

The rise of 'bundled products' necessitates more cooperation among enforcement bodies

6 November 2019

Regulators, ADR bodies from different sectors (including rail, telecoms, energy, financial services), consumer bodies and the European Commission gathered today for cross-sectoral, cross-authority dialogue in Brussels to better protect consumers who buy bundled products.

Today's "Bundled Products: Dispute Resolution & Consumer Rights Enforcement" regulatory roundtable, was organised jointly by BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation), the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER) and the National Energy Ombudsmen Network (NEON) under the Partnership for the Enforcement of European Rights (PEER) framework.

Consumers are buying more bundles

Bundled products are goods/services that are packaged together and can offer some benefits such as convenience to consumers. These products are common in several sectors e.g. travel (flight + car hire), insurance (home + travel) and telecoms (e.g. TV + phone + internet) where almost every contract is a bundle of different services. They have grown in sophistication from products/services being added through to innovative, cross-sectoral bundles (e.g. energy + babysitter + food delivery).

Bundles are exciting, but they also involve some risks

But with different rules and contractual conditions applying to the different parts of the bundles, these offers raise challenges for consumer protection and enforcement that are similar across sectors and across countries. These include mis-leading practices and unfair terms, lack of transparency, gaps in liability, complaint handling confusion for consumers in terms of who to turn to when something goes wrong, jurisdictional issues for public authorities as well as the risk of consumers being locked into complex contracts.

Cooperation between ADR bodies, regulators, consumer bodies and other enforcement authorities across sectors is essential to better understand the market evolutions and ensure that consumers are effectively protected when they buy a bundle.

CEER has developed a Guide for companies and regulators on Bundled Products, applicable across all sectors (not only energy). The [CEER Guide on Bundled Products](#), published today, has 10 principles for companies offering bundled products and 3 principles for regulators.

10 Principles for Companies that offer Bundled Products:

1. Ensure transparency
2. Keep it simple
3. Communicate clear and understandable contract terms and conditions
4. Apply clear liability principles where there are multiple parties/contracts involved in the bundled product
5. Comparison tools should endeavour to reflect features of all components in a bundle
6. Allow customers the possibility to switch out of a bundle
7. A single bill or a single summary sheet or single portal for consumers to find their different bills associated with their bundle.

8. Make clear the choice of payment methods for bundled-only products
9. Signpost the responsible (in-house or external) complaint handler
10. Protect essential services

3 Principles for Regulators:

1. Clarify and educate companies on the rules and obligations applicable to bundles in general consumer law and in sectoral rules
2. Monitor bundled products
3. Cooperate across sectors with relevant authorities

The following organisations support the principles in this [CEER Guide on Bundled Products](#):

BEREC (the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications)

BEUC (the European Consumer Organisation)

NEON (the National Energy Ombudsman Network)

Other organisations are invited to subscribe to the Guide. Safeguarding consumer rights, regardless of the sector or products, deserves the involvement of all market players. Hence, all consumer rights enforcers are encouraged to take advantage of these principles for their best-practice sharing.