



**Consumer protection in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, focus
on
digitalization**

- **Is there a potential for a shift to digitalization and more reliance on online activities in response to and in the aftermath of the COVID-10 pandemic? -**

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Transitioning towards the digital economy

Growth of e-commerce :

- ❑ **Global value of e-commerce:** 29 trillion USD or 36% of GDP.
- ❑ **Global value of B2C e-commerce:** 3.9 billion USD, only 13% of total, but growth of 22% to previous year.
- ❑ **Exponential growth of digital economy in MENA region:** increase of 41% data traffic, 35% cloud traffic).

Source: [UNCTAD Digital Economy Report, 2019](#)



Transitioning towards the digital economy

Positioning of ESCWA member States:

- **UNCTAD B2C index 2019:** 3 ESCWA member States in top 10 developing countries (UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) although overall positions are low.

Table 2: Top 10 developing economies in the UNCTAD B2C E-commerce index, 2019

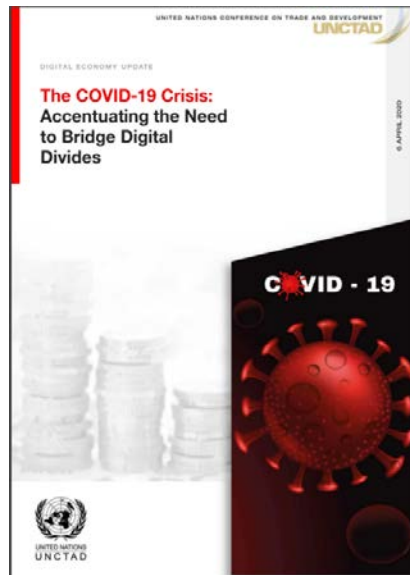
2019 Rank	Economy	Share of individuals using the Internet (2018 or latest)	Share of individuals with an account (15+, 2017)	Secure Internet servers (normalized, 2018)	UPU postal reliability score (2018 or latest)	2019 Index value)	Index value change (2017-18 data)	2018 Index rank
3	Singapore	88	98	97	97	95.1	-0.2	2
15	China, Hong Kong SAR	89	95	85	92	90.5	-1.1	16
19	Korea, Republic of	96	95	67	99	89.4	-2.4	22
28	United Arab Emirates	98	88	65	84	83.8	-0.1	33
34	Malaysia	81	85	75	86	81.9	-0.8	34
42	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	70	94	56	88	76.9	1.1	49
47	Qatar	100	66	54	77	74.2	6.4	59
48	Thailand	57	82	61	94	73.5	-3.0	43
49	Saudi Arabia	93	72	47	81	73.3	-0.2	52
53	Turkey	71	69	73	74	71.8	-1.4	47

Source: [UNCTAD B2C Index 2019](#)



Challenges in the context of COVID-19

- ❑ **Digital divide:** change in consumer behavior towards digital economy raises concerns over access and the protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged.
- ❑ **New challenges to online consumers:** price gouging of essential consumer goods (focus on platforms) misleading advertising and scams, refund policies, information campaigns and complaints, business engagement

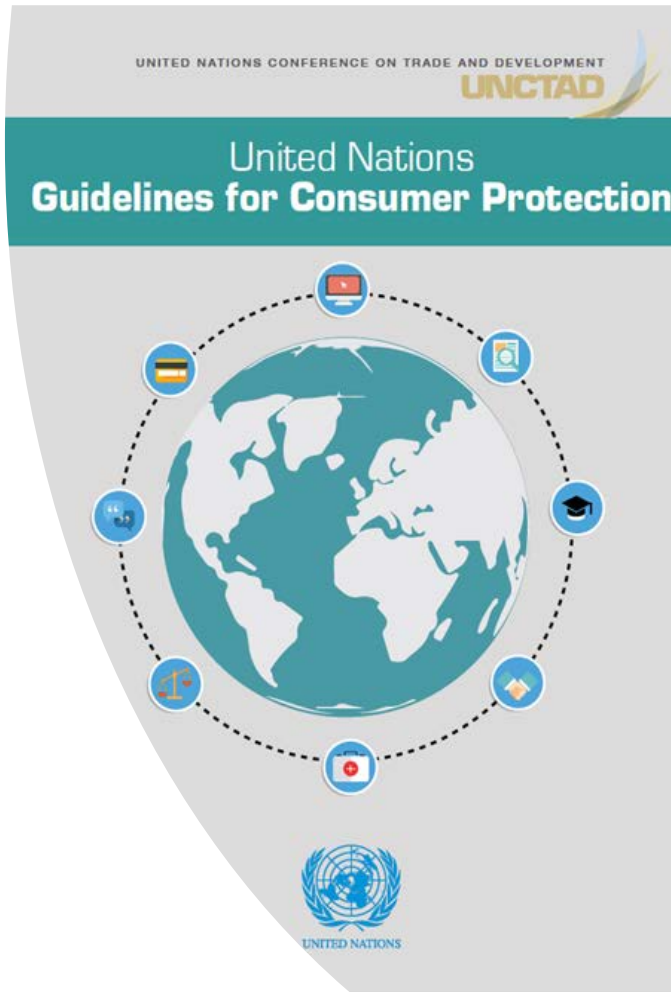


Source: [UNCTAD 2020](#)



Source: [UNCTAD 2020](#)

Guide for digital shift



Source: [United Nations, 2015](#)

- ❑ **United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (UNGCP):** in 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the revised UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection to respond to current challenges;
- ❑ **Cover most of consumer policy:** Consumers legitimate needs; National policies for Consumer Protection; Physical safety and Standards for the Safety and Quality of consumer goods and services; Distribution facilities for essential goods and services; Dispute resolution and redress; Education and information programmes; E-commerce and Financial Services; Good business practices; International cooperation.

Source: [UNCTAD 2020](#)



- UNGCP -

□ Consumers legitimate needs include:

- The protection of consumers from hazards to their health and safety;
- Consumer protection online not less than offline;
- The protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers;
- Effective consumer dispute resolution and redress.



UNGCP on E-COMMERCE

UNGCP 63 to 65 - Main objectives relate to:

- Consumer confidence;
- Transparency;
- Level of protection not less than for offline trade;
- If necessary, adjustment of national frameworks;
- Inform and empower consumers;
- Reference to international guidelines and standards, e.g. OECD Consumer E-Commerce recommendations; ISO standards.



UNGCP on INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

UNGCP 79-94

Highlight on enforcement and on cross-border cooperation and possible coordinated actions against rogue traders at regional and international levels (ICPEN; EU; other regional economic organizations)



Post-COVID-19 digital economy solutions needed to facilitate this shift (i)

UNGCP 14: National policies for consumer protection

- ❑ **Good business practices;** codes of good conduct, self-regulation, privacy, complaint handling
- ❑ **Clear and timely information** to enable consumers to contact businesses easily, and to enable regulatory and law enforcement authorities to identify and locate them. This may include information such as the identity of the business, its legal name and the name under which it trades, its principal geographic address, website and e-mail address or other means of contact, its telephone number and its government registration or licence numbers
- ❑ **Clear and timely information regarding the goods or services offered by businesses and the terms and conditions of the relevant transaction**



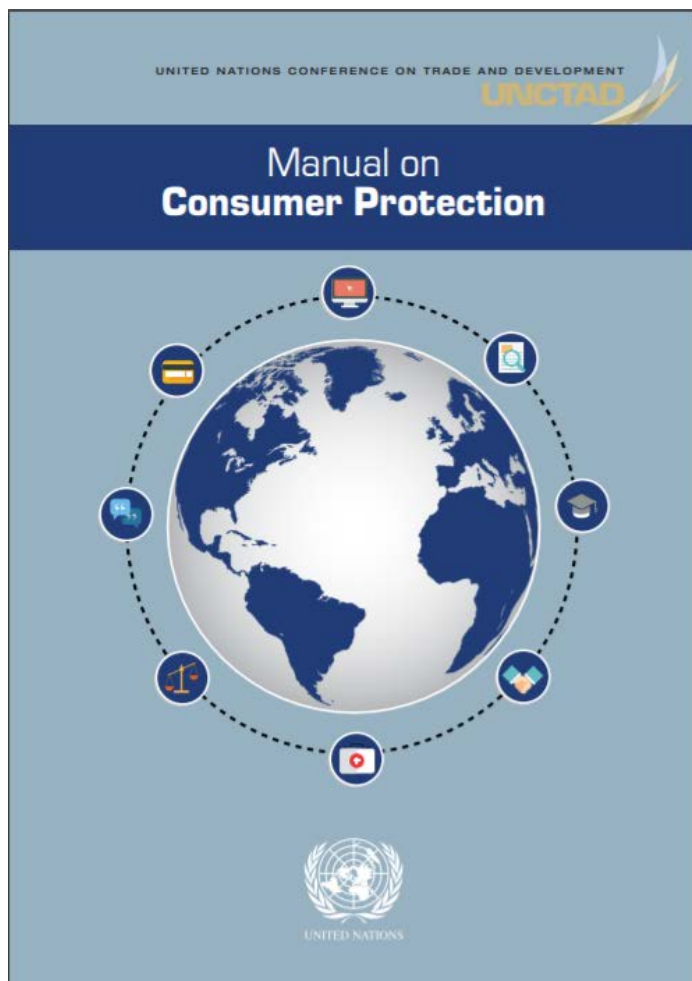
Post-COVID-19 digital economy solutions needed to facilitate this shift (ii)

UNGCP 14: National policies for consumer protection (cont)

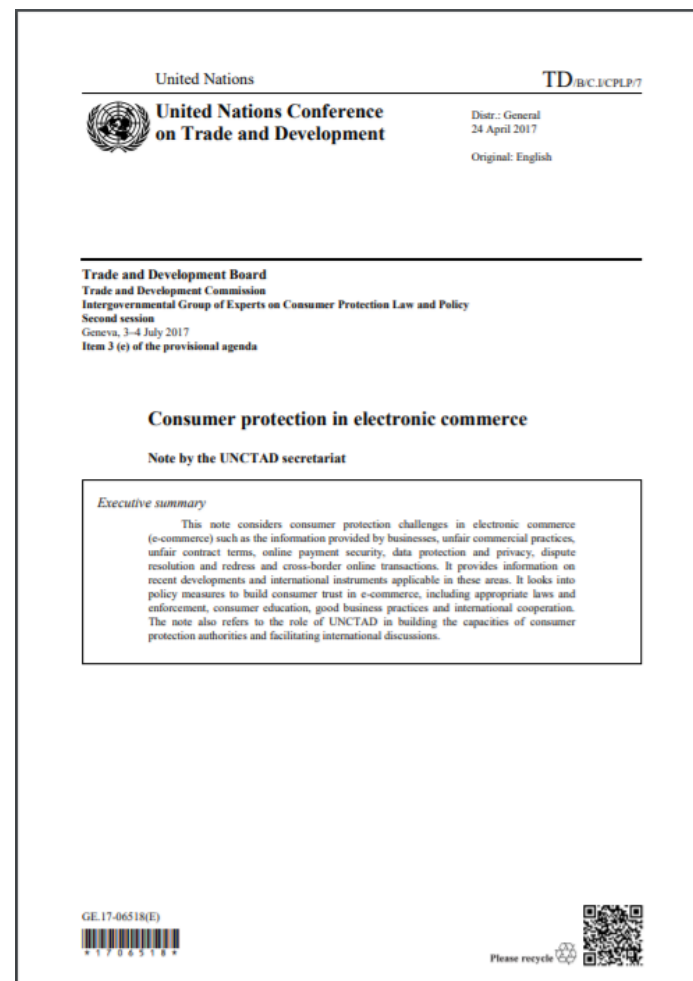
- ❑ **Clear, concise and easy to understand contract terms that are not unfair:** cooling off periods
- ❑ **A transparent process for the confirmation, cancellation, return and refund of transactions**
- ❑ **Secure payment mechanisms**
- ❑ **Fair, affordable and speedy dispute resolution and redress;** online dispute resolution, chargebacks, escrows
- ❑ **Consumer privacy and data security**
- ❑ **Consumer and business education**
- ❑ **Dispute resolution and related actions**



UNCTAD tools



[UNCTAD Manual on Consumer Protection \(2017\)](#)



[UNCTAD note Consumer Protection in Electronic Commerce \(2018\)](#)



Upcoming UN Ministerial Conference on Competition and Consumer protection, held by UNCTAD as the focal point on Competition and Consumer protection within UN system (mandated by the UN General Assembly)



THANK YOU!

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