

# Sustainable consumption

## Helping consumers make eco-friendly choices

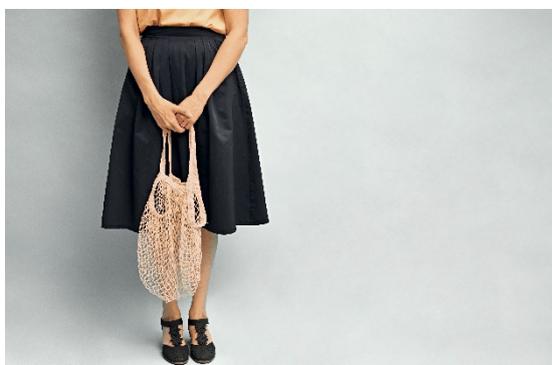
### SUMMARY

Household consumption in the EU has major environmental impacts, which in a number of cases exceed planetary boundaries. Two thirds of consumers in the EU realise that their consumption habits have negative effects on the environment, and the solution that they mention most often is to change consumption habits and production patterns.

However, a number of studies have shown a gap between consumers' good intentions and their actual behaviour. This happens because sustainability is not the only thing consumers consider when choosing what to buy; they are also influenced by price, availability and convenience, habits, values, social norms and peer pressure, emotional appeal, and the feeling of making a difference. Consumers also use their consumption patterns to communicate who they are to themselves and to others. Studies on the impacts of consumption show that these are influenced mainly by people's income.

The European Union has a number of policies that are relevant for consumers' sustainable choices. These include environmental product requirements, information and labelling requirements, rules on product guarantees, climate legislation that attempts to build the price of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions into production expenses, and waste legislation that makes it easier to recycle. The European Commission now plans to add a legislative initiative to empower consumers for the green transition.

The European Parliament has long been a supporter of making consumption in the EU more sustainable, and has recently called for measures to ensure that consumers are provided with transparent, comparable and harmonised product information, especially when it comes to the durability and reparability of products and their environmental footprint.



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## Introduction

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) has [measured](#) 16 different environmental impacts of EU consumption and concluded that for five of them – climate change, particulate matter, resource use, freshwater eutrophication and human toxicity-cancer – the average EU citizen's consumption is beyond [planetary boundaries](#).<sup>1</sup> Of the five areas of consumption studied, meanwhile, the average citizen's environmental footprint was largest for food, housing (especially energy used for heating)<sup>2</sup> and mobility (especially the use of private cars).<sup>3</sup> In addition, the environmental footprint in the five areas of consumption increased by 6 % between 2010 and 2015, with the most important rise in the number of kilometres travelled (+10 %) and the number of appliances owned (+29 %).

Households accounted for [19 % of the EU's greenhouse gas \(GHG\) emissions](#) in 2018. About a fifth of this came from direct use of fossil fuels for heating and private vehicles, and the rest from final products used by households. Roughly [14 % of GHG emissions](#) was produced in countries outside of the EU, owing to outsourced production. The [European Environmental Agency](#) (EEA) has estimated that, in 2011, 31 % of the EU Member States' energy footprint and 61 % of their land use footprint was externalised to other parts of the world, with the more material- and energy-intensive stages of production most likely to be outsourced in this way.

There is some evidence that consumers are increasingly ready to make sustainable choices. According to [Eurostat](#), between 2000 and 2017, the environmental economy saw faster growth in jobs and gross value added than the overall economy. A special [Eurobarometer](#) on the attitudes of EU citizens towards the environment, published in March 2020, showed that the environment was personally very or fairly important for 94 % of participants, while two thirds agreed that their consumption habits had negative effects on the environment. Changing consumption and production patterns was mentioned most often as the best way to tackle environmental problems – by slightly over 30 % of respondents. According to the EEA, the move towards a more sustainable lifestyle is being led by the younger generation, especially the 'millennials'. They are also more likely to seek satisfaction in non-material ways, including through more frequent adoption of minimalist and frugal lifestyles (a choice also referred to as [voluntary simplicity](#)).<sup>4</sup>

The EU plans to tap into this potential by enabling consumers to make more sustainable choices. This is one of the goals of the European Green Deal and the circular economy action plan, and is likely to feature strongly in the new 'consumer agenda'. The Commission has also announced a legislative proposal on consumers in the green transition for the second quarter of 2021.

## Defining sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumption has multiple dimensions. Those most often taken into account are: environmental sustainability, which focuses on the impacts on the environment and is the focus of this briefing; social sustainability, which focuses on issues such as labour practices, living conditions and impacts on local communities;<sup>5</sup> and economic sustainability, which focuses on enabling the economies to stay afloat and companies to stay in business.

There is no consensus on a single definition of sustainable consumption. One often quoted comes from the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development report '[Our Common Future](#)'. It is based on the definition of sustainable development, which is defined as the development that must 'ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. The other popular definition was proposed by the 1994 [Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption](#). It defines sustainable consumption as 'the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimising the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations'. The UN Environment Programme puts it simply: sustainable consumption and production means '[doing more and better with less](#)', by decoupling

economic growth from environmental degradation, increasing resource efficiency and promoting sustainable lifestyles.

The environmental sustainability of products is typically operationalised by life cycle assessments ([LCA](#)), which take into account various impacts of all the phases of a product's lifespan: raw materials, manufacturing, distribution, usage and end-of-life. Each of these phases can influence the environment in a different way and, depending on the product, the most damaging impacts may come from different phases.<sup>6</sup> For consumers this means that sustainable consumption is not just about identifying which choice is the most sustainable, but also about consuming less; using products in the way least damaging to the environment; taking good care of them to extend their lifespan; repairing them; keeping them for longer time before replacing them; and making sure they are reused or recycled when no longer needed.<sup>7</sup>

## Consumer behaviour

A number of studies have shown a gap between the consumers' good intentions and their actual behaviour. While 9 in 10 consumers say protecting the environment is important to them, according to the special Eurobarometer, only 22 % had bought products with an environmental label, 31 % avoided buying overpackaged products, 32 % repaired a product rather than replacing it, and 66 % said they separated most of their waste for recycling.<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon is referred to as the attitude-behaviour or [intention-action gap](#). It can partly be explained by the fact that environmentally responsible consumption is not easy: it often costs more and requires greater effort on part of the consumer, both in terms of finding and identifying sustainable products, and in terms of missing out on possibly more attractive and cheaper products in the name of a greater good.<sup>9</sup>

A wide range of research in psychology, sociology, behavioural economy and marketing has shown that consumer decisions on sustainability depend on a number of factors. It is worth noting though that these can vary depending on the type of product:

- **Price:** the higher price of sustainable products often outweighs ethical considerations. Although this is especially pronounced for households with fewer economic means, consumers in general have difficulty focusing on long-term benefits when faced with the immediate cost of the sustainable option.
- **Availability and convenience:** consumers are more likely to shop sustainably if it is convenient. Most are not ready to go out of their way to look for green products.
- **Habits:** consumers do not make every single purchase decision based on a rational decision-making process, but most of the time choose what to buy automatically. They are particularly biased towards keeping the *status quo*. This can be overcome by nudges such as making the green option a default. For instance, when German consumers were offered [green electricity as the default](#), most people used it. Another study looked at ways consumers are [nudged](#) towards keeping hotel towels for longer and agreeing to receive paperless bank statements.
- **Values:** environment-friendly attitudes are a major predictor of sustainable consumption. In addition, individuals' internalised ethical rules about what is right or wrong can also influence the choices they make.
- **Communicating who we are:** we communicate this to ourselves and to others. Consumers' motivation to choose sustainable products can be to view themselves more positively and to avoid feeling guilty for not following their own beliefs; to present themselves better to others; and to signal their ties to the group (social identification). Sustainable consumption can also be used to signal status to others – for instance by demonstrating that one can afford more costly environmentally friendly products, even though in some cases these are of lower quality.
- **Social norms and peer pressure:** an OECD [study](#) from 2015 showed that people can be motivated to make sustainable choices if a minimum number of other members of their group are also doing the same. People are more likely to install [solar panels](#) on

their roofs if their neighbours already have them, are more likely to choose a [sustainable type of detergent](#) in the presence of others, and send less waste to landfill if they have to put their rubbish in [clear bags](#). Telling people that others already engage in sustainable behaviour or making their commitments public can therefore increase consumers' sustainable behaviour.

- **Emotional appeal:** the OECD study found that the 'feel good factor' of making sustainable choices should be emphasised. Another study showed that [praising people](#) for conserving energy worked better than giving them money.
- **Making a difference:** consumers who believe that their actions make a difference are more likely to choose sustainable options. This is referred to as 'perceived consumer effectiveness'.

#### Rebound effect

Researchers have observed that an increase in sustainability can lead consumers to behave less sustainably. This is a well known phenomenon in the [field of energy](#), where improvements in energy efficiency of an appliance, a car or a home can lead people to use their appliance or vehicle more or heat their home to a higher temperature. A similar phenomenon has been found in [other circumstances](#): for instance, when people buy a sustainable product, they tend to use more of it, sometimes because they perceive it as less effective (e.g. cleaning product) and the same thing can happen if they are recycling.

Nevertheless, studies that focus on the impacts of consumption show that the biggest predictor of environmental impact may be people's **income**. This is because most consumers are more likely to focus on behaviours with relatively small impacts, while the largest impacts come from overall lifestyle – size of housing, size of car, frequency of flying, number of appliances and gadgets owned – and this usually corresponds to their income.<sup>10</sup>

## EU policy

The European Union and its Member States have taken on responsibilities from the [Paris Agreement](#), which aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C while pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C, and the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that include [SDG 12](#), requiring countries to 'ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns'.

On 11 December 2019, in the [European Green Deal](#) communication, the European Commission presented a vision of a climate-neutral EU by 2050 and a reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 50 to 55 % by 2030 compared with 1990. The [new circular economy action plan](#) has further announced policies to create a sustainable product policy framework, which will include empowering consumers for the green transition. In addition, sustainable consumption is expected to feature highly in the [new consumer agenda](#) that will lay out the priorities for EU consumer policy up to 2024. The European Commission plans to propose a legislative initiative on [strengthening the role of consumers in the green transition](#) in the second quarter of 2021, alongside a separate legislative initiative on [sustainable products](#).

## Environmental requirements for products

While not consumer policy as such, this type of legislation makes consumption more sustainable by removing the worst performing products from the market, leaving it to consumers to choose among the rest. It lays down requirements for technical and other characteristics of products that producers must comply with in order to place products on the internal market.

The [Ecodesign Directive](#) lays down minimum mandatory requirements for energy-related products. It is implemented through [product-specific regulations](#), directly applicable in all EU Member States, and complemented by harmonised European [standards](#). Until recently, requirements focused

mainly on energy efficiency, however, in 2019, for the first time, product-specific regulations incorporated requirements aimed at extending the lifetime of products (such as rules on availability of spare parts and information on durability and repair).<sup>11</sup>

Environmental requirements are also found in legislation on chemicals. The principal legislative act in this field is the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals ([REACH](#)) Regulation, which aims to ensure that chemicals used in all products are safe for both people and the environment. It applies in principle to all chemicals, including those used in industrial processes, cleaning products, clothing, furniture and electrical appliances.

The EU also has sector-specific legislation that regulates a number of other groups of products with respect to their sustainability, for instance, regulation on [CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from cars and vans](#), mandatory requirements for appliances to be designed in a way that allows [waste batteries and accumulators](#) to be readily removed and a [ban on some single-use plastic products](#).

## Consumer information and labelling

The [Consumer Rights Directive](#) requires that consumers be given '**material information**' on a product before the purchase (this is called 'pre-contractual information') and the [Unfair Commercial Practices Directive](#) (UCPD) forbids misleading omissions of any such information. Currently, the EU rules do not specifically require the 'material information' to include information such as the environmental footprint, or durability and reparability of products, although some Member States do require this information.

The EU has **mandatory labelling requirements** with respect to environmental characteristics, but only for some products and certain of their aspects. Notably, electrical products have to carry an energy efficiency label in line with the [Energy Efficiency Labelling Directive](#). Labelling products on a scale from A to G has proven a success, with [four in five consumers](#) taking it into consideration in their purchases. However, due to the progress in energy efficiency, most of the products now carry label A or better (i.e. A+, A++, A+++), and the difference between them is less obvious to the consumer. The directive was therefore [revised in 2017](#) and will lead to a rescaling of the labels, back to A to G, with regular rescaling scheduled in the future. The first new labels are set to appear in stores as of March 2021 and will cover [refrigerators](#), [dishwashers](#), [washing machines](#), [TV screens](#) and [lamps](#). These will also include some additional information for consumers, such as water used per washing cycle, storing capacity, noise emitted, etc. The EU legislation also requires consumers to be informed of the **energy performance of buildings, fuel efficiency of tyres, energy sources and environmental impact of electricity, and organic food products**.

Among **voluntary instruments**, the [EU Ecolabel](#) promotes products and services that meet high environmental standards throughout their lifecycle, from raw material extraction, to production, distribution and disposal. The Ecolabel encourages producers to generate less waste and CO<sub>2</sub> and to make products that are durable, repairable, upgradeable and easily dismantled. It sets requirements for a wide variety of products, not only electrical ones. In addition, a number of **private voluntary 'green' labels** exist. According to the Commission, [more than 100](#) such labels are active in the EU, with a 'varied level of reliability and environmental issues covered'. Research shows that the flood of different labels on the market confuses consumers and that trust in such labels is generally low. The EU currently does not have specific legislation banning false green claims, but the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive requires that all information presented to consumers be truthful, and it forbids companies from misleading consumers.<sup>12</sup>

## Product guarantees

The EU rules on guarantees for products have indirect consequences on issues such as durability and reparability of products. The [Consumer Sales and Guarantees Directive](#), which regulates certain aspects of the contractual relationship between a consumer and a seller, lays down a legal guarantee period of two years that applies to sales of all goods in the EU. The legal guarantee on

second-hand goods is one year. If the product turns out to be faulty while under guarantee, the seller must either repair or replace it, and if this is not successful, offer a discount or return of the money paid. From 2022, when the provisions of the new [Sale of Goods Directive](#) are due to replace the Consumer Sales and Guarantees Directive, repair and replacement of defective products will have to be attempted first, before consumers are able to ask for their money back or a reduced price. The choice between replacement and repair will be left to consumers, unless the chosen option is impossible or would impose costs on the seller that would be disproportionate.

Several studies have pointed to the inadequacy of the two-year legal guarantee period and suggested that for durable goods it should be extended to match their expected lifespan more closely. The expected average lifetime of products could be defined in sector-specific ecodesign legislation or, alternatively, the Sale of Goods Directive could be amended to require manufacturers either to offer a voluntary commercial guarantee that would cover the expected lifetime of the product (that producers would define themselves) or to declare that they could not guarantee that a product would last for a specific amount of time. In this way, consumers would be able to choose based on durability of products, while producers would have an incentive to make their products last longer.<sup>13</sup> Experts warn that the Sale of Goods Directive does not include incentives for consumers to choose the repair option or for the seller to perform it.<sup>14</sup>

## Price signals for consumers

Currently, sustainable options are often more expensive for consumers, even though the EU has introduced some policies to try to change that. Based on the 'polluter pays' principle, these mechanisms aim to make non-sustainable production more expensive and in this way nudge both producers and consumers towards more sustainable practices.

The EU's emissions trading system aims to push energy producers and goods manufacturers to invest in energy efficiency and low-carbon technologies to avoid paying for CO<sub>2</sub> emission allowances. It applies to more than 11 000 power stations and industrial plants, accounting for 45 % of emissions, but does not cover all sectors (the road transport, waste, agriculture and buildings sectors are exempt, for instance, but they are covered by the Effort Sharing Regulation). Some of the most energy-intensive industries receive free allowances owing to carbon leakage fears (i.e. that they might move production to non-EU countries where regulation is less strict).<sup>15</sup> The Commission is planning a [new reform](#) in the second quarter of 2021 to bring the system into line with the 2030 climate target.

The EU also plans to replace the free allowances with a new [border carbon adjustment mechanism](#), to ensure that the price of imports reflects their associated carbon emissions more accurately and to make it more expensive to import carbon-intensive products. This is expected to reduce the risk of carbon leakage. The planned [revision of the Energy Taxation Directive](#) would, meanwhile, aim to remove subsidies, tax exemptions and reductions for fossil fuels, also contributing to price signals for consumers.<sup>16</sup>

## Waste legislation

The EU has legislation on waste that makes products more recyclable, and recycling easier for consumers. The [Waste Framework Directive](#) requires Member States to encourage the design, manufacturing and use of products that are repairable, re-usable and upgradable and the setting up of systems promoting repair and re-use activities. It also requires them to organise separate waste collection for paper, metal, plastic and glass waste, and by 2025, for textiles. Member States can also introduce **extended producer responsibility** (EPR) schemes for particular products. Such schemes require manufacturers, sellers or importers to take back products at the end of their life-cycles, either directly or through an organisation that organises an EPR system, and make sure that they are recycled or properly disposed of. In the EU, EPR is mandatory for electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), batteries, accumulators and vehicles, and Member States have also set it up for tyres, oil waste, construction and demolition waste, medicines, light bulbs, for instance.

## Empowering consumers for the green transition

The Commission has announced that in the second quarter of 2021 it will propose legislation empowering consumers for the green transition. According to the [inception impact assessment](#), the Commission is considering either amending the existing consumer protection legislation or proposing a new stand-alone consumer protection instrument. Information on product sustainability, such as durability and availability of repair services and software updates could be included in the 'material information' required by the Consumer Rights Directive and the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive. [Premature obsolescence](#) and false green claims (also referred to as greenwashing) could be added to the 'blacklist' of banned practices in Annex I of the UCPD. Alternatively, these problems could be dealt with under new dedicated legislation that would take precedence over general consumer protection legislation and that could link green claims to the [product and organisation environmental footprint](#) (PEF/OEF) methods, currently being developed by the Commission.

### European Parliament position

The European Parliament is currently working on own-initiative reports on a [sustainable single market for businesses and consumers](#) and the [new circular economy action plan](#).

In its [resolution](#) of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal, Parliament stressed the importance of empowered and well-informed consumers. It called for measures to ensure that consumers are provided with transparent, comparable and harmonised product information, including the labelling of products. It called for consumers to be informed about the durability and reparability of products and their environmental footprint and for this information to be based on solid data and consumer research. It also stressed that consumers should have effective, easily understandable and enforceable remedies, but that, when it comes to remedies for faulty products, reuse and repair should take priority over discarding such products.

In the previous term, in its resolution of 9 July 2015 on [resource efficiency](#), Parliament urged the Commission to propose a review of the EU ecodesign legislation that would 'broaden the scope of ecodesign requirements to cover all main product groups, not only energy-related products' and for product requirements and standards to go beyond energy efficiency and cover all relevant resource-efficiency features, such as durability, reparability, reusability and recyclability. It also called for the introduction of a mandatory product passport based on mandatory product design requirements. It also called on the Commission to assess the possibility of establishing minimum recycled material content in new products.

In its resolution of 4 July 2017 on a [longer lifetime for products](#), Parliament called for a series of specific measures promoting product robustness, reparability and upgradeability. It also called for improved product durability information by creating a voluntary EU label, covering the product's durability, ecodesign features, upgradeability and reparability; creating a usage meter for the most relevant consumer products, in particular large electrical appliances; and assessing alignment of lifespan labelling with the duration of the legal guarantee, etc.

In its resolution of 31 May 2018 on the [implementation of the Ecodesign Directive](#), Parliament called for the extension of minimum guarantees for consumer durable goods. It called on the Commission to propose measures on the availability of spare parts, ensuring that products can be repaired during their lifetime.

### Stakeholder views

The European Consumer Organisation ([BEUC](#)) warns that consumer buy-in will be crucial for making the EU climate policy a reality and that the right price signals will be necessary so that the sustainable choice becomes the easiest and the most affordable one for consumers. BEUC warns that the EU also needs to ensure that products are manufactured in the right way and that consumers get new

rights, such as the right to repair, improved interoperability between devices, and improved legal guarantees. BEUC [welcomed](#) the Commission's plans to empower consumers for the green transition and recommended amending the Consumer Rights and Unfair Commercial Practices Directives, giving consumers comparable and credible information on product durability and reparability; expanding legal guarantees for longer lasting products and introducing direct producer liability (currently, it is the seller who is liable for faulty goods); and introducing a new, stand-alone legal instrument introducing a scheme requiring pre-authorisation for green claims and labels.

The European Environmental Citizens' Organisation for Standardisation ([ECOS](#)), which defends environmental interests in the standards development process at European and international levels, also called for a new dedicated regulatory instrument that would establish new rules and ensure minimum harmonisation for the mandatory provision of information to consumers on sustainability aspects via a standard label.

Reactions from the business community are mixed, with some supporting the plans for new legislation and others recommending better enforcement of existing laws. [Eurocommerce](#) affirms that the retail and wholesale sectors were ready to nudge both producers and consumers towards more sustainable choices. However, it notes that several conditions would need to be met: the quality of recycled and alternative materials would need to be as high as for virgin materials; reuse and reparability should be built into the primary design of products; spare parts and manufacturing information would need to be more readily available; harmonised testing methodologies would need to be ready before any new regulation; and information for consumers would need to be appropriate, tailored to the type of consumer and sufficiently clear so as to be fit for purpose. It also calls for greater harmonisation of extended producer responsibility across the EU and for more time for retail and wholesale companies to adjust. [Independent Retail Europe](#) meanwhile warns against hasty revision of legislation that has yet to enter into application. It calls for the new Sale of Goods Directive, the Digital Content and Digital Services Directive and the implementing regulations on eco-design to first be applied for a few years before introducing additional legislation. It also cautions against a one-size-fits all approach when it comes to repair, as products are inherently very different and some repairs are so complex that they should only be undertaken by experts.

The European Advertising Standards Alliance ([EASA](#)) shares the view that empowering consumers for the green transition can be achieved by enforcing the existing legal framework properly. It believes that this, in combination with its self-regulatory systems for advertising, can ensure responsible advertising in relation to environmental claims and other related issues.

The European Furniture Industries Confederation ([EFIC](#)) is in favour of an EU-level information scheme on the main characteristics of furniture products, as this would avoid the fragmentation of the rules on the internal market. It considers a combination of online information, information in stores and labelling as optimal and welcomes the idea of product passports. However, it is against requiring such information for every furniture component and opposes limiting the ecolabel to the PEF, as it considers that this is not a perfect tool when it comes to substantiating environmental claims and assessing the quality of furniture products.

The European Automobile Manufacturers' Association ([ACEA](#)) also welcomes efforts to avoid creating different sets of information for different EU countries. It calls, however, for unnecessary technical and administrative burdens to be avoided, noting that the car industry already ensures that customers are able to have their vehicles adequately maintained, serviced and repaired 'regardless of whether this occurs in the manufacturers' authorised repairer network or not'.

The International Association for Soaps, Detergents and Maintenance Products ([AISE](#)) supports the use of the PEF/OEF methods to substantiate environmental claims, but recommends that this remain voluntary until the methodology is sufficiently mature and robust.

The European Federation for Waste Management and Environmental Services ([FEAD](#)) supports the idea of a recycling label or product passport reflecting the actual recyclability of products and the

percentage of recycled content; mandatory recycled content in products; a lower price for products incorporating recycled content, reflecting CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions savings; reduced VAT or a 'CO<sub>2</sub> bonus' for products incorporating recycled content, reflecting CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions savings; and strict rules for product failures, products with short life-spans and greenwashing.<sup>17</sup>

## What's next?

A new [consumer agenda](#) is expected to present a vision for the role of consumers in the green transition in November 2020. The legislative initiative on consumers in the green transition is expected in the second quarter of 2021. It is likely to be published with a separate initiative on [substantiating environmental claims](#) using product and organisation environmental footprint methods. A [sustainable product policy](#), which would extend the ecodesign framework 'to the broadest possible range of products', including electronics, ICT, textiles and furniture, is planned for the end of 2021. Also for the end of 2021, the Commission has [announced](#) a legislative initiative on new design requirements and consumer rights for electronics, and a non-legislative initiative on circular electronics.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a full list and explanation of each type of impact, see [pp. 9-10](#) of the JRC report.

<sup>2</sup> This category also included, for instance, the production of materials necessary for a building and electricity used for running appliances.

<sup>3</sup> The other two categories were household goods and appliances, but to avoid double accounting, the electricity used for appliances was added only to the 'housing' category.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, according to the EEA, there seems to be some indication of a trend towards a vegan and vegetarian lifestyle in the EU, with the share of European consumers avoiding red meat and beef reaching 13 % of the total population. See also Statista's report [Meat consumption and vegetarianism in Europe – Statistics and Facts](#).

<sup>5</sup> For more on social sustainability, see for instance McGuinn et al: [Social sustainability: Concepts and benchmarks](#), IPOL, European Parliament, April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> For some products, the most important moment for eco-friendly consumer decisions is the point at which they choose which product to buy – for instance for furniture. For other products, however, the environment may be more crucially impacted by the way consumers use them. For instance, the biggest impact of clothes comes from their usage phase and the frequency with which they are washed and ironed, as washing releases the remains of detergents and microplastics, while ironing uses high amounts of energy.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, consumers cannot do this on their own – many of today's products are not durable, repairable or recyclable, or the infrastructure for repair and recycling does not exist. See also the EEA briefing [Europe's consumption in a circular economy: the benefits of longer-lasting electronics](#).

<sup>8</sup> Special Eurobarometer, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance M. Hosta and V. Žabkar, '[Antecedents of Environmentally and Socially Responsible Sustainable Consumer Behavior](#)', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2020.

- <sup>10</sup> See for instance S. Moser and S. Kleinhüchelkotten, '[Good intents, but low impacts: Diverging importance of motivational and socioeconomic determinants explaining pro-environmental behavior, energy use, and carbon footprint](#)', *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol. 50(6), 2017, pp. 626-656, and J.M. Cayla et al, '[The role of income in energy consumption behaviour: Evidence from French households data](#)', *Energy Policy*, Vol. 39(12), 2011, pp. 7874-7883.
- <sup>11</sup> See implementing acts on [washing machines](#), [dishwashers](#), [TV screens](#), [lamps](#) and [refrigerators](#).
- <sup>12</sup> For more on how the UCPD applies to green claims, see the Commission's [guidance](#) on the implementation/application of Directive 2005/29/EC on unfair commercial practices, pp. 95-108.
- <sup>13</sup> See, for instance, [A longer lifetime for products: Benefits for consumers and companies](#) and [How an EU lifespan guarantee model could be implemented across the European Union](#).
- <sup>14</sup> See B. Keirsbilck et al, [Sustainable consumption and consumer protection legislation: How can sustainable consumption and longer lifetime of products be promoted through consumer protection legislation?](#).
- <sup>15</sup> However, the free allowances are only enough to cover the emissions of the most efficient installations.
- <sup>16</sup> See EPRS briefing on [Carbon emissions pricing](#).
- <sup>17</sup> For more views see the [feedback page](#) on the Commission's inception impact assessment on strengthening the role of consumers in the green transition.

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