

Conference Theme 2022: “Responsible Consumption and Production”

Consumption takes place everywhere: Whether at home, at work, at school, in transit or on our phones. Defined as the using up of goods and services having an exchangeable value, it accounts for, on an average, 60% of a country's gross domestic product.

However, consumption results from production – the process of making or growing goods to be sold. Thus, when mentioning consumption, production cannot be ignored, as the two actions are strongly connected, occurring as an ongoing process. In recent times, both consumption and production have caused various problems in the economy, society, and environment. While they are crucial for the human species to survive, one must not ignore the consequences they themselves bear, as the cost of a good or a service does not only lie in its absolute material and manufacturing price, but additionally in the impact on its surroundings. To solve this massive issue, the economy, society, and the environment need to be respected equally and cannot be separated from one another. Moreover, it is indisputable that every party involved bears their own responsibilities concerning consumption and production and should assume their obligations thereto.

In a world where desires are unlimited, yet resources are scarce, decision-making is not an easy task. The economy strongly orientates itself towards the demand in a population and tries to calculate the needed supply. Still, the gap between More Economically Developed Nations and Developing Countries is massive. Each year, approximately 1.3 billion tons of food – roughly one third of all food produced – is being wasted, while about 9 million people are starving to death. Overconsumption in industrial nations is accelerating rapidly. Planned and perceived obsolescence run the customer markets: products are made less durable than possible, so customers have to replace them with new items, while favourability decides which new designs are chosen and which old cars, phones, etc. are too outdated. This leads to more and more products being wasted, whereas very few are suitable for recycling. For instance, technological and scientific progress nowadays enable companies to produce phones with replaceable batteries that could be used for centuries. Nevertheless, even today's high-end devices do not come with replaceable batteries and continue to be exchanged with newly purchased products.

In many countries, workers are being exploited systematically by big corporations for profit and for selling cheaper products. Clearly, this does not conform to human rights. Currently, workers are paid extremely low salaries while being exposed to toxic chemicals and having to work under even more inhumane conditions. On the other side, consumers are irritated and confused by contradicting statements and lack of information given by companies or retail shops.

Disproportionate and unnecessary consumption creates the basis of the ongoing environmental crisis. This so-called *overconsumption* takes place when the use of natural resources exceeds the sustainable capacity of a system. If this overconsumption continues, the system will be irreversibly destroyed. In our case, overconsumption would kill the natural system we all love and live in: our Earth. If we don't stop the systematic exploitation of our Earth's natural resources pushing them through our production facilities only to consume them irresponsibly in the end – the Earth as we know it will slowly fade away.

Every year over 80% of the world's electronic waste does not get recycled. Every day around 8 million pieces of plastic make their way into our oceans. Every minute an area equivalent to 35 soccer fields is cut down and burned.

This year's conference theme visualizes the 12th Sustainable Development Goal: "to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns". With this conference we want to point out how the Sustainable Development Goals influence our everyday life. We should all ask ourselves the personal questions: What do I consume? What do I need?

And of course: What has to be done to achieve responsible and sustainable solutions?

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Secretaries-General of MUNOL 2022