



verbraucherzentrale

Bundesverband

The voice of the Consumer

Federation of German Consumer
Organisations – vzbv



The voice of the Consumer

Germany has over 80 million consumers, and they need a strong voice to represent their interests. This voice is provided by the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv).

The vzbv is an umbrella organization that bundles the energies and specialist competence of 51 associations: 16 consumer centres, 26 associations working to shape consumer policy and nine sponsor members. Together they form a powerful and diverse network extending into all corners of our society. Our member associations and consumer centres with their more than 190 advice centres throughout Germany provide us with a unique insight into the concerns and problems of consumers in fields ranging from investor protection to dental care.

This powerful alliance devoted to shaping consumer policy enables us to ensure that the largest of all interest groups gains a hearing.

We provide a focus for the myriad concerns of consumers and give them a powerful voice.

Our neutrality in terms of party allegiance is a key foundation of our work. We are a non-profit organization financed by funding from the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, project funding and member contributions.

What we do

We analyse consumer markets, expose structural deficits and identify consumer problems, present solutions and fight for their implementation – these are the maxims guiding our work. We act as an advocate for equal opportunities for the interests of producers and consumers.

We aim to convince with the force of our arguments and participate in the formulation of consumer policy in Germany and the European Union.

We operate on four levels:

- ❖ as a lobby in the field of consumer policy and as a policy consultant,
- ❖ in the enforcement of laws,
- ❖ in promoting the availability of consumer advice and information,
- ❖ in consumer education.

We are tenacious and interventionist in our fight for:

- ❖ the right to safe and healthy products and services,
- ❖ effective protection against cheating,
- ❖ the right to information,
- ❖ the efficient provision of information and genuine freedom of choice,
- ❖ a sustainable lifestyle and a sustainable economic framework.

In pursuit of these goals we endeavour to ensure that:

- the concerns of consumers are made public,
- policy-makers create rules that ensure a fair and transparent market,
- policy deficits are exposed and identified and, if necessary, consumer rights are enforced in the courts,
- consumers are aware of their power and are able to assert it responsibly in their everyday consumption,
- the foundations for independent and competent consumer advice are guaranteed.

Our close collaboration with our member organizations means that we are constantly made aware of consumers' most pressing current concerns – we know where the most immediate problems lie.

Representing consumer interests

The markets in which consumers have to make new decisions on a daily basis are becoming increasingly complex and confusing. We ensure that the interests and needs of consumers do not fall by the wayside in the dynamic interplay of supply and demand – whether in the financial market, energy market, healthcare market or the food market. We are also actively engaging with the new technological and cultural challenges facing consumers. These include existential themes of climate change and resource scarcity as well as demographic changes and migration as well as the digitalization of the world with all its opportunities and risks.

Our alliance is able to draw on an invaluable store of knowledge about what is happening on the market. As a result we are able to offer informed advice to political decision-makers based on the expertise of our member organisations.



Implementing consumer rights

Formulating consumer rights is one thing. Implementing them is another. As state supervisory bodies become increasingly overburdened, our role as a market monitor is becoming increasingly significant. We are able to identify undesirable developments at an early stage, identify and analyse problems, present solutions and – where necessary – engage in the collective assertion of the law when consumer rights are violated.

The vzbv not only represents a powerful voice for consumers; it is also their dependable lawyer.

Together with the consumer centres we fight to ensure that all are accorded the rights they are entitled to – if necessary before the highest courts. In this way we are contributing to legal security and the continuing development of law. When the media report that the rights of consumers have been strengthened by a particular judgement, then this is often the result of a suit brought by the vzbv and the consumer centres.

Promoting equal access to information for consumers

But the vzbv is not only active in an external sense – it also functions as an internal service provider for its members. In addition we offer a comprehensive programme of training and further training providing qualifications for specialists in the fields of consumer rights and protection.

We bundle and coordinate the consumer-policy work of our member associations.

We are also involved in the coordination of consultation standards and consumer information and thus in ensuring that consumers are provided with high-quality and uniform advice in more than 190 advice centres across Germany.

Establishing consumer education

The shiny new world of consumption is seductive. Consumers need to know what they letting themselves in for with a new mobile phone contract, a life insurance policy or an instalment credit.

Today many children and young people, as well as adults, do not understand even simple economic interconnections and as a result make the wrong decisions or are unable to reach a decision at all. We campaign for the establishment of consumer education in schools and its integration into curricula on the same level as the teaching of mathematics or German.

Explanation and information is one side of the coin, education and empowerment is the other.

Providing consumer education and information is also part of a variety of projects the vzbv is undertaking with or coordinating for its member associations. One example is the energy project that has now been running for 30 years and represents Germany's most extensive impartial advisory service on the theme of energy use. Across Germany more than 350 energy consultants offer advice on all questions concerning energy conservation, renewable energy and changing providers.





European and international consumer work

The vzbv is part of an European and international network of consumer organisations.

We are a member of BEUC, the umbrella organisation of the European consumer organisations (www.beuc.org). The legal framework within which German consumers can assert their rights is increasingly being defined by Brussels – over 80 percent of laws relevant to consumers have been established by the European Union. In this area the BEUC has been the sole consumer advocate up to now in the contest between the interests of different lobbies. An efficient representation of consumer interests will be required at the latest when EU committees negotiate consumer-policy benchmarks. Such representation needs to be present in Brussels and the vzbv is campaigning for the establishment of an effective lobby in this regard.

For years we support the development and establishing of consumer organisations in central and eastern Europe. In addition we are a member of the world-wide umbrella organisation of consumer organisations, Consumers International (www.consumersinternational.org) and of the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD).

The vzbv at a glance

The Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband (vzbv) is the umbrella organisation of 51 consumer organisations – a consumer policy network with more than twenty million members. It represents the interests of consumers vis-à-vis politicians and policy-makers, the private sector and in public.

The vzbv was founded in 2000 but its history and its predecessor organizations date back to the 1950s, when the consumer-policy work of numerous organizations was first brought together in the form of a national, centralized lobby. Today the headquarters of the vzbv in Berlin has over 100 staff members.

As independent voice of consumers the vzbv is a competent consultant and pacesetter in the field of consumer policy. It bundles and coordinates the consumer-policy work of its member associations. Through its further education programmes and its uniform consultation standards and consumer information it ensures that high-quality and reliable information is available to consumers throughout Germany.

The vzbv is financed by the Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, project funding and member contributions.



Gerd Billen,
Executive Director



Klaus Müller,
Chairman of the
Management Board

Our members

❖ The 16 consumer centres in the federal states

Verbraucherzentrale Baden-Württemberg – Baden Württemberg Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Bayern – Bavarian Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Berlin – Berlin Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Brandenburg – Brandenburg Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Bremen – Bremen Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Hamburg – Hamburg Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Hessen – Hessian Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Mecklenburg und Vorpommern – Consumer Centre in Mecklenburg and West Pomerania
Verbraucherzentrale Niedersachsen – Lower Saxony Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Nordrhein-Westfalen – North-Rhine Westphalian Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Rheinland-Pfalz – Rhineland Palatinate Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale des Saarlandes – Saarland Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Sachsen – Saxony Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Sachsen-Anhalt – Saxony Anhalt Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Schleswig-Holstein – Schleswig Holstein Consumer Centre
Verbraucherzentrale Thüringen – Thuringian Consumer Centre

❖ 26 social and consumer oriented organisation

Aktion Bildungsinformation – Consumer Organization on Educational Issues – Consumer Protection on Issues Related to Learning and Education
Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad-Club (Bundesverband) – German Cycling Federation
Bundesverband Arbeiterwohlfahrt – Workers' Welfare Organisation
Bauherrenschutzbund – Building Clients' Protection Alliance
Bund der Energieverbraucher – Association of Energy Consumers
Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Senioren-Organisationen – German National Association of Senior Citizens Organisations (BAGSO)
Bundesverband hauswirtschaftlicher Berufe MdH – Federal Association of Home Economics Professions
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Hauswirtschaft – German Society of Home Economics

Deutscher Caritasverband – Caritas Germany
Deutscher Evangelischer Frauenbund – Protestant Church Women's Organisation
Deutscher Familienverband – German Family Association
Deutscher Frauenring – German Women's Association
DHB – Netzwerk Haushalt, Berufsverband der Haushaltsführenden – DHB – Household Network, Professional Association of Household Managers
Deutscher LandFrauenverband – German Country-women Association
Deutscher Mieterbund – German Tenant's Union
Diakonisches Werk der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland – social service agency of the protestant church in Germany
Familienbund der Katholiken – Association of Catholic Families
Gemeinschaft Hausfrauen – Berufsgemeinschaft in der Katholischen Frauengemeinschaft Deutschland – Housewives Association, Professional Association in the German Catholic Women's Association
Institut für angewandte Verbrauchersforschung – Institute for Applied Consumer Research
Katholische Arbeitnehmer-Bewegung Deutschland – Catholic Workers Movement
PRO BAHN – PRO BAHN German Passengers' Federation
Schutzgemeinschaft der Kapitalanleger – Association for the Protection of private Investors
Verband Wohneigentum – Homeowner's Association
VerbraucherService Bundesverband im Katholischen Deutschen Frauenbund – Consumer Service at Federation of German Catholic Women
Verkehrsclub Deutschland – Transport Club Germany
Zentralverband Deutscher Konsumgenossenschaften – Central Association of German Consumer Cooperatives

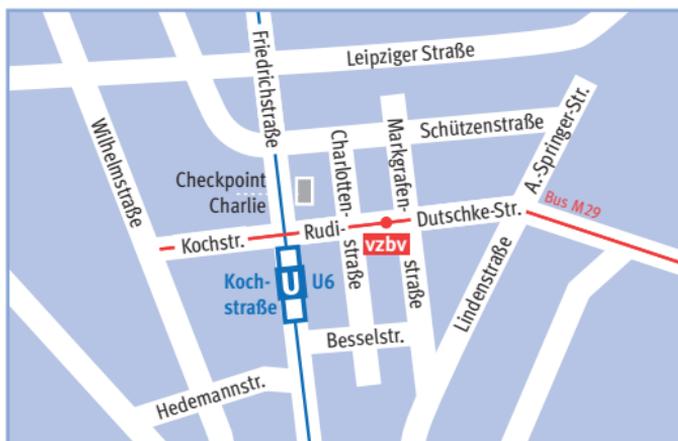
❖ Sponsoring members

Bundesverband für Wohnen und Stadtentwicklung – Federal Association for Housing and Urban Development
Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund – Confederation of German Trade Unions
Eurotoques-Stiftung – Eurotoques Foundation
Euro-Info-Verbraucher – European Consumer Centre Germany
Germanwatch
RAL – Deutsches Institut für Gütesicherung und Kennzeichnung – RAL – German Institute for Quality Assurance and Certification
Slow Food Deutschland – Slow Food Germany
Stiftung Warentest – Foundation for Comparative Product Testing
Transparency International – German Chapter

... and private individuals committed to consumer policy.

How to reach us:

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