

European Consumer Centre (ECC) Annual Report 2011



General Information about ECC-Iceland

ECC-net's main purpose is to assist consumers in disputes with traders and provide general information on consumer's rights in cross-border commerce within the European Economic Area (EEA). ECC-Iceland is one of 29 ECC centres across Europe. ECC-Iceland assists Icelandic consumers in their dealings with traders in other European countries by gathering information, forwarding complaints to trader's ECC centre and keeping track of any progress abroad. At the same time ECC-Iceland handles communication with Icelandic traders when complaints are received from consumers in other EEA countries. The main objective is therefore to make it easier for consumers to make cross-border purchases within the EEA and to build up trust in the internal market, as it is possible to seek assistance if consumers have trouble with traders in other European countries. The assistance of the ECC-net is free of charge. The Consumers' Association of Iceland manages ECC-Iceland in accordance with an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior, and is funded by the Icelandic government and the European Commission (SANCO), each responsible for half the operational costs.



ECC-Iceland staff

ECC-Iceland's operation is relatively small and is housed and managed by the Consumers' Association of Iceland. The association's staff therefore also works for ECC-Iceland but there is only one position equivalent to approx. 50% of a full time job that is shared between three employees. They are Hildigunnur Hafsteinsdóttir, lawyer and director of ECC-Iceland, Kristin Einarsdóttir case-handler, and Heimir Skarphéðinsson, legal intern and case handler.

Number of cases

In 2007 a new registration system (IT-tool) was introduced to the ECC-net. The system requires that all information requests and complaints as well as cases ECC handles be entered into the system. In 2011 40 information requests, 13 simple complaints and 37 normal complaints. The workload has increased steadily in recent years, for instance in 2007 there were 7 normal complaints. In 2008 there were 25 normal complaints and 23 in 2009. In 2010 there were 38 normal complaints so there seems to be stability in the number of normal complaints

between years now. Information requests are when a consumer contacts ECC and requests information regarding his rights, a simple complaint is when there is a dispute between consumer and trader, and a normal complaint is when the staff of ECC-Iceland mediates between consumer and trader. Most normal complaints are from tourists travelling in Iceland that have experienced problems with Icelandic traders, but a number of cases also involve mediation requests from Icelandic consumers. In those cases, ECC-Iceland examines them and forwards them to the ECC-centre in the trader's country.

Other projects

In addition to providing guidance and mediation in complaints, ECC-Iceland has many other projects. The ECC-network is quite extensive, with ECC-centres in all countries within the EEA (except Liechtenstein). ECC representatives therefore convene regularly in addition to having a great deal of email communication. The ECC-centres contribute to various reports and joint projects within the ECC-network. ECC-Iceland has its own homepage, www.ena.is, where the aim is to keep consumers up to date on the latest consumer issues within the EEA. Reports published by the ECC-net are also available online on ECC-Iceland's homepage.

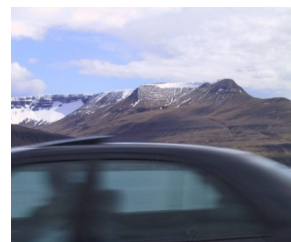
This year ECC-Iceland conducted a survey on the price of passports within the EEA, which received extensive media coverage. In the local media, around twenty reports mentioned ECC-Iceland during the year and the director was interviewed in the radio a number of times about ECC-Iceland and its activity.

Success stories from ECC-Iceland

Most of the cases ECC-Iceland received last year were about travel and transportation. Following are a few examples of cases in 2011.

An Icelandic consumer booked a flight from Iceland to Oslo and from there on to Warsaw in Poland. The flight from Oslo to Warsaw was cancelled but the consumer needed to get to Warsaw urgently. The next available flight to Warsaw was too late for the consumer and therefore he booked a new flight to Krakow that departed earlier and then take a train to Warsaw. The consumer also needed to book accommodation in Oslo while he waited for the flight. The airline refused to pay for the accommodation and train ticket because the consumer had decided himself to book the flight to Krakow. Following mediation by ECC-Iceland the airline agreed to pay for the accommodation but still refused to pay for the train ticket. ECC-Norway forwarded the case to an ADR that ruled that the airline should also pay for the train ticket. Finally the consumer was refunded both the cost of accommodation and the train ticket.

An Icelandic consumer booked a flight from Milano to Heathrow with an Italian airline. Scheduled departure was 18th December 2010, however, three hours before departure the flight was cancelled due to weather. After returning home the consumer tried repeatedly via phone, emails and regular mail, to get the cost of the ticket



refunded, but the airline did not reply. The consumer contacted ECC-Iceland that forwarded the case to ECC-Italy and in the end the consumer was refunded.

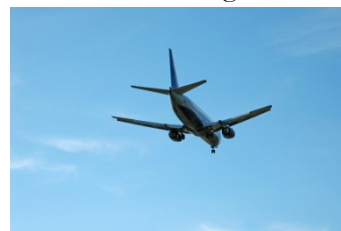
An Icelandic tourist rented a car in Germany. When returning the car to an employee of the rental agency, he asked the consumer if everything was in order, and the consumer thought everything was. Upon returning home the consumer was therefore surprised to realize that the rental agency had charged his credit card for 115.000 ISK just one hour after he had returned the car. He then received a letter from the rental agency ten days later stating that there had been damage on the rear end of the car and repair costs would be 115.000 ISK. Attached to the letter was an obscure picture of the rear end where the damage could not be seen and the picture was not dated and a picture of the mileage of the car was not produced. The consumer did not recognize the damage and contacted ECC-Iceland that forwarded the case to ECC-Germany. The rental agency could not prove that the consumer had caused the damage the consumer was refunded.



A woman from Luxembourg travelled to Iceland during Christmas 2010 to visit her relatives. Her luggage was delayed for six days and when it finally arrived the suitcase was damaged, as was some of its content. The woman needed to buy a new suitcase and some clothes to wear for Christmas and claimed compensation from the airline, which refused to pay her. The woman contacted ECC-Luxembourg that forwarded the case to ECC-Iceland and finally the airline compensated the woman for her damage.

A French consumer rented a car in Iceland in August 2011. When returning the car there was a crack in one rear light of the car and the traveller was charged an estimated repair cost of 57.000 ISK. He thought the cost was unreasonable and sought assistance from ECC-France which forwarded the case to ECC-Iceland which requested to see an invoice for the repairs. It turned out that the repair cost was only 37.000 ISK so the traveller was refunded 20.000 ISK.

A British consumer had booked a flight from Keflavik to Edinburgh on the 29th of August 2011. Because of hurricane Irene the flight was cancelled and he was offered either a re-route to Gatwick airport in London or reimbursement of the cost of the ticket. He chose re-route to Gatwick and then claimed the cost of a flight from Gatwick to Edinburgh from the airline. The airline refused since the consumer had chosen another destination and claimed that it only needed to transport the passenger to the same country as the final destination, but not to the final destination itself. Following mediation on behalf of ECC-Iceland the traveller was refunded the cost of the additional flight.



Reykjavik, 9th January 2012,
Hildigunnur Hafsteinsdóttir