



Advertising Self-Regulation in times of COVID-19

ICAS & EASA Report – May/June 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is severely impacting people's lives, our economy and our society. The lockdown as well as safety measures put in place to contain the pandemic have plunged the global economy into a severe contraction and it is uncertain when and how quickly it will recover.

This crisis has also led to serious disruptions in the advertising industry. It has impacted our members' finances and personnel and made changes in operations necessary. Many Self-Regulatory Organizations (SROs) have had to adjust their IT systems to allow remote access to internal servers and programs. They also had to start convening jury consultations virtually.

At the same time, an additional challenge arose. Advertisements started to appear around the world that undermined public health advice or exploited people's anxieties. SROs had to quickly take action against these practices and outline how the regulatory frameworks, that are already in place to ensure legal, decent, honest, and truthful advertising, had to be applied in the context of COVID-19 for the benefit of consumers and businesses.

The report provides an insight into the challenges and actions taken by our SRO members since the start of the pandemic to ensure the safety of their employees whilst advising businesses on how to advertise responsibly in times of COVID-19, and the measures necessary to remove misleading and harmful advertising.

This report is based on data collected by ICAS and EASA in April and May 2020, as well as on desk study and research.¹

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¹ The data is based on two different surveys, made in late April and May, the first covering ICAS Members only, whilst the second larger study on COVID-19 complaints included all ICAS and EASA members.

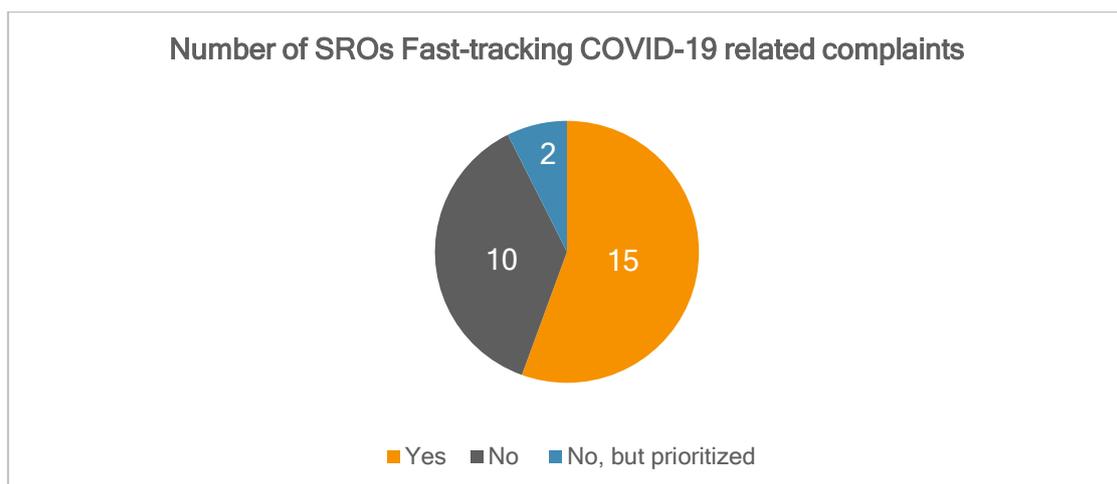
COMPLAINT HANDLING & INDUSTRY ADVICE

Despite the big impact that the current crisis has on our members' operations, which is outlined in the following chapter, all have managed to continue providing their services to businesses and consumers remotely and online. Not only that, but when faced with an increase in harmful COVID-19 related advertisements and subsequent complaints, the majority of SROs have prioritized these complaints or have fast-tracked them.

Fast-tracking complaints

15 SROs reported that they fast-track complaints about potentially harmful COVID-19 related ads. Furthermore, 2 SROs stated that, while there are no fast-track procedures in place, COVID-19 related complaints are being treated with priority.

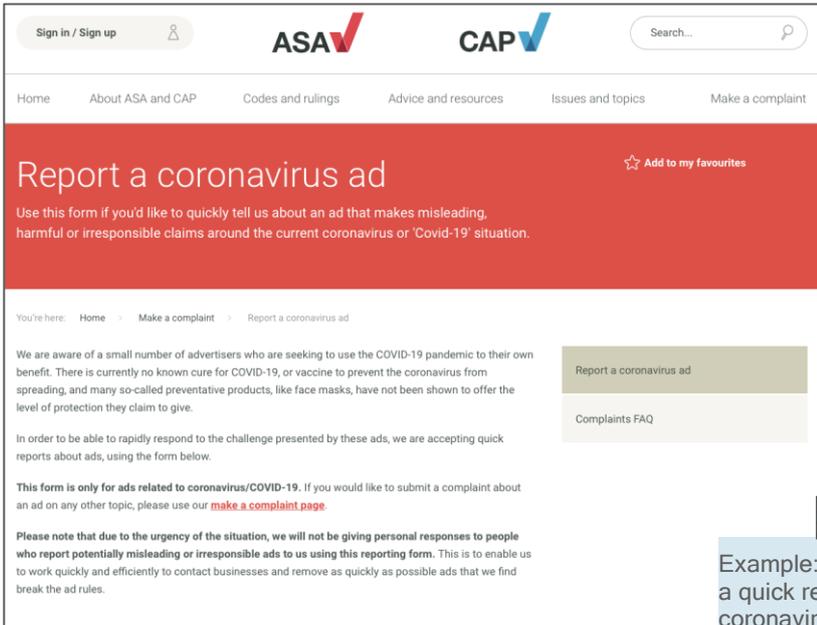
10 SROs have no specific fast-track procedure in place, either because their system is already fast or because it was not yet deemed necessary. A few reported that handling these types of complaints is not in their current remit.



Facilitating reporting of coronavirus ads

Additionally, some SROs have, for instance, also facilitated complaints handling for consumers by reducing the amount of information consumers need to provide to the SRO.

Below are a couple of examples:



The screenshot shows the website for the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and the Campaign for Realism (CAP). The main heading is 'Report a coronavirus ad' with a sub-heading: 'Use this form if you'd like to quickly tell us about an ad that makes misleading, harmful or irresponsible claims around the current coronavirus or 'Covid-19' situation.' Below this, there is a breadcrumb trail: 'You're here: Home > Make a complaint > Report a coronavirus ad'. The text explains that the SRO is accepting quick reports about ads related to coronavirus/COVID-19. A call to action button says 'Report a coronavirus ad' and another button says 'Complaints FAQ'. A small UK flag is visible next to the button.

Example: The ASA in the UK created a quick reporting system for coronavirus ads



Example: In India consumers can report misleading ads via WhatsApp



The advertisement features a dark blue background with glowing green virus particles. The text reads: 'REPORT MISLEADING ADS VIA' in large white letters. Below this, there is the ASCI logo (a red checkmark in a circle) and the WhatsApp logo (a green speech bubble with a white telephone handset). To the right of the WhatsApp logo is the phone number '7710012345'.

Industry advice and statements

20 SROs have also issued statements advising businesses to advertise responsibly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many also provided specific advice to businesses by using different media channels.



Home > Resources > UPDATE: COVID-19 AdHelp Information – Therapeutic and Health

Definition of Advertising and Advertisement

2020 Election & Referenda Advertising

COVID-19 AdHelp Information – Therapeutic and Health

COVID-19 AdHelp Information – Alcohol

UPDATE: COVID-19 AdHelp Information – Therapeutic and Health

Acceptability of words in broadcasting

Advertising self-regulation and how it works

Frequently Asked Questions

Advertorial or editorial – When is an editorial feature advertising?

About audio standards

The Fair Trading Act – Misleading claims

UPDATE: COVID-19 AdHelp Information – Therapeutic and Health

UPDATE: COVID-19 AdHelp Information – Therapeutic and Health

To assist advertisers to comply with the ASA Codes, the ASA recently developed AdHelp information on a therapeutic and health products and services during COVID-19 – this document (available [here](#)) has been updated today, 23 April 2020, to include information from a recent *New Zealand Gazette notice* which states from 2020, the importation, manufacture, sale, supply and use of COVID-19 point of care* test kits and material, prohibited, unless authorised by Medsafe. Further background information provided by Medsafe is available [here](#).

*Point of care test kits use a blood sample to detect antigens or antibodies in the blood.

We encourage you to review this updated AdHelp Information on [COVID-19 and Advertising Therapeutic Products or Services](#) and discard any previous versions that you may have.

If you are considering advertising a therapeutic or health related product or service and have any questions not covered by the information we have provided, we strongly recommend reaching out to the Therapeutic Advertising Pre-Vetting Service (TAPS) to help minimise the risk of a legal or code breach. Information about TAPS is available on the [ANZA website](#). If you have any questions on advertisements outside the scope of TAPS, you can email us via asa@asa.co.nz.

If you're a member of the public and have a complaint about our [complaints form](#). If you are an advertiser, please contact your account manager.

If the Complaints Board upholds a complaint, we will take appropriate action.

We are happy to help with any advertising queries.



Example: The ASA in New Zealand took a proactive approach to alert advertisers, agencies and the media to ensure that advertising remained accurate and responsible. Specific COVID-19 AdHelp Information Services were developed.



Example: Early on in the pandemic, the Canadian Ad Standards published a reminder to advertisers to substantiate all claims in advertising



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adstandards.ca

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Claims and a Reminder About Substantiating Advertising Claims

With rising concerns about the global spread of this novel Coronavirus disease, some companies are advertising products promising to help prevent the virus from spreading or offer a cure to those infected. Even claims about products that are not traditionally thought of as a treatment or prevention of an illness may be seen to imply a benefit to consumers looking for solutions at this difficult time. Ad Standards is releasing this bulletin to remind advertisers about their obligations in connection with substantiating claims, both in the context of health protection, and scientific claims more broadly.

Health Products

According to Health Canada, “[a]t this time, there is no vaccine for COVID-19 or any natural health products that are authorized to treat or protect against COVID-19.” For more information, see: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms.html>. As a reminder, claims about certain regulated products such as natural health products and non-prescription drugs are only permissible if authorized by Health Canada. These product categories include hard-surface disinfectants, antiseptic skin cleansers (e.g. hand sanitizer, disinfectant soaps), homeopathic remedies (including nosode products), and other similar products advertised for

treatment of a disease such as COVID-19. Ad Standards preclears advertising against applicable Terms of Market Authorization, and will only approve advertising that is preapproved by Health Canada. To the extent that not all advertising is submitted for preclearance, advertisers should ensure that their advertising complies with applicable Terms of Market Authorization.



Example: ARPP publishes updates on its blog regularly and advises on compliance of advertising in times of COVID-19





Example: Hungarian open letter reminding ÖRT's advertising members of the responsible guidelines for commercial communications, even in times of crises.

REKLÁMOK AZ EGÉSZSÉGÜGYI VESZÉLYHELYZET IDEJÉN – ÖRT AJÁNLÁS

Kedves Tagjaink,

ÖNSZABÁLYOZÓ
REKLÁM TESTÜLET
REKLÁM TISZTÁN



A koronavírusnak köszönhetően kialakult egészségügyi veszélyhelyzet mindannyiunk számára egy eddig nem tapasztalt helyzet. Magunk és a környezetünk védelmében nagyon fontos, hogy megfelelő, követendő példát mutassunk a társadalom számára a reklámokon keresztül is. A legfontosabb szempontok figyelembe vételével az ÖRT az alábbi pontokban fogalmazza meg a járványügyi veszélyhelyzetre vonatkozó etikai iránymutatásait a reklámozók, reklámkészítők, valamint a reklámközvetítők számára.

- A járványügyi veszélyhelyzetre tekintettel minden reklámozónak felelősen kell eljárnia és szem előtt tartania, hogy a fogyasztók félelmének, szorongásának kihasználása – akár figyelemfelkeltés céljából – nem lehet etikus.
- Egyetlen reklám sem használhatja ki a fogyasztó félelmét azáltal, hogy megtéveszti őket a reklámozott termék használhatóságával, tulajdonságával kapcsolatban. Különösen igaz ez olyan termékekre, amelyekről a fogyasztó alappal vagy alaptalanul azt vélheti, hogy támogatják az egészségét, immunrendszerét. Ilyenek elsősorban az élelmiszerek, étrend-kiegészítők, orvostechnikai eszközök, védőfelszerelések.
- Kerülendő a járvánnyal, kórral, vírusokkal, azok hatásaival, ellenhatásaival történő kommunikációs elemek használata még abszurd, vicces formában is.
- Ugyancsak nem etikus a felelőtlen magatartás – indokolatlan testi kontaktus és szükségtelen tömegjelenetek – bemutatása. Minden reklámban a távolságtartó érintkezés, a "maradj otthon" viselkedés támogatása lehet csak elfogadható.
- A gúnyos, a kialakult járványügyi helyzetet elbagatellizáló, felelőtlen magatartást támogató elemek nem elfogadhatók.



Home Bestellingen Advies Klachten FAQ Codes/Regels Extra Info Nieuws Contact Communicatie Centrum

CORONAVIRUS EN COMMERCIËLE COMMUNICATIE: AANBEVELINGEN VANUIT DE RAAD VOOR DE RECLAME

Tijdens deze coronacrisis wordt de JEP meer en meer geconfronteerd met vragen en klachten die in normale omstandigheden wellicht niet of veel minder zouden voorkomen, maar momenteel uiting geven aan zeer begrijpelijke gevoeligheden en bezorgdheden vanuit het publiek.

Eenzijds wordt vaak gewezen op reclames die in strijd lijken te zijn met overheidsmaatregelen met betrekking tot het coronavirus/Covid-19.

Het gaat dan om reclames die berichten bevatten zoals: 'kom langs bij uw adviseur', 'kom naar onze showroom', 'onze winkels blijven door de week open', enz. en naar alle waarschijnlijkheid voor de huidige crisis zijn gecreëerd en ingepland.

Anderzijds zijn er bijvoorbeeld klachten over reclames die verwijzen naar de versterking van het immuunsysteem, al dan niet met specifieke vermelding van het coronavirus.

De JEP heeft bovendien klachten ontvangen met betrekking tot een digitale marketingcommunicatie van een buitenlandse adverteerder waarbij twee mondmaskers werden aangeboden bij aankoop van het product in kwestie. Deze reclame werd intussen ingetrokken.

De Raad voor de Reclame heeft zijn leden er dan ook onmiddellijk toe opgeroepen om blijk te geven van voorzichtigheid in hun communicaties.

De regels waar verantwoorde reclame aan moet voldoen, zijn de algemene regels van de [Code van de Internationale Kamer](#) voor verantwoordelijkheid en eerlijkheid en waarachtigheid uiters.

Example: Belgium's JEP issued guidance and recommendations to advertise correctly and responsibly during the COVID-19 crisis.



Domov Novice Komuniciranje v krizi

DOMAČE NOVICE, ČLAN ČLANU

Komuniciranje v krizi

7. apr 2020

KAKO KOMUNICIRATI MED KRIZO?

PRISTOP

Kriza, ki ogroža življenje in zdravje ljudi, je največji komunikacijski izziv. Epidemija koronavirusa v Sloveniji in

Example: Slovenia's Advertising Chamber, SOZ, has consistently been reminding actors in the advertising field of the regulatory frameworks for responsible communications, with tips and tricks to keep communicating correctly and properly in times of crises.

Domov Novice Zagotovimo, da bo oglaševanje v kriznih razmerah še posebej odgovorno in etično

DOMAČE NOVICE, NOVICE SOZ SPLOŠNE

Zagotovimo, da bo oglaševanje v kriznih razmerah še posebej odgovorno in etično

25. mar 2020

Complaints data

Between mid-March to mid-May 2020, SROs across the globe dealt with more than 1600 complaints relating to advertisements connected to COVID-19. Those SROs that had the capacity and remit to do so, also investigated more than 400 ads on their own initiative.²

1600+
complaints about
ads related to
COVID-19
400+
advertisements
were investigated
on SROs' own
initiative

The main issues complained about were misleading health claims, financial claims, excessive pricing, offensive advertising, fearmongering, the promotion of unsafe behavior or issues regarding the availability of the promoted product.

The flagged advertisements appeared on different media channels, i.e. on TV, online, outdoor, etc. and were promoting different products and services, such as health and cleaning products, OTC, supplements, alcohol, food and beverages, as well as financial services.

A few examples are listed below:

Misleading health claims:

Some advertisements tried to exploit consumers' confusion about the difference between viruses, germs, and general cleanliness to give them the impression that they can feel protected.

An Indian ad, for example, promoted a mattress as an "Anti-Corona Mattress" and "Corona Resistance Mattress" given that it had anti-fungal properties. The advertiser was asked by the Indian SRO, ASCI, to stop the promotion.

One SRO reported complaints about TV commercials that promoted supplements designed to 'strengthen the immune system during winter and flu epidemics' and

² *Based on data from 20 European countries as well as data from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, India, New Zealand, South Africa, UAE, and the USA collected mid-March to mid-May 2020

promoted the product as 'fundamental' during current times. The SRO found the commercial inappropriate and misleading due to the obvious references made to COVID-19 symptoms. Given that no known cure for COVID-19 and its symptoms exists, the jury decided that the ad breached the codes.

The German SRO in charge of unfair commercial practices, WBZ, acted against several ads that promoted alternative cures and products against COVID-19 without scientific evidence. WBZ took an advertiser to court based on their claim: *"how we can protect ourselves [against the novel Coronavirus] with medicinal mushrooms"*.

Inappropriate ads:

Some brands used the novel coronavirus to showcase drastic reductions in prices, with the aim to attract potential consumers.

A German advertisement promoted discounted prices stating they were "infected by the virus" as they were lower than before the pandemic. The German SRO, DWR, upheld the complaint.

Other ads were considered inappropriate as consumers became highly sensitive to scenes that were very recently commonplace in our day-to-day behavior, such as social gatherings. Therefore, some campaigns that were considered compliant before the pandemic had to be stopped to take into consideration this new sensitivity.

Fearmongering:

Other SROs have received complaints against out-of-home advertising content. In one case, an SRO had to deal with a complaint against an ad for a financial service provider featuring a scared-looking young child and the question whether the end of the world was near. The SRO's Jury upheld the complaint due to its fearmongering content and irresponsible use of a child in advertising. During times of crises, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is deemed irresponsible to use the picture of a small distressed child as a means to attract attention to a product or service.

SRO Cooperation with National Authorities

Advertising Self-Regulation often works best where SROs and local authorities collaborate well together and where the authorities recognize the benefits of advertising self-regulation and support SROs.

With the aim to ensure a higher level of consumer protection regarding harmful COVID-19 advertisements, more than half of SROs reported that they collaborate with national authorities by exchanging information, ensuring complaints transfer as well as enforcement where appropriate.

More information on the publications and activities at country level can be found in the annex. The list in the annex is not absolute but should serve as information and illustrate the types of activities and publications in this space.

CHANGES IN SROs' OPERATIONS

All SROs in ICAS's and EASA's Membership have adapted the way they operate currently to protect first and foremost their employees and follow the legal measures in place to combat the spread of the virus. At the same time, they ensured that essential services to their members, businesses and consumers continue.

SROs' staff work remotely, and jury deliberation or Council meetings happen online or via telephone, as do hearings with the advertisers or complainants. Some SROs had to adjust their IT systems to allow for remote access to the servers and software tools for their employees.

Many SROs have also changed their complaints' handling procedures, with more than half of the SROs fast-tracking harmful consumer complaints, especially those related to COVID-19, while supporting the most affected industries, including possible 'regulatory forbearance'.

ICAS & EASA ACTIONS

On 1 April, ICAS, EASA and CONARED issued a Statement on the Importance of Responsible Advertising and COVID-19 in [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#).

EASA also organized a workshop on COVID-19 with the European Commission, exchanging perspectives on the EU-wide coordinated actions, learning about practices from the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Network, and sharing initiatives based on EASA and ICAS members' actions. This collaboration with the European Commission (DG Justice and Consumers) has led to subsequent meetings and exchanges on best practices of both the advertising self-regulatory and the national Consumer Protection networks.

ICAS and EASA jointly presented at a Webinar of the International Chamber of Commerce, once again stressing the importance of trustworthy advertising in times of Covid-19 and the significance of the advertising industries' collective actions.

EASA also spoke at the United Nations, "UNCTAD webinar on "Competition and consumer protection in times of #COVID19" and shared actions and experiences of the advertising self-regulatory network in combating misleading and irresponsible advertising. In alignment with the experts from other consumer authorities, EASA called for a coordinated response and a stronger cross-border dialog, stressing that trust in advertising can only be ensured if consumers are put at the heart of the economic activities.

Last but not least, since the beginning of the Covid-19 crises, the secretariats of ICAS and EASA have been supporting their members through continuous information sharing and timely updates, dedicated webinar series and sessions for best practice exchange and focused discussion on key Self-Regulatory challenges, as well as ongoing work on long-term Self-Regulatory initiatives, ensuring that these priority areas are not undermined by the current economic and social uncertainties.

INDUSTRY MEMBER ACTIONS

The World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) regularly conducts research on marketers' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The [surveys](#) indicate how far marketers currently invest in campaigns, how far they delay investments, and on their current outlook for the business environment.

WFA also created a [COVID Compendium for Global Marketers](#) which shows actions brands around the world have taken in order to provide inspiration.

The International Advertising Association (IAA) provides numerous insights on COVID-19 and publishes COVID-19 interviews with relevant stakeholders.

The Global Advertising Lawyer's Alliance issues regular updates on Global Advertising and Marketing Law, also in relation to the pandemic and published a [Report](#) in early June on Global COVID-19 Advertising Law Developments.

The World Out of Home Organization (WOO) and the European Publishers Council (EPC) have taken a proactive approach to support their members in this crisis, through an increased sharing of information and advocacy.

IAB Europe has been focusing on providing the ecosystem with [relevant economic insights](#) so that the industry can take informed business decisions. They have, for instance, organized [Economic Trends Forum sessions](#), during which impact studies of the lockdown on the ad sector were presented. Finally, IAB also updated their [National Quality Initiatives tracker](#) in July, and issued their [guidance to Brand Safety and Suitability](#) to help advertisers build confidence and help ensure the right levels of brand investment.

ABOUT ICAS AND EASA

About ICAS

The International Council for Advertising Self-Regulation (ICAS) is a global platform which promotes effective advertising self-regulation. [ICAS members](#) include Self-Regulatory Organizations (SROs) and other national, regional and international bodies working to ensure that advertising and marketing communications are legal, honest, truthful and decent.

ICAS' Mission is to exchange best practice around self-regulation and working on common solutions to the global challenges faced by the advertising industry. ICAS also facilitates the establishment of new SROs in emerging markets and promotes self-regulation and its benefits worldwide.

For more information please contact ICAS at info@icas.global.

About EASA

The **European Advertising Standards** Alliance (EASA) is the authoritative voice on advertising self-regulation issues in Europe. EASA members include European Self-Regulatory Organizations (SROs) and other industry bodies working to ensure that advertising and marketing communications are legal, honest, truthful and decent. EASA's mission is to promote responsible advertising through effective self-regulation by providing detailed guidance regarding the development and establishment of advertising self-regulation for the benefit of consumers and businesses, to set out high operational standards for advertising self-regulatory systems and to provide a space for the advertising ecosystem to work together at European level to address common challenges and make sure advertising standards are futureproof.

For more information please contact EASA at info@easa-alliance.org.

ANNEX: COUNTRY INFORMATION

Country	SRO	Activity, information and important links
AE	ABG	The Dubai Consumer Protection Department is in charge of all complaints related to COVID-19. In the context of the pandemic, the United Arab Emirates passed Cabinet Resolution No. 24 of 2020 Concerning the Publishing and Exchange of Health Information about Communicable Diseases and Epidemics and Incorrect Information Relevant to Human Health. It prohibits publishing false and misleading information and claims not approved by the Ministry of Health on any media channel, including social media posts. Administrative penalties apply for breaches.
AT	ÖWR	Austria's Advertising Council has updated its procedures for complaints against companies that are currently greatly affected by legal restrictions. In such cases, the procedure will be suspended until advertising activities of said companies resume. Otherwise, ÖWR makes every effort to ensure that the procedure runs smoothly and as quickly as usual. The ÖWR President has also issued a press release on the importance of communicating correctly and properly. He said: "Ethics and morals in advertising communication is not only appropriate these days, but rather an absolute must."
AU	Ad Standards	The Australian SRO, Ad standards, recommended to advertisers that they should ensure that the content of their ad aligns with current community standards and Australian Government health guidelines . The SRO advised them to rethink what is appropriate content: https://www.linkedin.com/company/ad-standards-australia/ .
BE	JEP	JEP has issued guidance on advertising responsibly and properly during the COVID-19 crisis with suggestions and examples of good and bad practices. JEP is also able to quickly deal with urgent complaints or manifest infractions and produce adjudications within a few days.
BR	CONAR	Since the pandemic, the Brazilian SRO had to deal with a wealth of complaints related to COVID-19. All these complaints were prioritized and were high on the jury's agenda. In the most serious cases, CONAR requested an immediate injunction. For all other cases which were less urgent and involved companies facing difficulties, procedural deadlines were extended. CONAR Brazil collaborates well with state authorities. The public prosecutor requested the SRO to conduct investigation into advertisements of financial institutions.
CA	Ad Standards	Ad Standards has issued an advisory reminding industry about their obligation in connection with substantiating claims, both in the context of health protection, and scientific claims more broadly. Claims about certain

		<p>regulated products also need the prior authorization by Health Canada. These product categories include hard-surface disinfectants, antiseptic skin cleansers (e.g. hand sanitizer, disinfectant soaps), homeopathic remedies (including nosode products), and other similar products advertised for the prevention, mitigation or treatment of a disease such as COVID-19. Ad Standards preclears advertising in these categories against applicable Terms of Market Authorization and will only approve claims that have been authorized by Health Canada.</p> <p>Ad Standards also fast-tracked procedure for COVID-19 related complaints and prioritized complaints relating to COVID claims. In case of unauthorized health claims (i.e. products claiming to prevent, or protect against, COVID-19, or viruses more generally) Ad Standards reports them to Health Canada. Complaints about price gouging (complaints about the price of products, and not specifically the advertising of that price, like charging \$x for PPE) were also sent to the applicable consumer protection authorities. Ad Standards has also existing relationships with the federal health authorities, and those reporting protocols address the types of complaints they see related to COVID-19 advertising, without the need to change their cooperative approach.</p>
CY	CARO	<p>CARO issued guidance to their members, suggesting that they should be very careful with regards to the general atmosphere and message of their ads. They should also avoid exploiting fears and refrain from exaggerated and/or undocumented claims. Suggestions also included that companies proceeding to set up e-commerce spaces on their websites, should take care regarding claims around delivery time and costs. CARO also underlined the importance of avoiding the trivializing of the crisis and other issues relating to it such as family ties and domestic violence.</p>
CL	CONAR	<p>The Chilean Code of Advertising Ethics regulates all issues related to misleading or indecent advertising relating to COVID-19. The SRO remains on alert to supervise that advertising communications continue to respect best practices.</p>
CO	Autocontrol	<p>The newly established SRO, Autocontrol Colombia, has not begun to provide the service of dispute resolution or complaint handling, yet. However, Autocontrol organizes webinars for advertisers and agencies, where they are reinforcing the message of the importance that all commercial communications during COVID-19 need to comply with the principle of social responsibility, as set out in the ICC code, in particular, that advertising and marketing practices should not, without justifiable reason, play on fear or exploit misfortune.</p> <p>The Colombian Consumer Protection Authority is taking action against those advertisements which promise</p>

		treatment of COVID-19, given that the Ministry of Health issued a document that clarifies that until now there is no evidence to support such claims.
DE	WBZ	<p>WBZ issued a press release in March on the topic of the COVID-19 crisis and the advertising practices to avoid. The German SRO also published information on their website and sent bespoke information to associations whilst organizing a webinar on COVID-19 related advertising with the Institute for Information Telecommunication and Media Law at the University of Münster.</p> <p>In May, a further press release was published, informing the public on measures taken by the SRO. By the end of May, WBZ had received 159 complaints, issued 51 warning letters, and 16 informal warning letters. Four injunctions and one main proceeding were initiated before court. Most cases dealt with claims regarding the product's ability to cure or prevent an illness. WBZ also took part in the second sweep of major platforms organized by the European Commission within the CPC-Network, by supporting the German Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection in the screening of websites.</p>
ES	AUTOCONTROL	<p>The Spanish SRO, AUTOCONTROL, reminded advertisers about the legal and deontological rules in place and the need to comply with them.</p> <p>They also collaborate closely with state and regional authorities including the Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs Directorate General, Audio-visual regulators, the Bank of Spain, etc.</p>
FI	MEN/LTL	The Finnish Chamber of Commerce underlined the importance, during times of crises, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, to not include children in advertising content, as it is irresponsible to use the picture of a small child as a means to attract attention.
FR	ARPP	The French SRO, ARPP, has issued a public communication in order to remind advertisers of the need to advertise responsibly and publishes regularly articles on its blog with specific advice, e.g. that advertisers shouldn't play on fear or dramatize the crisis for profit.
GR	SEE	SEE published a message encouraging the industry to show prudence and responsibility during this challenging period.
HU	ÖRT	The Hungarian SRO, ÖRT, published a special recommendation and best practice recommendations for advertising during the COVID-19 period.
IE	ASAI	The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI) has issued a guidance note to advertisers that any claims being made for products and services referring to COVID-19 should be adequately substantiated. ASAI received complaints about a number of advertisements for products and services relating to COVID-19 on the grounds that were considered misleading. Advertisers were reminded to avoid claims that undermine public health advice or exploit people's anxieties.

IN	ASCI	<p>The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has been working on various initiatives to spread awareness regarding COVID-19 claims in advertisements: this includes alerts to advertisers, press interviews with the Secretary General, awareness building through ASCI social media platforms aimed at creating awareness for the advertising network as well as consumers and a twitter survey in March to evaluate consumer's opinions if ASCI should be taking up suo motu action against misleading claims in the context of COVID-19. The poll resulted in participants wanting ASCI to look into such misleading claims.</p> <p>Also, the facility introduced by ASCI to register complaints via WhatsApp has enabled quick, easy and free redressal of complaints against objectionable advertisements.</p> <p>ASCI is working closely with the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH). AYUSH reached out to ASCI to monitor and report misleading advertisements related to COVID-19 to them. Every advertisement found to be misleading is being reported to AYUSH.</p>
IT	IAP	IAP has rigorously enforced its commercial communications codes as the SRO investigated a number of advertisements making false health claims.
NL	SRC	SRC published a statement on their website in which they called for extra attention for responsible advertising during the crisis. Additionally, they warned against advertisements that undermine public health or abuse people's fear. Furthermore, COVID-19 related complaints are handled with priority.
NZ	ASANZ	<p>The Advertising Standards Authority in New Zealand has pro-actively assisted individual advertisers with suggested changes to make their ads code-compliant following complaints. The ASA also issued two Free AdHelp advisory statements:</p> <p>https://www.asa.co.nz/resources/updated-covid-19-advertising-health-products/ and</p> <p>https://www.asa.co.nz/resources/covid-19-advertising-alcohol/</p> <p>The ASA also had informal contact with a number of Government agencies to provide an update on their actions and shared their AdHelp advisories with them.</p>
PL	RR	The Polish SRO, RR, has launched an information campaign to raise consumer awareness of their rights to complaint about unethical advertising.
PT	ARP	The Portuguese SRO, ARP, in joint cooperation with the Consumer General Directorate ("DGC") issued a number of recommendations to economic operators regarding their advertising communications before the current public health crisis. According to those, there is a need to combine efforts to remind all professionals that

		<p>advertising cannot falsely claim that a good or service is capable of curing or helping to prevent COVID-19, otherwise it would be considered a misleading practice under current legislation. Furthermore, those same entities have also raised awareness and alerted consumers to the misleading advertising of cleaning products, sanitizers or protective masks since they have been claimed to have characteristics or provide results that they do not possess.</p>
RO	RAC	<p>The Romanian, SRO, RAC, published a statement in Romanian based on the ICAS, EASA and CONARED statement on the importance of responsible advertising and COVID-19 which urges advertiser to make sure their claims are substantiated. RAC collaborates closely with the Audio-visual Authorities in Romania.</p>
SK	SRPR	<p>SRPR expanded ICAS's, EASA's, and CONARED's message on responsible advertising during the pandemic and reiterated the importance to respect the existing advertising laws and standards, be sensitive to people's current increased susceptibility to health claims and ensure that all claims are substantiated. SRPR is happy to give advice to companies if necessary.</p>
SE	Ro.	<p>Reklamombudsmannen issued a message on their website reminding companies of their commitment to advertise responsibly, in light of the ICAS, EASA, and CONARED statement.</p>
UK	ASA	<p>The Copy Advice team of the ASA has been giving advice on coronavirus and has updated the "AdviceOnline" resources. The ASA is also working alongside MHRA to follow-up on other coronavirus rulings, as well as with CMA to issue updated guidance on subscription traps and 'free trials'. They are also working with other agencies and consumer protection bodies to bolster the ASA's action and, where appropriate, referral to those bodies when they are best placed to tackle the issues at hand.</p> <p>The ASA also put in place a forbearance policy to focus mainly on COVID-19 related claims during the time of the pandemic.</p>
USA	BBB National Programs	<p>BBB National Programs, through its DSSRC (Direct Selling Self-Regulatory Council) and NAD (National Advertising Division) programs, has received and dealt with a number of complaints related to COVID-19 claims in advertisements, especially on social media. DSSRC does not have fast-track procedures, but COVID-related complaints are prioritized and expeditiously resolved.</p> <p>NAD has formalized fast track procedures (called Fast-Track SWIFT, limited to certain types of claims) under which a competitor's complaint about an ad is reviewed with a decision reached in 20 business days.</p> <p>BBB National Programs have also put out two statements regarding the necessity of direct selling companies to be</p>

		<p>mindful of any express or implied claims pertaining to COVID-19 and the corona virus.</p> <p>On March 30, 2020 DSSRC sent an email to more than 3,000 direct selling professionals, urging all direct selling companies and their salesforces to exercise extreme caution in the dissemination of health-related product claims in their marketing.</p> <p>On April 7, 2020, the DSSRC and the Direct Selling Association (DSA) published a joint statement urging all direct selling companies and their salesforces to ensure all claims made about health-related products are accurate.</p>
ZA	ARB	<p>The South African SRO, ARB, has dealt with complaints about advertisements in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of the complaints being about ads promoting alcohol.</p> <p>With the national state of disaster being declared in mid-March in South Africa, the Disaster Management Act (DMA) of 2002 was resurrected and a number of regulations were passed to control not only the movement of people but also to restrict the sale of certain goods. More specifically, the regulations under that Act prohibited the sale of alcohol, tobacco products and all restaurant, fast food and ready prepared fresh food delivery services. Although alcohol could not be purchased during the lockdown period, manufacturers of alcoholic beverages could still advertise their products.</p>