

**Price Research, Price Differences in Europe  
Products of H&M, Zara, C&A and Body Shop  
May 2009  
Executed by the European Consumer Centres Network  
(ECC-Net)**

**Introduction**

The European Consumer Centre Network (ECC-Net) provides consumers with information and direct help in cross-border problems. The ECC-Net offers a full service to consumers from information to dispute resolution to enable them to take full advantage of the internal market, without risk to their health, safety or economic interests. The Network provides consumers with a „one Stop shop“ for information and advice on shopping across-borders. The ECC-Net also assists in resolving cross-border complaints with traders, and helps consumers to gain access to appropriate Alternative Dispute Resolution schemes. The European Commission, together with the Member States, finances its operation. As expressed by the European Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Mrs. Meglena Kuneva, the ECC-Net has become one of the key tools to empower citizens, allowing them to take full advantage of their rights.

**The Price Comparison Project**

The Joint Project on Price Comparison in Europe was led by ECC Luxemburg in cooperation with ECC Ireland and ECC Austria in May 2009. Out of 29 European Consumer Centres 27 ECC's participated in the survey: Luxemburg, Austria, Ireland, France, Germany, UK, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Iceland, Hungary, Malta, The Netherlands and Slovakia.

The survey looked at some of the most common textile products of Zara, H&M, C&A and cosmetic products of Body Shop. Prices of three items for women and two items for men from each company were compared.

To ensure that exactly the same products were compared in all participating countries, product numbers and photos were used to identify the goods.

**Special attention is drawn to the fact that every European Consumer Centre participating in this project is responsible for the accuracy of the information given on prices by the Centre itself.**

## **Results of the Price Research**

The survey compared prices of selected goods between 27 European countries, showing that price differentials are not a simple and straightforward matter. In order to create an accurate picture of the situation one needs to take several factors into account and put the results into proper context. Some of the topics to be considered include consumer preferences and commercial strategies, level of competition and distribution channels, salary rates and taxes, cost of transport, property and utilities, cost of insurance, finance, marketing operations and other services, as well as the volatility of currency exchange rates.

The price comparison concerns a selection of textile and cosmetic products and is not representative for any other sector.

It was observed that there are no outlets of the selected retail chains in Bulgaria. In other countries like for instance Slovenia, Hungary, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta not all of the companies have established their branch offices. In few other cases the companies provided slightly different product range and only some but not all items could be compared. For example in France, some of the selected products were not available at the time and could not be taken into account.

Nevertheless, the results of the price comparison survey demonstrate quite clearly that shopping for the above selected range of products in some countries is cheaper than in others.

## **Results in detail**

### ***Portugal represents good value for money***

For the selected range of products shopping in Portugal is cheaper than the European average. Jeans of H&M or Zara are, for example, on average 10 Euro cheaper in Portugal than for instance in Finland, Italy, Austria, Ireland or Luxemburg. The price of cosmetic products is on average 3 EUR lower than in other countries.

### ***The Scandinavian Countries***

Concerning the selected range of products Scandinavian countries (Norway, Finland, Denmark, Sweden) appeared to be more expensive than the rest of Europe. In Sweden, however, the prices of H&M were below the average and Body Shop was more expensive than the average in other countries.

### ***Price differences between retail chains***

#### ***H&M***

Prices of H&M textile products in Sweden are relatively low. On the other hand, prices of H&M in Sweden's neighbouring countries, like for instance Norway, are well above the European price level.

#### ***C&A***

In Slovakia, the price of C&A Jeans was significantly higher (43 Euro) than for instance in Austria where the cost of the same product is 29 Euro. Overall the price level of C&A in Slovakia is above the European average.

#### ***Body Shop***

Majority of cosmetic products were relatively expensive for example in Sweden. In Belgium, Luxemburg, Ireland or Austria they were on average 2 to 3 Euro more expensive than comparable products in Germany.

It transpires from the survey that varying prices in participating countries do not in all cases mean that one country is more expensive than the other. For example the selected men's range jeans in Zara outlets in Ireland are more expensive than in UK but other Zara items such as for instance blazer in women's range are cheaper in Ireland than the same product in UK. It shows that there are opportunities for consumers shopping across borders but the price differences for specific products are not always representative for the market in general.

### ***Euro Countries – Non Euro Countries***

In the countries outside Euro zone price differences are more significant than in countries with Euro. In Hungary, Czech Republic, Denmark, Norway or Great Britain prices differ more from the average-prices in Europe than the prices within the Euro zone (except Portugal).

The survey also shows that prices in the new Member States of the EU are the same or even higher than the European average. In contrary to what might have been assumed earlier, consumers there pay on average the same or even higher cost for the same product (within the selected range of goods) despite significantly lower income per capita.

### **Summary concerning the investigated range of products**

- ➔ Within the most European Countries differences in price-level are marginal. Exception: Portugal and some Scandinavian countries.
- ➔ In the new Member States of the EU the selected range of consumer products is on the average European level.
- ➔ Prices within the Non Euro zone deflect more from the average prices in Europe than inside the Euro zone.

## **Conclusions**

The survey very evidently shows that there are price differences between Member States that are likely to remain in the near future. Shopping around still pays dividends and therefore consumers should feel free to explore the opportunities that the internal market offers. With the growth of e-commerce and the development of Europe-wide consumer legislation it is now easier than ever to compare prices across the European Union and avail of the best bargains with confidence.

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