

International **Comparative** Legal Guides



Product Liability **2021**

A practical cross-border insight into product liability work

19th Edition

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BLD Bach Langheid Dallmayr

Campos Ferreira, Sá Carneiro –
CS Associados

Clayton Utz

Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath
LLP

Faus & Moliner Abogados

Harris Kyriakides

Herbert Smith Freehills LLP

Iwata Godo Law Offices

Kellerhals Carrard

Kluge Advokatfirma AS

Lee and Li, Attorneys-at-Law

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Spain

Faus & Moliner Abogados



Xavier Moliner



Juan Martínez

1 Liability Systems

1.1 What systems of product liability are available (i.e. liability in respect of damage to persons or property resulting from the supply of products found to be defective or faulty)? Is liability fault based, or strict, or both? Does contractual liability play any role? Can liability be imposed for breach of statutory obligations e.g. consumer fraud statutes?

In Spain, the general regime governing liability for defective products is established in Royal Legislative Decree 1/2007, of 16 November, which approves the consolidated text of the General Law on the Protection of Consumers and Users and other complementary regulations ("RLD 1/2007"). Articles 128 to 146 of RLD 1/2007, both inclusive, set the main rules on product liability in Spain.

The general regime for product liability set forth in RLD 1/2007 is mainly of a strict nature (see question 1.3). Under this regime, the "producer" of a defective product will be liable for any damage caused by death or by personal injuries, and/or any damage to, or destruction of, any item of property other than the defective product itself, provided that the item of property is of a type ordinarily intended for private use or consumption and was used by the injured person mainly for his own private use or consumption. It will be on the claimant to prove that the product was defective, that damage occurred and that there was a causal link between the defective product and the damage suffered.

This strict liability system does not preclude other liability systems from providing an injured party with greater protection, nor does it affect any other right to damages, including moral damages, that the injured party may have as a consequence of contractual liability, based on the lack of conformity of the goods or any other cause of non-performance or defective performance of the contract, or any other non-contractual liability that may apply.

1.2 Does the state operate any special liability regimes or compensation schemes for particular products e.g. medicinal products or vaccines?

No. In Spain, the state does not operate any special scheme of compensation for particular products, but in several cases the general regime on liability of the public administration may apply (see question 1.4).

1.3 Who bears responsibility for the fault/defect? The manufacturer, the importer, the distributor, the "retail" supplier or all of these?

Under the RLD 1/2007 product liability regime, the responsibility for the fault/defect is borne by the "producer", who is strictly liable for the damage caused by the defective product (see question 1.1).

For the purposes of this regime, "producer" means: (i) the manufacturer or the importer in the European Union of a finished product, any raw material, or a component part of the finished product; and/or (ii) the "apparent producer" of the product (i.e. any person who, by putting his name, trademark, or other distinguishing feature along with the product, whether on the container, wrapping or any other protective or presentational component, presents himself as its producer).

Where the "producer" of a product cannot be identified, each supplier of this product (i.e. the distributor or the "retail" supplier) will be considered its "producer", unless he informs the injured party of the identity of the "producer" or of the person who supplied him with the product, within a term of three months before he is required to give such information. This has been clarified by, among others, the Judgment of the European Court of Justice of 2 January 2009 (case C-358/08) and the Judgments of the Spanish Supreme Court of 21 January 2020 and 20 July 2020.

The "producers" responsible for the same damage by application of this regime will be jointly and severally liable before the injured party. However, the one who responded to the injured party will have the right to file an action for recovery against the other responsible "producers", according to their participation in the damage.

Additionally, it must be noted that the supplier of a defective product will also respond as if he were its "producer" if he supplied the product while being aware that the defects existed. In such a case, the supplier is also able to file an action for recovery against the producer.

1.4 May a regulatory authority be found liable in respect of a defective/faulty product? If so, in what circumstances?

As mentioned above, under the regime on liability for defective products established in RLD 1/2007, the responsibility for the defective product is only borne by the "producer" (see question 1.3). As the regulatory authority is not a producer, it will not be responsible under this regime.

However, it is possible to file a complaint against the regulatory authority that authorised the defective product, based on the general regime on liability of the public administration. This is possible when the damage is derived from facts or circumstances that could have been prevented or avoided, according to the knowledge of science or techniques at the time it authorised or reviewed the authorisation of the product. Therefore, the state of scientific and technical knowledge works as a defence that may be used by the regulatory authority.

As we will see in question 3.1, this regime differs from the responsibility regime applied to “producers” in case of medicinal products, foods, or foodstuffs. Under the latter regime, the producers are not allowed to invoke the “state of scientific and technical knowledge” defence, as it is expressly excluded under RLD 1/2007. However, this ground for exemption was introduced into the Law on Administrative Procedure to exonerate the public administration (regulatory authority) from responsibility when the damage is derived from facts or circumstances that could not have been prevented or avoided, according to the knowledge of science or techniques at the time it authorised or reviewed the authorisation of the product.

Therefore, when claiming damages against the regulatory authority, it is important to prove that, based on the state of scientific knowledge, the authority did not act according to the scientific data and evidence available at that moment.

Between 2017 and 2019, the National High Court (“AN”) issued five judgments dismissing different damages claims, filed in connection with the authorisation and the administration of two human papillomavirus vaccines. These claims were addressed against the Ministry of Health (“MOH”) and the pharmaceutical companies that produced and marketed such vaccines.

The AN rejected the complaints on the basis that the claimant did not prove that the competent authorities, based on the state of scientific knowledge, did not act according to the scientific data and evidence available at that moment. The claimants did not provide any firm and scientific evidence which would lead to the conclusion that such risk-benefit balance was unfavourable and that, therefore, the vaccines should not have been authorised.

1.5 In what circumstances is there an obligation to recall products, and in what way may a claim for failure to recall be brought?

Article 13 of RLD 1/2007 establishes that any entity involved in placing goods and services at the disposal of consumers and users shall be obliged, within the limits of its activity, to withdraw from the market, suspend the marketing or recover from the consumer or user any goods or services that do not meet the necessary conditions or requirements, or which represent a foreseeable risk to personal health or safety on any other grounds.

In accordance with article 51 of RLD 1/2007, the corresponding public administration may order the precautionary or definitive withdrawal or recall of goods or services from the market on the grounds of health and safety.

1.6 Do criminal sanctions apply to the supply of defective products?

Criminal sanctions may apply if the supply of the defective product can be considered an intentional or negligent action specified as a criminal offence in the Spanish Criminal Code.

Criminal offences against public health are specified in the Spanish Criminal Code in articles 359 to 378.

According to the Spanish Criminal Code, not only natural persons but also legal entities such as companies may be held criminally liable. However, companies can only be criminally liable for those criminal offences expressly provided in the Criminal Code for legal persons, and because of the behaviour of:

- a) their directors or legal representatives, whether they have been appointed to perform their duties or even if they do so without a formal appointment;
- b) other persons authorised to adopt decisions on behalf of the company, including middle management, general and individual proxies, and persons to whom control and organisation functions have been delegated (including the compliance officer); and
- c) those who are subject to the authority of the above-mentioned persons, including the employees of subsidiaries and persons with a commercial relationship with the company, such as self-employed individuals or subcontracted employees, provided that they are within the company’s corporate domain, when the company has seriously breached its duty to control, monitor and supervise its activity.

As a rule, a company shall only be subject to criminal liability if the criminal behaviour of one of the above-mentioned persons was intentional and constituted wilful misconduct. Reckless behaviours may only result in the company being held criminally liable when it is expressly foreseen in the Criminal Code.

According to the Criminal Code, there are internal control tools (compliance systems) to prevent criminal conduct from being caused, which can exempt legal entities from criminal liability or minimise such liability. For a legal entity to be held criminally liable, the prosecution must prove both that the offence was committed and that the internal control tools (compliance systems) required by the Criminal Code for the prevention of the criminal conduct were either non-existent or ineffective.

2 Causation

2.1 Who has the burden of proving fault/defect and damage?

The injured party seeking compensation of damages has the burden of proving the defect, the damage and the causal relationship between the two.

2.2 What test is applied for proof of causation? Is it enough for the claimant to show that the defendant wrongly exposed the claimant to an increased risk of a type of injury known to be associated with the product, even if it cannot be proved by the claimant that the injury would not have arisen without such exposure? Is it necessary to prove that the product to which the claimant was exposed has actually malfunctioned and caused injury, or is it sufficient that all the products or the batch to which the claimant was exposed carry an increased, but unpredictable, risk of malfunction?

The regime on product liability places the burden to prove the existence of the defect, the damage and the causal relationship between such defect and damage upon the claimant. In order to establish the causal relationship, the claimant must provide solid and substantial evidence that supports such link and demonstrates appropriately and sufficiently that damage was a result of the defect.

However, occasionally, the Spanish courts also accept that the causal relationship may be proven by means of presumption or circumstantial evidence.

In Spain, the principle of generic causation (i.e. that, in order to prove the causal relationship, it would be enough to demonstrate that a product is capable of causing an alleged injury) is not applied. The Spanish courts have established that the mere fact that a product can cause damage is not enough to establish the defective nature of such product. In order to prove that a product is defective, the claimant must prove that the damage suffered is effectively caused by the defective product. It is sufficient that the claimant proves the existence of a defect, but it is not strictly necessary that the claimant provides evidence of the specific defect of the product. We can thus conclude that in Spain the “proximate causation” principle applies.

On 5 March 2015, the Court of Justice of the European Union issued a ruling on joined cases C-503/13 and C-504/13, under which certain kinds of product can be considered defective under the proximate causation principle. In these particular cases, the Court concluded that Directive 85/374/CEE regarding damage caused by defective products should be interpreted in the sense that, in the case of medical devices such as pacemakers and cardioverter defibrillators, considering their purpose and the vulnerability of patients who use them, the security requirements that patients can expect from such products are particularly high. Under these conditions, as they are products of the same model and production series, after a defect has been detected in a unit, the other units of the same model or batch can be classified as defective without it being necessary to prove the existence of the defect in each of the units.

On 21 June 2017, the Court of Justice of the European Union issued another case (C-621/15) referring to product liability of manufacturers in the event that their products have a defect which poses a risk to the consumer. The Court, in these circumstances, decided that European law does not preclude a national court from considering, when medical research neither establishes nor rejects a relationship between a vaccine and the occurrence of a disease, that some facts alleged by the injured person constitute serious specific and consistent evidence, enabling the court to conclude that there is a defect in the vaccine and that there is a causal link between that defect and the disease.

On the other hand, the Court also ruled that judges should ensure that when applying this evidence regime, they do not reverse the burden of the proof. According to the Court, the Directive precludes rules based on presumptions in which medical research neither establishes nor rules out the existence of a link between the vaccine and the disease; the existence of a causal link between the defect attributed to the vaccine and the damage suffered by the affected party will always be considered to be established if certain predetermined factual evidence is presented.

In the judgments issued by the AN mentioned in question 1.4 regarding liability claims filed in connection to the human papillomavirus vaccines, the Court confirmed that the burden of proving the defect, the damage and the causal relationship lies with the claimant and, in the absence of evidence from the claimant, it absolved the MOH and the pharmaceutical company of all wrongdoing attributed to them.

The AN rejected the evidence proposed by the claimants consisting of opinions which, according to the court, did not undermine the studies and clinical trials that endorsed the efficacy of the product.

With respect to the alleged lack of informed consent prior to its administration, the AN rejected the complaints because the claimants had not demonstrated that the pathologies with which they were diagnosed were a frequent adverse reaction, and therefore the obligation to inform did not include such risk since it was not known.

Moreover, the AN considered that the causal relationship between the diagnosed diseases and the vaccines had not been demonstrated, as the medical history did not associate the ailments and symptoms from which the claimants suffered with the vaccine.

The liability of the pharmaceutical companies for defect of information in the Summary of Product Characteristics and the leaflet was also rejected because the claimants had not proved that their diseases were caused by the vaccine.

2.3 What is the legal position if it cannot be established which of several possible producers manufactured the defective product? Does any form of market-share liability apply?

If it cannot be established which of several possible producers manufactured the defective product, all the manufacturers shall be jointly and severally liable *vis-à-vis* the injured parties. The producer who compensated the injured party shall have the right to claim recovery from the other producers, depending on their involvement in causing the damage.

However, the manufacturer of a part that is integrated into a finished product shall not be liable if he proves that the defect is attributable to the design of the product into which the part manufactured by him was integrated, or to the instructions provided by the manufacturer of the finished product.

2.4 Does a failure to warn give rise to liability and, if so, in what circumstances? What information, advice and warnings are taken into account: only information provided directly to the injured party, or also information supplied to an intermediary in the chain of supply between the manufacturer and consumer? Does it make any difference to the answer if the product can only be obtained through the intermediary who owes a separate obligation to assess the suitability of the product for the particular consumer, e.g. a surgeon using a temporary or permanent medical device, a doctor prescribing a medicine or a pharmacist recommending a medicine? Is there any principle of “learned intermediary” under your law pursuant to which the supply of information to the learned intermediary discharges the duty owed by the manufacturer to the ultimate consumer to make available appropriate product information?

In accordance with Spanish doctrine and case law, there are three large groups of defects that products may have: i) manufacturing defects; ii) design defects; and iii) information defects.

The absence of necessary warnings or instructions for use, or the inappropriateness of such information, may give rise to an information defect. Therefore, when the information that accompanies a product is inappropriate or insufficient, such product may be defective and may give rise to liability in the event that the product causes damage.

The information is considered to be appropriate when it allows for the identification, assessment or reduction of the announced risk. The information is also considered to be appropriate when there is a balance between the information on the safety of the product in possession of the manufacturer, and the information made available to consumers.

Moreover, the producer shall only be held liable for the lack of information on reasonably foreseeable risks (i.e. risks that he is aware of or should be aware of through the exercise of reasonable diligence). Within the framework of the regime for product

liability established in RLD 1/2007, a defect is defined as “the lack of safety that could legitimately be expected from the product, i.e.: based on the criterion of the consumer’s reasonable expectations”. Further, within the scope of the consumer’s legitimate expectations, only the information that was known to the producer or that, in accordance with the state of scientific and technical knowledge, should have been known to him at the moment of placing the product on the market must be included.

In principle, the information and warnings that shall be considered in order to determine whether a product suffers from an information defect shall be the information provided directly to the user of the product.

However, for certain types of product for which the intervention of an intermediary is required, the courts may take the information provided to the intermediary into consideration, in order to determine whether the information provided to the consumer is sufficient and appropriate.

Specifically, in the case of medicinal products, Basic Law 41/2002, of 14 November, governing patient autonomy and rights and obligations as regards clinical information and documentation, establishes that it is the doctor’s duty to guarantee that the patient has the necessary information to decide freely on the therapeutic strategy prescribed by the doctor. As a consequence, the information provided by the manufacturer to the doctor shall be taken into consideration in order to assess the set of information provided to the patient.

Finally, we must point out that RLD 1/2007 does not expressly foresee the “learned intermediary rule” referred to above, pursuant to which the supply of information to the learned intermediary discharges the duty owed by the manufacturer to the ultimate consumer to make appropriate product information available.

3 Defences and Estoppel

3.1 What defences, if any, are available?

The producer shall not be liable if he can prove that the product is not defective because it provides the safety which legitimately could be expected from it, taking all circumstances into account, including the time when the product was put into circulation, the presentation of the product and the use to which it could reasonably be expected that the product would be put.

Neither shall the producer be liable if he can prove that:

- a) he did not put the product into circulation;
- b) given the circumstances of the case, it may be presumed that the defect did not exist when the product was put into circulation;
- c) the product had not been manufactured for sale or for any other form of distribution with an economic purpose, and that it was not manufactured, imported, supplied or distributed within the context of a professional or entrepreneurial activity;
- d) the defect is due to the fact that the product was developed in accordance with existing mandatory rules; or
- e) the state of scientific and technical knowledge existing at the time the product was put into circulation did not allow for the discovery of the existence of the defect.

The producer of a part that is integrated into a finished product shall not be liable if he proves that the defect is attributable to the design of the product into which the part was integrated, or to the instructions provided by the manufacturer of the finished product.

Additionally, the doctrine points out that the apparent producer shall not be liable if he can prove that he was not the one who

placed the sign, brand, logo or stamp that identifies him as the apparent producer into the defective product or its packaging.

In the case of medicinal products, foods or foodstuffs intended for human consumption, the persons liable shall not be able to invoke the “state of scientific and technical knowledge” defence set out in point e) above.

3.2 Is there a state of the art/development risk defence? Is there a defence if the fault/defect in the product was not discoverable given the state of scientific and technical knowledge at the time of supply? If there is such a defence, is it for the claimant to prove that the fault/defect was discoverable or is it for the manufacturer to prove that it was not?

The fact that the state of scientific and technical knowledge existing at the time the product was put into circulation did not allow for the discovery of the defect may be used as a defence. However, as pointed out in the answer to question 3.1 above, such defence cannot be invoked in the case of medicinal products, foods or foodstuffs intended for human consumption.

The producer has the burden of proving that the defect could not be discovered.

3.3 Is it a defence for the manufacturer to show that he complied with regulatory and/or statutory requirements relating to the development, manufacture, licensing, marketing and supply of the product?

Compliance with regulatory and/or statutory requirements relating to the development, manufacture, licensing, marketing and supply of the product can be used as a defence, if such requirements impose the obligation on the producer to develop, manufacture, license, market and/or supply the product in strict compliance with and observance of these requirements. If this is the case, the manufacturer could invoke the ground for exoneration pointed out in point d) of question 3.1 above.

Additionally, compliance with regulatory and/or statutory requirements can be considered in the context of assessing whether a product meets legitimate safety expectations, and therefore when determining whether a product is defective or not. These cases should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

3.4 Can claimants re-litigate issues of fault, defect or the capability of a product to cause a certain type of damage, provided they arise in separate proceedings brought by a different claimant, or does some form of issue estoppel prevent this?

The effects of *res judicata* produced by final judgments, and consisting in the permanence over time of the efficacy of the judgment as a mechanism for legal safety and certainty, have certain limits.

One of those limits is the subjective limit, which means that the effects of *res judicata* only apply between the litigating parties, and therefore it is possible to bring new claims on matters of fault, defect or capability of a product to cause a certain type of damage, provided that the claimant is different. For example, in the event of personal injury suffered by an individual during a traffic accident as a consequence of the malfunctioning of an airbag, it is possible for the injured person’s insurance company to file a claim against the car manufacturer in order to recover the hospital expenses paid by such insurance company, and for the injured person him/herself to file a claim against the car

manufacturer for personal damages. Of course, such personal damages cannot include the hospital expenses paid directly by the insurance company. In this example, the claim by the insurance company would be brought under insurance law, and the claim by the injured person under the regime on product liability.

Different claimants are also allowed to file different complaints claiming that the same kind of product is defective and caused a certain type of damage. In each separate proceeding, the judge will assess whether the specific product was defective and if it caused the specific type of damage claimed by the claimant.

3.5 Can defendants claim that the fault/defect was due to the actions of a third party and seek a contribution or indemnity towards any damages payable to the claimant, either in the same proceedings or in subsequent proceedings? If it is possible to bring subsequent proceedings, is there a time limit on commencing such proceedings?

The producer against whom proceedings for product liability are brought may claim in his defence that the defect was due to actions of a third party, but his liability *vis-à-vis* the claimant will not be reduced thereby.

Nevertheless, the producer who paid compensation to the injured party shall be able to claim such compensation from the third party as corresponds to such third party's involvement in causing the injury, in subsequent proceedings. Such proceedings against the third party must be brought within a period of one year, counted from the day the compensation was paid to the injured party.

3.6 Can defendants allege that the claimant's actions caused or contributed towards the damage?

The liability of the producer may be reduced, or even excluded, if it is proven that the damage was caused partially or entirely due to the actions or negligent behaviour of the injured party. However, the behaviour of the injured party must be assessed on a case-by-case basis and must hold a direct relation to the defect.

For example, in the case of the malfunctioning of an airbag cited in our answer to question 3.4 above, the manufacturer of the airbag cannot defend itself by arguing that the accident was caused due to the reckless behaviour of the driver (injured party).

The behaviour of the injured party may have contributed to the accident, but not to the malfunctioning of the airbag.

4 Procedure

4.1 In the case of court proceedings, is the trial by a judge or a jury?

In the case of court proceedings, the case shall be resolved by a judge.

4.2 Does the court have power to appoint technical specialists to sit with the judge and assess the evidence presented by the parties (i.e. expert assessors)?

In legal proceedings on product liability, the examination of expert evidence may only be proposed by the parties to the trial. In this type of proceedings, the court may not *ex officio* propose the examination of expert evidence or appoint technical specialists in order to assess the evidence presented by the parties, but a party can request it.

In exceptional cases, once the proceedings have been concluded and before judgment is rendered, the court may *ex officio* order the examination of new evidence (including expert evidence) on relevant facts, in the event that the evidence already examined was insufficient. In practice, this is very unusual.

4.3 Is there a specific group or class action procedure for multiple claims? If so, please outline this. Is the procedure 'opt-in' or 'opt-out'? Who can bring such claims e.g. individuals and/or groups? Are such claims commonly brought?

Article 11 of the Code of Civil Procedure 1/2000 foresees the possibility to bring collective legal proceedings and establishes that legally constituted associations of consumers and users shall have standing in court to defend the rights and interests of their members and of the association, as well as the general interests of consumers and users, without prejudice to the individual legal standing of the persons who suffered the damage.

When those damaged by a harmful event (e.g. by a defective product) are a group of consumers or users which are perfectly determined or may be easily determined, the standing to apply for the protection of these collective interests corresponds to i) associations of consumers and users, ii) legally constituted entities whose purpose is the defence or protection of such consumers and users, or iii) the affected groups themselves.

In contrast, when those damaged by a harmful event are an undetermined number of consumers or users or a number that is difficult to determine, the standing to bring court proceedings in defence of these collective interests shall correspond exclusively to the associations of consumers and users which form part of the Council of Consumers and Users. If the territorial scope of the conflict mainly affects one specific autonomous region, the specific legislation of the autonomous region shall apply.

The Attorney General's Office also has legal standing to bring any action in defence of the interests of consumers and users.

4.4 Can claims be brought by a representative body on behalf of a number of claimants e.g. by a consumer association?

Yes; as previously stated in question 4.3, when those damaged are a group of consumers or users, then, depending on the case, the claims can be brought by associations of consumers and users, legally constituted entities whose purpose is the defence or protection of such consumers and users, the affected groups of consumers and users and/or even the Attorney General's Office.

4.5 May lawyers or representative bodies advertise for claims and, if so, does this occur frequently? Does advertising materially affect the number or type of claims brought in your jurisdiction?

In collective legal proceedings lodged by associations or entities formed for the protection of the rights and interests of consumers and users or by groups of affected people, those who have been damaged, as consumers of the product or users of the service which gave rise to the proceedings, shall be called to appear in order to assert their individual rights or interests. This call shall be made by the court, which shall announce the admission of the claim in the media with territorial coverage where the damage to these rights or interests occurred.

When proceedings involve certain damaged parties, or damaged parties that are easily determined, the claimant or claimants must have previously notified those concerned of their intention to lodge a claim. In this case, after the call, the consumer or user may act in the proceedings at any time but may only conduct the procedural acts which have not been precluded.

When the proceedings involve damage to an indeterminate number of persons or a number which is difficult to determine, the call shall suspend the course of the proceedings for a limited time which shall not exceed two months, and which shall be determined by the court in each case depending on the circumstances or complexity of the event and the difficulties concerning the determination and localisation of those damaged. The proceedings shall restart with the intervention of all the consumers who attended the call. As a rule, the individual appearance of consumers shall not be allowed subsequently, notwithstanding certain rights or interests that they may assert according to other provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure 1/2000.

4.6 How long does it normally take to get to trial?

Although it is difficult to provide a general answer, it is fairly common for a period of 14 to 18 months to go by between the filing of the claim and the rendering of the judgment at first instance.

4.7 Can the court try preliminary issues, the result of which determine whether the remainder of the trial should proceed? If it can, do such issues relate only to matters of law or can they relate to issues of fact as well, and if there is trial by jury, by whom are preliminary issues decided?

The preliminary issues which, due to their very nature, represent an obstacle to the continuation of the trial and require prior resolution by the judge are those that relate to: i) lack of jurisdiction or competence of the court before which the claim is brought; ii) lack of capacity or representation of the litigants; iii) *lis pendens* or *res judicata*; iv) necessary passive joinder of defendants; v) inappropriateness of the proceedings; or vi) a legal defect in the way the claim has been filed.

These preliminary issues to be decided beforehand are only related to matters of law.

4.8 What appeal options are available?

In legal proceedings on product liability, it is possible to file an appeal before the Provincial Court of Appeal against the judgment rendered at first instance by the Court of First Instance.

Against the judgment on appeal rendered by the Provincial Court of Appeal, there are two appeal options: i) an extraordinary appeal for infringement of procedure; or ii) a cassation appeal, provided that the amount of proceedings exceeds the sum of EUR 600,000 or the decision on the appeal has reversal interest, because the judgment subject to appeal contradicts the Supreme Court's jurisprudence or decides on points and issues on which contradictory case law from the Provincial Courts of Appeal exists, or applies rules that have been in force for less than five years, as long as, in the latter case, no jurisprudence from the Supreme Court exists concerning previous rules of identical or similar content.

4.9 Does the court appoint experts to assist it in considering technical issues and, if not, may the parties present expert evidence? Are there any restrictions on the nature or extent of that evidence?

The proposal of the examination of expert evidence corresponds to the litigants, and the only restriction regarding its nature and scope is that it must be necessary to have scientific, artistic, technical or practical knowledge to ascertain any facts or circumstances that are relevant to the matter or to acquire certainty about them.

4.10 Are factual or expert witnesses required to present themselves for pre-trial deposition and are witness statements/expert reports exchanged prior to trial?

Witnesses are not required to present themselves for pre-trial deposition and they only declare on the day of the trial.

The reports issued by experts must be provided by the parties together with their claim (i.e. the document that initiates the proceedings) or together with their response to the claim. If this is not possible, the parties can announce their intention to provide such reports in the claim or in the response to the claim. In such case, the reports shall be provided to the court five days before the date set for the pre-trial hearing (*Audiencia Previa*), so that the court may provide a copy to the other party.

Expert reports, the necessity or usefulness of which lies in the statement of defence or the allegations and pleas set forth at the pre-trial hearing (and the need for which therefore becomes apparent at a later stage of the proceedings) shall be submitted by the parties for their transfer to the counterparties at least five days prior to the trial.

If the parties so request, the experts who have prepared the reports shall appear at the trial in order to ratify, explain or clarify their reports, and to respond to any questions regarding their reports.

4.11 What obligations to disclose documentary evidence arise either before court proceedings are commenced or as part of the pre-trial procedures?

Under Spanish civil law, there is no discovery obligation between the litigant parties – neither before court proceedings are commenced nor as part of the pre-trial procedures. The Spanish civil system is based on the principle of parties' own production of evidence, i.e. each litigant party shall obtain and present its own evidence to support its claims in court proceedings.

Exceptionally, and only applicable in those cases in which the applicant is unable to obtain by himself certain data necessary to file a claim, he may request of the judge, prior to filing the lawsuit, access to certain sources of evidence specifically provided for, by way of preliminary proceedings, in the Code of Civil Procedure 1/2000. Among other preliminary proceedings provided in the law: i) any interested party may request a copy of the medical records from the health centre or professional with custody of said records; and ii) an individual who considers himself to have been damaged by an event that could be covered by civil liability insurance may request the exhibition of the insurance contract.

Additionally, at the pre-trial hearing, any litigant may request the judge to order the other party, or third parties unrelated to the proceedings, to exhibit any document related to the subject of the dispute. In said request, the applicant must: i) prove that

the document is not available to him and justify the impossibility of obtaining it; ii) prove that the document refers to the purpose of the process (because it is documentary evidence relevant to the case) or to the effectiveness of other means of proof (because it gives, or does not give, effectiveness to other evidence presented); and iii) provide a photocopy or simple copy of the document or indicate its content in the most exact terms.

4.12 Are alternative methods of dispute resolution required to be pursued first or available as an alternative to litigation e.g. mediation, arbitration?

RLD 1/2007 establishes the possibility for conflicts between consumers, users and companies to be resolved through the Consumer Arbitration System, with no special formalities and in a manner that is binding and enforceable on both parties, provided that the conflict does not concern intoxication, injury, death or the existence of reasonable evidence that an offence has been committed.

It is also possible to resolve conflicts in the field of product liability through the mediation system established in Law 5/2012, of 6 July, on mediation of civil and commercial matters through the arbitration system established in Law 60/2003, of 23 December, on arbitration.

Additionally, according to the Code of Civil Procedure 1/2000, the litigants are empowered to set out the matter at issue in the proceedings and may waive, acquiesce, submit to arbitration or mediation and reach agreements on the matter at issue.

The submission of the parties to any of the methods referred to is voluntary, and therefore alternative methods of dispute resolution are not required to be pursued before initiating any court proceedings.

4.13 In what factual circumstances can persons that are not domiciled in your jurisdiction be brought within the jurisdiction of your courts either as a defendant or as a claimant?

Provisions of Regulation (EU) No 1215/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 12 December 2012, on jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters, are applicable in Spain.

As a rule, the Spanish courts have jurisdiction over any dispute when the defendant is domiciled in Spain. This is regardless of where the claimant is domiciled. Therefore, if the producer of the defective product is domiciled in Spain, a claim may be brought against him before the Spanish courts.

In a product liability context, defendants not domiciled in Spain may be sued before the Spanish courts: (i) if the events leading to the product defect occurred in Spain; or (ii) if the damage occurred in Spain.

In this regard, see the Judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union, case C 45/13, of 16 January 2014, or the Judgment of the Spanish Supreme Court of 21 January 2019.

5 Time Limits

5.1 Are there any time limits on bringing or issuing proceedings?

The statute of limitations for proceedings claiming compensation for damage caused by a defective product under the regime

of RLD 1/2007 is three years, counted from the date the damage was incurred by the injured party, provided that the identity of the party liable for the damage is known to the injured party. The limitation period may be interrupted, as explained in question 5.2, at which point the period of three years restarts and is to be counted from this date.

Nevertheless, the right to claim the recovery of damages as provided in the product liability regime of RLD 1/2007 expires 10 years after the defective product is put on the market. The only way to stop this expiration date is to start legal proceedings.

5.2 If so, please explain what these are. Do they vary depending on whether the liability is fault based or strict? Does the age or condition of the claimant affect the calculation of any time limits and does the court have a discretion to disapply time limits?

If the claim is brought under the regime of RLD 1/2007 because of the defective nature of the product causing the damage, as defined in such regulation, the liability will always be of a strict nature, and the statute of limitations is three years. In case of bodily injury, this statute of limitations starts to run from the moment when the final extent of the injury has been defined and established.

If the claim cannot be brought under such regulation, the claim shall have to be brought under the general rules of civil law, the regime for liability of which is fault-based. In the event that the relation is non-contractual, the statute of limitations is one year.

In order to avoid a discussion on whether the product and the defects fall within the definition of RLD 1/2007 and, therefore, to avoid the debate on whether a statute of limitations of one year or three years applies, in cases of non-contractual liability some choose to initiate the proceedings within one year.

The age or the condition of the claimant does not affect the calculation of any time limit and the courts do not have any discretion to disapply them.

As noted above, legal proceedings brought under the product liability regime of RLD 1/2007 may be barred by limitation if they are initiated after a period of three years.

The limitation period for bringing proceedings may be interrupted by the injured party by filing a claim before the courts or by means of an extrajudicial claim, or through any act of acknowledgment by the liable party.

5.3 To what extent, if at all, do issues of concealment or fraud affect the running of any time limit?

The limitation period starts to run from the moment that the injured party has knowledge of the damage suffered and knows the identity of the person liable for such damage. We also refer to our answer to question 5.2 above regarding the commencement of the time limit in the event of bodily injury.

6 Remedies

6.1 What remedies are available e.g. monetary compensation, injunctive/declaratory relief?

In accordance with RLD 1/2007, every injured party has the right to receive economic compensation for damage caused by a defective product.

6.2 What types of damage are recoverable e.g. damage to the product itself, bodily injury, mental damage, damage to property?

The regime on product liability established in RLD 1/2007 extends to personal/bodily injury, including death, and/or any damage to, or destruction of, any item of property other than the defective product itself, provided that the item of property is of a type ordinarily intended for private use or consumption, and that it was used by the injured person mainly for his own private use or consumption.

Damage to the defective product itself is not recoverable under RLD 1/2007. However, the injured party may claim compensation for such damage under general civil and commercial law.

Moral damages may be recovered under general civil law.

6.3 Can damages be recovered in respect of the cost of medical monitoring (e.g. covering the cost of investigations or tests) in circumstances where the product has not yet malfunctioned and caused injury, but it may do so in future?

To recover the cost of medical monitoring, the claimant should be able to demonstrate that the cost incurred (the economic damage suffered) is a direct consequence of the product defect, even though the product has not yet malfunctioned and caused injury. Therefore, it shall demonstrate that medical monitoring is necessary to overcome or prevent the damage that the defective product will necessarily cause if there is no medical monitoring, and the existence of the product defect.

Additionally, it should be noted that in the previously mentioned Judgment of 5 March 2015, the Court of Justice of the European Union established that Directive 85/374/CEE, regarding damage caused by defective products, should be interpreted in the sense that the surgical operation for replacement of a defective product implanted in a patient constitutes “damage caused by death or personal injuries”, for which the producer is liable, if such an operation is necessary to overcome the defect in the product in question, even if the product has not yet malfunctioned.

Furthermore, in the particular case at hand, it is important to note that if the producer himself warned of the defect on the product and recommended that doctors monitor and/or replace the defective products by means of surgical operations (in this case the defect of the products was acknowledged even though the products had not yet malfunctioned), the “producer” may be liable for any damage/cost incurred by the injured party as a consequence of the acknowledged defect.

6.4 Are punitive damages recoverable? If so, are there any restrictions?

Under Spanish law, no punitive damages – only compensatory damages – can be recovered. However, the courts have some discretionary powers in awarding such compensatory damages and one may expect the conduct of the defendant to have some impact on the amount of damages awarded.

6.5 Is there a maximum limit on the damages recoverable from one manufacturer e.g. for a series of claims arising from one incident or accident?

The overall civil liability of one producer for damage – death and personal injury – caused by identical products with the same defect shall be limited to a maximum amount of EUR 63,106,270.96.

6.6 Do special rules apply to the settlement of claims/proceedings e.g. is court approval required for the settlement of group/class actions, or claims by infants, or otherwise?

Minors do not have procedural capacity and must be represented in the proceedings by their parents with parental authority, which may be exercised jointly by both parents or individually by one of the parents, with the consent of the other. If for any reason the parents have been deprived of parental authority, the minor shall be represented in the proceedings by his or her legal guardian, but the legal guardian will need judicial authorisation in order to bring or settle a claim.

6.7 Can Government authorities concerned with health and social security matters claim from any damages awarded or settlements paid to the claimant without admission of liability reimbursement of treatment costs, unemployment benefits or other costs paid by the authorities to the claimant in respect of the injury allegedly caused by the product? If so, who has responsibility for the repayment of such sums?

The possible right to be reimbursed by Government authorities in the terms set out in the question is not legally protected by the Spanish regime on product liability.

7 Costs / Funding

7.1 Can the successful party recover: (a) court fees or other incidental expenses; (b) their own legal costs of bringing the proceedings, from the losing party?

The costs of the proceedings shall be imposed on the party who has had all his pleas rejected, unless the court considers that the case posed serious *de facto* or *de jure* doubts.

When the payment of costs is imposed on the party who has lost the case, such party shall pay all court fees and other incidental expenses, the fees of experts who have intervened in the proceedings, and also the fees of the attorneys of the party who has won the case, up to an amount that shall not exceed one-third of the total claimed in the proceedings for each of the litigants who have obtained such award. If the court declares the recklessness of the litigant ordered to pay, such limitation shall not apply.

In the event that the pleas were partially accepted or rejected, each party shall pay the costs generated on its behalf, and half of the common costs, except when there are reasons to impose their payment upon one of the parties due to reckless litigation.

7.2 Is public funding, e.g. legal aid, available?

Law 1/1996, of 10 January, on Legal Aid, governs the regime of access to legal aid. According to this Law, Spanish citizens, nationals of other Member States of the European Union and aliens residing in Spain may have access to legal aid for (among other matters) civil and commercial proceedings, if they provide evidence that they do not have sufficient economic resources to litigate.

The following legal persons may also have access to legal aid, if they prove that they do not have sufficient resources to litigate:

- i) Associations of public interest, foreseen in article 32 of Organic Law 1/2002, of 22 March, that governs the Right to Association.
- ii) Foundations recorded in the corresponding Public Register.

7.3 If so, are there any restrictions on the availability of public funding?

In order to have access to legal aid, when making the application for legal aid, the litigant must prove that he or she does not have sufficient economic means, and that he or she has access to gross economic resources and income – annually calculated for all concepts and per family unit – that do not exceed the following thresholds:

- a) Two times the Public Revenue Index (“IPREM” by its Spanish acronym) in force at the moment of the application for legal aid, where the litigant does not form part of any family unit.
- b) Two-and-a-half times the IPREM in force at the moment of the application for legal aid, where the litigant forms part of any family unit with less than four members.
- c) Three times the IPREM in force at the moment of the application for legal aid, where the litigant forms part of any family unit with four or more members.

In the event that the litigant is a legal person, it shall be eligible for legal aid if it does not have sufficient means and the accounting result of the entity – annually calculated – is less than an amount equivalent to three times the IPREM.

The current annually calculated IPREM is EUR 7,908.60.

7.4 Is funding allowed through conditional or contingency fees and, if so, on what conditions?

The amount of the attorney’s professional fees shall be that which is freely agreed upon between the client and the attorney, in observance of the rules on ethics and on free competition. The form in which the fees are to be paid shall also be freely agreed upon and may include payment of a percentage of the outcome of the claim. In any case, the client shall pay the minimum expenses that the attorney may incur as a result of his designation.

7.5 Is third party funding of claims permitted and, if so, on what basis may funding be provided?

In Spain, third party funding of claims is not illegal. There is no specific regulation on this matter apart from article 1255 of the Civil Code, which sets forth the following: “*The contracting parties may establish any covenants, clauses and conditions deemed convenient, provided that they are not contrary to the laws, to the morals or to public policy.*” Therefore, if it is not contrary to the law, morals or public order, any agreement in this regard is valid.

7.6 In advance of the case proceeding to trial, does the court exercise any control over the costs to be incurred by the parties so that they are proportionate to the value of the claim?

No; in advance of the case proceeding to trial, the court does not exercise any kind of control over the costs to be incurred by the parties in order to check if they are proportionate or not.

8 Updates

8.1 Please provide a summary of any new cases, trends and developments in product liability law in your jurisdiction, including how the courts are approaching any issues arising in relation to new technologies and artificial intelligence.

We are not aware of new relevant cases related to product liability law in respect of new technologies and artificial intelligence.

Regarding medicinal products and medical devices, two judgments that deserve special mention have been issued by the Spanish Supreme Court.

In its Judgment of 20 July 2020, the Supreme Court dismissed the claim brought against the distributor in Spain of a hip replacement that identifies the producer. In this Judgment, the Spanish Supreme Court highlighted that the mere fact that the producer and the distributor become part of the same company group does not imply, *per se*, that the distributor shall assume producer’s liabilities in product liability claims. Companies of the same company group are different companies with their own personality, unless they were incorporated to wilfully prevent third parties from exercising their legitimate rights. The potential confusion between the producer and the distributor is already solved in the regulation on product liability, which imposes on the distributor the obligation to identify the producer. Therefore, the distributor may only be held liable for producer’s liabilities regarding defective products if the distributor does not identify the producer. If the distributor correctly identifies the producer, it shall not be held liable for any producer’s liability.

In its Judgment of 21 December 2020, the Supreme Court resolved the appeals for the unification of doctrine and case law reported in last year’s edition, regarding whether a hospital that has used a product whose toxicity is discovered and publicised after it has been used shall be liable for the injuries caused to the patient, or such liability lies only with the “producer” and the competent authorities that authorise such medicinal product, if applicable. The Supreme Court clarified that, in such cases, liability lies only with the “producer” and, if applicable, the authorities that authorise such product. The Supreme Court rejected any liability of the hospital, as the competence to monitor the adequacy of such product lies with the competent authorities (not the hospital). The Supreme Court also pointed out that the hospital cannot be held liable for the risk created by allowing the use of the product, since that risk derives from the defective manufacture of the product.



Xavier Moliner holds a law degree from the University of Barcelona and has been practising law since 1985. In 1997 he founded Faus & Moliner together with partner Jordi Faus.

Xavier has written various articles on product liability, public procurement and data protection.

Faus & Moliner has been internationally acknowledged as the best law firm in Spain for pharmaceutical law by various publications. For more than 10 years, the *Chambers and Partners* Guide has considered Xavier a professional with a solid experience in the sector. In 2021, the Guide pointed out that Xavier *"is regularly instructed by pharmaceuticals and medical device companies. He deftly handles complex regulatory issues and litigation relating to public procurements"*.

At Faus & Moliner, Xavier leads the teams in charge of advising on public procurement and product liability.

Faus & Moliner Abogados
Rambla Catalunya 135
Barcelona 08008
Spain

Tel: +34 93 292 2543
Email: xmoliner@faus-moliner.com
URL: www.faus-moliner.com



Juan Martínez graduated in Law from the University of Granada and holds a Master's Degree in Legal Practice with a specialisation in International Business Law from the *Centro de Estudios Garrigues*.

Juan has been part of the team at Faus & Moliner since 2017 and regularly advises national and international companies on litigation and arbitration procedures concerning various matters. He specialises in conflicts related to contracts, unfair competition and product liability.

He has written various articles on product liability, pharmaceutical law and dispute resolution.

Faus & Moliner Abogados
Rambla Catalunya 135
Barcelona 08008
Spain

Tel: +34 93 292 2100
Email: jmartinez@faus-moliner.com
URL: www.faus-moliner.com

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