UNDER STANDING EU

2.5 How to make EU legislation better understandable for Citizens

Policy Recommendation Paper

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Clearer EU Legislation: A Call for Action

About this paper

This policy paper was developed as part of the **'Understanding EU'** project, a collaborative initiative involving partners from across Europe. The project aims to explore ways in which EU legislation could be made more accessible and understandable to ordinary citizens.

To gather insights, the project team conducted structured citizen dialogues involving more than 80 people and an online multilingual survey, reaching over 600 citizens from more than 20 countries. Participants came from a range of age groups, educational backgrounds and nationalities.

This paper summarises the key findings and offers concrete recommendations for EU institutions, policymakers, NGOs, educators and civil society stakeholders. The paper aims to support advocacy and awareness-raising efforts around the importance of clearly and accessibly communicating EU legislation.

Snapshot of Citizen Engagement

- 700+ citizens engaged
- From 20+ countries
- 10 citizen dialogues held in partner countries
- Participants: citizens of all backgrounds, legal & education experts
- Input gathered via qualitative dialogues & quantitative surveys

Why This Matters

EU legislation affects all citizens, yet its complexity often prevents people from understanding their rights and responsibilities.

Although citizens expressed a strong desire to engage more deeply with EU topics, they also emphasised the urgent need for clearer communication, simpler language and easier access.

These findings are clearly reflected in the Understanding EU online survey, which gathered input from over 600 citizens in more than 20 countries. Over 60% of respondents reported difficulty understanding EU laws, citing legal jargon and overly technical language as the main obstacles. Many also expressed frustration that EU texts do not consider the everyday citizen, particularly those with lower educational qualifications or limited language skills.

Core Recommendations at a Glance

1. Make legal language understandable

> *"Legal texts are so hard to understand—why not use everyday words?"*
>
> Dialogue participant, Vienna

Survey participants overwhelmingly supported this approach:
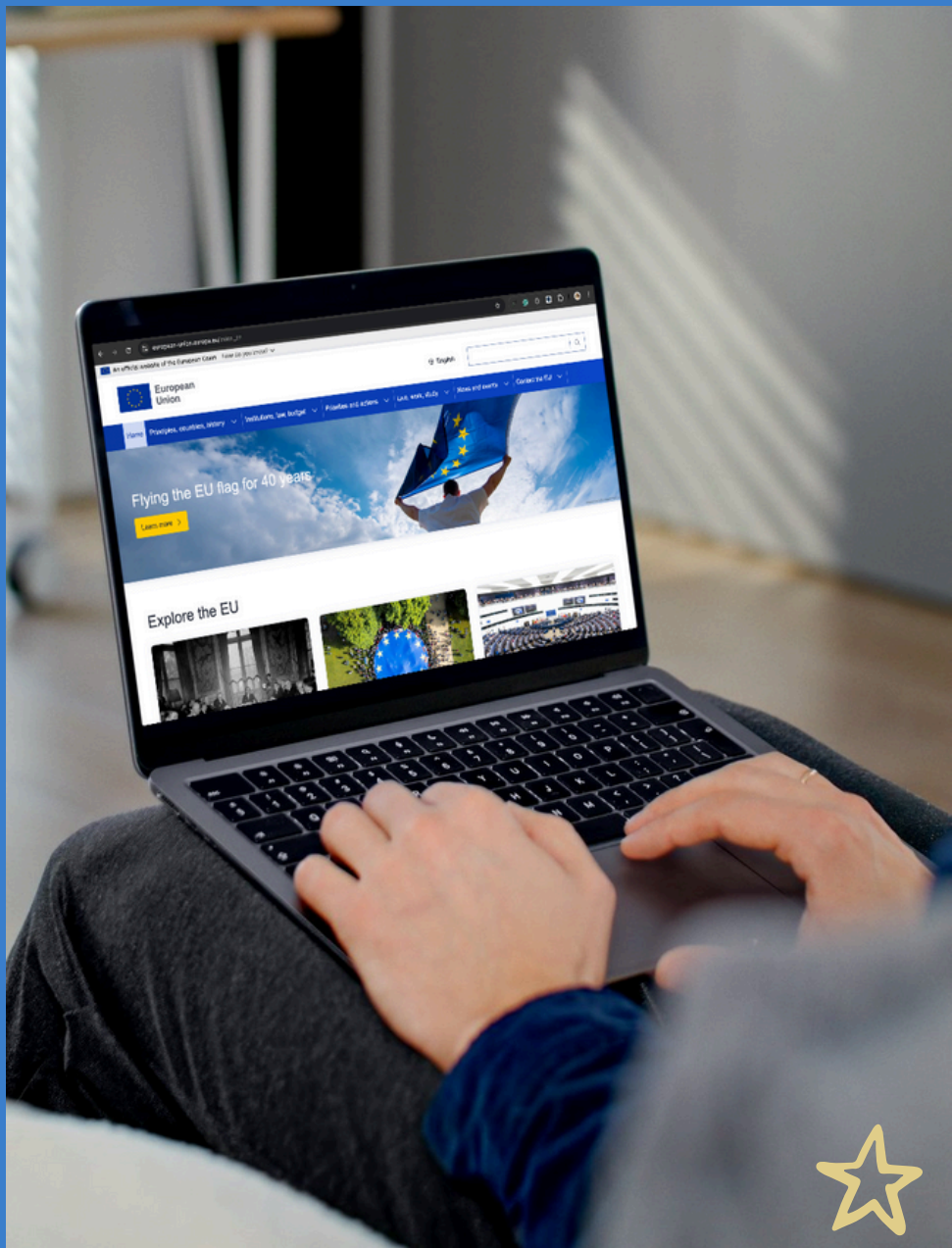
72% requested plain language summaries

61% called for more visual aids, and

55% wanted multilingual options to access content in their own language.

Recommendations

- Use plain language in all official EU documents and communications.
- Provide summaries and infographics for every major legal act.
- Publish short video explainers on key laws and updates.

2. Create inclusive digital tools

"A one-stop site where we can find all laws in simple language—that would help a lot."
Survey Respondant

Citizens also noted the lack of easy-to-use platforms as a reason they do not proactively seek legal information. When asked where they usually access EU-related content, most mentioned school education, social media, and news media, but few referred to official EU websites.

Recommendations

- Launch a multilingual, centralised EU Law Portal that is tailored to citizens' needs.
- Include searchable summaries, chatbots and visual overviews.
- Develop an interactive glossary to explain common legal terms.

3. Support civic and legal education

Survey findings show that formal education plays a vital role in shaping citizens' knowledge of the EU. However, adult learning and informal education channels remain underused.

Recommendations

- Offer ready-made materials for teachers and trainers on EU law and institutions.
- Promote awareness of EU law through youth work, community education, and lifelong learning programmes.
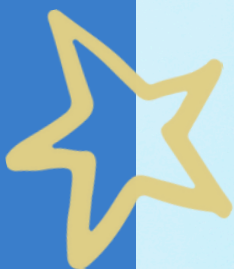
4. Foster dialogue and participation

"We need more chances like this to talk with others and share our views on EU topics."

Dialogue participant, Germany

Participants of the citizen dialogues valued these opportunities to express their concerns and felt empowered to make suggestions. Many advocated for more continuous forms of interaction between citizens and legal experts, particularly in plain-language formats.

Recommendations

- Organise local and online forums where citizens can discuss and reflect on EU legislation.
- Use citizen input to shape public-facing summaries of complex policies.

5. Promote transparency and trust

A recurring concern among citizens was the inability to distinguish between national and EU-level decisions. The principle of subsidiarity was largely unknown, leading to misunderstandings and misplaced criticism of the EU.

Recommendations

- Clarify who decides what by explaining the roles of the Commission, Parliament and Council.
- Actively address myths and disinformation related to EU law.
- Ensure national institutions relay accurate and timely information about EU legislation.

How Stakeholders Can Act

EU Institutions
Implement the above strategies across all communication and public consultation tools.

Educators & Trainers
Integrate accessible EU law content into civic education and informal learning.

NGOs & Civil Society
Use these recommendations to push for clearer legal communication and support inclusive outreach.

Media & Information Outlets
Simplify legal news and raise awareness of EU rights and processes.

Conclusion

Accessible EU legislation strengthens democracy, combats disinformation and empowers citizens. These stakeholder-driven actions are vital for closing the gap between institutions and the people they serve.

The combination of citizen dialogues and broad-based survey data confirms that citizens want to engage, but that they need easier, clearer and more inclusive access to the laws that affect their lives.

Together¸ we can ensure that EU law works for citizens and speaks their language.

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