



Empowering
young people

A stylized map of Europe is shown in a light blue color, overlaid on a dark blue globe. The globe has a yellow arc representing the horizon. The map shows the outlines of the major European countries.

Guidelines – Making EU language more accessible for young people

Editor: YES Forum

Author(s): Çağla Ezgi Yıldız

Contributions: Violeta Bakia

Proofreading: Lucy Croxton

Design: Ralf Schnarrenberger

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About the YES Forum

Founded in 2002, YES Forum is a European network of organisations working with and for young people facing challenging situations. By promoting their social inclusion and developing their professional skills, we act to improve the life chances of vulnerable young people. YES Forum aims to create an environment where young people and youth professionals have equally accessible learning and work-related opportunities in Europe and beyond.

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Introduction

According to the latest European Parliament Youth Survey (EPYS) 2021¹, young people's understanding of the European Union (EU) is lower compared to their understanding of the respective national government. Alarmingly, [the majority \(55%\) of respondents say they don't understand much or anything about the EU](#). An intriguing question arises: apart from the complexity of the EU structure, what other factors might cause to this knowledge gap?

Young people declared in the same survey that they do not participate in European elections due to a basic lack of interest, a belief that decision-makers "don't listen to people like me", and a lack of understanding for issues at stake. The barriers that exist to understanding the EU result in the feeling of exclusion by young people. This negative cycle illustrates why young European citizens and the EU can benefit from bridging the gap between the young people and the EU. [Education institutions and youth and social work organisations have a crucial role to play in supporting young citizens to better understand and connect with the EU](#). When provided with the right opportunities, young people are more likely to be interested in the EU and national politics, and are able to exercise their citizenship rights.

Our Three Guidelines

[Guideline 1: Apply Easy-to-understand Language in EU Political Education](#)

[Guideline 2: Apply Visual Aids within EU Political Education](#)

[Guideline 3: Apply Accessible and Inclusive Approaches in EU Political Education](#)

These set of guidelines are targeted at educational institutions and youth and social work organisations, and are designed to facilitate better and [more accessible EU education, through formal and non-formal outlets](#). They are based on YES Forum's expertise and experience with young people, through diverse activities and exchange with its member youth and social work organisations. The guidelines also build on the YES Forum's Policy Paper, "Making EU language more accessible for young people", which makes recommendations to EU institutions and policy-makers on how to improve their communication with young people.

Therefore, the next section will summarise the YES Forum's expertise and experience on accessible and inclusive political education approaches, which are then followed by guidelines to education institutions and youth and social work organisations on the topic.

¹ European Parliament, 2021, *European Parliament Youth Survey Report*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2021/youth-survey-2021/report.pdf>

YES Forum: Expertise and Experience

YES Forum is a network of organisations working across Europe with and for young people who face disadvantages stemming from their socio-economic background, educational difficulties, discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity, and/or geographical seclusion. The main areas of focus are education and training, youth employment, youth participation, and social inclusion. Furthermore, YES Forum supports the objectives of the European Youth Goals and strives to always develop new and innovative ways to work with and for young people.

Since 2020 the YES Forum has started [a movement to provide information which is easy-to-understand for its target group: young people](#). This began with the YES Forum's Youth Empowerment Strategy², which was developed in 2021, and provides the direction for all activities, as well as a framework to define annual priorities. Both documents form part of our strategic outlook and enable us to be more effective in complementing EU initiatives. Generating better education, employment and quality of life prospects for the younger generation, and the optimisation of professional approaches in youth work are among our strategic aims. Hence, the topics of active citizenship, EU awareness, and social inclusion promotion remain important to our work, and help guide our activities towards more inclusive approaches to non-formal political education across Europe in the current and coming years.

YES Forum has and continues to co-ordinate several European activities and projects with the general objectives of promoting active citizenship, EU and political awareness, and social inclusion by [providing various accessible approaches and methods on EU political education](#). The expertise gained through these projects and activities serve as a base for the guidelines in this paper.

Guidelines for Enhancing Accessibility in Political Education on the European Union

Traditional EU education in schools prioritises historical, geographical, and economic perspectives, while overlooking the profound implications of the EU for democracy, diversity, active citizenship, and human rights—essential elements in shaping an inclusive European society. The existing education curriculum offers only a brief overview of the EU's history, with limited exploration of its real-world impact on young people. We recognise the need to enhance political education, particularly in schools and youth organisations.

Acknowledging this gap, [innovative non-formal methods have become crucial in extending EU education to all young people, and seamlessly integrating into formal educational settings](#). This integration blurs the line between extracurricular activities and regular classes, and engages students and teachers, fostering universal interest and nurturing a deeper understanding of the EU's significance. The emphasis

² YES Forum, 2021, *YES! Youth Empowerment Strategy*, https://www.yes-forum.eu/site/assets/files/2006/yes_strategy_2023.pdf

on embracing non-formal, accessible, inclusive, innovative methods underscores their importance for effective communication with young people about the European Union.

Guideline 1: Apply Easy-to-understand Language in EU Political Education

In the context of enhancing political education about the EU, it is crucial to recognise the distinct but complementary endeavour towards improving language accessibility. Specifically, we advocate for the use of "easy-to-understand" language, designed to appeal to a specific target group—namely, young people with varying levels of education, language skills, and abilities. While "easy-to-read" language is designed for individuals with cognitive or reading challenges, our focus here is on "easy-to-understand" language, which simplifies complex ideas to ensure clarity and coherence. This approach aims to make the EU's complex concepts accessible to a broader audience without requiring specialised background knowledge, serving individuals with varying literacy levels. To effectively implement this, we recommend that education institutions differentiate between "easy-to-read" and "easy-to-understand" language, prioritising the latter for their EU-related educational material. This differentiation ensures that the content remains comprehensible while accommodating a diverse audience, especially young people who may possess different educational backgrounds, language abilities, and cognitive capabilities.

Young people's interest in the EU and national politics can be ignited when they are provided with suitable opportunities for engagement. To make political education on the EU more accessible, an effective approach is to translate complex documents, such as EU treaties, into an "easy-to-understand" language. This approach aims to bridge the gap between the intricate legal framework of the EU and the daily lives of young people. Initiatives like the READY³ and its "EU READY to READ"⁴ publication serve as prime examples of this strategy. This publication focuses on making the most relevant provisions from EU treaties easily understandable, selecting articles that have a significant impact on the lives of young people in Europe. It also seeks to enhance the literacy competencies of young people so they can better comprehend the meaning and importance of these treaties in their lives. Recognising that complex documents are likely unappealing to young people, the output ensures that language is easily readable, and involves young people in the process. Additionally, by providing resources like glossaries, and offering materials in multiple languages, the approach makes EU language more accessible and relevant to the everyday lives of young people. Education institutions and youth and social work organisations can draw inspiration from these initiatives to create and provide similar materials, fostering young people's understanding of the EU's significance in their lives and improving political education.

Guideline 2: Apply Visual Aids within EU Political Education

The use of accessible visuals in political education about the EU plays a pivotal role in making this complex subject more engaging and comprehensible, particularly for young people. Today's younger generations are known to respond positively to visual content, finding it easier to connect with and learn from visual materials. Infographics, explainer movies, and other visual aids are indispensable tools for

³ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-1-DE04-KA220-YOU-000028868>

⁴ READY, 2023, *EU READY to READ, Easy-to-understand version of EU Provisions*, https://www.yes-forum.eu/site/assets/files/2095/eu_ready_to_read.pdf

simplifying intricate topics. Visual elements, both static and moving, have the capacity to convey a wealth of information to the viewer more effectively than lengthy textual explanations. They enable the rapid comprehension of complex processes and connections, even when presented in a simplified form. By incorporating infographics, diagrams, and visuals, education institutions can significantly simplify and improve young people's understanding of complex EU concepts.

The power of infographics as an educational tool is illustrated by the READY project's result "EU READY to SEE"⁵, an educational publication featuring easy-to-understand infographics on complex EU themes. The publication follows the educational approach of "learning by doing," where young participants gain familiarity with EU content before creating infographics themselves. The topics for these infographics are selected by the young participants, based on relevant provisions from the first publication "EU READY to READ" which they deem to be significant in their daily lives or which are particularly difficult to understand. Each infographic in the publication is accompanied by a short explainer to provide context and a reference to the original provision. This approach not only helps young people to better understand the EU, but also actively involves them in generating knowledge by creating visually accessible materials, which enhances their connection to this intricate subject matter. Education institutions can draw inspiration from such methods and results to [harness the potential of accessible visuals in their political education about the EU, to make it more appealing and comprehensible for young learners.](#)

Guideline 3: Apply Accessible and Inclusive Approaches in EU Political Education

In this section, we will introduce guidelines on [utilising accessible and inclusive approaches to improve political education about the EU](#). These approaches emphasise active participation, peer engagement, and experiential learning, ensuring that young people not only grasp the complexities of the EU but also form a personal connection with it. By leveraging these methods, educational institutions can provide an accessible and enriching political education about the EU, ultimately empowering the next generation of informed and engaged European citizens.

Learning by doing

Implementing a "learning-by-doing" approach stands out as a highly effective method to increase the political education of young people within the EU. Recognising the shift in educational paradigms towards practical and experiential learning for younger generations, this approach is invaluable in helping young people comprehend the intricate relations between political institutions and decision-making processes. The YES Forum and its members have consistently embraced this methodology in all activities with young people, including various training programs within project contexts. The advantages of the "learning-by-doing" approach extends beyond non-formal education, and can be integrated as a valuable asset within formal education as well. Collaborations between schools and EU institutions for study visits, decision-making simulations, and firsthand exposure to the democratic

⁵ READY, 2023, *EU READY to SEE, Easy-to-understand Infographics on EU Provisions*, https://www.yes-forum.eu/site/assets/files/2095/eu_ready_to_see.pdf

process are crucial. Furthermore, the incorporation of practical learning methods into daily teaching in schools enhances students' understanding of complex EU topics. Experiential activities, such as games and puzzles, can be utilised as engaging tools in formal and non-formal education. These activities not only facilitate easier and faster knowledge acquisition but also allow participants to construct meaning, making complex EU topics more accessible by fostering open discussions without creating stress or intimidation. Board games like "Legislativity"⁶ offer a dynamic and interactive platform for learning, promoting a deeper understanding of EU legislative processes and encouraging active engagement.

Peer-to-peer learning

Peer-to-peer learning emerges as a powerful approach to improving political education on the EU, emphasising a collaborative and relatable learning experience among young people. Institutions can implement this method by encouraging collaborative projects, group discussions, and interactive activities that facilitate knowledge exchange among peers. The YES Forum and its members, through its activities within projects, continue to showcase the efficacy of peer-to-peer learning. In conjunction with this, the "Learning LAB"⁷ project, coordinated by YES Forum, pioneers a peer-learning approach by forming tandems between young people with varying levels of knowledge on the EU. This innovative model creates a two-way, reciprocal learning activity where university students and young people collaborate and learn from each other, fostering effective learning through shared experiences. The peer-learning approach, as demonstrated by the project, instils confidence in participants by enabling interactions with peers who understand similar situations and who are aware of the challenges faced by their counterparts. By embracing peer-to-peer learning, education institutions can cultivate an inclusive and dynamic learning environment, help young people to develop a more profound understanding of the EU, and promote active citizenship among young people.

Accessible and inclusive political simulations

Utilising accessible and inclusive political simulations is a groundbreaking approach in political education. Political simulations, designed as an interactive and immersive tool, engage young participants in a range of different scenarios, and offer a hands-on experience in understanding the functioning of political institutions. The key principle of "learning by doing" replaces passive and theoretical learning with active participation. While political simulations have immense educational potential, they often face challenges in inclusivity, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities. Barriers such as limited information, event exclusivity, financial constraints, language proficiency, and organizational complexities can hinder their participation.

This is why the YES Forum and its members have, for several years now, acknowledged the potential of political simulations for raising EU awareness among European young people. Political simulations are

⁶ <https://europa-zentrum.de/projekte/legislativity-das-spiel-zur-eu-gesetzgebung/>

⁷ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2023-1-DE04-KA210-YOU-000155746>

an innovative, powerful tool designed to involve participants in “make-believe” politics to teach them how political institutions work, while promoting their civic participation. By roleplaying as politicians and key stakeholders directly involved in the political process, young people get a hands-on experience, with a resulting powerful educational impact. However, inclusion remains an issue in this field: political simulations are very often not adapted to a wide diversity of profiles. YES Forum started addressing this through a previous European project, “YourEP”⁸. Designed as an experiment, the project took a participatory approach by involving a diverse group of young people in political simulations of the European Parliament (EP). It first identified key principles to make political simulations as inclusive (regardless of participants’ profiles and difficulties) and accessible (regardless of participants’ knowledge of or interest in politics and the EU) as possible, and implemented them in a mix of online, local and international activities.

This approach not only offers a new avenue for political education, but also serves as inspiration for education institutions and organisations to adopt more inclusive approaches in their educational initiatives focused on the European Union.

Photovoice method

Photovoice is a participatory research method which combines photography with a structured process, and stands out as an impactful tool for enhancing political education about the EU. As illustrated by the VOICE⁹ project, this method offers an innovative approach for youth organisations, workers, and educators in both formal and non-formal education settings. As a creative and accessible tool, Photovoice enables participants to express themselves and engage in civic issues through visual storytelling. This method, detailed in guides tailored towards international youth work, advocates for its inclusion in educational curricula. Practical applications include using Photovoice during integration weeks, as an ice-breaking activity for groups, or for needs assessment at various points in time. Beyond the classroom, it proves effective in workshops, group discussions, and even in parents-teachers’ meetings. To maximise its impact, it is recommended to provide training to educators, officially recognise and include Photovoice in youth work competence models, and dedicate resources to its application in diverse educational settings.

Overall, the use of Photovoice has been a great asset in the context of the YES Forum social work: it provides a framework [allowing young people facing diverse obstacles to participate in the EU Civil Dialogue, and to express their own personal messages towards the EU institutions](#). Importantly, the photovoice method supported them in turning their individual experiences and standpoints into a shared, collective narrative supported by powerful visual storytelling. By embracing Photovoice, educators can empower young people to explore their interests, facilitate discussions on complex topics, and foster a sense of civic engagement within the context of EU political education.

⁸ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2016-3-DE04-KA205-014655>

⁹ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-DE04-KA227-YOU-020846>

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pressing need for enhanced EU political education among young people is evident, as revealed by the European Parliament Youth Survey 2021. Recognising this challenge, these guidelines offer a comprehensive approach for education institutions and youth and social work organisations to make EU education more accessible and engaging. From employing easy-to-understand language to utilising visuals like infographics, the guidelines aim to bridge the gap between the intricacies of the EU and the daily lives of young individuals. The emphasis on interactive approaches, such as learning by doing and peer-to-peer learning, provide a dynamic and relatable learning experience. Additionally, the introduction of accessible and inclusive political simulations, alongside the impactful Photovoice method, serves as examples of innovative initiatives which foster a deeper connection between young people and EU topics. **By embracing these guidelines, education institutions can cultivate a more inclusive, engaging, and relatable political education approach, empowering young citizens to actively participate and comprehend the significance of the EU in their lives.**

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