



**READY**



## **EU READY TO DISCUSS**

Key Messages & Policy Recommendations

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# Introduction

European institutions communicate in 24 official languages. Yet, **over half of the young people** surveyed in the European Parliament's Youth Survey 2021<sup>1</sup> expressed a **lack of understanding about the European Union (EU)**. The initiative "EU READY to DISCUSS" gathers key messages and policy recommendations specifically aimed at **youth and social workers, organisations, education institutions, and policymakers on a local, national, and EU level**. The focus is on **improving communication about the EU and its effects on daily life for young people**.

This publication builds on the activities and results of the initial phases of the **READY project**, namely, "EU READY to READ"<sup>2</sup> and "EU READY to SEE"<sup>3</sup>. With the common aim of **bridging the gap between the EU and young people**, the first phase concentrated on translating chosen EU provisions into easy-to-understand language, while the second phase focused on crafting engaging and comprehensible infographics about specific EU topics. This publication is part of the third and the last phase of the project, and includes **key messages directly from young people's contributions** during two trainings which took place in Strasbourg (FR) and in Lucca (IT). Empowering young people with a sense of agency ensures that their perspectives and voices are not just acknowledged but actively heard.

The training sessions aimed to guide young participants in expressing their thoughts about the EU. Specifically, the focus was on understanding the sentiments of youth towards the EU within participants' own communities, and imagining the future of the EU if these feelings remain unchanged, emphasising the role of improved EU communication. This imaginative exercise took the form of participants writing short form political fiction. Additionally, participants shared "case studies" of the best and worst public communication they encounter daily. Through these activities, participants expressed themselves in a critical yet constructive manner. They also identified "DOs & DON'Ts" to guide EU institutions in enhancing their communication, to foster better connections with European youth through more youth-friendly content. The annex<sup>4</sup> at the end of this publication provides several examples of key messages in a creative format shared by young participants. The guidelines and key messages provided by the young participants are integrated into this publication.

Additionally, **youth workers and practitioners have added to the recommendations** by sharing their own expertise. By paying attention to the perspectives of both young people and youth workers, our goal is to grasp what distances young people from the European Union and bridge the gap between the policy level and their everyday lives. We aim to **offer innovative ideas for those involved in youth services, youth work, and policymaking**. While this document speaks to various stakeholders, it stays true to the core principle of the READY project: **using easy-to-understand language for young people**. The messages will be presented in an easy-to-read format, capturing the views and advice of practitioners and young people, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility in all educational efforts related to politics.

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

<sup>2</sup> 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](https://www.yes-forum.eu/site/assets/files/2095/eu_ready_to_read.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 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](https://www.yes-forum.eu/site/assets/files/2095/eu_ready_to_see.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> see page 13

## This publication has three main goals:

1. Offering insights as to why EU policy language must be made clearer for young people.

2. Highlighting the risks associated with having policy language that is so distanced from young people's daily interactions with the EU.

3. Providing practical tips from young people and youth work practitioners on how to make the language of the EU more accessible.

# The need for a better EU communication: Why?

Over time, the EU has undertaken various initiatives to encourage the use of clearer and simpler language in its communication<sup>5</sup>. Despite these efforts to promote accessible language, challenges persist in achieving consistent clarity. Research indicates that EU communication, including press releases, remains complex and technical, resembling scientific discourse rather than plain language<sup>6</sup>. This complex communication style is present across all policy areas and has not substantially improved over the years. Challenges related to ambiguous institutional culture, subject complexity, and multilingualism continue to impact the clarity of the EU's communication. **Achieving widespread adoption of plain language within the EU requires ongoing commitment and potential shifts in communication strategies, especially when engaging young people.**

The EU's struggles with popularity and low turnout rates in its elections further underline the urgency of clear communication. Young people (15-29 years) constitute a significant communication audience, accounting for 16.3% of the EU population in 2021<sup>7</sup>. As young European citizens, they gain the right to vote in European elections at different ages, ranging from 16 in several countries to 18 in others<sup>8</sup>. According to studies, young people currently participate less in institutional politics than other age groups, and less than cohorts of young people decades ago, which calls for immediate action<sup>9</sup>. **Young people themselves say that they do not participate in the European elections because of a lack of interest, a belief that decision-makers do not listen to them, and a lack of understanding of the issues at stake**<sup>10</sup>. The feeling of exclusion and barriers in understanding the EU emphasise how imperative it is to enter into a dialogue with young citizens and "speak" their language.

**Accessible communication can ensure that people from diverse backgrounds, including those with different levels of education, language skills, and abilities, can understand and engage effectively with EU information.** Effective and audience-centred communication not only encourages positive EU sentiments, but also helps diminish Euroscepticism and counteracts disinformation. Moreover, clear and accessible communication encourages youth participation and contributes to a more vibrant democracy. In such a context, clear communication becomes not only a practical necessity but also a vital tool for revitalising democratic engagement within the European Union.

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<sup>5</sup> see. [Joint Practical Guide for persons involved in the drafting of EU Legislation](#), [Clear English Tips for Translators](#), [Clear Writing for Europe](#), [English Style Guide](#) and "Fight the Fog" Campaign

<sup>6</sup> Grasso, A., 2018, *Plain English and the EU: Still Trying to Fight the Fog?*. Language and Law: The Role of Language and Translation in EU Competition Law, 359-376.

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat, 2022, *Young people in Europe – a statistical summary*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4031688/15191320/KS-06-22-076-EN-N.pdf>

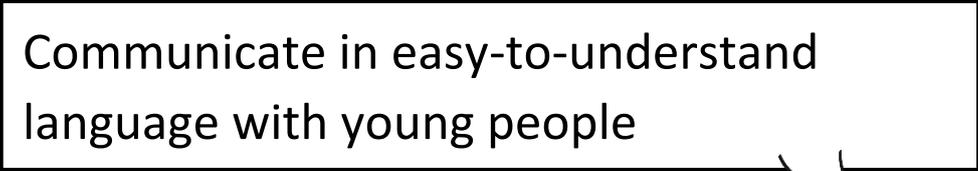
<sup>8</sup> European Parliament, 2023, *Voting age for European elections*, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_ATA\(2023\)749767](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2023)749767)

<sup>9</sup> Deželan, T., 2023, *Young people's participation in European democratic processes*, European Union, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/745820/IPOL\\_STU\(2023\)745820\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/745820/IPOL_STU(2023)745820_EN.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> 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>

## Recommendations for policymakers

We aim to bring young people closer to understanding the EU, and we have witnessed that the EU treaties which form the basis of the functioning of the EU are still very far from the reality of young people. With this policy paper, we aim to tackle this disconnection. With our recommendations to EU policymakers and institutions, we invite them **to ensure that their policies are available and understandable to young people, encourage young people's autonomy in searching for information, enhance their ability to understand the functioning of the EU, support them in being informed, and in advocating for their social rights within the European context.**



Communicate in easy-to-understand language with young people

To effectively communicate with young people and make complex EU topics more understandable, policymakers should prioritise **clarity and simplicity**. Avoiding complex jargon and breaking down information into digestible segments makes EU policies more understandable. **By breaking down abstract processes and jargon, EU institutions can demystify their operations, and make them more understandable to citizens.** Using relatable examples and providing educational resources further supports this effort, and ensures that young people grasp the complexities of EU policies. While doing this, institutions should **avoid being oversimplistic to maintain the quality and expertise of the given information**. Initiatives like the READY project's "EU READY to READ" 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.

**The EU should find a balance between quality and clear information in their communication.** To achieve this, the content of EU documents and communications should not include too much or too complex information, but it should also not be too short or oversimplified. Additionally, the content should be truthful and honest, not only mentioning the good sides of the EU but also highlighting the shortfalls while suggesting solutions to improve them. This kind of transparency from EU institutions would result in increased levels of trust from its (young) citizens.

## Engage with young people through social media platforms

In 2022, a staggering 96% of young people aged 16-29 years in the EU reported using the internet daily, with 84% actively participating in social media networks. This trend has consistently been the preferred internet activity for young people since 2014, highlighting the significance of social media in their daily lives<sup>11</sup>. To effectively connect with the younger generation, policymakers must **embrace digital communication methods by utilising social media platforms preferred by young people**. Providing visuals and maintaining an active presence on social media platforms are essential strategies. Policymakers should employ various media formats, such as videos, infographics, and podcasts, to explain complex EU topics in an accessible, relatable, and engaging manner.

It is crucial for policymakers to **adapt to accessible social media trends and utilise platforms that resonate with younger audiences**. While many policymakers use social media, their content often targets specific interests, creating a potential disconnect with the broader youth demographic. Platforms popular among younger generations should be leveraged, employing simplified styles and language to enhance engagement. EU institutions can enhance their social media strategy by leveraging testimonials from influencers and celebrities who already connect with young people. This approach, akin to advertising, can help disseminate EU topics through familiar faces, addressing the challenge of low recognition of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and other EU figures among the youth. Additionally, it is recommended that the EU funds media channels already popular among young people which are open to discussion and contradiction. By supporting channels that encourage diverse opinions and perspectives on EU topics, policymakers can **foster a more inclusive and dynamic dialogue with the youth**, enriching their overall understanding and engagement with EU affairs.

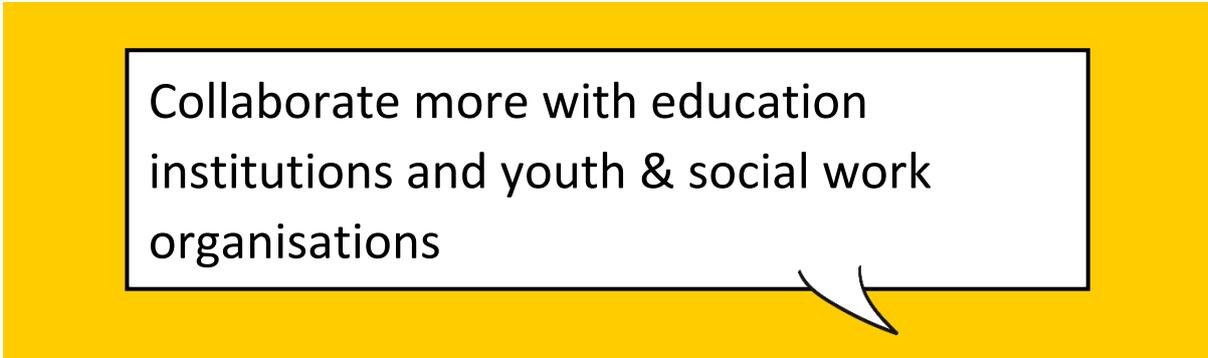
## Involve young people in decision-making processes

Policymakers should involve young people in discussions and decision-making when possible and appropriate. To enhance youth involvement in decision-making processes, policymakers should adopt a multifaceted approach. Firstly, they should **leverage social networks as effective communication channels**. Political decisions must be conveyed in a language that resonates with the younger demographic, which could be achieved by utilising social media platforms to encourage discussion and simplify policy explanations. Moreover, **creating platforms for direct youth involvement**, such as youth councils, is crucial. These initiatives ensure that the voices of young individuals are heard and

<sup>11</sup> Eurostat, 2023, 96% of young people in the EU uses the internet daily, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230714-1>

considered in the policy-making process, fostering a sense of inclusion and empowering youth to contribute meaningfully to shaping EU policies.

Direct interactions between policymakers and young people through **focus groups** are essential. These channels facilitate a two-way dialogue, allowing **policymakers to gain valuable grassroots insights** into the specific needs and concerns of young citizens. Policymakers also need to actively engage with professionals and young individuals, making policy and decision-making more accessible to the general public. This approach aims to close the gap between policymakers and the communities they serve, **ensuring a more inclusive and participatory decision-making process**. Additionally, policymakers should prioritise local engagement, organising focus groups on national and local levels. MEPs should proactively interact with their local communities, addressing the existing gap between policymakers, local politicians, and young people. Waiting for young individuals to initiate contact should be avoided; instead, **policymakers should take the initiative to bridge communication and understanding gaps at the grassroots level**.



Collaborate more with education institutions and youth & social work organisations

Policymakers should further **encourage and support education institutions and youth and social work organisations** that serve as **intermediaries between young people and EU decision-makers**. To enhance understanding of the relationships between institutions and decision-makers, cooperation between schools and EU institutions is crucial. This collaboration can include **organising study visits, participating in decision-making simulations, and integrating practical learning methods into everyday teaching in schools**. Non-formal teaching methods emphasise practical and hands-on learning, especially for younger generations. These initiatives should aim to bridge the gap, fostering inclusivity and ensuring that the voices and concerns of young individuals are acknowledged and addressed.

**Regular visits by policymakers to schools and youth centres should be organised**. These formal and non-formal visits can provide policymakers with the opportunity to engage with young people and professionals working in the field. By explaining their roles, policy makers can foster closer connections, embed policymaking in the everyday life of EU citizens, and establish a consistent feedback loop to demonstrate how public opinions are considered in facilitating meaningful change.

Additionally, EU institutions should **facilitate more projects like Erasmus+ and micro-projects** for small local youth organisations, simplifying the application process with appropriate budgets. Easy-access to micro-funding can make a significant difference for small organisations and young participants, and enable them to use non-formal methods, such as watching films and playing games, to integrate EU topics with young people's daily lives. Moreover, the EU can **create and promote courses on becoming a certified "EU promoter"**, empowering individuals to share the importance of EU topics effectively among diverse groups of people. This could be achieved by offering (compulsory) EU training for trainers, teachers, educators, and youth and social workers. Recognising a substantial lack of knowledge about the EU among educators, the EU can establish compulsory certifications, similar to those for foreign language proficiency or digital competence.

# Key messages for youth & social workers, organisations, and education institutions

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. In this section, we will introduce key messages for youth and social organisations and education institutions on how to bridge the gap between the EU and the young people.



Promote the EU more within non-formal education

The existing approach to EU education in schools focuses primarily on historical, geographical, and economic perspectives, offering only a brief overview of the EU's history and minimal exploration of its real-world impact. This approach neglects the profound implications of the EU for democracy, diversity, active citizenship, and human rights—critical elements in shaping an inclusive European society. Recognising this gap, we call for youth and social work organisations, as well as educational institutions, to **incorporate innovative non-formal methods within the context of EU education**. The integration of non-formal education blurs the line between extracurricular activities and regular classes, engaging both students and teachers. This fosters universal interest and nurtures a deeper understanding of the EU's significance. Customising communication to fit the nature and structure of these contexts **ensures comprehension and interest, even among those unfamiliar with the EU**.

Various examples of these non-formal methods include learning-by-doing, peer-to-peer learning, experiential learning, political simulations, among others. These methods aim to promote, teach, and learn about the EU among all young people, seamlessly integrating into formal educational settings. Utilising experiential activities in non-formal education can be an effective method for introducing complex EU topics. Games and puzzles within these contexts provide an engaging and non-threatening environment, allowing participants to gain insights and fostering a better understanding of EU processes and their implications. Furthermore, it is crucial to disseminate EU-related subjects across various non-formal contexts, such as sports, music schools, theatre, cinema, and foreign language courses. These approaches **ensure 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 them to be informed and engaged European citizens.

## Approach young people through social networks

**To effectively connect with young people, it is crucial to meet them where they already are.** In today's interconnected world, where young people are deeply engaged with social networks and predominantly gather information online, adapting communication methods is highly important<sup>12</sup>. The widespread use of these platforms by young individuals presents an excellent opportunity to bridge the understanding of complex EU topics with this demographic. It is crucial to grasp the platforms they use and the trends that influence them to communicate more effectively with young people. Through social networks, youth and social work organisations and education institutions should create a link and engage in conversations with the young people about the EU as their target group.

Social media has significantly changed how information is consumed, shared, and discussed. Effective use of social media is crucial for fostering effective communication between institutions and young people. Through social media, organisations can create engaging content that simplifies EU language and resonates with the everyday experiences of the youth. Therefore, it is vital to **leverage digital tools to educate, inform, and spark the curiosity of the younger generation**. Organisations and institutions should embrace creativity, allowing their imagination to flourish, just like today's younger generations. **Youth and social workers, along with educational institutions, play a key role in building a sense of belonging in the EU from a bottom-up perspective.** They should achieve this by teaching young people how their voices matter and how EU political decisions impact them.

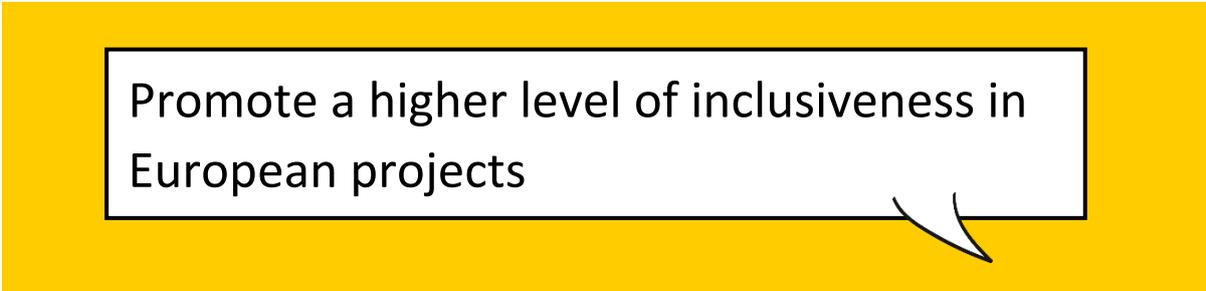
## Make the EU language more accessible through visuals and creativity

The use of accessible visuals in political education about the EU plays an important role in making this complex subject more engaging and comprehensible, particularly for young people. Based on our interactions with young people through project activities, we can confirm that today's **younger generations respond positively to visual content, finding it easier to connect with and learn from visual materials**. Visual elements, both static and moving, have the capacity to **convey a wealth of information to the viewer more effectively than lengthy textual explanations**. Infographics, explainer movies, and other visual aids are indispensable tools for simplifying complex topics. They enable the rapid comprehension of complex processes and connections when presented in an easy-to-understand format without oversimplification of the topic. By incorporating infographics, diagrams, and visuals, educational institutions can simplify and improve young people's understanding of complex EU concepts.

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<sup>12</sup> [ibid.](#)

The power of infographics as an educational tool is illustrated by the READY project's result "EU READY to SEE". This result not only helped young people to better understand the EU, but also **actively involved them in generating knowledge by creating visually accessible materials**, which enhances their connection to this complex subject matter. Involving young people in these processes ensures that content remains up-to-date, aligning with latest trends and designs. Education institutions can draw inspiration from such methods and harness the potential of accessible visuals in their political education about the EU, to both make it more appealing and comprehensible for young learners.



Promote a higher level of inclusiveness in European projects

Erasmus+ initiatives play a crucial role in engaging young people in European topics. Expanding their outreach and ensuring equal opportunities for participation should be prioritised by social work organisations and education institutions. Focusing on inclusivity addresses the need for diverse voices, promoting a sense of belonging and making EU-related experiences accessible to a broader audience.

While the idea of promoting the European project among young people through travel and first-hand experience is praiseworthy, the application and eligibility rules still pose barriers to participation, including socio-economic background, limited knowledge, skills or ability, age, and citizenship requirements, among other factors. These processes result in the exclusion of different groups of young people, particularly pushing already disadvantaged youth to the margins with limited chances of equal access to the benefits of such learning mobilities.

In this context, it is essential that **skilled professionals, such as social or youth workers, support young people from vulnerable backgrounds in the entire mobility application and implementation process**. Therefore, trained staff are required to have experience in working with young people and be aware of their broad range of needs, including psycho-pedagogical aspects, equality, gender mentoring, interculturality, and language competence.

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# Annex

During the READY “EU I see, I understand” training in Lucca (IT), young participants imagined **creative ways of presenting their “Key messages on how to improve EU communication”**.

These creative presentations were for young participants to present their work both to their peers, but also to develop “concepts” for potential ways to present their conclusions to EU institutions later on, and to “lead by example”.

Below are their three concepts with some additional comments.

## EU Communication, What NOT to do

**EU COMM' ... What NOT to do**

1 CONTENT	2 FORMAT	3 ADVOCACY
<b>DON'T:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>BE UNCLEAR/ABSTRACT</li><li>/BORING/COMPLEX</li><li>USE UNVERIFIED SOURCES</li><li>USE DATA WITHOUT CONTEXT</li><li>USE TOO MUCH TEXT</li><li>BE TOO SERIOUS AND FORMAL</li><li>USE CRINGY MEMES</li></ul>	<b>DON'T:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>MAKE TECHNICAL MISTAKES (LINKS, ETC.)</li><li>USE UNLICENSED PHOTOS</li><li>USE ONLY ENGLISH</li><li>STICK TO SOCIAL MEDIA</li><li>USE OUTDATED MEDIA/TRENDS</li></ul>	<b>DON'T:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>RELY ONLY ON SOCIAL MEDIA</li><li>COMMUNICATE WITHOUT A TARGET GROUP IN MIND</li><li>TREAT YOUR AUDIENCE LIKE CHILDREN</li><li>NEGLECT ADVERTISING (E.g. the E.P. has only 600,000 followers)</li></ul>

**Instagram Post:** "ORDINARY LEGISLATIVE PROC." with a complex flowchart. Annotations: "Too complicated", "BORING!", "Too Long", "Too much info".

**Facebook Post:** A meme of a cat with a speech bubble saying "link does not work!". Annotations: "Facebook?", "link does not work!".

**LinkedIn Post:** A post from "European Commission" with an "Unlicensed Photo" and "Bad Engagement". Annotations: "LinkedIn? (target group)", "Too Long", "No licence", "Bad Engagement".

The group working on this theme used their presentation to illustrate their list of what EU institutions are “NOT to do” when it comes to EU communication through three fake social media posts, each (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn) showing a visual example of common mistakes.

# EU Communication, Best practices, CONTENT

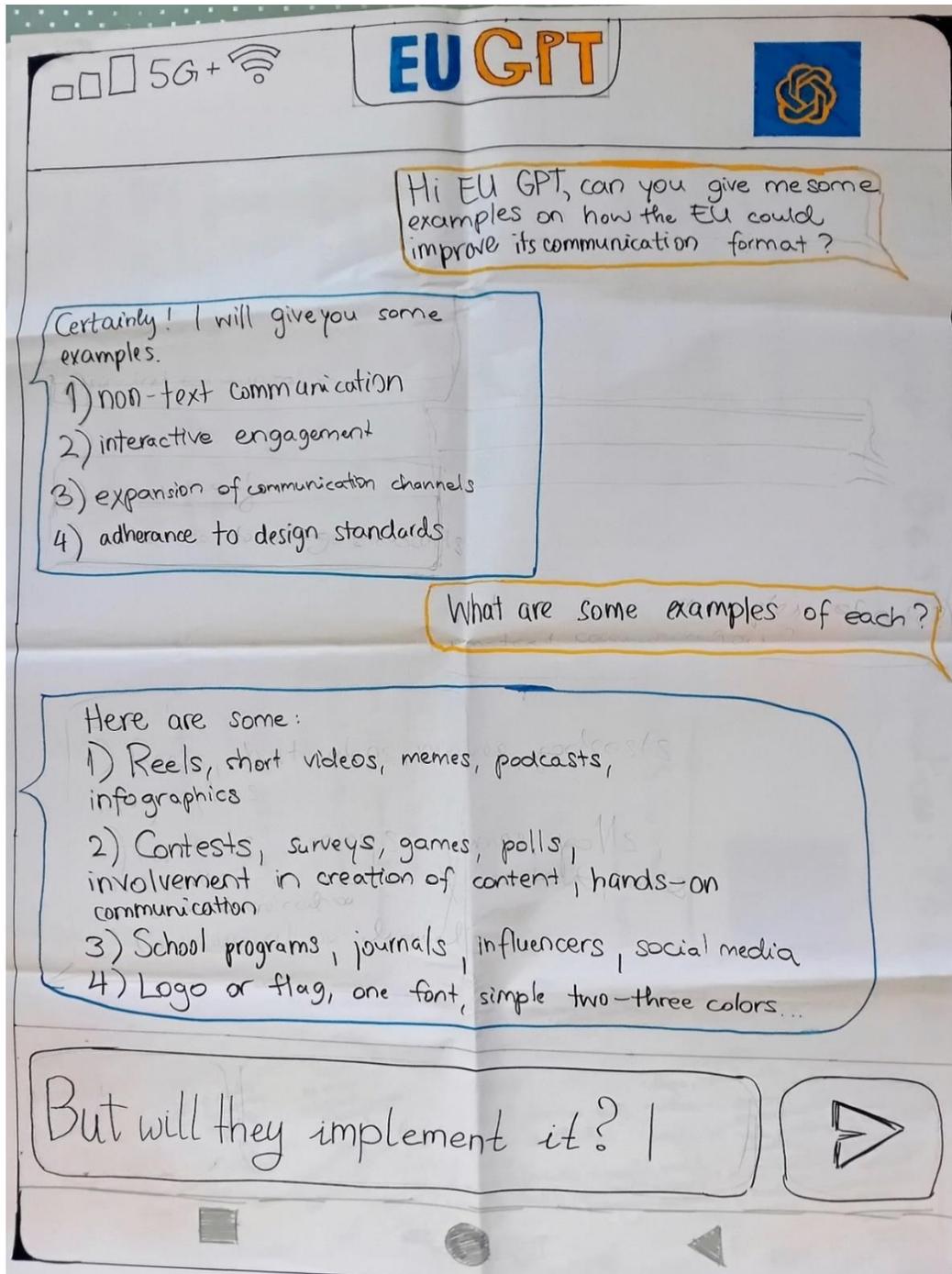


The group working on this theme used their presentation to illustrate their “recipe” for good EU communication in a very literal way!

Their presentation shows an infographic which depicts the various parts of a sandwich which highlights the need for key ideas to be shared in a more visual and catchy way. and the focus is on the fact that “EU youth are starving information” (contradicting the cliché that young people do not care about politics and the EU especially).

The group also envisaged categorising ingredients for good communication in a relevant way. For instance, the inside ingredients of the sandwich could represent “What the EU can say”, while the bread and topling could represent “How to say it”, and the salt and pepper could allude to the need for EU communications to “Add some spice: humour, memes etc!”.

## EU Communication, Best practices: FORMAT



The group working on this theme used their presentation to illustrate one of their ideas for enhanced communication. They imagined what one of their suggestions could look like in reality: an “EU chatbot” replying conversationally using AI such as ChatGPT to answer all users’ questions in an interactive and quick way.

## Project partners

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 <p><b>FORUM ZA SLOBODU ODGOJA</b></p> <p><b>Forum for Freedom in Education, Croatia</b> <a href="http://fso.hr">fso.hr</a> Contact: Mario Bajkuša, <a href="mailto:mbajkusa@fso.hr">mbajkusa@fso.hr</a></p>	 <p><b>IEKEP</b> INSTITUTE OF TRAINING AND VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE</p> <p><b>Institute of Training and Vocational Guidance - Lifelong Learning Centre, Greece</b> <a href="http://iekep.gr">iekep.gr</a> Contact: Lilika Trikalinou, <a href="mailto:lilika@iekep.gr">lilika@iekep.gr</a></p>
<p><b>pistes solidaires</b></p> <p><b>Pistes-Solidaires, France</b> <a href="http://pistes-solidaires.fr">pistes-solidaires.fr</a> Contact: Mathieu Decq, <a href="mailto:mathieu@pistes-solidaires.fr">mathieu@pistes-solidaires.fr</a></p>	 <p><b>Zefiro Società Cooperativa Sociale, Italy</b> <a href="http://zefiroformazione.it">zefiroformazione.it</a> Contact: Mirco Trielli, <a href="mailto:mirco.trielli@gmail.com">mirco.trielli@gmail.com</a></p>

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<https://www.yes-forum.eu/our-work/projects/ready-raising-eu-awareness-through-accessible-documents-for-youth/>



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