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ELIPS – European Languages and their Intelligibility in the Public Sphere

Abstract

This article contains an analysis of the data survey ELIPS (https://elips.efnil.nytud.hu/). ELIPS is the acronym for *European Languages and their Intelligibility in the Public Sphere*, one of EFNIL's major projects. The project focuses on the use of the official languages of various European countries as instruments for legislation, government and public administration. Attention was paid, amongst others, to the use of plain and easy-to-read language, the availability of high-quality terminology for legislation and public administration, the existence of practices and policies regarding diversity in society (linguistic and cultural minorities, gender diversity). The data survey also focuses on the training facilities in these domains for civil servants and on national participation in international, collaborative structures. The survey was conducted by EFNIL in 2018-19 and contains information from 24 European countries covering 27 languages.

The article starts with a short description of the various subdomains covered by the survey as well as the issues and trends at stake within each of them. This forms the basis for a detailed presentation of the data, with a series of tables and figures that will enable readers to gain a good overview of the situation in Europe and to compare countries. The article ends with a series of recommendations, both general ones for stakeholders active in these fields and specific ones for EFNIL as a collaborative network of national language institutions.

1.   Introduction to ELIPS

ELIPS is a project organised by EFNIL, the European Federation of National Institutions for Language. The acronym ELIPS refers to (the use of) *European Languages and their Intelligibility in the Public Sphere*, which underlines the aims of the project, namely to examine the use of European languages as instruments of communication for government, legislation and public administration and to find ways to promote interest in ensuring good quality communication by authorities.

As EFNIL's mission is to gather and publish information about language use and language policies within Europe, it is natural that language use by public authorities falls within the scope of these activities. When ELIPS was initiated in 2017, it was decided that its first action would be a survey in order to map the situation regarding language use by public authorities in the countries and language areas that are represented within EFNIL. The questionnaire was sent to member institutions in 2018-2019. The results were analysed in 2020-2021 and a special ELIPS website was created to present them.

The ELIPS survey is a pioneer in mapping Europe-wide the engagement of public authorities in domains important to communication with citizens. Earlier, plain language requirements placed on authorities and their activities in implementing those requirements were only examined in an international but limited pilot survey carried out by the *Plain Language Association International* and the Portuguese plain language organisation *Claro*. This 2017 survey included New Zealand, Portugal and the United States and also covered the opinion of citizens on the quality of the authorities' communications (Miguel Martinho 2017).

National surveys have partly covered the same topics. For example in Sweden the plain language activities of the authorities have been surveyed regularly since 1994. In Finland the plain language work of central government agencies and municipalities were investigated in a series of surveys in 2012-2017 and the comprehensibility of Finnish language versions of EU legislation was studied in 1998, 2006 and 2018. In Estonia, a survey was conducted in 2021 by the local plain language community to gather information and best practices of plain language in operation in various public authorities (Cf. Hansson 2020, Piehl 2019, Viertiö 2011).

The information collected through the ELIPS survey is meant to serve as a reference base for further activities within the project, e.g. for proposals, conferences and partnerships. Although the focus of ELIPS remains within the domain of the relationship between language and society, it widens the scope of EFNIL's activities from monitoring and promoting the status of national and minority languages to promoting the *quality* of communication by authorities.

Information about the ELIPS project is available on the web pages of the project at http://www.efnil.org/projects/elips. This gives each member institution of EFNIL and, indeed, everyone interested in these issues the chance to compare their national situation with other language areas and member states represented within EFNIL. Acquiring information about the actors and activities in play will hopefully serve, in turn, as a basis for further development, e.g. for formulating policies and strategies or searching for partner organisations for projects of common interest. It would also be desirable for the survey to inspire more academic research on its topics so as to provide a basis for development efforts.

ELIPS covers the following topics:
- plain language policies and actions;
- easy-to-read language policies and actions;
- terminology policies and actions;
- policies and actions on the use of other languages, gender, cultural and sexual diversity;
- training of information providers in public institutions;
- collaboration between the translation services of EU institutions and experts in member states.

2.   Domains examined in the ELIPS survey

It is increasingly recognised that the language used by authorities has a fundamental impact on the functioning of society: the comprehensibility of authorities' communications affects citizens' access to rights, their legal protection and, finally, their trust in society. Good communication makes it possible to participate in and influence the development of society and to interact with authorities. An important aspect is that good communication helps the administration to function efficiently.

The ELIPS survey examines different aspects of the language used by public authorities. All those aspects, i.e. policies and practices for plain language, easy-to-read language, terminology work, taking account of societal diversity, training public officials and collaborating with EU linguistic services, contribute to successful communication and the smooth functioning of authorities.

2.1   Plain Language

Worldwide interest in the comprehensibility of the language used by public authorities resulted in plain language movements being launched in several countries. The topic had been discussed now and again before, but in the 1970s authorities started to respond on a larger scale to calls for clearer communication (see e.g. Ehrenberg-Sundin/Sundin 2015; Piehl 2008; Schriver 2017). It can be considered a necessary (albeit not sufficient) condition for an effective democracy, allowing citizens to exercise their rights and participate in the management of common issues. Thus the growing demands for plain language were connected to other movements demanding a more democratic and equal society in the 1960s and 1970s.

At first, the focus was on the complexity of sentence structure and difficult words used in communications with citizens but over the following four decades the field evolved to include coherence, text structure, tone of voice issues and information design as well as accessibility and the demands of originally or increasingly multicultural societies. Thus the focus has shifted from readability towards usability and, from there, towards the legitimacy of the government; likewise it has shifted from the text itself to the process and conditions of its creation (Ehrenberg-Sundin/Sundin 2008, 269-277; Schriver 2017: 343, 345, Tiililä 2018).

An example of both understanding the need for trust and the impact of circumstances on the success of a plain language policy is the Estonian plain language project that came into life in March 2020. Within a few days the Estonian government created a web page to inform people about the new regulations and restrictions related to the COVID crisis. Information from various government agencies dispersed over several websites was assembled on one platform and it urgently needed structure and good linguistic assistance.

A team of volunteer Estonian language editors and Russian and English translators was compiled to assist the government with the platform. For the plain language activists, this was a great opportunity to get a hands-on introduction to government communication and to train the editors and translators on the basics of plain language. Plain language guidelines were sent to officials composing the original texts in government agencies. The volunteer project lasted four months until the situation calmed down.

This example of volunteer enthusiasm linked to a government's need in a social crisis shows that efficient solutions can be created in a short time and with scarce resources. Plain language guidelines, text structures and terminology will remain in the text corpus of the government and will keep creating change.

2.1.1　Concept of plain language

In the questionnaire for the ELIPS survey, plain language is described for the respondents as follows:

> By plain language we understand any communication that uses wording, language, grammatical structures and information design aimed at making meaning as clear and therefore as effective as possible in order to offer its audience the best possible chance (a) of understanding it immediately and (b) of readily finding in it what it needs or expects, (c) of using the information it contains and/or (d) of performing the actions that are required.

This closely resembles the definition developed by the International Plain Language Federation (it should be kept in mind that the term plain language also refers to communications by businesses and NGOs):

> *A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.*[1]

This definition by the International Plain Language Federation has existed since 2010 (see Cheek 2010). It was developed jointly by plain language organisations that are members of the Federation (see Section 2.1.2). Before choosing this type of definition, possible approaches were discussed on the basis of existing definitions. The options were a numerical, formulae-based definition (e.g. readability tests), an element-based definition (focusing on linguistic and visual features) and an outcome-based definition (focusing on readers' ability to use the texts).

Existing definitions do not represent any of these types in a pure form but combine characteristics of two or all three types. Examples of element-based definitions are found, for example, in Finnish (2003) and Swedish (2008) legislation.

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[1]　See definitions on the website of the International Plain Language Federation: https://www.iplfederation.org/plain-language.

The Finnish law requires that public authorities use appropriate, clear and comprehensible language (*asiallista*, *selkeää ja ymmärrettävää*) while the Swedish Language act requires that it is cultivated, simple and comprehensible (*vårdat*, *enkelt och begripligt*).

The outcome-based type of definition was chosen by the Federation because readers' benefits and reading experience have become crucial in plain language work. The definition is intended to apply regardless of the language and the medium. It allows for flexibility since different audiences and media have different needs. Numerical and element-based approaches have by no means been discarded; they are used to support the approach which is based primarily on outcomes (Cheek 2010, 9). Based on this definition, an ISO standard for plain language is currently being developed in a working group that has experts from 25 countries.

It is worth remembering that *plain language* is not the only English expression that refers to the concept of comprehensible, functional or effective language, although it is in the process of becoming the most commonly used. *Clear language*, *clarity*, *comprehensibility* and *intelligibility* are also used to refer to the same concept. The term plain language has been criticised for creating a false image by linking the concept mentally to something simple and childish. This does not correspond to the purpose of plain language, however, since the aim is not to simplify the content but to ensure clear, comprehensible expression of meaning and usable communications by administrations and the judiciary, also in text types which are not only addressed at lay persons (see, for example, Kimble 2016.) It should be noted that the terms *easy-to-read language* (see Section 2.2) and plain language refer to two different concepts.

Preferring the image of clarity to that of simplicity has probably had a bearing on the choice of the equivalent term in several languages. For example, the following languages rely on *clear*: *klarsprog* (Danish), *selge keel* (Estonian), *selkeä kieli* (Finnish), *klarspråk* (Norwegian, Swedish), *linguagem clara* (Portuguese) and *lenguaje claro* (Spanish) while German and Romanian prefer the image of *plainness/simplicity*, e.g. *einfache Sprache* (German) and *limbaj simplu* (Romanian). Greek uses both terms related to *clarity*, i.e. *σαφής γλώσσα*, and to *plainness*, i.e. *απλή γλώσσα*, the latter being the one which seems to be most commonly used. It should be kept in mind that any term equivalent to *plain language* has not yet established itself in many languages and that expressions equivalent to *comprehensible language* are also common.

2.1.2   Two international organisations Clarity and PLAIN

International cooperation between actors promoting plain language seems to have gained momentum especially since the 1990s, when it was facilitated by easier contacts to other countries provided by the Internet and email. The plain language community cooperates on many levels, sharing expertise and advocating the use of

plain legal language instead of legalese. Worldwide there are two big international organisations, in addition to many local plain language organisations that have been set up by plain language activists.

Clarity[2] is the oldest and largest international plain language organisation, founded in 1983, with more than 650 members in 50 countries and official representatives in around 30 countries. Its members are plain language practitioners – writers, editors, researchers, consultants and trainers, judges, lawyers, government officials, scholars and teachers as well as corporate and NGO representatives.

The parallel international organisation, *Plain Language Association International*[3] (PLAIN), has likewise created a support network for plain language practitioners around the world. The growing network includes members from over 30 countries working in clear communication in at least 15 languages.

The European Commission is one of the organisations working on clear writing as a way of providing better services to EU citizens. The Commission aims at improving the quality and clarity of its written communication. Its administrative bodies have been running a clear writing campaign for 10 years, encouraging their staff to put clear writing principles into practice and change the drafting culture at the Commission.

The European Union's booklet *How to Write Clearly*[4] is available in the 24 official languages of the EU.

2.1.3   Other international activities

Clarity and *PLAIN* have English as their working language; although the use of other languages is encouraged in conferences and on the websites, it occurs on a limited scale. There is clearly a need for gatherings conducted in other languages and there are a few European conferences and networks for plain language activities. For example the German Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection has organised five symposia since 2012 about comprehensibility in legal provisions where the languages used are German and English.

There are also conferences where English is not an option. The Nordic countries have organised biannual plain language conferences since 1998 where presentations are held in Danish, Norwegian or Swedish. Participants from the other Nordic countries are expected to understand and communicate in these. The Comprehensible Public Administration and Government Network in Belgium and the Netherlands (*Netwerk Begrijpelijke Overheid*) coordinates and stimulates plain language-related collaboration between organisations in the two countries in Dutch.

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[2]   See website https://www.clarity-international.org/.

[3]   See website: https://www.iplfederation.org/plain-language.

[4]   See online version: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/clear_writing_tips_en.pdf.

2.2   Easy-to-read language

Easy-to-read language (or easy language) is a form of language which is simplified in order to make information accessible to people with restricted reading and writing skills. The reason may be, for example, intellectual or developmental disabilities, poor competence in the official language of a country or even a temporary illness or crisis. The reading abilities of target groups for easy-to-read language vary and the level of simplification in easy-to-read texts varies accordingly. The *Swedish Agency for Accessible Media*[5] gives this description of basic types of simplification:

> What distinguishes easy-to-read books is, among other things, that they are written with easy everyday words, short sentences and straightforward and simple actions. There are few lines of text on each page and the text is often supported by explanatory images.

No internationally agreed definition of easy-to-read language exists, perhaps because the understanding of who belongs to target groups of easy-to-read language varies from one European country to another. However, there are national definitions (see Lindholm and Vanhatalo 2021). For example the *Finnish Centre for Easy Language*[6] defines easy-to-read language like this:

> Easy Finnish […] is a form of Finnish where the language has been adapted so that it is easier to read and understand in terms of content, vocabulary and structure. It is targeted at people who have difficulties with reading or understanding standard language.

The equivalent terms for easy-to-read language reflect the perception of the concept as they often include the word for 'easy', for example *leichte Sprache* (German) or *lätt språk* (Swedish), etc.

Easy language user organisations cooperate internationally or within Europe (e.g. Inclusion Europe), as do providers of easy language services and researchers of the subject. The first international conference on easy-to-read language research was held in 2019.

Easy-to-read language and plain language (see Section 2.1) are often confused with each other. It is understandable as the concepts are close. When public authorities use both easy and plain language the aim of both is to adjust language so as to give readers a better chance to know what they are entitled or obligated to do and to take care of their business with public authorities without undue difficulties. The target groups differ and the means are partly different but together the two varieties cover much of the needs of the entire population of a country and contribute to the goals of accessibility, inclusion and empowerment of all members of a society.

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[5] See website: https://www.mtm.se/var-verksamhet.

[6] See website: https://selkokeskus.fi/in-english/guidelines-and-instructions/definition-and-background/.

2.3   Terminology

It is self-evident that the use of languages as instruments of legislation, government and communication by public authorities implies the use of specific terminology. This terminology is meant to increase precision and clarity within these domains, especially for communication between domain experts. For non-experts, the use of this terminology can complicate understanding and for this reason its use is often discouraged for communication to the general public.

2.3.1   Definitions and distinctions

Terminology is used to refer to groups of specialised words and their meanings within a particular field but also to refer to the scientific study of these groups of words and concepts as well as their characteristics, use and behaviour. In this article and the data survey on which it is based, the word is used almost exclusively to refer to the first meaning. In this way we can speak about the terminology of legislation (e.g. law, decree, regulation), of public governance (e.g. legislature, motion of no confidence) or of administrative law (e.g. appeal procedure, right of refusal). There is also terminology for the sciences, like quantum mechanics or thermodynamics, and technical branches, like computing and the construction industry.

Unlike the ordinary meaningful elements in language we call words, terms have specific meanings in a particular domain and situation and normally come into being by explicit stipulation ('*the term x in this text/domain is used to refer to y*') in order to avoid ambiguity, polysemy and connotations that might influence the interpretation and which characterise a great deal of our 'normal' words. Terms are not only single words but can also be compounds and multi-word expressions.

Sometimes terminology and jargon are considered to be synonyms but quite often a distinction is made. Jargon is a broader concept than just terms and refers to the linguistic characteristics of a specific language community. It does not only consist of terms in the real sense of the word but also of all kinds of words, expressions, formulations, stylistic registers and sentence patterns etc. that help to create a specific group language as the binding element of a social entity. Thus, the goal of jargon is not (only) to facilitate precision within a field of interest but also to create a specific community, a feeling of belonging among members of the same social group, in other words a group identity. Jargon functions along the demarcation lines of inclusion – exclusion. By using a certain jargon, persons manifest themselves as members of a community. People who do not know how to communicate in that proper way will be regarded as outsiders.

Needless to say, language use within legislation, government and public administration is not only characterised by the use of specific terminologies but also

contains linguistic features that may be characterised as being part of the jargon of inner crowds, be it juridical experts, political actors or civil servants. These linguistic elements are not included in this survey.

2.3.2 Terminology work in the public sphere

In many countries terminologies governing the public sphere are the object of explicit action or policies. Terms are stipulated and agreed upon, collected and described and may be the object of unification or standardisation if there appear to be too many discrepancies. The actors involved in these processes differ from country to country and may involve ministries and other public authorities, official translation services, language institutes and even institutions responsible for normalisation and standardisation.

All sorts of problems concerning terminology may arise and may become the object of explicit action, for example:

– terminological differences within a given domain and disagreements between specialists in a given domain;
– terminological differences between domains that are closely related, e.g. between the economic and social spheres of public governance;
– differences between countries where a given language is used as the instrument of legislation, government and public administration as a result of broader sociocultural differences and traditions as well as official authorities and structures between these countries. These are so-called bicentric or pluricentric languages relating, for example, to the official terminology of French-speaking Belgium, the French language community of Switzerland and France;
– differences between language varieties within the same language in one country, like between the two varieties of Norwegian and between a sophisticated administrative language and a more vernacular one in Greek;
– differences and discrepancies between different languages that are used as communicative instruments in the same country, for instance between Swedish and Finnish official terminology in Finland or between Dutch and French terminology in Belgium;
– differences and variation between the terminologies used in separate countries within a given domain and the terms used for the same domain by institutions belonging to the European Union, e.g. by the European Commission and its directorates-general.

Apart from actions which address issues concerning the collection, description and unification or standardisation of terminology, many countries are also concerned about the existence of good, acceptable terms in their own official language using native lexical elements and following proper word formation processes as alter-

natives to terms borrowed from other languages, in most cases from English. These policy actions focus on the production and implementation of so-called terminological neologisms. Countries with active policies in this area include France, Greece and Norway.

2.3.3   International cooperation

Terminology work is also the object of international collaboration. Almost all collaborative terminology structures are not specific to the field of public governance and administration but cover all sectors that are relevant to terminology work. There are also international exchange structures between public administration bodies. For them terminology is often only one area of collaboration among others.

The *European Association for Terminology*[7] (EAFT-AET) has more than 50 institutional member organisations from all over Europe. It promotes the professionalism of terminology work and stimulates cooperation between its member institutions. EAFT has its secretariat in Barcelona, Spain.

TermNet[8] is a global network for terminology founded on the initiative of UNESCO, with the aim of stimulating collaboration and sharing expertise. It has its secretariat in Vienna, Austria.

Another collaborative structure in the field of terminology which is also based in Vienna is *Infoterm*,[9] which promotes and supports the cooperation of existing as well as the establishment of new terminology centres and networks. The ELIPS questionnaire did not explicitly ask about membership of Infoterm.

The *Conference of Translation Services of European States*[10] (COTSOES) is a platform of exchange and collaboration between 52 translation services from 20 different countries. Collaboration and sharing best practices in the field of terminology is one of the four main areas of COTSOES for which there is a specific working group.

The institutions of the European Union are also important for terminology cooperation on a European level. There is an inter-institutional database for terminology, called *IATE*[11] (*Interactive Terminology for Europe*) involving important collaboration between terminology actors belonging to member states. On the initiative of the Directorate-General for Translation there are also collaborative structures for specific official European languages in which the EU translation services collaborate with national partners in specific language areas. Examples

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[7]   See website: https://www.termcat.cat/en/european-association-terminology-eaft.

[8]   See website: https://www.termnet.org/.

[9]   See website: http://www.infoterm.info/.

[10]   See website: http://www.cotsoes.org/.

[11]   See website: https://iate.europa.eu/home.

are REI (*Rete per l'eccellenza dell'italiano istituzionale* – the network for the excellence of the Italian institutional language) and the *Interinstitutionelle Termi-nologiegruppe Deutsch* (Interinstitutional terminology group for German).

A collaborative network and tool that deserves a special mention is the *EuroTermBank*,[12] which is the largest centralised terminology bank for languages of the European Union and Icelandic. Through its harmonisation, collection and dissemination of public terminology resources, *EuroTermBank* strongly facilitates the enhancement of public sector information and strengthens the linguistic infra-structure in new EU member countries.

The last network organisation that needs to be mentioned is *Nordterm*,[13] the association of organisations and societies in the Nordic countries which are engaged in terminology work, training and research.

2.4 Diversity

Our societies are diverse. As a result, in some way or another, legislation, govern-ment and communication by public authorities, especially between these authori-ties and the general public ('citizens'), have to cope with this diversity, even more so as the sensibility for diversity in society has rapidly increased over the past decades. Coping with these aspects in a proper way has increasingly become a challenge for public governance and public authorities. In many cases they also constitute a challenge for our languages themselves and the linguistic and stylistic choices that are (or are not) available to express and acknowledge this diversity.

Important diversity aspects in our society are, for instance:

– the presence of languages and language communities other than the dominant, so-called official, language of the country, including minority languages with long traditions in our societies but also languages of recent migration and non-verbal sign language;
– gender diversity, the visibility of male and female persons and increasingly also acknowledgement of a more nuanced, non-binary approach to gender identities closely related to the gender phenomenon;
– diversity of sexual preferences and identities;
– social diversity, e.g. of social classes, degrees of schooling, cultural back-grounds, religious and ideological convictions;
– physical differences such as skin colour;
– functional disabilities.

There is an increasing conviction that all communication, verbal and non-verbal, should reflect society as it really is, in all its really existent variety and variation,

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[12] See website: https://www.eurotermbank.com/.
[13] See website: http://www.nordterm.net/.

in order not to exclude certain categories of citizens, not to discriminate against them or to conceal their existence. Most if not all of the aspects of diversity mentioned above are subject to discussion and even struggles within our societies, including strong opposition towards this diversification and especially towards forms of linguistic engineering in order to cope with diversity issues.

In the Flemish region of Belgium, for instance, there is a language law that forbids public authorities and their civil servants to communicate in languages other than the official language(s) of the region, even if this means that crucial information, for instance in relation to public health and concerning all kinds of social regulations, does not reach certain categories of citizens. Authorities in other countries do use other languages on certain, well-specified occasions in cases where the nature of the information and its accessibility for the population at large is considered crucial to inclusion, democracy and the active participation of citizens.

Certainly gender and sexual identities are increasingly a topic of discussion in society, with sometimes contradictory and conflicting strategies and attitudes, even among those in favour of diversity policies. In some language communities there has been a tendency to systematically distinguish between male and female, even to the point of changing word formation patterns in order to produce female designations for functions and professions which did not exist before. This diversification strategy is often considered detrimental to a more nuanced, non-binary approach to gender identity, including all identities on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. For this reason, in other societies there is the opposite tendency towards gender neutral communication involving, for example, the introduction of a gender neutral pronoun for people instead of the binary he/she dichotomy, for instance in Swedish with the neutral third person singular pronoun *hen*.

These are only a few examples of diversity issues, the strategies at stake and discussions about them within societies. These aspects are the focus of part 4 of the ELIPS data survey, revealing that in almost all countries many of these diversity aspects have only become the object of explicit policy measures relatively recently.

2.5   Training

The training of public officials is an important factor in maintaining good governance and enabling public sector agencies to meet the requirements of a developing society. Many, if not all, domains examined by the ELIPS survey call for skills that are unlikely to have been included in the regular education and training of civil servants.

Training is often purchased as a service provided by various actors such as government research and expert institutions, universities, NGOs, enterprises or individual experts. It may be organised as in-house training or as courses offered by the

providers. Increasingly, lectures and courses are held as webinars and self-learning courses are offered on digital platforms; using digital media offers flexibility in time and space. This development has been speeded up by the Covid-19 crisis.

In some countries university courses are available for those who wish to improve their competence in plain language, easy-to-read language and terminology studies. Such a plain language course in English was created at the University of Antwerp in international cooperation and partly with EU funding, although at the moment it is not available. Easy-to-read courses are part of Finnish language studies at the University of Helsinki for example. In Sweden it has been possible to complete an academic degree for plain language consultants since the 1970s.

2.6   The European Union

The influence of the EU on the language of legislation and administration in member countries is significant. The leading principle guiding the language regime of the EU is multilingualism: all legislative proposals and many other texts are translated into its 24 official languages by translators who mostly come from countries where the language they translate into is spoken. In many languages, the legal language of the EU has developed into a variety that is different enough from the national legal language to be called a eurolect (see Mori 2018). Sometimes this eurolect is regarded as more comprehensible and usable than the national variety, sometimes vice versa (cf. Mikhailov/Piehl 2018).

In order to achieve functional legislation in its official languages, EU translation units have established contacts with public officials and language experts in member states in order to consult them about various linguistic issues. These contacts may be informal, i.e. built on personal acquaintances, but there are also structured, more official networks and platforms which have often been found to be useful (Somssich et al. 2010, 46-47). Collaboration facilitated by such platforms takes various forms. There may be a need for guidance in language problems (e.g. textual, syntactic, terminological) when discussing new terminology, creating translation tools or training and interaction on other topics.

3.   Participating countries and languages represented

Twenty-three out of the 34 EFNIL member institutions and one additional institute representing 24 countries and 27 official languages provided information in the ELIPS questionnaire. In total, there were 28 respondents:

– Austria
– Belgium (Flemish Community)
– Bulgaria
– Denmark

- Estonia
- Finland (answers regarding Swedish)
- Finland (answers regarding Finnish)
- Germany
- Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland (except Northern Ireland)
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Malta
- The Netherlands
- Norway
- Portugal
- Slovak Republic
- Slovenia
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom (England)
- United Kingdom (Wales)
- United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)
- United Kingdom (Scotland)

In some countries with more than one official language, the questionnaire was answered separately for each language. In some cases, a country has identical provisions for different languages and in some cases the provisions differ. For instance, the legal provisions in Finland for Finnish and Finland-Swedish are almost the same, whereas in the UK they differ for Welsh and English. In other cases, the same language is spoken in different countries with different provisions. Other countries, e.g. Switzerland, chose to fill in the questionnaire just once covering all official languages. For Belgium, on the other hand, there is only information regarding the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, i.e. the Flemish Region and the Dutch-language community of the bilingual Brussels Capital Region, and the situation in the French-speaking areas of Belgium might be completely different.

Therefore, the statistical data in the survey is based on the answers provided by each respondent, not on countries or languages as a whole, e.g. there is one response from Finland for Finnish and one for Swedish although the provisions for the two languages in most cases may be identical. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the data.

4.   Project group

The plan to conduct a survey as the first stage of the ELIPS project was initiated by the project group which also designed the questionnaire. The group was nominated by the executive Committee of EFNIL in 2017. In conducting the survey the group was assisted by the Danish Language Council and Sabine Kirchmeier did the main part of setting up the website and analysing the results. The group that conducted the survey consisted of the following persons:

– Aino Piehl, Finland;
– Cecilia Robustelli, Italy;
– Johan Van Hoorde, Belgium/the Netherlands;
– Júlia Choleva, Slovakia;
– Katrin Hallik, Estonia.

The following persons contributed to the work in its earlier stages: Anne Kjærgaard, Denmark; Nathalie Marchal, Belgium; Daiva Vaišnienė, Lithuania.

5.   The ELIPS survey

5.1   Methodology

The data collection for ELIPS is based on an online survey conducted in 2018-2019 consisting of 7 main topics and covering 69 different questions. Some are simple yes/no questions while others offer multiple options. As many questions as possible were designed to elicit quantifiable answers which allow for a comparative overview. The comment fields, on the other hand, provide detailed information where nuances and modifications come across. The respondents were invited to provide examples and links which are preserved in the data on the website. Therefore, the comments should always be consulted before drawing conclusions.

5.2   Visualisation

The answers to the questionnaire are displayed on interactive web pages. All questions and answers for all countries can be selected and displayed in a flexible manner. On the ELIPS website (https://elips.efnil.nytud.hu/browse) it is possible to view the answers to all questions for a specific country, to compare the answers to a given question across countries and to combine questions and comments in order to get a more detailed picture.

Comments are given in English. Quotes are given in the original language and in English translation. Active links to current legislation etc. are provided in most cases as shown in Figure 1. Translations of the original quotes are either authorised translations or translations provided by the respondent. This is indicated accordingly.

Fig. 1:   Screenshot of the ELIPS website

For yes/no questions and questions containing quantities, ELIPS offers map views which give a good overview of the results for the participating countries.

The website and its search functions were designed by Ivan Mittelholcz and Ferenczi Zsanett from the Research Institute for Linguistics at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in cooperation with Sabine Kirchmeier.

6. Results

The following sections present ELIPS topic by topic and summarise the results.

6.1 Plain language policies and actions

The first section of the questionnaire addresses the existence of – and interest in – official plain language policies and the institutions that have been established to implement these policies. It describes explicit policies and measures taken and contains links to language materials, instructions, services and tools available for public administrations. It also touches on how plain-language communication is evaluated and promoted, mapping the degree of international cooperation between official institutions in this field.

6.1.1 Public interest in and institutions for plain language

Clearly, there is public interest in government and public administration using plain language for most languages in the participating countries. Only 7% of the respondents stated that there is no interest and 4% did not know, meaning that 89% said that the use of plain language by government and public administration is indeed a subject of public interest.

Answer	%	Participants
Yes	89%	25
No	7%	2
Unknown	4%	1
Total	100%	28

Table 1: Is the use of plain language by government and public administration a subject of interest in your country?

Consequently, in most countries, there are institutions responsible for maintaining plain language policies and providing plain language services, either the institution of the respondent (29%) or another institution (43%); 14% stated that there are no official institutions while 14% did not know or did not answer the question.

Answer	%	Participants
Yes – my own institution	29%	8
Yes – another institution	43%	12
No	14%	4
Unknown	7%	2
No answer	7%	2
Total	100%	28

Table 2: Is there an institution or body in your country that is responsible for plain language policies for public authorities and/or provides plain-language services for public authorities and/or coordinates the actions of other bodies?

It emerges from the comments that in some countries, like Finland, the subject is well established and plain language policies have existed for about 50 years, whereas in other countries, such as Estonia, the work is just starting. It is evident that at present plain language is not a core activity of EFNIL member institutions and only few of them collaborate with the institutions responsible for that. Fewer than 1/3 of the institutions (8 out of 28) are directly involved in plain language policies, with an additional 3 institutions stating that they collaborate with the plain language institutions. Yet they have knowledge of those institutions' work: 11 respondents named the other institution.

The addresses and links to the institutions responsible for plain language policies in each country can be seen on the ELIPS website (Sections 1.2 and 1.2.2).

6.1.2 Explicit policies and measures for plain language

Recommendations by central governments for government agencies and public administration in general to use plain language were reported by 61% of the participants, with 43% having legal provisions and regulations. More than half of the respondents reported that recommendations exist made by public bodies for their own use. Only one respondent (Lithuania) replied that there are no policies or measures whatsoever for plain language in the country, while 5 respondents did not know or did not answer the question (Austria, Bulgaria, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia).

The most far-reaching provisions can be found in Slovakia and Wales where provisions not only rule that citizens have the right to comprehensible communication by public authorities but also give them the right to refuse unclear information.

Detailed descriptions and links to measures and instructions can be found in Section 1.5 on the ELIPS website.

Country	1.4.1. Recommendations by the central government for government agencies and public administration in general	1.4.2. Legislation by the central government for government agencies and public administration in general	1.4.3. Legal provisions or regulations which rule that citizens have the right to comprehensible communication by public authorities	1.4.4. Legal provisions or regulations that give citizens the right to receive comprehensible communication by public authorities and to refuse unclear information	1.4.5. Recommendations made by separate public administration bodies for their own use
Austria	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Belgium (Flemish Community)	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Bulgaria	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Denmark	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Estonia	No	No	No	No	Yes
Finland (Swedish)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Germany	No	Yes	No	No	No
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Greece	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Hungary	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Iceland	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	Yes	No	No	No	No
Italy	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Latvia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Lithuania	No	No	No	No	No

Country	1.4.1. Recom-mendations by the central government for government agencies and public adminis-tration in general	1.4.2. Legisla-tion by the central govern-ment for gov-ernment agen-cies and public administration in general	1.4.3. Legal pro-visions or regulations which rule that citizens have the right to compre-hensible com-munication by public authorities	1.4.4. Legal pro-visions or regulations that give citizens the right to receive comprehensible communication by public au-thorities and to refuse unclear information	1.4.5. Recom-mendations made by sepa-rate public administration bodies for their own use
Malta	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Netherlands	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Norway	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Portugal	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Sweden	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
UK (England)	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
UK (Wales)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UK (Northern Ireland)	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
UK (Scotland)	No	No	No	No	Yes

Table 3:   Explicit policies or policy measures or instructions addressing the use of plain language within public administration

6.1.3   Plain language materials, services and tools

Regarding methods to help public administrations comply with the principles of plain language, the publication of guidelines seems to be the most widespread. Three quarters (21 out of 28 respondents) reported that such measures are used. Web services also seem rather popular (used by 68%) while 36% mentioned the use of templates and 39% the use of digital tools such as style checkers or complexity-of-text predictors. Public administrations in Denmark, Finland (those working in Finnish), Greece, Norway and Sweden seem to have the whole palette of possibilities available.

Country	1.6. Materials, instructions, services and tools			
	Web service(s)	Guidelines (online, pdf or printed)	Models or templates	Tools
Austria	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Belgium (Flemish Community)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bulgaria	Yes	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer

	1.6. Materials, instructions, services and tools			
Country	Web service(s)	Guidelines (online, pdf or printed)	Models or templates	Tools
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estonia	No Answer	Yes	No Answer	No Answer
Finland (Swedish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Answer
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Germany	Yes	Yes	No Answer	Yes
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Answer
Greece	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hungary	No Answer	Yes	No Answer	No Answer
Iceland	Yes	Yes	No Answer	No Answer
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	Yes	Yes	No Answer	Yes
Italy	Yes	Yes	No	No
Latvia	Yes	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	No Answer	Yes
Malta	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	No Answer	Yes
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Portugal	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	No Answer	No Answer
Slovenia	Yes	No Answer	No Answer	Yes
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Switzerland	No Answer	Yes	No Answer	No Answer
UK (England)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Answer
UK (Wales)	No Answer	Yes	Yes	No Answer
UK (Northern Ireland)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Scotland)	No Answer	Yes	No Answer	No Answer

Table 4:   Which materials, instructions, services and tools are available in your country in order to help public administration comply with the principles of plain language?

Descriptions of and links to materials, instructions, services and tools are available in Section 1.7 on the ELIPS website.

6.1.4   Endeavours to measure the effect of plain language policies

One third of the respondents reported that there are projects that aim to measure the effect of plain language policies either in terms of increased quality and user satisfaction or in terms of efficiency. Authorities in Norway have developed an

online toolbox with methods for user involvement and measuring results and in the Netherlands a proposal has been submitted for a project that aims to monitor plain language results. Only Finland referred to documented studies, with other countries mainly referring to projects in progress (cf. Section 1.8 on the ELIPS website).

6.1.5   Promotion of plain language policies and awareness

Just over half, or 54%, of the respondents reported that there are initiatives to promote plain language policies in their country. The strategies range from launching a plain language prize to competitions and campaigns. Awards are given for different achievements, for instance, the clearest text, the best author or the best promoter of plain language. In Wales, it is possible to obtain a quality seal if certain conditions are met.

Detailed descriptions and links to various initiatives can be found in Section 1.8 on the ELIPS website.

6.1.6   International cooperation

Estonia, Finland, Norway, the Slovak Republic and Sweden said that they are members of one or both of the two main international organisations for plain language, *PLAIN* and *Clarity*. Six other respondents reported their involvement in other organisations or conferences. About half of the respondents are not involved in any kind of international cooperation.

Country	1.10.1. Member of PLAIN	1.10.2. Member of Clarity	1.10.3. Member of other organisations	1.10.4. Involvement in international conferences	1.10.5. Involvement in other types of international cooperation
Austria	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer	No Answer
Belgium (Flemish Community)	No	No	Yes	No	No
Bulgaria	No	No	No	No	No
Denmark	No	No	No	Yes	No
Estonia	No	Yes	No	No	No
Finland (Swedish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Germany	No	No	No	No	No
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	No	No	No	No	No
Greece	No	No	No	No	No
Hungary	No	No	No	No	No
Iceland	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

Country	1.10.1. Member of PLAIN	1.10.2. Member of Clarity	1.10.3. Member of other organisations	1.10.4. Involvement in international conferences	1.10.5. Involvement in other types of international cooperation
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	No	No	No	No	No
Italy	No	No	Yes	No	No
Latvia	No	No	No	No	No
Lithuania	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Malta	No	No	No	No	No
Netherlands	No	No	Yes	No	No
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Portugal	No	No	No	No	No
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Slovenia	No	No	No	No	No
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Switzerland	No	No	No	No	No
UK (England)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Wales)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Northern Ireland)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Scotland)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Table 5: Is your institution involved in international cooperation concerning plain language?

Descriptions and links to various plain language organisations, networks and conferences can be found in Section 1.11 on the ELIPS website.

6.2 Easy-to-read language policies and actions

The basic difference between easy-to-read language and plain language is the target audience. Whereas easy-to-read language texts specifically address persons with reading or comprehension barriers, plain language texts address the public reader in general.

More than half of the respondents (53%) confirmed the existence of legislation or recommendations by central government agencies and public administration in general. Almost one third (29%) reported on the existence of recommendations made by separate public administration bodies for their own use while 57% seemed to have nothing of the kind.

Country	2.1.1. Legislation or recommendations by public administrations in general	2.1.2. Recommendations made by separate public administration bodies for their own use
Austria	Yes	No
Belgium (Flemish Community)	No	Yes
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes
Denmark	No	No
Estonia	No	No
Finland (Swedish)	Yes	Yes
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes
Germany	Yes	No
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Unknown	Unknown
Greece	Yes	No
Hungary	Yes	No
Iceland	Yes	Yes
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	No	Yes
Italy	No	No
Latvia	Yes	No
Lithuania	Unknown	Unknown
Malta	No	No
Netherlands	No	No
Norway	Yes	Yes
Portugal	No	No
Slovak Republic	Yes	No
Slovenia	No	No
Sweden	Yes	No
Switzerland	Yes	No
UK (England)	Yes	Yes
UK (Wales)	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Northern Ireland)	No	Yes
UK (Scotland)	Yes	No

Table 6:   Are there explicit policies or policy measures or instructions addressing the use of easy-to-read language in some cases for some target groups?

The respondents provided a number of references to local or global guidelines, such as to the recommendations of the *World Wide Web Consortium*.[14] The references can all be found in Sections 2.1.3 to 2.2.2 on the ELIPS website.

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[14]   See website: https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/.

In some countries, there are separate guidelines for easy-to-read language, whereas in others, the guidelines are part of the guidelines for plain language. A few countries are still working out policies in this field.

Just over one fifth (22%) of the respondents reported that there is an institution or body responsible for the use of easy-to-read languages by public institutions. In most cases (18%), it is not the respondents' own institution but some other body or institution. It is noteworthy that the largest group of respondents (32%) did not answer this question.

No	29%
No answer	32%
Unknown	18%
Yes, another institution than the respondent's	18%
Yes, the respondent's institution	4%

Table 7:   Is there an institution or body that is responsible for the use of easy-to-read language by public authorities and/or provides easy-to-read language services for public authorities and/or coordinates the actions of other bodies?

Detailed information and links about institutions dedicated to working with easy-to-read language can be found in Section 2.4 on the ELIPS website.

6.3   Terminology policies and actions

6.3.1   Public interest in terminology

The interest in terminology seems to be quite strong in the participating countries and is well known to the responding institutions: 86% reported that the use of terminology within government and public administration is a subject of public interest.

No	11%
Unknown	4%
Yes	85%

Table 8:   Is (the use of) terminology within government and public administration a subject of public interest in your country?

In all, 29% of the participants stated that the responsibility for terminology development and/or terminology policies lies within the respondent's own institution and 39% reported that there are other institutions that deal with terminology. In these cases, most of the respondents' institutions collaborate directly or in some other way. Around one fifth (21%) reported that there are no institutions responsible for terminology management.

Descriptions of the collaboration and links to other terminology institutions can be found in Section 3.2 on the ELIPS website.

6.3.2 Terminology management tools

The respondents were also asked to provide information about which methods are used to help public institutions with the acceptance, use and description of terminology. Here, terminology databases and terminology extraction tools turned out to be the most widely used, with 68% (19 out of 28) of the respondents indicating that terminology databases and extraction tools are used. In addition, 57% (16 out of 28) of the respondents stated that official guidelines, legal acts or regulations are in use and 46% (13 out of 28) reported that web services are used.

Country	3.3.1. Web service(s)	3.3.2. Official guidelines, legal acts or regulations	3.3.3. Tools
Austria	No	No	No
Belgium (Flemish Community)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bulgaria	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Denmark	No	No	Yes
Estonia	No	No	Yes
Finland (Swedish)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Germany	No	No	No
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	No	No	No
Greece	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hungary	No	No	No
Iceland	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Italy	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Latvia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes
Malta	No	Yes	No
Netherlands	Yes	No	Yes
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes
Portugal	No	No	No
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	Yes	No	Yes
Sweden	No	No	Yes
Switzerland	No	Yes	Yes
UK (England)	No	Yes	No

Country	3.3.1. Web service(s)	3.3.2. Official guidelines, legal acts or regulations	3.3.3. Tools
UK (Wales)	Yes	Yes	Yes
UK (Northern Ireland)	No	Yes	Yes
UK (Scotland)	No	Yes	Yes

Table 9:   Which of the following specific materials, instructions, services and tools are available in your country in order to help public administration with the acceptance, use and description of terminology?

Detailed information and links to guidelines, tools and web services can be found in Section 3.4 on the ELIPS website.

6.3.3   International cooperation about terminology

Although there seems to be strong interest in terminology in almost all countries, international cooperation on terminology is not equally widespread. Furthermore, those countries that do collaborate internationally do not use the same conferences or networks so the picture is rather diverse. Some countries are associated with the *European Association for Terminology* (EAFT-AET), a few with *TermNET* and only one, the Slovak Republic, reported that it makes use of the *Conference of Translation Services of European States* (COTSOES).

   In all 39% of the respondents stated that their institutions are members of other conferences or networks. For instance, many of the Nordic countries are organised in *Nordterm* and others are associated with the *EuroTermBank* project that runs under the EU's *Connecting Europe Facility* (CEF).

Country	3.5.1. European Association for Terminology (EAFT-AET)	3.5.2. TermNet	3.5.3. Conference of Translation Services of European States	3.5.4. Other international organisations or networks	3.5.5. International conferences and symposia	3.5.6. Other forms of collaboration
Austria	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Belgium (Flemish Community)	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Bulgaria	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Denmark	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Estonia	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Finland (Swedish)	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Finland (Finnish)	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Germany	No	No	No	No	No	No
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	No	No	No	No	No	No
Greece	No	No	No	No	No	No
Hungary	No	No	No	No	No	No

Country	3.5.1. European Association for Terminology (EAFT-AET)	3.5.2. TermNet	3.5.3. Conference of Translation Services of European States	3.5.4. Other international organisations or networks	3.5.5. International conferences and symposia	3.5.6. Other forms of collaboration
Iceland	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Italy	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Latvia	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Malta	No	No	No	No	No	No
Netherlands	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Norway	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Portugal	No	No	No	No	No	No
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Slovenia	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Sweden	No	No	No	No	No	No
Switzerland	No	No	No	No	No	No
UK (England)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Wales)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Northern Ireland)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Scotland)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Table 10: Is your institution involved in international cooperation concerning terminology?

Descriptions and links to other conferences and networks that are used can be found in Section 3.6 on the ELIPS website.

6.4 Policies and actions on the use of other languages as well as gender, cultural and sexual diversity

Just over two thirds of the respondents (68%) indicated that there are language-specific instructions or guidelines for communication by public authorities for using languages other than official languages, for instance minority languages, foreign languages or sign language, in certain cases and for certain target groups. Rulings for minority languages such as Sámi and sign languages are very prominent in this group.

A slightly smaller group (64%) stated that there are official guidelines on the use of gender-neutral language and other gender aspects such as the masculine and feminine forms for the names of functions and titles.

Language-specific instructions or guidelines on cultural diversity and/or sexual preferences seem to be less widespread (29%). In Sweden, such research projects

have only been initiated recently. In the UK, these issues are covered by the guidelines for gender equality and Italy has guidelines for non-sexist language as well.

Other issues include disabilities, mental health, religion, nationality and age. Nearly one third (29%) of the respondents indicated that there are guidelines on such other issues as well.

Country	4.1.1. Guidelines on the use of other languages (minority languages, foreign languages, sign language)	4.1.2. Guidelines on the use of gender-neutral language and other gender aspects	4.1.3. Guidelines on culturasl diversity and/or sexual preferences	4.1.4. Guidelines on other issues
Austria	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Belgium (Flemish Community)	No	Yes	No	No
Bulgaria	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Denmark	No	No	No	Yes
Estonia	No	No	No	No
Finland (Swedish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Germany	Yes	Yes	No	No
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	No	No	No	No
Greece	Yes	Yes	No	No
Hungary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iceland	Yes	No	No	No
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Italy	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Latvia	No	No	No	No
Lithuania	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Yes
Malta	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	No	No
Norway	Yes	Yes	No	No
Portugal	Yes	No	No	No
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	No	Yes	No	No
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	No	No
UK (England)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UK (Wales)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
UK (Northern Ireland)	Yes	Yes	No	No
UK (Scotland)	Yes	Yes	No	No

Table 11: Are there other language-specific instructions or guidelines for communication by public authorities in your country?

Only 11% of the respondents indicated that plain language principles also apply to guidelines and instructions for other languages and special groups. However, in many countries there may be the same attitude as in Switzerland, where the response is as follows: "In principle, all publicly available information issued by federal authorities is subject to the same principles. There is no explicit mention in the relevant laws, by-laws or guidelines that some languages would be exempt from this principle".

Detailed descriptions and links to national guidelines and instructions can be found in Section 4.2 on the ELIPS website.

6.5   Training

Just over two thirds (68%) of the respondents replied that civil servants receive specific training regarding aspects of language use, effective writing and communication. Of course, quite a number of linguistic aspects can be addressed, as can be seen in Figure 2.
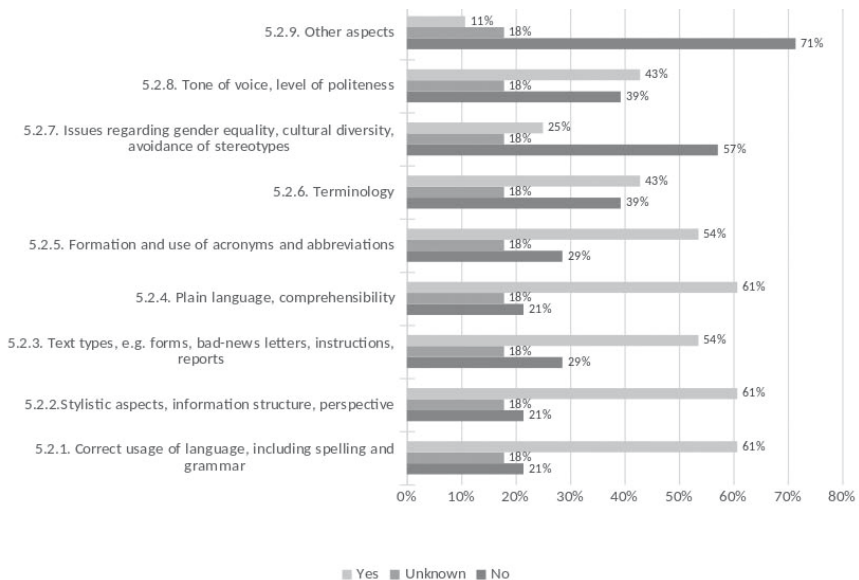

Fig. 2:   What aspects are addressed in training? (Summary)

In fact, it seems that most aspects are addressed in training, although terminology and tone of voice seem to receive a little less attention. These topics were only mentioned by 43% of the respondents, while over half of them reported training for most other domains. The least prominent domains regard gender equality, cultural diversity and avoidance of stereotypes, being mentioned by only 25% of the respondents.

Country	5.2.1. Correct usage of language, including spelling and grammar	5.2.2. Stylistic aspects, information structure, perspective	5.2.3. Text types, e.g. forms, bad-news letters, instructions, reports	5.2.4. Plain language, comprehensibility	5.2.5. Formation and use of acronyms and abbreviations	3.5.6.Terminology	3.5.7. Issues regarding gender equality, cultural diversity, avoidance of stereotypes	3.5.8. Tone of voice, levels of politeness	3.5.9. Other aspects
Austria	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Belgium (Flemish Community)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Estonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Finland (Swedish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Germany	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Greece	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Hungary	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Iceland	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Italy	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Latvia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Malta	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Netherlands	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Portugal	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
UK (England)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Wales)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
UK (Northern Ireland)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
UK (Scotland)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 12: What aspects are addressed in training?

Among the other topics addressed in the linguistic training of civil servants are the formation of plain official proper names and general communication skills.

Descriptions and links to training principles and training facilities can be found in Section 5.2 on the ELIPS website.

6.6 Collaboration between member states and the EU

The question of international collaboration has already been addressed several times in the previous sections. In this section, however, we specifically focus on collaboration between member states and the EU. Half of the respondents stated that there is some kind of formal collaboration platform that links the language services of the EU with the official institutions for language. The rest answered negatively or simply did not know.

Country	6.1. Is there a platform for collaboration and coordination between the language services of the EU and the national institutions regarding your national language(s)?	6.3. Is your institution involved in the collaboration platform?
Belgium (Flemish Community)	Yes	No
Denmark	Yes	No
Estonia	Yes	Yes
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes
Greece	Yes	Yes
Hungary	Yes	Yes
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	Yes	No
Italy	Yes	Yes
Netherlands	Yes	Yes
Portugal	Yes	Yes
Slovak Republic	Yes	No
Switzerland	Yes	No
UK (Northern Ireland)	Yes	No
Lithuania	Yes	Not relevant

Table 13: Collaboration with language services of the EU

For those countries that do have formalised collaboration, the main issues addressed were translation tools, terminology databases and tools. Collaboration on plain language was reported in 5 cases and exchanges about gender equality and cultural diversity were only reported for Italy.

Country	6.2. What aspects do the platforms address?					
	6.2.1. Translation tools (dictionaries, corpora, translation memories etc.)	6.2.2. Terminology bases and tools, e.g. for terminology extraction	6.2.3. Plain language and comprehensibility	6.2.4. Gender equality and cultural diversity	6.2.5. Style guides, templates, models	6.2.6. Organisation of meetings, conferences and training sessions
Belgium (Flemish Community)	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Denmark	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Estonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Finland (Finnish)	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Greece	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Hungary	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Italy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Netherlands	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Portugal	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
UK (Northern Ireland)	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not relevant	Not relevant	Yes

Table 14: Domains of collaboration with language services of the EU

7. Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

The analysis of the answers as described in the paragraphs above show that most of the participating countries do have policies related to the use and quality of their (national) languages as instruments for government, legislation and public administration. Many of these policies also cover the various aspects which were the focus of our ELIPS survey.

However, there seem to be large differences in the attention paid to the various subdomains. Terminology and plain language seem to receive the most widespread attention. Fields such as easy-to-read language as well as social, cultural and gender diversity are less well established and/or seem to be more recent, probably as a result of an increasing sensitivity towards these aspects over the last few years as they are considered constituents of inclusive communication. Moreover, even well-established fields show important impact differences between the countries which participated in the survey. In Finland and Sweden, for instance, plain lan-

guage policies have existed for about 50 years or so, while many other countries like Estonia and the Netherlands have only started working on them recently.

The answers to the survey also show that, as a rule, policies are developed on a national scale without too much awareness of what other languages and countries do, to say nothing of active interchange or cooperation. Most countries are not involved in international organisations and networks such as *PLAIN* (Plain Language Association International) and *Clarity* for plain language or *EAFT* (European Association for Terminology) or *COTSOES* (Conference of Translation Services of European States) as far as international platforms for terminology are concerned.

If we look at the various subdomains within the field of the institutional use of languages, we also see that these national policies are fragmented. There is no coherence and almost no exchange or collaboration between the various subdomains and bodies responsible for it, e.g. between plain language and easy-to-read actors, or between official terminology bodies and actors in the field of diversity.

Our survey also brings us to a third observation: the discontinuity between the level of the nation state and the institutions of the European Union. Typically, EU institutions are not involved or consulted in the definition and evaluation of language-specific policies, even though the quality of European regulations has a direct influence on public communication on a national level because member states have to integrate European rulings into their national legislation.

This leads us to the conclusion that more coherence and convergence between the various domains, a better sharing of experiences and practices between the various nation states in Europe and more continuity and interaction between national and European policy levels could be beneficial for the overall quality and effectiveness of language use within the domains of government, legislation and public administration.

Last but not least, the survey gives us a good idea of the involvement of the member institutions of EFNIL in these official language policies. Many EFNIL members have a direct commitment and involvement in the policies addressed by this survey, either as primary actors responsible for some or even all of these fields or as collaborating parties with the institutions that are directly in charge, while some members have no involvement whatsoever. The degree of involvement differs from country to country and from subdomain to subdomain. It seems strongest for terminology, followed by plain language.

This leads us to the conclusion that there are various opportunities for EFNIL to be instrumental in strengthening these policies and contributing to more coherence and comparability within Europe as a whole, e.g. by encouraging members from countries with weaker or absent policies to help their country close the gap and, in doing so, build on the experiences of colleagues in countries with strong traditions and active policies or by encouraging its members to act as intermediaries

between subdomains and between national and European levels in order to stimulate cooperation and strengthen overall coherence. This leads us to a number of recommendations to EFNIL and EFNIL member institutions alike which are included in the next few paragraphs. Although these recommendations focus on EFNIL and EFNIL member institutions, we sincerely hope that both the survey and our conclusions and recommendations will prove to be useful and inspiring to all other users, for instance to academic experts when identifying topics for research or to governments and policy bodies when comparing their national situation with other countries and even to identify partners for international cooperation.

7.2   Recommendations

7.2.1   Recommendations for member institutions about national activities

The ELIPS group recommends that EFNIL member institutions consider the following actions:

1) The member institutions could involve themselves more in national plain language and easy language activities to strengthen their position as national expert institutions, for example:
    –   If there is a national body responsible for that, member institutions could organise joint conferences with that body about themes that are common to both or connect to the core activities of each (e.g. the translation of communications by public authorities into national minority languages and the quality of those texts). They could also carry out joint projects or lobby together for the creation of national policies or influence their content.
    –   The member institutions could convene national actors from several different domains (e.g. plain language, easy language and terminology actors as well as actors promoting inclusive policies) and bring them together at conferences or meetings to examine the possibilities of promoting their domains together or forming national policies for them, e.g. language as a part of accessibility policies.
    –   If no body exists for any given domain, the member institutions could bring together individual actors in one or several such domains (plain language, easy language, gender neutral language, inclusive language) and offer a platform to exchange best practices and find common goals of action.
2) The member institutions could participate more often in international cooperation on plain language, easy language, terminology and other domains, i.e. joining international organisations and participating in international conferences in the relevant field to exchange experiences and best practices and to benefit from them.

3) The member institutions could get involved in developing and localising the international ISO standard for plain language in a national standard via the national standardisation organisations to lend their expertise and gain networks for their own tasks.

7.2.2   Recommendations for EFNIL as an organisation, influencing outwards and continuation of the project

The ELIPS group recommends that EFNIL considers the following suggestions:

1) EFNIL could organise conferences and meetings for its member institutions and outside experts about plain language, easy language and other domains of the survey in order to exchange experiences and best practices and to provide opportunities for partnerships and networking for those involved or interested in the same fields of activities. Strengthening especially those domains that receive less attention at present (especially gender neutrality and inclusive language) would enhance the overall quality and suitability of the language use by public authorities in member countries.
   – One theme for conferences could be the impact and effectiveness of plain language, easy-to-read and diversity policies since in many countries there is a need to demonstrate the return on investments in these. The conference could present findings on the effects of completed projects, both in material terms (reduction in costs, e.g. as a result of fewer complaints, legal actions etc.) and in immaterial terms (increased trust in institutions) and discuss their reliability.
   – Another theme could be the possible benefits of integrating national language resources (terminology collections, translation memories etc.) in a multilingual language infrastructure. Many EFNIL member institutions seem to be directly involved in policies and corpus planning regarding (legislative and administrative) terminology for their language. Cooperation with EU terminology experts and the IATE database would be beneficial to all parties.
2) EFNIL could commission or initiate a comparative review of tools for plain language and easy language which are already in use. International collaboration on sharing the same or comparable technological and linguistic bases for these tools can lead to a considerable gain in quality. It could also help develop comparable tools for those languages where such tools are not yet available. EFNIL could also contact universities or research institutes in member countries with research in these fields to sound out their interest in a research project which could apply for EU project funding.
3) EFNIL could explore with the European Commission (and perhaps also with the Secretariat of the Parliament and/or the Council of the EU) the possibility

of convening relevant national actors in different domains examined in the survey (e.g. competent bodies or other experts) to discuss whether common recommendations can be formulated for establishing national policies to promote plain language, easy language and other forms of inclusive use of language (not texts but procedures, tools, institutions).

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