Decision on the use of languages by the European Medicines Agency on its website (case 1096/2021/PL)

Decision
Case 1096/2021/PL - **Opened on** 29/10/2021 - **Decision on** 22/06/2022 - **Institution concerned** European Medicines Agency (No further inquiries justified) |

The complainant was concerned that most of the information on the European Medicines Agency's (EMA) website is available in the English language only.

In the context of the inquiry, the Ombudsman reminded EMA of her recommendations on the use of official EU languages for the EU administration when communicating with the public.

EMA informed the Ombudsman that it is working on a language policy and a multilingual interface for its website.

The Ombudsman welcomed EMA's plans to address the matter and closed the inquiry suggesting it follows up on its commitment in good time. The Ombudsman also suggested that, in the meantime, EMA seeks to make core information in all official EU languages more prominent on its website.

Background to the complaint
1. The complainant, a French national, was concerned about the use of languages by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) on its website, in particular, that most of the information is available in the English language only. The complainant raised the issue with EMA.

2. In its reply, EMA stated that its working language is English and, as such, most of the information on its website is available in English only. It added that some key content is available in all official EU languages, in particular concerning the safety information on medicines that is shared with the public. EMA also noted that it replies to citizens' queries in all official EU languages.

3. Dissatisfied with EMA's reply, the complainant turned to the European Ombudsman in June 2021.
The inquiry
4. The Ombudsman opened an inquiry into EMA's use of languages in its website, asking for details on its language policy.

5. In the course of the inquiry, the Ombudsman received EMA's reply on the Ombudsman's request for information.

The Ombudsman's assessment

6. The Ombudsman has issued a set of practical recommendations for the EU administration on the use of languages when communicating with the public. [1] One of these recommendations is that EU institutions, agencies, offices and bodies should make available in all official EU languages as much information as possible that is of particular interest to the public, notably core information about the body and its work. In order to determine what information is, or should be, available in all or as many official languages as possible, the Ombudsman recommended that the EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies establish a clear language policy.

7. Having a language policy setting out which languages are used in which type of situation allows the public to understand why not everything is translated. It can also help ensure public trust. This is particularly important for an agency such as EMA, with crucial tasks in public health, even more so in the context of a global pandemic.

8. In reply to this inquiry, EMA informed the Ombudsman that it is currently developing a language policy taking into account her practical recommendations. EMA noted that the delay in adopting the language policy was due to the COVID-19 crisis.

9. The Ombudsman welcomes this development and trusts that EMA will adopt its language policy soon, and publish it on its website in all official EU languages.

10. The Ombudsman also welcomes EMA's commitment to develop a multilingual interface for its website. The Ombudsman trusts that EMA will complete this project in good time and invites EMA to report on its progress within six months. Meanwhile, EMA could look into making the core information that it has already published in most official languages, [2] more prominent on its website. It could also seek to make this information available in all official languages, where this is not yet the case.

Conclusion

Based on the inquiry, the Ombudsman closes this case with the following conclusion:

There are no further inquiries justified at this stage.

The complainant and European Medicines Agency the will be informed of this decision **.**

Suggestions for improvement

1. The European Medicine Agency should follow up on its commitment to develop a language policy and a multilingual interface for its website, as soon as possible.

2. In the meantime, EMA should seek to make the core information that it has already published in most official EU languages more prominent on its website.

[1] Available at: https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/correspondence/en/129519 .

[2] The Ombudsman notes that the following information is available in most official languages: general information about EMA in the 'About us' section, the FAQ s, some documents related to COVID-19 and core information on the medicines EMA evaluates for approval.