



STAKEHOLDERS

PROJECT

Mobilising citizens as stakeholders in the
protection of the rule of law in Europe

A Practical Toolkit for Civil Society and Youth Engagement on the Rule of Law Cycle of the European Commission

A Practical Toolkit for Civil Society and Youth Engagement on the Rule of Law Cycle of the European Commission

Author: Valentina Zoccali
Organisation: S-Com
Date: May 2026
Type of publication: Toolkit

Acknowledgements:
This toolkit was developed as part of a broader effort to support civil society engagement on Rule of Law issues across Europe. It builds on insights, practices, and experiences shared by partner organisations and stakeholders involved in civic participation and democratic governance initiatives.

Funding statement:
Funded by the European Union.

Disclaimer:
Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Use and reproduction:
This publication may be used, reproduced, and shared for non-commercial purposes, provided that appropriate credit is given to the author and source.

Contents

1. Purpose, Vision & Engagement Principles	4
1.1 Purpose & Positioning of the Toolkit	4
1.2 Evidence Gathering and Research Process	5
1.2.1 Lessons Learned and Emerging Good Practices	6
2. Toolkit	9
2.1 How to use this Toolkit	9
Orientation Guide	10
2.2 Expanding Engagement	11
2.2.1 Stakeholder Mapping	11
Table 1: Stakeholders mapping	13
2.2.2 Identifying Allies and Partners	13
2.3 Target Groups and Engagement Approaches	14
2.3.1 Other civil society organisations and grassroots actors	14
2.3.2 Young people (18–30)	15
2.3.3 Citizens and non-expert audiences	16
2.3.4 Students and academic contexts	16
2.3.5 Media	16
2.4 Key Engagement Principles	17
2.5 “Making the Rule of Law understandable”	18
Table 2: Shared Vocabulary – Rule of Law (Simplified Translations)	20
2.6 Using narratives and storytelling	21
Table 3: Example of films and documentaries	22
Table 4: Example of podcasts	23
2.7 Visual and participatory tools	23
2.8 Connecting local realities to European processes	24
2.9 Creating safer spaces for dialogue, not instruction	25
2.10 Building a Continuous Rule-of-Law Engagement Ecosystem	26
2.11 Participatory Workshops	27
2.11.1 Focus on a good practice: World Café	28
Table 5: Workshops formats:	29
2.12 Online engagement	29
2.13 Gamified and Experiential Engagement	30
2.14 Using Engagement Activities within Broader Evidence-Gathering Processes	31
3. EU Resources and Supporting Tools	33
3.1 The EU Rule of Law Toolbox	33
3.2 EU Educational and Multimedia Resources	34
3.3 Additional Resources and Platforms	34
4. Final Conclusions and Acknowledgements	35
Acknowledgement	35
ANNEXES	37
1. Glossary of Key Terms	37
2. Stakeholder Mapping Tools	38
3. Workshop Formats	43
4. Feedback Form - Facilitators (Toolkit Validation Survey)	62
5. Feedback form for Participants (Experience & Engagement Survey)	82
6. Engagement Checklist	65
7. Checklist: Ensuring Inclusive Participation in Engagement Activities	67

1. Purpose, Vision & Engagement Principles

1.1 Purpose & Positioning of the Toolkit

Grassroots organisations and civil society are the democratic actors closest to people's everyday realities. They are frequently the first to identify early signs of shrinking civic space, reduced access to rights, or declining institutional accountability. They mobilise communities, build trust in contexts where institutions may be distant or inaccessible, and provide channels through which citizens can express concerns and participate in public life. Strengthening the rule of law therefore requires recognising these actors not as external observers, but as essential partners within the democratic system.

At the same time, the capacity of civil society to fulfil this role is not uniform and depends heavily on the conditions in which it operates. Legal protections, access to information, institutional openness, and the broader civic environment all shape the extent to which organisations can engage effectively. Where civic space is constrained, fragmented, or under pressure, the ability of civil society to contribute meaningfully to rule-of-law processes is significantly weakened.

Within this context, the STAKEHOLDERS Toolkit is grounded in a broader normative and operational vision: that the rule of law depends not only on institutions, but on informed, structured, and sustained civic participation. By equipping civil society actors with practical tools, methods, and confidence to engage with the European Rule of Law Cycle, the STAKEHOLDERS Project contributes to a more inclusive, participatory, and resilient democratic framework.

This Toolkit has been developed as part of the STAKEHOLDERS Project — *Mobilising Citizens as Stakeholders in the Protection of the Rule of Law in Europe*. The project addresses a central challenge: although the European Union has established structured mechanisms to monitor the rule of law across Member States, civil society participation in these processes remains uneven, limited, and often difficult for those actors who are closest to the realities being assessed.

The project consortium brings together civil society organisations from seven European countries — Belgium, Germany, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain — working collaboratively to strengthen their capacities and develop a joint contribution for the upcoming Rule of Law Cycle¹. Within this framework, project partners play a key role as intermediaries between the European level and national and local realities. In particular, they act as a bridge between grassroots organizations and citizens operating within their respective national context, with the aim of collecting, structuring, and amplifying their inputs. To achieve this, from September 2026 to February 2027, the partners will organize activities and events at the national level. This approach is intended to ensure that a broader range of voices and experiences can be reflected in rule-of-law processes, thereby enhancing both inclusiveness and democratic participation.

¹ An annual process through which the European Commission monitors rule of law developments in EU Member States and publishes the Rule of Law Report. For more information, please refer to the STAKEHOLDERS Trainer's Handbook.

1.2 Evidence Gathering and Research Process

The primary objective of this Toolkit is to support the project partners of the STAKEHOLDERS Project, as well as a broader community of grassroots and civil society organisations seeking to engage with rule-of-law mechanisms at national and European level. It is designed to be practical, adaptable, and grounded in real-world experience.

To inform the development of this Toolkit, a structured evidence-gathering process was undertaken involving different groups of actors, ensuring that the content reflects both practical experience and diverse perspectives on rule-of-law engagement.

First, project partners from the STAKEHOLDERS consortium played a central role in this process. A survey was designed in order to understand existing engagement practices, identify needs, and map common barriers faced by civil society actors in engaging with rule-of-law processes at national and European level.

The main obstacles identified by partners relate, on the one hand, to limited resources (time, staff, and budget), and on the other hand to difficulties in reaching target audiences and generally low participation levels. Most partners reported that they have never participated in any part of the EU rule-of-law cycle (e.g., consultations, reporting, monitoring, advocacy), with only three indicating involvement more than three times.

When asked about the top three tools or resources needed to improve engagement efforts, respondents strongly emphasized structural and communication-related gaps that directly affect their ability to engage audiences effectively. A recurring priority was the need for long-term financial resources to ensure continuity and sustainability of engagement activities, alongside dedicated and specialized staff capable of maintaining consistent outreach over time.

A second major area of concern relates to visibility and outreach capacity. Partners highlighted the need for stronger social media strategies, more effective communication tools, and increased visibility through collaboration with well-known actors and networks, in order to reach and engage wider and more diverse audiences.

Partners also stressed the importance of improving engagement infrastructure and skills, including training opportunities to involve more participants, specialist thematic expertise to strengthen credibility and relevance, and clearer coordination structures with well-defined roles to support more effective collective action. Several partners underlined the challenge of sustaining engagement over time, pointing to the need for more consistent methodologies for outreach, participation, and audience retention rather than sporadic and fragmented.

In parallel, a mapping exercise was conducted of organisations that have already participated in the Rule of Law Cycle (based on the list publicly available on the European Commission's official website). These organisations were contacted and interviewed by S-Com and invited to complete a dedicated questionnaire. The results of this process were used to identify and collect good practices directly from field experience, ensuring that the Toolkit is grounded in real cases of engagement with EU rule-of-law mechanisms.

In addition, the analysis extended to the academic sphere, with a focus on how the concept of the rule of law is taught within universities. This component aimed to understand how complex and often abstract legal and institutional concepts are translated into more accessible and applied forms of learning, particularly for students who may later engage in policy, advocacy, or civil society work.

Rule of law principles, such as judicial independence, legal certainty, or institutional accountability, can sometimes feel distant from everyday life. In reality, they become much more concrete when connected to situations that people experience in their daily interaction with public institutions and services.

Effective engagement therefore starts here: by understanding how these principles appear in real life. For example, when people face delays or obstacles in accessing justice, when they experience unequal treatment in public services,

when decision-making processes are unclear, or when they feel restrictions on freedom of expression or association. Starting from these experiences makes the concepts easier to understand and more relevant.

This approach is grounded in law and political science literature and commonly used in university teaching. Teachers often explain that “Rule of Law” is not a single idea, but a set of connected ideas.

A common way to present it is through three levels:

- a **formal or “thin” conception**: laws must be clear, public, stable, and applied equally to everyone;
- an **institutional level**: power must be separated, and judges must be independent;
- **substantive or “thick” conception**: the rule of law also includes rights such as access to justice, equality, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination.

Another point discussed academically is that the term “Rule of Law” is translated differently across legal traditions (*état de droit*, *Rechtsstaat*, *stato di diritto*). These translations are not always identical in meaning. In some cases, they are reduced to a narrow idea of simply “respecting laws”. For this reason, some scholars prefer to also use the concept of **constitutionalism**, which better captures the idea that power must always be limited by rules and rights.

A key teaching strategy is to connect principles to real-life consequences. For example, judicial independence is not abstract: it affects whether a person can receive a fair trial without external pressure. Similarly, rights such as freedom of expression or equality become concrete when linked to media freedom, minority rights, or access to public services.

Numbers and concrete data also help make the topic more tangible, such as EU funds being frozen or released depending on rule of law compliance. This shows that rule of law has real financial and political consequences.

Several common challenges emerge in teaching the rule of law concept. In fact, students often confuse the rule of law with democracy or anti-corruption. Others struggle with different meanings of the concept across legal traditions. Complex political cases are sometimes oversimplified as well.

To address these challenges, professors use several strategies: starting from real cases instead of definitions, using original documents, simplifying institutional explanations, and always connecting the EU level with national and everyday realities.

Finally, interactive methods work particularly well, such as press analysis, role-playing exercises, or the creation of podcasts and videos. These approaches encourage active reflection and help students understand that the rule of law is not something distant, but a system of rules that directly affects everyday life.

The findings from these complementary strands of analysis have been translated into practical tools, methods, and engagement strategies developed by S-Com. The resulting Toolkit focuses in particular on strengthening the capacity of civil society, including youth actors, to participate actively and effectively in rule-of-law processes.

1.2.1 Lessons Learned and Emerging Good Practices

The research and consultation process carried out during the development of this Toolkit revealed a number of recurring challenges, needs, and effective practices concerning civil society participation in rule-of-law processes.

Across interviews, a recurring finding was that meaningful participation rarely emerges through isolated or one-off activities alone. Organisations consistently highlighted the importance of building a broader engagement ecosystem capable of connecting awareness-raising, community dialogue, evidence collection, advocacy, communication, and institutional participation over time.

Many interviewees stressed that one of the main barriers to participation is not necessarily lack of interest, but rather the challenges many actors face in recognising how their existing work connects to rule-of-law frameworks. Grassroots organisations frequently work on issues that are deeply connected to rule-of-law principles — including social inclusion, environmental justice, anti-discrimination, media freedom, human rights, including for migrants and LGBTI persons, civic participation, and access to public services — without necessarily recognising how their forms of engagement and participation fit within broader institutional or legal frameworks.

For this reason, one of the most important lessons emerging from the project was the need to “connect the dots” between local experiences and broader rule-of-law principles. Interviews showed that organisations became significantly more engaged once facilitators helped them understand how their existing expertise and experiences related to themes addressed within the Rule of Law Report². For example, organisations monitoring parliamentary activity often did not initially perceive their work as contributing to rule-of-law monitoring, despite the fact that issues such as legislative quality, democratic oversight, and anti-corruption mechanisms are central elements of the Report. Highlighting these links helped participants recognise the relevance of their work and engage more confidently in the process.

Another strong theme emerging from the interviews concerned the importance of communication, visibility, and public storytelling. Several organisations highlighted how websites, social media platforms, campaigns, public events, podcasts, and storytelling initiatives became essential tools not only for outreach, but also for sustaining public attention around rule-of-law issues that risk disappearing from public debate.

Some organisations working on accountability and justice issues described how continuously highlighting “forgotten stories,” underreported cases, or overlooked rights violations contributed to generating broader civic awareness and keeping institutional accountability visible over time. These practices demonstrated that civic engagement is strengthened when institutional debates are connected to identifiable human stories and emotional reference points.

The importance of **networking and coalition-building** also emerged very clearly throughout the research process. Organisations consistently stressed that participation becomes significantly more sustainable and impactful when actors collaborate through formal or informal networks. Partnerships helped organisations share expertise, distribute workload, amplify visibility, and create safer spaces for participation.

The interviews further highlighted the value of collaborative, flexible, and distributed coordination models in making participation in the Rule of Law process more accessible and effective. An important example emerged from experiences where several organisations coordinated contributions to the Rule of Law Report by dividing thematic responsibilities among partners. Different organisations acted as focal points for specific chapters, allowing each actor to focus on its own area of expertise while reducing individual workload and improving the coherence and depth of the overall submission process.

At the same time, organisations stressed the importance of flexible participation formats, particularly for grassroots groups with limited resources or reduced institutional capacity. Rather than expecting organisations to engage with the entire reporting framework, contributors were often invited to focus only on the sections or questions most relevant to their expertise and activities. In addition, instead of requiring entirely new technical reports or formal submissions, organisations were encouraged to build on materials they had already developed, such as research, monitoring activities, case documentation, testimonies, reports, or advocacy work. These existing materials could then be integrated into broader joint submissions through the support of coordinators and partner organisations. Together, these practices significantly lowered barriers to participation and ensured that grassroots knowledge, experiences, and evidence could be meaningfully incorporated into institutional processes.

² The Rule of Law Report is an annual report published by the European Commission that assesses the situation of the rule of law in all EU Member States. It examines key areas such as judicial independence, anti-corruption, media freedom, and checks and balances, and identifies both progress and challenges.

More information can be found in the Stakeholders Training Handbook.

This collaborative approach also reinforced another recurring lesson: civil society’s distinctive added value lies not in reproducing information already publicly available, but in its ability to provide grounded evidence, lived experiences, local knowledge, and concrete examples that institutional actors may otherwise struggle to access.

Several interviewees also highlighted the importance of creating continuous engagement structures rather than relying exclusively on isolated consultations or one-off events. This directly informed the Toolkit’s approach to engagement, which promotes the idea of a “continuous engagement ecosystem” linking awareness-raising, dialogue, evidence gathering, public communication, structured consultations, and policy contribution within an ongoing cycle of participation.

The research process also revealed important risks and pressures faced by organisations and activists working on rule-of-law issues. Some interviewees reported experiences of online harassment, reputational attacks, political hostility, and public delegitimisation campaigns linked to their advocacy work. These findings reinforced the importance of creating trust-based, ethically facilitated, and psychologically safe spaces for participation, particularly for vulnerable groups and grassroots actors.

Finally, one of the clearest lessons emerging from the research process was that participation should not be understood as a linear process where experts simply transfer information to citizens. Meaningful engagement depends instead on recognising citizens, communities, young people, grassroots organisations, and underrepresented groups as holders of valuable knowledge and lived experience.

2. Toolkit

2.1 How to use this Toolkit

This Toolkit is designed as a practical resource to support civil society organisations, youth groups, and grassroots actors in making rule-of-law processes more accessible, understandable, and participatory. Rather than providing formal training, it translates complex institutional and legal concepts into accessible forms of engagement for those without prior expertise. While training remains the primary entry point for meaningful participation—addressed through the **STAKEHOLDERS Trainer’s Handbook**—this Toolkit focuses on outreach and engagement, complementing rather than replacing structured learning.

The Toolkit is structured in a modular and non-linear way. Users are encouraged to navigate it according to their needs, context, and the audiences they work with. Each section can be used independently or combined with others to design activities that foster awareness, participation, and dialogue around rule-of-law issues. The Toolkit is also intended to be highly adaptable: facilitators are encouraged to adjust methods, language, and formats to suit local contexts, target groups, and varying levels of familiarity with the topic. In particular, concepts can be simplified, examples localised, and activities reshaped to ensure they remain relevant, accessible, and inclusive.

The Toolkit can be used in several complementary ways:

- As an engagement design resource

The Toolkit supports organisations in developing activities that make rule-of-law issues concrete, relatable, and locally meaningful. Workshops, participatory exercises, storytelling methods, and discussion formats can be adapted to different contexts and audiences.

- As a facilitation support tool

The Toolkit provides methods and facilitation approaches for engaging citizens, youth groups, grassroots organisations, and non-expert audiences who may have little familiarity with EU institutional processes or legal terminology.

- As a bridge between institutional frameworks and lived experience

One of the central functions of the Toolkit is to help facilitators connect technical rule-of-law frameworks with everyday experiences, local realities, and public concerns. Rather than focusing primarily on institutional explanations, the Toolkit prioritises approaches that begin from stories, cases, media narratives, social experiences, and concrete examples.

- As a contribution-building resource

Several methodologies included throughout the Toolkit are specifically designed to help organisations transform local experiences, discussions, and participatory activities into structured civic input capable of informing policy discussions, advocacy work, or contributions to the European Rule of Law Cycle.

Finally, this Toolkit should be seen as a practical and evolving resource. Its value lies not only in its content, but in how it is used to open up participation, generate dialogue, and make rule-of-law processes more visible and accessible to broader groups of citizens.

Orientation Guide

This orientation guide is a practical navigation tool that helps users quickly find the most relevant sections without having to read the Toolkit sequentially.

1. So you want to talk about the rule of law – great! Who do you want to talk with?

- I am not sure yet / I want to understand the landscape → **Stakeholder Mapping** (2.2.1) - p.11
- I want to find partners or build a coalition → **Identifying Allies and Partners** (2.2.2) - p.13
- I already know my audience → **Target Groups and Engagement Approaches** (2.3) - p.14

2. What kind of engagement approach do you want to use? What methods fit your objectives?

- Films, podcasts, storytelling → **Using narratives and storytelling** (2.6) – p.21
- Connecting local realities to wider EU processes → (2.8) - p.24
- Interactive workshops → (2.11) – p. 27 and **World Café** (2.11.1) – p.28
- Online engagement → (2.12) – p. 29
- Gamified or experiential methods → (2.13) – p.30
- Visual or participatory tools → (2.7) - p.23

3. How ready are you to start engaging on rule-of-law issues?

- I would like to understand the basics → **Making the Rule of Law understandable** (2.5) – p.18 and **Key Principles** (2.4) – p.17
- I have some experience but need more structured guidance → **Trainer Handbook** and **Workshop methodologies** (2.11–2.11.1) - p.27
- I am ready to design or contribute to EU-level engagement activities → **Continuous engagement ecosystem** (2.10) – p.26 and **evidence-based participation** (2.14) – p.31

2.2 Expanding Engagement

Sustainable engagement requires reaching beyond already active participants and building wider networks of actors capable of contributing to rule-of-law processes.

This includes mapping stakeholders, identifying potential partners, and actively engaging underrepresented groups. Outreach strategies should be tailored to specific audiences and supported through appropriate communication channels, including digital platforms, in-person events, and media collaboration.

Civil society plays a key role in connecting different actors and ensuring that engagement is not limited to already active organisations.

A central ambition of the STAKEHOLDERS Project is to move beyond a core group of participants and broaden the circle of civil society actors engaged with the European rule-of-law framework. Expanding this network is essential both to increase the diversity of perspectives represented and to strengthen the overall impact of civil society contributions to the Rule of Law Cycle.

This means reaching audiences that may not traditionally engage with EU-level processes. These may include grassroots groups, youth organisations, community initiatives, and actors working in sectors not usually associated with rule-of-law issues. By widening participation, the project seeks to make the Rule of Law Cycle more inclusive and better reflect a wider range of experience.

A key part of this process is awareness-raising. Many potential contributors are either unaware of the opportunities for engagement or see the process as too technical or inaccessible. Outreach should therefore explain what the Rule of Law Cycle is, how civil society can participate, and why the process is relevant to different kinds of organisations and communities.

Expanding the network also means creating connections between different kinds of actors. Bringing together organisations with diverse expertise and experience can improve the quality of engagement and reveal connections across issues and sectors.

At the same time, outreach must be targeted and strategic. Relevant audiences need to be identified, their needs understood, and messages adapted accordingly. This may involve different communication channels, varying levels of language and technicality, and different engagement formats.

Expansion is only effective if engagement is sustained. Outreach should therefore aim not only to make initial contact but to build ongoing relationships and support continued participation over time.

2.2.1 Stakeholder Mapping

Effective outreach and civic mobilisation begin with a clear understanding of the actors involved. Stakeholder mapping is the process of identifying, analysing, and organising the individuals, organisations, and networks that may have a role, interest, or potential contribution in relation to rule-of-law issues and the European Commission's Rule of Law Cycle.

A first stage of stakeholder mapping involves identifying relevant actors. This requires looking across a broad range of categories, including civil society organisations, community groups, professional associations, academic institutions, media actors, and informal networks. It is important to look beyond organisations already engaged in rule-of-law work and consider actors operating in areas such as social rights, environmental protection, youth participation, or local governance, where rule-of-law issues may also arise.

A second stage focuses on assessing stakeholders’ relevance and potential contribution. Factors to consider include their expertise, current level of engagement with rule-of-law issues, capacity to participate, and links to wider networks or institutions. While some stakeholders may already be active in the field, others may possess valuable experience and perspectives but require additional support or encouragement to become involved.

Another important dimension of stakeholder mapping concerns levels of influence and interest. Some actors may have significant visibility or influence within their field or community, while others may demonstrate a strong interest in the topic despite having more limited reach. Understanding these differences can help organisations prioritise outreach efforts, allocate resources effectively, and tailor engagement strategies to different groups.

Attention should also be given to existing relationships and networks. Stakeholders are often connected through formal or informal structures, and these connections can reveal opportunities for collaboration, information-sharing, and collective action. Working through existing networks can be an efficient way to engage multiple actors and expand participation.

Geographical and sectoral diversity should be considered throughout the mapping process. Including stakeholders from different regions, communities, and areas of expertise helps broaden perspectives, strengthen inclusivity, and improve the quality and representativeness of future contributions.

Finally, stakeholder mapping should be understood as a continuous rather than a one-off activity. New actors may emerge, organisational roles may evolve, and levels of engagement may change over time. Regularly reviewing and updating stakeholder maps helps ensure that outreach efforts remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive to changing contexts.

The purpose of stakeholder mapping is practical. It should inform outreach strategy by clarifying who should be engaged, what they may contribute, and how engagement can be approached most effectively.

Below are some examples of templates that can be used for stakeholder mapping exercises. Printable worksheets for all tools are available in Annex 2.

Table 1: Stakeholders mapping

Tool	Purpose	What it is used for
Stakeholder Identification Template	Identify relevant stakeholders	Helps map formal and informal actors (public authorities, judiciary, civil society, media, academia, international actors, others) and their roles.
Influence and Interest Matrix	Analyse power and engagement levels	Classifies stakeholders by high/low influence and interest to define engagement priorities (key partners, strategic targets, support base, monitoring).
Stakeholder Engagement Planning Tool	Plan engagement strategies	Defines how, why, and how often to engage each stakeholder, and assigns responsibilities and methods (meetings, workshops, submissions, media, etc.).
Coalition Mapping Tool	Identify partnerships and alliances	Supports identification of organisations with shared interests and assesses alignment and potential collaboration.
Outreach Channel Mapping	Select communication channels	Identifies the most effective channels, messages, and formats for different stakeholder groups (youth, civil society, media, institutions).
Risk and Sensitivity Assessment	Manage engagement risks	Identifies risks linked to stakeholders and defines mitigation strategies and sensitivity levels.

2.2.2 Identifying Allies and Partners

Expanding engagement with the Rule of Law Cycle depends not only on reaching individual stakeholders but on building relationships with organisations that can act as allies and partners. These actors can support outreach, contribute expertise, and help sustain engagement over time.

Allies and partners are organisations or networks that share an interest in promoting rule of law principles, even where that is not their primary area of work. They may include civil society organisations, professional bodies, academic institutions, media organisations, or advocacy networks. What matters is their ability to contribute to, strengthen, or amplify engagement with the Rule of Law Cycle.

A first consideration in identifying partners is alignment of values and objectives. Organisations committed to transparency, accountability, and democratic governance are natural allies, even when they operate in different sectors. This shared orientation provides a basis for collaboration.

Existing relationships and networks offer a useful starting point. Many organisations are already connected through formal or informal collaboration, and these connections can be built on to support rule-of-law engagement. Working through established relationships can make coordination easier and reduce the effort required to create new partnerships from scratch.

Complementarity is also important. Effective partnerships often bring together organisations with different strengths, such as research capacity, community engagement, communication skills, or policy expertise. Combining these strengths can improve both the quality of contributions and the reach of outreach efforts.

Trust and reliability are essential. Organisations should be considered not only for their expertise, but also for their willingness to collaborate, share information, and contribute constructively. Building strong partnerships often requires transparent communication and clarity about roles and expectations.

Capacity and level of engagement should also be considered. Some organisations may be ready to play an active role in preparing contributions or organising training, while others may be better placed to share information, support outreach, or participate at a more limited level. Recognising these different forms of involvement helps make collaboration more realistic and effective.

Strategic partnerships can also improve visibility and impact. Working with organisations that have established networks or public presence can help amplify messages, increase participation, and strengthen the influence of civil society contributions.

Partnerships should be approached as ongoing relationships rather than one-off arrangements. Sustained communication, repeated collaboration, and shared objectives help build stronger and more effective alliances over time.

By identifying and working with suitable allies and partners, civil society actors can extend their reach, strengthen their contributions, and build a more coordinated approach to engagement with the European rule-of-law framework.

2.3 Target Groups and Engagement Approaches

Effective engagement on rule-of-law issues requires recognising that different groups participate with varying levels of knowledge, experience, confidence, and motivation.

Expanding the network of engagement requires deliberate efforts to include groups that are often underrepresented in rule-of-law processes. These may include grassroots organisations, youth groups, minority communities, and actors operating outside traditional policy or legal fields. Engaging these groups is essential if the Rule of Law Cycle is to reflect a broader range of perspectives and experiences.

Through this Toolkit, we aim to support organisations that wish to engage the following specific target groups in participatory processes. It provides practical guidance to help facilitators adapt methods, language, formats, and activities to the realities of the groups they work with, making participation more accessible, meaningful, and inclusive.

2.3.1 Other civil society organisations and grassroots actors

Civil society organisations are among the primary users of this Toolkit. This includes both established organisations already working on democracy, rights, and advocacy issues, and smaller grassroots initiatives operating at community level.

However, not all organisations engage with the rule of law in the same way. Some may already participate in EU consultations and monitoring processes, while others may work directly on issues connected to the rule of law — such as social inclusion, anti-corruption, environmental justice, LGBTI rights, anti-discrimination, or access to public services — without identifying their work through rule-of-law terminology.

For this reason, engagement should not assume prior familiarity with institutional language or EU procedures. Many organisations are already addressing rule-of-law issues in practice, even if they do not define them in those terms.

Effective approaches for engaging civil society organisations may include:

- simplifying technical terminology and consultation language;
- creating spaces for peer exchange and collaborative reflection;
- recognising existing expertise and lived experience;
- offering visibility and opportunities for collaboration;
- connecting local experiences to broader European frameworks;
- supporting organisations in translating their work into policy-relevant contributions.

Several organisations interviewed during the development of this Toolkit highlighted that reducing linguistic and procedural barriers significantly increases participation, especially among grassroots actors and smaller organisations with limited institutional experience.

2.3.2 Young people (18–30)

Young people represent a particularly important target group within the STAKEHOLDERS approach. Although many young people are directly affected by rule-of-law issues — including access to education, freedom of expression, digital rights, discrimination, climate justice, and political participation — they often perceive institutional and EU-level processes as distant, abstract, or inaccessible.

Engagement with youth audiences is generally more effective when it starts from issues that are already present in their daily experiences and public debates rather than from institutional explanations.

Interactive and participatory approaches tend to work particularly well, including:

- simulations and role-playing exercises;
- debates and group discussions;
- podcasts, films, and storytelling activities;
- press and social media analysis;
- creative outputs such as videos, campaigns, or mock consultations;
- case studies linked to current political or social developments.

Research conducted within the project also highlighted that young participants are often more engaged when they are asked to actively create, interpret, or discuss content rather than passively receive information.

For this reason, the Toolkit prioritises methods that encourage critical reflection, dialogue, and collaborative meaning-making over lecture-based approaches.

2.3.3 Citizens and non-expert audiences

Many engagement activities developed within this Toolkit are designed for participants with no legal or institutional background. This includes local communities, informal groups, volunteers, community activists, and citizens who may have little familiarity with EU governance structures.

In these contexts, accessibility becomes essential. Technical concepts should be translated into clear language and connected to concrete situations that participants can recognise in their own lives.

Approaches that are particularly effective with non-expert audiences include:

- storytelling and lived experiences;
- visual and participatory methods;
- simplified shared vocabulary exercises;
- practical examples drawn from current events;
- facilitated dialogue rather than formal presentations.

2.3.4 Students and academic contexts

The Toolkit can also support educational and university environments, particularly in disciplines such as law, political science, European studies, media studies, and social sciences.

Interviews conducted during the project showed that academic actors increasingly rely on applied and case-based approaches to make rule-of-law concepts more understandable and relevant to students.

Methods frequently used in academic contexts include:

- analysis of real-world crises and court cases;
- simulations of EU institutional processes;
- work with primary legal and political sources;
- debates on contemporary rule-of-law controversies;
- media and press analysis.

These approaches help students connect theoretical concepts with political realities and institutional practice.

2.3.5 Media

Engagement with the media can contribute to a better understanding of issues such as media pressure, media independence, and media pluralism. By facilitating informed discussion on how media systems function and the challenges they face, such collaboration can help raise awareness of structural issues within the media landscape and improve public understanding of the broader ecosystem in which rule-of-law debates take place.

Beyond this analytical dimension, the media also represent an important channel for outreach and communication. Journalists and media organisations can help translate complex issues into more accessible language, highlight relevant developments, and stimulate public debate. Collaboration may involve sharing information, providing

context or analysis, or contributing to public discussion. Constructive relationships with media actors can therefore extend the reach of engagement efforts and support more informed reporting.

Such collaboration should, however, be approached with clarity and professionalism. Information provided should be accurate, well supported, and suitable for public communication. Respect for journalistic independence remains essential, as does an understanding of the distinct roles of media and civil society.

Joint initiatives, shared resources, and coordinated messaging can improve both efficiency and impact.

Networks and coalitions offer a structured way to support this collaboration. They allow organisations to maintain contact, exchange information, and coordinate activities over time. Participation in such networks can strengthen civil society's collective capacity to engage with the Rule of Law Cycle and related processes.

Strategic collaboration can also increase credibility and influence. Contributions that reflect the work of multiple organisations, or are supported by a wider network, may carry greater visibility and weight, especially when addressing systemic concerns.

Effective collaboration depends on clarity. Roles, objectives, and expectations should be discussed openly, and communication should remain transparent. This helps ensure that partnerships function well and that collective work remains coherent.

Collaboration should also be seen as an ongoing process. Relationships become more valuable over time when maintained through regular communication and repeated joint activities.

2.4 Key Engagement Principles

This Toolkit is grounded in a set of principles that guide how civil society actors can make rule-of-law processes more accessible, inclusive, and meaningful for broader groups of citizens. These principles are not theoretical statements, but practical orientations for designing engagement activities that connect institutional frameworks with everyday experiences.

1. Rule of law is lived, not abstract

Rule-of-law principles are often presented in technical and institutional terms, but they directly shape people's daily lives. Access to justice, protection from discrimination, media freedom, and institutional accountability are not abstract concepts. Effective engagement starts from lived experiences and translates them into shared understanding and collective reflection.

2. Accessibility is a democratic requirement

Meaningful participation depends on whether people can understand what is being discussed. Language, formats, and tools must be adapted to avoid exclusion. Making complex processes accessible is not a simplification of content, but a condition for democratic inclusion.

3. Civil society as a translator, not only an advocate

Civil society organisations play a dual role: they advocate for rights and policies, but they also translate complex institutional processes into forms that people can understand and relate to. This translation function is essential for bridging the gap between EU-level rule-of-law frameworks and local realities.

4. Engagement starts from trust and proximity

Grassroots organisations and local actors are often the first point of contact for communities. Trust is built through proximity, consistency, and relevance. Engagement is most effective when it builds on existing relationships and local knowledge rather than imposing external agendas.

5. Participation must include those who are usually excluded

Engagement processes should actively reach individuals and groups who are typically distant from institutional debates, including young people, marginalised communities, and non-expert audiences. Inclusion is not automatic; it requires intentional design of methods and spaces.

6. From information to participation

Providing information is not sufficient. Engagement must create opportunities for dialogue, interpretation, and contribution. Citizens should not only understand rule-of-law issues but also be able to reflect on them and contribute their perspectives in meaningful ways.

7. Local evidence strengthens European understanding

The European Rule of Law Cycle is enriched when it incorporates experiences from local contexts. Grassroots perspectives help reveal how formal principles operate in practice and ensure that assessments reflect real conditions across Member States.

8. Engagement is a process, not a single moment

Effective participation is built over time. One-off consultations are not enough. Sustained engagement requires continuity, feedback loops, and mechanisms that allow citizens and organisations to see how their contributions are used.

2.5 “Making the Rule of Law understandable”

The concept of the rule of law is often framed through legal terminology, institutional procedures, and policy frameworks that can be difficult to access for non-specialist audiences. Yet, the rule of law is not only a technical or institutional principle: it is a lived reality that shapes rights, opportunities, and everyday experiences across societies.

As mentioned before for civil society organisations, youth groups, and grassroots actors, a key challenge is therefore not only to understand the rule of law, but to make it understandable and meaningful for others.

A key step in making the rule of law understandable is linguistic translation. This does not mean simplifying content or reducing accuracy, but rather making ideas more accessible by removing unnecessary complexity and ensuring that concepts are expressed in clear and understandable language.

Technical terms can be replaced with clearer explanations, and institutions can be described in terms of what they actually do rather than through formal titles. The way questions are formulated is also important: questions are often more effective than definitions because they open up discussion instead of closing it.

For example, instead of referring to “judicial independence,” engagement activities can ask: *what happens when judges cannot make decisions without external pressure?*

A shared vocabulary can therefore be understood as a practical framework that translates complex concepts into accessible, everyday language that can be used in workshops, focus groups, and outreach activities. The aim is not to simplify the content itself, but to make meaning transferable across different levels of knowledge and experience.

This type of approach is already used by many of the organisations interviewed in this project. In particular, they often adapt or simplify technical language in tools such as questionnaires or consultation materials in order to make them more accessible to their members and partners. This is especially important for grassroots actors who work on rule-of-law related issues in practice, but who do not necessarily use technical legal or EU terminology in their daily work. Simplifying language in this way therefore helps to include a wider range of contributors and ensures that participation is not limited to those already familiar with institutional jargon.

This shared vocabulary can be used at different stages of engagement: at the beginning of workshops to create a common understanding, during group activities to translate technical concepts in real time, when collecting input from non-expert participants, and as a reference tool for facilitators and trainers.

Overall, it helps to reduce barriers created by technical language, ensure consistency across workshops and organisations, connect lived experience with institutional frameworks, and support the translation of grassroots input into the language used in EU policy processes.

A shared vocabulary is therefore not only a communication tool, but a participation tool. It directly influences who can take part in discussions on the rule of law and who may be unintentionally left out.

Here are some examples of how complex legal and institutional terms can be translated into clearer, everyday language.

Table 2: Shared Vocabulary – Rule of Law (Simplified Translations)³

Concept	Formal meaning	Shared translation
Rule of Law	A principle of governance in which all persons and institutions, including the state, are subject to and accountable under the law, ensuring legality, legal certainty, equality before the law, and access to justice.	Rules apply to everyone, including governments, and no one is above the law.
Judicial independence	The principle of judicial independence, meaning that judges and courts must be free from external influence, particularly from the executive and legislative branches, in their decision-making.	Judges must be able to decide cases without pressure from politicians or powerful interests.
Accountability	The obligation for public authorities and institutions to explain their decisions and actions, and to be subject to oversight and consequences where necessary.	Those in power must explain what they do and be answerable if something goes wrong.
Transparency	The principle that information about decisions, processes, and actions is accessible and understandable to the public.	People have the right to know how decisions are made and how public money is used.
Consultation Process	The procedure through which the European Commission invites stakeholders, including civil society, to provide input for the Rule of Law Report.	People and organizations can share their opinions and experiences to help the European Commission prepare the Rule of Law Report.
Rule of law principles	Core elements of the rule of law include legality, legal certainty, prohibition of arbitrariness, independent and impartial courts, effective judicial protection, and equality before the law.	Laws must be fair, applied equally to everyone, and enforced by independent courts.
Article 7 TEU	EU procedure to address serious breaches of EU values by Member States.	EU procedure used when a Member State seriously violates shared democratic values.
Fundamental rights	Basic rights and freedoms protected by law, including those set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights.	Basic rights that protect people's dignity, freedom, and equality.
Constitutional identity (debate concept)	Doctrine used by some constitutional courts to define national constitutional limits in relation to the EU legal framework.	A country's claim that its constitution sets certain fundamental limits, even in relation to EU law.

A particularly useful and still highly relevant exercise consists in co-creating this shared vocabulary directly with participants during sessions or workshops. In other words, instead of presenting pre-defined definitions from the

³ Additional definitions can be found in the Annex 1.

outset, the facilitator can invite the group to collectively define key concepts and explore their meaning together.

This is an activity that may appear simple, but it has significant methodological value. On the one hand, it allows facilitators to assess the group's starting point, namely the level of familiarity, understanding, and language already present among participants. On the other hand, it helps bring out different interpretations, lived experiences, and perspectives that often do not emerge in more formal settings.

This process of co-construction is not only about arriving at the “correct answer”, but rather about developing a shared and negotiated understanding of concepts. In many cases, the discussion itself becomes the most important element, as it opens the way to a broader and more informed debate on the implications of the rule of law in everyday life and in institutional contexts.

2.6 Using narratives and storytelling

Stories are one of the most effective tools for making complex rule-of-law issues understandable and accessible. Unlike abstract definitions or institutional descriptions, stories allow people to connect legal and democratic principles to concrete human experiences, emotions, and real-life situations. This helps participants understand not only what the rule of law is, but also why it matters in everyday practice.

Civil society organisations can use a wide range of narrative-based tools, depending on the context, the target group, and the level of sensitivity involved. These include personal testimonies, where appropriate and safe, which allow individuals to share lived experiences in a protected and ethically responsible way. They can also include anonymised case studies, which are particularly useful for discussing real situations while safeguarding privacy and reducing risks for those involved.

In addition, community stories can be used to reflect collective experiences within a neighbourhood, organisation, or social group, helping participants recognise patterns that go beyond individual cases. Fictional but realistic scenarios are another particularly effective tool, as they allow facilitators to address sensitive or complex rule-of-law issues without referring to specific real-world actors, while still maintaining credibility and relevance.

Alongside traditional storytelling, films, documentaries, and podcasts can further strengthen engagement by offering accessible and engaging narrative formats. Films and documentaries can visually communicate issues such as justice, corruption, media freedom, or institutional accountability, making them more tangible. Podcasts, on the other hand, offer reflective and conversational formats that can deepen understanding and create space for diverse perspectives and expert insights.

Storytelling helps shift engagement away from purely abstract discussion towards concrete understanding. It enables participants to recognise rule-of-law issues in familiar situations, connect them to their own lived experiences, and engage more actively in discussion and reflection. In this way, storytelling becomes not only a communication tool, but also a bridge between institutional frameworks and everyday civic reality.

Table 3: Example of films and documentaries

Film / Documentary	Year	Director	Main themes connected to the Rule of Law
Official Secrets	2019	Gavin Hood	Whistleblowing, government accountability, transparency, abuse of power
The Great Hack	2019	Karim Amer & Jehane Noujaim	Data protection, democracy, political manipulation, digital governance
Dark Waters	2019	Todd Haynes	Environmental rights, corporate responsibility, legal advocacy
The Post	2017	Steven Spielberg	Freedom of the press, public interest, government secrecy
I, Daniel Blake	2016	Ken Loach	Access to rights, welfare systems, bureaucracy, social justice, dignity
Spotlight	2015	Tom McCarthy	Investigative journalism, institutional accountability, media freedom
Citizenfour	2014	Laura Poitras	Surveillance, privacy, whistleblowing, digital rights
No	2012	Pablo Larrain	Civic campaigning to win in an autocratic "democracy"
I cento passi (One Hundred Steps)	2000	Marco Tullio Giordana	Anti-mafia, freedom of expression, institutional accountability.
Erin Brockovich	2000	Steven Soderbergh	Corporate accountability, environmental justice, access to justice
Philadelphia	1993	Jonathan Demme	Discrimination, LGBTQIA+ rights, equality before the law
A Man for All Seasons	1966	Fred Zinnemann	Limits of political power, integrity, independence of institutions

Table 4: Example of podcasts

Podcast	Producer / Organisation	Relevant themes
Democracy Now!	Independent media programme	Democracy, accountability, human rights, civic participation
EU Confidential	Politico Europe	EU politics, rule of law, institutional developments
RightsCast	Various NGOs and civil society organisations	Human rights, justice, civic freedoms
The Europeans	Independent European media project	European democracy, citizenship, social issues
Talking Europe	European Policy Centre	EU governance, democracy, policy debates
Amicus	Slate	Courts, constitutional issues, legal rights
RESPOND News: Dispatches on the hidden threats to democracy	S-Com and Tele Radio City	Corruption, political funding, lobbying, media capture

2.7 Visual and participatory tools

Not all learning needs to rely on text-heavy explanations or formal discussion formats. In many cases, visual and participatory tools are more effective in helping participants engage with complex topics in an intuitive, accessible, and experiential way. By shifting the focus from abstract explanation to interaction and observation, these methods make institutional and legal systems easier to understand, especially for non-specialist audiences.

A range of tools can be used for this purpose. Mapping exercises, for example, allow participants to visually represent how institutions, actors, and decision-making processes are connected, helping them identify where influence and accountability lie, and where gaps or blockages may exist. Role-playing activities enable participants to step into different institutional or civic roles, making it easier to understand how decisions are made, negotiated, and contested in practice.

Simple diagrams can be used to break down complex systems into more understandable components, showing, for instance, how a policy moves from proposal to implementation, or how different branches of government interact. Card-based discussions offer a flexible and participatory format where participants can sort, group, and prioritise concepts, rights, or institutions, encouraging dialogue and collective interpretation rather than passive reception.

Among all these tools, the power of visual materials (such as photographs, illustrations, infographics, and other visual content) is particularly significant. Images do not simply illustrate ideas; they shape understanding. A well-designed visualisation can make abstract concepts such as accountability, injustice, or institutional failure immediately

perceptible. It can also evoke emotional and ethical engagement, helping participants not only to understand a system intellectually but to “see” its effects on people’s lives. In this sense, images function as a bridge between analysis and experience: they translate complexity into something that can be grasped at a glance, remembered more easily, and discussed more concretely.

Data visualisations further extend this capacity by transforming technical or numerical information into visual narratives. Charts, infographics, timelines, and comparative visuals can reveal patterns that are otherwise difficult to detect, such as long-term changes in judicial independence, variations in access to justice, or disparities in the enforcement of rights. When presented visually, data becomes not only more accessible but also more persuasive, as it allows participants to immediately perceive trends, inequalities, and systemic developments.

These approaches are particularly effective in mixed groups or non-expert settings, where participants bring different levels of knowledge and familiarity with institutional processes. By offering multiple visual entry points to the same content, they ensure that complexity is not reduced, but made visible, navigable, and shared. In this way, visual and participatory methods do not simply support learning, they actively reshape how participants perceive, interpret, and discuss rule-of-law realities.

2.8 Connecting local realities to European processes

A key objective of this Toolkit is to address a persistent and often underestimated gap between citizens’ everyday experiences and the more complex institutional architecture of the European Rule of Law Cycle. In practice, people are usually very aware of the problems they face in their daily lives—such as long delays in court proceedings, difficulties in accessing public services, lack of transparency in decision-making, or unequal treatment by authorities. What is far less visible is how these experiences relate to European-level monitoring, assessment, and policy processes designed to protect the rule of law across Member States.

Engagement activities become significantly more effective when they make these connections explicit and tangible. This can be achieved by consistently starting from real-life situations and then progressively linking them to broader legal principles and EU mechanisms.

For example, a discussion on long waiting times in courts can be used to introduce the principle of access to justice, and then further connected to how the European Commission evaluates the efficiency and independence of national judicial systems in its annual Rule of Law Report. In this way, a personal frustration or local observation becomes an entry point into understanding how judicial performance is assessed at European level.

Similarly, experiences of unequal treatment in public services can open a discussion on the principle of non-discrimination, which can then be linked to EU-wide monitoring of equality and fundamental rights across Member States. What might initially be perceived as an individual case can thus be reframed as part of a broader pattern relevant to European standards and safeguards.

A further example concerns media freedom and transparency. When participants describe situations involving pressure on journalists, limited access to public information, or lack of accountability in public communication, these experiences can be connected to the principles of freedom of expression and institutional transparency. They can then be linked to the role of civil society organisations and media watchdogs that contribute evidence and analysis to EU consultations and reports on media pluralism and democratic accountability.

The same logic applies to civil society input itself. For instance, a local organisation documenting barriers faced by migrants in accessing legal aid is not only addressing a specific social issue but also generating evidence that can feed into structured submissions to EU monitoring mechanisms. Participants can thereby see how concrete local experiences are transformed into inputs that inform European assessments of how rights are implemented in practice.

This approach is equally powerful in the fields of environmental rights and LGBTI rights, where the connection between lived experience and legal frameworks is particularly visible.

In the case of environmental rights, a community affected by air pollution, illegal waste disposal, or water contamination may initially interpret these problems as local environmental or administrative failures. However, these situations can be reframed through the lens of effective access to justice and environmental rule of law, highlighting the role of courts, regulatory bodies, and public authorities in enforcing environmental standards. This discussion can then be extended to show how the EU monitors the implementation of environmental legislation and assesses whether national institutions are capable of enforcing environmental protections independently and effectively.

In the case of LGBTI rights, participants may refer to experiences of discrimination in schools, workplaces, healthcare, media, access to justice, or access to public services, as well as concerns about hate speech or unequal treatment. Where these experiences can be directly linked to the application of EU law (e.g. freedom to provide goods and services), the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights can be relied on to protect against discrimination under EU law. Please note that the Charter is only applicable when EU law is being applied, and therefore instances of discrimination falling outside the scope of EU law cannot be acted upon in the EU’s rule of law framework.

Some examples that can be used instead:

- If a judge is posting anti-LGBTI content consistently on their social media channels, and also presides over cases involving LGBTI claimants or defendants – there is an issue related to “independence of the judiciary”.
- If there is consistent non-implementation of Constitutional or supranational court judgements bringing equality to LGBTI persons, there is a rule of law issue here as this non-implementation is repetitive in the cases of granting a minority group equal rights – it is a structural rule of law problem caused by a discriminatory and thereby selective approach to implementation.
- If your country adopts provisions censoring LGBTI content from advertising or television at certain hours – this breaches EU law on audiovisual media services in conjunction with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- If the Ombudsperson is not acting properly on LGBTI cases – there could be an issue with the independence of equality bodies – which is a rule of law issue covered by the EU’s report.

By systematically making these connections visible—between lived experience, rule-of-law principles, and EU-level processes—participants begin to recognise that their experiences are not isolated or purely local phenomena. Instead, they become part of a wider democratic and institutional system in which local realities inform European analysis, and European frameworks, in turn, help shape and protect rights at the local level.

2.9 Creating safer spaces for dialogue, not instruction

Making the rule of law understandable is not a one-way process of information delivery, but a collective process of dialogue, reflection, and meaning-making. For this to happen in a meaningful way, engagement must take place in *safer spaces*—environments where participants feel respected, protected, and free to express experiences and perspectives without fear of judgment, exposure, or negative consequences.

A safer space does not mean a risk-free space, but rather a carefully facilitated environment in which trust, confidentiality, and mutual respect are actively built and maintained. This is particularly important when discussing rule-of-law issues, which may involve sensitive personal experiences, vulnerable groups, or contested institutional practices.

Effective engagement spaces therefore:

- encourage questions rather than only providing answers, recognising that uncertainty is part of learning
- value lived experience as a legitimate form of knowledge, alongside institutional or expert perspectives
- allow participants to interpret, reflect, and disagree constructively, rather than expecting uniform conclusions
- avoid overly technical, hierarchical, or lecture-based formats that reinforce distance between “experts” and “non-experts”
- establish clear ground rules for respectful interaction, confidentiality, and responsible sharing

In this sense, facilitation is not only about transmitting content, but also about protecting the conditions in which participation can safely occur.

Creating safer spaces is also closely linked to ethical responsibilities in the collection and use of information, particularly when participants are invited to share real-life experiences or contribute evidence to rule-of-law processes. Civil society actors often work with sensitive material that may involve identifiable individuals, vulnerable groups, or situations that could carry legal, social, or personal risks.

2.10 Building a Continuous Rule-of-Law Engagement Ecosystem

Civil society engagement with rule-of-law processes can become more effective when structured as a continuous and interconnected ecosystem rather than as a series of isolated activities, consultations, or one-off events.

One of the strongest findings emerging from interviews conducted for this Toolkit is that meaningful participation in the European Rule of Law Cycle rarely develops through occasional engagement alone. Most organisations that successfully contributed to the process described engagement as something cumulative: relationships, knowledge, monitoring activities, networks, and civic discussions gradually reinforce one another over time.

For this reason, one of the key recommendations emerging from this Toolkit is to move away from fragmented participation practices and instead build sustainable ecosystems of engagement that continuously generate knowledge, trust, civic dialogue, and evidence.

At the base of the ecosystem is the continuous observation of institutional, legal, and social developments connected to rule-of-law issues.

For this reason, effective ecosystems create regular opportunities for dialogue through:

- workshops;
- community discussions;
- thematic events;

- youth activities;
- participatory forums;
- online consultations;
- storytelling initiatives;
- press and policy analysis sessions.

2.11 Participatory Workshops

While most interviewed organisations reported engaging their target groups primarily through bilateral consultations, email communication, webinars, and online meetings, several more innovative approaches have been tested in recent years to broaden and deepen engagement. Among these, the organisation of participatory workshops stands out as a particularly effective method to move beyond one-way communication and create more interactive, inclusive, and deliberative forms of participation.

Inclusivity in this context can be strengthened at the planning stage and through communication and materials by systematically addressing key dimensions of participation. These include ensuring gender balance and applying gender-sensitive facilitation, taking into account different educational backgrounds and levels of familiarity with the topic, and designing participation formats that reflect diversity in socio-economic, cultural and lived experiences. Accessibility should be ensured for persons with disabilities, including physical and digital accessibility and reasonable accommodations, while outreach should actively engage underrepresented and marginalised groups and avoid assumptions of homogeneity among participants.

In annex 7 a checklist has been developed to support the practical application of these principles throughout implementation.

Rather than focusing on technical legal training, these formats aim to create spaces where participants can connect institutional concepts to everyday experiences, strengthen critical understanding, and explore how civil society and citizens can contribute to democratic accountability. They are intentionally designed to be participatory, discussion-based, and flexible, allowing adaptation to different audiences such as young people, grassroots organisations, students, community groups, and mixed stakeholder settings.

Workshop methodologies can take multiple forms, ranging from dialogue-based approaches to narrative-based formats, press analysis exercises, and simulation activities. Some workshops focus on lived experiences of the rule of law, others on transforming these experiences into structured civic input, while more advanced formats explore policy mapping, institutional processes, or decision-making simulations at EU level. Across all formats, facilitators play a key role in shaping inclusive discussions, ensuring accessibility, and guiding participants in translating reflection into meaningful contributions.

More generally, this set of practices reflects a broader shift in engagement strategies: from traditional consultation-based approaches towards more participatory, interactive, and experience-driven methods of involvement.

2.11.1 Focus on a good practice: World Café

A participatory approach that is often used to strengthen civic engagement on Rule of Law issues builds on structured small-group dialogue formats inspired by the World Café methodology. This type of engagement is typically organised at local or regional level and on a relatively small scale, with the aim of fostering more inclusive, interactive, and dialogue-oriented discussions among diverse stakeholders.

Such sessions usually bring together a limited number of participants from different sectors — including civil society organisations, academia, business, public authorities, media, youth representatives, and community actors — in order to ensure a plurality of perspectives. Diversity of participation is considered a core element of the approach, as it allows different experiences and forms of expertise to interact within the same deliberative space.

Rather than relying on a lecture-style format, these discussions are facilitated by trained moderators whose role is to guide the process, ensure balanced participation, and support a constructive and respectful exchange. Particular emphasis is placed on creating a safe and open environment in which participants feel able to express different viewpoints and engage in meaningful dialogue.

The World Café-inspired methodology structures conversations through small rotating groups, each focusing on a specific guiding question or thematic issue related to Rule of Law and democratic governance. Topics may include, for example, institutional trust, transparency, access to justice, media freedom, discrimination, civic space, or accountability. Participants rotate between tables over several rounds, allowing ideas and perspectives to circulate and evolve across groups. In some cases, a designated “table host” remains to ensure continuity by summarising previous discussions for incoming participants.

This rotation mechanism helps generate a cumulative and dynamic exchange of ideas, where shared concerns, recurring patterns, and divergent views gradually emerge. At the end of the process, key insights are synthesised in a plenary discussion, supporting the identification of common themes and potential recommendations or follow-up actions.

This type of participatory engagement has been used in various contexts as a way to bridge the gap between citizens, experts, and policy-makers. One example mentioned in this context is its application by the Center for the Study of Democracy, which has employed similar deliberative formats to facilitate structured dialogue on governance and Rule of Law-related issues.

More generally, this approach is valued because it lowers barriers to participation, encourages cross-sectoral interaction, integrates lived experiences with institutional perspectives, and supports collective reflection on complex democratic challenges. Beyond information exchange, it contributes to strengthening civic trust and reinforcing the idea that Rule of Law issues are directly connected to everyday democratic life and public accountability.

Table 5: Workshops formats:

Workshop	Objective	Target Group	Duration	Expected Outputs
From Everyday Experience to Rule of Law Action	To help participants connect everyday experiences to rule-of-law principles and develop civic reflections and recommendations.	Citizens, youth, grassroots organisations, community leaders, civil society organisations, mixed groups.	2–3 hours	Mapping of rule-of-law concerns, identification of systemic issues, civic recommendations, and inputs for consultation and monitoring processes.
Mapping the Rule of Law System	To understand the rule of law as a system of institutions, actors, and accountability mechanisms through participatory mapping.	Youth, students, civil society organisations, local communities, mixed stakeholder groups.	60–90 minutes (up to 2–3 hours in extended versions)	Visual maps of institutional ecosystems, identification of accountability gaps and participation opportunities, inputs for reporting and advocacy.
Rule of Law through Stories, Film and Podcasts	To make rule-of-law issues more accessible and engaging through storytelling, film, and podcasts.	Youth, general public, grassroots organisations, mixed civic audiences.	90–120 minutes	Increased awareness of institutional dynamics, collective interpretation of democratic themes, and civic reflections based on storytelling.
From Headlines to Rule of Law	To analyse news and current affairs to understand how rule-of-law principles appear in real-life events and democratic processes.	Youth, citizens, civil society organisations, mixed groups, media literacy initiatives.	90–120 minutes	Analysis of news cases, mapping of rule-of-law issues, civic recommendations, and inputs for advocacy and reporting.

In the Annex 3 of this toolkit we provide ready-to-use workshop templates that partner organisations and other organisations can test and adapt at local level to further strengthen engagement on rule-of-law issues. The workshops, practices, and methodologies presented are directly derived from these practical experiences. They should therefore be understood not as abstract or theoretical models, but as adaptable tools grounded in real civil society practice across different European contexts.

2.12 Online engagement

Online engagement on the Rule of Law can be structured in a systematic and sustained way, combining continuous monitoring tools with participatory mechanisms that connect institutional analysis and stakeholder input. Rather than relying on ad hoc initiatives, effective digital engagement benefits from a clear architecture that supports data collection, analysis, dissemination, and feedback loops over time.

One approach is the development of legislative observatories and continuous monitoring systems that allow organisations to track institutional and legal developments in a structured way. In Cyprus, initiatives linked to Oxygen for Democracy — including the “Nomoplatform” ecosystem developed in connection with parliamentary transparency work and broader civic participation processes such as the Cyprus Forum — contribute to collecting and systematising inputs on legislative developments and public policies. This type of approach helps transform dispersed information into structured evidence, strengthening transparency and enabling more informed civic engagement.

Innovative approaches also include digital reporting tools that enable broader participation in Rule of Law monitoring. In Slovenia, for instance, an organisation such as *PIC – Legal Center for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment*⁴ has developed an application that allows individuals — including experts, journalists, and activists — to report potential Rule of Law breaches throughout the year. These inputs are then collected, analysed, and integrated into broader reporting exercises, including Rule of Law assessments.

Beyond these more structured platforms, online engagement can also be strengthened through simpler and highly scalable digital instruments. Online surveys, for example, can be used not only to collect regular feedback from civil society organisations, experts, or citizens on perceived challenges, emerging risks, or priorities related to the Rule of Law, but also to help sustain engagement over time by creating recurring touchpoints that maintain participation beyond initial outreach moments. When repeated periodically, surveys can help identify trends, measure engagement gaps, and inform advocacy or reporting cycles.

Similarly, digital communication channels such as newsletters, social media platforms, and dedicated mailing lists can be used not only for dissemination but also for maintaining engagement after first contact has been established. Sustaining participation beyond initial outreach is often more challenging than generating it, and these channels can help address this gap through update cycles linked to relevant policy or reporting calendars, periodic newsletters for previously engaged stakeholders, or lightweight interaction formats such as polls, short Q&A prompts, or discussion questions that maintain connection without requiring significant effort from participants.

These examples illustrate how online engagement can be strengthened through a combination of structured monitoring systems and participatory digital tools with different levels of complexity. More generally, effective engagement in the Rule of Law field can be supported by several key principles: establishing stable infrastructures for continuous data collection, diversifying participation channels (from apps to surveys and social media), ensuring accessibility and usability of tools, and clearly communicating how inputs are used in policy or reporting cycles. Equally important is maintaining visibility and feedback towards contributors, so that engagement becomes a sustained and meaningful process rather than a one-off consultation.

2.13 Gamified and Experiential Engagement

Effective engagement on rule-of-law issues can be significantly strengthened through gamified and experiential approaches that transform abstract concepts into interactive and participatory experiences. Rather than relying solely on traditional formats such as presentations or consultations, gamification introduces elements of participation, decision-making, and problem-solving that increase motivation, accessibility, and understanding.

Gamified engagement does not refer only to digital games, but to a broader set of methodologies that use game mechanics to support learning and participation. These may include role-playing exercises, scenario-based simulations, card-based discussions, quizzes, and collective challenge activities. The aim is not entertainment per se, but structured engagement that helps participants explore complex rule-of-law dynamics in an accessible and memorable way.

⁴ <https://pic.si/en/domov-english/>

A key feature of gamified approaches is active participation. Participants are not passive recipients of information but are instead placed in situations where they must make decisions, negotiate trade-offs, or respond to simulated institutional or societal challenges. This allows them to better understand how rule-of-law principles operate in practice and how different actors interact within democratic systems.

For example, **rule-of-law decision-making simulations** can assign participants different roles such as judges, journalists, civil society representatives, government officials, or citizens. They are then asked to respond to realistic scenarios involving issues such as restrictions on freedom of expression, access to justice, or allocation of public resources. Through role-play, participants experience how institutional constraints and competing interests shape decision-making processes.

Similarly, **scenario-based card activities (“What would you decide?”)** can be used in more informal settings. Participants are presented with short real-life situations linked to rule-of-law principles—such as discrimination in public services, delays in court proceedings, or media pressure—and are invited to discuss what the problem is, which principle is at stake, and how they would respond.

Other formats such as **rule-of-law challenge quizzes** can be used to reinforce knowledge in a more dynamic way, either individually or in teams. These activities are particularly effective with youth audiences or online engagement contexts, as they combine learning with interaction and discussion.

In more participatory formats, **collective priority games** can be used to simulate decision-making under constraints. Participants are asked to prioritise different rule-of-law challenges—such as judicial independence, corruption, media freedom, or access to justice—within limited resources, encouraging negotiation and consensus-building. This helps illustrate the complexity of policy choices and the need to balance competing democratic priorities.

Another useful format is the **“build your rule-of-law system” mapping exercise**, where participants collaboratively construct a visual representation of institutions, actors, and rights. By adding both enabling factors (such as independent courts or free media) and risks (such as political interference or corruption), participants develop a shared understanding of how rule-of-law systems function and where vulnerabilities may arise.

Gamified approaches also support inclusion and accessibility. By reducing reliance on technical language and formal expertise, they allow participants with different backgrounds and levels of familiarity to engage meaningfully with complex topics. This is particularly relevant for youth groups, grassroots organisations, and non-expert audiences.

Digital tools can further enhance these methods, for example through online quizzes or interactive platforms, but low-tech formats such as card-based exercises, group simulations, and physical mapping activities remain equally effective and often more adaptable to local contexts.

Another important dimension is collaboration. Many gamified activities are designed to be collective rather than individual, encouraging participants to work together, negotiate perspectives, and reach shared outcomes. This reinforces dialogue, trust-building, and mutual understanding across diverse groups.

2.14 Using Engagement Activities within Broader Evidence-Gathering Processes

The engagement activities presented in this Toolkit are designed to support awareness-raising, civic reflection, dialogue, and community engagement around rule-of-law issues. They help participants connect institutional concepts with lived experience and create more accessible spaces for discussion and participation.

At the same time, these activities should not be understood as substitutes for structured evidence-gathering methodologies such as targeted interviews, formal monitoring processes, questionnaires, legal analysis, or systematic data collection.

Structured research tools remain essential for:

- documenting evidence rigorously;
- collecting comparable information;
- supporting formal submissions and policy recommendations;
- identifying recurring patterns across different contexts;
- contributing to institutional monitoring and reporting processes.

Participatory actions can, however, play an important complementary role within broader evidence-gathering strategies.

In particular, they can help:

- make complex institutional processes more understandable and accessible;
- encourage participation from groups that may otherwise feel excluded;
- create trust and safer spaces for discussion;
- identify emerging concerns and experiences that may require deeper investigation;
- support participants in recognising the relevance of their own experiences;
- facilitate collective interpretation of local realities;
- generate preliminary qualitative insights that can later inform more structured research activities.

Facilitators and organisations are encouraged to adapt, combine, simplify, expand, or redesign these formats according to:

the needs of participants;

- the local context;
- available resources;
- thematic priorities;
- cultural and linguistic realities;
- the level of institutional familiarity of the target group.

The examples included in this Toolkit should therefore also be understood as inspiration for developing new engagement formats and creative participatory approaches tailored to specific communities and objectives.

Effective engagement often emerges not from replicating a single model, but from the ability to create participatory spaces that are relevant, accessible, and meaningful for the people involved.

3. EU Resources and Supporting Tools

The methodologies presented in this Toolkit can be complemented by a range of existing European resources and institutional tools related to democracy, participation, justice, and the rule of law.

These resources may support facilitators, educators, civil society organisations, and participants in deepening their understanding of rule-of-law mechanisms and European democratic processes.

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law_en

3.1 The EU Rule of Law Toolbox

The **Rule of Law Toolbox** is a set of instruments and mechanisms developed by the European Commission to promote, monitor, and protect the rule of law across EU Member States.

The Toolbox combines preventive mechanisms; monitoring instruments; policy dialogue; financial conditionality tools; legal enforcement procedures.

Its objective is both to prevent rule-of-law problems from escalating and to respond where serious breaches occur.

Key components include:

- the Annual Rule of Law Report;
- the Rule of Law Recommendations;
- the EU Justice Scoreboard;
- the Rule of Law Framework;
- infringement procedures;
- the Rule of Law Conditionality Mechanism;
- Article 7 TEU procedures.

These mechanisms provide important institutional context for many of the issues explored throughout this Toolkit.

3.2 EU Educational and Multimedia Resources

The European Commission has also developed accessible communication materials aimed at explaining rule-of-law concepts to broader audiences, including non-experts and young people.

Useful resources include:

- the European Commission's series of six short animations explaining the rule of law;
- educational videos and explainers available through the EU Justice communication https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/what-rule-law_en#want-to-learn-more-watch-our-series-of-six-animations channels; <https://www.youtube.com/@EUJustice/search?query=rule%20of%20law>
- public materials related to democracy, participation, and fundamental rights.

3.3 Additional Resources and Platforms

Additional tools and platforms that may support engagement activities include:

- Communities of Practice on Democracy (JRC); <https://cop-demos.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>
- FRA launched **"The Rule of Law Explained"**. It translates a foundational legal concept into clear, practical terms that resonate with everyday life. Its aim is to support clear and accessible communication on the rule of law. It was developed jointly with the 10 other international organisations. [The rule of law and why it matters - explained | European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#). There are [CARDS](#) and a [MAP](#).
- Amnesty International Campaign "Defending rule of law in Hungary" including a petition addressed to the foreign ministers of the signatory countries: <https://www.amnesty.eu/news/defending-rule-of-law-in-hungary/>
- media literacy initiatives;
- educational resources developed by civil society organisations and universities;
- participatory democracy toolkits and facilitation guides.

Facilitators are encouraged to combine institutional resources with locally relevant materials, examples, and participatory methods in order to make engagement activities more accessible and meaningful for participants.

4. Final Conclusions and Acknowledgements

This Toolkit is the result of a collective effort to make rule-of-law engagement more concrete, accessible, and rooted in real civic practice. It starts from a simple assumption: democratic principles only matter if people and communities can actually recognise them, use them, and act on them.

Across the research and development process, one message has been consistent. Participation does not fail because of lack of interest, but because of distance — between institutions and everyday life, between technical language and lived experience, and between formal processes and the realities of civil society work on the ground.

This Toolkit responds to that gap by focusing on practice rather than abstraction. It is not designed as a closed methodology, but as an open set of tools that can be adapted, reshaped, and re-used in different contexts. Its value lies precisely in its flexibility: what matters is not replication, but relevance.

At its core, the Toolkit affirms that civil society is not an external observer of rule-of-law processes, but an active part of how they are understood, monitored, and defended. This role becomes especially important in contexts where democratic standards are under pressure, civic space is shrinking, or institutional trust is weakening.

For this reason, engagement cannot be reduced to consultation moments or formal reporting cycles. It requires sustained work: building relationships, creating shared understanding, and turning fragmented experiences into collective knowledge that can travel between local realities and European-level processes.

The approaches presented here are meant to support that work — not by simplifying complexity, but by making it possible to navigate it collectively.

Acknowledgements

This Toolkit would not exist without the contributions of the organisations, networks, and individuals who took part in the STAKEHOLDERS Project mapping exercise carried out by S-Com between February and May.

We are deeply grateful to the civil society organisations, grassroots initiatives, and practitioners who shared their time, experience, and analysis throughout the research phase. Their input was not simply informative — it shaped the direction of this work and grounded it in real conditions of civic engagement across Europe.

We also acknowledge the organisations that contributed examples of practice and reflected critically on their own engagement with rule-of-law processes. These contributions helped move the Toolkit away from abstract design and towards something rooted in how civil society actually works — with all its constraints, creativity, and resilience.

Special thanks go to:

- Amnesty International
- Articolo 21
- Asociația Pentru Cooperare și dezvoltare durabilă
- Basta ! Belgian Antimafia Steps forward Association
- Between
- Center for the Study of Democracy
- Centre for Democracy and Law Miko Tripalo
- Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties)
- Civil Society Europe
- Committee to Protect Journalists
- European Partnership for Democracy
- Fiadys
- FNSI - Federazione nazionale Stampa italiana
- ILGA-Europe
- Libera
- Mafianeindanke EV
- NOVA University Lisbon
- Oxygen for Democracy
- Repubblica
- Transparency International
- Université catholique de Louvain

Their perspectives were essential in challenging assumptions about access, participation, and institutional language.

Finally, we recognise the broader ecosystem of partners and collaborators who supported outreach, reflection, and dissemination throughout the project. Their engagement reinforced a key lesson of this work: that meaningful participation is never individual, but always built through networks of trust, cooperation, and shared purpose.

The STAKEHOLDERS Toolkit is ultimately the product of that collective effort. It reflects a shared commitment to strengthening democratic participation and keeping the rule of law connected to the societies it is meant to protect.

ANNEXES

1. Glossary of Key Terms

This glossary defines key terms used in the Handbook. It supports a shared understanding, particularly for participants less familiar with rule-of-law concepts and EU processes.

Definitions are concise and reflect usage within the STAKEHOLDERS Project and the European Commission's Rule of Law Cycle.

Use this glossary:

- ➔ as a reference during training
- ➔ to ensure consistent terminology
- ➔ to support participants with different levels of familiarity

Facilitators may expand it for the national context.

Civil Society Organisation (CSO)

A non-governmental, non-profit organisation that operates independently from the state and represents the interests, values, or concerns of citizens.

Coalition

A group of organisations working together towards shared objectives, often to strengthen impact, coordinate actions, or produce joint contributions.

Evidence-Based Analysis

An approach to analysis that relies on verifiable information from credible sources, rather than opinion or unsubstantiated claims.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Processes used to assess the implementation, outcomes, and impact of activities, including training and outreach.

Peer Review

A process in which individuals review each other's work to provide feedback and improve quality.

Stakeholder

Any individual, group, or organisation with an interest in or influence over rule of law issues or processes.

Stakeholder Mapping

A process of identifying and analysing stakeholders, including their roles, influence, and interests, to inform engagement strategies.

Train-the-Trainer Model

An approach in which participants are trained not only to apply knowledge themselves but also to train others, creating a multiplier effect.

Workshop

An interactive training session focused on practical exercises, discussion, and application of concepts.

Working Group

A group of participants collaborating on a specific task or topic within a training or project context.

2. Stakeholder Mapping Tools

This annex provides practical tools for identifying, analysing, and engaging stakeholders relevant to rule-of-law work and participation in the European Commission's Rule of Law Cycle.

The tools support structured analysis of roles, influence, interests, and engagement strategies. They can be used in training, workshops, or organisational planning and should be adapted to the context.

Use these tools:

- in training exercises
- for planning and strategy
- to support group analysis

Encourage participants to:

- include formal and informal actors
- consider power dynamics
- think strategically about engagement

Stakeholder Identification Template

Objective:

Identify relevant stakeholders

Instructions:

List stakeholders across categories, including formal and informal actors.

Worksheet:

Category	Stakeholder	Description of Role
Public authorities		
Judiciary		
Independent institutions		
Civil society organisations		
Media		
Academia/experts		
International actors		
Other		

Influence and Interest Matrix

Objective:

Assess stakeholders by influence and interest.

Instructions:

Place stakeholders in the matrix.

Matrix:

	High Interest	Low Interest
High Influence	Key partners	Strategic targets
Low Influence	Support base	Monitor

Guidance:

Key partners: Engage closely and regularly

Strategic targets: Inform and seek to increase engagement

Support base: Mobilise and involve

Monitor: Keep informed as needed

Stakeholder Engagement Planning Tool

Objective:

To define strategies for engaging different stakeholders.

Worksheet:

Stakeholder	Objective of Engagement	Method	Frequency	Responsible

Examples of methods:

- Meetings
- Workshops
- Written submissions
- Media engagement
- Informal networking

Worksheet for analytical or more strategic planning purposes:

Stakeholder	Needs of stakeholder	Alignment of needs	Objective of Engagement	Method	Frequency	Responsible

Examples of methods:

- Strategic dialogues / policy roundtables
- Mapping and consultation processes

- Partnership development meetings
- Multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms
- Advisory groups / steering committees
- Structured interviews or focus groups
- Co-design sessions / collaborative planning workshops

Coalition Mapping Tool

Objective:

To identify potential alliances and collaboration opportunities.

Instructions:

Identify organisations working on related issues and assess potential for collaboration.

Worksheet:

Organisation	Area of Work	Potential for Collaboration	Level of Alignment	Next Steps

Outreach Channel Mapping

Objective:

To identify the most effective communication channels for different stakeholders.

Worksheet:

Stakeholder Group	Preferred Channels	Key Message	Format	Notes
Youth				
Civil society				
Media				
Institutions				

Risk and Sensitivity Assessment

Objective:

To identify potential risks in stakeholder engagement.

Worksheet:

Stakeholder	Potential Risk	Sensitivity Level (High/Medium/Low)	Mitigation Strategy

3. Workshop Formats

Workshop: “From Everyday Experience to Rule of Law Action”

This workshop helps participants move from personal experiences and everyday concerns to a broader understanding of rule-of-law principles and their connection to democratic institutions and policy processes.

Rather than treating experiences as isolated stories, the workshop supports participants in collectively identifying recurring patterns, institutional issues, and possible civic responses. The aim is to transform lived experience into shared analysis and structured civic reflection.

Target group

- General public and non-specialist audiences
- Youth groups and students
- Grassroots organisations
- Community leaders
- Civil society organisations
- Mixed stakeholder groups

Duration



2–3 hours (adaptable)

Learning objectives

- By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:
- recognise how rule-of-law issues appear in everyday life;
- connect personal experiences to broader democratic principles;
- identify institutional actors and responsibilities;
- distinguish between individual problems and systemic issues;
- formulate simple civic or policy-oriented recommendations;
- understand how local experiences can contribute to broader rule-of-law monitoring processes.

Structure

The facilitator opens the session with a simple and non-technical discussion about the meaning of the rule of law.

- Rather than starting from legal definitions, the discussion focuses on everyday questions such as:
- What happens when rules are not applied equally?

- What happens when institutions are not transparent?
- What happens when people cannot access justice or public services fairly?

The aim is to create a common and accessible starting point, while reassuring participants that no prior expertise is required.

The facilitator also establishes the workshop as a respectful and safer space for dialogue, where participants are encouraged to share experiences voluntarily and where different perspectives are welcomed.

Participants are invited to reflect individually on situations they have experienced, witnessed, or encountered in their communities.

Prompts may include:

- Have you ever experienced unfair treatment in a public service?
- Have you seen situations where rules seemed unclear or inconsistently applied?
- Have you experienced difficulties accessing information, rights, or institutions?
- you seen examples of discrimination, lack of transparency, or abuse of power?

Participants may write short notes, keywords, or examples on cards or post-its.

The purpose of this phase is to anchor the discussion in concrete experiences rather than abstract institutional language.

Participants work in small groups to share and compare their experiences.

The facilitator encourages groups to move beyond individual stories by exploring:

- Are similar issues recurring?
- Which institutions are involved?
- is affected most?
- Are these isolated cases or broader patterns?

At this stage, facilitators help participants recognise that many apparently “personal” frustrations often reveal larger structural or institutional issues.

This phase is particularly important because it shifts the discussion from anecdotal experience to collective interpretation.

Once common themes emerge, the facilitator introduces a simplified framework of rule-of-law principles, for example:

- access to justice;
- transparency;
- accountability;
- anti-corruption
- equality and non-discrimination;
- freedom of expression;
- institutional independence.

Participants are then invited to connect their cases to one or more of these principles.

For example:

- long waiting times in courts → access to justice;
- unequal treatment in schools or services → equality and non-discrimination;
- difficulties accessing public information → transparency;
- political pressure on institutions → accountability or institutional independence.

The facilitator helps participants understand that rule-of-law principles are not abstract legal concepts, but practical conditions that shape everyday life.

Participants now work on transforming their discussion into a simple civic or policy-oriented contribution.

Using a structured template, each group identifies:

1. the issue;
2. why it matters;
3. who is affected;
4. which institutions are involved;
5. what should change.

The emphasis is not on producing technical policy recommendations, but on developing clear and structured civic input grounded in lived realities.

This phase is essential because it helps participants experience themselves not only as observers of problems, but as potential contributors to democratic processes.

Groups present their reflections and recommendations to the plenary.

The facilitator helps identify:

- recurring concerns across groups;
- shared institutional challenges;
- differences in perspective;
- possible connections with national or European rule-of-law debates.

The session concludes by highlighting how local experiences and community perspectives can contribute to broader democratic monitoring and policy discussions, including the European Rule of Law Cycle.

Outputs

The workshop may generate:

- collective mapping of rule-of-law concerns;
- thematic clustering of recurring issues;
- civic narratives connected to institutional principles;
- draft recommendations or advocacy messages;
- material that can feed into consultations, reports, or participatory monitoring processes.

Workshop: Mapping the Rule of Law System

This workshop is designed to help participants understand how the rule of law functions as a system of interconnected actors, institutions, and accountability mechanisms rather than as an abstract legal concept. Through participatory mapping exercises, participants visualise how decisions are made, where power is concentrated, how accountability operates, and where citizens and civil society can intervene.

At the same time, the workshop is structured not only as an educational activity, but also as a practical evidence-gathering tool capable of generating insights and contributions relevant for the European Rule of Law Cycle and related civic reporting processes.

This workshop helps participants “connect the dots” between everyday experiences, institutional structures, and broader democratic processes. By mapping relationships, gaps, and accountability failures visually and collectively, participants move from isolated observations to a more systemic understanding of how rule-of-law issues emerge and persist.

Target group

This workshop is particularly suitable for:

- youth groups and students
- grassroots organisations
- civil society organisations
- civic education programmes
- mixed stakeholder groups
- local communities with limited institutional knowledge

It can be adapted for both introductory and more advanced audiences.

Duration



60–90 minutes (extended versions of 2–3 hours may include deeper institutional analysis and reporting exercises)

Learning objectives

By the end of the workshop, participants should be able to:

- identify the main actors involved in rule-of-law systems
- understand how institutions interact and influence one another
- recognise where accountability mechanisms function or fail
- identify barriers to participation and transparency
- understand where civil society can intervene or contribute

- connect local experiences to broader institutional patterns
- generate observations that can support civic reporting and policy contributions

Structure

The facilitator introduces the idea that the rule of law is not a single institution or legal principle, but a network of actors and relationships.

Participants are asked:

- Who exercises public power?
- Who controls or limits that power?
- Who can challenge decisions?
- Who informs the public?
- Who protects rights?
- Where do citizens fit into this system?

Rather than starting from legal definitions, the facilitator focuses on helping participants recognise that they interact with institutions in their everyday life without knowing it.

The facilitator may introduce a simplified institutional framework including:

- courts and judges
- parliament
- government and public administration
- anti-corruption bodies
- media and journalists
- civil society organisations
- oversight authorities
- citizens and communities
- European institutions

The aim is to create a shared understanding before beginning the mapping exercise.

Participants work together to identify all actors they believe influence fairness, accountability, rights protection, or public decision-making in their context.

Importantly, participants are encouraged to think beyond formal institutions and include:

- local authorities
- schools and universities
- watchdog organisations
- social movements
- online platforms
- businesses or economic actors
- community networks

This step often reveals how participants perceive power structures in practice, not only formally.

The facilitator may ask:

- Which actors are visible?
- Which actors seem powerful?
- Which actors are trusted or distrusted?
- Which actors are missing or inaccessible?

Participants collaboratively create a visual map showing how institutions and actors interact. This can be done through a structured visual mapping exercise using a predefined template or pattern supported by:

- flipcharts
- sticky notes
- cards and connecting strings
- wall-based diagrams
- digital collaborative tools (for online or hybrid formats)

Participants draw:

- flows of influence
- decision-making processes
- accountability relationships
- barriers or bottlenecks
- missing connections

The facilitator encourages participants to visualise:

- who influences whom
- where decisions are concentrated
- where transparency exists or fails
- where citizens can intervene
- where complaints or challenges become difficult

Participants may use colours or symbols to indicate:

- trusted institutions
- weak accountability points
- inaccessible processes
- conflict areas
- areas where rights protections are perceived as weak

Once the map is complete, participants analyse it collectively.

The facilitator guides reflection around questions such as:

Accountability

- Where are accountability mechanisms weak or unclear?
- Which actors seem to operate without oversight?

Participation

- Where can citizens realistically intervene?
- Which groups appear excluded from decision-making?

Transparency

- Where is information difficult to access?
- Which processes appear opaque?

Access to justice

- Where do people encounter obstacles when trying to seek remedies?

Civic space

- Are there barriers affecting civil society participation?

At this stage, participants often begin recognising structural patterns rather than isolated problems. This step is particularly important for organisations intending to contribute to the European Rule of Law Cycle or similar monitoring processes.

The facilitator supports participants in transforming observations into structured findings.

Participants are encouraged to identify:

- recurring institutional weaknesses
- evidence gaps
- issues requiring further monitoring
- examples suitable for inclusion in reports or consultations

This helps move from discussion to actionable civic intelligence.

Outputs

The workshop may generate:

- visual maps of institutional ecosystems
- identification of accountability gaps
- mapping of civic participation opportunities
- thematic observations for reports or consultations
- evidence of recurring local concerns
- preliminary material for advocacy or Rule of Law submissions

Workshop: Participatory Rule of Law Dialogue (World Café)

To enable large-group dialogue on rule-of-law issues through structured conversation.

Target group

- Mixed civil society groups
- Citizens
- Youth
- Civil society organisations
- Academia
- Business representatives
- Public authorities
- Journalists

Duration



90–120 minutes

Learning objectives

Participants will be able to:

- discuss rule-of-law topics collaboratively
- identify shared concerns and themes
- connect personal views to collective understanding

Structure

These workshops are organised locally and on a relatively small scale in order to create a more participatory, inclusive, and dialogue-oriented environment. Each session typically brings together a maximum of 30–40 participants selected from different sectors, including civil society organisations, academia, business representatives, public authorities, journalists, youth actors, and community stakeholders. The diversity of participants is an essential element of the methodology, as it allows different perspectives, experiences, and forms of expertise to interact within the same discussion space.

The workshops are facilitated by an external moderator or expert facilitator whose role is not to “teach” participants in a traditional top-down format, but rather to guide discussion, encourage balanced participation, and ensure that all voices can contribute meaningfully. Particular attention is given to creating a respectful and safer space for dialogue, where participants feel comfortable expressing different views, sharing experiences, and engaging in constructive debate without fear of judgment or exclusion.

Discussions are organised using the World Café methodology, a participatory facilitation approach designed to encourage collective reflection and knowledge-sharing through small-group conversations. Participants are seated at tables of approximately 4–5 people, creating an informal and accessible setting that supports active participation even from individuals who may be less comfortable speaking in large plenary sessions.

Each table is composed by members with different backgrounds or representing different actors and focuses on a specific guiding question or thematic issue related to rule-of-law challenges and democratic participation. Examples of discussion themes may include:

- transparency and access to information;
- trust in institutions;
- access to justice;
- anti-corruption
- media freedom and misinformation;
- discrimination and equality;
- youth participation and civic space;
- accountability of public authorities.

Participants discuss the topic for a set period of time, usually between 15 and 25 minutes. After each round, participants rotate to a different table and engage with a new group and a new topic. In some cases, one participant remains at the table as a “table host” to briefly summarise the previous discussion and ensure continuity between groups.

This rotation system is one of the core strengths of the World Café approach. It allows ideas, experiences, and perspectives to circulate progressively throughout the room, helping participants build on each other’s reflections rather than remaining within isolated discussions. As conversations evolve, recurring themes, shared concerns, and contrasting viewpoints begin to emerge organically.

At the end of the process, key insights from each table are collected and brought back into a plenary discussion. The facilitator supports participants in identifying common patterns, areas of disagreement, and possible recommendations or follow-up actions. This final collective reflection helps transform individual conversations into a broader shared understanding of the issues discussed.

The methodology is particularly effective for rule-of-law engagement because it:

- lowers participation barriers through informal and accessible discussion formats;
- encourages dialogue between actors who do not usually interact directly;
- values lived experiences alongside institutional or professional expertise;
- supports collective interpretation of complex democratic issues;
- creates a sense of shared ownership over the discussion and its outcomes.

Beyond information-sharing, these workshops aim to strengthen trust, civic participation, and mutual understanding between different sectors of society. They help participants recognise that rule-of-law issues are not abstract institutional debates, but questions that directly affect communities, rights, public trust, and democratic life.

Outputs

- Shared thematic insights
- Collective reflection

Workshop: Rule of Law through Stories, Film and Podcasts

This workshop uses films, documentaries, podcasts, and other cultural narratives to make rule-of-law issues more accessible, relatable, and emotionally engaging. Rather than beginning with legal definitions or institutional frameworks, the workshop starts from stories and lived experiences, allowing participants to explore democratic principles through characters, conflicts, and real-world situations.

Cultural materials are particularly effective because they transform abstract institutional concepts into human experiences. Participants may not immediately connect with terms such as “judicial independence,” “institutional accountability,” or “fundamental rights,” but they often immediately recognise injustice, abuse of power, discrimination, censorship, or exclusion when these are presented through stories.

The workshop therefore uses narrative as an entry point into civic understanding.

Target group

Youth groups and students

- public
- Grassroots organisations
- Mixed civic audiences
- Participants with no prior legal or political knowledge

Duration



90–120 minutes (adaptable depending on the material selected)

Learning objectives

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:

- identify rule-of-law themes within cultural narratives;
- connect emotional reactions to institutional and democratic questions;
- reflect critically on power, rights, and accountability;
- recognise how media and storytelling shape civic understanding;
- relate fictional or documentary narratives to real-world issues;
- discuss institutional problems in a more accessible and participatory way.

Structure

One of the main barriers in rule-of-law engagement is that institutional language often feels distant, technical, or intimidating. Films and podcasts lower these barriers by creating emotional and narrative entry points that participants can immediately relate to.

Stories:

- humanise institutional issues;
- make abstract concepts visible through concrete situations;
- encourage empathy and identification;
- create shared reference points across diverse groups;
- stimulate discussion even among participants with very different levels of knowledge.

Importantly, cultural narratives also create safer and more inclusive discussion spaces. Participants may sometimes feel more comfortable discussing sensitive issues through fictional or mediated stories rather than through direct personal exposure.

For facilitators, stories become a bridge between emotional understanding and civic reflection.

The facilitator introduces:

- theme of the session;
- the selected material;
- a few simple observation questions.

At this stage, technical explanations should be avoided. The goal is to encourage curiosity and open interpretation rather than “teaching” concepts immediately.

Possible guiding questions:

- What forms of power do you see in the story?
- Who has a voice and who does not?
- Where do you see fairness or unfairness?
- Which institutions appear trustworthy or untrustworthy?
- What rights or freedoms are at stake?

The facilitator should also establish the workshop as a respectful and open discussion space where multiple interpretations are welcome.

Viewing or listening session

Participants engage with selected cultural material.

Depending on time and context, facilitators may choose:

- a full podcast episode;
- short excerpts from films or documentaries;
- selected scenes;
- mixed multimedia content.

It is often more effective to use shorter and carefully selected extracts rather than entire films, especially in workshops with non-expert audiences.

Before introducing formal concepts, participants are invited to react emotionally and intuitively to the material.

Questions may include:

- What scene or moment stayed with you most?

- Which character or situation felt most unfair?
- Did anything remind you of real-life situations?
- What emotions did the story create?

This phase is important because it validates emotional understanding as part of civic learning.

Only after discussion begins organically does the facilitator introduce simplified rule-of-law concepts such as:

- accountability;
- transparency;
- anti-corruption
- equality before the law;
- access to justice;
- freedom of expression;
- institutional independence;
- protection of fundamental rights.

Participants collectively identify where these principles appear — or fail — within the story.

For example:

- a journalist facing political pressure → media freedom;
- a citizen unable to access legal remedies → access to justice;
- hidden information → transparency problems;
- unequal treatment → discrimination and equality issues.

This step helps participants understand that rule-of-law principles are embedded in social realities and human relationships, not only legal texts.

The workshop concludes with a broader discussion connecting the narrative to contemporary social and political realities.

Possible questions:

- Does this happen in real life today?
- Which institutions are responsible for preventing these situations?
- What role can citizens or civil society play?
- Why do these issues matter for democracy?

Facilitators may also connect the discussion to current events, local issues, or EU-level debates.

Outputs

The workshop may generate:

- collective interpretation of civic and democratic themes;
- identification of relevant rule-of-law principles;
- increased awareness of institutional dynamics;
- thematic reflections for future workshops or advocacy;
- visual maps or discussion notes;
- civic narratives grounded in cultural storytelling.

Workshop: “From Headlines to Rule of Law”

The workshop uses journalism, media narratives, and current affairs as entry points to explore how democratic systems function in practice. Participants learn to “read” news stories not only as isolated events, but as expressions of broader institutional dynamics involving accountability, transparency, access to justice, equality, and protection of rights.

The overall objective is to make the rule of law visible in real time, helping participants understand how everyday events connect to larger democratic and institutional frameworks at both national and European level.

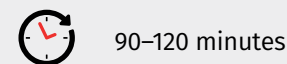
Target group

This activity is particularly suitable for:

- youth groups and students
- grassroots and community organisations
- civil society organisations
- citizens with no legal or policy background
- mixed stakeholder groups
- journalism and media literacy initiatives

The workshop can be adapted to both introductory and more advanced audiences.

Duration



90–120 minutes

Learning objectives

By the end of the workshop, participants should be able to:

- identify rule-of-law dimensions within everyday news stories
- recognise how institutions interact in democratic systems
- distinguish between political controversy and institutional accountability issues
- connect local events to broader European frameworks and debates
- develop critical media literacy around governance and rights issues
- reflect on how media narratives shape public understanding of democracy and institutions

The facilitator opens the session by introducing a simple but important idea: most people encounter rule-of-law issues through news and social media long before they encounter them through legal or institutional language.

Participants are invited to reflect on questions such as:

- What kinds of news stories make people lose trust in institutions?
- When does a political issue become a rule-of-law issue?
- Why do some institutional problems become highly visible while others remain unnoticed?

At this stage, the facilitator avoids technical definitions and instead focuses on helping participants recognise that concepts such as accountability, fairness, transparency, or abuse of power already exist in their everyday understanding of public life.

The facilitator may briefly introduce a simplified framework linking news stories to key rule-of-law principles. This creates a shared vocabulary before moving into analysis.

Participants are divided into small groups and provided with a selection of recent headlines, articles, social media posts, short videos, or news excerpts.

The materials should ideally combine:

- national and European examples
- different political perspectives
- both highly visible and less visible rule-of-law issues
- stories connected to participants' realities

Examples may include:

- data privacy scandals involving technology companies
- climate litigation cases against governments or corporations
- protests over judicial reforms
- corruption investigations involving public officials
- attacks on journalists or media concentration
- discrimination cases involving LGBTI rights or minorities
- misuse of EU funds
- police violence or surveillance controversies
- restrictions on protest or freedom of association
- environmental conflicts affecting local communities

Each group analyses one or more stories using guiding questions such as:

Understanding the story

- What is happening?
- Who are the main actors involved?
- What is the conflict or controversy?

Institutional dimension

- Which institutions are involved?
- Are institutions acting independently and transparently?
- Is someone exercising power without accountability?

Rule-of-law dimension

- Which principles may be at stake?
 - transparency
 - accountability
 - judicial independence
 - equality before the law

- of expression
- access to justice
- protection of fundamental rights

Civic dimension

- Who is affected?
- Why does this matter for ordinary people?
- Could this issue affect trust in institutions?

The facilitator should encourage interpretation rather than “correct answers.” Different participants may identify different dimensions within the same story, and this diversity of interpretation is part of the learning process.

The aim is not legal precision, but developing the ability to recognise institutional dynamics behind everyday events.

Participants often initially describe stories as “politics” or “controversy,” but through discussion begin identifying deeper structural questions:

- Who controls power?
- Who can challenge decisions?
- Are rules applied equally?
- Can citizens obtain remedies?
- Is information accessible?

This moment is often where participants begin understanding the rule of law as something concrete rather than abstract.

Once participants identify rule-of-law dimensions within the stories, the facilitator helps connect these issues to broader institutional and European frameworks.

The facilitator explains how:

- EU institutions monitor some of these developments
- civil society organisations contribute evidence and reports
- journalists and NGOs often shape institutional attention
- public debate influences policymaking processes

This helps participants understand that news stories can become part of larger democratic accountability mechanisms.

The session concludes with a collective discussion focused on broader reflection:

Did this workshop change how you read the news?

- Which stories felt most connected to your own life?
- Which institutions seemed most visible or invisible?
- What role can citizens or civil society play?
- How can the media strengthen or weaken democratic accountability?

The facilitator reinforces the central message:

Rule-of-law issues are not distant institutional debates. They are embedded in the information people consume every day, in the functioning of institutions, and in the way power affects ordinary life.

Outputs

The workshop may produce:

- thematic mapping of rule-of-law issues in current events
- group reflections or flipcharts
- simplified institutional maps
- civic recommendations
- media analysis summaries
- possible inputs for advocacy or civic reporting activities

4. Feedback Form - Facilitators

(Toolkit Validation Survey)

Target: facilitators, trainers, CSO practitioners

Section 1 – Profile

1. What is your role?

- ☐ Facilitator
- ☐ Trainer
- ☐ CSO representative
- ☐ Project coordinator
- ☐ Other (please specify)

2. Have you previously worked on rule-of-law related engagement activities?

- ☐ Yes, extensively
- ☐ Yes, occasionally
- ☐ No, this is new to me

Section 2 – Use of Toolkit

3. Which parts of the toolkit have you used?

4. In what context did you use them?

- ☐ Youth groups
- ☐ Civil society organisations
- ☐ Mixed stakeholder groups
- ☐ Online engagement
- ☐ Training setting

Section 3 – Method effectiveness

5. How effective were the methods in facilitating engagement? (Scale 1–5)

1 2 3 4 5

6. To what extent did the methods support:

- Participation of non-expert audiences → 1 2 3 4 5
- Inclusive dialogue → 1 2 3 4 5
- Understanding of rule-of-law concepts → 1 2 3 4 5
- Interaction between participants → 1 2 3 4 5
- Reflection on real-life experiences → 1 2 3 4 5

(Scale 1–5 for each)

Section 4 – Usability

7. How easy was it to implement the methods?

- ☐ Very easy
- ☐ Easy
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Difficult
- ☐ Very difficult

8. What challenges did you encounter? (open answer)

9. Were the instructions sufficiently clear?

- ☐ Yes / ☐ No / ☐ Partially
- Please explain

Section 5 – Adaptability

10. Did you adapt the methods to your context?

- ☐ Yes, significantly
- ☐ Yes, slightly
- ☐ No

11. If yes, how did you adapt them? (open answer)

12. Which methods are most scalable or transferable? (open answer)

Section 6 – Overall evaluation

13. What is the most valuable element of the toolkit? (open answer)

14. What should be improved? (open answer)

15. Would you use these methods again?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

5. Feedback form for Participants

(Experience & Engagement Survey)

Target: citizens, youth, CSO participants, non-experts

Section 1 – About you

- Age group:
☐ <18
☐ 18–24
☐ 25–34
☐ 35–50
☐ 50+
- Have you previously taken part in rule-of-law related activities?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Section 2 – Experience

- Which type of activity did you take part in?
☐ Workshop
☐ Game / simulation
☐ Group discussion
☐ Online activity
☐ Other
- How clear were the topics discussed? (Scale 1–5)
1 2 3 4 5
- Did you feel able to participate actively?
☐ Yes, very much
☐ Somewhat
☐ Not really
☐ Not at all

Section 3 – Engagement quality

- What helped you participate the most?
☐ Group discussions
☐ Practical examples
☐ Games or activities
☐ Facilitator support
☐ Other participants
- Did the activity help you understand what “rule of law” means?
☐ Yes
☐ Partially
☐ No
- Did you find the activity interesting? (Scale 1–5)
1 2 3 4 5

Section 4 – Methods evaluation

- Which activities did you like most?
☐ Games / simulations
☐ Storytelling / examples
☐ Discussions
☐ Visual exercises
☐ Other
- What did you find most difficult? (open answer)

Section 5 – Impact

- After the activity, do you feel more confident talking about rule-of-law topics?
☐ Yes
☐ Somewhat
☐ No

12. Would you participate in similar activities again?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

13. What would you improve? *(open answer)*

Optional open question

14. In one sentence: what does “rule of law” mean to you now?

6. Engagement Checklist

This checklist is a practical tool to support civil society organisations, facilitators, and practitioners in designing, implementing, and evaluating engagement activities on rule-of-law issues. It can be used across offline and online formats, including workshops, consultations, participatory events, and digital engagement initiatives.

Planning and design

- ☐ Have the target groups been clearly identified (CSOs, youth, citizens, media, etc.)?
- ☐ Has stakeholder mapping been conducted or updated?
- ☐ Is the objective of the engagement clearly defined?
- ☐ Is the topic translated into accessible, non-technical language?
- ☐ Have appropriate engagement methods been selected (workshops, online tools, gamification, surveys, etc.)?
- ☐ Are partners, allies, or networks involved in the process?
- ☐ Has the activity been adapted to the local context and audience profile?

Accessibility and inclusion

- ☐ Is the language clear, simple, and understandable for non-expert audiences?
- ☐ Are barriers to participation (language, digital access, timing, format) minimised?
- ☐ Are underrepresented or harder-to-reach groups actively considered?
- ☐ Does the format allow participation from people with different levels of knowledge?
- ☐ Are materials and tools accessible and user-friendly?

Engagement methodology

- ☐ Does the activity include interactive or participatory elements (discussion, dialogue, simulation, storytelling, gamification)?
- ☐ Is there a balance between information sharing and participant contribution?
- ☐ Are participants encouraged to actively contribute rather than passively receive information?
- ☐ Are real-life experiences and examples integrated into the discussion?
- ☐ Is there space for dialogue, disagreement, and reflection?

Facilitation and implementation

- ☐ Is a facilitator or moderator assigned and adequately prepared?
- ☐ Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined?
- ☐ Is a safe and respectful space for dialogue ensured?
- ☐ Are all voices actively encouraged and included?
- ☐ Is group dynamics managed to ensure balanced participation?
- ☐ Is time allocated for discussion, interaction, and reflection?

Digital and communication tools

- ☐ Are digital tools appropriate for the target audience (if used)?
- ☐ Are online engagement tools (surveys, polls, social media, forms) integrated effectively?
- ☐ Are communication channels used both for outreach and interaction?
- ☐ Is visibility ensured through clear and accessible messaging?
- ☐ Are tools tested for usability and accessibility?

Follow-up and feedback loops

- ☐ Are participant inputs documented and structured?
- ☐ Is there a clear plan for how inputs will be used?
- ☐ Are participants informed about outcomes or next steps?
- ☐ Are feedback mechanisms in place to maintain engagement over time?
- ☐ Is engagement connected to broader rule-of-law processes or cycles?

Sustainability and learning

- ☐ Are lessons learned captured for future activities?
- ☐ Is the activity part of a continuous engagement process rather than a one-off event?
- ☐ Are partnerships strengthened through the activity?
- ☐ Is the methodology adapted based on feedback and experience?
- ☐ Is there continuity with previous or future engagement actions?

7. Checklist: Ensuring Inclusive Participation in Engagement Activities

Planning and design stage	
	Ensure gender balance and apply gender-sensitive facilitation practices in both participation and moderation
	Take into account participants' different educational backgrounds and levels of familiarity with the topic, avoiding overly technical language
	Ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities, including physical accessibility of venues, digital accessibility of tools and materials, and provision of reasonable accommodations
	Design participation formats that reflect diversity in socio-economic backgrounds, lived experiences, and community contexts
	Ensure outreach strategies reach underrepresented or marginalised groups and communities
	Avoid assumptions of cultural, linguistic, or social homogeneity among participants
Communication and materials	
	Use clear, accessible, and non-technical language
	Provide materials in accessible formats and, where relevant, in multiple languages
	Ensure visual and written content is inclusive and representative of diverse groups
	Ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities, including adaptations for blind and visually impaired participants (e.g. screen-reader compatible formats, alternative text descriptions) and for deaf and hard-of-hearing participants (e.g. captions, subtitles, sign language interpretation where appropriate)
Participation and facilitation	
	Use facilitation methods that enable equal participation and prevent dominance by specific individuals or groups
	Create safe and respectful spaces where participants can express diverse perspectives without discrimination
	Consider different participation needs, including digital access, time constraints, caregiving responsibilities, as well as accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities, including support for deaf and hard-of-hearing participants and blind and visually impaired participants through appropriate facilitation, communication formats, and tools
Monitoring and reflection	
	Monitor participation to identify underrepresented groups and adjust outreach accordingly
	Regularly review inclusivity practices based on participant feedback and lessons learned, ensuring that barriers experienced by different groups (including persons with disabilities) are identified and addressed over time

