

- Opening the closed doors of government:
- **Legislating for and with Plain Language**

Heerlijk Duidelijkdag, 21 May 2024

Torunn Reksten

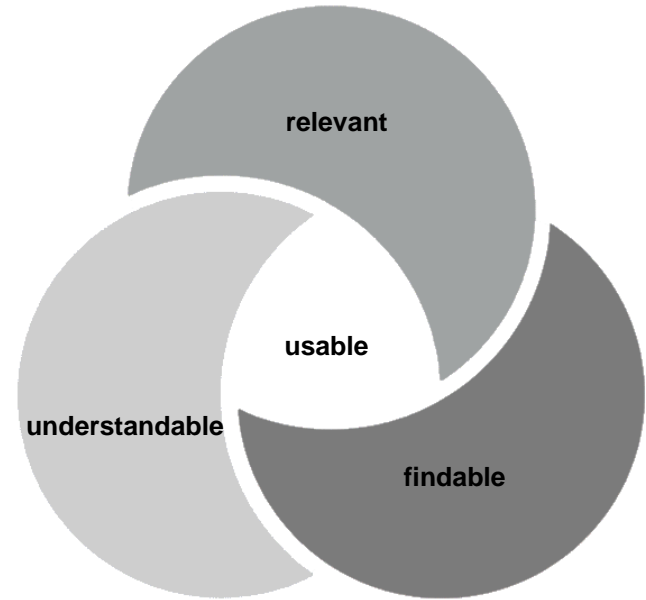
● Why am I here?

- Norway's story
- Norway's Plain Language legislation
 - *context, contents and implementation*
- Plain Legal language

● What is Plain Language in 2024?

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

Source: International Plain Language Federation



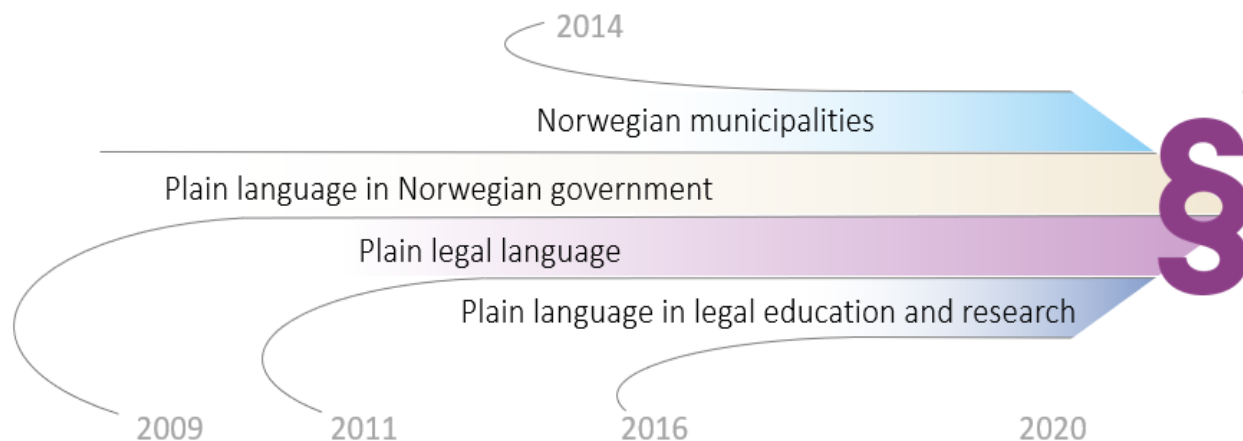
● A language act with Plain Language requirements

Act relating to Language

Date	LOV-2021-05-21-42
Ministry	Ministry of Culture and Equality
Entry into force	01.01.2022
Abbreviated title	The Language Act
Original title	Lov om språk (språkløva)



● From scratch to plain language legislation in 13 years



Norwegian Ministry
of Local Government and Modernisation

UiO • The University of Oslo



Norwegian Ministry
of Justice and Public Security



The Association of
Local and Regional Authorities

Digdir The Digitalisation Agency

Språkrådet
The Language Council of Norway

• The Norwegian Language Act

Prop. 108 L

(2019–2020)

Proposisjon til Stortinget (forslag til lovvedtak)

Lov om språk (språkløva)

Sec. 1: Purpose

Sec. 4: Norwegian language

Sec. 5: Sami languages

Sec. 6: National minority languages

Sec. 7: Norwegian sign language

Sec. 8: Scandinavian languages

Sec. 9: Plain language

Sec. 10: Official orthography

Sec. 11.–18: The use of the two Norwegian language forms

Sec. 19: The Language Council of Norway

Sec. 20: Duty to provide information to the Language Council of Norway

• The Norwegian Language Act

Sec. 9 Plain language

Public bodies shall communicate in **plain** and **correct** language **adapted to the target group**.



● The Norwegian legal context reality

The Constitution

Sec. 100 *The authorities of the state shall create conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse.*

The Public Administration Act (2024?)

The Language Act

Sec. 9 *Public bodies shall communicate in plain and correct language adapted to the target group.*

Specialised legalistaion

(Consumer Act, Health legislation etc.)



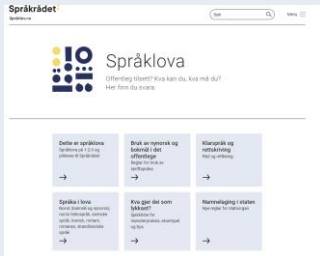
• Section 9 – what does it imply?

- Clear/plain
- Correct
- Adapted to the target group



Section 9 – how do we implement it?

Guidance



Compliance



Revisjonsrapport for 2022 om forståelig kommunikasjon i vedtaksbrev fra SPK og Nav

Rapportert i Dokument 1 (2023–2024)



Development



● Section 9 – does it work?

- Learning from our friends
- Sticks
- Carrots



● Learning from our friends: Sweden's Language act

SVERIGES  
RIKSDAG  **Språklag (2009:600)**

Section 11 The language of the public sector is to be cultivated, simple and comprehensible.



● Learning from our friends: The USA's Plain Writing Act

SEC. 2. PURPOSE. The purpose of this Act is to improve the **effectiveness** and **accountability** of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that **the public can understand and use**.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS. (3) PLAIN WRITING.— The term “plain writing” means writing that is **clear, concise, well-organized**, and follows other **best practices** appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.



● Learning from our friends: New Zealand's Plain Language Act



Plain Language Act 2022

The purpose of this Act is to improve the **effectiveness** and **accountability** of public service agencies and Crown agents, and to improve the **accessibility** of certain documents that they make available to the public, by providing for those documents to use language that is—

- (a) **appropriate** to the intended audience; and
- (b) **clear, concise, and well organised.**



Sticks – with a little help from our friends



The Parliamentary Ombud for Scrutiny of the
Public Administration



Office of the Auditor General of Norway



**NORGES
DOMSTOLER**

Gulating Court of appeal



● Carrots

Plain Language

- maintains infrastructure
- protects status
- saves time and money



● Proven numbers

Norway's leading financial analysis company, Menon Economics:

In addition to several other gains, Plain Language investments yield a **Return On Investment of 30% to 300%!**

Klart språk gir en avkastning på minst 30 til 300 prosent

Det er svært lønnsomt å investere i klart språk. En ny effektmåling viser at offentlig sektor med stor sikkerhet vil få en avkastning på 30 til 300 prosent ved å investere i klarspråksarbeid.



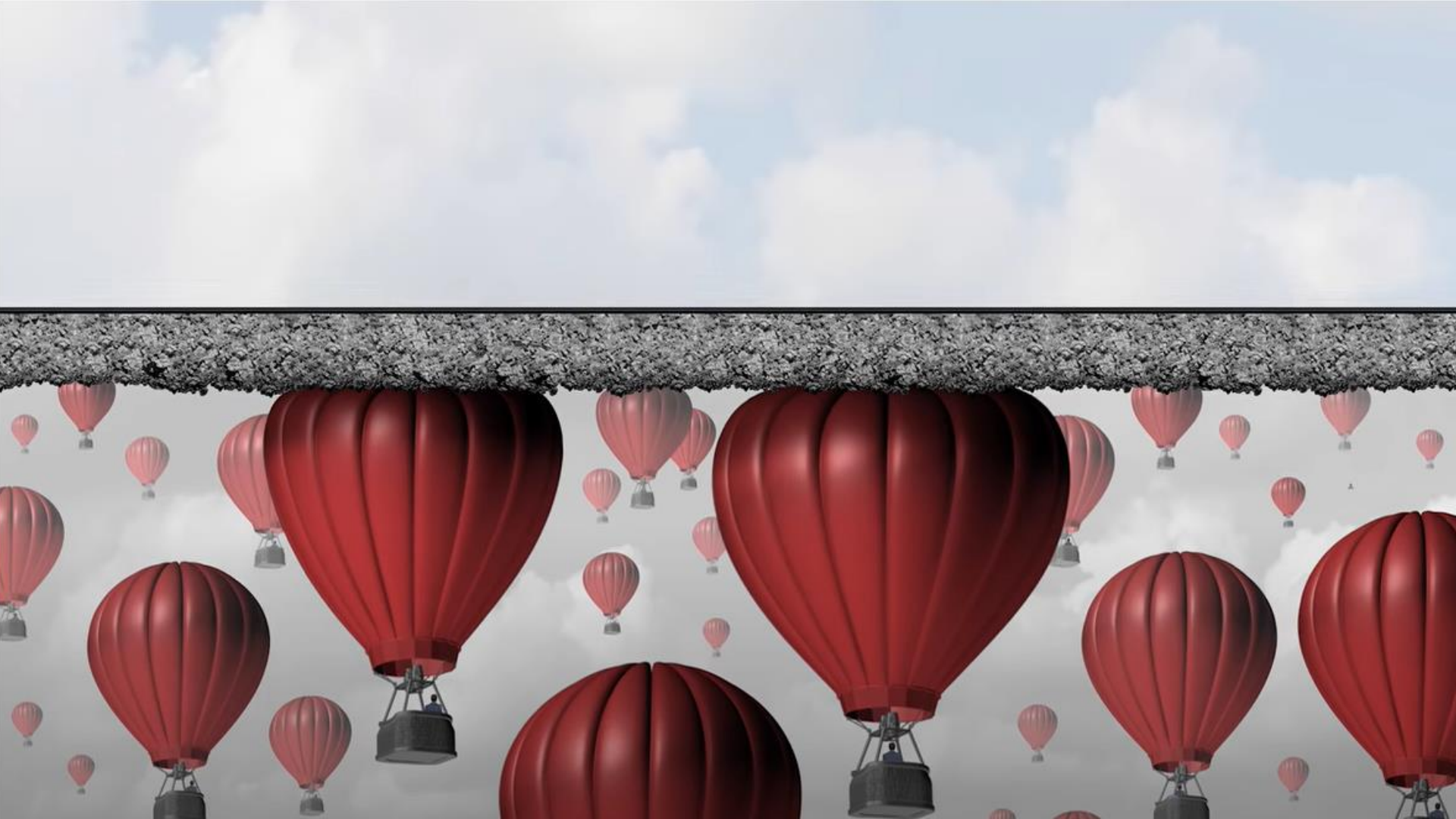
Foto: Johnny Syversen

En sikker gevinst er et godt argument for å investere tid og ressurser i språkarbeid, sier Kristin Weidemann Wieland, områdedirektør i KS.

Publisert: 20.02.2023

– Dette er enestående tall, også internasjonalt. Selv om vi vet at det er fornuftig med klart språk, har vi manglet tall på nøyaktig hvor mye penger vi kan spare for nå, sier områdedirektør Kristin Weidemann Wieland i KS.

ter av klart



● Plain legal language leads to better services



• Plain language requirements in the mandate

New Execution of Sentences Act

The wording of the Act must be clear and good and be informative and user-friendly, also for non-lawyers.

New University and college Act

The committee's bill must have a good structure and be written in good and clear language so that the proposal is also understood by those who are not lawyers.

New Public Administration Act

An important aim of the legislative work is to achieve user-friendly rules. The bill should therefore be systematic, and the language should be simple and clear.

New Education Act

The wording of the Act must be good and clear.

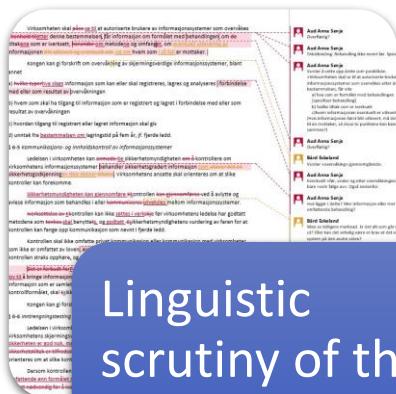


● Some of the Acts we've worked on

- The Constitution
- new Adoption Act
- new Inheritance Act
- new Defence Act with regulations
- new Education Act with regulations
- new Municipality Act
- new Security Act
- new Harbour and Waters Act
- new Child Protection Act
- new Act on Religions Communities and Life Stance Communities
- new Public Administration Act
- new Election Act
- new Children Act
- new University and College Act
- new Act relating to Motor traffic on uncultivated land and in watercourses
- new Archives Act with regulations
- new Cultural Environments Act
- new Minerals Act
- the Execution of Sentences Act



Plain legal language – How we work



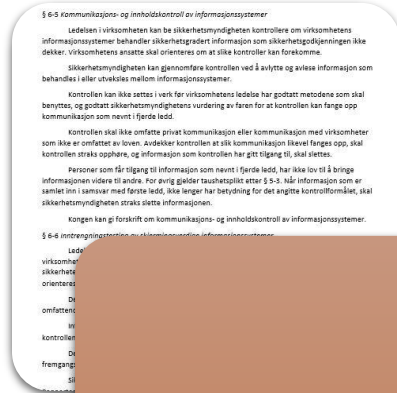
Linguistic scrutiny of the text

- Improvements
- Written suggestions



Workshops

- Discussions
- Introducing changes



Edited text

Thank you!