

Global Monitoring Finds Widespread Violations of Right to Information

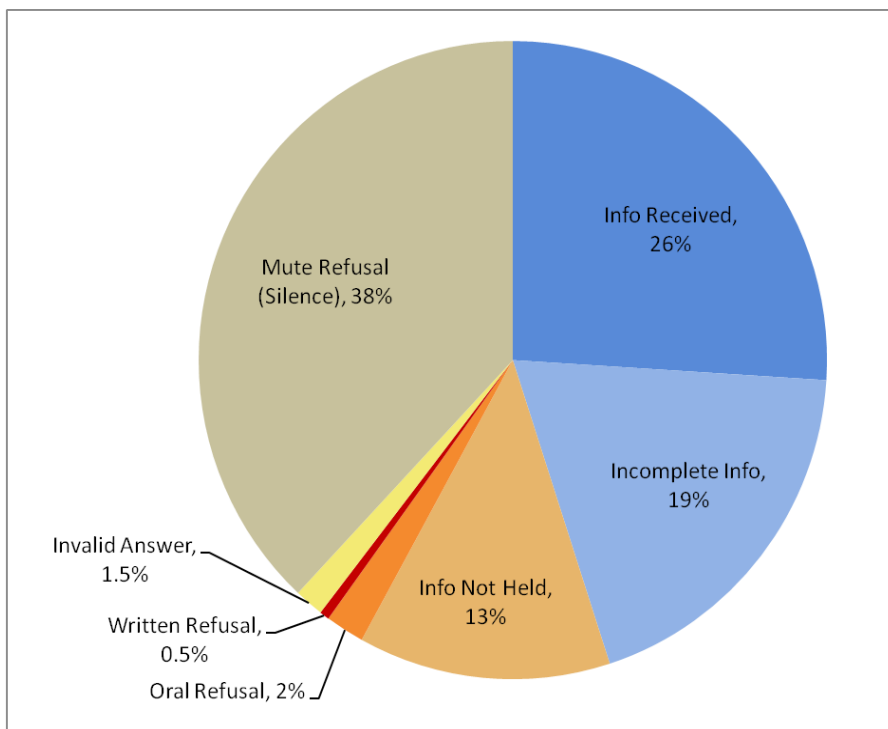
4 October 2011, Ottawa – The largest global monitoring of the right of access to information in practice, the **Ask Your Government! 6 Question Campaign** has found widespread violations of the right to information with only 1 in 4 requests resulting in provision of full information.

480 requests for budget information were submitted in 80 countries by a global network of civil society organisations. No information at all was provided in response to over half of the requests and 38% of the requests elicited no response from the government body to which the request was sent (mute refusals).

As they present the findings of the **Ask Your Government! 6 Question Campaign** in Ottawa during at the 7th International Conference of Information Commissioners, human rights organisations [Access Info Europe](#) and the [Centre for Law and Democracy](#) will call on governments to improve respect for the right to information in practice.

The monitoring survey, organised in collaboration with the International Budget Partnership, involved sending government bodies in the 80 countries the same six questions about public spending in areas of environmental protection, promotion of maternal health, and overseas development assistance.

Toby Mendel, Executive Director of the Centre for Law and Democracy, commented: *"The tremendous advances in terms of recognising the right to information as a fundamental human right at both the international and national levels have yet to be translated into respect in practice for this right. Basic information in key areas such as protection of maternal health and the environment remains inaccessible even in countries where the right to information is constitutionally and/or legally protected."*



- The **Ask Your Government! 6 Question Campaign** survey found a huge range in country performance: only 12 out of 80 countries responded to all 6 questions in a way that complies with right to information standards, for example by answering the requester within 30 calendar days.
- » **Top performing countries** included a number of new democracies and/or countries with young right to information laws, indicating that recent campaigns to promote the right to information have a positive effect on performance.

The top 15 countries were: New Zealand (1st place), Georgia, India, Namibia, Armenia, Colombia, Ukraine, Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, South Africa, Costa Rica, and Germany (see attached charts for full details).

- » **The poorest performers** tended to be those with no access to information law and performance improved with the age of the right to information law. The main exception was France, whose law was 32 years old at the time of the monitoring and which gave only one answer to the 6 requests.

The bottom 15 countries which provided no response to five or more questions after repeated submission of the requests were (in descending order): Malaysia, France, Morocco, Uganda, Yemen, Iraq, Nigeria, Algeria, Bangladesh, Cameroon, East Timor, Liberia, Nicaragua, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela (80th place).

Access Info Europe and the Centre for Law and Democracy note that the **Ask Your Government! 6 Question Campaign** is based on a small number of requests and yet it highlights some very worrying patterns.

"Simple measures such as improving data management and training of public officials are essential," commented Helen Darbishire, Executive Director of Access Info Europe. "The survey also found that countries were too ready to provide incomplete information or state that information is not held. When it comes to key financial data related to protection of other human rights, public bodies should make an appropriate efforts to extract data from existing documents."

In the context of many governments signing up to the Open Government Partnership, the findings of the **Ask Your Government! 6 Question Campaign** should be instructive in helping to identify reform priorities.

Tracking Implementation

Access Info Europe and the Centre for Law and Democracy recently launched the RTI Rating, a comprehensive assessment of the legal framework in the 89 countries that have adopted right to information laws (www.rti-rating.org). The next phase of this work will be to assess implementation in practice. The **Ask Your Government! 6 Question Campaign** represents an initial attempt to collect data for such an exercise.

On the occasion of the 7th International Conference of Information Commissioners it is opportune to note the important role that Information Commissioners could play in ensuring much more comprehensive data collection on respect for the right to information at the national level, including by scientific tracking of requests and how they have been dealt with.

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