

# Recommendations to Ensure Citizens' Right to Access Information

## Recommendations for government organisations

### 1. Ensuring the right to information about information

#### Basic Requirements for Ensuring This Right:

- Ways to find the information should be generally known, understandable, inexpensive and require little training, skills, or special knowledge;
- The organisation's metadata department is responsible for providing a way to find specific resources about where and how to obtain the necessary information;
- The organisation's dispatching department is responsible for answering questions about how to find official information;
- Institutions and governmental organisations must guarantee the availability of information about their activities as well as which resources they have at their disposal.

#### Recommendations for Government Organizations

Organisations must:

1. Publish a catalogue of the data and resources they have at their disposal. To ensure the receipt of information from official sources, it is important to know what kind of information various departments have. Large volumes of information must be structured and systemised by creating special indices, electronic directories, and searchable databases to ensure ease of searching.
2. Implement standards for providing visitors to state and municipal organisations with information on operating procedures and other relevant information through information booths and dispatching services. Organisations must also facilitate access to information, publish and distribute it in reception rooms and on websites, as well as maintain a strong online presence.
3. Establish government call centers and information and referral services to simplify searching for official information. These services will answer questions such as where to look for information, what information is provided by a particular department, under what conditions, etc. They would also be responsible for creating online search engines for official information.

4. Interact with social media to distribute information that is important to the general public. Develop public access points for obtaining socially significant information.

5. Develop formal requirements for information exchange between organisations and departments of all levels engaged in related activities. Create internal, interdepartmental information resources and search engines.

## **2. Ensuring the right to the humanisation of information provision (user-accessibility) and non-discrimination**

### **Basic requirements for Ensuring This Right:**

- Obtaining information should not be onerous for citizens;
- The government should provide multiple methods for conveying information;
- Information that is officially distributed should be understandable to everyone;
- The method used to convey information should take into account the preferences and limitations of individuals and target groups;

### **Recommendations for Government Organisations:**

Organisations must:

1. Take into consideration group preferences and social conventions regarding access to information. Study existing barriers and limitations on access to information that are relevant for certain categories of citizens. Begin conducting sociological surveys on consumers of public services and civil servants. Develop feedback mechanisms ('helplines', 'hotlines', internet conferences, etc.) while relying on the established 'people's experience' and even persistent stereotypes when planning the options for disseminating information.

2. Provide a variety of methods and channels for disseminating information, both private and public. Create and disseminate information in the most accessible formats, taking into account the interests and preferences of citizens and vulnerable groups. Create a 'one-stop shop' for obtaining information. Support initiatives for disseminating information in national languages.

3. Ensure the availability of and easy access to information. Publish popular commentary on laws and by-laws that facilitate citizens' understanding of the specific language of legal documents. Guarantee access to information of public importance regardless of residential area. Create conditions for equal access to information disseminated via information and telecommunication networks.

4. Ensure the adaptation of official information so that it may be better understood by the general populace. For this purpose create special services in state agencies and institutions that are responsible for the adaptation and promulgation of official information. Include on-demand adaptation of information for citizens in the list of official duties for state and municipal employees. Include explaining the rules for filling out documents to citizens and providing citizens with information in officials' formal duties.

5. Introduce measures to help citizens better navigate the flow of information and make it easier to search. Create referencing, consulting and dispatching services, information booths, reference books addressing certain segments of the population, etc. Involve non-governmental organisations in such activities.

6. Expand the sector developing information-oriented products and services for people with special needs (for example, individuals with limited mobility). Each institution must provide access to information to people with special needs and inform them of this right.

### **3. Ensuring the right to receive targeted information from the government on socially significant matters**

#### **Basic Requirements for Ensuring This Right:**

- Information should be disseminated in a timely manner and with consideration of consumer interests;
- Information that is of social importance must be processed and disseminated;
- Information that is particularly relevant and meaningful for realising the rights and interests of an individual or group should be disseminated in a targeted manner and emphasised;
- The method for providing information should take into account the preferences and limitations of individuals and target groups.

#### **Recommendations for Government Organisations**

Organisations must:

1. Guarantee the timely distribution of information to citizens on changes relating to their rights and responsibilities. Publish legal information, laws, decisions, regulations and departmental instructions, taking into account the abilities and limitations of target groups and individuals. Inform citizens in a timely and targeted manner about the content of legislative changes relating to their rights and responsibilities.

2. Disseminate information through effective public networks (including outsourced paid services). Ensure that interested NGOs have free access to official information. Create permanent communication channels and infrastructure for disseminating information among non-profit organisations and initiative groups.

3. Ensure the disclosure and wide dissemination of socially significant information, including special measures to make it understandable and reach those categories of citizens who are most interested in obtaining it. Adhere to understandable and consistent rules for the publication and dissemination of information that have proven effective.

## **4. Ensuring the right to make an inquiry: the right to be sure of a timely, substantive and relevant answer**

### **Basic Requirements for Ensuring This Right:**

- Standards of information presentation in responses to inquiries should be formalised and set out in public officials' job descriptions;
- Requests for information should be dealt with quickly and impartially;
- Answers to inquiries should contain complete, accurate, and up-to-date information on the content of the inquiry, in a format accessible to the user;
- Refusals to provide information should be justified and allow for the possibility of appeal;
- Users should have the option to receive supplementary explanations and advice;
- Making an inquiry should be as simple and economical as possible. The state should provide various methods of contacting public authorities;
- The cost of receiving information should not be excessively high, in order to avoid dissuading citizens from making inquiries.

### **Recommendations for Government Organisations**

Organisations must:

1. Formalise expectations concerning the quality of information provision. Implement corresponding rules and standards, and uphold these standards by means of administrative procedures and adequate funding. Put measures in place to make officials personally responsible for wrongful or unmotivated refusals to provide the information requested, or for providing incomplete, inaccurate, or out-of-date information.
2. Provide citizens with round-the-clock access to the following information: the progress made in responding to their inquiry; and the full name of the official responsible for preparing the response. Remote access to this information should also be available.
3. Provide various methods of inquiry: in oral or written form, by telephone or email, or online.
4. Set limits on charges for providing and processing information. Provide a single list of payable services. Establish general procedures, principles, and charges for furnishing information. The costs should not exceed the total amount spent on copying and sending the information. Information disseminated online should be free.
5. Develop institutions to protect the right to access information (inspectorates or bodies to file complaints, including administrative courts; or bodies registering data banks) and create unified information dispatching centres. The need for timely information that can allow a person to realise his or her rights and responsibilities in full requires the presence of accelerated procedures for the protection of the right (not abolishing the court).

## **5. Encouraging the independence and activity of citizens in providing them with information**

### **Basic Requirements for Ensuring This Right:**

- The government should provide legislative guarantees of maximum information that is of public interest;
- The list of classified information should be concise and limited, and the classification procedure should include a strict system protecting it from abuse;
- Officials should bear personal responsibility if they violate the information provision rules;
- Information that is officially distributed should be accessible to all;
- The rules for the provision, production, and storage of information should take into account the need of the individuals to retrieve said information;
- The ability to protect the right to access information must be supported by the existence of independent institutions which ensure the realization thereof;
- Information transfer mechanisms should be chosen on an alternative basis, while the government maintains responsibility and guarantees the provision of information.

### **Recommendations for Government Organisations**

Organisations must:

1. Provide access to all information at the disposal of government authorities that is of public interest except for that which is classified by law as restricted access.
2. Provide in detail the rules and procedures pertaining to the access to and disclosure of information. Define clear and understandable grounds for classifying information as restricted, ensure the concept of sensitive information is understood, limit the quantity of classified information and guarantee protection against abuses of this system. Recognise that refusal to provide information is illegal, aside from cases where the disclosure of information poses a threat to the objectives clearly stated in the law and when the damage anticipated as a result of disclosure is greater than the public interest in this information.
3. Publish departmental indices of classified information. Publish information which shows the activities of the government, the process and outcomes of decision making, as well as, for example, lists of the authorities' incoming and outgoing correspondence, reports of activities, results of audits and reviews, etc. Create other arrangements for public scrutiny of the validity of departmental information that is subject to access restrictions.
4. Recognise the legal validity and authenticity of data distributed electronically. Require that parties distributing official data provide reliable and verifiable information about the source of the information and the opportunity to compare the distributed information with the original.
5. Create opportunities for independent research. Create web resources to disclose relevant information of public importance. Provide access to a list of informational resources that will be at the disposal of the government and individual departments, and metadata. Develop interactive services to provide information and deliver public

services.

6. Provide regulations and procedures governing access to archives and original sources, as well as over meetings of the government and the local self-governments.

7. If there is no direct need to identify users, always create opportunities for anonymous access.

8. Support self-organising citizens by providing them with information to create alternative non-governmental networks for disseminating information.



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