

ACCESS TO INFORMATION



MAIN RESULTS

Representative public opinion poll on public attitudes regarding the right of access to information among adult Bulgarian population and journalists from Bulgarian media

September 2008

Aims and tasks of the public opinion poll

Aiming at better efficiency in achieving its mission to facilitate the exercise of the right of access to information, Access to Information Programme Foundation assigned to Market LINKS, a Research and Consulting Agency, to perform a public opinion poll among adult Bulgarian population, as well as among Bulgarian journalists from electronic and printed media. The public opinion poll had the following aims.

1. To study the level of awareness about the right of access to public information – among Bulgarian citizens and journalists.
2. To outline public attitude towards the guarantee and respect of the right of access to public information.
3. To outline practices and problems with obtaining access to public information.

The percentage of people aware of the right of access to public information among the adult population is lower (38%) than that of the aware journalists (94%). The share of aware citizens is considerably higher among the respondents with higher education (52%), compared to the respondents with elementary education (25%).

The percentage of journalists who believe that the right of access to public information is guaranteed by Bulgarian legislation is higher (63%). Among citizens, this percentage is only 32. 18% of responding citizens cannot define their opinion on legislative guarantees with regard to that right.

It is a common belief that the right of access to public information is not respected in Bulgaria. Out of all questioned citizens, 62% hold that opinion. The number of journalists who expressed the same opinion is again high – 81%.

The majority of adult Bulgarians are not aware of the procedure of obtaining public information and do not know whom to address to receive public information and what to do in case of refusal. The percentage of citizens who are aware of the process of receiving public information is very low. Only 7% know well what they shall do to receive information that is of their interest from a State or Municipal Administration. Other 21% have only general knowledge about the process.

The percentage of citizens who are aware of which institution to address to receive access to information is low - only 8% are well aware, while 20% have only general knowledge.

Regarding the process of accessing information, citizens are least aware about the institution they have to address in case they are refused access to information - 65% state they do not know, while 15% have a vague idea.

Journalists are much better aware of the procedures for obtaining access to public information. A problem to some extent for them is to figure out which institution to address in case of refusal for provision of public information.

A small part of the adult Bulgarian citizens have exercised their right of access to public information – only 7%. Other 63% state that they have not exercised it yet, but are likely to do it. The percentage of citizens who have definitely not used it but are also definite in not exercising their right of access to public information in the future is not negligible – 19%.

The exercise of the right of access to public information is, however, widespread among Bulgarian journalists – 62% have already exercised it, and other 24% state that they would seek/request for public information if they had the occasion.

The biggest percentage of those who have exercised their right of access to information is that of citizens who make their request for public information in the institutions themselves – orally (39%). Other 36% request information in a written form, while 24% do that via Internet.

Out of the journalists who have used the right of access to information, the greatest share belongs to those who have submitted their request in the particular institution – in writing – 49%, other 32% request information in the institution – orally, and 17% - via Internet.

The percentage of citizens who state that they definitely need assistance in the process of requesting public information is high – 49%. That percentage among journalists is 15.

The majority of journalists (71%), however, state that they need assistance/consultations in cases when they are refused access to public information. 23% of the respondent citizens hold that opinion.

Out of the citizens who have exercised their right of access to public information, only half have received the entire information they needed/have requested. Another third of them state that they have received the information but it was not complete. The shares of journalists who have received the entire requested information and those who have received incomplete information is 37% each. Among journalists who have used their right of access to information, the share of those who have been refused access is higher – 18%, compared to the ratio of citizens which is 12%. The share of journalists who have not received a response with regard to their request is also higher – 8%, compared to that number among the citizens - 6%.

Journalists are more aware of cases in which access to public information has been refused – 79% know about at least one such case while 14% of the citizens know that.

The percentage of journalists who have used their right of access to information and has been refused but did not appeal the refusal because they did not know how to do it is pretty high (65%).

According to the results from the public opinion poll, of greatest interest to Bulgarian journalists is information related to activity reports of local authorities (93%), financial reports of institutions (90%) and budgets of institutions (90%).

Among citizens, the interest is directed at the highest extent towards activity reports of local authorities (60%), budgets of institutions (54%) and financial reports of institutions (54%).

The majority of citizens (54%) explicitly state that they do not follow media publications and broadcasts related to problems with access to information provision.

Main recommendation: Regarding citizens, the undertaking of a wide public awareness campaign on the right of access to information is necessary. With regard to the journalists, trainings and consultations on what to do in case institutions refuse to provide public information are necessary.