



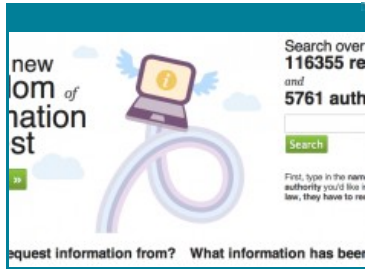
Council of Europe

WOB value

▶ With a little help from a site

16/05

2012



Websites transmitting requests and providing information from official authorities have mushroomed during the last couple of years. The results range from a good start to success. Here's a guidance.

The Brits were first out in Europe, and are by far leading by numbers of transmitted requests.

[WhatDoTheyKnow.com](#) in the UK (actually England and Wales, Scotland is a different story) has at the time of writing filed 116355 request since the start 2008 to all in all 5761 official authorities.

"We don't yet publish statistics partly because we're concerned about making generalisations and trying to draw conclusions which the data doesn't really support. But we can

say that 73,833 have been marked partially or fully successful. Note that the figure for total requests includes all those "in progress", not just those which have been concluded," explains **Richard Taylor**, volunteer at the website. "We have many people from all those categories. mySociety the organisation which runs WhatDoTheyKnow has a focus on making it easier for people to participate in civic life, so we're certainly aiming at the "ordinary people"; the public at large, but overall we simply want to see as great a proportion of FOI requests as possible made in public via our site, so the requests and responses are easily available to the public," he adds.

Rescued kittens

When asked about interesting information achieved by the site Richard Taylor points at [a summery](#) of no less than 366 findings, one for each day for the last year.

Amongst the answers are information about money spent by Kent Council on travels abroad, how much oil the British government keeps in reserve, and how many kittens have been rescued by South Wales Fire Service since 2011 (77), to mention a few.

Measured by numbers of request the German site [FragdenStaat.de](#) (ask the state) probably comes second in Europe although on a somewhat lower scale. Since the start in august 2011 FragdenStaat has transmitted close to 1000 requests, including some multiple request for the same information.

"I think we have had an incredible experience with it over the past few months - it is now accounting for a third of the German FOI requests and has been part in quite a few campaigns. Most users are somewhere between activist and ordinary people not necessarily with a clear political agenda, but with an interest and some persistence," says system administrator **Friedrich Lindenberg**.

Results by ikons

At the time of writing 77 request have been given a full answer, for example the costs of conducting a controversial census (counting of people) in 2011 (€ 710 millions). 53 have been partly answered, where as some 300 are being processed, or have been delayed or rejected.

The webpage [Anfragen](#) (requests) has a nice and easy way to sort results, with ikons understandable also for non-German readers.

On interesting results Friedrich Lindenberg mentions a request for a paper on corruption of members of the German parliament, produced by a parliamentary research service. The service claimed copyright to prevent its distribution. Then **Stefan Wehrmayer**, the site's project manager, added a possibility on the site for more people to ask for the same report.

"This was used by about 400 people and created an interesting dynamic, although I'm not sure its effects will be entirely positive," Friederich Lindenberg says.

(For a more thorough interview about the start and considerations behind the German site, see an [interview](#) at the Alaveteli program website)

A right even without a law

The Spanish [TuDerechoaSaber.es](#) ("Your right to know") is an ambitious [newcomer](#) on the scene. It is built on the same Alaveteli platform as the british WhatDoTheyKnow, and was launched with the double aims of providing a help to information and to promote a Spanish legislation on access to information.

"Freedom of information is recognized as a fundamental right, so request for access can be done also without a law, just by exercising the right," says **Victoria Anderica** campaigner and project coordinator with [Access-Info Europe](#) a pro-transparency organisation based in Madrid which helped launch the Spanish site together with civil rights group [Fundación Ciudadana Civio](#)

Since the start in March this year the site has transmitted some 400 requests and counting.

Ask the EU

Another Alaveteli-site also based in Madrid is the [AsktheEU.org](#) run by Access-info with support from a number of groups and actors from civil society.

Since the launch in September 2011 AsktheEU has transmitted some 100 requests to EU bodies and institutions. About a third of the request transmitted by AsktheEU have been classified as partially or fully successful.

In 2010 the Commissions received 6127 applications for documents all in all, according to an annual reports on transparency. The Council received 9184 requests the same year.

Besides an online request form and published results from previous inquiries, AsktheEU has also got a Request Guide on how to approach the EU-institutions and what to expect from them.

Interest revealed

A common feature for three of the four sites described above is that filed request are put on the web thus revealing

Related

[21/05/2012](#) Negotiations starts on an "unacceptable" proposal

[03/05/2012](#) Presidency criticised : "Even worse than the Commission" -

[11/04/2012](#) World's oldest access law will remain

interest for journalists preparing a story before it has been published, or giving hints of what interests a NGO might have for an upcoming campaign.

Richard Taylor at WhatDoTheyKnow, is aware of candid requests might improve the use of the site:

"We have lots of journalists who monitor the site for releases; as we don't offer the facility to make requests in private we do miss out on some requests journalists make themselves and which they prefer to make in private," he says

The German site FragdenStaat provides a possible embargo, letting reporters file requests and get answers privately and then releasing the material once the story has been published.

"But the press has been reluctant from what I hear, even though we have an embargo, unlike WhatDoTheyKnow," Friedrich Lindenberg comments.

None in Scandinavia

Two similar sites up with the same concept are Informatazyrtare.org, in Kosovo and Spinfo.org in Macedonia.

In Scandinavia there are, to our knowledge, no similar sites aimed to help the public at large, partly because access legislation has had a longer tradition with a less felt need to introduce the concept to the public.

In Sweden tips and tricks of the trade are provided by the Journalist union but on a closed site for members only.

The Swedish association for investigative journalists, [Föreningen för Grävande Journalister](http://Foreningen for Grävande Journalister) (litterally the association of digging journalists) runs a public site with [tools](#) and recent [case-law](#), but in Swedish only.

In Denmark the site Aabenhedstinget.dk (Openness meeting) collects case law, provides good examples and reports on legal news, somewhat in line with wobbing.eu

The Norwegian gateway

Norway is in this respect an interesting story of its own with a official website [Offentlig Elektronisk Postjournal](http://OffentligElektroniskPostjournal) (Electronic Public Records) run by the government. The site provides guidance on how to request information, some download possibilities, and a "shopping basket" for documents, like baskets or charts found at commercial webshops.

The Norwegian site is partly in English. As Norway is closely linked to EU-legislation, although not a member state, the Oep.no can provide a useful shortcut to documents with relevance beyond the Norwegian borders.

Outside Europe - hat tip Toby McIntoch at Freedominfo.org – there are the US-sites FOIA Letter Generator started in 1996 and Muckrock. Civil society sites have also been established in [New Zealand](#), [Chile](#), and [Brazil](#), whereas the [site in Mexico](#) is an official site run by the state and the one in [Honduras](#) is run by the country's Information Officer.

Staffan Dahllöf

Tags: [access to documents](#) | [Access-Info Europe](#) | [Alaveteli](#) | [FragdenStaat](#) | [Whatdotheyknow](#) | [Wob international](#) | [Wobbed out news](#)



Wobbing.eu recommends

- HD - Krant wint weer slag in wob-zaak Haarlemmermeer
20/04 - 10:32 | FPD Feed
- Besluit op Wob-verzoek inzake beslistermijnen
16/04 - 12:45 | FPD Feed
- Bezwaar tegen weigering WOB-verzoek Molenkwartier | BredaVandaag.nl
16/04 - 12:42 | FPD Feed
- WOB-verzoek over vergunning Tristan van der V. | nu.nl/algemeen | Het laatste nieuws het eerst op nu.nl
16/04 - 12:34 | FPD Feed
- Tweede Conferentie voor Verhalende Journalistiek
22/03 - 12:34 | FPD Feed

[Go to the archive](#)

FOI community

- Liberia Announces Intention to Appoint FOI Commissioner | Freedom Info
11/05 - 09:53 | FOI community
- Sierra Leone Parliament to Consider FOI Next Week | Freedom Info
04/05 - 10:55 | FOI community
- Local Bodies Score Better in Georgia Access Study | Freedom Info
24/04 - 10:01 | FOI community
- Pleidooi voor een lekkende overheid - Analyse - De Nieuwe Reporter - Journalistiek & Nieuwe Media
19/04 - 11:47 | FOI community
- FOI debate: The genie of freedom will never be put back - Telegraph
19/04 - 09:03 | FOI community

[Go to the archive](#)

Tweets

- robevansgdn: RT @BenQuinn75: Accused Met officers part of unit behind Nigerian embezzler's conviction <http://t.co/gH12Tyjk> More on that @paullewis @r ...
22/05 - 21:15 | United Kingdom - Rob Evans
- robevansgdn: RT @BenQuinn75: Accused Met officers part of unit behind Nigerian embezzler's conviction <http://t.co/gH12Tyjk> More on that @paullewis @r ...
22/05 - 21:15 | United Kingdom - David Leigh
- robevansgdn: Metropolitan police anti-corruption unit investigated over payments <http://t.co/scilRbgh> via @guardian
22/05 - 21:14 | United Kingdom - Rob Evans
- robevansgdn: RT @PaulLewis: Accused Met officers part of unit behind notorious Nigerian embezzler's conviction <http://t.co/3W9kVvzw>
22/05 - 21:14 | United Kingdom - Rob Evans
- robevansgdn: RT @PaulLewis: Exclusive: Metropolitan police anti-corruption unit investigated over payments <http://t.co/6tt0gTTT> < This is a biggy
22/05 - 21:14 | United Kingdom - Rob Evans

[Go to the archive](#)

Wob per country

- | | | | |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| ● Albania | ● Estonia | ● Kosovo | ● Poland |
| ● Austria | ● Finland | ● Latvia | ● Portugal |
| ● Belgium | ● France | ● Lithuania | ● Romania |
| ● Bosnia | ● Germany | ● Luxembourg | ● Serbia |
| ● Britain | ● Greece | ● Macedonia | ● Slovakia |
| ● Bulgaria | ● Hungary | ● Malta | ● Slovenia |
| ● Croatia | ● Iceland | ● Montenegro | ● Spain |
| ● Cyprus | ● Ireland | ● Netherlands | ● Sweden |
| ● Czech Republic | ● Italy | ● Norway | ● Switzerland |
| ● Denmark | | | |

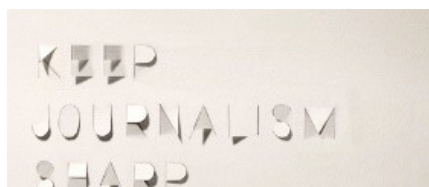
Wob international

- Council of Europe
- European Union
- World Bank

Wobbing Europe is a project by the Pascal Decroos Fund, an independent non-profit association registered in Belgium (vzw/asbl).

Contact

Wobbing Europe
Rozenweg 4b



Follow us on



