

Press Release: Information Commissioner's Office and Transparency Maldives Launch RTI Implementation Assessment Report

27 April 2025- Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and Transparency Maldives (TM) published the Comprehensive Assessment on the Implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act in the Maldives. This assessment was conducted in collaboration with the international human rights organization, the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) using their methodology on assessing RTI implementation. It evaluates the effectiveness of RTI implementation across four key areas: central mechanisms of the ICO, institutional frameworks at public authorities, proactive disclosure practices, and reactive disclosure in response to information requests.

Data for the assessment was collected from a representative sample of 30 Public Authorities across different sectors including government ministries and departments, independent institutions, courts, local councils and state-owned enterprises.

Under the assessment, the Maldives received an overall score for mediocre (0.56 out of 1.00) which signifies the while there were some positive results, there is still a lot of room for improvement across the board.

Key Findings:

- **Timeliness of Information Requests:** Only 38% of RTI requests received full information within the period prescribed in the law. While public authorities acknowledged and responded to requests within the stipulated time, the actual information requested was often not provided. Only 45% of RTI submissions resulted in the provision of the information requested fully, with some information arriving after the stipulated timeframe.
- **Lack of RTI Implementation Plans:** None of the public authorities assessed had formal RTI implementation plans. This absence leads to significant delays and instances of missing requests altogether. Public authorities are urged to develop detailed implementation plans to streamline the processing of RTI requests.
- **Need for Enhanced Online Infrastructure:** Proactive disclosure remains the weakest aspect of RTI implementation. Challenges include managing websites that fulfill disclosure requirements. Efforts must be made to develop and maintain websites for local councils and smaller public authorities, ensuring information is accessible through other means if websites are not feasible.
- **Challenges Faced by RTI Practitioners:** Despite denials of external pressure by Information Officers, RTI practitioners and journalists reported delays and withholding of information, indicating possible fear of reprisal or institutional reluctance. Journalists feel targeted, with authorities often abusing RTI law provisions to extend deadlines without valid reasons.

Key Recommendations:

Information Commissioner's Office and Transparency Maldives recommend the following key actions to promote effective RTI implementation.

- **Institutional Capacity Building:** Prioritize the development of online infrastructure for public authorities to support proactive disclosures, including necessary budget and technical support for website maintenance.
- **Alternative Information Disclosure Methods:** Introduce alternative means for information disclosure for institutions without website access or management capabilities.
- **Staff Capacity Building:** Enhance the skills of relevant staff, including Information Officers, increase accountability, and develop institutional RTI implementation plans to streamline and improve information provision.

A concerted effort by public authorities, oversight bodies, and civil society is essential to ensure the right to information is not only protected in law but realized in practice. Information Commissioner's Office and Transparency Maldives urge all stakeholders to work together to uphold the spirit of the RTI Act and ensure transparency and accountability in the Maldives.

For more information, please contact:

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Assessment on the Implementation of Right to Information Act – Maldives