

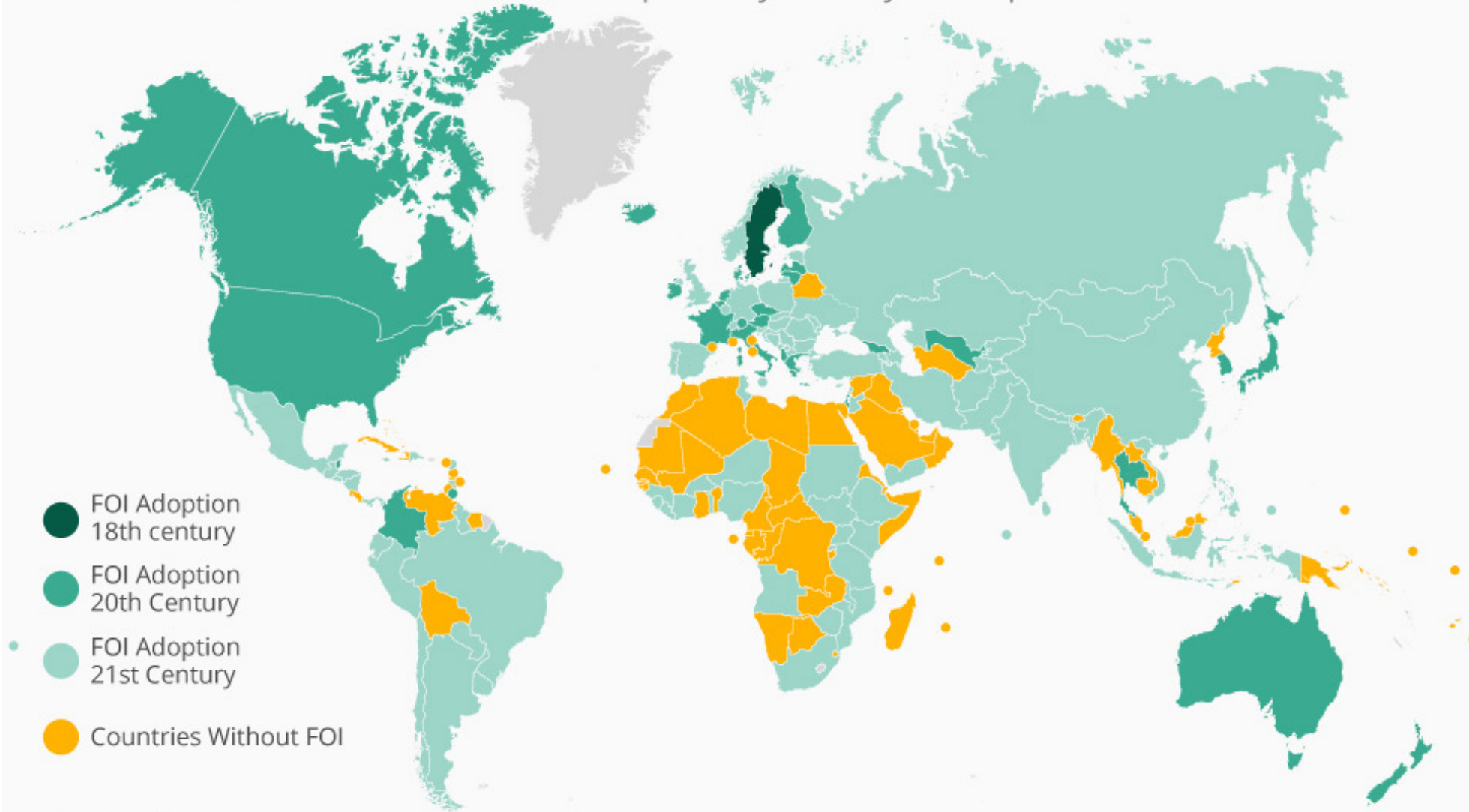
# Access to document laws as an advocacy tool

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# Where Do Freedom of Information Laws Exist?

Global freedom of information law adoption, by century of adoption



@StatistaCharts Source: Freedominfo.org

# Accessing EU documents: Rights and regulations

- EU rules on access to documents are found in [Regulation 1049/2001](#)
- They apply to the Commission, Council and Parliament, and other EU institutions have similar systems in place
- The right to ask for EU documents is found in
  - Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
  - Article 42 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union
- If you are asking for environmental information, the Aarhus Directive (Directive 2003/4/EC) on public access to environmental information also applies.
- Asking for EU documents is free of charge, can be done in any language, and you never have to say why you want the information.

# Accessing EU documents: Rules and processes

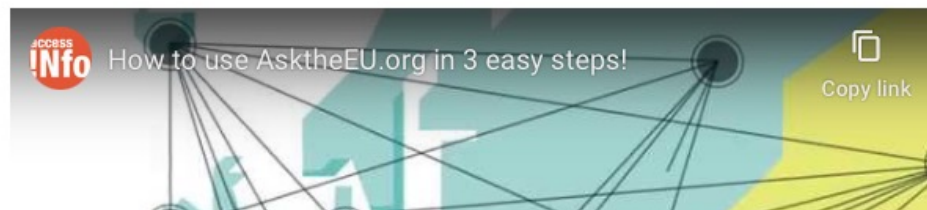
- Requests must be made in writing
- Institutions must respond within 15 working days
- Complex requests can warrant extension by further 15 days
- Institutions may refuse – wholly or partially – to fulfil a request if:
  - May undermine public interest or privacy
  - May threaten ongoing decision-making procedures, legal procedures or commercial interests
- Refusals can be challenged in a confirmatory application
- Continued refusals can be taken to the European Ombudsman

# AsktheEU.org

- Platform for making requests; optional but highly recommended
- List of EU institutions and organisations, direct to correct contact point
- Record of correspondence, automatic reminders etc.
- Advice on framing requests, assistance with submission and follow up
- Source of previous / existing requests

The screenshot shows the AskTheEU.org website homepage. At the top left is the logo "asktheEU.org" with the tagline "it's your right". To the right are language options: "English", "Deutsch", "Español", and "Français". Further right is a "Sign in or sign up" link and a search bar with a magnifying glass icon. Below the header is a green navigation bar with links: "How it works", "Which EU body?", "Make a request", "Browse requests", and "Blog". The main content area features a background image of various European national flags. A large white heading reads "Get answers from EU Institutions". Below this is a paragraph: "AskTheEU.org is an online platform for citizens to send access to documents requests directly to EU institutions." There are two buttons: a green "Send a request" button and a white "Find out more" button with a green underline. Below the main content are two sections: "How to AskTheEU.org" and "Top requests". The "How to AskTheEU.org" section includes a thumbnail with the text "How to use AsktheEU.org in 3 easy steps!" and a "Copy link" button. The "Top requests" section shows a request titled "DG Trade contacts with industry lobbyists about EU-US trade negotiation..." with a green speech bubble icon containing the number "114".

## How to AskTheEU.org



## Top requests

DG Trade contacts with industry lobbyists about EU-US trade negotiation...

114

# Some considerations

- Right to documents, not information
- Careful wording of requests
- Automatic publication of response (AsktheEU Pro)
- Commitment of time and effort
- The reality... '[the Ombudsman](#) has seen a sharp increase in complaints about access to document delays in the Commission, with the number in 2023 already four times higher than it was for the entirety of 2020'



# Examples of FOI requests in health & social research

*Original Scholarship*

## Public Meets Private: Conversations Between Coca-Cola and the CDC

NASON MAANI HESSARI,\* GARY RUSKIN,†  
MARTIN McKEE,\* and DAVID STUCKLER‡

International Journal of  
Environmental Research  
and Public Health



Article

## Targeting Children and Their Mothers, Building Allies and Marginalising Opposition: An Analysis of Two Coca-Cola Public Relations Requests for Proposals

Benjamin Wood <sup>1,\*</sup>, Garv Ruskin <sup>2</sup> and Garv Sacks <sup>1</sup>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Corporate political activity in the context of unhealthy food advertising restrictions across Transport for London: A qualitative case study

Kathrin Lauber <sup>1,2\*</sup>, Daniel Hunt <sup>3</sup>, Anna B. Gilmore <sup>1,2</sup>, Harry Rutter <sup>2,4</sup>

OPEN ACCESS Freely available online



## Towards National Surgical Surveillance in the UK – A Pilot Study

Riaz Agha <sup>1,2\*</sup>

1 National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence Scholar, London, United Kingdom, 2 Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Cambridge, United Kingdom

Int J Ment Health Addiction (2011) 9:276–281  
DOI 10.1007/s11469-010-9284-3

## Problem Gambling Treatment Within the British National Health Service

Jane Rigbye • Mark D. Griffiths

**researching sexual violence  
against older people:  
reflecting on the use  
of Freedom of Information  
requests in a feminist study**

Hannah Rows

Original Article



BJPIR

## The Prevent Duty in UK higher education: Insights from freedom of information requests

Andrew Whiting , Ben Campbell,  
Keith Spiller and Imran Awan

The British Journal of Politics and  
International Relations  
2021, Vol. 23(3) 513–532  
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# Thank you

Dr Eleanor Brooks @Ellie\_Brooks



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
School of Social  
& Political Science



UK Research  
and Innovation





# Useful resources

- [European Ombudsman Access to Documents Guide](#)
- [Ombudsman A2D inquiries](#)
- [AsktheEU How to request and appeal guide](#)
- [MySociety links to FOI systems in other countries](#)
- [National Centre for Research Methods \(NCRM\) resources on FOI](#)