

1.75 crore RTI applications filed since 2005: Study

Every day 4,800 applications are filed to access information from the government across India. The first decadal study conducted after Right to Information (RTI) Act implemented in October 2005 has revealed that over 1.75 crore applications have been filed with one-fourth being requests to the Centre.

A study conducted by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), exclusively accessed by ET, reveals that 27.2% (47.66 lakh) of the total RTIs filed between 2005 and 2015 were to the different ministries and departments under the Centre.

Maharashtra finishes a close second with 26.40% (46.26 lakh) of the applications being submitted in the same time period.

Karnataka government received 11.83% (20.73 lakh) applications. The top three – Centre, Maharashtra and Karnataka governments – received two-thirds or 65.43% of the RTI applications filed by Indians in the last 10 years.

The data attains significance as there is no official record of the total number of RTI applications received in India even as RTI Act enters its 12th year of implementation on October 12.

The study conducted by CHRI's Sneha Chandna reveals that southern states account for a quarter of RTIs received. Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala received almost a quarter 24.90% of the RTI applications submitted across the country.

The study also points to less frequent use of RTI Act by the northeastern states. While Meghalaya received 11,092 requests in 2005-15 Nagaland government received 16,009 requests.

CHRI's Venkatesh Nayak says, "The number of RTI applications needs to reduce. For this, the governments need to identify frequently asked questions and proactively disclose that information.

The governments also must fulfill their obligations of spreading awareness about RTI with particular focus on the disadvantaged segments of society."

The study points out that the actual number of RTI applications could be higher since many public authorities do not report their annual compliance, the number of applications filed with them does not get accounted for, Nayak explained, "Under Section 25 of RTI Act, all public authorities under Centre and state governments are required to submit annual status of implementation to information commissions.

But compliance with the statutory requirement has been poor. Also, the information commissions follow disparate cycles of annual reporting – some follow calendar year and some adopt the financial year reporting cycle."

The state information commissions, the final appellate authorities in the states for RTI Act, also have been playing truant as far as their responsibilities are concerned.

The study has found that basic responsibilities of publishing annual reports and having functional websites are not followed by the state commissions.

Four state information commissions – Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh – have not published any annual report on their website.

Information commissions of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have been reporting state statistics erratically. The information commission of Goa does not have a functional website, the study says.

(Economic Times)