

INFO REMOVER / RESEARCH

How Do EU Data Protection Authorities Explain the Right to Be Forgotten for News Articles?

A 12-country review of official guidance on search-engine delisting, old news and practical complaint routes

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71 Yes · 13 Partially · 12 Unknown · 87.5% assessed

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A 12-country review of official guidance on search-engine delisting, old news and practical complaint routes

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Scope note: This report studies how official data protection authorities document the Right to Be Forgotten in the context of news and search results. It does not measure legal protection, predict whether a request will succeed, or provide legal advice.

Funding and Conflict of Interest Disclosure

This research was funded and conducted by Info Remover. Info Remover provides paid online content removal, search de-indexing, privacy and reputation services, including services that may involve Right to Be Forgotten requests. There was no external sponsor.

The practical steps, official forms and complaint routes in this report can be used without hiring Info Remover. No paid service is required to follow the public procedures described here.

The study evaluates public documentation and official procedures. Info Remover client outcomes, internal case data and commercial conversion data were not used as evidence. This report is not independent of Info Remover’s commercial interests, and Info Remover is not a law firm.

Executive Summary

The Right to Be Forgotten (RTBF) is often described as if it were a single removal mechanism. In practice, the official guidance reviewed here describes a narrower and more procedural reality. A person may ask a search engine to stop showing specified links for a name-based search while the underlying article remains online at the publisher. Whether delisting is justified can depend on factors such as freedom of expression, public interest, the age and accuracy of the information, the individual’s public role and the nature of the underlying event.

Info Remover reviewed official data protection authority guidance, FAQs, complaint procedures and directly relevant decisions across 12 EU countries. The fixed study contained 96 coded country-criterion fields (12 countries × 8 criteria). The final publication dataset contains 71 Yes, 13 Partially and 12 Unknown / inaccessible, giving 84/96 (87.5%) substantively assessed coverage.

All 12 countries have a verified complaint or escalation route in the material reviewed. Journalism or freedom-of-expression considerations are clearly documented in 10 of 11 assessed countries, with one additional country coded Partially. Public interest is assessed in all 12 countries, with 10 Yes and 2 Partially. The distinction between source removal and search-engine de-indexing is clearly explained in eight of 10 assessed countries and partially explained in two.

These findings are not a country ranking. More accessible documentation does not mean stronger privacy rights, a more favourable authority, or a higher probability of delisting.

Key Terms and Legal Context

Term	Meaning in this report
GDPR	The EU General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679).
Article 17	The GDPR provision formally titled “Right to erasure (right to be forgotten)”. It sets out grounds for erasure and exceptions, including where processing is necessary for freedom of expression and information.

Term	Meaning in this report
RTBF	Shorthand here for the Right to Be Forgotten. In search-engine cases, the practical remedy can be delisting rather than deletion of the source article.
Delisting / de-indexing	Removing specified links from results shown when someone searches for the person's name. The underlying webpage can remain online.
Controller	The person or organisation that determines why and how personal data are processed. A search engine and a publisher can each be controllers for separate processing activities.
DPA	Data protection authority, used here as shorthand for a national data-protection supervisory authority.
Coding labels	Yes = direct and clear official support; Partially = incomplete, indirect or narrow official support; Unknown / inaccessible = the required official evidence could not be reliably established.

Key Findings

Finding	Verified result
Overall documentation coverage	84/96 (87.5%) substantively assessed
Complaint / escalation route	12 Yes / 12 assessed
Journalism / freedom of expression	10 Yes, 1 Partially / 11 assessed; 1 Unknown
Public interest	10 Yes, 2 Partially / 12 assessed
Source removal vs search de-indexing	8 Yes, 2 Partially / 10 assessed; 2 Unknown
Remaining unresolved fields	12/96 (12.5%)

What We Studied

The study asked a narrow question: how clearly do national data protection authorities explain the considerations and procedures relevant to Right to Be Forgotten requests involving news articles and search results? It did not submit live RTBF requests, measure response times in practice or assess the likelihood of removal.

The 12 countries were fixed before final coding: Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Austria, Sweden, Croatia, Malta and Poland. Each was assessed against eight predefined documentation criteria. Evidence was limited to official national DPA material, including guidance pages, FAQs, procedures, complaint pages and directly relevant DPA decisions or case studies.

Findings by Criterion

Documentation criterion	Yes / assessed	Partially / assessed	Unknown
Journalism / freedom of expression	10/11	1/11	1
Public interest	10/12	2/12	0
Age / outdatedness	9/11	2/11	1
Accuracy / inaccuracy	9/9	0/9	3
Public role / public figure status	8/10	2/10	2
Seriousness / nature of underlying event	5/9	4/9	3
Source removal vs search de-indexing	8/10	2/10	2
Complaint / escalation route	12/12	0/12	0

For each criterion, the assessed denominator counts Yes and Partially values. Unknown / inaccessible fields are excluded and shown separately. Unknown is not a negative finding.

Country Comparison

Y = Yes; P = Partially; U = Unknown / inaccessible. These are documentation codes, not outcome scores.

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Germany	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	Y	Y
France	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Spain	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	Y	Y
Italy	Y	P	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	Y
Netherlands	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y
Belgium	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Ireland	Y	Y	P	Y	Y	P	Y	Y
Austria	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	P	Y	Y
Sweden	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Croatia	P	Y	U	U	P	U	U	Y
Malta	Y	Y	Y	U	U	U	P	Y
Poland	Y	P	P	U	P	U	Y	Y

Criteria: 1 journalism/freedom of expression; 2 public interest; 3 age/outdatedness; 4 accuracy/inaccuracy; 5 public role/public figure status; 6 seriousness/nature of underlying event; 7 source removal vs search de-indexing; 8 complaint/escalation route.

What the Guidance Actually Says

Journalism and freedom of expression

Article 17 is not an absolute right. Several authorities expressly connect erasure or search-engine delisting with freedom of expression and information. The public's continuing interest in access to information can remain relevant.

Public interest

Public interest is one of the most consistently documented substantive considerations. Authorities discuss the relevance of the information to internet users, the publication context and, in some cases, whether the person remains active in the same professional or public sphere. Poland is coded Partially because the recovered UODO material addresses the balance in a media context without providing a full request-specific delisting test.

Age, accuracy and later developments

Age can be relevant, but age is not the same as irrelevance. Some official material considers whether information has become outdated or whether later developments changed the context. Accuracy is likewise treated carefully: demonstrably inaccurate information can strengthen a request, while disagreement with commentary or opinion may not.

Public role and the underlying event

Several authorities consider whether the individual plays a role in public life and whether the information relates to that role. The nature of the underlying event can also matter, including professional conduct, political activity, disciplinary matters and criminal proceedings.

Source removal and search de-indexing

A publisher controls the original article while a search engine separately processes links in search results. A successful name-based delisting request can therefore reduce visibility in search while leaving the source page online and reachable directly, through another query or through another search engine.

A Practical RTBF Framework

If the goal is to stop a result appearing for a name search, the relevant first request is generally directed to the search engine. If the goal is to change, correct or remove the original article, the publisher or source controller is a separate route.

Before submitting a request, preserve the exact result URLs, source-article URLs, screenshots and the search query used. Where relevant, document later developments, factual inaccuracies, changes in professional role or other context that explains why the result should be reassessed. Keep the original request and every response for any later DPA complaint.

Under the GDPR, a controller generally has one month to tell an individual what action it has taken on a request to exercise relevant rights, subject to a possible extension of up to two further months where the GDPR conditions are met. A DPA complaint is a separate process.

Practical Pathways by Country

The summaries below are procedural guides, not predictions of outcome. The public routes can be used directly; using Info Remover is not required.

Germany

Authority: German supervisory authorities; Hamburg DPA route used for Google complaints

Where to start: Submit the delisting request to the search engine first. Germany is decentralised; the Hamburg authority publishes a Google-specific complaint route.

Source article: Publisher/source removal is separate.

If refused or ignored: If the search engine refuses or does not resolve the issue, escalate to the competent German supervisory authority. Do not treat BfDI as the sole authority for private-sector search-engine complaints.

Official authority: <https://datenschutz-hamburg.de/>

France

Authority: CNIL

Where to start: Start with the search engine using its delisting procedure.

Source article: A request to the publisher/source is a separate route.

If refused or ignored: A controller normally has one month to respond, subject to an extension under GDPR conditions. After refusal, CNIL or a judicial route may be available.

Official authority: <https://www.cnil.fr/>

Spain

Authority: AEPD

Where to start: Start with the search engine. Contacting the publisher first is not required for a search-delisting request.

Source article: Contact the publisher separately if source correction/removal is the goal.

If refused or ignored: Escalate an unresolved rights request to the AEPD.

Official authority: <https://www.aepd.es/>

Italy

Authority: Garante per la protezione dei dati personali

Where to start: Exercise the relevant GDPR right with the controller. For search delisting, that controller is the search engine.

Source article: Source deletion/correction is a separate request to the publisher/source controller.

If refused or ignored: A rights request generally receives a response within one month, with a possible extension. Complaints to the Garante are a separate route.

Official authority: <https://www.garanteprivacy.it/>

Netherlands

Authority: Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens (AP)

Where to start: Contact the relevant controller first. A current AP search-engine-specific form was not reliably recovered in this study.

Source article: Publisher/source and search-engine processing should be treated separately.

If refused or ignored: The current AP website provides a general privacy complaint route after prior contact with the organisation.

Official authority: <https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/een-tip-of-klacht-indienen-bij-de-ap>

Belgium

Authority: Gegevensbeschermingsautoriteit / Autorité de protection des données

Where to start: Use the DPA's delisting guidance and the relevant search-engine form.

Source article: The editor/source and search engine are separate actors.

If refused or ignored: Mediation or a formal complaint can follow an unresolved request.

Official authority: <https://www.gegevensbeschermingsautoriteit.be/burger/desindexering>

Ireland

Authority: Data Protection Commission (DPC)

Where to start: Contact the controller first and retain the request and correspondence.

Source article: Use a separate publisher request if the objective is to alter the source article.

If refused or ignored: If unresolved, raise the matter through the DPC concern/complaint route and include supporting correspondence.

Official authority: <https://www.dataprotection.ie/>

Austria

Authority: Österreichische Datenschutzbehörde (DSB)

Where to start: Austria's guidance supports contacting the original site where appropriate and using the relevant search-engine delisting form for search results.

Source article: Removing a search index result does not remove the source page.

If refused or ignored: An unresolved request can be escalated through the DSB complaint procedure.

Official authority: <https://dsb.gv.at/>

Sweden

Authority: Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten (IMY)

Where to start: Contact the search engine, identify the specific search results and explain why they should be removed from name-based results.

Source article: The source article can remain online after delisting.

If refused or ignored: If unresolved, complain to IMY; a general court route can also be relevant depending on the issue.

Official authority: <https://www.imy.se/>

Croatia

Authority: Agencija za zaštitu osobnih podataka (AZOP)

Where to start: Use the search-engine RTBF route for delisting and the controller route separately for source-level rights.

Source article: Source and search are separate processing contexts.

If refused or ignored: If the controller does not respond within the GDPR period or refuses, escalate to AZOP. Administrative-court review can follow DPA decisions.

Official authority: <https://azop.hr/>

Malta

Authority: Information and Data Protection Commissioner (IDPC)

Where to start: Use the general Article 17 route with the relevant controller or its Data Protection Officer.

Source article: A separate source request is needed if the original article itself is the target.

If refused or ignored: After an unresolved request, use the IDPC complaint process. No dedicated national search-engine RTBF procedure page was confirmed in this study.

Official authority: <https://idpc.org.mt/>

Poland

Authority: Urząd Ochrony Danych Osobowych (UODO)

Where to start: UODO guidance separates source removal from search-engine delisting and points users to search-engine request routes.

Source article: Delisting does not itself delete the original article.

If refused or ignored: After an unresolved controller request, use the UODO complaint route.

Official authority: <https://uodo.gov.pl/>

Methodology

The country list and eight criteria were fixed before final coding. Evidence was accepted only where the authority itself explained the relevant point. Party submissions quoted in decisions were not automatically treated as authority reasoning.

Each country-criterion pair was coded Yes, Partially or Unknown / inaccessible. Yes required direct and sufficiently clear official support. Partially was used where the authority addressed the point only incompletely, indirectly or in a narrow example. Unknown / inaccessible was used where official evidence could not be reliably recovered. Unknown was never treated as No.

Every newly used source supporting a Yes or Partially value was reopened and checked in a second pass. This was an AI-assisted research and verification process, not independent human legal review.

Germany required a methodological exception because data-protection supervision is decentralised. The study therefore uses relevant German state-level and joint supervisory material with explicit attribution rather than treating BfDI as the sole national authority for private-sector search-engine complaints.

The Netherlands also requires a scope note. Five balancing criteria are supported by an official May 2017 AP search-delisting mediation report issued under the former Dutch Data Protection Act (Wet bescherming persoonsgegevens, Wbp), before the GDPR became applicable. Those findings are historical documentation, not a complete current Dutch Article 17 test. The current AP complaint route is separately verified.

A final targeted recovery pass re-examined only the 18 then-unresolved fields. Six were recovered: Austria age/outdatedness and accuracy as Yes, Austria event nature/seriousness as Partially, and Poland public interest, age/outdatedness and public role as Partially. Twelve remained Unknown.

Limitations

The study covers 12 selected EU countries and is not representative of the entire EU. 12 of 96 fields remain Unknown / inaccessible. Missingness is concentrated in the Netherlands (2), Austria (1), Croatia (4), Malta (3) and Poland (2).

The report measures documentation, not enforcement or legal effectiveness. It does not test complaint outcomes, response quality, actual publisher behaviour, search-engine acceptance rates or the strength of privacy protection. No success rates or country rankings should be inferred.

Website content and forms can change. The report reflects sources checked through 11 September 2026.

Data Availability and Supporting Files

The underlying research files are published alongside the report so readers can inspect the coding, evidence and recovery history.

- `country_coding_final_publication.csv` — final 12-country coding matrix
- `evidence_table_final_publication.csv` — field-level evidence and source URLs
- `recovery_log_final_publication.csv` — recovery history
- `source_register_final_publication.csv` — consolidated official-source register
- `final_unknown_evidence.csv` — final six recovered fields
- `final_unknown_recovery.csv` — full final 18-field recovery pass
- `remaining_unknowns_final_publication.md` — final unresolved fields and scope note

The HTML report at <https://info-remover.com/research/eu-right-to-be-forgotten-news-report-2026> is the version of record. This PDF is a convenience copy.

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Selected Official Sources

- GDPR Article 17 and legal text: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/>
- Netherlands AP complaint route: <https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/een-tip-of-klacht-indienen-bij-de-ap>
- Netherlands historical AP search-delisting mediation report: https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/uploads/imported/01_overzicht_bemiddeling_ap_bij_verwijdering_resultaten_zoekmachines_mei_2017.pdf
- Belgium GBA delisting guidance: <https://www.gegevensbeschermingsautoriteit.be/burger/desindexering>
- Austria DSB: <https://dsb.gv.at/>
- Poland UODO: <https://uodo.gov.pl/>

For the full claim-level mapping, use `evidence_table_final_publication.csv` and `source_register_final_publication.csv`.