
WORLD WIDE WEB
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The Case
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For The Web

WORLD WIDE WEB FOUNDATION

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The Web Foundation was established in 2009 by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web. Our mission is to establish the open web as a public good and a basic right.

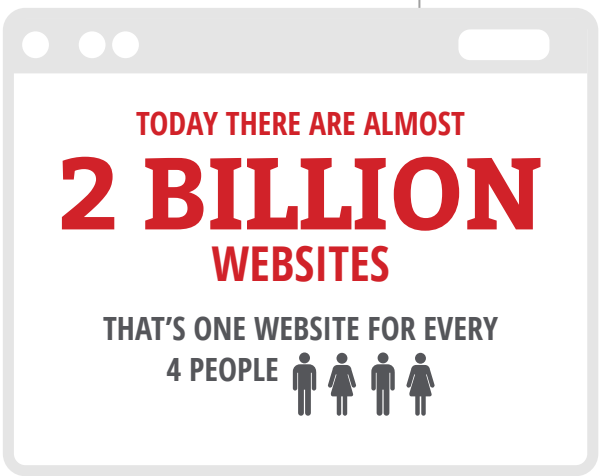
Contents

Why should we fight #ForTheWeb?

Open a newspaper, turn on the television or scroll through your Twitter feed, and you're likely to see a story about how the World Wide Web is under threat. We've lost control of our personal data and that data is being weaponised against us. The power to access news and information from around the globe is being manipulated by malicious actors. Online harassment is rampant, and governments are increasingly censoring information online — or shutting down the internet altogether.

And yet, as we approach nearly 30 years of the World Wide Web, we still have much to celebrate. In the short time since its creation by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the web has transformed our lives. It has allowed billions across the globe to connect, communicate and create, and has leveraged the power of the internet to open previously closed doors, allowing a global community to come together across borders and timezones.

As a young physicist at CERN, Sir Tim saw that valuable information was being trapped within institutions and recognised that the inability to freely share this information was undermining its value. To counter this, he created the World Wide Web as an open platform for sharing and exchanging information, open to anyone with a computer and an internet connection. In the time since his invention, the free flow of information across the globe has taken off in ways he could not have imagined: *Where there was just one website in 1990, there are nearly two billion websites today — one website for every four people in the world.*[1]



Over this time period, we've seen the tremendous power of the web to change lives and alter the course of history. The web has empowered people to uncover corruption and bring it to light, to overthrow dictators, to make their voices heard and speak truth to power. It allowed Prisca to take the exam she needed to get into medical school in Nigeria, enabled Vinodha's community in India to get subsidies for housing, and empowered Stephen in the UK to clear his name of a crime he didn't commit. It has changed the way we communicate with each other, opening up new worlds and new ways of thinking, even if we haven't left home. It has even changed the way many of us look for and find love.

1 Internet Live Stats. Total Number of Websites. Accessed 24 Oct. 2018.

"This is for everyone"

Sir Tim gave the technology of the web to the world for free, with the understanding that only by making it freely available would it reach its potential as a truly worldwide network. As he famously tweeted at the 2012 London Olympics, *"This is for everyone"*.

The reality today, however, is that the web is *not* "for everyone". Over half the world's population is still not connected to the internet. Most of the unconnected are marginalised populations in low- and middle-income countries, and most are women.

What's more, the web we know and love — the one that has spurred amazing innovation, advanced access to critical health and educational resources, and launched a million cat memes — is under attack.

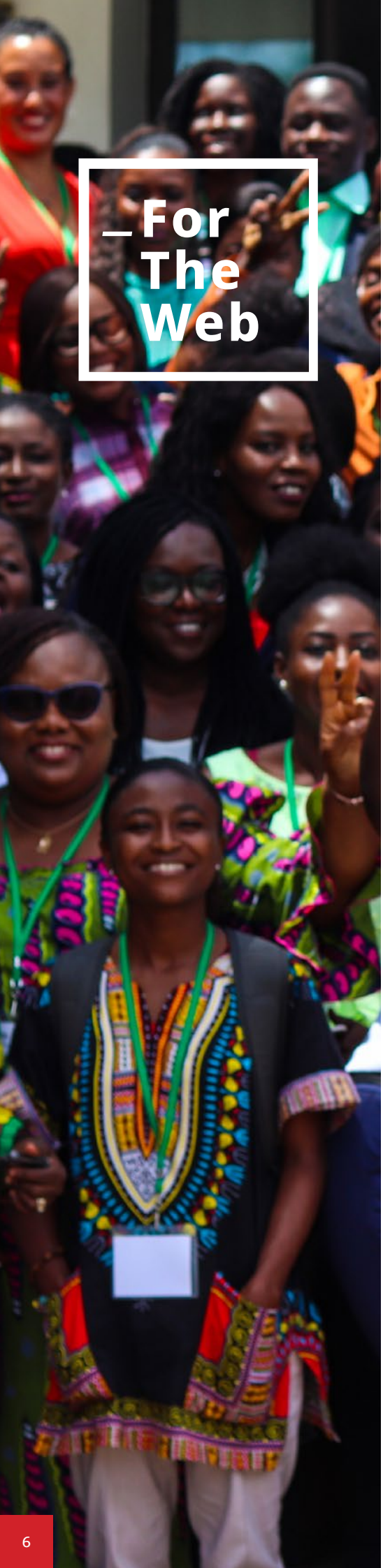
Billions of people experience the World Wide Web through a small handful of huge companies. More than 90% of online searches go through Google, giving the company tremendous power over what people see when searching online.[2] More than half of cloud services run on Amazon. Facebook boasts over 2.2 billion active monthly users, and users of Facebook-owned WhatsApp top 1.5 billion. The responsibility that weighs on the shoulders of these companies and others like them could hardly be greater.

At the same time, online decisions with serious real-life consequences are increasingly being made by algorithms and machines that are replicating biases and reinforcing inequalities found offline. Automated job recruitment tools have been revealed to use algorithms that favor white, male candidates, while advertisements for loans with punitive rates of interest have been shown predominately to low-income individuals. Identifying and fixing these issues is made all the more challenging by the fact that the code underlying the development and use of these tools is typically not open to public scrutiny.

The web is under threat — but the web we want is not out of reach. It's up to us to overcome these threats and ensure the web remains an open platform that is truly a force of good for everyone. In this brief report, we outline some of the biggest issues facing the web today, as well as a game plan for tackling them and advancing our fight for the web.

> *"If we spend a certain amount of time using the internet we have to spend a little proportion of that time defending it, worrying about it, looking out for it... Do me a favour, fight for it for me."*
>
> **— Sir Tim Berners-Lee (2014)**

2 StatCounter. Search Engine Market Share Worldwide. Accessed 24 Oct. 2018.



#ForTheWeb that is_

Accessible and affordable for everyone

For many of us, the World Wide Web is a given. We go online every day to do work, connect with friends, file our taxes, catch up on our favourite series. For some, the internet is so integrated into the fabric of their daily life that they may not even realise that they're online.

The growth of internet users over the past 30 years has been nothing short of remarkable. Just 13 years ago, in 2005, not even 16% of the global population was online, and the internet was predominately Western — nearly 50% of Europeans were online at that time, compared to just 2% of Africans. While we've made great strides in the years since — with nearly 50% of the world estimated to be using the internet today — we still have a long way to go.

Over half of the global population remains offline. Globally, the digital divide — the division between those who are able to access and use the internet and those who are not — falls primarily along gender, economic, and geographic lines. Most of the nearly 4 billion people offline today are women — research has shown that women in poor, urban areas are up to 50% less likely to be online than men in the same communities. Most of those offline live in low- and middle-income countries. The percentage of Europeans online today (80%) is nearly four times that of Africans (22%).

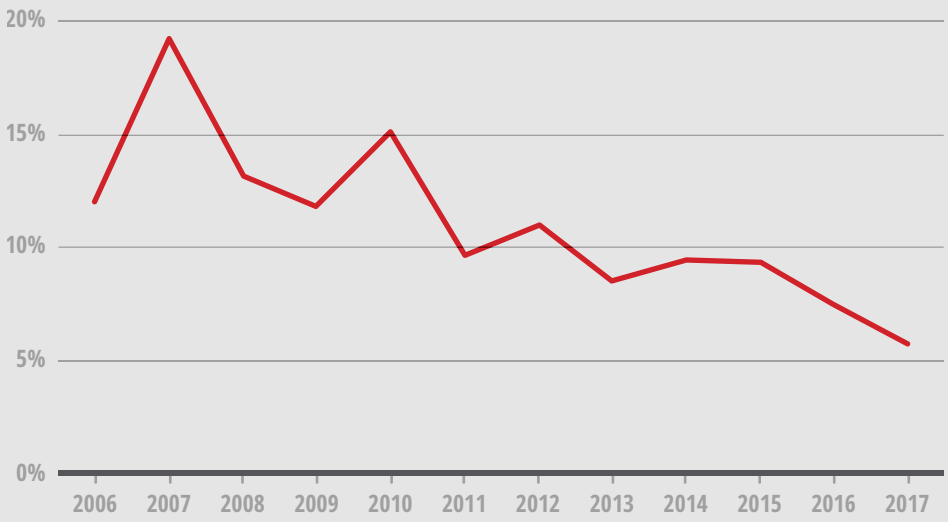
These nearly 4 billion people are being further marginalised, excluded from the online revolution. The consequences of this exclusion are significant. To be offline today is to miss out on economic opportunity, global public debate, social and cultural exchange, basic government services, and democratic empowerment. As our daily lives become increasingly digital, these offline populations will continue to be pushed further to

the margins of society, entrenching existing inequalities and snuffing out opportunities for sustainable global development. Failing to connect these offline populations will result in a loss for everyone: the longer these billions remain unconnected, the less we will all benefit from their collective knowledge, talent and contributions to economic prosperity.

Accelerate the rate at which people are coming online

While the number of people online continues to grow around the world, the rate at which people are coming online is slowing. Between 2005 and 2014, new users were coming online at about a rate of 12% annually; between 2015 and 2017 this rate of growth dropped to around 6.5% (as illustrated in Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 - Annual % increase in the global number of people coming online (2005-2017)



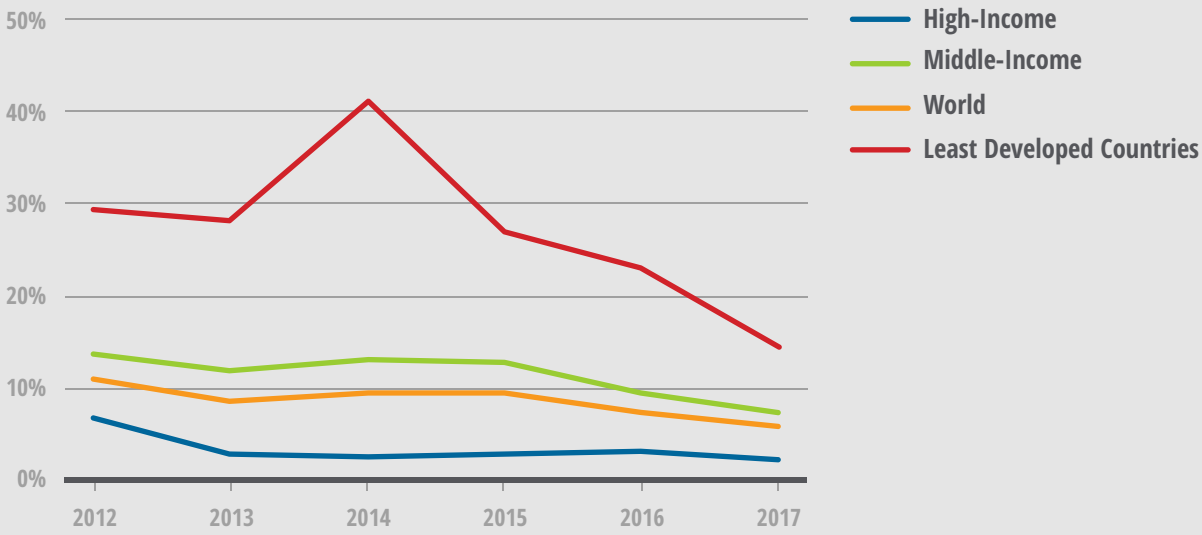
Source: ITU World Telecommunications Database, 2018

In 2014, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) estimated that in 2017, more people across the globe would be online than off — a projection the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) later confirmed. Indeed, had growth trends remained the same, over half the world would be connected to the internet already — around 556 million more people than are online today.[3] Instead, we now expect to cross the 50% threshold in May 2019 — two years later than anticipated. This "50/50 moment", when more than half the world are online, has proved stubbornly hard to reach.

3 Assuming an average annual growth of 11% between 2010 and 2017.

This decline in growth of people coming online has been most prominent across the world's least developed countries (LDCs). As Figure 2 shows, in 2014, the rate of new users coming online in the LDCs was 41%; by 2017, this growth rate had dropped to just 15%. This trend is particularly worrying, given that these countries are where most of those offline today live. Urgent action is needed to reverse this trend, and enable these last billions to access the internet.

Figure 2 - Annual % increase in number of people coming online (2012-2017), by income level



Source: ITU World Telecommunications Database, 2018

In 2015, the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) estimated that achieving near-universal connectivity in the world's LDCs would take at least until the year 2042.[4] An update of this analysis, using the most recent available data, finds that this date has been pushed back to 2043, suggesting that far from accelerating progress as needed, efforts to achieve internet access for all have stalled.

Drive down the cost of internet access so that people can afford to connect

The global community has agreed on the importance of ensuring access for all, rooted in the understanding that the consequences of failing to do so are high. Why then are we seeing a deceleration in how quickly people are connecting to the internet? One of the major reasons is the high cost of getting online.

4 This was based on estimating trends in ITU data on internet penetration rates in LDCs included in the Alliance for Affordable Internet 2015-16 Affordability Report. We define universal connectivity where at least 90% of a country's population is online.

Affordability remains one of the biggest barriers to internet access and use around the world. This is particularly the case in low- and middle-income countries, where just 1GB of mobile broadband data costs, can cost up to one-third of a user's monthly income — a price that is well out of reach for many, and especially for those living in poverty or earning less than the national average income.

While prices are coming down on the whole, they aren't coming down nearly fast enough to create opportunities for affordable access for these populations. According to A4AI's 2018 Affordability Report, over 2 billion people live in countries where internet access is not affordable. Just 40% of the low- and middle-income countries studied have affordable internet access, where 1GB of mobile broadband data is available for 2% or less of average monthly income.

Focus on connecting women

As the growth of people coming online slows, we are also seeing an increase in the global digital gender gap (i.e., the difference in internet use rates between men and women). The 2018 Inclusive Internet Index reports that, globally, men are 33% more likely to have internet access than women.

Together with a lack of digital skills, affordability was found to be the biggest obstacle to women coming online. The high cost of connectivity is exacerbated by the fact that women, on average, earn less than men; indeed, of the 61 countries analysed in the A4AI 2018 Affordability Report, the digital gender gap is the largest where women's average incomes are the lowest.

Closing the digital divide and enabling internet access for all requires policies that specifically target the unique barriers to access faced by women and other unconnected populations. Unfortunately, most governments seem to have missed the call to action, and progress toward gender-responsive policies in the ICT sector continues to disappoint. New research by A4AI and the Web Foundation shows that *less than 7% of countries have gender-responsive broadband policies in place.*[5]

< 7%

OF COUNTRIES HAVE GENDER-RESPONSIVE BROADBAND POLICIES IN PLACE

This means that just four of the 61 countries reviewed had developed gender-specific targets for internet access and digital skills training, with adequate budget set aside to implement the policy.

Closing the global digital divide will remain an impossible goal if we don't take steps to close the digital gender gap. So long as these divides exist, women and other offline populations will be pushed further to the margins of society, deepening inequalities and perpetuating disparities, rather than bridging them.

5 Out of 61 countries researched. The four countries are Costa Rica, Indonesia, Malaysia and Mexico.

Our Goal

In order for the web to be truly "for everyone", all people — no matter their gender, where they live, or how much they earn — should have the opportunity to access and participate in the digital world. Costs should not be a barrier to getting online, and women and other marginalised populations should have the same opportunities as men to access and use the web.

How We Get There

To achieve this vision, we need to:

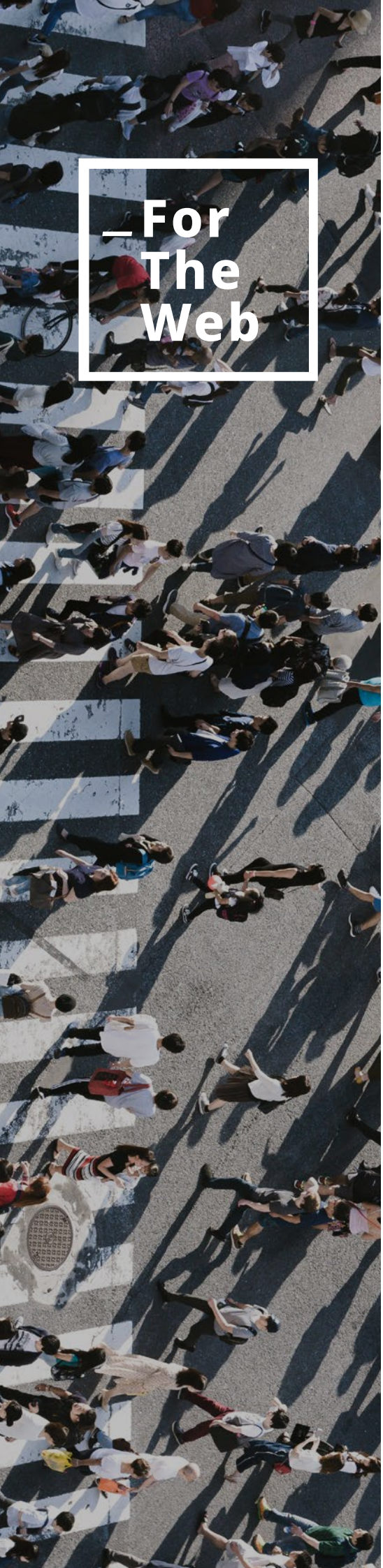
- **Tackle the barriers preventing people from coming online, with a particular focus on the challenges faced by women and other marginalized populations.** Affordability remains one of the most significant, but solvable, obstacles to access. A first step is to be clear about what we mean by affordable internet to ensure that we are all working toward the same goal. Affordable internet is "1 for 2" — that is, internet is affordable where 1GB of mobile broadband data is priced at 2% or less of average monthly income.

- **Develop smart policy that fosters competition and drives prices down.** Even as amazing technologies emerge to expand internet access, good policy remains the key towards unlocking sustainable opportunities for affordable access. Policy and regulatory frameworks that encourage competition and eliminate monopolies in the ICT sector are critical to reducing internet costs for consumers. Likewise, policies that incentivise the sharing of costs to build out needed connectivity infrastructure and simplify processes for internet service providers looking to enter the market can help to drive down costs for industry players and, in turn, for consumers.

- **Expand public internet access initiatives.** Whether it be free internet offered at a library or school, or public WiFi hotspots in places open to the public, publicly available internet access is a critically important on-ramp for those that might not be able to afford their own connection. These solutions are particularly important in rural or poor areas where opportunities to connect may be limited and/or particularly expensive. Research has shown that governments that invest in public access solutions see higher rates of internet access — and reduced broadband prices for all.

- **Design national broadband plans that set out clear targets for increasing internet access for all, and especially for women.** Plans that outline clear goals for broadband development and time-bound targets on the path to achieving those goals are important for creating citizen buy-in and for holding government and private sector players to account. These plans should particularly consider the challenges to access faced by women and other offline populations in order to ensure that resources are allocated for and invested in expanding connectivity opportunities for these populations in particular.

We are at a pivotal moment in the web's history, and need to ensure we take steps to close the digital divide and reverse the trend of slowing growth. We know that policy has the power to impact this change. We now need policymakers to get on board and take action to develop and implement the policies needed to accelerate opportunities for affordable internet access for all, and ensure that the next chapter of the web's history reflects a World Wide Web that is truly "for everyone".



#ForTheWeb that is_

Safe and welcoming for everyone

The web is a platform built on trust. Its power comes from the ability of anyone, anywhere to create and share content, ideas and information freely. However, the inherent trust that characterised the early days of the web — and is so critical to its success — is receding.

Recent research by the Pew Research Center shows a marked decline in the proportion of people in the United States who believe that the internet has been "mostly a good thing for society", compared to four years ago. In the UK, eight in ten internet users have concerns about going online. Rebuilding trust in and on the web requires that web users are free from undue harm, protected from potential risks, and shielded from individuals and institutions who would use people's data without permission to advance their own interests or satisfy ill motives.

Protect personal data online

People produce an enormous amount of data using the web — around 2.5 billion GB of data per day. To put that into perspective, that's enough data to stream 1 billion movies.[6] Most of this data is produced through people's interactions on the web. Whether you're searching for information or writing an email, online shopping or seeing what your friends are up to on social media, you are leaving a trail of data crumbs as you go.

Many online companies have grown through a business model rooted in their ability to sweep up these data crumbs and use them for advertising purposes. As a result, the biggest companies collect and store a tremendous amount of personal data, including data on your location, behaviour patterns, social preferences, political choices, and more.

6 Calculated at 2.5GB/high quality movie, per International Telecommunications Union (2015). Measuring the Information Society Report. Pg. 123.

In many cases, people have agreed to have their data collected and shared by signing or agreeing to terms of service or end-user license agreements, frequently served in tiny print and complicated legal language. In many cases, people agree to have their data collected without fully reading or understanding the conditions to which they are signing up. Other users agree to it simply because it was the default option presented to them and they didn't realise they had a choice in the matter, or because it doesn't seem like such a big deal to have your data collected in exchange for a free service. In other cases, this data is collected without explicit or conscious user consent.

Though many people might understand broadly that their personal data is being collected as they browse the web, they often don't know or understand what data is being collected or the extent of this collection. This is particularly concerning given that data breaches are increasingly common. Since 2004, there have been almost 300 major data breaches reported, impacting more than 12 billion records, endangering a huge volume of personal data and resulting in serious economic and social costs.[7] It is perhaps unsurprising then that research by UNCTAD shows, globally, there is growing mistrust regarding how personal data is used and protected.

Despite these escalating threats and public concern, governments have not made data protection a priority. A Web Foundation review of policies in 65 countries for this report found that *over 1.5 billion people live in a country with no comprehensive law on personal data protection*. Over half (34) of the countries surveyed have no data protection policy in place, or have legal protections that are so vague or piecemeal that they are essentially meaningless.

The good news is that recognition of the importance of this issue seems to be on the rise, with a number of countries considering draft versions of data protection legislation and regulation.[8] The landmark General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union offers a promising example, laying out a set of strict data protection rules for all companies operating in the EU, no matter where they are based.

7 Breaches that compromised more than 30,000 records.

8 A framework to analyse the various provisions which are commonly presented in a data protection law is presented in Privacy International (Sep 2018). The Keys to Data Protection: A guide for policy engagement on data protection.

Ensure automated decision-making is fair and unbiased

The vast troves of data we produce through our online interactions are collected and processed with the aim of learning more about us and, in turn, optimising the services we interact with on the web. To sort through this massive amount of data, companies and governments are increasingly relying on automated processes. These processes are driven by algorithms, which can, for example, help to classify content, tag and sort pictures, or tailor advertisements to your unique interests. While online, we interact with these algorithms and automated processes on a regular basis — they prioritise the results we see when we search for something online, they organise the news we see on Twitter and Facebook, and the photos we're shown on Instagram.[9]

As the web continues to grow and web users continue to produce ever more data, the use of these algorithmic-based processes will become more ubiquitous. The move to automation has the power to produce tremendous positive change, increasing the relevance and efficiency of products and services.

However, flawed algorithmic design can result in the use of automated processes harming the populations they were intended to assist. Automated systems fed by poor quality data or biased algorithms have resulted in women not being shown advertisements for high-paying jobs, posts about a deadly earthquake triggering a celebratory confetti animation, and important digital content being erased from the web at the hands of tools designed to eliminate offensive content.

These mistakes can reinforce biases, deepen inequality, and make the web feel like a less welcoming place.

Combat online bullying, harassment and abuse

Harassment and abuse online remains a serious — and growing — problem. Spending any time on social media or reading comments on blogs and news articles will reveal that harmful speech is alive and well on the web. This toxic discourse is rampant, and is often experienced most acutely by women, young people, and ethnic minorities.

Research by Amnesty International shows that one in five women in the UK has been the victim of online harassment or abuse. Over 40% of the women surveyed expressed concerns over their physical safety after experiencing online abuse, and 30% of women surveyed reported that the online abuse threatened sexual or physical assault.

Likewise, youth seem to experience higher rates of online abuse. Related research looking at young adults in four high-income countries shows that at least a quarter of teenagers experience online harassment, disproportionately affecting women and

9 "Algorithmic approaches and systems allow for collecting, classifying, structuring, aggregating and analysing data in such a way that unexpected insights, trends and predictions often become apparent." Web Foundation (Jul 2017). Algorithmic Accountability. Applying the concept to different country contexts.

immigrants. Higher percentages are reported in research conducted in other countries, such as Thailand (49%), Israel (82%), and Indonesia (80%). Our own research has revealed that many teenagers across low- and middle-income countries feel powerless in protecting themselves from risks online.

Recent years have seen the emergence of a disturbing trend of hate speech online driving physical violence offline. In nations including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, India, and South Sudan ethnic minorities have become the victims of physical violence fueled by misinformation spread online.

Ensure governments respect people's rights online

As governments struggle to put into place the policies needed to protect user data and privacy online, a growing number of countries, including the US, UK, North Korea, Turkey, Ethiopia, and Mexico, are using the web to surveil their citizens – some in the name of national security, others as part of intentional efforts to identify and quell dissenting voices.

Examples of how governments have started to wrest control over the online space has increased over the last five years. In China, for example, internet users have been arrested and intimidated for criticising official government pronouncements; in Uzbekistan, owners of internet cafes are legally required to keep the browsing history records of cafe visitors for at least three months.

Just the perception of being surveilled can lead to chilling effects in speech, search, and personal sharing online, particularly for young people and women. The web's power is rooted in broad, open and active participation from everyone, and increasingly ubiquitous government surveillance undermines this power and turns it into a weapon for those already in power.

The ability of the web to reach billions of people instantly has resulted in governments increasingly using the web to manipulate public opinion. An Oxford Internet Institute study found that 28 countries have employed social media bots, online applications, or people to shape public opinion in their favour. In the Philippines, for example, troll armies are considered to have "debased political discourse and silenced dissidents" through widespread sharing of fake news and amplification of hate speech. In Egypt, under the guise of protecting the public against "fake news", laws are being used to persecute dissidents. Foreign intelligence services and local groups have conducted orchestrated efforts to spread misinformation and influence democratic processes in countries including the US and the UK.

Our Goal

As a collaborative platform designed and built by the people that use it, the web should be a space that anyone can access, engage with, and benefit from safely and without fear. A safe and welcoming web is one where everyone is empowered to control their digital identities and how their personal data is used, where everyone can understand how automated decisions are affecting their lives and experience online, and where everyone feels safe and able to speak freely.

How We Get There

To achieve this vision, we need to:

- **Equip every person online with the right and ability to effectively control their personal data.** Users of the web must have the full control on how their data is used through understandable terms of service, prior and informed consent, data portability and freedom from bulk mass surveillance.
- **Put into place comprehensive data protection laws and strong operational frameworks.** The collection and holding of personal data should be done with adequate safeguards in place, and users should be accorded with sufficient oversight and legal recourse to redress privacy violations.
- **Ensure automated decisions are explainable and accountable to the people they are meant to serve.**[10] As automation on the web grows, we must work to ensure that both the web and these systems continue to serve the people. Those designing these automated systems should make the values expressed in their design clear to the public so that people can understand why and how decisions are made.
- **Work to protect everyone's safety online.** Governments and companies must enact policies and enforce regulations to protect the right to safety alongside the right to freedom of speech. This will require a number of steps, including: public discussions regarding the boundaries between free speech and abusive speech; retraining judges, lawyers and police to make use of existing legal instruments to effectively protect people, especially women and other targeted groups, from online abuse; training children in how to protect their data online, and in ways to protect themselves from online abuse, and; ensuring online service providers offer easy-to-use mechanisms to report abuse in local languages.

Everyone should be able to use the web freely, safely and without fear or discrimination. Web technologies must support the best in humanity and challenge the worst, to ensure that the web remains a public good that puts people first.

10 See: Design Justice Network (2017). Design Justice Principles; and World Wide Web Foundation (2018). Artificial Intelligence: open questions about gender inclusion.

#ForTheWeb that is_

Empowering for everyone

Building a web that is empowering for all means ensuring that those already online — and those coming online for the first time — are able to use the web in a meaningful way.

Users must be able to meaningfully engage with the online space for the web to realise its true potential.[11] A web that is empowering is one where all voices can speak out and have a fair chance of being heard. To achieve this goal, we need everyone to be able to access and create relevant content in their own language, and make sure that control over access and content distribution does not sit in the hands of just a few powerful actors.

Work toward a diverse, multilingual web

Today, the web is disproportionately skewed toward English-speaking, Western populations. Over half (54%) of the top 10 million websites are in English, yet the majority (75%) of people around the globe do not speak English, or are not native English speakers. Though the past five years have seen an increase in the production and availability of non-English content, growth has been incredibly slow, and content in non-Indo-European languages (e.g., indigenous languages) remains incredibly rare.

A different, but related, issue keeping a vast number of people offline is the lack of online content relevant to diverse populations — particularly for marginalised groups, including differently-abled people, women, and indigenous populations.[12] The reasons for this are many: web users across the board are

11 Pathways Commission (2018). Digital Lives: Creating Meaningful Connections for the Next 3 Billion.

12 For example, people with disabilities in the US are about three times as likely as those without a disability to say they never go online. Anderson M., Perry A. (7 Apr 2017). Disabled Americans are less likely to use technology, Pew Research Center; and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 80% of people with disabilities are living in developing countries.

traditionally more active content consumers than producers[13], and many users either lack the digital skills needed to produce and share content, or are unable to access or afford to access a stable connection and data sufficient to enable easy content production.

Making sure the web is welcoming to and empowering for diverse populations is about more than making the web a stronger and better place. Failing to make room for these groups online is to risk losing important and unique cultures, and different ways of seeing the world. Creating the conditions for a diversity of cultures and languages to thrive online will help preserve ideas, thoughts, perspectives, and languages that may otherwise disappear forever.[14] Research estimates that failure to develop and protect diversity online could contribute to the digital extinction of up to 95% of minority languages.

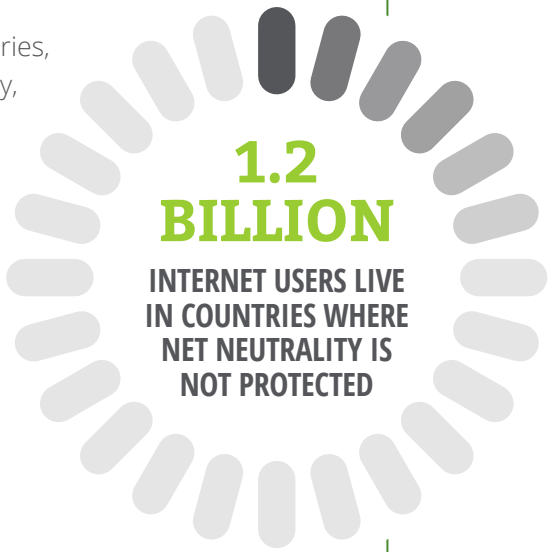
Treat all online traffic equally

A neutral internet is at the heart of the web's founding and its subsequent success and popularity.[15] Net neutrality ensures that all internet traffic, whether to stream a movie or read the news of a big or small media outlet, is treated equally. It means that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) cannot discriminate or charge different rates depending on the user or the content or applications accessed.

This neutrality is critical to the web's future as an open platform for creativity, and a place where everyone has the opportunity to share their ideas..

Weak, limited or absent net neutrality protections risk creating a "pay-to-play" digital space, where those that pay a premium to companies controlling online traffic are given priority and an unfair advantage. This diminishes consumer power to choose products and services, and threatens to limit freedom of speech, competition and innovation. Without net neutrality, people would face a more limited choice of services and products both in terms of internet access provision and content.

Unfortunately, net neutrality is at risk. While a few countries, like India, have adopted strong rules to protect net neutrality, these protections are eroding throughout much of the world. In 2018, the US repealed rules that were in place to ensure effective enforcement of net neutrality, putting small businesses, companies looking to enter the market, and consumers at the mercy of companies with longer histories and bigger pockets. A new Web Foundation survey of net neutrality policies across 65 low- and middle-income countries has found *that an estimated 1.2 billion people who use the internet live in countries with no legal or regulatory framework in place to protect net neutrality.*[16]



13 "In most online communities, 90% of users are lurkers who never contribute, 9% of users contribute a little, and 1% of users account for almost all the action." Nielsen, J. (9 Oct 2006). The 90-9-1 Rule for Participation Inequality in Social Media and Online Communities.

14 The Internet Archive has been building a digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form since 1996, providing free access to researchers, historians, scholars, the print disabled, and the general public.

15 As Sir Tim famously said: "When I invented the web, I didn't have to ask [...] for permission to use the internet." Solon, O. (15 Nov 2017). Tim Berners-Lee on the future of the web: 'The system is failing', The Guardian; and "if we lose net neutrality, we lose the internet as we know it".

16 Based on a Web Foundation review of policies in 65 countries, completed between June and August 2018; 44 of the 65 countries studied did not, at the time of study, have net neutrality protections in place.

Put the power back in the hands of the people

While the web was created to be a decentralised platform where everyone can contribute and no single creator has a built-in advantage over the other, web activity has become dominated by a shrinking number of powerful companies that are able to wield significant influence over what we see online — and what we don't. The growing imbalance between individuals and these powerful actors threatens to limit and undermine the power of the free and open web.

Ten years ago, like today, content was distributed across millions of personal blogs. Whereas back then, users would find this content through searches or links on other blogs; today, a small group of companies are estimated to have influence over more than 70% of online traffic, meaning that many only know the web delivered to them as defined by those large platforms.[17] These companies are increasingly empowered to act like information brokers, determining what content is prioritised and seen at the top of search results or in social media feeds. Today, a blogger's ability to optimise content for these companies determines their success, and whether or not we see their blog. These narrow paths to success limit the types of content we see online, and threaten to quell ideas and creative exchange online.

17 With video streaming having a 58% traffic share already. Sandvine (Oct 2018). The Global Internet Phenomena Report.

Our Goal

The web was designed to open and share information and experiences, and is its most powerful when it is a source of valuable information, a means of political participation, a facility for accessing public services, and an enabler of well-being for all, irrespective of race, gender, location, physical ability, or beliefs. For the web to realise this potential, it must be shaped by its billions of individual users, and not by the vested interests or limited experiences of a select few. The web's ability to empower people lies with the ability of people to access, understand, and create relevant content freely and without undue interference from any company, platform, or government.

How We Get There

To achieve this vision, we need to:

- **Incentivise the production of diverse, multilingual content.** We must remove barriers to internet access and use, and facilitate diverse — and particularly underrepresented — communities to create the content needed to make the web a useful and engaging space and facilitate communication and interaction within various conditions and environments — whatever the devices, software, language, location, script, culture or ability. Governments should create mechanisms to encourage relevant content in local languages, and aim to support a diverse and inclusive cultural online space.

- **Prioritise digital skills training and education so people can become active digital creators.** We need to make sure that everyone can access the tools and skills they need to create content and use the web in a meaningful way. This is especially important for those whose voices are typically silenced online, such as women, LGBT+, and ethnic minority groups.

- **Protect net neutrality.** Governments should develop and implement enforceable rules to prevent blocking, throttling and paid prioritisation, and ensure that all traffic online is treated equally.

- **Work toward a level playing field by ensuring that power and control on the web is distributed across its billions of users.** As the web has grown, so too have a handful of companies, which have managed to amass disproportionate power over our online experience. This market concentration has led to almost all internet traffic being controlled by a small number of central players. It is crucial we work to understand the impact of this concentration of power online, and engage in ways to reverse the trend towards control by a small number of players.

- **Keep the web global.** Efforts to comply with policies enacted in various jurisdictions often undermine the web's ability to remain truly global. We need to make considerable progress in global multi-stakeholder forums, in order to ensure that internet traffic flows freely across national borders, that national and international institutions coordinate effectively to protect people's online rights, and that the value created by the web is distributed fairly and people everywhere enjoy these benefits.

The web should allow individuals, communities and humanity as a whole to flourish. It is still young and has yet much to deliver. But we need to ensure that we work together to put into place the policies and designs needed to keep it open and empowering for everyone. The more people the web serves, the stronger the community of people willing to fight for it.

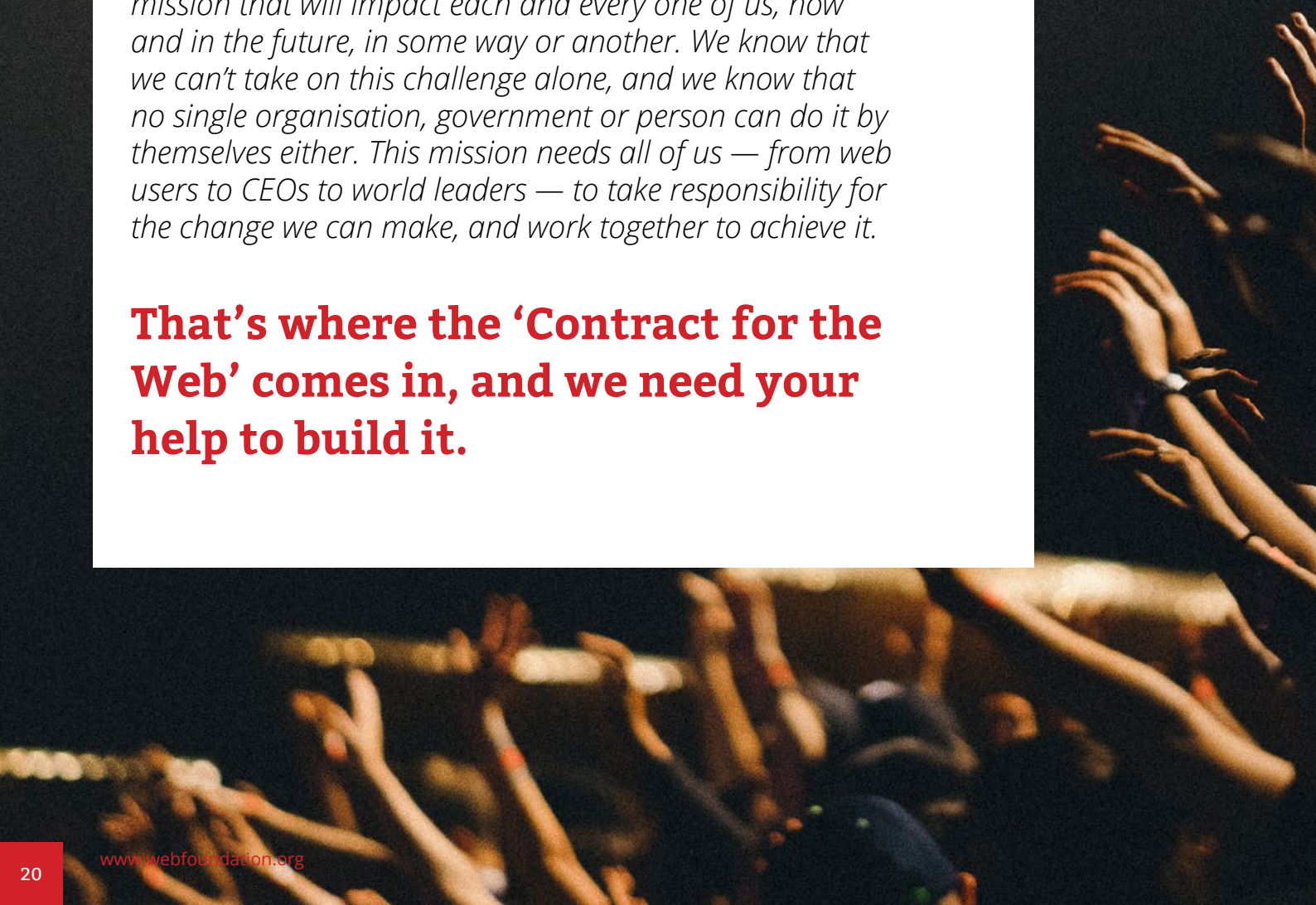
_For The Web

Are you_

#ForTheWeb?

Making sure the web is accessible, affordable, safe, welcoming and empowering for everyone is an ambitious task. It's a mission that will impact each and every one of us, now and in the future, in some way or another. We know that we can't take on this challenge alone, and we know that no single organisation, government or person can do it by themselves either. This mission needs all of us — from web users to CEOs to world leaders — to take responsibility for the change we can make, and work together to achieve it.

That's where the 'Contract for the Web' comes in, and we need your help to build it.



We've spent months working with a wide range of partners to develop a set of guiding principles which describe a web that is for everyone and is a public good. Between November 2018 and May 2019 we are asking governments, companies and citizens to join us in building these into a full and detailed Contract for the Web.

The Contract will be a roadmap for the future of the web. It will lay out the responsibilities of governments, companies and citizens, and will create a set of norms to guide the development of digital policies and new technologies. By getting involved in the process to shape this, these three groups will contribute to building a web that works for all of us.

But to get there, we need you. We need voices from all around the world, all sectors, and all experiences to help us shape the web, and to show policymakers at every level what's possible, what we need to do, and why it matters.

At the Web Foundation, we hope you will support the principles, join the process and take to social media to tell everyone why you're #ForTheWeb. Share your story on how the web has changed your life and what you hope for its future.

You know what the web can do for you. It's time to ask what you're going to do #ForTheWeb.

Support the principles and join the process at
fortheweb.webfoundation.org

Contract for the Web - Core Principles

The web was designed to bring people together and make knowledge freely available. Everyone has a role to play to ensure the web serves humanity. Toward that end, we have developed a set of core principles to build a "Contract for the Web". We are encouraging governments, companies and citizens around the world to commit to these principles, and to help protect the open web as a public good and a basic right for everyone.

Governments will:

Ensure everyone can connect to the internet

So that anyone, no matter who they are or where they live, can participate actively online.

Keep all of the internet available, all of the time

So that no one is denied their right to full internet access.

Respect people's fundamental right to privacy

So everyone can use the internet freely, safely and without fear.

Companies will:

Make the internet affordable and accessible to everyone

So that no one is excluded from using and shaping the web.

Respect consumers' privacy and personal data

So people are in control of their lives online.

Develop technologies that support the best in humanity and challenge the worst

So the web really is a public good that puts people first.

Citizens will:

Be creators and collaborators on the web

So the web has rich and relevant content for everyone.

Build strong communities that respect civil discourse and human dignity

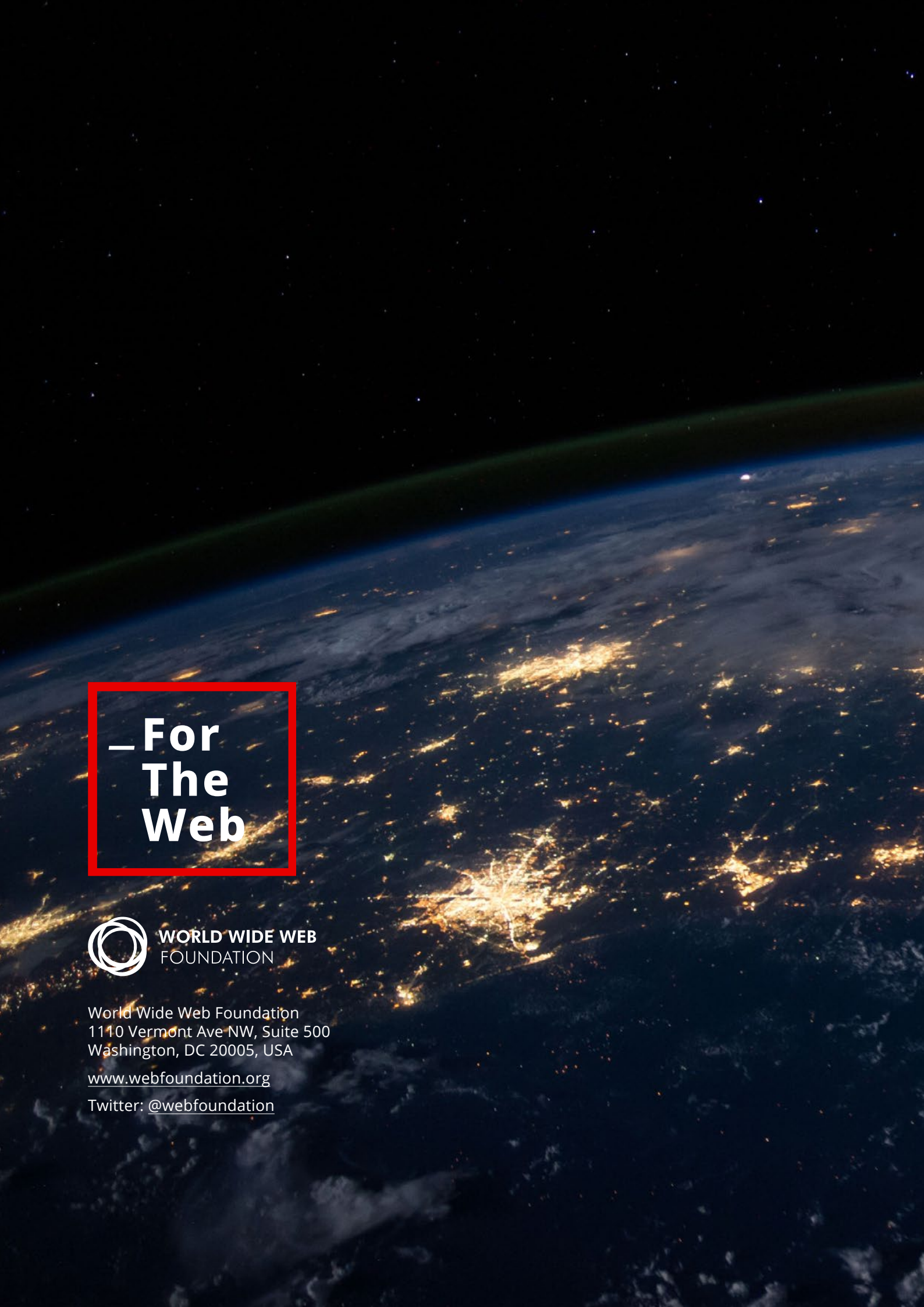
So that everyone feels safe and welcome online.

Fight for the web

So the web remains open and a global public resource for people everywhere, now and in the future.

We commit to uphold these principles and to engage in a deliberative process to build a full Contract for the Web, which will set out the roles and responsibilities of governments, companies and citizens. The challenges facing the web today are daunting and affect us in all our lives, not just when we are online. But if we work together and each of us takes responsibility for our actions, we can protect a web that truly is for everyone.


love



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