



## ***A report on a micro survey regarding online privacy and personal data***

### **The survey**

In February 2013, in preparation for a workshop entitled "The New PII: Privacy-Impacting Information" organised by the Internet Society at the WSIS+10 Review Event<sup>1</sup>, the Internet Society invited its members and others to voice their opinion via an online micro survey. There were three optional requests:

- 1. What is your country of residence?**
- 2. What do you think should be protected online by data protection or privacy laws, and why?**
- 3. Write your own definition of "personal data".**

We received 68 responses from Europe, North America, Africa, Latin America and Asia, indicating international interest in the topic of **online privacy**. The sample is clearly too small to be representative and we do not seek to draw particular conclusions regarding a country or continent. Nonetheless, the views expressed in the responses reveal some common themes, while at the same time highlighting that perspectives vary.

### **Themes**

These are some of the themes that emerged:

#### **1. Identification**

*For example:*

*"Any piece of information that can lead to identification of an individual" (India)*

#### **2. Uniqueness**

*For example:*

*"Anything that describes your own uniqueness ..." (South Korea)*

*"Personal data is anything that pertains uniquely to me and which identifies me specifically, including my location" (Switzerland)*

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<sup>1</sup> Report: [http://www.internetsociety.org/sites/default/files/The%20New%20PII-%20Privacy-Impacting%20Information\\_1.pdf](http://www.internetsociety.org/sites/default/files/The%20New%20PII-%20Privacy-Impacting%20Information_1.pdf)

*"Any data that can be associated uniquely to one individual" (Portugal)*

### **3. Public vs. private**

*For example: (from South Africa)*

*"Any information that I consider to be private and not for public consumption" (South Africa)*

*"User defined 'private' all the communications and activities that [involve the] Internet" (Taiwan)*

*"Data that has not explicitly been placed in the 'Public Domain'..." (USA)*

*" 'Personal Data' means private information. But some sensitive information can also be called "personal data". For some 'personal data' is information that disclosure or misuse can be harmful or can affect the life of the owner" (Cameroon)*

### **4. User decides**

Some respondents are of the view that they should be able to decide what is their "personal data".

*For example:*

*"Anything I define as specific to me" (USA)*

### **5. Ownership and control**

Some respondents also consider that they own or should have control over their personal data.

*For example:*

*"Personal data is all data that I own... Personal means something that I control and something that is related with myself ..." (Portugal)*

*"Information that I do not wish to share with anyone other than the people I want to" (India)*

*"Data that I want to share with a specific group of people or person and not the world at large!" (Kenya)*

None of these themes is surprising.

## Reasons why personal data should be protected online

The respondents gave various reasons as to why personal data should be protected online:

- because the data is personal and/or private and/or confidential
- "because any data that is released without encryption can be copied infinitely onto any digital media without proof of origin"
- "because data is power ..."
- to provide a personal space on the Internet (as many of us spend almost all our time on the Internet)
- " to ensure one can comfortably enjoy the services offered by the internet without fear of data corruption"
- so that users can feel safe to have new ideas and be creative
- to protect personality
- to protect integrity
- to protect autonomy
- to allow an individual to enjoy his or her right to private life
- because disclosure and inappropriate use can affect the life of the owner
- because "third parties could cause damage to the individual's Internet usage"
- because "the sharer might be underage, or unaware that they're sharing information with everyone"
- to protect the physical security of the users
- to prevent abuse and commercial profit
- to protect against bad actors:

*For example: identity theft; financial theft; social engineering by criminals; fraud*

- fear of a public sector or private sector "big brother".

A respondent from France emphasised that although privacy is broader than data protection, the pervasiveness of data collection means that data protection/data privacy is a fundamental component for online privacy.

## Definitions of personal data

There were two basic approaches to defining “personal data”:

- (a) a list of categories of data; and

*For example:*

*“Name, ID, Postal/ Email Address, Telephone Contacts, Biographical, Medical and Financial Data” (Portugal)*

- (b) a description of the characteristics of the data;

*For example:*

*“Personal data is every piece of information that, by its own or in connection with other easily obtainable data, allows an individual to be identified”. (Portugal)*

not unlike what we see in current data protection and privacy laws.

However, one respondent from Senegal proposed a two-factor approach:

- Content: i.e. whether the information refers to a particular individual; and
- Purpose: i.e. whether the information is used to monitor or track a user’s online activity.

One group of the respondents specified user-generated content as part of their definition.

Another group of the respondents proposed definitions that are in effect “what I decide”.

One respondent drew upon statistics, namely:

“Any information that MAY be used to personally identify a person. I think statistics [are] useful here: data is “personal” if its value gives any information about a person, i.e.: they're not statistically independent variables. Using this definition, any data that can be used to uncover partial information (an IP address, for example) would be considered personal.”

And, one respondent proposed a definition that extended to “households” as well as individuals.

## **The responses**

The “actionable” responses are set out in Appendix A and B.

*Note: We have not included a handful of responses which were not intelligible or which did not appear to address the questions posed.*

## **Thank you**

We would like to thank all our members and other individuals who participated in this micro survey. The responses are helpful in identifying some of the different perspectives Internet users have on this topic.

Comments, views or ideas reported in this document are not necessarily held, or endorsed, by the Internet Society.

Questions regarding this report may be directed to [isoc@isoc.org](mailto:isoc@isoc.org). Please include the words “Micro Privacy Survey” in the subject field of your email.

## Appendix A

### **What do you think should be protected online by data protection or privacy laws, and why?**

No country specified	<b>WHAT:</b> All personal and related business data. <b>WHY:</b> I admit that, when [it] is detected, that the security of human lives is in danger or the integrity. Police should access personal data for investigation (with court order)
No country specified	A real "big brother" should be avoided. Correlation of personal data by public or private sector should be prohibited.
United States of Bankers apparently ...	<b>WHAT:</b> Individuals' identity, medical and financial data only. Copyrights should only apply to physical objects.
Argentina	<b>WHAT:</b> Personal data should be protected by Law, especially in the area of freedom of speech to protect the communication of opinions and ideas.
Armenia	<b>WHAT:</b> Any personal information - in case, if this person does not give his confirmation, that he is ready to distribute this information
Bulgaria	<b>WHAT:</b> Personality. <b>WHY:</b> Now with the social networks your personality is so bonded with the virtual world so this is the most important thing which should be protected. Nowadays we are so vulnerable it is so easy to steal s.o. personality and then to make his/her real life miserable
Cameroon	<b>WHAT:</b> Personal information or private information (sex orientation, religion affiliation, politic affiliation, thoughts, interaction with family and friends) - Sensitive information (copy rights works, bank information, e-mail, address...) <b>WHY:</b> because the disclosure and inappropriate use of that information can affect the life of the owner.
Canada	<b>WHAT:</b> My porn surfing habits. Because. But seriously, it depends on who has access to what. I do not want government agencies tracking much of anything without judicial oversight for example. I am fine with private sector companies having access to some data (shopping interests, tastes in music etc.) so that they can provide me with better service, but that should be set to user accounts and not sold off without my permission to third parties.
Ethiopia	<b>WHY:</b> we [have] to feel safe in order to come up with new ideas and to be creative

France	<p><b>WHY:</b> The right to privacy consists in the capacity to control the "presentation of self". Privacy protection may be considered as the right to control one's "public face", i.e. one's image before the eyes of others. The right to privacy is composed of different dimensions: it encompasses right to freely develop one's personality, the right to be left alone and the right to exert a control over personal information that cannot be considered of legitimate concern to the public. Therefore, the concept of privacy embraces the protection of personal interests such as bodily integrity, solitude and freedom from observation. The capillary expansion of the Internet and other ICTs has decomposed every aspect of both private and public life into data which can be collected, stored and processed by both public and private organisations. Hence, in such a context, the right to the protection of personal data becomes prodromal to the right to experience a private life. The development of one's personality, the control over personal information and the possibility to be left alone are indeed directly linked to the protection of one's personal data, which forms part of the right to private life. Hence, even though privacy is a broader interest than data protection, the pervasiveness of data collection makes data protection – or data privacy – a fundamental component of privacy in the online context.</p> <p><b>WHAT:</b> Data protection laws and privacy laws should therefore invest the individual with the power to control his/her personal data without interference, unless such interference is necessary and in accordance with law. To this extent, the interception or surveillance of communications, and the related data traffic, by persons other than users shall not be allowed unless the concerned user expresses his/her consent or the law considers it as "necessary, appropriate and proportionate" to fulfil precisely defined public order objectives.</p>
Ghana	<b>WHAT:</b> Any data one tags with any of the privacy laws
Greece	<b>WHAT:</b> All individual data should be protected. All public (i.e. government) should be transparent
India	<b>WHY:</b> to secure his/her own data
India	<b>WHAT:</b> Any personal or identity revealing information gathered about the users
India	<b>WHAT:</b> Personal Information and placement of Tracking cookies by various websites
Indonesia	<b>WHAT:</b> The data and information itself especially relates to privacy which is categorized as private and confidential by ourselves
Kenya	<b>WHAT:</b> Private information... like one should not be able to download a person's photo from a social media site without owner's permission. Passwords and site access codes. <b>WHY:</b> this is in order to ensure one can comfortably enjoy the services offered by the Internet without fear of data corruption
Mexico	<b>WHAT:</b> Own Privacy. The way your own information is handled by 3rd parties, with option to delete it permanently.
Netherlands	<b>WHAT:</b> Personal information of every user. <b>WHY:</b> To prevent abuse and commercial profit with those data

Norway	<b>WHAT:</b> My right to decide what can be done with my personal data, such as pictures, social media postings that can be related to me, my personal contact data, profile of interest etc.
Portugal	<b>WHY:</b> because my personal data is personal
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> personal data, photos, emails, credit cards
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> All personal details (contacts, financial information, images)
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> Personal data and navigation data <b>WHY:</b> because its private!
Portugal	I think that personal data should [be] protected either by privacy laws [or] by data protection mechanisms deployed by ISPs. Today, with the spread of Social Networks [it] is urgent to protect personal data. [Another] important issue is parental control. Many young people use Internet to communicate, study and doing other jobs, so it is important to take some time to understand the risks and vulnerabilities associated with this.
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> Everything that is traditionally not transferable ("pessoal e intransmissível") <b>WHY:</b> the lack of protection can lead to identity and financial theft
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> personal data
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> contacts and document numbers
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> I think what should be protected online is the identity and the place of residence of the person, in a way that it becomes almost impossible to reach it.
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> All the information that has not been approved by myself as being susceptible of being [disclosed] as well as information concerning my health records, financial situation, political and sex preferences, market preferences, relatives, set of friends, etc. if these were not disclosed by myself
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> All private data and individual data should be protected
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> Any information that MAY be used to personally identify a person. <b>WHY:</b> If we can expect computing power (and storage) cost to keep up with Moore's law, it's not hard to imagine a future where the cost of storing just about everything about a user (email, websites visited, form content, mouse/[keystroke]/page load timing, continuous geolocation, etc.) is lower than the expected monetary value of the data - as low as it may be.
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> All personal data <b>WHY:</b> because it can be used by third parties to cause damage to the individual's Internet usage, unless there is a clear guaranty that usage data is anonymous
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> Any kind of personal data <b>WHY:</b> Because this data can be valuable to social engineering criminals
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> All the personal data

Portugal	<p>1-One every three months you should be warned that company X holds personal data on you.</p> <p>2-You should be given access to all the data company X has on you with instructions given in the periodical warning.</p> <p>3-Should you require it, you should be able to delete all your personal information, and company X would be kept from keeping any copies (except in those cases explicitly allowed by law, such as for invoicing and maintaining a business relation, and for fiscal purposes.</p>
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> All data referring to personal information filed in all possible types of databases
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> Personal Data, Live or deferred Camera/ Audio Feeds, Service Subscriptions
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> All personal data <b>WHY:</b> fraud
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> Private communications and personal data provided by users for registration
Portugal	The users' identity and activities should be anonymous, as a general rule. The track of users identity and the track of online activity should be separate, and only reconciled through a court order.
Portugal	<b>WHAT:</b> e-mail and cloud content <b>WHY:</b> Normally this type of data contains information about the private life of the user.
Senegal	<p><b>WHAT:</b> Data protection or privacy laws should protect all the information/data that allows [the identification of] a person (identified or identifiable individual) and that are processed without his knowledge and prior consent. The subject-matter of the protection is a natural person not a body corporate. The type of information/data that should be protected are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ordinary personal data: information such as name, home/work address, images, photographs, videos, etc.</li> <li>- sensitive personal data: information such a sexual orientation, religious and political views, physical or mental health, etc.</li> <li>- other data such as IP addresses: these are defined as identifiers for a computer or device on a TCP/IP network. However, they are now used by investigation/enforcement authorities to pursue infringers of Intellectual Property Rights for example. These authorities can obtain a user's identity from an IP address. As such, IP addresses can be considered protected personal data as they can be used to track and eventually identify individuals.</li> </ul> <p>In conclusion, in order to determine whether a data is personal and subject to protection under data protection or privacy laws, we could look at 2 indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Content of the information/data: the question to ask is whether the information refers to a particular individual or not;</li> <li>2. Purpose of the information/data: the question to ask is whether the information is used to monitor/track a user's activity on the net or not.</li> </ol>
South Africa	<b>WHAT:</b> financial transactions, personal details, online activities

South Korea	<b>WHAT:</b> Any personal information that is not shared publicly - 100% protected (email, private or limited-privacy blogs, Facebook profiles that aren't set to public). Also a fair amount of protection (depending on the context) for things that are shared publicly – <b>WHY:</b> the sharer might be underage, or unaware that they're sharing information with everyone, etc. Just because something was shared publicly, I don't think it should be a free-for-all. Also, I would want more protection for certain kinds of data, regardless of whether it was shared publicly or not (financial info, credit card information, anything that could be used for identity theft).
Sudan	<b>WHAT:</b> Data protection <b>WHY:</b> Because there are people who do not apply the laws of privacy
Switzerland	<b>WHAT:</b> All photos, addresses and phone numbers at the very least...
Switzerland	<b>WHAT:</b> Email contents and address books, social media posts not marked by me open to the public, IP addresses where I logged in, search history, financial information, medical information, employment history, criminal records
Switzerland	<b>WHAT:</b> Personal information like mailing and email address, phone numbers, and images, and personal video as well.
Taiwan	<b>WHAT:</b> I guess all the online communication, browsing, any Internet related activity [where privacy is required] by the user should not be allowed to view by the others [by] any means. <b>WHY:</b> Because it is privacy, and especially we all need that personal space in the Internet as many of us spend almost all the time in Internet.
Uganda	<b>WHAT:</b> User identity, private conversation as and location of users
UK	I think online privacy can ONLY be protected by global laws
USA	<b>WHAT:</b> All personal data, transactions, passwords, etc.
USA	<b>WHAT:</b> My date of birth, financial information, social insurance and/or social security number, credit card numbers and anything else I don't wish to disclose. <b>WHY:</b> Because more and more, data is power and everyone deserves autonomy.
USA	<b>WHAT:</b> Nothing
USA	<b>WHAT:</b> whatever users believe should be protected, it should be dependent on local customs and needs
USA	<b>WHY:</b> Interaction on the Internet is presumed to be a private interaction between the sender and the receiver. In theory, no government (of the People) should "eavesdrop" or "listen in" to that interaction without a warrant. The grey area is if a party has waived those rights (knowingly?) via a user agreement.
USA	<b>WHAT:</b> Financial records, location data, health records
USA	<b>WHAT:</b> Personal information (name, address, job, salary, etc.) when tied to personally identifiable information (e.g., phone number, email address, SSN, permanent/long-term IP address, etc.).

USA	<b>WHAT:</b> All data that is not explicitly made public <b>WHY:</b> because any data that is released without encryption can be copied infinitely onto any digital media without proof of origin
Venezuela	<b>WHAT:</b> My personal data

## Appendix B

### Write your own definition of personal data

No country specified	All data that could be sufficient to identify someone or that could compromise the security and confidentiality of his life. Data created by a person or shared with him.
No country specified	All kind of data that can be correlated with something personal
"United States of Bankers, apparently..."	Information describing personal identity, medical or financial information
Argentina	"Personal Data" means all data that allows [the identification of] a person or internet user specifically
Armenia	Personal data - information which allows [the identification of] a person
Belgium	Personal data is the data that belongs to a individual
Bulgaria	Personal Data = all data related to s.o. personality = photos; documents; etc.
Cameroon	"Personal Data" means private information. But some sensitive information can also be called "personal data". For some "personal data" is information that disclosure or misuse can be harmful or can affect the life of the owner.
Canada	Anything I have written, photos I've taken, banking information, browsing habits. Basically unless I give clear and expressed permission I do not want to share it.
Ethiopia	Any data
Ethiopia	Anything that I own. It can be my personal info, my address, my password, my contacts...
France	Personal data are those data which allow [the identification] – in a direct or indirect way – a specific internet user who is a natural person
Ghana	Data about a person which may not be viewed or tampered with by someone else
Greece	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Correspondence. What I discuss with other people, when, how, and from where.</li> <li>2. Computer data: The bit patterns on my computer, laptop, pad, phone, and other devices is a private matter for me</li> <li>3. Money, my assets, inflow of funds and outflow of funds.</li> <li>4. Identity: I have the right to be anonymous in all daily matters and as I go about my day.</li> <li>5. Location: Where I am physically at the current time or were a previous point in time.</li> </ol>
India	Personal data is all personal information about ourselves, our families, all communication and identification id's

India	Personal data is nothing but some data [that] is protect[ed] by [a] personal user... data of particular user only [his view of] data
India	Any piece of information that can lead to identification of an individual
India	Information that I do not wish to share with anyone other than the people I want to
Indonesia	Data that belongs and relates to me as a person
Kenya	Data that I want to share with a specific group of people or person and not the world at large!
Mexico	Anything that a 3rd party got from me or out of me
Netherlands	Name, address, date of birth, medical & legal info, pictures & movies tagged with a persons name
Norway	... my personal data, such as pictures, social media postings that can be related to me, my personal contact data, profile of interest etc.
Portugal	Every [piece of] information that relates to the person or to its family
Portugal	Contacts, official ID data, financial information, tax information
Portugal	Any element that allows [the identification of] a person
Portugal	Personal data is all data that I own. It could be personal or related to professional issues. Personal means something that I control and something that is related with myself (job, family, hobbies, and so [on])
Portugal	"personal data" is data not transferable ("pessoal e intransmissível")
Portugal	image, identifiable data about someone
Portugal	contacts and document numbers
Portugal	Name, age, occupation, residence, place of birth and family members
Portugal	Information concerning my health records, financial situation, political and sex preferences, market preferences, relatives, set of friends, etc. if these were not disclosed by myself
Portugal	Personal data: Data which is not to be shared
Portugal	Any information that MAY be used to personally identify a person. I think statistics [are] useful here: data is "personal" if its value gives any information about a person, i.e.: they're not statistically independent variables. Using this definition, any data that can be used to uncover partial information (an IP address, for example) would be considered personal
Portugal	Name, street address, phone numbers, email, bank accounts, credit cards, photos, videos
Portugal	Any data that can be associated uniquely to one individual
Portugal	Personal Data is all the data relative to a person: such as, but not limited to:

	Citizen Id, Tax number, Social Security number, phone, address, age
Portugal	Any data that can be traced back to me
Portugal	All the information behind my curtains (as in a house). This includes all my data filed in all the databases, starting from my Bank account.
Portugal	Name, ID, Postal/ Email Address, Telephone Contacts, Biographical, Medical and Financial Data
Portugal	Name, address, phone, fax, mobile phone, tax registration, company name, family name
Portugal	Data that can identify the user who owns it, and that could potentially compromise his or her anonymity on the Internet
Portugal	Bank accounts data, health issues, passwords
Portugal	Personal data is every piece of information that, by its own or in connection with other easily obtainable data, allows an individual to be identified
Portugal	For me, personal data is every type of information generated by the user or containing information about the user, like e-mail, photos or documents
Senegal	A personal data is an information relating to a natural person who is identified or identifiable directly or indirectly through several factors specific to his physical, mental, economic, social identity or his geographical location
South Africa	Any information that I consider to be private and not for public consumption
South Korea	Anything that describes your own uniqueness - financial account numbers, SIN numbers, personal address, family information. Information that is not easily accessed by others, that shouldn't be shared with a wide audience in order to protect private identity and security
Sudan	Full Name: [redacted] Place & Date of Birth: [redacted] Sex: [redacted] Marital status: [redacted] Email: [redacted] Phone: [redacted] Address: [redacted] Religion: [redacted] Nationality: [redacted] Education: [redacted]
Switzerland	Personal data is anything that pertains uniquely to me and which identifies me specifically, including my location
Switzerland	Information that is individual to me and makes it possible to identify me
Switzerland	Personal pictures, personal videos, personal mailing and email address, personal writing
Taiwan	User defined "private" all the communications and activities that [involve the] Internet
U.S.A.	Anything I define as specific to me
Uganda	Personal data is the users identity on the internet, day to day life online
UK	Data that relates to me, and me only. Secondly, the amalgamation of data points that allow people to identify me in an authorised fashion

USA	My definition of personal data would be anything personal like credit card numbers, bank accounts, passwords, etc.
USA	Anything I think. I should be the one who decides when and how to share, it will depend on circumstances...
USA	Data that I have not published for worldwide dissemination. That is, data that has not explicitly been placed in the "Public Domain".
USA	Any digital information about me, whether it's created by me or by someone else
USA	Data that identifies an individual or household and/or identifies activities in which an individual or household engages (e.g., job, salary, sites visited, shows watched, places visited, thoughts) and the location of the individual or household
USA	All data pertaining to a person's unique or individual attributes (i.e. given name, address, tax number, biometrics, and visual identification) without that person's explicit permission, or any data submitted by that person that is not explicitly marked as public (i.e. published to any "Public" group on a social communications service, or posted without any encryption intended on a known publicly accessible site). Even when the permissions granted by a person are explicit, the bounds of sharing should be assumed constrained to entities actively listed by that person, never by the permission seeker, to avoid confusion or duress
Venezuela	Is all the material (audio, notes, information on my ownership) which defines me as a digital citizen
Venezuela	Data that speaks about my individuality, who I am, where I live, what I do and, of course, my password