

Contract for the Web

What is the issue?

- Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, has announced a “Contract for the Web” .
- It aims at saving the future of his invention, which is now almost an essential condition for human existence.

What is the “Contract for the Web”?

- Berners-Lee announced plans for this contract in 2018, and the World Wide Web (WWW) Foundation worked on it.
- The idea is to create a global plan of action for all stakeholders to together commit to building a better Web.
- The Contract consists of **9 principles** - three each for governments, private companies, and individuals and civil society to endorse - with 76 clauses each.
- The Contract wasn’t meant to be simply aspirational. It’s meant to be implemented, and meant to be a plan of action.
- The **governments** who are looking to regulate in the digital era, can use this as a roadmap to lay out their policies and laws going forward.
- The **companies** to do the same when they’re developing their products and services for the world.
- The **individuals** to endorse the contract on the official website.

Who has created this Contract?

- Representatives from over **80 organisations**, including governments, companies, civil society activists, and academics.
- The goal was to create a standard policy for a Web that benefits all.
- The 9 principles emerged after a series of discussions over almost a year.
- Participants included the governments of France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Ghana; tech majors Google, Facebook, Twitter, Github, etc.

What are the principles in the Contract?

- **Governments** will “Ensure everyone can connect to the Internet”, “Keep all of the Internet available, all of the time”, and “Respect and protect people’s

fundamental online privacy and data rights”.

- **Companies** will “Make the Internet affordable and accessible to everyone”, “Respect and protect people’s privacy and personal data to build online trust”, and “Develop technologies that support the best in humanity and challenge the worst”.
- **Citizens** will “Be creators and collaborators on the Web”, “Build strong communities that respect civil discourse and human dignity”, and “Fight for the Web” so that it remains open and a global public resource.

How will the Contract be implemented?

- The principles are lofty, and implementation will not be easy.
- **Companies** - The companies that do not implement the Contract would be delisted from it - which may not be the strongest deterrent.
- However, the companies had themselves reached out to be active participants in the Contract.
- This was an opportunity for the companies to have conversations with governments and civil society instead of shouting at each other.
- To the engineers, they say that they had committed to all the other stakeholders that they are going to fight hate speech and respect privacy.
- **Not a legal document** - Even so, the ‘Contract for the Web’ is not a legal document, or a United Nations document - though the organisation is in talks with the UN.
- It cannot currently bend governments or companies - even those that are on board - to its will.
- As a global community, we have to agree on what are the right standards.
- Citizen action is an important part of the Contract, and the organisation hopes citizens would hold governments and companies accountable for violations of its terms.

As the Contract is ready, what happens now?

- The idea is to build concrete solutions that support the goals that were set out in the Contract.
- A clause for companies calls on them to invest in research to ensure they are not designing services that manipulate people.
- Currently, there is no real accepted standard of best practices to make sure that people actually understand what they’re consenting to, what information is being collected.
- That’s still work that needs to be done.
- The WWW Foundation says it will work with all stakeholders to build some of these standards, which could help the Web stick to the principles of the Contract.

- It will measure the progress of the Contract's endorsers.
- It will work with regulators around the world to ensure that companies comply with national laws that support the Contract's goals.
- The organisation hopes to persuade more governments across the world to come on board the Contract.

Source: The Indian Express

