

Digital Inclusion



A healthy Internet is for everyone. People — no matter where they live in the world, their income, their language, the color of their skin, their political affiliation, their religion, their physical ability, their sexual orientation, or their gender — should have unfettered access to the Internet. They should be able to both consume and create online so that the Internet reflects the diversity of the people who use it.

From the Mozilla Manifesto:

#02: The Internet is a global public resource that must remain open and accessible.

#03: The Internet must enrich the lives of individual human beings.

At its best, the Internet and the technologies that support it foster the expansion of individual agency, amplify creativity, and enable collaboration and shared understandings.

- The free, crowdsourced online encyclopedia **Wikipedia** drastically lowers the barriers to accessing knowledge and engages hundreds of thousands of people in creating and sharing information.
- Mobile money services, such as Kenya's **M-Pesa**, make it possible for people previously unable to afford a bank account to securely save money, run businesses more effectively and transfer funds to relatives or friends quickly and safely.
- In the hands of grassroots organizers, the Internet and related technologies fuel global movements such as the **Arab Spring** and **#BlackLivesMatter**.

But at its worst, the Internet and the technologies that support it reinforce and exacerbate existing inequities, divisions and discriminatory practices—and may even introduce new threats.

- According to the **World Economic Forum**, women are up to 50% less likely to be connected, and 80% of online content is only available in 1 of 10 languages together spoken by less than half the world's population.

- **Members of marginalized groups are more likely to be surveilled** via Internet technologies, reflecting offline biases and often leading to self-censorship—**depleting the diversity of voices online**.
- Day-to-day activities are becoming increasingly intertwined with the Internet, which can result in communities with less access to or familiarity with technology being marginalized. For instance, as social services move online, older adults who may be skeptical about the benefits of technology or have a health challenge that make technology difficult to use can get left behind.

The Internet is unique because it is shaped by its users, and thus reflects and in due course shapes society. This is why Mozilla envisions a world in which the whole Internet is accessible to everyone, and welcoming and safe for everyone to use. We call this digital inclusion.

The obstacles that stand in the way of digital inclusion are numerous and diverse, and they won't be overcome by default. Our aim is to collaborate with, create space for, and elevate the contributions of those individuals and organizations who, like us, are working to build an inclusive Internet that serves everyone.

Key topics in digital inclusion:

Advancing universal access to the whole Internet

Advancing diversity online

Advancing respect online

Advancing universal access to the whole Internet

Connecting the unconnected is one of the great challenges of our time, but we also have to ask, what are people connecting to? We believe people should have access to the full diversity of the open Internet. The Internet as an engine for education, opportunity, social benefit, economic empowerment, political engagement, and cultural development is most powerful when users have access to all of the Internet.

The inherent costs and challenges of connectivity are not the only threat to getting all of the world's citizens online. Some governments actively turn off all or parts of the Internet, with excuses ranging from protecting national security, to stopping cheating on exams. This threatens people's fundamental human rights, such as freedom of speech. It's also bad for business: from 2015-2016, **Internet shutdowns cost countries at least US\$2.4 billion in GDP globally.** Despite the fact that **the United Nations has condemned Internet shutdowns as a violation of human rights**, the practice has not stopped.

Mozilla's work on Equal Rating is focused at the intersection of Internet openness and access, and we join many others who are working to make Internet access universal and affordable as well as those who are defending net neutrality. Our work builds on our strong commitment to net neutrality: the idea that all Internet traffic should be transmitted without discrimination, restriction, or interference no matter the sender, receiver, content, website, platform, application, feature, attached

equipment, or means of communication. Net neutrality is important for digital inclusion, as well as openness.

Connectivity is not cheap. In response, some programs that provide free or subsidized Internet access have emerged. The most well-known of these approaches is "zero rating", which provides users with free access to certain websites or services. Marginalized groups are the most likely to be disadvantaged by networks that play favorites. For example, lower-income people may be unable to access certain content or services if they are more expensive or require more data. This severely limits the free and open spread of ideas, entrepreneurship, and other possibilities to level the opportunity field. Furthermore, this approach can have serious negative effects in the long term, such as skewed and uncompetitive markets, and does little to address the underlying economics that make Internet access so expensive in the first place.

The promise and the premise of our work on Equal Rating is that we can and must do better. Equal rating services are content-agnostic, not subject to gatekeepers and do not allow pay-for-play. We have advanced our vision of Equal Rating through policy work with governments around the world, research to better understand the challenges and expectations of users, and innovation. Our **Equal Rating Innovation Challenge** is designed to catalyze new thinking and new solutions to connect the unconnected to the full diversity of the open Internet, and thereby enrich it further.

Advancing diversity online

For the Internet to reach its full potential, it must reflect the diversity of our world—and to get there, the Internet community must actively work on diversity and on opportunities for everyone to use and to create online, above and beyond the challenge of connectivity itself.

Not only are Internet access and use not yet universal, but also they are far from equally distributed. This represents a connectivity problem and also a diversity problem. Worldwide, **far fewer women are using the Internet than men**. On average, Internet adoption amongst women is **11 percent lower than among men and the gap is much larger in developing countries**. Deeper, independent factors contribute significantly to this, such as unequal access to education and social inequity. Even in places with high Internet usage, marginalized communities are often the last to get connected. For example, in New York, **25% of all households and 50% of those making less than \$20,000 a year** don't have Internet at home. In an increasingly digital school system, this means that kids from low-income families need to find free wi-fi just to get their homework done.

The content and systems that make up the Internet—and related technologies, like mobile apps—**reflect the views and biases of their creators**. And the tech sector, despite growing efforts and some progress, continues to be dominated by white, able-bodied, English-speaking males. When creators are disproportionately from one group, this can lead to the development of technologies

that are not reflective of the needs and principles of a diverse group of users. For example, **a 2016 examination by ProPublica** found that an algorithm commonly used in the United States to predict the likelihood of a criminal defendant committing a future crime - predictions that are used to inform decisions about sentencing and parole - is generally unreliable, and particularly likely to falsely flag black defendants as future criminals, wrongly labeling them this way at almost twice the rate as white defendants. To minimize these unintended effects, we must actively work to increase the number of people from more diverse experiences and backgrounds in tech-related careers.

Mozilla is working to increase representation and diversity online on many fronts. **The Mozilla Leadership Network** is expanding globally, and partnering with organizations like **UN Women**, in order to support diverse leaders in increasing their knowledge, skills and connections as they advance the open web. Mozilla's **Engineering for Inclusion** team is working to advance web accessibility standards and to make Mozilla products, including Firefox, inclusive. Mozilla's Hive Learning Networks consist of member organizations that provide free, high-quality youth development and digital learning opportunities directly to young people. Our **Outreachy** program also offers opportunities for people from groups underrepresented in free and open source software to get involved.

Advancing respect online

Once online, many people—and members of marginalized communities in particular—experience discrimination and harassment. According to the **Pew Survey on Online Harassment**, 73% of Internet users have seen someone harassed online and 40% have personally experienced it. **Women in particular are singled out and targeted** by harassment across the range of services they use.

Most Internet users are familiar with **trolling**—aggressive, foul-mouthed posts designed to abuse, harass, or elicit angry responses in a site’s comment space. Trolling can make it hard for people to constructively engage in conversations on the web.

Some are using networked technologies to target people, subjecting them to vicious, often terrifying, online abuse. As Danielle Citron writes in **Hate Crimes in Cyberspace**, “Persistent online attacks disproportionately target women and frequently include detailed fantasies of rape as well as reputation-ruining lies and sexually explicit photographs. And if dealing with a single attacker’s ‘revenge porn’ were not enough, harassing posts that make their way onto social media sites often feed on one another, turning lone instigators into cyber-mobs.”

These experiences often lead to people pulling back from participating fully online, leaving

some online communities and self-censoring. In the worst cases, they may leave people feeling threatened, fearful for their safety or reputation, or considering self-harm. Given how deeply integrated the Internet is in our daily lives, this is bad for society as a whole. The negative effects ripple both online and offline, and impact individuals and communities everywhere.

While important, it is not enough to simply target the individuals who undermine respect and civil discourse online. Technology alone is also not enough: tools and algorithms aren’t perfect at identifying discriminatory content and **can at times perpetuate discrimination rather than address it**. We must focus on changing and building systems that rely on both technology and humans, to increase and protect diverse voices on the Internet.

Mozilla will continue to concentrate our efforts here by supporting initiatives such as **The Coral Project**, which is working to improve dialog on news websites by building free, open-source tools for publishers of all sizes. One of those tools is **Talk**: an application to reshape how moderation, comment display and conversation function in order to create a safer, smarter discussion that’s open to all. In addition, we will continue to lift up related work from our allies and contributors.

Read More

Key facts and reports from our site, EqualRating.com

Resources in Internet shutdowns: [KeepItOn](#) and [Internet Shutdowns in India](#)

[National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#)

[CoSN Digital Equity Action Agenda](#)

New America: [Technology and Learning in the Lives of Lower Income Families](#)

New America: [Yesterday's Internet Isn't Good Enough for Tomorrow's Cities](#)

Web Foundation: [Women's Rights Online Digital Gender Gap Audit 2016](#)

[Digital Equity and Opportunity for All: Research Findings](#)

[What Developers Need to Know from New Digital Equity Research](#)

HeartMob—a community working to help end online harassment, a project of Hollaback!, a non-profit organization powered by a global network of local activists who are dedicated to ending harassment in public spaces.