



data_privacy.txt as a Web Standard for Data Privacy Compliance

PROPOSAL

Drafted by

Data Foundation Lab

DFLab FHO Pty Ltd – Proprietary Limited Company

(13 676 090 289)

Table of Contents

1. Overview	2
2. Problem Statement	2
3. Proposed Solution	2
4. Objectives	3
5. Structure of data_privacy.txt	3
6. Example data_privacy.txt	4
7. Adoption Strategies	4
8. Benefits of the data_privacy.txt Standard	5
9. Considerations	6
9.1. Standardisation Process	6
9.2. Encouraging Adoption	6
10. Conclusion	7

DRAFT

1. Overview

With increasing incidents of data breaches and misuse of personal information, individuals and regulators alike are demanding higher transparency from websites and online services regarding how personal data is collected, used, and shared.

However, the current methods for communicating data privacy policies are inadequate. Privacy policies are often long, complex legal documents that the average user may not fully understand. Additionally, there is no standardised, machine-readable format that allows automated systems to access and process this information efficiently.

This proposal introduces `data_privacy.txt`, a simple, standardised, and machine-readable text file that websites can place in their root directory to declare their data privacy policies concisely. The file will complement traditional privacy policies, making it easier for users, automated systems, and regulatory bodies to understand a website's data privacy practices.

2. Problem Statement

Data privacy practices today are obscured by complexity and legal jargon, leaving users uninformed about how their personal data is collected, processed, and shared.

- 1. Privacy Policies Are Complex.** Privacy policies are lengthy and difficult to understand for the average user, leading to a lack of transparency.
- 2. Machine-Readable Standards Are Lacking.** There is no standardised, machine-readable format for data privacy practices, making it difficult for automated systems (such as AI crawlers or regulatory bots) to detect and monitor compliance.
- 3. Compliance Are Wrapped with Challenges.** Websites must comply with an increasing number of data privacy regulations (e.g., GDPR, CCPA), which vary across jurisdictions. Communicating compliance can be burdensome without a standardised approach.
- 4. Lacking User Trust.** Users are increasingly concerned about how their data is used but are often left in the dark due to the opaque presentation of data privacy information.

3. Proposed Solution

We propose the creation of a `data_privacy.txt` file, a standardised text file that websites can host in their root directory (e.g., https://example.com/data_privacy.txt). This file would contain essential information about the website's data privacy practices in a concise and easily understandable format. The `data_privacy.txt` file would serve as a complement to traditional privacy policies, providing a quick reference for users and automated systems alike.

4. Objectives

1. **Enhance Transparency.** Provide users with a clear and accessible summary of a website's data privacy practices.
2. **Simplify Compliance.** Offer a standardised format that aligns with various global data privacy regulations (e.g., GDPR, CCPA).
3. **Improve Accessibility.** Enable automated systems to easily access and process data privacy information.
4. **Increase User Trust.** Create trust by making data privacy practices more transparent and understandable.

5. Structure of data_privacy.txt

The data_privacy.txt file will include the following sections, each of which can be configured based on the specific practices of the website:

1. Basic Information

This section provides the essential information for users and regulatory bodies, including when the file was last updated and the contact for data privacy-related inquiries.

- **# Basic Information**
- **Last Updated: [YYYY-MM-DD]**
- **Contact: [Email of data privacy officer]**

2. Data Collection

This section lists the types of data the website collects, such as personal information, cookies, IP addresses, and usage data. It provides transparency regarding the scope of data collection.

- **# Data Collection**
- **Data_Collected: [Personal Information, Cookies, IP Address, Usage Data, None]**

3. User Rights

This section specifies the rights users have concerning their data, aligning with regulations such as GDPR (e.g., the right to access, delete, or correct their data). If no rights are provided, None can be used.

- **# User Rights**
- **User_Rights: [Access, Correction, Deletion, Portability, None]**

4. Data Sharing

Here, the website must disclose if and with whom data is shared. If no data is shared, none should be listed.

- **# Data Sharing**
- **Data_Sharing: [Third-Party Partners, Service Providers, None]**

5. Data Retention

This section provides the duration for which data is retained by the website, offering transparency about how long user data is stored.

- **# Data Retention**
- **Data_Retention: [Specific time frame, Indefinite, None]**

6. Cookies

This section informs users about the types of cookies being used and whether they are for analytics, functionality, or advertising.

- **# Cookies**
- **Cookies_Used: [Analytical, Functional, Advertising, None]**

7. Third-Party Services

This section lists any third-party services that the website uses, which might collect user data (e.g., Google Analytics).

- **# Third-Party Services**
- **Third_Party_Services: [Google Analytics, Facebook Pixel, Cloudflare, None]**

8. Security

This section provides a brief description of the security measures used to protect user data.

- **# Security**
- **Data_Security: [SSL, Two-Factor Authentication, Encryption, Standard]**

9. Breach Notification

This section outlines the website's policy for notifying users in the event of a data breach, specifying the time frame for notification.

- **# Breach Notification**
- **Breach_Notification: [Time frame (e.g., 72 Hours), Standard, None]**

10. Contact

This section provides the contact information for data privacy-related inquiries.

- **# Contact**
- **Contact: [privacy@[website].com]**

6. Example data_privacy.txt

A full example of data_privacy.txt is available at: https://github.com/Data-Foundation-Lab/data_privacy.txt/blob/main/data_privacy.txt

7. Adoption Strategies

Step 1: By Websites.

The first step is to encourage websites to adopt the data_privacy.txt file as part of their data privacy communication strategy. This can be done by integrating it into existing compliance

workflows, making it easy for web administrators to implement the file.

Step 2: Development of Tools and Resources.

To support the adoption of data_privacy.txt, tools and resources should be developed, including:

- **Open-Source Online Generators:** Tools to help website owners create their data_privacy.txt file based on their specific practices.
- **Educational Materials:** Documentation and guides for developers and businesses on how to configure and maintain the file.
- **Integration with CMS Platforms:** Plugins or modules for popular CMS platforms (e.g., WordPress, WIX) to simplify implementation.

Step 3: Partnership with Browsers and Search Engines.

Collaborate with browser developers and search engines to recognise and process data_privacy.txt files. Browsers could alert users about data privacy practices before they enter a website, and search engines could use this information in their ranking or compliance checks.

Step 4: Alignment with Global Regulations.

The format of the data_privacy.txt file should align with key global regulations such as GDPR, CCPA, and others. This can ensure that the file can serve as a complementary tool for compliance in different jurisdictions.

Step 5: Pilot Programs.

Launch pilot programs with businesses, regulatory bodies, and developers to test the implementation of data_privacy.txt. These pilots will help refine the format and establish best practices for its usage.

8. Benefits of the data_privacy.txt Standard

For Users:

1. **Simplified Privacy Information.** Users can quickly and easily understand a website's data privacy practices without having to navigate lengthy privacy policies.
2. **Greater Control.** By being informed, users can make more educated decisions about how their personal data is used.

For Businesses:

1. **Simplified Compliance.** The data_privacy.txt file can simplify compliance efforts, making it easier for businesses to align with global data privacy regulations.
2. **Trust.** The use of this file can amplify transparency, helping to build user trust and differentiate businesses as data privacy-conscious.

For Developers:

1. **Easier Implementation.** Developers can implement a standardised file that reduces the complexity of data privacy policy communication.
2. **Automation-Friendly.** The data_privacy.txt format is machine-readable, making it suitable for automated compliance checks, AI systems, and regulatory bots.

9. Considerations

While the data_privacy.txt file has the potential to reform data privacy transparency, there are several challenges and considerations that need to be addressed for it to be widely adopted and effective.

9.1. Standardisation Process

Creating a universally accepted standard is a complex process involving multiple stakeholders across industries.

1. **Legal Requirements.** Data privacy regulations differ significantly between jurisdictions (e.g., GDPR in Europe, CCPA in California, PIPEDA in Canada). Achieving a consensus on the elements that should be included in the data_privacy.txt file may be challenging, as different jurisdictions may require different levels of detail or address different rights.
2. **Technical Variations.** Websites differ greatly in terms of technology stacks and data processing practices. Creating a standard that accommodates both small websites and large enterprises, while keeping the file lightweight and machine-readable.
3. **Industry-Specific Needs.** Some industries (e.g., healthcare, finance) have stricter data privacy regulations that may necessitate additional fields or variations in the structure of data_privacy.txt.

9.2. Encouraging Adoption

One of the major hurdles is encouraging widespread adoption of the data_privacy.txt standard.

1. **Lack of Awareness.** Smaller businesses and individual website owners may not be aware of the need for newer data privacy requirement, especially if they are operating in regions without stringent data privacy laws. Educating these groups about the benefits of adopting data_privacy.txt will be the most top priority.
2. **Perceived Complexity.** Some businesses, may perceive implementing data_privacy.txt as too complex or burdensome, especially if they already struggle with compliance under current regulations. It will be critical to provide tools (such as generators or CMS plugins) to simplify the process.

- 3. Incentives for Adoption.** Unlike robots.txt, which impacts how search engines index a website, data_privacy.txt does not have an immediate, visible benefit that directly impacts traffic or rankings. Finding ways to incentivise adoption such as public recognition, integration into search rankings, or simplified regulatory compliance will be required.

10. Conclusion

The data_privacy.txt proposal addresses the growing need for transparency, simplicity, and standardisation in how websites communicate their data privacy practices. By providing a concise, machine-readable format, this file provides users the power to make informed decisions about their data while simplifying compliance for businesses.

DRAFT