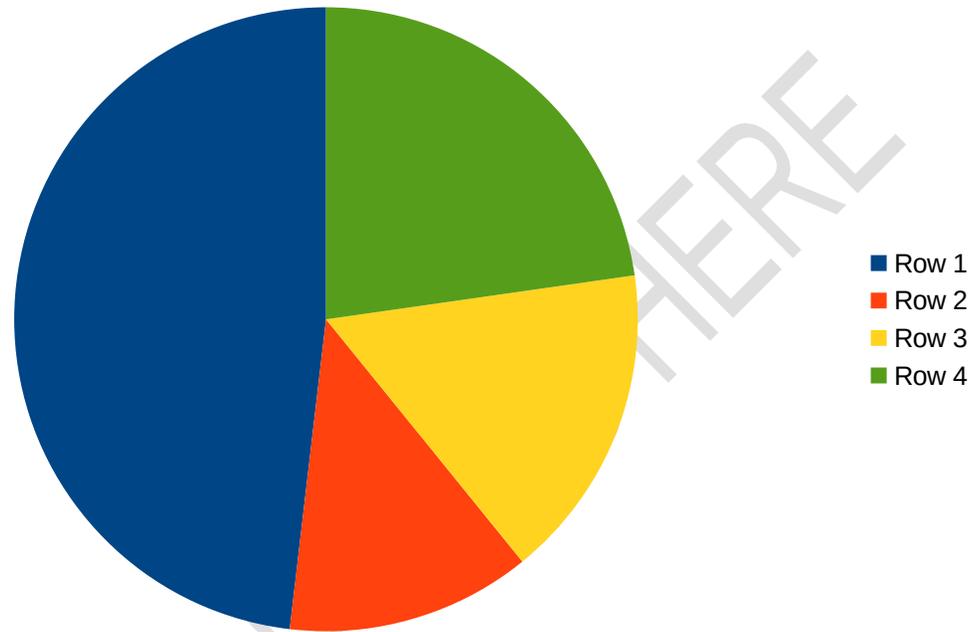


Microsoft Office

Microsoft Office, or simply Office, is a family of client software, server software and services developed by Microsoft. It was first announced by Bill Gates on August 1, 1988, at COMDEX in Las Vegas. Initially a marketing term for an office suite (bundled set of productivity applications), the first version of Office contained Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft PowerPoint. Over the years, Office applications have grown substantially closer with shared features such as a common spell checker, OLE data integration and Visual Basic for Applications scripting language. Microsoft also positions Office as a development platform for line-of-business software under the Office Business Applications brand. On July 10, 2012, Softpedia reported that Office was being used by over a billion people worldwide.

Office is produced in several versions targeted towards different end-users and computing environments. The original, and most widely used version, is the desktop version available for PCs running the Windows and macOS operating systems. Microsoft also maintains mobile apps for Android and iOS. Office on the web is a version of the software that runs within a web browser. Since Office 2013, Microsoft has promoted Office 365 as the primary means of obtaining Microsoft Office: it allows the use of the software and other services on a subscription business model, and users receive feature updates to the software for the lifetime of the subscription, including new features and cloud computing integration that are not necessarily included in the “on-premises” releases of Office sold under conventional license terms. In 2017, revenue from Office 365 overtook conventional license sales. Microsoft also rebranded most of their standard Office 365 editions into Microsoft 365 to emphasize their current inclusion of products and services.



The current on-premises, desktop version of Office is Office 2021, released on October 5, 2021.

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Tabla 1:



On November 12, 2018, a report initiated by the Government of the Netherlands concluded that Microsoft Office 2016 and Office 365 do not comply with GDPR, the European law which regulates data protection and privacy for all citizens in and outside the EU and EFTA region. The investigation was initiated by the observation that Microsoft does not reveal or share publicly any data collected about users of its software. In addition, the company does not provide users of its (Office) software an option to turn off diagnostic and telemetry data sent back to the company. Researchers found that most of the data that the Microsoft software collects and “sends home” is diagnostics. Researchers also observed that Microsoft “seemingly tried to make the system GDPR compliant by storing Office documents on servers based in the EU”. However, they discovered the software packages collected additional data that contained private user information, some of which was stored on servers located in the US. The Netherlands Ministry of Justice hired Privacy Company to probe and evaluate the use of Microsoft Office products in the public sector. “Microsoft systematically collects data on a large scale about the individual use of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook. Covertly, without informing people”, researchers of the Privacy Company stated in their blog post. “Microsoft does not offer any choice with regard to the amount of data, or possibility to switch off the collection, or ability to see what data are collected, because the data stream

is encoded.”

Axel Lopez 25/02/2025

The researchers commented that there is no need for Microsoft to store information such as IPs and email addresses, which are collected automatically by the software. “Microsoft should not store these transient, functional data, unless the retention is strictly necessary, for example, for security purposes”, the researchers conclude in the final report by the Netherlands Ministry of Justice.

As result of this in-depth study and its conclusions, the Netherlands regulatory body concluded that Microsoft has violated GDPR “on many counts” including “lack of transparency and purpose limitation, and the lack of a legal ground for the processing.” Microsoft has provided the Dutch authorities with an “improvement plan” that should satisfy Dutch regulations that it “would end all violations”. The Dutch regulatory body is monitoring the situation and states that “If progress is deemed insufficient or if the improvements offered are unsatisfactory, SLM Microsoft Rijk will reconsider its position and may ask the Dutch Data Protection Authority to carry out a prior consultation and to impose enforcement measures.” When asked for a response by an IT professional publication, a Microsoft spokesperson stated: “We are committed to our customers’ privacy, putting them in control of their data and ensuring that Office ProPlus and other Microsoft products and services comply with GDPR and other applicable laws. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss our diagnostic data handling practices in Office ProPlus with the Dutch Ministry of Justice and look forward to a successful resolution of any concerns.” The user privacy data issue affects ProPlus subscriptions of Microsoft Office 2016 and Microsoft Office 365, including the online version of Microsoft Office 365.

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