2024 Annual Report to UNCTAD

ICANN Contribution

31 October 2024

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Part 1. Executive Summary

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is committed to supporting the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action Lines by fostering digital inclusivity through its work on Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) and its broader community support initiatives. By supporting the development of IDNs in a wide variety of scripts, ICANN ensures that the multilingual Internet becomes a reality for communities around the world. This work is facilitated through the multistakeholder model, where language experts, technical professionals, and domain name organizations collaborate to establish secure and inclusive policies. In 2024, ICANN continued to expand IDN support, with new languages and scripts such as Balinese and Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics, ensuring that more users can access the Internet in their local languages. Universal Acceptance (UA) is critical to the success of IDNs, as it ensures that all domain names and email addresses, regardless of script or language, are processed effectively by online systems. ICANN's ongoing UA efforts are essential for the seamless integration of IDNs across platforms and applications, driving further inclusivity.

In addition to its work on IDNs, ICANN has developed innovative programs to support Internet diversity and access.

- The Applicant Support Program (ASP), to be launched in November 2024, is designed to help applicants apply for the New Generic Top-Level Domains (gTLD) Program: Next Round. By offering both financial and nonfinancial support, the ASP seeks to lower the barriers to entry for applicants, promoting greater diversity and competition in the domain name space. Applicants eligible for the ASP may receive reduced fees, pro bono services, and additional support during the application process.
- The Grant Program, launched in 2024, further complements these efforts by providing financial resources to projects that promote ICANN's mission of a single, open, and globally interoperable Internet.

Through these programs, ICANN demonstrates its commitment to fostering an inclusive and accessible Internet ecosystem, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals of WSIS and the U.N.'s 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Together, ICANN's work on IDNs, the ASP, and the Grant Program reflects a broader commitment to promoting linguistic diversity, Internet accessibility, and equitable participation in the global digital landscape. By supporting diverse communities and stakeholders, ICANN is laying the groundwork for a more inclusive Internet that benefits users worldwide.

Part 2. Analytical Overview

Digital Inclusivity – ICANN and the Development of IDNs
IDNs are essential to accessing the Internet using domain names in local languages and scripts used by various communities across the world. IDNs promote digital inclusion by supporting the use of a multilingual Internet. ICANN has been actively working with the global technical and language communities to securely define IDNs. ICANN has also supported community work to develop policy and guidelines to allow for implementing IDNs.

ICANN has already published rules for forming IDNs for the following scripts: Arabic, Armenian, Bangla, Chinese (Han), Cyrillic, Devanagari, and Ethiopic. Additional supported scripts include Georgian, Greek, Gujarati, Gurmukhi, Hebrew, Japanese (Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji [Han]), Kannada, Khmer, Korean (Hangul and Hanja [Han]), Lao, Latin, Malayalam, Myanmar, Oriya, Sinhala, Tamil, Telugu, and Thai. These rules support IDNs in hundreds of languages that use these scripts worldwide. ICANN continues to support community efforts to enable IDNs in additional languages and scripts, with recent efforts focusing on Balinese, Thaana, and Unified Canadian Aboriginal Syllabics. Ongoing work is also being done on the Javanese and Sundanese scripts.

This work is carried out by forming and supporting script-based community panels within an open, multistakeholder model. This model brings together representatives from different sectors, including script community users, language experts, domain name business organizations, and the technical community, ensuring that various perspectives are considered in decision-making. To date, 61 country code top-level domains and 90 generic top-level domains (gTLDs) have been delegated in 37 languages across 23 scripts. ICANN has also collaborated with the community to develop more detailed policies and guidelines to comprehensively address the challenges of implementing IDNs. By leveraging the multistakeholder model, ICANN ensures that the needs of diverse linguistic communities are met while maintaining global Internet security and stability.

Once registered and operational, UA of domain names and associated email addresses in local languages and scripts is crucial for ensuring their full utilization across all software and systems. UA is a technical best practice which requires that Internet applications can accept, validate, process, store, and display all valid domain names and email addresses. For example, it would allow a person with an email address in the Japanese language to sign up on a social media application or an e-commerce website. ICANN actively engages directly with organizations and supports community efforts toward raising awareness of UA challenges and helping to address them.

The ICANN community, under the multistakeholder framework, continues to lead the development of policies that support secure, efficient solutions for IDNs, as well as promote usability by creating awareness for UA. These efforts promote inclusivity by allowing global communities to use the Internet in their native languages. Through the collaborative efforts of these stakeholders, ICANN is paving the way for a more linguistically diverse Internet.

Part 3. A Brief Description of Innovative Policies, Programs, and Projects

ICANN's Applicant Support Program for the New gTLD Program: Next Round
ICANN created the ASP to provide financial and non-financial support to prospective gTLD applicants. The program aims to make applying for a new gTLD and operating a registry more accessible to those facing financial and resource constraints.

The ASP application process is separate from the New gTLD Program application, and takes place before the new gTLD application submission period opens. This timing ensures that supported applicants have sufficient time to utilize the available support package to inform their gTLD application. The application submission period for the ASP is anticipated to open on 19 November 2024 and will remain open for 12 months.

Applicants that qualify for support would be eligible for:

- An ASP training program.
- Access to pro bono (volunteer) providers that have agreed to volunteer their services to supported applicants.
- Resources and information for potential applicants to better understand the New gTLD Program, what it means to operate a gTLD, and how to participate in ICANN's multistakeholder community.
- Access to Applicant Counselors to help answer questions about the gTLD application process and provide guidance on where to find available resources.
- A 75-85% reduction in New gTLD Program evaluation fees for supported applicants.
- A bid credit applied to supported applicants participating in contention resolution procedures established in the New gTLD Program: Next Round Applicant Guidebook, which could occur if two or more applications are placed in contention sets. The type of support will be determined as part of the implementation of SubPro Final Report Topic 35 (see pp. 173-182). Further detail around this will be included in the New gTLD Program: Next Round Applicant Guidebook.
- Reduced base Registry Operator fees, should the supported applicant prevail in the gTLD program evaluation and proceed to contracting and delegation.

To find more information about the ASP, please refer to the ASP Handbook and ASP website.

The ICANN Grant Program
The ICANN Grant Program, launched in early 2024, is currently processing applications received during the inaugural application window. This program reflects ICANN's commitment to championing a single, open, and globally interoperable Internet that serves all users. In doing so, it aligns with the principles of the U.N.'s WSIS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

The Grant Program represents a significant milestone in ICANN's ongoing efforts to nurture a robust and inclusive Internet ecosystem. It is the culmination of years of collaborative work within the ICANN community, showcasing the multistakeholder model in action and ICANN's capacity to implement community recommendations.

The ICANN Grant Program was conceived as a powerful mechanism to fund projects that encourage, facilitate, and support ICANN's mission and its vision of a single globally interoperable Internet. The program is designed to support initiatives that further ICANN's mission by:

- Supporting the development, distribution, evolution, and initiatives that strengthen the Internet's unique identifier systems.
- Providing capacity development.
- Advancing development, innovation, and open standards for the benefit of the Internet community.
- Contributing to diversity, participation, and inclusion across stakeholder communities and geographic regions.

ICANN's future initiatives, including the ICANN Grant Program, are directly aligned with the principles and goals of WSIS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By fostering an open and interoperable Internet, these initiatives contribute to the overarching objective of harnessing information and communication technologies for the betterment of societies worldwide.

One World, One Internet