

2025 Annual Report to UNCTAD

ICANN Contribution to the annual report on “Progress made in 2025 in the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels”

31 October 2025



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Part One: Executive Summary

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is advancing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2025 by promoting digital inclusion, multilingualism, and strengthening the multistakeholder model of Internet governance. ICANN's efforts on Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) directly supports WSIS Action Line C8 and Target 9 by working with stakeholders to enable communities to access the Internet in their local languages and scripts. ICANN is collaborating with UNESCO to drive Universal Acceptance (UA) of all domain names and email addresses. This ensures that valid addresses regardless of character length, language, or script can be used in all Internet-enabled applications, devices, and systems. A key milestone this year was the publication of the Root Zone Generation Rules Version 6, a technical standard that expands the Internet's domain name system to support more scripts like Thaana, allowing millions more people to use the Internet in their native language.

The UA program expanded global readiness for IDNs by holding regional workshops across Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America. These workshops improved technical capacity for IDNs, and ensured wider domain name and email address functionality across applications. While tremendous progress has been achieved, the pace of UA adoption must remain a priority. More accelerated efforts are needed to overcome the remaining technical barriers and drive wider implementation.

The New Generic Top-Level Domains (gTLD) Program: Next Round is expected to open in April 2026. This ICANN community-driven initiative will enable the continued expansion of the Domain Name System (DNS). This initiative is specifically intended to foster diversity, encourage competition, and enhance the utility of the DNS by introducing new gTLDs. The Applicant Support Program (ASP) is making this opportunity more accessible to all. The ASP provides financial and nonfinancial support to applicants who would otherwise be unable to apply for a new gTLD or operate a registry due to financial and resource constraints.

ICANN remains committed to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), strengthening our engagement in the forum this year. ICANN co-organized sessions on digital cooperation and trust, and promoted dialogue among stakeholders, including governments, the technical community, and civil society. ICANN's joint publication with the Internet Society titled "*Footprints of 20 Years of the Internet Governance Forum*," provides substantive perspectives on the global impact of the IGF.

Through sustained efforts in promoting the successes of the multistakeholder model for Internet governance, ICANN continued to contribute to the WSIS objectives by supporting a single, open, and interoperable Internet.

Part Two: Analytical Overview

WSIS recognized the Internet's transformative power, setting ambitious human-centric goals to ensure its benefits reach everyone. Grounded in the multistakeholder model, this monumental effort to expand digital transformation across the globe cultivated the necessary collaborative partnerships from the private and public sectors, resulting in remarkable achievements.

Achievements

Expanding Internet Access: a defining success has been the significant expansion of global Internet access with the number of Internet users, increasing from approximately 1.4 billion people in 2005¹ to 5.5 billion today, according to information and communications technology (ICT) figures from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Throughout 2025, the technical community has continued to be instrumental in maintaining the Internet's stability, security, and interoperability. This foundation has not only facilitated the Internet's extraordinary global reach, but has served as a crucial platform supporting vital sectors, including business, education, and e-government services.

Digital Inclusivity and Multilingualism: A vast majority of the world's population are non-native English speakers. Digital inclusion enables people to use the Internet in their native language allowing them to fully realize the Internet's full potential and benefits. Significant progress has been made toward multilingualism and digital inclusivity. Collaboration within the ICANN community has led to the delegation of 151 IDNs supporting 37 languages across 23 scripts, and established rules for 26 commonly used scripts, spanning over 350 languages.

Increased Confidence and Security Online: Enhancing end-user privacy and Internet security is a key technological trend in the Internet infrastructure. The Internet was initially designed for functionality within a trusted ecosystem, but it became accessible to all, and prioritizing security became crucial. Key developments by the technical community include: the implementation of encrypted DNS protocols², like DNS-over-HTTPS and DNS-over-TCP and others to address end-user privacy concerns over clear text DNS queries, and the global deployment of Resource Public Key Infrastructure (RPKI)³ to enhance user trust and privacy.

Key Obstacles and Emerging Trends

Risks of Internet Fragmentation

Despite its successes, the WSIS process faces several ongoing challenges in its implementation. Geopolitical tensions remain a significant barrier, as competing interests can hinder consensus and global cooperation on digital policies. Additionally, the enactment of rules and regulations without a thorough understanding of their technical implications may

¹ Statista, Percentage of global population accessing the internet from 2005 to 2022, by market maturity <https://www.statista.com/statistics/209096/share-of-internet-users-worldwide-by-market-maturity/>

² ICANN, Office of the Chief Technology Officer. Local and Internet Policy Implications of Encrypted DNS. <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/octo-003-30apr20-en.pdf>

³ ICANN Wiki, Resource Public Key Infrastructure. https://icannwiki.org/Resource_Public_Key_Infrastructure

result in unintended consequences, such as Internet fragmentation or creating inefficiencies in digital systems.

Challenges to the Multistakeholder Model

WSIS established a framework for Internet governance, clearly defining the roles of diverse stakeholders such as governments, the technical community, civil society, and business. Central to this framework was the establishment of the IGF as a key multistakeholder forum for discussing Internet related issues and to collaboratively identify solutions. The IGF continues to serve as an indispensable platform. However, proliferation of new and duplicative multilateral processes to address similar Internet-related issues may affect inclusive and meaningful participation by all stakeholders in WSIS implementation.

Part Three: Innovative Policies

ICANN and the ICANN community continue to drive a more inclusive global digital landscape, underscored by new programs and technical solutions.

Root Zone Generation Rules Version 6

In September 2025, ICANN published the Root Zone Generation Rules Version 6 (RZ LGR-6), a technical standard that defines the set of rules and characters that are available for creating IDNs in the Domain Name System (DNS) root zone of the Internet. The RZ LGR-6 represents a significant advancement for multilingualism and digital inclusion to enable a more inclusive Internet. The updated rules now cover twenty-seven scripts such as Arabic, Chinese (Han), Cyrillic, Devanagari (Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji [Han]), Thaana, and Thai.

Applicant Support Program

[The ASP](#) was developed as part of ICANN's New gTLD Program. The Program helps promote participation from entities that wish to apply for a gTLD, but may need financial and capacity development resources to do so. As affirmed by the ICANN community in its policy development processes, the primary purposes of new gTLDs are to foster diversity, encourage competition, and enhance the utility of the DNS.

The ASP also contributes to ICANN's Strategic Objective of facilitating digital inclusion – ensuring that the DNS is accessible and beneficial to all. Efforts such as the ASP can also help strengthen the global participatory infrastructure for the Internet in the Domain Name System. Towards that end, the ICANN community advised on raising awareness of the ASP, emphasizing the importance of targeting potential applicants from the not-for-profit sector, social enterprises, and community organizations from under-served and developing regions and countries.

The ASP's capacity development initiatives – such as toolkits, training, mentorship, and pro bono services – support WSIS action line goals by building the skills and knowledge needed for meaningful engagement, particularly in developing regions. As of 19 October 2025, ICANN has seen 115 ASP applications initiated from across 28 different countries or territories. ICANN continues to encourage interested organizations to apply before the deadline of 19 November 2025.



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