

ICANN's Contribution to the European Commission's Call for Evidence

on a Joint Communication
on an International
Digital Strategy

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1. Introduction

Founded in 1998, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is a global nonprofit, public-benefit organization, dedicated to the coordination and technical management of the Internet's unique identifiers. ICANN's responsibilities include overseeing domain names, allocating IP addresses, setting protocol parameters, and managing the root server system. By maintaining the stability and interoperability of these unique identifier systems, ICANN plays a crucial role in supporting the Internet's secure growth and ensuring over a billion websites remain reachable by 5.8 billion users worldwide.

ICANN's efforts ensure the Internet remains unified, secure, interoperable and functioning smoothly across borders. ICANN's work helps prevent fragmentation, mitigates technical failures and security threats, and supports a neutral, multistakeholder governance model. Considering that the Internet is the backbone of the global economy, governance, and cross-border digital services, ICANN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the European Commission's Call for Evidence on a Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy.

This contribution to the European Commission's Call for Evidence (Ref. Ares(2025)3716570 - 07/05/2025) on a Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy is submitted by ICANN in accordance with its [charter](#) for engagement with governments and standards-setting bodies. ICANN appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the European Commission regarding the strategic objectives of this initiative, namely the concrete actions on international cooperation, including Internet governance, and better coordination of the EU's positions in multilateral forums.

First, ICANN welcomes the European Commission's and the EU's strong support of a global, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet through its acceptance and participation in the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, as well as efforts on the global stage leveraging digital partnerships to increase procedural transparency, broaden stakeholder participation, and enable globally representative engagement in international processes that underpin the Internet governance framework.

Second, ICANN welcomes the European Commission's objective to implement concrete actions on international cooperation, including actions on Internet governance, and cautions against possible negative implications resulting in Internet fragmentation at the technical level, rooted in either technical or legislative divergence.

Third, noting the EU's strategic objective to better coordinate its unified positions in relevant forums and in the multilateral arena, especially in light of the upcoming review of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20 Review process), ICANN recommends the extension of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) mandate, recognition of the technical community as a distinct stakeholder and support of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance.

2. Reinforcing the Multistakeholder Model of Internet Governance

Policies governing the Internet's unique identifiers system are developed through a bottom-up, multistakeholder process. Through ICANN's multistakeholder model, the Supporting Organizations (SOs) develop and recommend policies concerning the Internet's technical management within their areas of expertise, and community members participate in an open, transparent, consensus-driven approach to policy development. Their participation ensures broad consensus in adopting new policies that impact the operation of the global DNS namespace.

ICANN coordinates the global system of unique Internet identifiers—including domain names, IP addresses, and protocol parameters—to ensure the secure and stable operation of a single, interoperable Internet. This coordination, grounded in a neutral and technical driven model, helps prevent fragmentation and supports continued scalability, and global reach.

The multistakeholder model of Internet governance has kept the Internet scalable, secure, and globally interoperable and has allowed endless new services to become accessible for all Internet users. As discussions take place all over the globe, reinforcing this model is essential to ensure that governance frameworks remain adaptable and technologically neutral—supporting the seamless integration of future technologies without undermining the Internet's foundational principles.

ICANN urges the EU to remain committed to supporting and advancing the multistakeholder model of Internet governance—not only in multilateral and international forums but also through the digital policies it adopts and the partnerships it builds. Moreover, ICANN recommends the EU leverages its digital cooperation with partner countries to advocate for meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, particularly from underserved countries and regions such as the Global South, in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines.

The next significant wave of Internet growth is expected to come from regions where Internet penetration is currently low. Engaging proactively and building coalitions with countries in the Global South is a priority—not only to foster capacity building and enable participation in the global digital economy, but also to mitigate the risks of fragmentation and widening digital divides.

The Internet is essential infrastructure for economic development, broad participation, and global connectivity. By reinforcing the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, the EU can strengthen its role on the global stage and support efforts to close global digital divides.

3. Prevent Internet Fragmentation

The Internet functions because it is a single, globally connected network. However, policy decisions, alternative technical approaches, and geopolitical tensions are increasing the risk of fragmentation—where parts of the Internet function differently depending on region, platform, or technology.

Through the lens of a technical organization such as ICANN, Internet fragmentation—sometimes referred to as “Splinternet”—involves the splitting of the global Internet into smaller, non-interoperable segments. This can result from physically disconnected networks to conflicting name spaces. As long as the tens of thousands of different computer networks that make up the global Internet can interconnect, the Internet remains single, interoperable and unified.

Internet fragmentation can result from policy or technical divergence. It may be triggered by national regulations that conflict with globally coordinated approaches or by the deployment of incompatible technical standards. Fragmentation at the technical level, threatens its global reach and interoperability that are essential to the Internet’s role as a global network.

While the Internet continues to evolve, its core stability, interoperability, and global reach must be preserved. Technologies such as AI, digital twins, blockchain-based systems and next-generation connectivity will transform how digital services operate—but only a unified Internet can support that innovation at scale and for all users.

To prevent fragmentation it is imperative to support and preserve the mandates and governance structures of multistakeholder organizations and institutions that uphold the global Internet, such as the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), ICANN, and others, and to enable their respective consensus-driven processes to produce globally implementable and technically sound outcomes.

ICANN also cautions against extending the notion of digital sovereignty to the Internet’s core technical infrastructure, and recommends the European Commission considers integrating mechanisms or metrics into its impact assessments to evaluate the potential effects of legislative initiatives on Internet fragmentation at the technical level.

Such considerations could enable a more systemic approach to digital security and resilience, along with preemptive measures to avoid unintended consequences from digital policy initiatives. This would help ensure that new policies align with global Internet standards, including by participating in standards organizations like the IETF, Network Operator Groups, and ICANN.

4. Advance the Future of Internet Governance

In December 2025, the United Nations General Assembly will conduct the 20-year review of the WSIS outcomes. This process will revisit the foundational principles of global Internet governance as outlined in the Tunis Agenda and the WSIS+10 Outcome Document. The purpose of the review process is to assess progress made on the implementation of the WSIS outcomes and identify areas for continued focus. The outcome of this process could have profound implications for how the Internet is governed in the future.

ICANN, and the broader Internet community, support the reaffirmation of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, which includes the involvement of governments, businesses, civil society and the technical community, and cautions against any shifts toward a multilateral top-down approach to Internet governance. Such shifts could result in the exclusion of key stakeholders, increased risks of technical fragmentation, reduced innovation, slower digital transformation, and weakened global interoperability of the Internet.

The EU's digital future, as well as its role as a global digital leader, depends on reinforcing a global, stable, secure, and interoperable Internet and a resilient governance model. Any erosion of the multistakeholder model risks sidelining the technical community, introducing geopolitical influence and motivation into technical decision-making, and undermining the open and interoperable nature of the Internet.

ICANN recommends the EU supports the preservation of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, as any attempts to replace it with a top-down, multilateral approach risk fragmenting the Internet's technical foundation, and limiting the broad representation in the technical decision-making processes.

Furthermore, ICANN recommends that the EU advocates for the technical community's expertise and unique role—distinct from that of other relevant stakeholders—to remain central in Internet governance discussions. The technical community comprises organizations and groups that play essential roles in the Internet's daily technical operations, supporting the smooth functioning and interoperability of the Internet for business, government, civil society, and end users alike.

ICANN supports extending the mandate of the IGF, and exploring the possibility of establishing its permanence and improving its operations. The United Nations GDC has acknowledged "the importance of the Internet Governance Forum as the primary multi-stakeholder platform for discussion of Internet governance issues", enabling all stakeholders— including governments—to engage equally and exchange ideas that support Internet development.

The IGF highlights the success of the multistakeholder model and demonstrates the value of globally representative, bottom-up governance that takes into account the importance of technical stability for the proper functioning of the global Internet. Finally, to avoid duplication, ICANN recommends clarifying the relationship between the WSIS+20 process and the GDC to ensure they have distinct mandates and responsibilities as emphasized in GDC paragraphs 68, 69 and 72.

5. Conclusion

ICANN appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the European Commission's Call for Evidence on a Joint Communication on an International Digital Strategy, and remains committed to providing expertise regarding the technical functioning of the Internet and the multistakeholder model of Internet governance.

ICANN welcomes the European Commission's and the EU's strong support for a global, interoperable, reliable, secure, stable and resilient Internet, including its endorsement of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance. By affirming and actively championing this model, the EU can reinforce its leadership role on the global stage and deepen meaningful partnerships to advance the future of Internet governance.

ICANN recommends that the mandates and governance structures of multistakeholder organizations and institutions that uphold the global Internet be supported to avoid risks of fragmentation.

As discussions regarding the future of Internet governance and the WSIS+20 process at the U.N. progress, ICANN supports the reaffirmation of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, recommends recognition of the distinct role of the technical community, and supports extending the mandate of the IGF while exploring the possibility of establishing its permanence and improving its operations.



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