PSR on Expired Domain Deletion and Expired Registration Recovery Policies

NCSG Comments

May 23, 2025

About NCSG

NCSG represents the interests of non-commercial domain name registrants and end-users in formulating the Domain Name System policy within the Generic Names Supporting Organisation (GNSO). We are proud to have individual and organizational members in over 160 countries, and as a network of academics, Internet end-users, and civil society actors, etc, we represent a broad cross-section of the global Internet community. Since our predecessor's inception in 1999, we have facilitated global academic and civil society engagement in support of ICANN's mission, stimulating an informed citizenry and building their understanding of relevant DNS policy issues.

About this Public Comment

https://www.icann.org/en/public-comment/proceeding/psr-on-expired-domain-deletion-and-expired-registration-recovery-policies-15-05-2025

Our Comment

The Non-Commercial Stakeholders Group (NCSG) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the Policy Status Report (PSR) concerning the Expired Domain Deletion Policy (EDDP) and the Expired Registration Recovery Policy (ERRP). We acknowledge the efforts made to evaluate these policies and offer the following comments and recommendations to ensure they continue to serve the interests of non-commercial users effectively.

1. Enhance Transparency and Accessibility of Renewal and Redemption Fees

While the ERRP mandates that registrars disclose renewal and redemption fees, there remains inconsistency in how this information is presented. Non-commercial registrants, often operating with limited resources, may find it challenging to locate or comprehend these fees.

There’s inadequate Protection for Non-Commercial Registrants:

The current policies fail to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial domain holders, leaving vulnerable users (e.g., grassroots organizations) at risk of losing essential digital assets due to:

Opaque recovery fees: Many registrars charge exorbitant redemption fees, effectively pricing out non-commercial entities.

Inconsistent notifications: Despite ERRP requirements, registrants often report unclear or delayed expiration alerts.

One of the most exploitative practices under the current system is the imposition of exorbitant recovery fees, which some registrars use to extract additional revenue from registrants who fail to renew on time. Non-commercial users, often operating on tight budgets, are disproportionately affected by these fees, which can reach 5-10 times the cost of an annual renewal. To curb this abuse, the Policy must establish a regulatory cap on redemption fees, limiting them to no more than 1.5 times the standard annual registration cost (e.g., a $15/year domain would max out at $22.50 for recovery). Additionally, registrars should be required to disclose all fees upfront in expiration notices, ensuring registrants are fully informed before entering the redemption process

2. Strengthen Communication Channels for Expiration Notices

The current requirement for registrars to send expiration notices primarily via email may not suffice, especially considering issues like spam filters or outdated contact information. We suggest that registrars employ multiple communication channels—such as SMS, phone calls, or postal mail—to ensure that registrants receive timely notifications. This multi-faceted approach will reduce the risk of unintentional domain expirations, particularly for non-commercial entities that may not monitor email communications regularly.

Many non-commercial registrants report that expiration notices are either buried in spam folders, written in confusing language, or delivered through unreliable channels. To mitigate this, this Policy should enforce strict notification requirements, including a minimum of three email alerts (sent 30, 15, and 1 day before expiration), supplemented by SMS or registered mail for high-value domains (e.g., those registered for more than five years). Registrars should also be required to display prominent, click-through warnings in user dashboards, ensuring that registrants cannot overlook pending expirations.

3. Clarify and Standardize the Redemption Grace Period (RGP) Process

The RGP serves as a critical safety net for registrants to recover expired domains. However, the process and associated fees can vary significantly among registrars, leading to confusion and potential inequities. We advocate for the standardization of the RGP process, including a uniform duration and a cap on redemption fees. Short redemption windows (30 days), which incentivize predatory actors to target expired domains.

Non-commercial users, such as nonprofits, community groups, and independent media, often operate with limited administrative capacity, making it difficult to track and respond to domain expiration notices in a short timeframe. The current 30-day redemption period is insufficient for these entities to recover from accidental lapses, particularly when staff turnover or funding delays occur. To address this, ICANN should implement a tiered grace period system, granting non-commercial registrants 60 days to reclaim expired domains, while maintaining the existing 30-day window for commercial registrants. Eligibility could be verified through tax-exempt status (for NGOs) or a self-certification process for informal groups, with penalties for misuse.

4. Address Potential Exploitation in the Domain Aftermarket

There is concern that some registrars may engage in practices that prioritize the resale of expired domains over the interests of the original registrants. This is particularly detrimental to non-commercial users who may lose critical online identities. We urge ICANN to investigate and regulate such practices to ensure that the rights of original registrants are protected and that the domain aftermarket operates transparently and ethically. Prioritize recovery for domains associated with public-interest projects (e.g., .ORG, .NGO).

The existing 30-day redemption window inadvertently enables domain speculators to swoop in and acquire expired domains for resale or adversarial purposes, a practice that harms non-commercial users whose domains often carry reputational or operational value. To disrupt this cycle, we propose to implement a 90-day "cooling-off period" before expired domains can be re-registered by third parties. During this time, the original registrant would retain exclusive recovery rights, while auctions or bulk sales would be prohibited. This measure would deter domain hoarding and give legitimate owners a fair chance to reclaim their assets without competing against automated bots or opportunistic investors.

Certain domains, such as those used by humanitarian organizations, crisis response teams, or independent journalism outlets, serve critical public functions and should not be subject to the same deletion risks as commercial or personal sites. ICANN should allow registrants to designate domains as "high-priority" (e.g., .ORG, .NGO, or verified civil society projects), granting them extended 90-day redemption periods and requiring registrars to make direct outreach attempts (e.g., phone calls) before deletion.

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