
ICANN75 | AGM – At-Large Policy: ICANN’s Goal for a Multilingual Internet through IDNs
Monday, September 19, 2022 – 13:15 to 14:30 KUL

YEŞİM SAĞLAM:

Hello and welcome to At-Large Policy Session: ICANN's Goal for a Multilingual Internet Through IDNs. My name is Yeşim Sağlam, and I'm the remote participation manager for this session.

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With that, I will hand the floor over to Justine Chew. Thank you.

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JUSTINE CHEW:

Thank you very much, Yeşim. My name is Justine Chew, and I am here in my capacity as the APRALO Policy Forum co-chair, despite what my name card says.

Okay, so we are starting a bit late. Sorry about that. I think people are sort of strolling in after lunch. To be expected, I suppose. But I think we do have a pretty exciting agenda. Hopefully you will stay until the end. And I'm trying to scan if there are newcomers in the room. I think there's some because I don't recognize the faces.

Anyway, so I'm going to just talk a little bit about what this session is about, and then I'm going to introduce our three panelists at one go so that we don't have a break in between the whole thing. But once we start, when I call upon the first panelists, I'm probably going to try and pose some questions to them so that they will respond when they speak to it. And I would ask that, if possible, you hold ... You can post questions or comments in the chat, but we'll try and hold them until the end where we have dedicated discussion time.

If we see ... And this is not for Yeşim [inaudible]. If we see a particular question that is addressed to the first panelist, the first speaker, Edmon, then we might want to bring it up straight away because Edmon is conflicted and he's very kindly come up from his other session to join us for a little while. Okay?

So, not spending any more time going through housekeeping. So we know that for two decades now, ICANN ... And when I say ICANN, I'm talking about the ICANN community as well as the technical community that works with ICANN. They've been very hard at work in the forefront

of efforts to support what we're trying to achieve here, which is an inclusive and multilingual Internet, and to do that by way of internationalizing the Domain Name System.

So this sort of effort has been ongoing since 2003, insofar as ICANN is concerned. And this effort has enabled end users—so you and I, people who actually use the Internet—to navigate the Internet by using the Domain Name System (the DNS) in selected local scripts. And what we mean by local scripts, “script” refers to the writing language, the written language. And “local” means, basically, scripts that are not Latin script. So that's what IDNs are about. And examples of what I'm talking about is things like Han script, Arabic script, Devanagari, and a whole bunch of other scripts.

To date, we have 61 IDN country code top-level domains, or ccTLDs, and 92 IDN generic top-level domain names, or gTLDs. And these have been delegated into the root. And together they represent 37 languages in 23 scripts. But still in the end of 2021, we've had only about 8.6 million IDN domain name registrations according to the IDN [inaudible] report, anyway. And that number pales in comparison to the overall domain name registration which stands at about over 314 million as it ran about the end of 2021.

And the internationalization of the Domain Name System has always been one of the At-Large’s—the At-Large community, the committee that I represent—goals. We've been big proponents of this goal to expand the DNS by internationalizing it. But we do also appreciate that it's not a simple process. It's not just a matter of just introducing

something to the root. It had to comply with certain standards and language, uniqueness, and that sort of thing.

And today we have the pleasure of listening to several experts in this area who have been in the forefront of making the Internet more multilingual. So without further ado, I am going to introduce the panelists for a little while.

So the first speaker that we have is Mr. Edmon Chung. Edmon is a social innovator and award-winning entrepreneur. He currently serves as the CEO of DotAsia Organisation, and he's also on the Executive Committee of Internet Society Hong Kong, or ISOC HK, among other organizations and entities that play in the space of Internet Governance Forum.

Interestingly enough, Edmon has long been a participant in Internet governance and social innovation matters. He is also the inventor of patents of Internationalized Domain Names and e-mail addresses technologies and has served in many capacities in the IDN space. He has most recently been appointed to serve as an ICANN Board member. And that happened in 2021. So that is Edmon.

The second speaker that we have is Sarmad Hussain. Sarmad is Senior Director of ICANN’s Internationalized Domain Names and Universal Acceptance Program. He was a professor of computer science and held the IDRC chair in Multilingual Computing. His also has extensive experience in researching asia Asian languages, linguistics, localization, speech processing, and computational linguistics.

He has also been engaged in the ICANN community for a while. He was involved with the IDN ccTLD application for Pakistan and is still a

member of the Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC) before joining ICANN.

So, welcome to our guests Edmon and Sarmad.

The last speaker is a speaker from At-Large, Jonathan Zook. Jonathan is now vice-chair of Policy with the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC). He's also the co-chair of the At-Large Consolidated Policy Working Group (CPWG). And that's where much of the deliberations on ICANN policy development from an individual end user perspective takes place.

And Jonathan, I'm pleased to say, is the incoming ALAC chair, and he will take his seat at the end of the AGM at ICANN75.

All right, so let's move on so that we have time for Edmon to get through what he needs to get through. So, Edmon, if I can call upon you. As one of the pioneers in the efforts to internationalize the Domain Name System, can you tell us a little bit about what are the primary hurdles that the community has had to face in introducing IDNs, whether it's at the top level or second level? And what do you see as the agenda for the IDNs going forward?

EDMON CHUNG:

Thank you, Justine. And thank you for having me. Those of you who know me, this is obviously a passionate topic for myself. I have been working on it for over 20 years now all the way here. One thing, this IDN is one of the longest-standing discussions at ICANN. Just like WHOIS. Right? We always talk about WHOIS and IDNs for the last 20 years.

So when we talk about Internationalized Domain Names, we often start by setting the narrative about bringing the next billion users online. And that is true. The majority of people do not speak English as a first language. However, I would like to emphasize a couple of things that I think are ways to look at this challenge.

First of all, I think IDNs and the Universal Acceptance of using IDNs is a matter of consumer trust. I think it's a matter of consumer trust for the DNS. Imagine a user registering an IDN and realizing that some of the applications or not accepting it. That dilutes the trust all of the DNS. And not only it dilutes the trust. In fact, it kind of renders the different languages as second-class citizens on the Internet. And that is the reason why I think it's very important for the ICANN community to work on the acceptance of IDNs.

Another part that I wanted to add to is we ... Another hot topic in recent years is the fragmentation of the Internet. If we don't have acceptance of IDNs, we could end up having a fragmented Internet as well. And here is where I want to bring up that there are systems and even countries that think that, “Okay, we are actually a majority English-speaking area. We don't need IDNs. We don't need support for IDNs.”

That's actually not true because you could have other language speakers in the country and also beyond the country using Internationalized Domain Names and e-mail addresses. And if you don't accept them, what that really means is that fragments the Internet. It fragments the Internet in the sense that certain language communities would only be able to use their IDNs and e-mail addresses

in their native language in those communities. Effectively, that fragments the one Internet that we cherish and uphold here at ICANN.

So all of this seems to drive to—and to Justine's point—why is IDN not taken up for so long? I think it's a mixture of issues. And the important aspect is that we have been working on it for a long time. IDNs also bring new challenges. And for the first 10 years at ICANN, as Justine mentioned, actually a lot of it was focused on the technology, the standards at IETF. And also then on to here at ICANN to make sure the security and stability of the root system as it's added in.

So we spent the first 10 years really ironing out the basic technology that allows IDNs to be safely and securely implemented into the root and into the DNS. And then we spent the last 10 years, which is the next 10 years, working out a lot of policies. And these policies are actually very important because of the nature of the different languages.

I like to use this example, but some IDN experts think it's the wrong example, but it's the easiest way to explain. In English, for example, you would have capital letters and small letters. And they all, when you type it into your URL bar, it works the same. In the case of, let's say, Chinese, there's actually simplified Chinese and traditional Chinese. It's a little bit like, although not exactly like capital letters and small letters. But in the technology they are considered two different domains.

Now think about that. If you have to register each domain in different variations of capital letters and small letters, that is a huge problem. Right? So part of the policy for, for example, Chinese domain names is

to map those simplified Chinese and traditional Chinese together as a package or what we now call IDN variants.

And that’s the reason why it takes time, because first of all people have to understand the challenges of the different languages. And then certain specific policies and what we call language tables—or now we call Label Generation Rulesets—need to be put in place. So for the last 10 years, really, the community has been working very hard on developing these Label Generation Rules that are linguistically consistent and technically viable.

And actually, I’m quite excited that in May of this year, the fifth version of the Root Zone LGR, the Label Generation Rules, already includes 26 unique scripts and basically includes most of the active languages around the world. In fact, it covers 386 languages around the world, these 26 scripts that was mentioned.

So these policies, we spent another 10 years working out these policies. So I think the point, I guess, of this particular panel and the discussion now is that now is the time to really implement and to really get it off of the ground. Although 20 years ago, I always said that IDNs is going to happen in three to five years. I’m still saying that and I still believe it’s true. So I think ...

But we still have challenges, and the challenge is like a chicken and egg situation. As Justine mentioned, there doesn’t seem to be enough demand. But why is there not enough demand? It’s because right now, a lot of the hosting platforms, e-mail hosting, they’re still not supporting IDNs natively. And some don’t even support them at all. And

that's one of the things that the Universal Acceptance Steering Group is working on.

And through the support of the UASG, ICANN is really actively working on this issue, both through the UASG and also through supporting the work from the community and conducting work that really tries to bridge the gap in terms of technology, in terms of deployment, and so on.

But the reality right now is that there is a little bit of a market failure because registrars and hosting providers do not see the demand. I think there is latent demand, and I think Jonathan's going to talk a little bit more about that. But because the providers, the supply side, doesn't see it, they're not building out the infrastructure and not upgrading their system to support it. So we have a little bit of a market failure here.

And therefore when we have market failure, policies, incentives and market intervention is required. ICANN itself is of course doing its part as well. Its own procurement process has started to include IDNs and so on.

But I think in this chicken and egg situation, it's also important to promote the awareness from the user side. And this is where the At-Large comes in, promoting the awareness and creating the demand from the user side. If each of our ALSes calls the local hosting provider or calls the e-mail provider and says, “Why can't I use my e-mail address in local language? Why can't I do that?” The more calls they get, the more likely that they will actually update the system.

Again, I think this is not only about places where it's here in Asia Pacific, especially in Japan or in Thailand where the local language is the major speaking language. But it's also relevant for places that have English as a majority because you [want to] update your system to accept other people's e-mail addresses as they come in for a sign in or login or profile, even for things like a social media profile. You put your e-mail address. You put your domain name in it. Those places need to support IDNs regardless of whether you are an English-speaking majority place or not.

So right now, again, we have for the last 20 years worked on this. And I think right now is really the time when the rubber hits the road, if you will. Currently at the ICANN Board and ICANN general community level, the Strategic Plan, especially on the evolution of the internet's identifier systems, does specifically look at IDN and UA and make it a strategic priority.

And also, the GNSO and the ccNSO are completing, I would say, the last stretch of the policy processes to put IDNs firmly in place with IDN variants such that IDNs don't remain a second-class citizen. The ICANN Board is very much keen to make progress on the topic of IDNs and Universal Acceptance.

I personally am very much honored to be currently chairing the Board IDN and UA Working Group. And it is looking to the community to probably connect with the IDN Working Group here at ALAC with the IDN Working Group at GAC and other, like the UASG. I think that's also an important linkage that I'm looking forward to try to establish.

So I'll end by just noting that it's really excited to see the work that is being done here At-Large. And I took a sneak peek at what Jonathan is going to be presenting in terms of the results of the survey which really evidences the need and the latent demand that is currently not realized by the supply side.

And so, again, I want to leave you with that. This is the community that can do a lot in terms of raising awareness in the demand side. And we need that as we, on the policy level, try to work on incentives. And I'll work on the supply side. The demand side is really going to be equally important in terms of breaking the chicken and egg situation we have here. So I'll leave you basically with that.

And also back to the first thing I mentioned. IDN acceptance is really about consumer trust for the DNS. And this is why it's really important for the entire Internet and especially for the At-Large. So this is where it can really make an impact. And I look forward to the continued work from the At-Large. Thank you.

INTERPRETER: [speaking Spanish].

JUSTINE CHEW: [inaudible], you should be locked into Zoom so that I can see you putting up the hand. But I'll make an exception because [inaudible]. So apart from Satish, was there someone else who had a question over there?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes.

JUSTINE CHEW: Sorry, I can’t ...

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Amrita.

JUSTINE CHEW: All right, okay. So we'll take Amrita first, and then we'll take Satish. Thank you.

AMRITA CHOUDHURY: Thank you, Justine. So you mentioned the issue, as in we know there is a demand. Everyone says that, yes, we need IDNs or UA because most countries want it for the citizens. Unfortunately, the aspirations and the reality there is a gap. You've been working in the Asia Pacific region for a long time. Are there case studies wherein, you know, you've been working with various ... Even in India, there is a lot of work going, but the gap still remains. Are there any case studies you would want to refer wherein it has been [bridged] to certain extent in a multistakeholder model and the ICANN community has played a significant role?

EDMON CHUNG: I think a couple of examples that comes to mind would be Thailand and India. I think their procurement processes are starting to look into having IDNs and Universal Acceptance at the government level. And

when that happens, you can see that the system integrators immediately become aware of the issue. But in reality, I think that's why the ...

I think there's the survey results this time. I think is the first time I see the real data that says, “Hey, people actually want it and really want to use it.” If I'm not mistaken, two out of three said that they would like to use—

JONATHAN ZUCK:

That have seen them. The part of it is even knowing about it. But the people that have been exposed to them [inaudible] use them.

EDMON CHUNG:

Right. That's exactly the problem because people don't even know about it. And why I say there is a latent demand is because the anecdotal evidence says that people want it. Anecdotal evidence also says that the hosting providers are not getting calls. Nobody's calling them to say, “Why can't I host my IDNs? Why can't I host my multilingual e-mail address” because they don't even know. Because most users don't even know that [it exists]. Once they know, they might start to demand it.

JUSTINE CHEW:

Satish, quickly. Thank you.

SATISH BABU:

Thanks very much, Justine. So on the chicken/egg issue of demand and supply, I completely agree with the fact that there is a gap somewhere and we need to kind of bridge that gap and ensure that these both come up.

Now the problem is really that the language communities, it's not easy to mobilize them, rally them around. But now we have something that can help us to do that. That's the UA Day which has been announced for February the 16th starting from next year onward. That gives us an opportunity, especially from an At-Large perspective, because we have these five regions and a lot of grassroots-level organizations as members. So it is an opportunity for us to really kind of get going, mobilize the language communities, rally them around, ensure that they start asking the service providers for the services.

So one technical hitch is that this has been thought of pretty quickly. There is no budget support for activities to come up next year in February. So from the Board side, do you think it's possible to support the UA Day for 2023? Beyond that we can, of course, plan for it. Thank you.

EDMON CHUNG:

In terms of budget, I will need to defer. But the Board is certainly very supportive of the UA Day idea, and I am absolutely sure that the Board will be participating in the UA Day. And I call on every ALS at the At-Large to participate in the UA Day. Maybe just to call your local provider and say, “Hey, can I host my IDN and can I have my language, an e-mail address?” That would make a big impact. I think UA Day is a great idea.

It's not going to be like the day that UA and IDN completely happens, but it is a good way to drive the awareness and mobilize, as you mentioned, and get things started.

JUSTINE CHEW:

Sorry, Hadia, but Edmon really has to run out. So, yeah. All right, okay. Perhaps you could possibly address your question to Sarmad as well possibly. Yeah, all right.

So our next speaker is Sarmad Hussain. I’ve already introduced him. Sarmad, you are with ICANN Org now. Right? So from the perspective of ICANN Org, can you tell us what technical and operational challenges that ICANN has to have had dealt with over the last 20 years to bring us to this point, even? And is there anything you can share in terms of the commitment that ICANN is prepared to put forward in pressing ahead with the IDN agenda? Thank you.

SARMAD HUSSAIN:

Thank you, Justine. And hello everyone, here and online. So the community, of course, has shown great interest in Internationalized Domain Names or IDNs, as we call them. And of course, based on the community's interest and drive, ICANN has continued to support the community's efforts in implementing IDNs for the last two decades.

So what I'll do is try to just present a very high-level summary of some of the efforts which the community has undertaken over these two decades, also pointed out by Edmon, earlier. And of course, ICANN has supported these initiatives.

The work, of course, started in IETF (Internet Engineering Task Force) which came up with the IDNA 2003 standard back in the early 2000s. And soon afterwards, ICANN community at ICANN develop the IDN Implementation Guidelines which were guidelines which were used by the top-level domain registries to implement the IDNs using the IDNs 2003 standard.

But at that time, the Internationalized Domain Names were introduced at the second level not the top level. So you could still not type a complete domain name in your language. You would have to type the second-level domain name in your language, but then you would have to add “.com” or “.org” or “.net” in front of it.

So of course, to have a completely internationalized domain name, there was need to have top-level domains as well in local languages and scripts so that you could have the second level and top level. So a complete domain name in local languages and scripts.

The community, of course, worked on the relevant policies and procedures over the years. And the first time internationalized domain name top-level domains were introduced for the community's use were following the IDN ccTLD fast track process which was approved in 2009. And the first strings which we saw delegated were in 2010. And following that, it was then possible to have complete domain names in local languages and scripts, both at the second level as well as the top level.

In parallel in the meantime, the technical community also realized some drawbacks or some limitations in the IDNA 2003 standard. And so

they actually revised or updated the standard at Internet Engineering Task Force to IDNA 2008 which is now the applicable standard for IDNs to be implemented anywhere.

Soon after, based on community's interest and the policy developed by the GNSO, IDN gTLDs we're introduced into the root or delegating into the root starting from the based on the 2013 gTLD round. And to date, as Justine also shared, we have 61 IDN ccTLDs and 92 IDN gTLDs which have been delegated and which cover 37 languages and are in 23 scripts like Arabic, Chinese, Cyrillic, Devanagari, Ethiopic, and so on.

So the challenge, of course, has been balancing the linguistic content of what can be expressed in a domain name and compare that or contain that to make sure that these domain names remain technically viable. So there's actually a balance, of course, between linguistic expression and technical viability. And that actually has been, of course, a topic of discussion on how do we solve that problem that we want to introduce domain names.

We want to have clear expression in many languages, but we want to make sure that this done in a way that the DNS, from a security stability perspective, obviously is addressed. This was, of course, not something ICANN could do. ICANN does not have linguistic expertise for all of the different scripts which are used. So ICANN again, of course, turned to the community which has led this process tirelessly over the last decade or so.

Each script community across the globe, we've facilitated and they've stepped up and developed their own panels which have deliberated in some cases for many years to develop a solution which now allows or is now integrated into what we call the Root Zone Label Generation Rules.

These Label Generation Rules allow for not only implementing top-level domains in a very secure fashion, but also define some of the intricacies of each of these scripts on how they should be encoded for top-level domains and also identify what Edmon was also referring to as variants of it and labels or top-level domains so that the top-level domains can be implemented not only securely, but in a usable manner so that end users can actually use them without any challenges.

So, of course, thanks to all of the different script communities for all their hard work across the globe to make that possible. And this is work which is now concluding. As Edmon said, we published a fifth version which includes all of the active Generation Panel’s work this May.

And at this meeting on Wednesday, we actually have a session where we've invited all of these script communities to share their experiences. And we’re celebrating, of course, the excellent work they have done. So please do join us there. And you will also get more details on actual effort and some of the challenges which were based on and addressed by the script communities.

We continue to support the community which has now updated the IDN Implementation Guidelines. We've also worked towards developing IDN variant TLD recommendations to allow for implementing variants at the top level. Those recommendations were approved by the Board,

and the Board requested GNSO and ccNSO to consider these recommendations as part of their policy along with the Root Zone LGR.

And effort continues, but now we are supporting the community as all of this work has gone into policy development work stage where both GNSO and ccNSO are currently active developing policy. And ICANN continues to support both GNSO and ccNSO in these policy development processes to address how to implement especially IDN variants at the top level.

As all of this comes together and the supply side of things are eventually determined, or at least the technical standards are available, there is continued challenges which we face as far as acceptance of these domain names are concerned. That is what is normally referred to as the Universal Acceptance problem or challenge around domain names and e-mail addresses.

So both IDNs and UA, of course, continue to be a focus of ICANN as, of course, they continue to be the focus of the community. And both topics are part of ICANN’s Five-Year Strategic Plan. And if you saw, they were part of the CEO goals in FY22 and they are also part of the CEO goal in FY23.

In addition to the Org’s focus, the ICANN Board also continues to focus on these topics where ICANN Board actually has sustained a working group focused on IDN and UA. It's called the Board IDN and UA Working Group which continues to oversee the work of ICANN Org on these topics and continues to guide this work.

On the UA side, ICANN Org continues to support the community's effort. We support the Universal Acceptance Steering Group. As the UASG conducts its work, we also support the work being done by ALAC, GAC, other community members at ICANN which is also looking at these topics.

And in the end, we as ICANN Org also, I'd like to share, are looking at updating our own systems to make the UA already. Many of our systems, as was shared, [has always been shared] by our tech teams. They are accepting IDNs and, generally, longer and newer TLDs. We continue to work towards supporting internationalized e-mail addresses. And so it's something we are still focused on internally. And we hope that we'll eventually get there soon.

With that, I'll stop here and hand it back to Justin. Thank you.

JUSTINE CHEW:

Thank you very much, Sarmad. Amrita, can I ask you to hold that question in mind? Because I just want to let Jonathan do his thing. And then we'll get into a little bit of time of discussion.

So Jonathan, you've been leading a team of At-Large folks in developing and actually rolling out a survey targeted at getting the perspective of selected Hindi-speaking Internet users in selected parts of India. Can you tell us a little bit about that project and what you see as the results? And do they kind of align with where ICANN Org is headed towards with the IDN program?

JONATHAN ZUCK:

Sure. Thanks, Justine. And thanks for organizing this session. As the designated representative of the interests of individual end users, the At-Large community focuses on the aspects of ICANN policy that actually touch the people that don't even know that ICANN exist that are just using the Internet to communicate with businesses and services, that are using it for e-mail, that are making airline reservations, etc. So the everyday user, if you will, of the Internet.

And it's sometimes difficult to gain an understanding of what that experience is liked and whether or not it meets the expectations of the people that are coming on to the Internet, etc. As Göran said in his opening remarks this morning, we're trying to build an Internet that's welcoming to everyone, whether it's people that have not yet made it onto the Internet or people that are there but whose experience on the Internet is not what it could be. And so that's kind of our mission.

And so as we try to explore as the At-Large what that experience is and what the disconnect might be between that experience and the hopes and expectations of individual users and we try to use a number of different tactics, sometimes it's just logic because we're all end users. Sometimes it's a SurveyMonkey survey that we try to go through our RALOs and ALSes, etc., which is still a fairly technically savvy group of people.

And we applied for an ABR, Additional Budget Request, to do a pilot of a true End User Survey. In other words, going after folks not because they already know about the Internet or the intricacies of Internet policy, but because they don't. And gain an understanding of, as Edmon put it, the demand side of this equation.

And so this isn't even the demand necessarily of potential registrants, but the individual end users that might want to be making use of government websites, for example, and what is the easiest way for them to get on to make use of products and services that are available online in their own language?

And so we chose the so called Hindi Belt in India for a number of reasons. We were curious about keyboard usage, for example, because if people are using a Hindi keyboard then they would have to use escape characters in order to complete a non-IDN domain name. In other words, if even if the first half of it, the second level, was in Hindi, the first level was not. And so that would be something they would have to do that was sort of out of the ordinary and inconvenient.

But it's also an area that ICANN hasn't really explored into with surveys and such. And so as our pilot End User Survey, we decided to look into it IDNs, and to look into it specifically in the Hindi Belt. And hopefully, this is a precursor for more surveys like this that the At-Large can conduct around the world on a variety of topics.

Another one that came to mind when we had the ABR was DNS abuse where, again, we fight these battles internally with logic, but the extent to which we're able to really understand what the end user experience has been will only embolden us and empower us for the discussions that we need to have inside the ICANN community.

So what we did was look at a couple of hypotheses. For example, is the absence of IDN TLDs keeping people from getting on the Internet? Is it making that experience less convenient, etc.? And that's what we were

trying to determine, very much at the end user level. And what were those challenges?

And I'm going to take you through a few results. We haven't really finished parsing and doing what we call cross tabs of the survey to get at all of the nuggets of information that it reveals, but there are some interesting results. Next slide.

So as you might imagine, a lot of folks use the Internet. So the response back—and this was a combination of urban and rural individuals within the Hindi Belt—72% are using the Internet, 28% are not using the Internet. So as we go through this, we could ask some questions of those two communities to see what their preferences and experience has been. Next slide.

So one of the things that I think we're all aware of in the periphery but it's worth repeating is, is this relevant if no one's using browsers to connect to the Internet? And that question comes up with some frequency. And so this, again, was predictable.

But 88% of folks that were online that we surveyed, which was over 4,000 people—a pretty good sample size—make use of apps is their primary way of getting onto the Internet. So then the very question of IDN or not IDN doesn't even come up in that case. Right?

But it still was such a large sample—12% using the browser—that it gave us a little bit to hang on to and to talk about. But this is an unsurprising result and nothing that should shock us. We shouldn't think, “Oh, if only we had IDNs and suddenly 5 billion new people would

join the Internet.” It's not a Panacea, but it's part of a broader effort. Next slide.

Also predictable are the reasons for not using the Internet, and IDNs are not at the top of that list. Things like, “I don't have access to the Internet ... I don't know how to use the Internet ... I don't have the technology necessary to get onto the Internet.” Those are the primary reasons that folks are not online today, and we can't forget that that's the case.

ICANN it's just one piece of a larger puzzle. We have to look at what's in our remit, but it's not, again, going to be a cure all. So again, not a particularly surprising result, but good to see how this is parsed out. And I believe also useful from the standpoint of promoting IDNs or activating folks in this community in the future. Knowing how they get to the Internet will help us understand how we might get to them, if that makes sense. Next slide.

But when we looked at, “Do you find it difficult to access the Internet due to lack of Hindi domain names written in Devanagari script” it's about half. So there was an expression of discomfort and inconvenience associated with the absence of the Devanagari script throughout the domain name.

And so you begin to get the notion that, in fact, there's demand even if folks don't know what it is that they're demanding. They've never heard of an IDN, but ideally being able to get to domains using their own script is an objective that they can get behind. Next slide.

Then we asked the question, “Have you ever seen a Hindi domain name written in Devanagari script?” And a number of folks have seen them,

wo there's at least some interest. There's enough knowledge that it's possible to gain an assessment of demand. Next slide.

“Do you find these Hindi domain names easier to use than more popular domain names such as .com?” And again, there was something close to two-thirds that suggested that they would find Hindi domain names easier to use.

One of the interesting challenges as we talk about keyboards is that the hegemony of the English language is such that even though we asked only people for whom Hindi was their primary language, their native language, almost all of them do conduct a lot of their business and online activity in English and therefore have English keyboards. And so the irony is that we now have a situation in which using Devanagari script can be inconvenient because they're having to use escape codes on their English keyboard. Or sometimes they have dual keyboards in order to use Devanagari script.

So this will take time for people to really settle into what's most comfortable for them. But you can see that there's a preference, at least, for the people to make use of their native script. Next slide, please.

Was that it? Okay, thank you. Yeah, so this is probably the most powerful graphic that we have. And we'll make these slides available and we will come out with a more formal presentation of all of the survey results [as soon as we've] had a chance to parse them like “if this is true and this is true, what do they think about X.”

We also asked them questions about how they get their news and how they get information about the Internet that we hope, again, will be helpful to ICANN’s efforts in promoting these out into the world. But we just wanted to give you a taste and some preliminary results from the survey that showed some real promise in terms of the demand side of this equation. And by the demand side, its potential registrants but also just users that just use the Internet for everyday tasks. Thanks.

JUSTINE CHEW:

Thank you very much, Jonathan. Much appreciated. Yeah, as Jonathan said we're still parsing ... The team that's shepherding this project is still parsing through all of the results and coming up with a final report, so to speak, but I just wanted to take the opportunity to try and share some of the anecdotes that we can because, being a face-to-face meeting, it's a better forum for that.

Okay, so now we have a little bit of question time. I see some hands, so let's take the queue. Alan, you're up first.

ALAN GREENBERG:

Thank you very much. For full disclosure, I was part of the group that participated in deciding where we should survey. It never dawned on me at the time that we had picked a country where English was also a standard language that was well known. And that was probably a mistake because of what you said, that everyone speaks English anyway. We probably should have picked a country where English was not one of the common languages being spoken. It didn't dawn on me at the time.

JONATHAN ZUCK: Yeah. Thanks, Alan. I think it dawned on us to some extent at the time, but we were looking for an area in which there was a heavy use of non-English keyboards. And so that was driving where we thought we might get interesting results, were folks that were predominantly using ... And that's why we have some differences between urban and rural results. For example, in the rural communities it's more important to be able to use Devanagari script. And so we we're getting some results like that, but again we need to finish parsing.

But, yes, it's true that we did have a strange circumstance where folks for whom English was not their primary language were still having to do business in English and, therefore, had added complexity for sure.

JUSTINE CHEW: Sure. And we also had a set of constraints to work with as well, so I think we did the best that we could within those constraints.

Amrita, you're next, please.

AMRITA CHOUDHURY: Yes. So I have a question for Sarmad and some comments for Jonathan. So I'll start with the latter and then I'll come to the question. So this is an interesting survey. Being from the Hindi Belt, I'm definitely interested to see what it is all about.

One of the questions which I had is, when the question was asked to people about the IDN, were they aware of what an IDN means? The

reason why is that many of our government websites are also mentioned in Hindi.

So are they taking that into consideration and saying that, “Yes, we have seen Hindi website domain names” because they may not know that after the dot part but before the dot, because we have the 10 national languages, most government websites are in Hindi. So was that reflected there?

Because if you ask any Hindi-speaking person [inaudible] we may not understand the question because we don't speak in that way. And if you're talking about websites or applications ... Because most of the apps are available in local languages, that's how they're built.

So that's one of the comfort areas. So I'm not sure if my question was perhaps, if I look at the methodology, whether they knew what IDNs mean. That one part.

JONATHAN ZUCK:

Thanks, Amrita. And as you imagine, as we were trying to work with the survey contractor ... Because one of the things we were trying to do was a professional survey. Not like a SurveyMonkey, self-selection survey that happens so often in the ICANN community. So we did go out to the marketplace to find a professional polling firm.

And as we were talking with them, we did our best. I don't know the real answer. Nobody ever mentioned “IDN,” for example. And we've had many conversations about, “It's just the part to the right of the period, and part of the script is in Hindi and part of it isn't.” So we were trying

to find some balance between educating and confusing the people that we were trying to ask the question to.

But it was certainly something we were well aware of and we definitely spent a lot of time eliminating any technical terminology so that none of that was part of the survey. But we tried to give people enough of a background ... And you'll see this from some of the questions when we publish it. We tried to give enough background for the question for people to understand it.

But one mistake we might have made is that when we asked, “Do you trust Hindi domain names more than the regular domain names,” we use google.com as an example. And that's such a widely used site that it could bias that result, too. So there's definitely an exercise here to a list of things to consider when trying to do this again.

But it's a good question and one we grappled with and we did our best on. But we'll welcome feedback, obviously, when you've had a chance to see the fuller survey.

AMRITA CHOUDHURY:

Thank you. And my question to Sarmad is, Sarmad, I do appreciate that ICANN Org is doing a lot in terms of helping communities in IDN and UA. At times, and this comes from experience which we have in India ... For example, during InSIG we have a UA workshop, which we are organizing. But for us to even get the UA ambassadors to come ...

Because they need funding and, unfortunately, ICANN is not funding them. And UA is important for us, and IDN is. Or if we want to get some

specialists. So that becomes a challenge. And how do we address those issues? Because we want to promote it. We want end users or even the communities in certain places to be involved, but we don't have the funds. ICANN is not supporting with funds. We don't have any way in which we get the UN ambassadors.

And then from InSIG, we are trying to pull our strings from here and there trying to get them. So that's the challenge with end user communities. If we want to promote and do things, we need some funding. We are not business entities.

So how do we address those gaps? And I am sure it will happen everywhere.

SARMAD HUSSAIN:

Thank you, Amrita, for the question. I think from my understanding, that's not really a funding challenge but like a travel support challenge, which is slightly different. The travel support is currently, as you all know, slightly constrained due to COVID restrictions. We are working with ICANN travel team as far as community travel is concerned.

So of course, UA ambassadors which request for travel support funding have same kind of ... The funding request goes through the same assessment as any other community travel support and follows ICANN’s Community Travel Support Policy. So the funding is there.

The only challenge, of course, is that once these COVID-related constraints are, I guess, behind us, we should be able to use that funding to provide travel support. I hope that clarifies. Thank you.

JUSTINE CHEW: Thank you. Next we have Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI: Thank you, Justine. And I'm back to the demand side. And maybe this is also what I wanted to say when Edmon was here. I do think that we do not see the demand side that clear because it is directly correlated with connectivity and connecting the unconnected. And I would say, also, the results of the survey also kind of point to this. So those who are not connected, maybe those are the people that really need those IDNs.

And I think also we were we always saying that IDNs are very important for connecting the unconnected, looking for the next billion people. So I was wondering how can we actually measure the needs or know the needs of the unconnected and if, actually, this is the case? Thank you.

JUSTINE CHEW: Were you directing the question to anyone in particular? No. Sarmad, would you like to have a go at that? Sorry, you might need to repeat your question, I think. Hadia, could you repeat your question, please?

HADIA ELMINIAWI: It's mainly about connecting the unconnected and if, really, the unconnected are the ones really in need for IDNs because this is the perception. And maybe if we can survey or ... Maybe it's a survey. Maybe

it's another survey. I don't know. Or maybe we do have information already. We already do have information.

SARMAD HUSSAIN:

Right. So I think it's surveys like these which Jonathan's just presented which will provide us more data as far as actually quantifying the need is concerned. We obviously do have qualitative kind of information. We also have ... One of the things one could look at, for example, is that in a particular country how much, for example, is a local language newspaper circulation versus an English language newspaper circulation. Those kinds of indicators are also in some ways indicative of what is the demand of the content in a particular region.

And obviously, when people come online, those numbers can vary slightly or more than slightly significantly in some cases because the community or the percentage of population or demographically the part of the population which is online may actually be very different, for example, than the community which is, for example, just reading the newspapers or magazines.

But to really actually gauge the demand of the content, I think one place to go is to look at the media—and not just newspapers—TV programming, others in a particular country to really see what is a mix of, for example, a local language versus another official language in a country, or a foreign language. And that can give all of us some idea of what the real, for example, demand is.

Whether that of course is [equivalent] online or not? That's obviously another separate question which obviously needs to be, perhaps, separately investigated. Thank you.

JONATHAN ZUCK:

Sure. Hadia, there's more information revealed in the survey that we need to try and interpret. And a lot of it is, as Edmon put it, a chicken and egg problem. But what we found is that the majority of people that are not online, it's not because of a lack of IDNs. It's because of, as has been mentioned in the chat, the availability of apps and other devices that are in the native script has ...

It means that people do have access to some products and services online in their native script. So most of the people that aren't online at all, it's still largely an infrastructure and economics problem and not an IDN problem.

Where I think it will come into play is that once people are online, whether or not people develop websites—for example, whether they'll register and create a website to provide services online, news sites, etc.—I think it could potentially be a function of IDNs based on the survey results. But it's not the primary reason that people aren't online.

HADIA ELMINIAWI:

If I can quickly. Yeah, I wasn't implying that this is the reason, actually, for people not being going online. I was actually thinking that people not online are in need for IDNs. So once they are online, we will see the demand. So I know, yeah, it's an infrastructure thing [inaudible].

JUSTINE CHEW:

Thank you. I'm going to cut the queue off with Satish. But I just wanted to say that I think At-Large can be proud of the fact that we have done this pilot survey within constraints, as I mentioned, including budget. So this is a very, very good pilot. I think it's getting a lot of interest now, and I think there is absolutely great opportunities to build on it, to do more surveys.

And it's been a great opportunity to show what at lunch can do for the ICANN community. So with that, can I take Satish? And we probably have to end right after that.

SATISH BABU:

Thanks, Justine. Satish for the record. Yeah, I agree with the [inaudible] that it has been ... This is the first time we are doing a survey of our end users like this, in my knowledge. And there are formidable challenges. And considering those challenges and the constraints, I think it's an excellent job. There are perhaps more that we can do, maybe as an extension of this—a Phase 2 or whatever.

One particular challenge I'd like to highlight, which is a case with all IDN-related work including EPDP and IDNs, is that the people in the decision making—in this case, the Survey Design Team, they do not speak or handle the end language.

So therefore, what's happening here is that, first of all, it's a very technical topic. That topic is being discussed in English and passed on to a survey team. That survey team is going to pass it on to a bunch of

enumerators, and they're going to actually go to the field with the schedule and they're going to make the presentation to respondent of the survey.

Now this communication process has so many steps and it's also likely to be complicated. So what the survey team did was to actually put down on the survey form what we meant by IDNs. So we put something in Hindi @ [inaudible]. So there are so many examples listed out there.

But it turns out that that itself might be inducing a bias. We don't know. And some of the examples used were far too popular to be considered as a kind of example. So I'm saying that this has given us a very good exposure to what are the risks in doing a survey on IDNs. Thank you.

JONATHAN ZUCK:

That's why we have pilots.

JUSTINE CHEW:

Correct. And we accept that there were some unintended consequences, as with most things. So we just learned from the process.

And with that, we are at the half-past mark. So thank you very much for attending the session, and thank you very much for the questions as well. I would like to thank the panelists. Edmon, obviously you will get my personal thanks. Sarmad, thank you for joining us and for your insights and your comments. And Jonathan, we look forward to more things from you. Thank you, all. Have a good day.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]