



**Comment on Middle East and
Adjoining Countries (MEAC)
Strategy 2021-2025**

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Business Constituency Submission

GNSO//CSG//BC

Background

This document is the response of the ICANN Business Constituency (BC), from the perspective of business users and registrants, as defined in our Charter:

The mission of the Business Constituency is to ensure that ICANN policy positions are consistent with the development of an Internet that:

1. promotes end-user confidence because it is a safe place to conduct business
2. is competitive in the supply of registry and registrar and related services
3. is technically stable, secure and reliable.

Middle East and Adjoining Countries draft 2021-2025 MEAAC Regional Strategy Document

The BC welcomes the opportunity to review and comment on the draft 2021-2025 MEAC Regional Strategy document aimed at developing ICANN's regional engagement strategy for the Middle East and adjoining countries¹.

This document is designed to identify and define the strengths and weaknesses currently inherent in the DNS ecosystem within the Middle East and adjoining countries, and goes further to develop recommendations on how to advance each strategic focus area to impact the industry and bring it closer to the opportunities available.

We support ICANN's motivations for the development of this strategic plan for the Middle East and recognize that the initiative to develop a plan for the growth and effectiveness of the DNS industry in the region advances ICANN's remit.

We want to underscore that the ultimate intended beneficiaries of ICANN's activities are the registrants and users of unique identifiers. The BC believes that any ICANN strategy paper would be made much stronger if it included more direct discussion of the ways in which the proposed actions serve the interests of business registrants and if the envisioned outreach around legislation and policy more directly and intentionally includes the expertise and experience of business leaders.

General Comments and Recommendations

The BC appreciates the goals and breadth of developing this strategic plan for the Middle East and adjoining countries DNS marketplace. The plan explores many areas contributing to the current adoption and use of the DNS marketplace for a wide range of stakeholders.

The BC generally agrees with the scope provided by ICANN that the development of the strategic plan follow the ICANN 2021-2025 strategic plan laid down in the ICANN bylaws. This strategic plan addresses four strategic objectives in the region, which are;

1. Security
2. ICANN's Governance
3. Unique Identifier Systems
4. Geopolitics

The BC notes that where prior Strategic Plans were more focused on building awareness of and participation in the ICANN ecosystem (versus a broader look at the DNS in the region suggested by this

¹ ICANN Public comment page at <https://www.icann.org/public-comments/meac-strategy-2020-02-18-en>

plan), the BC welcomes the attention given to the highlighted areas of relevance to the region. The areas of focus in the previous study were:

- Evolving and further globalizing ICANN;
- Supporting a healthy, stable, and resilient unique identifier ecosystem;
- Advancing organizational, technological and operational excellence;
- Promoting ICANN's role and multistakeholder approach;
- Developing and implementing a global public interest framework bounded by ICANN's mission.

The BC very much hopes that with carefully implementation, one of the outcomes of the Strategy would be to enhance the opportunities for DNS-related/DNS-enabled business in the MEACA Region.

In the view of the BC, the plan cohesively outlines many of the factors affecting the DNS, but the BC recommends bolstering the recommendations portion of the report by considering the following:

1. The plan seeks to strengthen the security of the Domain Name System (DNS) and the DNS Root Server System with proposed actions focused on capacity building. The BC notes that these are highly technical requirements that may require massive investments in the DNS in addition to training and capacity building. The BC however supports effort aimed at capacity building as many of the initiatives resulting from the prior MEAAC Strategy have contributed admirably to building regional knowledge of ICANN and regional participation in the ICANN multistakeholder system.
2. The Region seeks to improve the effectiveness of ICANN's multistakeholder model via a governance structure that improves on current stakeholder participation in policy development and support for ICANN regional programs. This is laudable and should be encouraged. An analysis of the ability to provide traditional face-to-face training in light of the coronavirus and physical stability/visa issues arising from conflict in the region should be explored.
3. The study seeks to evolve the unique identifier systems in coordination and collaboration with relevant parties to continue to serve the needs of the global Internet user base. This is a region with vast potential for ICANN's IDN initiative and its development across the region should be significantly supported and promoted. The BC recommends more tracking of (and sharing about) IDN usage and the challenges the region is facing in the expansion of IDNs. The BC also strongly supports the promotion the work of Universal Acceptance of gTLDs to relevant stakeholders and the adoption of new DNS-related standards and protocols in the region.
4. On addressing the geopolitical issues impacting ICANN's mission to ensure a single, globally interoperable Internet, the plan calls for ongoing tracking of policy and legislation and discussion with policymakers around the use of the internet and openness to the MSM. The BC urges the MEAAC region to include regional business leaders in this discussion, as they are often well aware of both the legislation AND its potential impacts – both within the region and in the region's dealings with other regions.

5. Furthermore, in providing a global context in which to examine the Middle East and adjoining countries DNS, the BC proposes that:
 - a. Ongoing comparison of MEAAC DNS figures to the broader DNS landscape would allow readers to generate conclusions on whether trends are specific to MEAAC or reflect the global norm. For example, the ccTLD registration fees can be compared to Europe, the Asia Pacific, and the initial findings of the study to examine the DNS environment in other parts of Africa.
 - b. As the community begins preparing for a subsequent round of new gTLDs, it would also be helpful to understand the uptake of names from this most recent round of new gTLDs in the region and the specific challenges faced by potential registrants looking at these new names – including and especially IDN gTLDs.
 - c. The BC remains interested in understanding how the region’s relatively small number of ICANN accredited registrars and limited channels is impacting the growth and sustainability of the DNS business environment in this and other regions, and the BC notes that registrants in the region may also be well served by registrars located outside the region.
 - d. From the perspective of current and potential registrants, ICANN should assess the quantity and quality of registrars offering websites displayed in languages and scripts used in the Middle East and offering domain registrations in the TLDs that are popular in the region.

6. Finally, in understanding and adapting to changing political and environmental conditions in the region and In light of COVID-19 and multiple instances of longstanding conflict in the region, the BC thinks it is wise to analyze the ability to complement traditional face-to-face training and outreach with remote and other internet-enabled forms of learning and onboarding of new community members, and urges regional leaders to be creative in developing new methods of outreach in keeping with our goals of building community, capacity and participation in a safe, sustainable way.

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This comment was drafted by Lawrence Olawale-Roberts and Andrew Mack.

It was approved in accord with the BC charter.