
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – GAC Discussion on Universal Acceptance
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JULIA CHARVOLEN

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I will now hand the floor over to Christine Arida, GAC Vice Chair. Thank you, and over to you.

CHRISTINE ARIDA

Julia, can you hear me all right?

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JULIA CHARVOLEN

Yes, thank you.

CHRISTINE ARIDA

Wonderful. So, I would like to welcome you all back into the GAC room and also colleagues online. And this session is about Universal Acceptance. And let me maybe start by welcoming all colleagues and speakers that are joining us for this panel.

So, I'll first welcome my dear colleague, Abdalmonem Galila, who is the Universal Acceptance Working Group Chair. We also have a Guilherme Canela from UNESCO. We have Seda Akbulut from ICANN.org. We have Edmon Chung from .asia, Regina Fuchsova from .eu. And we will also listen from our intern colleagues. So, as you know, the Universal Acceptance is one of the strategic objectives in which we strive to make universal acceptance available everywhere so that internet access is seamless across devices and applications and all websites and emails.

So, in this session, we are going to have various parts. We will first be hearing about updates on Universal Acceptance, and we will listen to the work of the working group. We will listen to the UNESCO ICANN policy brief. We will hear about planning for UA Day 2026, and we will also understand a bit more how can governments be effective by listening to the experience from our dear colleagues from the Indian government.

And then we are going to have a panel discussion to discuss explicitly how can governments be more effective in pushing the

Universal Acceptance agenda. So, without further ado, I'm going to hand the floor to my colleague, Abdalmonem, who is going to be giving the introduction and moderating this session. Abdalmonem, the floor is yours.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Christine. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening. This is Abdalmonem Galila for The Record. I will chair the session for today on behalf of Universal Acceptance IDN Workgroup that was created since ICANN66 in 2019 in order to help the committee to track, consider, and address the matters and the topics that are relevant to the government in the areas of IDNs, EIs, and Universal Acceptance.

Actually, UA IDN Workgroup currently consists of 79 members representing more than 50 entities covering the five regions of ICANN. Back in 2003, for WSIS Geneva, Declaration of Principles and Tunisia Agenda 2005 outcome that explicitly called for advancing domain names and email addresses, and hence WSIS+20 outcome document to keep the focus on multilingual internet including domain names in local languages and enabling Universal Acceptance.

Based on that, UNESCO and ICANN have formalized a MoU that strengthens cooperation on universal acceptance of domain names and email addresses. ICANN and UNESCO collaborated to draft a policy brief to support linguistic diversity and digital

inclusion by ensuring that all valid domain names and email addresses work across a global internet.

Mr. Canela, the Director for Commission for Digital Inclusion and Policies and Digital Transformation at UNESCO, will give us more details about why the policy brief drafted by ICANN and UNESCO is important, the key objectives of the policy brief, what are the stakeholders that should be involved, and what are the expected benefits. So, for now, I will leave the floor for Mr. Canela from UNESCO. Go ahead, please.

GUILHERME CANELA

Thank you very much. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening again to all those here in the room and following us online. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for the GAC and ICANN and the Indian government for this invitation. Very briefly, why UNESCO is involved with this that maybe is not clear to everyone.

In the very first paragraph of our constitution that was approved in 1945, our member states told us that one of the functions of UNESCO is to promote the free flow of ideas, knowledge, and information. Later on in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 19 has reiterated this mandate on the universal system of human rights, saying that every individual has the right to seek, receive, and impart information, ideas, entertainment and so on.

So, those are the legal principles in the international human rights law, but if we translate that in effective tools that are needed to put these principles in practice, multilingualism is fundamental, right? So, there is no possibility of free flow of ideas, information, and knowledge if we don't guarantee several layers of inclusion in the information and digital ecosystem, and different languages is one of those.

So, this is a bit of why UNESCO is involved on this not today from the last 80 years. But in this very first slide, you'll see several other elements that we are interested in promoting to have effective knowledge societies. That we are together with our colleagues from ITU speaking about the idea of meaningful connectivity. So, it's not about only being connected, you need to be able to access content in your own language.

If you are a person with disability, also with the elements required for you to access if you have a disability of any kind and so on and so forth. And as you can see, although we still have to connect more than 2 billion people, even among the connected ones, we have several issues that don't guarantee this meaningful connectivity, and the multilingualism and also, of course, universal acceptance that is part of this overall agenda of multilingualism is one of them. Next slide, please.

So, in that sense, of course, the entire United Nations system, not only UNESCO, is advancing on a global overview of what is required to have global digital public goods. In September 2024, the UN

member states approved the Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact, and you'll see again that in these documents multilingualism is very much present, and the idea of closing all digital divides, leaving no one behind, implicates among many other things the idea of multilingualism. Next slide, please.

So, more specifically in the case of tools available in the UNESCO ecosystem, you can see in a very avant-garde manner already in 2003, so more than 20 years ago, all the UNESCO member states approved this recommendation for the promotion and use of multilingualism in universal access in the cyberspace, which is a legal document that we, as secretariat, are in charge to implement in cooperation with all our 194 member states.

And it's the basis for the more recent discussions in this area. UNESCO is also the global secretariat of the international decade for indigenous languages, which was approved by the UN General Assembly and will run from 2022 to 2032. As you know, among the 8,000 plus languages in this planet, those among the ones that are really in danger and are not present, the indigenous languages represent a significant amount of those. Hence the importance of connecting these discussions with the international decade of indigenous languages.

And also, of course, the overall connection with languages and technologies is particularly relevant, artificial intelligence, but not only, and hence UNESCO launched last year during the World Social Summit this global roadmap for multilingualism in the

digital era. And then the cooperation with ICANN, it's under this chapeau trying to connect these different dots with the overall idea of universal acceptance. Next one, please. So, here, just a quick timeline from the more recent cooperation with ICANN.

We signed, again, our Global Memorandum of Understanding between the President of ICANN and the Director General of UNESCO in 2025. And then very rapidly, as you can see, a series of elements took place, including here today, to further discuss with you this initial draft of this policy brief that we are going to publish, hopefully, soon this year. Next one, please. So, very briefly, you have received the policy brief. What is the logic of this kind of policy briefs?

As you know, in the multilateral system, we have different kinds of documents, right? We have treaties that are legally binding, that we have recommendations approved by member states. They are not legally binding in the sense that they generate enforcement measures, but they are strong recommendations from the governing bodies to all member states. And then we have technical documents, we have standards, guidelines, and so on.

And among these different kinds of documents, we have what we call policy briefs. They are not legally binding, they are not official recommendations approved by member states, but they are documents produced by the Secretary, and then its partners, in this case ICANN, with concrete elements of the discussion that is relevant in that particular moment on a topic.

And then we distribute these policy briefs across the border to all the relevant ministries and the stakeholders under the UNESCO ecosystem, our university chairs, our associated NGOs, etc. So, the overall idea of this policy brief is similar to this one, is to put on the table a conversation with these relevant stakeholders so that they have the most updated elements on this overall discussion in terms of universal acceptance.

But as I said, as a policy brief, this is not a legally binding document approved by the UNESCO member states, it is a discussion document that is produced, in this case, by the Secretariat of UNESCO and one of its partners, again in this case, ICANN. Next one, please. So, here you have just in a nutshell some of the key elements of the policy brief, obviously the importance of Universal Acceptance, but also the challenges that the concept face to be implemented. Next one, please.

Then policy recommendations for internet stakeholders, again based on this conversation, and then recommendations here used in the LATOS sense of the world recommendation, not the legal sense of recommendations that are approved under resolutions in our governing bodies. Next one, please.

So, also here some recommendations from our governments, and particularly the idea of developing action plans to align with standard protocols in this area, to also update policy and regulatory frameworks vis-à-vis the needs of really getting universal acceptance readiness there, and a lot of

recommendations in the area of capacity building, which is one of the questions we get more from our different stakeholders. Next one, please.

Then the policy brief also, in my view, very interesting, is also suggesting some measures that can be put in place, not only to say this is the talk, but how we walk the talk, and how we monitor if we are being successful in this implementation. So, the policy brief is suggesting for the different stakeholders some concrete questions that they can take in place to then monitor the advancement of the implementation of universal acceptance in their different contexts and constituencies and so on. Next one, please.

So, from our side, and I'm almost concluding, we are already promising, if I can say that, from a UNESCO Secretariat point of view, to include in the quadrennial monitoring that we do of the 2003 recommendation, which that one has, let's say, a legal process of every four years ask all our 194 member states what they are doing regarding multilingualism in the digital ecosystem overall, not only universal acceptance, but what we are going to do, and it's a very good coincidence that the new quadrennial cycle is starting next year, so we are going to include some of these questions about universal acceptance in the new monitoring exercise under the 2003 recommendation, which is a very interesting way of collecting data to see what difference our 194 member states what they are doing or not doing in relationship with the specific aspect of universal acceptance. Next one, please.

And then very briefly also from our side, we have recently sent instructions to all our 53 field offices all over the world to strongly participate in the Universal Acceptance Day 2026. Some of them are already working concretely with ICANN partners on that way.

And obviously, we want this to be part of this global conversation of which this policy brief is one aspect, but we hope there will be many others that we can advance. So, I will conclude here. Thank you so much, and obviously open for questions and discussion. Thank you, Chair.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Mr. Canela, for these insights about the draft policy brief. I could have one question from here or from remote participants. Are there any questions? We don't have any. So, from UNESCO, where is the draft policy brief, we will go for Mrs. Seda Akbulut from ICANN, the UA program manager at ICANN, who will give us an update on Universal Acceptance Day 2026 and recap what were there for Universal Acceptance Days, starting from 2003, 2005, and the journey moving from UA Awareness Universal Acceptance Days to UA Adoption Universal Acceptance Days. Mrs. Seda, the floor is yours.

SEDA AKBULUT

Thank you, Abdalmonem, and hello, everyone. So, I will start with a general information about the universal acceptance and what it is. But before that, as you know, there are currently 1,200 100 new

gTLDs, including 151 IDN TLDs in the domain name ecosystem. And with universal acceptance of domain names and email address is a truly global multilingual and inclusive internet that is also interoperable could be possible, but achieving the universal acceptance is not possible just by one organization or in isolation, so a joint effort is very important and crucial and collaboration is very important in that sense.

Therefore, held annually, UA Day events aim to rally local, regional, and global stakeholders to spread awareness and encourage UA adoption through various types of events around the world. The inaugural UA Day was held on 28 March 2023, and the keystone events for UA Day were held in India. The first one was in 2023, and then we had the keystone event in 2024 in Serbia, and then finally it was in Vietnam last year. Basically, UA Day events are organized by ICANN in collaboration with UNESCO and the community.

ICANN and UNESCO have been collaborating for UA Day starting from the UA Day 2025, and we will continue this year for the 26th as well. So, next slide. Yeah, with regard to our focus on UA Day events, it's worthwhile maybe to share some background information about how it has evolved. In the first year the main purpose was to create a buzz around the universal acceptance across the world, but not only it created a buzz but it also enabled us to build capacity through the technical training we provided but it also opened up discussions for the UA curriculum integration roadmaps in the academic institutions as well.

So, each year it has different themes and different approaches. So, it's kind of a live project around the world. This year with the ICANN's five-year strategic plan, we mostly focus on universal acceptance adoption and demonstration events. And since October and November last year, we called for proposals for the UA Day events and we received 70 proposals from 45 countries and territories.

And a community-based team was formed to review all these proposals and go through them and shortlist them, and there have been 30 events from 30 different countries and territories that were shortlisted. And for all these events, ICANN will be providing different kinds of supports that includes financial support, logistics that includes speaker support and technical training and presentation materials.

And on this website, icann.org/ua-day-en, you can find the details of all the UA Day events that are going to happen in more than 30 countries now including all the volunteer events as well. So, you can take a look at where these UA Day events will take place this year and you can participate or distribute this within your network. And next slide, please.

So, looking at the last three years for the UA Day at a glance, actually this chart is showing all the statistics around the number of events, which is 167 events in three years in 82 countries and in 39 languages across all the regions. As you can see, it's distributed, and the number of participation across the regions are also shared,

and now so far we have reached 23,663 participants and mostly from non-English speaking countries which is from APAC, Latin America and Caribbean region and Africa regions.

And the events are organized in March, April, and May time periods, and the events are distributed in mainly five different categories. So far, the awareness type of events are the highest amounts, but it's going to be increasing for the UA adoption academic events and the regional events as well. And next slide. Okay. And this chart illustrates the number of shortlisted events, which is 30 events from 30 countries. And it also shows the types of events shared, the focuses on UA Day adoption and demonstration type of events.

Therefore, we have 19 shortlisted events under this category for which type of events we expect the UA Day organizers to implement an UA adoption, to register an IDN, to have a web form that accepts all kinds of email addresses in the input, and then also set up a mail server that supports universal acceptance. And there will be one regional strategic event for each region.

And for the curriculum type of event, it is held by the academic institution to drive a discussion on how to integrate the UA curriculum that includes micro-modules and IDN and UA-related topics into their existing technical curriculum. And the awareness type of events basically includes the basics of the UA and introduce the concept and provide some information on how to disseminate the message and what stakeholders include and their actions.

So, events are held between 25-30 March and 30 May this year, and majority of the events will take place from April and May. Next slide. As you can see from 2023 till now, UA Day has grown into a significant global effort, and it brings multilingual and cultural technical communities, governments, industry, and the businesses to work together towards one goal, Universal Acceptance Adoption, and if you want to be part of this mobilization we encourage all the GACs members and the relevant stakeholders to participate in and contribute to the events for the UA day that is listed on our webpage.

And we have regional events this year in Europe, Africa, North America, Latin America, Caribbean, and APAC region, and in these countries, Armenia, by AFRALO for Africa, and in United States of America, one in Uruguay and the other one will be in Vietnam. But in addition, there will be also national events in different countries as well. So, you may feel interested in joining and contributing in those events as well. And with that, I think I came to the last section. I'll pause here and see if there are any questions.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Actually, I have one. Let me break the ice. And I have two cents and one question. The first sense is that I didn't see any global events happen for the UA Day 2026. The first thing. Second thing that I didn't see from the statistics how many governments involved or collaborated for Universal Acceptance Day, 2026. These are the

two trends. The question, the only one, what milestones or goals expected for the UA Days events in the next few years? Thank you.

SEDA AKBULUT

Okay, thank you. So, starting from the first one, yes, we don't have a keystone event this year, but ICANN will be providing support for more UA Day adoption and demonstration events, which is our core focus, and this time we actually put our energy into making more UA Day adoption events and we will also kind of foresee to strengthening the regional events this year. So, there is a different strategy.

But ICANN is also collaborating with ITU as well, so we expect to have one event which is not called a keystone event, but it's going to be in Prague in Czech with ITU. Regarding the number of UA Day events that are done by ccTLDs and governments, I think there are nine UA Day events that are either organized by the ccTLDs, but also involving their participation, even if they are not hosted directly by ccTLDs.

So, the government agencies and the ccTLDs are part of these nine events during the UA Day events, but also there may be even more with the GAC members and their participation as well. So, I forgot to mention that it's not just the ccTLDs and the governments, but also, as Guilherme mentioned, that UNESCO will be in present in many of the UA Day events in person mostly in the UA Day events that are being organized. Sorry, the last question.

So, for the focus area in the next few years on the UA Day, our strategic plan covers the Universal Acceptance and the IDN promotion and focusing on the UA Adoption. And this will be continuing for the UA Day as well. So, this is already included in the strategic plan. So, our aim will continue to hold more UA Day events with the focus on UA Adoption.

And there may be more regional support for strong UA Day events in which we would ask, for example, the regional events to form their own strategic plan for their region and to go through it during the year and do follow-up and report back to ICANN. So, that may not be just the one-day work, but also it would require for the regional events to do some work during the year as well.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Seda. Nearly in the middle of 2025, ICANN President and CEO announced the establishment of Universal Acceptance Expert Work Group, which will provide guidelines for ICANN future on Universal Acceptance Adoption. This UA Expert Work Group has nominees from different ACs and SOs. So, we have Mr. Edmon Chung from .asia who will give us more details about Universal Acceptance guidelines that was published for public comment since a couple of weeks. Doctor, go ahead.

EDMON CHUNG

Thank you, Abdalmonem, and thank you for having me here. Those of you who know me know that this is a topic that I'm pretty

passionate about. So, the first two slides is background and what is Universal Acceptance, so can you please skip to slide four? I think everyone knows what Universal Acceptance is by now, and we're going to talk a little bit about the background. One more slide.

Yeah, so as Abdalmonem was saying, this group was actually formed from a resolution by the Board. And we started our work in August last year. We've been meeting weekly since then. Next slide, please. One of the things that is interesting, I guess it's called the Expert Working Group, and it's formed in part by representatives coming from the community including the GAC.

Well, Abdalmonem was the representative from the GAC, but also from ALAC, from SSAC, from GNSO, and ccNSO, and we did have also a Board liaison on the group. But on top of that, next slide, please, the working group also included a number of experts from the Unicode Consortium, Guilherme here from UNESCO, from the W3C, from China, from Big Tech, and from academia.

And Sarmad and I were serving as the co-chairs, and this is why I'm here speaking to you about this. But next slide. One of the important things I wanted to just let you know, yes, it's called the Guidelines for Universal Acceptance, but in terms of the scope of work, it's not guidelines about what universal acceptance is, how to achieve it. Next slide, please.

An important part of the scope, and I encourage you to read the preliminary report, is to guide ICANN staff teams work in the next little while in terms of universal acceptance. So, it's not everything

that universal acceptance is, but very specific about providing guidance to ICANN staff team on what to prioritize in terms of achieving universal acceptance.

We know that it's not going to happen in one or two years. It is something that will take some time, but the focus of the guidelines is what are some of the areas that will actually have more better impact that ICANN should dedicate their resources on. So, right now, the preliminary report is out for public comment, so really would like to get feedback from GAC members or the GAC in general on the draft, and it is out for public comment since February 23rd.

And as I mentioned, please do take a look at look at it and give us feedback. The next slide, please. In terms of the scope, the charter actually set forth ten areas of including how to approach big tech, how to approach open-source communities, how to deal with standards setting bodies, reaching out to software development professionals, system administrators, hosting providers, and also the DNS industry itself, so the registries and registrars here at ICANN.

But for the GAC, I guess number eight and number nine seems to be more directly relevant, so how ICANN should reach out to public sector and intergovernmental organizations, the academia. But also, number 10 on measures to look at how much UA readiness is in a particular area or a particular system. Before I go to a summary of them, I want to highlight that out of all of this, we had 45

recommendations or 45 guidelines that were produced by the group.

The two general ones on top is the overarching ones which, as we talked about, seem to be applicable for any type of engagement. While I mentioned that number eight and number nine seems to be more directly related to governments, throughout the discussion actually, I'm pretty sure that that every single topic, there was some discussion about how the government can be involved and how government both policies and incentives or government procurement activities, for example, could actually impact universal acceptance in a positive way.

So, I think that part I did want to particularly highlight. But let me quickly summarize. Next slide, please. We'll quickly summarize, I won't go into details. Again, do look up the document, it's out for public comments and read it and give us some feedback. But I'll just quickly touch on each of them as highlight. So, what we found is a general two points of overarching recommendation is that we must look at it as Guilherme actually mentioned, as in a broader sense of multilingual internet.

And it is a broader internationalization effort. It's not just the domain name and email address. This is a part of the wider internationalization effort, regardless of whether it's government, a particular software system, or a corporation. And the other one is that the different stakeholders require different messaging. In

order to affect and create impact, different messaging needs to be done. So, besides those overarching, I'll quickly touch on all ten.

So, the first one is about big tech. We found out that it's important to identify multiple value dimensions, not just business, but of course business value, but also social value, cultural value, for corporations, for big tech to engage. But more importantly, actually, a full stack approach, which means that different layers of the technology that a big tech organization or a big organization uses, it's important to look at it in the full stack because only addressing one particular part of the system usually is not enough. Next slide, please.

And then on the second and third one, in terms of open source, we realized that it's both vertical and horizontal. So, it's a particular system, whether it's WordPress or whatever your favorite open-source system is, it comes in vertical, like the entire platform, as well as certain components. For example, verifying email addresses.

That particular code could go horizontal across multiple open-source software platforms. And in terms of number three, which is standards organizations, we identified that the already developed standards is quite robust, but how to integrate them into other standards like credentials systems and so on that is being developed, that's something that's important. Next slide, please.

You will see that for software development system administrators as well as number seven in terms of hosting providers, actually they

share similarities. And one interesting thing that we did pick up on is that the expertise in internationalization for software systems is actually not a big community. So, training the trainers or building capacities as well as building some longevity in people that have expertise in internationalization of systems is going to be important because apparently that is a very small group around the world that has that kind of expertise.

And the other thing that was identified is that they're growing old as well, so we need to build that capacity. So, that's an interesting observation I thought I would share. Next slide, please. One of the things that are more directly related to the ICANN community, which I want to highlight, is of course the DNS industry. On the ccTLD side, we realize that working with ccTLDs in the governments and the digital agendas of the local governments is going to be important.

On the gTLD side, we're actually putting forward a recommendation to look into an issue report with potential identification of whether there might be policy gaps such as incentives for registries and registrars to actually implement Universal Acceptance Readiness.

Next slide, please. And then on to the governments themselves, we have identified that not just through the GAC, of course, engaging the GAC is important, but through the GAC perhaps to identify multiple ministries that actually have a kind of portfolio that's relevant, including language, including accessibility, including

cultural heritage and those kinds of things that might be useful for UA.

Again, the overarching thing about the broader multilingualism, multilingual internet and internationalization. Next slide, please. And finally, in terms of the academia, one of the interesting things that we identified is, of course, the curriculum and how to integrate UA into Networking 101, for example, and those kinds of things. But even more interesting is that we realized that a lot of the textbooks or a lot of the program actually have a hub and network effect.

One particular university might be actually creating certain curricular materials that is shared across a larger network of universities. And that's where we are looking at prioritizing ICANN's effort to find those hub universities and make an impact through that. And then finally, we identified a few ways to measure Universal Acceptance Readiness, and of course, promoting self-reporting by not only registries and registrars but platforms and other systems.

But interestingly also a framework that includes not only implementation or the technical implementation but actually a framework that includes the awareness, whether the organization is aware, whether the government is aware, policy support, is there policy support from the government, it's the policy support from, if it's an organization, is there policy support from the management?

And then of course implementation, how many email servers are out there and is supporting internationalized email addresses and so on, as well as finally capacity building. The one that I mentioned, actually the ability to look at internationalization of systems, that seems to be an area that requires us to pay some attention some more attention to in order for UA to be adopted, as well as the larger and broader issue of internationalization.

That's a quick summary of the many pages that hopefully you'll find interesting to read because there's a lot more details about some of the priorities that we put together. But in terms of the next steps, thank you, the next slide, please. The next steps is, of course, to finalize the report. We're looking to close the public comment period not too long after the ICANN meeting, so please do take a look at them and give us feedback.

And we're looking to probably May, so by the time we meet again in, where are we going? Oh, Sevilla. I can't read that name, city's name properly, but in Spain. We'll have the guidelines ready and kind of marching orders for ICANN staff to look into.

And the staff team, I guess Sarmad is not here today, but Seda and Sarmad will continue to update us as the implementation happens. But first of all, Looking for your feedback on the preliminary draft at this time. Thank you.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Edmon, for sharing this big and valuable information. I could have one question from here or from the remit participant. Only one, for sake of time as we are running out of time. Any questions? Okay.

Mrs. Regina, the industrial relation manager of EURID will give us more details about ccNSO Universal Acceptance Committee scope of work and recap what happened and what are the activities since the last ICANN meetings, Universal Acceptance Sessions, and Universal Acceptance Committee activities.

The last meeting was for ICANN84, we have a joint session between GAC, UA IDN Workgroup, and the ccNSO Universal Acceptance Committee. So, Regina will give us more details about all of this. Regina, the floor is yours.

REGINA FUCHSOVA

Thank you very much, Abdalmonem. Good morning, afternoon, evening to everybody. I'm joining online from Middle Europe, from Prague, and I would like to update you on another community activity in this overview we are holding now, mainly on the ccNSO Universal Acceptance Committee. Country Code Top-Level Domain registries are special because they are themselves responsible for the policies and standards settings.

So also, the aim of this group is not to produce some standardized policies, but to enable ccTLDs to interact and share information among themselves, but also with our groups under the ICANN

umbrella in order to make the best effort in the field of universal acceptance and internationalized domain names. Part of it is also a library which we have created and which I would like to invite you to not only have a look at but also contribute should you have some documents, links or news from your countries.

Next slide, please. In 2025, we have devoted the free in-person sessions at ICANN meetings to having a look into, first of all, what motivates ccTLDs to be active in the field of Universal Acceptance and IDNs. That was at ICANN82 in Seattle. And we identified over six points, including aspects such as support of local communities and needs. That was a very strong motivator for ccTLDs. Also, there was clearly stated the aspect of digital inclusivity and closing digital divide. Not surprisingly, these concepts were more relevant for ccTLDs from countries that speak multiple languages and languages with non-Latin scripts.

This all brought us to the conclusion that it's important to cooperate on a national level and also to explore the role of governments in digital transformation and look at their role from the point of view of Universal Acceptance. We continued at ICANN83 to have a look not only at barriers which eventually prevent better uptake of IDNs with various ccTLDs, but most importantly, how to break them and what can be done to improve the situation.

Overall, we identified three main areas of barriers, which are not that far away from what we heard from the previous speakers that

other groups work on. It included lack of demand. It's turning out that the habit of using English online is really deeply rooted with users and also still the awareness about the fact that own languages can be used to access more online content and to have more users online is not that widely spread still or needs to be worked on.

Then also still lack of technical solutions, even though there are more and more improvements in this field. And then also, as a third group, the internal ccTLD focus, including the resources. Also, there is some cost, of course, associated with bringing the systems up to the speed with universal acceptance.

Next slide, please. Out of this barriers and driver's session, we identified the need for a government decision, especially in the field of procurement. So, we agreed with the Universal Acceptance and IDN Working Group under GAC on a joint session which happened in ICANN84 in Dublin, and it was really a very nice collaborative and interactive session. We discussed in small groups three main fields, policy leverage, capacity building, and technical adoption, and explored opportunities for coordination to enhance the UA Readiness.

We have a report out of this session which is also available online, and as a conclusion because I'm aware of the time restriction we have present, I would like to conclude that the topic of inclusion and multilingual internet also as we heard today is very up-to-date, not only in the context of WSIS process which is now entering a new

phase and which invites national and regional initiatives to be more involved and multilingualism universal acceptance is one of the ways how to get more people online and involved but also in connection to the sustainable development goals.

So, this topic will not disappear on contrary and we as ccTLDs, the technical community, are here to help, inspire each other. You can visit either our library or also the website idmworkreport.eu, which is another activity run by multiple partners, and, for example, explore the section of case studies where we bring in success stories, but also issues which ccTLDs face when introducing IDNs.

There are many activities done on national level, including, for example, a recent one from our Serbian colleagues, who introduced a very nice script for their non-Latin script, Serbian, for online use. And we believe that this is one of the ways where the ccTLD community can be helpful and together with the national policymakers do some difference and pushing topic forward. Next slide, please.

This is just a very brief recap that this topic is not only discussed during today's session, but our Universal Acceptance Committee continues uh after this session with our own working session, and also we are for the first time joining forces at the Tech Day and exploring possible technical advancements, including AI for this field.

Next slide, please. This is just our to-do list for later on. We can skip it and go to the last slide, please. This is, again, an invitation,

should you be interested, to consult the library or contribute to it or subscribe to our mailing list. Thank you very much.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Regina. For the sake of time, I will defer any question to the end of the meeting. Now we have our local host, the delegate from India, Mr. Santhosh, who will give us some updates about the Indian government experience in advancing the universal acceptance. Mr. Santosh.

T. SANTHOSH

Thank you, Abdul. So, colleagues, I will be giving you an overview of what India has done on universal acceptance. So, next slide, please. Kind request if you go to the next slide. So, India has a large linguistic diversity. It has 22 scheduled languages and having major scripts in 11. And the challenge is one script is into many languages, and for example Devanagari is the script and the languages are many.

And one language, many scripts, that is also another challenge in India. So, Konkani is a language which is written in Roman, Devanagari, Malayalam and Kannada. So, India has also got 100 of dialects. So, this country is a multilingual country, and approximately 90% of the population speak the language other than English. Next slide, please.

Now, coming to the role of internationalized domain names under the country code top level domains, we are one of the largest IDNs

country code top level domains, and on date we have 15 internationalized domain names that is IDN country code top level domains which covers all the 22 official languages, and this is represented using the 11 scripts.

Now what we have done during all this year, so way back from 2017, sorry 2007-8, we have been studying this RFC related to the universal acceptance, and we have also got the stakeholder consultation done on various Indian languages by which we could come out with policies. And also, the Indian language community as well as the technical community participated and contributed in ICANN's variant top level domain program.

And during 2022, we came up with the implementation of the Universal Acceptance and Multilingual Internet Roadmap of India. And the very next year, 2023, we had the first Universal Acceptance Day, which was inaugurated in India. So, it was on 8th March 2023, the first UA Day celebrated in India. Next slide, please. Yeah.

Now, coming to the policy level, what initiatives India has done. So, as on date, we have this Digital Brand Identity Manual. So, it has recommended the multilingual user experience by which all the government websites are advised to provide IDN, that is Internationalized Domain Names websites for each supported language to ensure that our 90% of the population understands the URL.

Now there is another policy level intervention which is called the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities which has an amendment

which came during 2023 in which it is mentioned that accessibility standards on the products and services under ICT, which also promote the adoption of internationalized domain names.

Besides that, we have this GOV.IN subdomain, which is allocated to the Government of India organization. So, it is, one, any organization which takes a domain, say organization.gov.in, they are allocated organ organization.gov.in in their respective language. So, that is also policy which the government has brought up. Next slide, please.

Now how we have done this having IDN, so as on date we have 0.38 million IDNs in India. Now how we have done it, I mean what was the dissemination done? So, we had got a dissemination portal of the universal acceptance which was launched during March 2024, again, on the Universal Acceptance Day event. And this BashaNet portal is implemented by the center for development of advanced computing which is an autonomous organization of government of India.

So, the main purpose was to provide the developer community because there is a problem statement that there is less awareness which all the speakers have mentioned about it. So, there was a support to the developer community which helped them to come up with websites which were the universal acceptance ready. And subsequent to that, we conducted various awareness campaigns across India on this.

So, this initiative strengthened the ecosystem of UA and promote the adoption of multilingual solutions in India. Now I would kindly request that we have a booth of center of development of advanced computing in the same floor, you must have seen that, so, you can get a glimpse of what are the initiatives they have done. Next slide, please. Yeah. So, this slide I have talked about what are the various things. So, you can wish visit this site, it is called bashanet.in. Can we go to the next slide, please

So again, this portal had the SOPs for develop because each and every website is made in different frameworks like Drupal, Python, Node.js. How the developers will make a domain in an IDN, it was a challenge, so they had come up with a SOPs. So, if you visit the site, you will be able to understand what are the SOPs made.

Next slide, please. Yeah, I would request to go to the next slide. Yeah, so these are the glimpse of the IDNs which are there. I mean, you can see to your right, the Hindi or the Devanagari script of the IDNs which are at place. I mean, there are many such portals in India on IDNs.

So, next slide, please. So, as I had mentioned, there are 0.38 million IDNs which has been delegated to the root. However, there are lots of challenges which I am not going to reiterate. It has been discussed with the eminent speakers over here.

So I would like to end, it is not a technical problem, the technology exists. Now it is the time that all the big players, different

economies to take up this UA issue seriously, and we need to have a UA ready system in place. Thank you.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you very much, Mr. Santhosh. The next part will be a panel discussion. Could you go for the slides of the question? Yeah, the first question for the panel discussion, “Why should Universal Acceptance be considered a policy priority for governments, and what are the risks of delaying Universal Acceptance adoption at the national level?” I will forward this question first to Mr. Sami Muhammad Ali from .bh and the government delegate for Bahrain. Mr. Sami, the floor is yours.

SAMI MOHAMED ALI

Hello, good afternoon, good morning, good evening, everyone. This is Sami from Bahrain. Can you hear me clearly?

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yes, we can.

SAMI MOHAMED ALI

Unfortunately, I was not able to be there physically, but I would like to share our experience in Bahrain for the Universal Acceptance and the reasoning of why it is important for the current environment as we are moving towards the Internet for All policy where it is everyone in the kingdom should be able to address and

to be able to use Internet. There should be internet in all languages.

So, in Bahrain, the way forward for this was to start pushing it from the government side, whereas the Telecom Regulatory Authority, we are a semi-government organization that manages .bh and .bahrain in the Arabic language. And to support this whole process, what is required is the policy needs to be very supportive and your systems need to be a very inclusive system to allow each and every person that is using the internet in the kingdom to use this Arabic language online.

So, the risk for delaying UA adoption will be that you will lose out on all the community that is not very fluent in English and not using English as a language, whereas if you see on WhatsApp on other social media channels where they use the Arabic language or other languages to promote their content, the same is required from the government perspective to share their information or share what's happening in the country or the updates, they need to be in the language that everybody will understand.

So, from Bahrain perspective or even from global perspective, the reason that the delay in UA adoption will be lack of information will be shared with the public. This is my point of view from the .bh and .hahrain. Thank you.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Mr. Sami. My colleague, Canela, from UNESCO would like to share his thoughts about this question. Go ahead, please.

GUILHERME CANELA

Well, I will be very brief. I think there are two main points. For us, obviously, in the United Nations system, in the universal system of human rights, it's a matter of individual rights. When you don't have this type of policies implemented, you are leaving citizens, individuals, out of the picture, out of the conversation, either it is accessing governmental services, or any other matter that is important for the life of these individuals that can't communicate properly if you don't have Universal Acceptance.

But there is also an economic reason. When you are leaving people outside of the conversation, you are also not engaging new people with new business, with new whatever they are, either it is in education or any other type of knowledge elements that could be there. So, at the end of the day, it's a win-win game for everyone to advance and having more inclusion in the digital ecosystem. Thank you.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Mr. Canela. Second question, I will get an answer from Mr. Edmon for one minute, "How can governments integrate Universal Acceptance requirements into national digital strategies, e-government platforms, and procurement policies?"

EDMON CHUNG

Thank you. Yeah, Edmon here. And I guess few people in the past and now have also talked about, I guess, one of the policy interventions is going to make a difference, definitely, I totally believe. Procurement processes that governments put together to require Universal Acceptance out of the gate is probably difficult, but at least ask for a roadmap, then quickly all the system integrators in the country will already know that, that when the government is requiring something, they become aware that at least there is this thing called Universal Acceptance.

The other thing that I want to talk a little bit about is many countries are still working, especially developing countries, are still working on access to rural areas. That's an area where UA by design I think is important, because when you build out new infrastructure, there really isn't any reason why it couldn't be you know built from UA by design and having what I call multilingual first instead of the English first approach that a lot of times is in the past.

And the last thing I wanted to touch on is that this is relevant also for English speaking only countries or largely English-speaking countries, because when you think about government services, it is also to support the minority. What about visas and dealing with other countries' systems?

At least if you decide, of course, some forms you decide you can only fill in English, but at least the system should know if you're making that restriction, and that's important, not just fail for

whatever reason. So, even if it's an English only environment, having UA capabilities I think is important. Thank you.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Edmon. Next slide, please, for sake of time. The membership for GAC UA IDN Work Group is open for any ICANN delegate to join this work group. Next slide. Just send an email to join-gac@icann.org.

Next slide, please. Yeah, what is next? We need to have our input for the draft of the policy brief collaborated between ICANN and UNESCO by the 20th of March, 2026. And we need to review and respond to the public comments from the ICANN UA Expert Work Group by the 13th of April. We need to liaise and coordinate with other stakeholder communities to ensure alignment and cooperation for Universal Acceptance and adoption. And develop the plan for the future activities for UA IDN Work Group, including priorities, timelines, and outreach efforts.

Next slide, please. At this time, I will leave the floor for Christine Arida to wrap up the session. Thank you.

CHRISTINE ARIDA

Thank you very much, Abdalmonem. Thank you, colleagues. A very interesting discussion, and we really hope to see more activities on the Universal Acceptance. And I will now close this session. Thank you so much.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yeah, Christine, we have a question here from the participant. Go ahead, please.

SUADA HADZOVIC

So, as co-chairs of Human Rights International Law Working Group, Giacomo Mazzone and I, Suada Hadzovic, would like to say that we greatly appreciate the work of the Universal Acceptance Working Group, noting that our work complements each other.

The GAC perspective is that it is of high importance to give the opportunity to users of minor languages to enjoy their right to access information in cyberspace by promoting the inclusion of new languages in digital ecosystems. Therefore, achieving UA readiness is essential to enabling a more linguistically diverse Internet. Additionally, we are thankful for the continuous support of UNESCO to both working groups.

As it is written in ICANN70 GAC communique that the Human Rights International Working Group will be consulting UNESCO to explore its Internet Universality Indicators, which measures how elements of diversity, disability, language, human rights, among others are represented in the Internet environment in a given country. We think that this internet universal indicators are very important for our works. Thank you.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Go ahead, Christine.

CHRISTINE ARIDA

Thank you very much. I trust we don't have any time for additional comments. Very sorry that we went slightly over time. And thank you, everyone.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you very much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]