

Middle East Space

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Statement (Draft) for New gTLD Applicant support program for diversity in the DNS industry

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The team crafted the statement ahead of the ICANN 81 meeting and proactively reached out to the Middle East community by email for their valuable feedback one week before the event.

The ME Space community gathered during the ICANN81 Annual General Meeting on Thursday 14 November 2024 in Istanbul, Turkey to discuss the applicant support program for new gTLDs and explore how organizations and individuals from our region can benefit from it. We identified key challenges that may hinder accessibility for applicants from the MEAC region and shared ideas on how to overcome these obstacles to make the program more inclusive and accessible to our region.

The new gTLD round currently underway was intended to be a remedial round that will bring more diversity and more inclusiveness in the Domain Name industry, and the associated applicant support program is supposed to be designed to reach this objective.

The Middle East Space Community extends its gratitude to the new gTLD SubPro Working Group and the Implementation Review Team for their thorough efforts in shaping the Applicant Support Program (ASP). We would like to highlight a few points that we think might impact participation from our region in the Applicant Support Program and offer some recommendations that may encourage greater regional involvement.

- **Program Eligibility Entries**

While the ICANN Applicant Support Program (ASP) eligibility framework effectively prioritizes nonprofits, IGOs, Indigenous organizations and small businesses focused on social impact, it lacks a specific focus on geographic diversity among applicants. This gap may limit opportunities for regions that are underserved or less represented in the global domain space, potentially missing out on a more inclusive internet expansion that truly reflects a wide range of global communities.

- **Qualification for Support**

The Applicant Support Program (ASP) uses a “go/no-go” approach, where any applicant that meets at least one eligibility criterion qualifies on equal footing with others, regardless of how many categories they satisfy. This lack of ranking means that all qualifying applicants are considered equally without prioritization. However, with the ASP budget potentially capping the number of applications processed, some high-impact applications may remain unconsidered if resources are exhausted, while less impactful ones are still approved based on their timing in the submission period.

- **Awareness and Outreach prior to the launch of the program**

The limited time available to promote the final version of the ICANN Applicant Support Program (ASP) may result in few, if any applications from the MEAC region, or applications being submitted late. This could jeopardize their chances of receiving support for the upcoming round of new gTLDs, as funds are only available until they are exhausted.

To address this we suggest:

- Launching regional specific campaigns to raise awareness about the program and how to apply.
- Collaborating with local partners, civil society and community organizations to promote the program.
- Establishing feedback loops to allow the community to evaluate the effectiveness of the outreach program.
- Developing awareness campaigns about the next round of gTLDs and what it entails to operate a gTLD registry.

- **Long-Term Operational or Financial Support**

Given that the goals of the applicant support program include making the application and evaluation fees more accessible to entities that would like to operate a registry but would otherwise be unable to apply, because of financial constraints, long-term operational support is also necessary. In addition, while financial aid for successful applicants includes reduced base registry operational fees, there are no clear details on the exact amount of reduction or how long the support will last. Therefore we suggest the introduction of:

- Specific percentage by which the base registry operational fees will be reduced and provide a clear timeline for how long the financial support will be available.
- Mechanisms for continued financial support beyond the initial application phase specially for applicants from less developed economies.
- Operational support in terms of training, resources and capacity development programs.

In close, we wish the ASP every success and hope it expands access to new gTLDs for resource limited applicants from diverse communities and regions, enhancing the program’s inclusivity and effectiveness.