ICANN81 Readout

Highlights & Take-Aways from the 26th Annual General Meeting

On 26 November 2024, eco – Association of the Internet Industry & ICANN – Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers hosted a joint ***ICANN81 Readout*** to summarise and discuss selected topics from the ***26th Annual General Meeting of ICANN*** (ICANN81), which was held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 9 – 14 November 2024.

The ICANN81 Readout was moderated by **Lars Steffen**, Head of International, Digital Infrastructure and Resilience at the eco Association, and was hosted by **Christopher Mondini,** Vice President, Stakeholder Engagement & Managing Director, Europe at ICANN, and **Thomas Rickert**, Director Names & Numbers at the eco Association.

Reports from the constituencies were provided by:

- **Ram Mohan**, Chair of the SSAC

- **Peter Koch**, Member of the ccNSO Council

- **Philippe Fouquart**, Chair of the ISPCP

- **Hervé Clement**, Chair of the ASO

- **Greg DiBiase**, Chair of the GNSO Council

- **Joanna Kulesza**, ALAC Leadership Team Member

- **Nicolas Caballero**, Chair of the GAC

ICANN81: Over 2,600 participants and 177 public sessions

Christopher Mondini, Vice President of Stakeholder Engagement & Managing Director, Europe at ICANN, delivered the opening remarks at the ICANN81 Readout webinar. The 26th Annual General Meeting of ICANN – Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers in Istanbul drew an impressive attendance of over 2,600 participants, including 1,900 on-site and 700 online attendees from 141 countries and territories. The event featured 177 public sessions covering crucial topics such as the new gTLD program, geopolitical and regulatory issues, multistakeholder governance, capacity building, and an update on the Universal Acceptance strategy.

The ICANN Board recognises Guiguemde's significant efforts in capacity building on a local and regional scale. Particularly notable is Guiguemde's key role in the development of a new Coalition for Digital Africa capacity-building track for governments which earned the ICANN Board's deep appreciation. The ICANN Board saw important changes, with Maarten Botterman's re-election, Tripti Sinha becoming Chair, Chris Chapman appointed as Vice Chair, and the addition of new members Miriam Sapiro and Amitabh Singhal. The event also welcomed 39 fellows from 36 countries and 11 NextGen participants from the region.

Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC)

Coalition for Digital Inclusion (CODI)

Ram Mohan, Chair of the SSAC, discussed the newly launched Coalition for Digital Inclusion (CODI), which had a soft launch at ICANN81. A formal launch is planned for ICANN82 in Seattle. CODI's vision is to ensure everyone can navigate the Internet in their own language. This goes beyond technical aspects like internationalised domain names or email addresses; it encompasses providing resources in local languages for tasks like setting up routers or accessing essential online services. He highlighted that governments are increasingly moving services online, yet language is often overlooked in digital inclusion efforts. This can create a barrier for populations who lack resources in their native languages, hindering their ability to fully participate in the digital world.

Open-Source Software

The SSAC is conducting a survey and study to examine the prevalence and impact of open-source software in the infrastructure supporting DNS and domain name registration. By identifying the open-source software used in DNS and domain name registration, the SSAC hopes to determine if any of the open-source components pose security risks to the Internet's infrastructure and highlight the benefits and contributions of open-source software in supporting critical Internet functions. While the study is not expected to produce specific policy recommendations, it will establish an important baseline understanding of the role and significance of open-source software in maintaining a stable and secure Internet.

DNS Blocking/Filtering

The SSAC is revisiting the topic of DNS blocking and filtering, which was the subject of a previous report published several years ago. This renewed focus stems from the evolution of technologies and the increasing prevalence of DNS blocking as a method for controlling Internet access.

The SSAC's current work aims to analyse the pros and cons of DNS blocking. DNS blocking is often applied in a disproportionate manner, blocking entire zones or domains to restrict access to a single website. This approach can have unintended consequences and limit access to legitimate content. The SSAC recognises that DNS blocking can undermine trust in the Internet, as users may experience arbitrary blocks on accessing information. This erosion of trust can have far-reaching implications for the open and free flow of information online.

The SSAC is currently developing a report on this topic, which will provide a comprehensive analysis of the evolving landscape of DNS blocking and filtering, its implications for Internet access and trust, and potential ways to mitigate its negative impacts.

AI, Phishing and DNS Abuse

Ram Mohan also presented the key findings of Lauren Bissinger's research on AI and DNS abuse during the ICANN81 Readout webinar. Bissinger, an expert member of the SSAC, found that AI is being used to create more sophisticated and effective phishing attacks. AI-powered phishing emails can now perfectly mimic genuine emails, making them much harder to detect.

Previously, phishing attacks relied on sending out mass emails based on a single template. This approach, while widespread, was often ineffective as recipients could easily identify the emails as spam. AI allows attackers to create individualised phishing

emails tailored to specific targets. These emails can be automatically translated into the recipient's language, increasing their effectiveness.

Research shows that within the first hour of a domain name becoming accessible on the Internet, approximately 100,000 phishing emails are sent out. A single successful phishing attack can generate around $20,000 for the attacker. Despite the challenges posed by AI-powered phishing, 'good' AI is also being used to develop tools and techniques to detect and prevent these attacks.

DNS Abuse

Peter Koch, a member of the ccNSO Council, highlighted the work of the ccNSO DNS Abuse Standing Committee and shared results from a recent survey that showed an increase in awareness and measurement of DNS abuse among ccTLD registries. Notably, the levels of abuse measured remained below 0.1% in most ccTLDs. Koch emphasised that the DNS Abuse Standing Committee operates on a voluntary and information-sharing basis. This means that individual ccTLDs are not obligated to adopt specific policies but rather benefit from shared knowledge and best practices to combat DNS abuse within their respective domains.

Philippe Fouquart, Chair of the ISPCP, addressed DNS abuse from the perspective of the Non-Contracted Parties House (NCPH). He noted a consistent push from both researchers and commercial stakeholders for a policy response to address abuse, though not all instances classified as "abuse" necessarily fall under the domain name system. Fouquart acknowledged ongoing efforts to improve responsiveness to DNS abuse reports through contract amendments with ICANN-contracted parties, and emphasised the ISPCP's support for stronger measures to combat DNS abuse within their constituency.

Greg DiBiase, Chair of the GNSO Council, echoed Fouquart's comments about assessing the effectiveness of recent contract amendments aimed at mitigating DNS abuse. DiBiase stated that the GNSO intends to evaluate these amendments in the coming year and explore potential policy options, including a targeted Policy Development Process (PDP) focused on specific areas like phishing.

Nicolas Caballero, Chair of the GAC, expressed appreciation for the SSAC's efforts in raising awareness about AI-powered DNS abuse and emphasised the need for further collaboration between the GAC and the SSAC on this issue. Caballero also noted that while some GAC members found the technical aspects of the discussion challenging, he personally appreciated the insights provided by Bissinger's research and believes ongoing dialogue on this topic is crucial.

Joanna Kulesza, a member of the ALAC Leadership Team, emphasised the At-Large community's commitment to combating DNS abuse and protecting end-users. She welcomed the publication of an informal report analysing malicious domain registration features and highlighted the need to translate technical information about DNS abuse into accessible language for end-users.

Country Code Names Supporting Organization (ccNSO)

ccNSO Internal Matters and Policy Work

Peter Koch, a member of the ccNSO Council, reported on internal matters and policy work. The ccNSO has two vacant board seats, with two candidates vying for the positions: Byron Holland, CEO of CIRA (**.ca**), and Nick Wenben-Smith, General Counsel of

Nominet (.uk). The election process is underway, with background checks being conducted and a final vote anticipated early in the new year.

Koch highlighted the ccNSO's role in developing policy for Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs). He noted three recently completed policy recommendations:

- Retirement of Country Code Top-Level Domain Names (ccTLDs)
- Review Mechanisms for ccTLD Operators
- ccTLD Selection

The ccNSO is currently awaiting board review of the recommendations concerning review mechanisms.

Koch discussed a presentation and conversation with the GAC regarding the role of ccTLDs in the process of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20). Many ccTLD registries are involved in local Internet Governance Forums (IGFs), contributing to the WSIS+20 process.

He also noted ccTLD engagement in the Global Digital Compact and the Internet Governance Liaison Committee within the ccNSO. This committee facilitates information sharing and coordination among ccTLDs on Internet governance issues.

Policy Gap Analysis Working Group (PGA)

This working group is tasked with identifying and addressing potential policy gaps within the ccNSO. Koch explained that the group aims to determine whether certain issues require new policy development or fall under existing policies. He cited the case of Lebanon, where the ccTLD operator was unable to fulfil its duties and IANA intervened to provide support. While IANA's actions were deemed appropriate, the situation highlighted a potential need for clearer guidelines in such cases.

The PGA is currently working through a list of potential policy gaps, considering various solutions, including the development of new working groups within the ccNSO or even a broader cross-community approach involving other ICANN stakeholders.

TLD-OPS

Koch also described the workshop held by the ccNSO's TLD-OPS group in Instanbul, which held a tabletop exercise simulating a hypothetical DNS attack. This card game-like exercise involved participants from various ccTLDs and focused on technical, managerial, communications, and regulatory aspects of responding to such an attack. He noted the exercise was well-received and will likely be replicated within individual ccTLDs.

Technical Community Coalition for Multistakeholderism (TCCM)

Finally, Koch introduced the Technical Community Coalition for Multistakeholderism (TCCM). This coalition, consisting of ccTLDs, registrars, and members of the numbering community, aims to provide a collective voice for the technical community in global Internet governance discussions.

He highlighted the TCCM's successful engagement in the consultation phases of the Global Digital Compact and the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Working Group on Internet Governance. The coalition plans to continue its work in 2025, leading up to the WSIS+20 summit. Koch extended an open invitation for other members of the technical community to join the TCCM, emphasising the importance of a unified voice in shaping Internet governance policies.

Internet Service Providers and Connectivity Providers Constituency (ISPCP)

Philippe Fouquart, Chair of the ISPCP, gave an update from the ISPCP's perspective. The ISPCP hosted a hands-on session at ICANN81 focused on DNSSEC, with around 30 participants. The ISPCP will host a series of webinars on DNS leading up to March 2025, offering opportunities for further engagement and learning within the community.

Public DNS Resolvers and DNS Filtering

Fouquart raised an interesting point during the discussion on DNS filtering, connecting it to the use of public DNS resolvers. He referenced a draft report by Digital Medusa that suggested a decline in the use of public resolvers over the past 12-24 months. The reasons behind the reported decline in public resolver usage remain under consideration. Fouquart also raised the question of VPN usage as an alternative method for circumventing filtering, suggesting a need to investigate the impact of VPNs on this issue.

WSIS+20 and the Multistakeholder Model

As a constituency, the ISPCP will respond to the questionnaire regarding the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) by the end of January. He stressed the importance of all ICANN constituencies participating in this process, advocating for the multistakeholder model through national channels and individual contributions.

Address Supporting Organization (ASO)

The ASO Structure and Board Seat 10

Hervé Clement, Chair of the Address Supporting Organization (ASO), talked about the ASO's structure. Made up of the CEOs of the five Regional Internet Registries (RIRs), the Number Resource Organization Number Council (NRO NC) manages IP resources. The chair of the NRO NC is the CEO of the RIPE NCC. The ASO Address Council (ASO AC) is composed of community members from the five regions, the ASO AC normally has 15 members. However, no one from the African Network Information Centre (AfriNIC) is currently serving, due to governance issues the group is facing.

Currently, the ASO is in the process of nominating a board candidate for seat 10, which is presently filled by Christian Kaufmann. The nomination period is open until December 16. The ASO is accepting nominations from all regions, except for the AfriNIC region, since Alan Barrett, who currently occupies Seat 9, is from AfriNIC.

ICP-2

The Address Supporting Organization (ASO) does not create policies related to Internet Protocol (IP) resources, as these policies are developed and agreed upon at the regional level. The ASO reviews global policies that affect the relationship between the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) and the different regions. One such global policy, called ICP-2, establishes the criteria for creating new Regional Internet Registries (RIRs). Since this policy was developed almost 24 years ago, there is a pressing need to update and consolidate it.

In 2020, the CEOs of four RIRs requested that the ASO consider applying the criteria not only to the operation of RIRs but also to the verification of whether RIRs are functioning properly. This task was completed in February 2023. They also requested that the criteria outlined in the ICP-2 document be updated. However, the group is still working on updating the criteria and discussed their progress with various stakeholders at ICANN81.

Philippe Fouquart, Chair of the ISPCP, expressed concerns within the ISPCP regarding the possibility that a group could "game the system" under the updated ICP-2 criteria to obtain recognition as a new RIR.

To gather feedback from different communities, the ASO has launched an online questionnaire that will remain open until December 6. Additionally, ICANN has initiated a public consultation on this topic, which will also be open until the same date.

Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO)

Greg DiBiase, Chair of the GNSO Council, reported on the GNSO's progress in finalizing recommendations for the next round of new gTLDs, which are expected to open for applications in April 2026. The Subsequent Procedures Working Group (SubPro) recently sent their recommendations to the ICANN Board for approval. At ICANN81, the Board approved the final report of the Expedited Policy Development Process (EPDP) Phase Two on Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs). This phase focused on second-level variants. The Review and Recommendations Team (RRT) is now working to clarify these recommendations. DiBiase encouraged community members to get involved in the RRT's work on the next round of gTLDs.

Private Resolution of Contention Sets

A key issue that arose in relation to the next round of gTLDs is the private resolution of contention sets, which occurs when two or more applicants apply for the same gTLD. Following advice from the Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) and the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC), the ICANN board determined that private resolution of contention sets will not be permitted in the next round. This means that contention sets will be settled using an ICANN-run auction. The board also decided to 'unadopt' a previous recommendation that allowed parties to form joint ventures to resolve contention sets. This was because the board no longer believes this recommendation is in the public interest. DiBiase added that, although the GNSO did not issue a consensus recommendation on this point, it will work with the board to develop a process for situations where the board adopts a recommendation and later decides it is not in the public interest.

Nicolas Caballero, Chair of the GAC, expressed support for the ICANN board's decision to prohibit private auctions of contention and their proposal to allow applicants to apply for alternative strings in case of string contention.

Bylaw Amendment on Applicant Support

A working group on auction proceeds recommended that applicants for financial support cannot use ICANN accountability mechanisms to challenge a denied application to prevent funds from being used for litigation. The ICANN board proposed a bylaw amendment reflecting this recommendation, which is up for a community vote by 6 January.

At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC)

Support for Applicants for the next round of new gTLDs

A key part of the At-Large's mandate is supporting applicants for the next round of new gTLDs. **Joanna Kulesza**, a member of the ALAC Leadership Team, explained that the At-Large wants to ensure diverse geographic representation in the next round of gTLDs, particularly from underserved regions and communities. She noted that ICANN has made

supporting applicants a top priority. The organisation has a coordinated programme in place, including external support, that aims to inform potential applicants about the next round. The At-Large sees its role as facilitating dialogue, with its members participating in policy development processes. The At-Large is also working on the ground with ICANN staff to ensure end users are informed about the next round.

Kulesza acknowledged the challenges applicants face, particularly those from underserved regions and communities. She noted the steep learning curve involved in understanding the technicalities around the next round. Kulesza highlighted the importance of translating key documents, such as the applicant guidebook, into a variety of languages. She gave the example of the Polish translation of the guidebook, which was recently made available online.

Multistakeholderism

Kulesza thanked Ram Mohan, Chair of the SSAC, for moderating the 'Shifting Paradigms' session. The session was proposed by the At-Large and GAC and aimed to communicate a message of confidence and concern in relation to multistakeholderism. She highlighted a recent blog post by Randy Makowski, who argued that criticisms of multistakeholderism come from those who would benefit from it.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum will take place in 2025. Kulesza agreed with GAC Chair Nicolas Caballero that WSIS+20 is an important opportunity for the ICANN community to promote multistakeholderism. She stressed the importance of developing a clear message about multistakeholderism, which can then be communicated to a wider audience. She noted that the At-Large wants to build a narrative around sustainable development and the importance of the multistakeholder model in creating a welcoming online space.

Kulesza noted that the At-Large welcomes the updates from the Governmental Engagement Team on regulatory developments, including the UN Cybercrime Convention, cybersecurity discussions, and the EU's NIS2 Directive.

Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC)

Nicolas Caballero, Chair of the GAC, highlighted several important issues for the committee. The GAC strongly advocates for transparency within ICANN and believes that all participants should disclose their affiliations. They welcome the development of a general ethics policy and a code of conduct regarding Statements of Interest (SOIs).

Caballero expressed the GAC's concern about DNS security, emphasizing the need for robust measures to protect it from cyber threats and to ensure its resilience. Additionally, the GAC supports the promotion of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) and underscores the importance of addressing the technical and policy barriers that hinder their adoption.

The committee believes it is crucial to find a balance between data protection and the needs of law enforcement, national security, and the general public.

Caballero also welcomed Sebastian Dooku as the liaison with the GAC during the session with the GNSO in Istanbul. He concluded by stressing the necessity of collaboration, transparency, and accountability in Internet governance.

Statements of Interest (SOIs)

The GNSO has been working on the issue of Statements of Interest (SOIs) for some time. As **Thomas Rickert**, Director Names & Numbers at the eco Association, explained, the community has been unable to reach a compromise on the issue of lawyers disclosing who they represent. He noted that the main sticking point has been lawyers who claim that regulations on professional secrecy prevent them from disclosing who they represent. Although Rickert himself is a lawyer, he believes that lawyers participating in ICANN processes should disclose who their clients are. He tells his clients that ICANN's rules require him to disclose who he is working for.

Rickert argued that requiring participants to disclose who they represent will help to prevent any particular interest group from taking control of ICANN's policymaking processes.

ICANN82 Readout, March 2025

As always, the ICANN81 Readout webinar demonstrated the importance of collaboration and dialogue within the ICANN community. The event provided an opportunity to discuss key issues, share updates on important work, and identify areas for future collaboration. The next event, the ICANN82 Community Forum, will be held 8-13 March 2025 in Seattle, USA. eco – Association of the Internet Industry & ICANN will again host a Readout webinar on 25 March 2025.

The recording of the ICANN81 Readout is available for eco members here.