Project Overview for the Middle East Domain Name Industry Study 2023 RFP

Request for Proposal

8 June 2023

ICANN

1 Introduction

1.1 About this Document

This document provides an overview of the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the ICANN Middle East Domain Name Industry Study 2023. It provides background and pertinent information regarding the requirements for the respondents. The RFP itself is comprised of this as well as other documents that are hosted in the ICANN sourcing tool (SciQuest/Jaggaer). Indications of interest are to be received by emailing ME-Domain-Name-Industry-Study-2023-RFP@icann.org. Proposals should be electronically submitted by 23:59 UTC on 17 July 2023 using ICANN's sourcing tool, access to which may be requested via the same email address as above.

1.2 About the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers' (ICANN's) mission is to ensure the stable and secure operation of the Internet's unique identifier systems. To reach another person on the Internet, you have to type an address into your computer - a name or a number. That address has to be unique so computers know where to find each other. ICANN helps coordinate and support these unique identifiers across the world.

See www.icann.org for more information.

2 Scope

2.1 Project Objective

ICANN is soliciting proposals to identify a provider who can:

- study the current state of the domain name industry and how this industry has evolved in the Middle East region since 2016 when the Middle East and Adjoining Countries (MEAC) DNS Study was conducted
- provide data that can help identify gaps and opportunities in the broader Internet ecosystem, with a special focus on domain names
- make recommendations that can help relevant stakeholders, who work or have interest in the region, to make informed decisions
- help the ICANN Global Stakeholder Engagement team reposition its engagement efforts to focus on gaps defined in the report, and work towards addressing these gaps

2.2 Background

The "Middle East Domain Name Industry Study" intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of the domain name industry in the wider context of the Internet ecosystem in the Middle East region[1]. In 2015, ICANN commissioned the Middle East and Adjoining Countries (MEAC) DNS market study based on the recommendations of the community-driven regional engagement plan back then. In 2020, the FY21-FY25 regional engagement plan recommended that ICANN review the key findings of the 2015 study. The 2015 study was reviewed internally, and the results were shared with the regional community.

Now that ICANN is moving forward with the implementation process of the next round of new gTLD applications, and with efforts underway to promote Universal Acceptance of domain names to help make the Internet more inclusive, this is the time to conduct a comprehensive study to understand how the domain name industry in the region is evolving. Hence, ICANN is seeking proposals from vendors who have the knowledge and experience to conduct such study.

2.3 Scope of Work

2.3.1 Scope of the Study

The goal of this study is to provide an updated and comprehensive analysis of the Middle East domain name industry to help ICANN and other relevant stakeholders make informed decisions on the needs and priorities for the development of this industry in the region.

The awarded vendor will research the domain name industry at both regional and country levels and provide a comparative analysis to show the changes from 2015 to 2023 as applicable. At a minimum, the methodology must rely on primary research[2] (e.g., real-time measurements, surveys, or in-depth interviews) and secondary research (e.g., review of ICANN's previous reports and third-party reports such as World Bank, UNESCO, ITU etc.). The research should cover:

1. Breakdown of domain name registrations including but not limited to:
    a. number of domains under management[3] (DUM) per ASCII and Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) ccTLD.
    b. number of IDN domains under management per ASCII and IDN ccTLD
    c. total number of second level domain names (i.e., example.com) per ASCII and IDN gTLD per country
    d. total number of IDN second level domain names per ASCII and IDN gTLD, per country, per script
    e. Under both ccTLDs and gTLDs, the percentage of domain names that are active, redirect to active websites, or inactive

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[1] For the list of in-scope countries in the Middle East region, please see Appendix A.

[2] For ccTLD related data, ICANN can help reach out to ccTLD operators and other stakeholders and solicit input on the surveys.

[3] A DUM for a gTLD means the number of domain names registered at the second level (e.g. NAME.com). On the other hand, a DUM for a ccTLD means the number of domain names registered under both the second level (e.g. NAME.jo) and third level (e.g. NAME.com.jo).

     f. The level of Registration Data Access Protocol (RDAP) implementation for ccTLDs
     g. To the extent possible, provide data about the registrants and whether the registrations are made by businesses, governments, not-for-profits, research and academic, individuals, etc.

2. Benchmark of the number of domain name registrations per 1,000 population in countries in the Middle East against other countries/regions of the world
3. The growth rate of domain name registrations over the period of 2015 to 2023 in ccTLDs and gTLDs, including IDNs
4. The growth rate of IDN domains over the period of 2015 to 2023 per ASCII and IDN TLDs
5. The projected growth of domain name registrations over the next five years in ccTLDs and gTLDs, including IDNs
6. Degree of availability and use of content in local language/script over the years between 2015 and 2023:
     a. What are the top 5 languages in which the content is provided in the region?
     b. How much has the content increased for the languages identified above over the years?
     c. How much do the users access this content per language (i.e., identified by the volume of search queries or domain name resolution requests per year)?
7. Qualitative analysis of the current landscape registry operators, registrars, resellers, and hosting providers, including but not limited to:
     a. ccTLD registry operators, their governance models, registration policies, pricing, accreditation policies for registrars and resellers, dispute resolution policies, registry technical backend systems, and registry/registrar connectivity security mechanisms in place.
     b. gTLD registry operators established in the region, their business and governance models, number of domain registrations, percentage of domains registered through registrars in the region vs. domains registered through registrars from outside.
     c. ICANN-Accredited registrars in the region, their business models, and number of domains under their management per top-level domain.
     d. Local registrars, resellers and hosting providers in the region, their business models and number of domains under their management per top-level domain.
     e. Registry/registrar/reseller provisioning services and infrastructure (e.g. in-house vs. 3rd party services, etc.).
     f. Registrant information security mechanisms at the registrar level (e.g. online management interface, two-factor authentication, etc.).
     g. Registrant DNSSEC data (DS) provisioning (automated, manual, etc.)
8. Qualitative analysis of the user experience from the registrant's point of view:
     i.   Preference to register domains in ccTLDs vs. gTLDs
     ii.   Preferred language for the user interface
     iii. Preferred method for customer support (chatbot, phone, etc.)
     iv. Preferred language for customer support
     v.   Preferred method of payment
9. Assessment of the level of (i) awareness, (ii) willingness, and (iii) ability to use IDN, including but not limited to
     a. A series of questions to assess the supply side (including Registries, Registry Service Providers Registrars, Hosting Providers and ISPs);
     b. A series of questions to assess the demand side (at least including end users and registrants from all countries relevant to this study)
10. Assessment of the level of (i) awareness, (ii) willingness and (iii) ability to use EAI (e.g., Arabic email addresses), including but not limited to;

a. A series of questions to assess the supply side (Registrars, Hosting Providers and ISPs)
b. A series of questions set for demand side (at least including end users and registrants from all countries relevant to this study)

11. Assessment of the level of (i) awareness, (ii) willingness and (iii) ability to use new and longer ASCII TLDs (e.g., .abudhabi, .istanbul and .photography) including but not limited to:
   a. A series of questions to assess the supply side (Registries, Registrars, Hosting Providers and ISPs)
   b. A series of questions to assess the demand side (at least including end users and registrants from all countries relevant to this study)

12. Assessment of the use of new gTLDs in the region, including but not limited to:
   a. Supply and demand factors impacting new gTLDs
      i. To what extent do the supply-side issues impact demand for new gTLDs?
         1. Which new gTLDs do regional registries and registrars supply? Explain the preference with reasons.
      ii. To what extent do demand-side issues impact supply for new gTLDs?
         1. Which new gTLDs do regional registrants demand? Explain preference with reasons.
   b. Hypothesis formulation: What explains the variation in new gTLD uptake across the Middle East region?
      i. Dependent variable (example)
         1. New gTLD growth (per country, TLD, and/or Middle East region)
      ii. Independent variables (examples)
         1. New gTLD application process obstacles
         2. Competition from legacy and ccTLDs
         3. Universal acceptance issues
         4. Awareness and trust in new, legacy, and ccTLDs
         5. Literacy rates per country.

13. Series of questions to assess the state of DNS Abuse in ccTLD registrations:
   a. What forms of DNS Abuse do ccTLD registry operators take action on as aligned with their mandate?
   b. How do ccTLD registry operators analyze it?
   c. What kind of actions do ccTLD registry operators take?

14. Other components of the Internet ecosystem that may potentially impact the domain name industry in the region, including but not limited to,
   a. Internet infrastructure, connectivity, hosting services, and use of social media/messaging apps.
   b. Internet connectivity cost and mobile device pricing.
   c. Internet related policies and regulations.
   d. Other economic and social indicators that may affect the use of the Internet and technology.

15. A SWOT analysis of the domain name industry at the regional level.

16. Suggestions and recommendations on how to further develop and grow the domain name industry at the regional level.

Geographical scope of the study is defined as follows:

- Nineteen (19) countries must be covered in the study: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates.
- Five (5) countries may be covered for as much data as required in the scope of work and should the vendor be able to collate this data[4]: Afghanistan, Libya, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

2.3.2 Structure of the Study

The study should include three main sections:

1. **Facts:** This section should provide data on all aspects as described in the Scope of the Study section above.
2. **Analysis:** This section must provide an in-depth analysis of the data and show correlations amongst the various data sets.
3. **Conclusions and Recommendations:** Based on the findings from analyzing the data collected, the report must provide suggestions and recommendations on how to grow the industry in the region.

2.3.3 Deliverables

The following deliverables and milestones have been set for the study:

1. Inception report
2. Draft report
3. Final report
4. Supplementary materials that can describe any aspect of the study and be used for the outreach activities. (e.g., a summary report, a slide deck and infographics).

All the above deliverables are to be reviewed, and approved by the ICANN org. The Final Report of the Study along with all supplementary materials, and any attached outcomes will be submitted electronically and in the English language.

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[4] The vendor to propose which countries they will be able to cover, and this will be considered in the evaluation

3 High Level Selection Criteria

The decision to select a provider as an outcome of this RFP will be based on, but not limited to, the following selection criteria:

1. Capability
2. Approach
3. Project Team
4. Project Management
5. Commitment
6. Financial health
7. Financial value / pricing
8. Reference checks
9. Mitigation of any conflicts of interest
10. Value added services

4 High Level Business Requirements

The provider must be able to adhere to the complete list of business requirements as listed in SciQuest/Jaggaer. A summary of the key business requirements is listed below:

1. Ability to provide a complete response based on ICANN specifications by the designated due date.
2. Availability to participate in finalist presentations via conference call/remote participation.
3. Ability to negotiate a professional services agreement using ICANN Contractor Consulting Agreement.
4. Ability to conduct periodic update calls and send periodic status reports to the review team during the study, frequency to be determined.
5. Ability to conduct all communications in English
6. Ability to develop work methods, data gathering mechanisms and evaluation/assessment approaches as appropriate for the activity.
7. Ability to conduct examination (interview, questionnaire administration, research) work using remote tools and/or in-person as necessary.
8. If using sub-contractors, ability to serve as a coordination center to ensure standardized implementation of survey across multiple linguistic and cultural environments.
9. Ability to provide the following deliverables:
   a) Work plan and timeline.
   b) Inception Report by 24 December 2023 and to include methodology and approach, assessment of the specific objective and quantifiable criteria, high level assumptions and risks, basis for conclusions, and recommendations
   c) Draft Report by 5 February 2024
   d) Final Report to be submitted by 15 July 2024
   e) Study must be structured to include Facts, Analysis, Conclusions and Recommendations

5 Project Timeline

The following dates have been established as milestones for this RFP. ICANN reserves the right to modify or change this timeline at any time as necessary.

Activity	Estimated Dates
RFP published	8 June 2023
Participants to indicate interest in submitting RFP proposal	**30 June 2023 by 23:59 UTC**
Participants submit any questions to ICANN	**30 June 2023 by 23:59 UTC**
ICANN responds to participant questions	7 July 2023
Participant proposals due by	**17 July 2023 by 23:59 UTC**
Evaluation of responses	18 July 2023 – 18 Aug 2023
Final evaluations, contracting and award	August – November 2023

6 Terms and Conditions

General Terms and Conditions

1. Submission of a proposal shall constitute each respondent's acknowledgment and acceptance of all the specifications, requirements and terms and conditions in this RFP.

2. All costs of preparing and submitting its proposal, responding to or providing any other assistance to ICANN in connection with this RFP will be borne by the respondent.

3. All submitted proposals including any supporting materials or documentation will become the property of ICANN. If respondent's proposal contains any proprietary information that should not be disclosed or used by ICANN other than for the purposes of evaluating the proposal, that information should be marked with appropriate confidentiality markings.

Discrepancies, Omissions and Additional Information

1. Respondent is responsible for examining this RFP and all addenda. Failure to do so will be at the sole risk of respondent. Should respondent find discrepancies, omissions, unclear or ambiguous intent or meaning, or should any question arise concerning this RFP, respondent must notify ICANN of such findings immediately in writing via e-mail no later than ten (10) days prior to the deadline for bid submissions. Should such matters remain unresolved by ICANN, in writing, prior to respondent's preparation of its proposal, such matters must be addressed in respondent's proposal.

2. ICANN is not responsible for oral statements made by its employees, agents, or representatives concerning this RFP. If respondent requires additional information, respondent must request that the issuer of this RFP furnish such information in writing.

3. A respondent's proposal is presumed to represent its best efforts to respond to the RFP. Any significant inconsistency, if unexplained, raises a fundamental issue of the respondent's understanding of the nature and scope of the work required and of its ability to perform the contract as proposed and may be cause for rejection of the proposal. The burden of proof as to cost credibility rests with the respondent.

4. If necessary, supplemental information to this RFP will be provided to all prospective respondents receiving this RFP. All supplemental information issued by ICANN will form part of this RFP. ICANN is not responsible for any failure by prospective respondents to receive supplemental information.

Assessment and Award

1. ICANN reserves the right, without penalty and at its discretion, to accept or reject any proposal, withdraw this RFP, make no award, to waive or permit the correction of any informality or irregularity and to disregard any non-conforming or conditional proposal.

2. ICANN may request a respondent to provide further information or documentation to support respondent's proposal and its ability to provide the products and/or services contemplated by this RFP.

3. ICANN is not obliged to accept the lowest priced proposal. Price is only one of the determining factors for the successful award.

4. ICANN will assess proposals based on compliant responses to the requirements set out in this RFP, responses to questions related to those requirements, any further issued clarifications (if any) and consideration of any other issues or evidence relevant to the respondent's ability to successfully provide and implement the products and/or services contemplated by this RFP and in the best interests of ICANN.

5. ICANN reserves the right to enter into contractual negotiations and if necessary, modify any terms and conditions of a final contract with the respondent whose proposal offers the best value to ICANN.

APPENDIX A

The list of in-scope countries in the Middle East region is as follows:

- Afghanistan
- Algeria
- Bahrain
- Egypt
- Iran
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Mauritania
- Morocco
- Oman
- Pakistan
- Palestine
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- Sudan
- Syria
- Tunisia
- Türkiye
- United Arab Emirates
- Yemen

GLOSSARY

For the glossary, please visit ICANN acronyms and terms