

Feedback on Draft MEAC Regional Strategy for Fiscal Year 2021-2025

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Overview of approach to feedback

In preparing feedback to the draft MEAC regional strategy for fiscal year 2021-2025, emphasis is placed on this draft strategy with the understanding that there is an association between it and ICANN's strategic plan for the same period. Therefore, there is no attempt on my part to raise issues concerning the identified strategic focus areas, although I do note that one of these areas in ICANN's strategic plan has been dropped - concerning ensuring ICANN's long-term financial sustainability.

Not including ICANN's financial sustainability is likely an appropriate decision on the part of the MEAC-SWG, as this focus area is unlikely to be of high priority to the MEAC region's community.

The feedback below concerns thoughts on the draft regional goals, targeted outcomes and proposed actions for each of the focus areas:

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

Generally, none of the regional goals are unworthy of adoption, however, they seem to be too nuanced for the purpose of goals to achieve over a 5-year period. Identification of goals, and working towards them may be better served if these goals were set at a higher level, with an aim to achieving them over the 5-year period of this strategy, while dealing with the details of realizing the goals on an annual basis by development of and implementation of the annual action plans.

The annual action plans should include key performance indicators, which evaluate the extent to which the proposed actions for each year have been performed, to what extent implementation of the actions have contributed to success in achieving the desired outcomes, and how those outcomes, over time, contribute to realizing the regional goals stated in the 5-year strategy.

The MEAC-SWG should also be diligent in potentially needing to amend the details in the 5-year strategy, as challenges and difficulties are identified on an annual basis. This 5-year strategy should be subject to an iterative process with each year's conclusion of an annual plan.

1. Security

Regional Goals:

As indicated above, the regional goals concerning the focus area of security should address a higher level of issues than the ones identified in the draft strategy. One high level goal may be for regional infrastructure to contribute to the overall health of the global DNS, and to become a model for combatting DNS Abuse and mitigating against DNS vulnerabilities.

Being effective at achieving security is critical, but a goal of promoting public perception of this success will also increase confidence in regional ccTLDs and gTLDs. The impacts of public perception of a healthy regional DNS should contribute to a healthier and more vibrant marketplace, whether this be the regional market of domain name registration services, or services using regional ccTLDs and gTLDs to offer other goods and services online. This perception must, of course be grounded in facts about how security is achieved, which is why this goal needs to go hand-in-hand with the first one.

Targeted Outcomes:

The stated goals involving security are better placed under the targeted outcomes, and merged with the existing outcomes in the strategy document for this section. However, the targeted outcomes should not be limited to supporting the development of technical capabilities or increasing the technical capabilities and skills in the region. The targeted outcome should be implementation of measures to enhance DNS security region-wide, as well as increasing public awareness of achievements of this implementation.

Furthermore, identification and mitigation of security threats (as currently stated in the goals) should not be the ultimate desirable outcome, but rather it should be something along the lines of enhancing the abilities of regional registry operators, registrars and network operators; empowering them to identify and mitigate security threats for themselves. To use a common analogy, the targeted outcome should not be to provide regional stakeholders with fish, but to empower them by enhancing their ability to fish for themselves.

Proposed Actions:

The MEAC-SWG should identify the appropriate proposed actions, in order to achieve outcomes and goals, should it choose to make amendments to the draft strategy based on this advice.

2. ICANN's Governance

Regional Goals:

The stated regional goals seem fine, but are vague, and could use a little more specificity. This does not necessarily require changing the goals themselves, but could be supplemented with additional specificity in the targeted outcomes. (contd. below)

Targeted Outcomes:

For example, what does *“active, informed, and effective stakeholder participation from the region”* actually mean, and how will it be measured? Are active community members at ICANN from the region the best example for targeted outcomes? Should the strategy mandate seeking different benchmarks? Does active, informed and effective participation mean being awarded support through the Fellowship and NextGen Programs (I hope this isn't it)? Does it mean contributing to the executive administration of different ICANN SOs and ACs? Does it mean some kind of contribution to policy development at ICANN? Being active, being informed and being effective each needs to be defined in more details, and each also requires its own unique KPIs in order to measure success and/or failure.

Increasing awareness and understanding of ICANN's multi-stakeholder model across the regions is a worthy outcome, and should be enhanced for many different stakeholders across the region. This includes regional industry stakeholders, who seem to have less understanding of ICANN's multi-stakeholder model and governance processes than they should, particularly if these affect them directly.

Proposed Actions:

It may be advisable to have an overarching strategy to participation in regional activities, in order to best achieve the strategy's regional goal for this focus area. The proposed

actions are fine, however, more effective coordination in ICANN's efforts at regional activities may prove helpful. That is to say that every instance of organizing, participating in or supporting a regional activity or event needs to somehow contribute to realizing the goals of the MEAC Regional Strategy. Coordination of the purpose behind regional activities should also be stressed. In other words, capacity building activities by the DNS Entrepreneurship Center, MEAC SIGs and DNS forums should not be stand-alone events, but should complement each others' mandates, in order to achieve higher-level goals, whatever these goals ultimately ends up being.

This coordinated effort needs to also include how ICANN supports individuals from the region, such as through programs like the Fellowship Program, NextGen and others. GSE team members supporting the region, as well as existing community members from the region should evaluate candidates who may be beneficiaries of ICANN support of any kind, and invest effort and resources into increasing their potential to actively contribute to ICANN's multi-stakeholder model.

3. Unique Identifier System

Regional Goals:

The stated goals in the draft strategy strike me as not being as ambitious as they should be. For example, supporting the use of IDNs in the region should not be the goal in itself. Rather, a definitive increase in the use of IDNs should be the ultimate goal. Similarly, promotion of readiness for UA should be replaced with implementation of UA by the appropriate actors. In the same spirit, informing regional stakeholders about new rounds of gTLD applications reads more like a proposed action more than a goal. The goal should be for regional actors to secure delegation of new gTLDs through competitive applications. Deployment of the latest standards and protocols should replace "encouragement" of deployment of these standards and protocols. These are not merely semantic differences in language, but fundamentally shift the goals from being merely aspirational to seeking more actionable outcomes.

Implementation of Internationalized Registration Data (IRD) via policy development at ICANN should also be a regional goal. This is a missing element in providing end-to-end domain name registration services in local languages and scripts in the region. If the regional community does not take ownership of this goal, it is unlikely that anybody else will do so on its behalf.

Targeted Outcomes:

Targeted outcomes should be amended to be fit-for-purpose regarding the goals. Again..., these need to be supported by KPIs to be achieved on an annual basis, and specified in the annual action plans.

Proposed Actions:

Amend as appropriate.

4. Geopolitics

I have little feedback on this focus area, except to say that any outreach and leveraging of regional community members, and their perspectives, should represent the diverse nature of stakeholders involved. Monitoring and influencing ICANN's policies and operations (as well as those of its contracted parties) should involve input from regional governments, industry actors as well as consumers and civil society.

Often, measures taken to achieve one goal will conflict with measures to achieve another. For example, strategic risks identified in ICANN's strategic plan include:

“National or regional regulations cause unintended consequences, which threaten the security and stability of the single, interoperable Internet.”

and

“Competing priorities – such as public safety, personal security, privacy, and socioeconomic concerns – raise challenges in mitigating DNS security threats.”

In order to address these risks, ICANN needs to encourage participation of a diverse set of stakeholders with an interest in the geopolitics of the region, and not rely on participation of the most convenient, or the stakeholder most likely to have actionable input (specifically, governments).