|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Document CWG-Internet-18/4** |
| **4 October 2023** |
| **English only** |
|  |  |
| **Contribution from United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** |
| TOPIC FOR CONSULTATION: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC POLICY IN PROMOTING UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE  |
| **Purpose**The United Kingdom is pleased to submit this contribution to the Council Working Group (Internet). We welcome the opportunity the Group provides to identify, study and develop international Internet-related public policy issues. For the next open consultation, we invite the Council Working Group to consider the topic: **“The role of public policy in promoting Universal Acceptance.”****Action required**CWG-Internet is invited to **consider** the following topic for the next open consultation: **“The role of public policy in promoting Universal Acceptance.”**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**References**[ITU Statistics](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx), [W3Tech Statistics on content languages](https://w3techs.com/technologies/overview/content_language), [Universal Acceptance Steering Group paper: Unleashing the power of all domains](https://uasg.tech/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Unleashing-the-Power-of-All-Domains-White-Paper.pdf). |

Universal Acceptance for meaningful connectivity

Universal acceptance of domain names in different scripts is essential if everyone is to be able to have meaningful access to the Internet and enjoy the benefits it brings. While much work has been taken forward by many bodies, such as UNESCO, the ITU, ISOC and ICANN to further multilingualism on the internet, particularly with respect to International Domain Names, there is still work to do. Universal Acceptance is a critical issue and remains a significant challenge for all stakeholders.

Universal Acceptance enables all users to access the Internet though their own scripts and identifiers. It ensures that all domain names, including new (and often longer) Top Level Domains (TLDs) and International Domain Names (IDNs), and email addresses are treated equally and can be used by all Internet-enabled applications, devices, and systems – without this we do not have a truly global Internet.

There are over 7000 languages and dialects used around the world, however on the Internet English dominates – a survey by W3Techs identified that, as of 4 October 2023, 53.3% of content on Internet web-pages is in English. Universal Acceptance can help to bridge the gap between languages in the world and languages on the Internet, resulting in more meaningful access and potential new business and economic opportunities. With the ITU estimating in 2022 that only 66% of the global population uses the Internet, Universal Acceptance is an essential requirement for achieving the ITU’s targets for achieving universal and meaningful digital connectivity by 2030.

A lack of Universal Acceptance may also result in missed opportunities for innovation and growth around the world. Solving Universal Acceptance can help businesses to reach new customers in different markets – particularly as more become connected. A 2017 study from the Universal Acceptance Steering Group estimated that Universal Acceptance of Internet domain names is a 9.8 billion USD opportunity.

Understanding the role of public policy in Universal Acceptance

There are several challenges related to Universal Acceptance which public policy can help mitigate. Technical challenges can be tackled by providing platforms for greater information sharing and targeting support to find solutions; economic challenges can be addressed by mitigating financial barriers and promoting economic incentives; and social challenges can be addressed by increasing awareness among users and creating demand for the opportunities Universal Acceptance offers.

Across the Internet Governance ecosystem public policy work on Universal Acceptance is ongoing. For example, in 2023 the first Universal Acceptance Day was held to raise awareness among stakeholders, the WSIS forum ran a session on the issue, bringing together communities to identify priority actions, and UNESCO hosted a workshop on ‘Connecting Universal Acceptance and Digital Inclusion for a More Inclusive Cyberspace,’ which shed light on the importance of multilingualism on the internet.

Building on this work and promoting the issue of Universal Acceptance requires cooperation between all stakeholders. A consultation on this topic would be an excellent opportunity to bring stakeholders together, learn from one another’s experience, foster partnerships and identify the role that public policy can play in supporting this important issue. We propose the following questions for consultation:

* What is the impact of Universal Acceptance, or the lack thereof, on communities, economies, businesses and innovation?
* What is the role of public policy? What more could governments, with other stakeholders, do to promote Universal Acceptance, both in the public sector (such as in procurement practices and provision of public services) and in the private sector (in websites and other Internet services)?
* What problems (if any) have ITU member states and sector members experienced concerning the promotion of Universal Acceptance?
* How can the ITU and its members work to promote Universal Acceptance?

Invitation to ICANN

ICANN plays a critical role in promoting Universal Acceptance and it has created a multi-stakeholder UA Steering Group which works with governments, business and the technical Community to promote UA across the global Internet.

We propose that the CWG-Internet invites a senior representative from ICANN to the CWG-Internet meeting itself to present and discuss directly with Member States the work it is doing on Universal Acceptance, and to consider opportunities for cooperation between ICANN and ITU Member States. This would be particularly valuable ahead of the new application round for gTLDS planned for ICANN in 2026 for which applications for IDN variants will be welcomed for the first time.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_