
ICANN82 | CF – Middle East Space at ICANN82
Tuesday, March 11, 2025 – 10:30 to 12:00 PST

CHRISTIAN WHEELER

Hello, and welcome to the Middle East space at ICANN82. My name is Christian Wheeler, and I am the participation manager for this session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Standards of Behavior and ICANN Community Antiharassment policy. During the session questions or comments will only be read aloud if submitted within the Q&A pod. Interpretation for the session will include Arabic and English. If you would like to speak during the session. Please raise your hand in Zoom. When called upon, virtual participants will be given permission to unmute in Zoom. On-site participants will use a physical microphone to speak. Please state your name for the record, the language you will speak if speaking a language other than English, and speak at a reasonable pace. I'll now hand the floor over to Amin Hacha. Thank you.

AMIN HACHA

It's okay. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening everyone and welcome in this session, ICANN Middle East Space. It's a pleasure to bring together such a distinctive group of experts to discuss topics related to applicant support program, ICANN's engagement and outreach strategy and how the members in the

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Middle East can support this program. We are fortunate to have with us a panel of extended professionals, each bringing a wealth of experience in the internet multistakeholder engagement and digital development. Before we start to listen to our speakers I will move the speech to Abdalmonem, co-chair.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yes, thank you Amin for that inspiring introduction. Actually, I would like to thank the community member who did suggest to have the topics of ASP program for ASP for the second time at this moment. As we were at ICANN81 we discussed the topic of ASP and at this time we'll have the same topic again for ASP, but in different nature. The first one for ICANN Istanbul, it was related for a statement that had some consensus and some recommendations, but now with the agenda that's drafted by the support of the company we have a different nature there to have a discussion about the ASP and the updates that will be there. Thank you very much for that. I will turn over the floor to Baher.

BAHER ESMAT

Thank you Abdalmonem. This is Baher Esmat, for the record. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening everyone. Thank you for joining us today at the Middle East Space. Special thanks to our remote participants. I realize that some are joining us at a late hour. The Middle East space, as many of you know, is a community space where community members from the Middle East come together, whether at ICANN meetings or online to discuss topics of interest and to try to get some input and feedback from the community on

ongoing initiatives and projects at ICANN. Today, as the agenda shows and Abdalmonem noted, the topic is the applicant support program, which is one of the subprograms of the next round program. We have the program leads joining us today and we're going to hear from them, but I wanted to thank everyone for joining and I'll turn it back to Amin to introduce the speakers. Amin.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you Baher. We'll go over what was our agenda. We're looking to start listening to Kristy Buckley, outreach and digital inclusion director. Kristy brings over 15 years of experience in global multilateral and multistakeholder process, ranging from climate change to systems, public health and technical internet governance. Her areas of expertise include collaborative problem solving, multistakeholder process design and organizational strategy development. Currently Kristy serves as outreach and digital inclusion director for the internet corporation for assigned name and number ICANN. In this role she leads the applicant support program for the next rounds of applications for generic top-level domain. Prior to this role she served as an independent consultant provided research analysis and strategy advice to several societies and organizations, rich institutions and philanthropy. She brings a collaborative spirit and **[6:33 inaudible]**. I don't know today what I have, spelling of some... Okay. Perspective based on her work across diverse sectors and international policy areas such as the UN climate change negotiation food system summit and seems to have a long history

to introduce. I will give you the floor. We are looking forward to hear from you.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Many thanks for the kind introduction and thank you so much for having me here today. As mentioned, my name is Kristy Buckley and as I serve as the lead for the next round's applicant support program, otherwise known as ASP. We have a few slides to share with you today. We'll just go to the agenda slide on the next one.

We'll provide a status update on the applications that we're seeing so far in the applicant support program and the statistics that we're seeing there as well as the geographic distribution. We also, I will share a high-level timeline to help situation ASP vis a vis some other key elements of the program. A Then we're excited to provide an update on the pro bono service providers recruitment efforts that we're doing, and then we'll have some time for questions and discussion, hopefully. Next slide.

I just wanted to point your attention to a recent meeting with the ASP IRT. That's the sub-track of the implementation review team that's focused on the applicant support program. We had a meeting on February 6 that covered a lot of materials and recent developments, so we wanted to share that here with you and we can pop the link into the chat in case you're interested to see the deck or the recording from that. Otherwise I'll just move on to a statistics update. Thank you.

This shows at a high level a snapshot of the applicant support program. As of February 19, we update our numbers monthly because we opened for applications on the 19th of November. We had 30 applications drafted or initiated and you can see at a high level the regional distribution that we're seeing on those so far, and we had one application under review so far. In addition, and my colleagues from our engagement team will speak a bit more in detail about this in a few minutes, we had a number of outreach and engagement activities, communication activities, and we also published a number of resources that we refer to as readiness tools and resources. What that means is we're trying to help applicants that are interested to apply for support to be able to better do so.

You might recall that the applicant support handbook is a 70-page document that outlines the rules and the processes for applying, so we've created a number of readiness materials, including a quick start guide, the checklist and a system user guide to help prospective applicants navigate the applications process more easily and hopefully just be guided in that process a bit better.

We also have some recorded demos and trainings that are posted on the resources page as well to help people navigate the application process. Next slide just shows a breakdown of the pipeline, so to speak. We have 17 applications in draft mode, 13 that have been initiated, and then that one submitted. We do not yet have applications that have been conditionally or fully approved, which just means that they have not get gone all the way

through the ASP evaluation process. We expect that will be updated in the coming weeks. Next slide please.

One question that we frequently get is about the geographic distribution for ASP and we have received a number of questions about which countries specifically we're seeing ASP applications from. We have maintained in the ASP handbook that we would aim to protect the business confidentiality of supported applicants that qualify or that even apply for support, because we recognize that this is a relatively small community and industry, so it's possible that if see an application from a particular country that some folks may be able to guess who that might be applying, and also may be even able to guess their string. We've so far steered away from publishing which countries we're seeing applications from, but this slide does show you the breakdown. You can see we have three applications total from Africa and that's spanning two different countries. In the APAC region we have nine applications total and that's spanning six different countries, and so on and so forth. What this is intended to show is the geographic distribution within a region, because I think we have received questions about whether we're seeing all of the applications from a region coming from one particular country as opposed to a range of countries.

Then for reference here on the righthand side I've included a table just to show the number of applications that we received on applicant support in the 2012 round. As you might recall, it was only three in total, so comparatively just in the first four months or so of opening the ASP application window we're already seeing a significant, I think 900 percent increase in the number of

applications so far, which is really encouraging, including the geographic distribution of those. Next slide please.

We're sharing here just a high-level timeline to remind folks of the ASP key milestones. The first one, as I mentioned, we opened the applicant support application period in November of last year and the plan is for that to be open through to November of this year. We have a 12-month application period and evaluation period, so there's still plenty of time for more applicants to express their interest and to apply for the ASP. We also show here on this top line when the new GTLD program round is expected to open in April of 2026. The idea here is that applicants that apply for support would be able to know the results of their evaluation prior to applying for a GTLD.

On the nonfinancial support side we mention here that we have an applicant counselor already in place as well as ASP training materials, the readiness materials that I mentioned and we will soon be publishing the pro bono professional services list. This is to coincide with the first applicants that qualify for support. We're also working on an ASP capacity development program which is designed for applicants that qualify for support to help them prepare for a GTLD application and ultimately we hope becoming a registry operator. This quickly evolves into overall GTLD applicant readiness, so we're working with that team to figure out how to best integrate and be mutually complementary between what we're developing for ASP capacity development versus what we're developing overall for GTLD applicant readiness materials.

Lastly, the final line here just shows the applicant support communications and engagement efforts, and you'll notice here that while that continues the focus is now transitioning overall to the next round. That doesn't mean that ASP is no longer part of the communications and engagement, it just means that it's part of the broader awareness raising around the next round in general and that goes all the way through to the next round opening in April 2026. Next slide please.

We have an update on the pro bono service provider recruitment. You might recall that we published a call for both mentors and pro bono service providers to assist supported applicants and we've got a link here to the announcement where we've requested that, including a link to the registration. We've highlighted here one of the questions that we've gotten is, what's the difference between a pro bono professional service provider versus a mentor? The way that we see it is that the pro bono providers offer volunteer hours for professional services. This might be legal or technical or translation services that people would normally have to pay for as opposed to mentors that are intended to offer their perspective and their guidance based upon their own personal experience as appropriate. If they're already in the community or they've worked previously in the industry or maybe they've helped others apply for a GTLD in the past. We have some recruitment results so far that we'd love to share with you by way of update on my next slide.

We have seen 216 click on the registration or the signup form that we have on that announcement. We've had 15 registrations in process and we have 14 registrations confirmed. We will be posting

the pro bono service providers on the ASP resources website hopefully in the coming weeks. Again, we want this to coincide with the applicants that qualify for support as they are intended to get priority for the pro bono service providers in particular, though the IRT indicated that they didn't want the pro bono service providers to be for exclusive use of support applicants. They did want to make that public and available to other GTLD applicants that may need volunteer services. We would love for you to help us out, if you can help spread the word around, the announcement and the signup form to your networks, if you know folks that would be able to offer professional services or mentorship services. That would be great, to have them sign up and register.

In terms of the results that we're seeing so far, I have a couple of slides if you go to the next one, just in terms of what we're seeing in those registrations. Here you'll see the breakdown of results by region. We have a number of providers that have signed up from Africa, from Europe, from APAC, Latin America, North America, and one of the questions that we asked in the registration process is how many applicants could you support as a pro bono service provider. In Africa you'll see on the right-hand column the lowest range that folks have indicated across all of the pro bono service providers that have signed up to say that they could help in Africa is 37, all the way up to over 115 applicants. We have already even just with the 14 or so registrations that we've seen, pretty significant capacity across those pro bono service providers to offer help to more applicants than we currently have registered for ASP, but probably even more applicants than we will ultimately get. It's

great to see that regional coverage, but also the number of applicants that each of those providers thinks that they can support. Next slide.

We also asked in the registration process about the languages that pro bono service providers could support. You'll see here the number of providers and the types of languages that they could support, as well as again the number of applicants that they could support in that language. For instance, in Arabic we have one provider that's indicated that they could support that language, but they've indicated that they could support over 25 applicants in that language, which is very encouraging. Next slide.

We also of course ask the types of services that pro bono service providers could offer. Here we have general services. Sorry, general business services, application services, technical services and then mentorship services. You see there's a number of providers that have indicated that they could provide across all of those types of services, which is great. Previously when we issued an expression of interest survey in the fall of 2023 on this we did have a gap in the technical services that folks could offer, so it's nice to see in the official registration that we have good coverage of the technical services. Again, we have a very wide distribution in terms of the numbers of applicants that can be supported. I think there's a low risk that there will be more applicants, at least from the supported applicants' side, that would be demanding these services than there would be support available, so that's a great thing to see.

I think with that, it concludes my portion of the presentation, but I'll see if there's any questions before we move on to the next speaker.

CHRISTIAN WHEELER

We have a raised hand.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER

Thank you so much for this presentation. My ask is with regard to the services that are being provided, the pro bono services. As we've seen for example in Africa, you have a number of service providers, but it is also important to know if there is a diversity in the services that those providers provide in Africa, because although you have actually, the last slide does provide the services provided, it does not indicate per region. For example, if a specific region you have some providers only providing one kind of service, that's not really helpful, although I don't think this is the case, but I just wanted you to elaborate on this. Thank you.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Yeah, that's a great point. Perhaps we can add a slide just showing the number of services that are offered at a regional level. Yeah, happy to do that. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER

Can we go back to the slide of the services, the last one? Yeah. First, thank you so much for the presentation. I just wanted to

understand a bit more general business services. What does that cover?

KRISTY BUCKLEY

I don't have the list in front of me right now, but I believe it would be translation or legal services or administrative filling out of the application. Some of those types of services. There are also folks that are going to be looking for support in developing a business plan or a business model or a financial model, so those might be also part of that. I think some of them also included marketing plan, those types of services, but I can pull it up and just confirm that.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER

That's fine and the reason I'm asking that is because we had a very informative discussion yesterday with Bob at the African GAC meeting about registrars and the fact that helping with all the different services is one thing but a good possibility could be that the registry might fail at the point when it comes to reach out to registrars and build that business escalation. If there is a possibility that this is somehow included or at least consider it for later on, that would be, I think, good. Thank you.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

That's a great point, and my colleague Samantha Mancina has posted in the chat what is listed under general business services. That's including consulting, business plan development, marketing communications, operations, translation services, financial services and legal services. It's a good point about the

relationship with registrars and I think that would probably fall under the marketing communications effort, but yeah, we are trying to think about the whole lifecycle, not just as an applicant, but once they also become a registry operator. Yeah, thank you.

AMIN HACHA

Go Zeinab, please.

ZEINAB MOHAMED

Yes, just a small question. Do you have any indication about the application if any was initiated or being prepared from the Middle East?

KRISTY BUCKLEY

That's a good question. I think we have one from the Middle East so far, but I would have to just check that to confirm because the ICANN regions don't break down right on that level, but I think we have one so far from the Middle East, yeah, as far as I know.

AMIN HACHA

Abdalmonem, you have a question?

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yes, thank you. Actually I have three questions but let me make it one question. Actually, some facilities are part of governmental organizations. How could CCD be eligible to apply for the program? The first one. What if government itself wanted to apply for this

program? As I see that inside the handbook it say that there are five categories for eligible entities to join the program, is the first one.

Second one is related to the slide that has the timeline here. There are, as I understand it from this slide there are two fees, two times fees should be paid. The first one, to be eligible, or being eligible for the program and the second one before the conditional approval or the approval one, so the reduction for the program, it is around 75, to 85, something like that. It will be applied for both of them, for the terms of the payment, the first one before the application and the second one after approval of the application? The second one.

Third one is related to maybe some entities applied for a new GTLD and one of them is a variant of the other. Are there any communications between the program and LGR tools in order to overcome all of this? If one of them is escaped the other one will go to have the other variant as well, or not? Thank you. I think I read the document.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thank you for those very thoughtful questions. I'll try my best. The third one, I'm not the expert on that, so it'll be hard for me to answer that one. On the first one around ccTLDs, yes, a ccTLD registry offer is able to apply so long as they are also one of the eligible entity types. Maybe they're constructed as a nongovernmental organization or a nonprofit or a small business. As long as they meet the definitions and thresholds of small business in the ASP handbook, if they have a relationship with the government, again, it would be the entity applying, so we don't

have a category of government entity applying. But if it's another type of entity, again small business or a nonprofit or even IGO, that would be allowable as far as I understand. The main restriction that we have is that it can't be an existing GTLD registry operator. They can be a ccTLD registry operator, but they cannot be an existing GTLD registry operator, if that helps.

On the second question it might be helpful to go back. I want to make sure I understood that question. To the slide with the colored circles on it. Slide 10 I think it is on mine. What conditionally approved means is that they have passed all aspects of the ASP evaluation except they have not yet submitted their deposit. Part of the financial viability evaluation includes the submission of a \$2,500 US deposit. This is intended to show commitment that they in fact are going to apply for a GTLD because they are taking up a slot, so we want to make sure that they have intent to apply. Then once they get the deposit in, then they become fully approved. They receive a letter of support. They can use that letter to go to pro bono service providers and say, "Look, I'm a supported applicant. You give me priority for your volunteer hours," et cetera. That's the two-stage process there.

In terms of the discount, when they apply as a supported applicant to the new GTLD program they will receive a discount on the base GTLD evaluation fee, which you might recall is estimated right now at \$227,000 USD. They will also receive the same level of discount, whether it's 75 or 85 percent, on other conditional evaluation fees. Not all of them. There are some that are omitted, but it's part of the applicant guidebook that's out for public comment right now, so if

you have opinions on that please weigh in on the public comment. ICANN has proposed which conditional evaluation fees would be eligible for the same level of discount. For example, if they are applying for a geographic name there's a special evaluation for the geographic names. They would get the same level of discount on that evaluation as well. Does that answer your second question?

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yes, actually, I am looking for the challenges that we could face for the Middle East. I could buzz the first one for the plus \$200,000, but the other fees, maybe it would be a challenge. That's why I am asking this question. If the reduction will be happening here for the second payment I think it will be much better in order to make it easy for the applicant to continue having huge utilities.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Do you mean once they become a registry operator?

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yeah.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Okay. So that's actually part of our funding plan, which Samantha, if you could post the link to that in the chat, that would be helpful. The ASP funding plan proposed that we also provide a discount on the base registry agreement fees for the first three or four years of operation of a supported applicant that becomes a registry operator and that's proposed to be on a graduated scale. They get,

I can't remember off the top of my head, but the most discount in the first year and then less discount in the second year so it helps to get them started. They can get up and running before they have to pay those fees. That's part of the long-term support that we're offering to supported applicants.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you Krisy. I don't see online we have any questions so we will continue with our next speaker, Baher Esmat, who will tell us about ASP outreach and engagement in the Middle East. Baher is the ICANN regional vice president of stakeholder engagement in the Middle East and managing director for the Middle East and Africa office in Istanbul. In his role, Esmat oversees ICANN's engagement in the Middle East region and facilitates collaboration with stakeholders to fulfill ICANN's strategy, objectives at the regional level. The floor for you.

BAHER ESMAT

Thank you Amin. So I'm going to give you a quick brief about our ASP engagement in the region. We started this effort maybe nine months ago, before the launch of, way before the launch of the ASP program. We started by reaching out to community members from the different stakeholder groups, from the government, the private sector, the country code operators, the at-large community, just to try to get their sense about how such a program would be perceived within their respective countries. We did this effort via email communication, online meetings and so on. Then we started to focus on specific countries based on the feedback we received

from our contacts and also based on our knowledge about the region. The Middle East has different countries that vary economically and socially and various conditions. For some countries the ASP might not be a priority since there are enough funds available if someone wants to venture a TLD. They would probably go straight to the next round when it's launched, but in other countries getting support, whether financially or non-financially, through the ASP would be of paramount importance.

Based on that we started to engage with the different stakeholders and more importantly we also started to try to reach out to new audiences outside our ICANN borders, if you will. Those are communities or stakeholders from entrepreneurs investors, brand owners, trademark owners and so on, and these are folks who do not engage with ICANN directly even if their businesses are based on internet and online services and so on. On the screen, this is a list of some of the events and activities that we have conducted over the past nine months in which the ASP was key subjects on our agenda. In Turkey for example, we participated and organized online meetings including with civil society organizations, with trademark associations, and chamber of commerce committees. This is the top OEM in Turkey. Also with the business associations, the Turkish Informatics Association is the largest or one of the largest associations in Turkey of IT businesses. In Egypt and in collaboration with a multistakeholder setup from the ISOC chapter and the Information Technology Industry Development Agency, which is a government entity, EITESAL, which is a business association and others, we organized an online session on this

topic and in each of those events we had follow-up communications with some of those who participated in discussions. They had more questions. They wanted to learn more about the program eligibility criteria, timeline and so on. Can we move to the next slide?

Also in Tukey we engaged with the government, some of the government agencies and we also organized a webinar for GAC members from the Middle East to make sure that not only GAC members are briefed and informed, but also to make sure that they also try to spread the message across the different government entities, and the goal here is not to have the government themselves apply for the program. Rather, to have them spread the word across the different networks that they engage with.

In Saudi Arabia and alongside, well, actually not only alongside but as part of the main IGF, the Internet Government Forum agenda, ICANN organized a workshop on the applicant support program and the next round and alongside the IGF we organized a session with some of the local stakeholders in Saudi Arabia from business and some of the government agencies on the same topic. That was organized in collaboration with Internet Society of Saudi Arabia.

Domain Days Dubai is one of the main domain events in the region. It was held back in November, right before ICANN81. ICANN participated in this event and presented on the next round and the ASP. Then at the Arab IGF in Jordan a couple of weeks ago we organized a workshop on the same topic.

Upcoming events, the Middle East DNS Forum 2025 is coming up in Bahrain end of April, April 29 and 30, and ASP and the next round will be discussed. Also in Morocco in mid-April ICANN is participating in the MA Domain Day as well as GITEX Africa. We're participating in both events and presenting on the same topic. Again, ICANN is ready willing with your help to engage with your local communities and local stakeholders to participate in any discussions. We're happy to join any online setup where any local community groups would want to learn more about these programs. Please feel free to reach out and my team and I will be happy to work with you on those activities. Thank you.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you Baher. First there are some on the floor who want to ask a question? Nobody? Okay. Before Abdalmonem ask his question, but also online, nobody to ask? Go Abdalmonem.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yeah, thank you, Amin. This is Abdalmonem Galila for the record again. Actually, I would like to combine both what's said by Kristy and what's said by Baher, that one of the stakeholders here inside the engagement of ASP in the Middle East is the government. I think the government's position may be well enough in order to reflect that. How could we be one of the applicants? Maybe there should be another workaround in order to overcome this, is one point.

Second one, the question mainly for Baher. Are there any training materials, videos like ICANN Learn in order to help some kind of

awareness or having the knowledge for the applicant to apply for this? This is outreach and communications. Thank you, Baher.

BAHER ESMAT

Thank you Abdalmonem. Indeed, governments are a main stakeholder in this process and my colleagues Bob and Chris may talk more about the engagement to the GAC and GAC members and so on. That's why at the national level we ensure that we engage with governments, not only for the ASP but also for the next round program. Again, the goal is not to have the governments themselves apply. Of course they can apply for whatever they want to apply for, but mainly to have them through their networks spread the word, and also if there is an opportunity for us to engage with stakeholders through the governments we'd be happy to do so.

Now, on the material and I can say and I'm sure Bob and Chris can add more, that on the ICANN website we have what we call the champions toolkit and in there you'll see lists of presentations, facts and also some recordings of some of the engagements we have done in the past so that for community members to, if they couldn't attend those sessions they can always go back and check the recordings and also check the materials that are available online and it's being updated as we go. There might be more materials to be added as we go forward and my colleagues might want to talk about that in more detail. Thank you.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you Baher. I don't see any questions, so we'll move forward to our next speaker, Chris Mondini, to tell us about ASP global engagement strategy and statistics. Chris is vice president stakeholder engagement of Europe and managing director for Europe, stationed in Brussels. In his role Mondini oversees ICANN org operations in the region and leads ICANN org's global business engagement initiative worldwide. Chris is dedicated to bridging communication gaps to public, private and nonprofit sectors. The floor for you Chris, please.

CHRIS MONDINI

Thank you very much, Amin, for the kind introduction. It might be easier to just say I am the Baher Esmat of Europe. We have the same role, in fact, but a different region, although after meeting Ines here and being ready for ICANN83 I may ask it by here if I can move into your region because Oman looks amazing and I'm very excited to be there.

I'm going to just really tell you about the global approach and then hand over to Bob Ochieng who is also at the global level on the program for outreach. Just as Baher explained his approach to targeting reaching out directly and setting up meetings with different stakeholder groups, each of the regional vice presidents on the slide is doing the same in his or in her region and we began really with a targeting matrix with different categories, the stakeholder categories, the kinds of organizations who might have interest, starting with the categories that are eligible under applicant support program and then adding other entities that

might be interested more generally in new GTLDs like business associations or brands or cities.

We try to find where they are and we find them sometimes by the associations they're members of or we go to present at the events they attend, or in many cases we contact them directly with an email or a LinkedIn to have a conversation about the level of interest. Both from targeting entities, organizations and showing up at events, this is what's happening around the world and Bob and I are the ones that are privileged enough to coordinate it. We recognize that the needs of each region are distinct and the interest in each region is at various levels in different categories. This is why there's a lot of autonomy for vice presidents and managing directors like Baher and others to operate in their region with coordination by Bob and me.

I'm going to hand over to Bob. He's ideally suited because he's worked both on the engagement team and on the program team for the next round. Bob, would you like to take us through the next slides please?

BOB OCHIENG

Sure. Thank you very much Chris, and I know we don't have a lot of time. Obviously we've been making a lot of these updates in various sessions. I'm almost tempted to say that the communities are almost becoming experts on the latest in the program. But again, let me also point out even as we get the next slide that we have a dedicated booth on the third floor next to the GAC room. If you want to talk to us in further detail, always there during all

coffee breaks, so please pass by and I will be very happy to engage you.

Very quickly in terms of how we've fared in terms of engagement from what Chris has painted on a regional level, we track those statistics very closely so that at the end of the day by the time the program is fully opened we can come back and look back and see how we fared on the engagement front. This is something that we did not do in the last round so the community is very keen on tracking our efforts in engagement and obviously our resources toward that. This is for 2024 calendar year. For those categories that Chris has highlighted, the different ASP eligible entities, in trying to reach out to them our team across all the regions were able to reach out in at least 200 events across all the regions. You will notice that the predominant focus was in underserved regions or less developed economies, which is the intention of ASP even though it is open to all the regions, but really we are spending more resources to outreach to underserved regions. You will see that the Middle East region, for example, Africa, the LAC region and Asia were our main focus as opposed to Europe and North America. Next slide.

This is also just now looking at this year as we change gears now to focus a little bit more and broadly on potential applicants for GTLDs. Remember last year was potential applicants for ASP. These are two different objectives. We are trying to patronize a lot of events and forums. For example, between January and February in the Middle East region for example, we had a webinar titled Digital Opportunities in the Regional World, which was put together by a

group in Egypt, which we worked with Baher to deliver that. This is just a snapshot of what is coming in the pipeline. What is planned in the pipeline might not be the full detail or the full listing of events across different regions. Obviously we plan to be part of the Middle East DNS forum planned in April. We are very intentional in placing this information in front of major events across all the regions working with the RSVPs. Next slide.

Now, the other thing that we have been reiterating across these meetings is that the final report card on our engagement performance as far as the next round is concerned will be a report on the entire community, the ICANN community as we know it. The efforts that the org shall have done but also what the community shall have done in supporting and partnering with us to deliver this engagement because our network is only so much and we are very intentionally and actively inviting you to join and share this information in your respective networks, whether you are GAC, whether you are ALAC, so that you help us reach beyond those networks that we know. We have organizations or forums that are out of the typical ICANN community and some of these are better known to yourselves than us, so we keep inviting you, send us ideas. We have a dedicated email address there. You can also join a dedicated mailing list of the next round where we share regular updates on the program, so please join us in this effort on engagement on the next round. Next slide.

To help you do that much more adequately and support your potential engagement work is the champion toolkit that has been talked about already. There is a lot of material in that link and I

should say that this material in the six ICANN languages. We have Arabic, for example, included. It's material covering scripts, FAQs, presentations both in PDF and PowerPoint versions for ASP for the next round in general. Some of the questions that I hear in the room are actually covered in a lot of detail in those presentations, so we want to encourage you to access this material and should you have questions after reading that, please reach out to us. This material is available for you and a lot of resources have gone into creating it and we really want to encourage you to use it. I believe that should be all from the engagement front. Otherwise the last is to really invite you to our monthly reporting to the implementation review team, which is the community group that oversees our implementation of the final recommendations and therein we report on a monthly basis, including on the engagement efforts globally. For this particular month of March that update will be with the team here, at that particular time. We want to encourage you to join that session and ask your questions and share ideas. For the April update that will be on the 16th. Otherwise we also publish those updates afterwards, again, on the website, so you can follow if you're not able to join them, the Zoom recordings, the presentation for that particular session. Please, we are doing everything that is possible to keep you informed, but also we'd like to really call upon your participation in helping us further our engagement network. I think with that I'll get it back to you. Thank you very much.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you Chris and Bob for your input. I don't see online questions or more questions to have. We will move forward. Before that I want to thank Seher for her important links she's putting online, as well for Samantha for also her information online. Our next part and speaker is Hadia Elminawi. Before ICANN81 in the Middle East Space a working group formed from Tijani, Wafa and Omar and I'm sure Hadia. Did I forget someone? I was a pin holder of this statement and we worked on a statement and the topics of new GTLD, ASP for diversity in the DNS industry. We discussed this statement before and during ICANN81 and after that, and now Hadia will give us a briefing about this statement. I want to introduce briefly Hadia.

Hadia is AFRALO chair, but also she's very dynamic and very energetic in our region. Always she has very important input and I thank her for being with us today. The floor for you.

HADIA ELMINAWI

Thank you so much, Amin. It's always a pleasure to be with the Middle East and adjoining countries space and I'm also, by the way, an SSAC member. As Amin mentioned during ICANN81 in Istanbul, the Middle East and adjoining countries community who attending the Middle East Space at ICANN81 discussed how potential applicants from our region can benefit from the applicant support program for new GTLDs. The session was before the applications submission period had started. It's good to know that we have about, I think maybe 31 applications. During the session we identified some key challenges that may limit accessibility for

applicants from the Middle East and adjoining countries region and we discussed potential solutions to make the program more inclusive and accessible. We highlighted several key points including those related to eligibility entries. While the ICANN applicant support program eligibility framework effectively prioritizes nonprofits, intergovernmental organizations, indigenous organizations and small businesses focused on social impact, it lacks a specific focus on geographic diversity among applicants, which we thought that might limit opportunities for regions that are underserved or less represented in the global domain space. I don't know if maybe the diverse number of applications that we have now shows otherwise. Maybe.

Speaking about qualifications for support, the applicant support programs 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. We thought that this lack of ranking means that all qualifying applicants are considered equally without prioritization. However, with the applicant support budget being limited this might mean that somehow impacted applications may remain unconsidered if resources are exhausted. I don't know if this is true anymore given the number of applications that we have and the number of successful applications, but again, we are only four months into the program, which will be lasting for a whole year. With regard to awareness and outreach, prior to the launch of the program, again, this was before actually the submission period started because it started on November 19, so that was before this. We discussed as

well the limited time available to promote the final version of the ICANN applicant support program, which we thought might result in few number of applications from the region. We had concerns that this limited time could jeopardize the chances of entities from the region to receive support in the upcoming round.

We made several suggestions. I think all of them are now covered apart from one maybe. We had initially suggested launching regional specific campaigns to raise awareness about the program, how to apply. This already exists. Collaborating with local partners at societies and community organizations to promote the program, this to an extent exists. Developing awareness campaigns about the next round of GTLDs and what it entails to operate a GTLD registry, that part is covered but I'm not sure that the part related to what it entails to operate a GTLD is fully covered. We also thought about establishing feedback loops to allow the community to evaluate the effectiveness of the outreach program.

I've been told that I need to slow down. We've also discussed establishing feedback loops to allow the community to evaluate the effectiveness of the outreach program and maybe we don't see that clearly now. With regard to the long-term operational or financial support we thought that 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 necessarily. The idea here is about long term support.

Currently the program offers from 75 to 85 percent reduction in a new GTLD program evaluation fee. It does not, though, specify the exact amount. It does offer a bit credit applied to supported applicants participating in contention resolution procedures. It offers as well reduced base registry operator fees. During the discussion we suggested introducing specificity with regard to the 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. We also talked about mechanisms for continued financial support beyond the initial application fees, especially for applicants from less developed economies. Basically this was like a summary of the statement and how things have developed so far. With that I thank you and return the mic back to Amin.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you Hadia. I see Kristy has raised her hand.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Thank you very much. Great to know those points that you're going to raise. Just a few things to note here with regards to the geographic piece that you mentioned at the beginning. We do not have a policy basis upon which to prioritize geographies, but we do know in the small business categories there are actually two different types of small business categories you can apply for under the applicant support program. The first is a small business that is a social enterprise. The second is a small business that is operating in a lesser developed economy, so there is an entry point and a

priority given there, but the policy from the sub-pro final report explicitly says that we should not limit the geography of the applicant support program.

In addition, there was a GNSO guidance process for the applicant support program that was tasked with defining success for the program, including how to distribute funds fairly. They also discussed the idea of prioritization and decided that this was not a good idea and again runs counter to the policy. It was in fact the GNSO guidance process that recommended a range of support, so this is why we have the 75 to 85 percent. Originally the ASP IRT recommended a 50 to 85 percent range of support. That went out for public comment and the feedback was that's not high enough, so we upped it to 75 to 85 percent, but this is all based upon community developed policy recommendations. Thanks.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you. Is there any questions, or anybody want to... Not sure if online. Yes, Chris, please.

CHRIS MONDINI

Thank you. It's Chris Mondini. I did want to make a point about feedback and what we hear from our efforts. In the monthly IRT presentations out on our outreach and engagement efforts we are beginning to give some high level, I would say subjective feedback in what we're hearing, what the challenges are with an aim to helping the community and our team understand any adjustments in the way we're engaging. As Kristy indicated, we can't really

adjust what's in the program but we want to learn from what's working in terms of how we target, who we reach, what we communicate, what tools we provide. It's early days because we just really began two months ago in this manner, but the Thursday session here in Seattle at the IRT will have a few minutes to discuss what we've learned. Thanks.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you Chris. I don't see any questions. We will move forward. Sorry, Aziz. Aziz, **[65:19 inaudible]**.

AZIZ HILALI

Thank you Amin. Aziz Hilali, AFRALO. Baher mentioned that in Marrakech next month there will be GITEX Africa next month in between 11 and 14 April. Just information about GITEX Africa. It's more than 1,400 companies from Africa and 45,000 visitors from 130 countries are expected. I think it is an opportunity, a big opportunity for us to raise awareness about the new GTLD program. As Bob told us yesterday there were four... Four applications from Africa? Three. Three applications from two countries only. Maybe the ASP needs to be sanctioned to better support African applications. I would also inform you that we will have tomorrow AFRALO African meeting and we will propose a statement about the new GTLD in Africa and what we ask ICANN and the community to encourage LGCs and companies to apply for a new GTLD. Thank you.

AMIN HACHA

Thank you Aziz. We will move to our next part. This part in my point of view is very important to discuss with our community any topics or anything related to our region and even globally. Discussion is important, especially if it's open discussion where we can get a lot of revenue to our region. There is something prepared by Seher concerning this. I will move to Abdalmonem to continue this part.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yeah, thank you Amin for this. Actually, as I said before, it is an interactive session that community members could have some inquiries. Presenters should answer these inquiries. It's fine, but actually there are some details that could be collected from the community members, where I am part in, in order to help the Middle East best for future work. This is some kind of slide, some details that could be helpful for the future. So we will use Mentimeter. Actually, you could go scan this QR code from your mobile or just go from your laptop to menti.com and add the room number that is at the top of the screen. I will let you a small bit of seconds in order to go for that, in order to start the question. Yeah, just scan the QR code and wait for the future screen. Yeah. That's fine.

Let's go for the first. I don't see they're sharing the screen. Oh, I am logged out. Just a second. I don't know why I logged out, but just a small second. Yeah. Yeah, could you see the Mentimeter results on the screen?

SEHER SAGRIOGLU

Yes, we are. Not on the screen. Yes.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Okay, thank you. Actually, the first question is, what country are you from? It's very important. This question is very important for us. As a question in the guidelines that will come after, we may have some details which should be collected from some countries within the Middle East, so we need to have what are the countries that are already available here, even for here at Seattle or at the remote participation. Now we have Uzbekistan, Turkey, Egypt, Oman, Bahrain. Any other countries that are already here?

AMIN HACHA

Also, some people are writing in the chat. Sorry, it seems it's not working. **[70:14 Inaudible.]**

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Again, please, for anyone who had a problem going to Mentimeter, the QR code is already shared now, again, for the screen. You could go for menti.com and add the code that is above the screen. The code is 3734 3423. Yeah, it's fine. We have now an extra one, which is Benin, Yemen. Yeah, it's working now. Thank you for that. Yeah, let's go for the next question. What challenges do the Middle East stakeholders face when applying for the ASP? I think as said by Hadia for the brevity statement that it is mainly rated to awareness. What are the challenges that we need to consider and ask for support from ICANN in order to go for applicants or engagement from their community? If you still know that, or still aware of that,

still we have kind of awareness, you can add it. Yeah, it's fine here. Any other challenges? You have 30 seconds in order to answer. Oh, 15 seconds left.

Yeah, now it's fine. A lake of information, awareness, we have multilingual support. Actually, as I know, maybe Kristy correct me if I'm wrong, that the handbook is already translated into the six UN languages. Arabic, French, Chinese, Spanish... The other one? Yeah, okay, it's fine. Most of the challenges here are related to awareness and the other ones, that small ranking is related to financial, and the ones that have my attention, the benefits.

I would like to ask maybe Kristy or Chris or Baher, our presenters, what are the benefits for the applicant in order to succeed and go for the ASP program as we have this one of the challenges here. Yeah, Baher, the floor is yours.

BAHER ESMAT

No, just a clarifying point. I'm not sure if the benefit means it's not clear what the benefits of the program, the ASP program are. If this is what is meant then I think Kristy can clarify briefly what the benefits that the program offers.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

Sure Baher. It's supposed offer a range of financial and non-financial support. On the nonfinancial support side we have what I talked about earlier, the pro bono service providers, the mentorship. We're also developing an ASP capacity development program which is actually, to your point earlier about the ICANN

Learn courses, there are many ICANN Learn courses and we want to create a curated syllabus to help guide people on their journey, so speak. That's something that we're working on as part of the capacity development program.

Then on the financial side we have the discounts on the base GTLD application fee as well as the discounts on the conditional evaluations as well as the bid credit if they end up in an auction. Then when they become a registered operator, the reduced base registry agreement fees for the first three or four years of operation. Off the top of my head those are the main benefits, and those are also elaborated in our ASP funding plan, as well.

Chris, yeah.

CHRIS MONDINI

To Baher's point also around clarifying what is meant by benefit, it is one of the feedback points that we receive on the engagement team very often. Why do I want a GTLD? What do I get from a GTLD? What is the benefit for me? Really this is, I would say beyond our remit of raising awareness but we are working with our colleagues and also people in the domain name sector to be able to have those conversations, to make a business plan or decide the benefit, look at the return on investment. We want to be able to answer that question but we're still working on the facility to do that, but it's a frequent question we receive.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Yes, thank you Chris. Let's go for the third question for today. What opportunities does ASP offer for the Middle East region? I think we have something similar for the answer for this question by Chris and Kristy and Baher in the previous question, while we have one of the challenges that there is not awareness about the benefits. I think we already covered this, so I think it is good to go for the next question.

What engagement methods can effectively raise awareness of the ASP? I will leave you for 30 seconds in order to answer. Baher, go ahead.

BAHER ESMAT

Yeah, this is a crucial question for us as an engagement team so we can give you more than 30 seconds if you can give us input. Thank you.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you, Baher. As an example for this, maybe DNS forums, Middle East ones, other ones related to DNSs, should be some awareness, something like that. APTLD, FTLD, if it is something similar. Maybe webinars, maybe workshops. Maybe there will be a workshop linked to champion's toolkit. I think I am interesting in hearing something like this, by the way, but it is up to you to write here what, the methods you are interested in.

Okay, if you have any methods you could take a stance at for the Middle East... Yeah, go ahead. Raise your hand.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER I was just, one of my suggestions was maybe awareness campaigns through important events, maybe have a booth or something.

AMIN HACHA Chris will answer, okay.

ABDALMONEM GALILA Yes, thank you. It is working. It seems that you didn't click the submit in the correct way. No problem for that. Actually, what you said is already informative and actually I shared some other methods and we are hoping for many methods that could be shared for the Middle East Space. Let's go for the next question.

What local or regional events can help to increase awareness of the ASP? I think here the ICANN team is curious enough to know this input. You are left for 30 second in order to answer. Until you answer this question, Baher, could you go over that? Maybe offer what you could do in order to help the community to increase awareness about ASP.

BAHER ESMAT Yeah, sure. As I noted, our engagement efforts take different means and approaches from reaching out to individuals and organizations like one-to-one, via email, online meetings, schools and so on. Then when we visit any country in the region we would reach out beforehand to our community members from this country to let them know that we'll be there, happy to engage if you have any

opportunities that we can run alongside the events or meetings that we're there for. Also organizing webinars, as I mentioned. We're happy to participate in any online settings with your local stakeholders to let them know more about the program if they have any questions and so on. Of course, in-person participation in events. I noted a few events that we participated in in the past and some events are coming up, so there are different ways of engaging and raising awareness and as always we'd be guided by your input and feedback so that we can also improve what we are already doing. Thank you.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you Baher. Actually, we have multiple options here. Civil society days and forums, GITEX, Internet Society events, national events organized by investment office/bureau, gamification I don't know what is meant by. Thirty seconds left. We'll go forward to the next question. Thank you for your input.

Besides the six UN languages, which other languages should ICANN translate the new GLTD program material to? We have English, French, Chinese, Spanish. The other languages?

BAHER ESMAT

Russian and Arabic.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Russian and Arabic. Yeah. I think while Kristy has some statistics about geographic distribution, there are different languages other

than the six UN languages. I do think from my view that many languages that already exist, maybe it would be good for the ASP program to have translation to. We have here Turkish as one of the languages. Other languages that could be there for the ASP materials? Yeah, Kristy, it seems you have something.

KRISTY BUCKLEY

I just wanted to bring attention to the link that I just posted in the chat a few minutes ago. We are in the process of rolling out a new GTLD program In Your Language. We'll be presenting on it in a bit more detail during Thursday's IRT session, so I put a link into the chat to see if anyone would like to come and learn more. We presented on it briefly during the prep week session for the next round, but this will be a bit more in depth explaining how the In Your Language works but it's essentially a crowd sourced AI tool for providing materials in more languages than the ICANN six. Please come on Thursday and learn more.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you Kristy. Actually, this is the last question for the interaction for today and I will leave the floor now to my colleague Amin to ceremony close. Thank you.

AMIN HACHA

As a closing remark I want to thank all who attend in person or online. Also I want to thank our speakers. Without all this collaboration and this input we wouldn't succeed to finish this session. I think we did something new or fruitful for our community.

Sure, at every work there are people that work behind this. One of them is Seher. I want to thank her, in Istanbul. We would like she is in person with us, but her tasks to success of our agenda before and after are very notable for us and especially for me.

Also, I want to thank Baher and Fahd also. They were a lot supporting and covering our work. This is until now for me, I'm looking for the future collaboration in our region and also we are open for any new topics for our Middle East Space to start to discuss for future meetings and maybe we can make something virtual or in the coming ICANN meeting.

For you, Abdalmonem, you can close.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you Amin. Actually I need to thank all the participants who are part of preparing for this session, whether you are community members and from ICANN and of course those representatives who are with us today, who gave us a lot of information that honestly, myself, I didn't have an idea about that but now the ideas are crystal clear. Thank you very much. This is the closing of the session. Thank you.

CHRISTIAN WHEELER

Thank you very much. You may stop the recording.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]