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ICANN86 Seville | PF – At-Large Plenary 1: Universal Acceptance as a Policy Imperative: Bridging the Gap Between Technical Readiness and Real-World Adoption  
Monday, June 08, 2026 – 14:45 to 16:00 CEST

MICHELLE DESMYTER

Hello and welcome everyone to At-Large Plenary 1: Universal Acceptance as a Policy Imperative: Bridging the Gap Between Technical Readiness and Real-World Adoption. My name is Michelle DeSmyter and I am the Remote Participation Manager for today's session.

Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior and ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy. During this session, questions or comments will be read aloud if submitted within the Q&A pod. Interpretation for today's session will include English, French, and Spanish.

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 please speak at a reasonable pace. And with this, I will now turn the meeting over to your moderator today, Hadia Elminiawi.

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HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Michelle. This is Hadia Elminiawi for the record, and welcome everyone to the At-Large Plenary 1: Universal Acceptance as a Policy Imperative: Bridging the Gap Between Technical Readiness and Real-World Adoption.

First, I would like to start by thanking Mutegeki Cliff. He's an AFRALO member and AFRALO UA lead. I would like to thank him for proposing this session. And I start the session by giving the floor to him to provide us with the welcoming notes and the objectives of this session. Mutegeki, thank you and the floor is yours.

MUTEGEKI CLIFF

Thank you so much, Hadia. My name is Mutegeki Cliff Agaba and I'm glad to welcome you all to this session. And just to start off, I'll just highlight out the key objectives for this session. First, we will explore the roles of different stakeholders in advancing Universal Acceptance, governments, industry, and the technical community, academia, and At-Large structures, the RALOs, ALAC and the broader ICANN community, the role that they have in making progress towards Universal Acceptance.

And second objective is that we'll examine the gap between the technical readiness and real-world adoption, noting while many technologies are capable of supporting Universal Acceptance. Implementation has been seen across many platforms are still lacking. And then thirdly, we will identify the barriers that continue

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to slow implementation and these barriers could be technical, operational, institutional, or policy related.

And then fourth, we'll discuss practical approaches for accelerating Universal Acceptance through shared experiences and best practices and implementation strategies. And then finally, we'll focus on a collaborative action through community engagement, capacity building, and different initiatives. Thank you so much, Hadia, and over to you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you again, Mutegeki. So, we have a rich and engaging session ahead of us, bringing together some of the most prominent voices in the Universal Acceptance ecosystem. We begin with a presentation by Dr. Hu of UNESCO who will walk us through the recently published UNESCO ICANN policy brief on advancing Universal Acceptance through policy and ecosystem coordination. This will be followed by Dr. Sarmad Hussain of ICANN, who will present the guidelines developed by ICANN's UA expert working group.

We will then hear from a diverse group of practitioners sharing UA project showcases from across the globe, from Africa, India, Europe, El Salvador, and Canada. And finally, we will bring our speakers together for a panel discussion on the practical applications where our panelists represent a broad range of stakeholder communities.

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Agenda item seven is about audience engagement, and I encourage everyone to actively engage, ask questions, and share your perspectives. And I now give the floor to Dr. Hu of UNESCO. Thank you, Dr. Hu for being with us today.

XIANHONG HU

Thank you. Thank you, Hadia. Thank you, everyone, for inviting UNESCO to this important At-Large Plenary. I'm very pleased to share UNESCO ICANN's joint initiative promoting Universal Acceptance and multilingual internet, particularly this recently launched policy brief. Next slide, please.

So, the global context of digital device still outstanding and 2.2 billion people unconnected. Language is still a barrier. Imagine 7,000 languages in the world and a few hundred online. Many minorities, indigenous languages are disappearing on a daily basis. This language gap profoundly impacts the landscape of AI development. The lack of Universal Acceptance in the digital ecosystem significantly limits what AI can learn or how it can perform and who eventually it will benefit.

I'm very pleased to see the presence of our partner OEF in the ICANN meeting since they are addressing the linguistic inclusion and the UA issues at their forthcoming AI forum functioning in Geneva in July. And next slide, please. Sorry, that's what the slide I was talking about, about how UA is impacting the AI development. Now, please, next.

Yes. So, this slide I liked very much also shows the beautiful progress of the involvement of the DNS system in past years. According to our policy brief, the IDNs are now available in seven languages covering 23 scripts. Warm congratulations to all the ICANN community for the wonderful achievement. But the acceptance rate, as mentioned by our AFRALO colleague is still very low in many countries, less than 30%. So, next slide, please.

So, the global response and consensus from WSIS+20, Global Digital Compact, all recognize the urgent need to promote culture diversity, heritage, and language, calling for the expanding of the multilingual Internet, IDNs, and UA, including through the failures of AI. Next slide, please.

As you know that UNESCO has a unique and strong mandate and commitment for long to multilingualism, enshrined from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, our normative framework, UNESCO's recommendation on multilingualism in cyberspace was endorsed by member states early in 2003, meaning 23 years ago, is still valid and even gets more and more pertinent. Now we are hosting another important UN initiative called the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to network, empower the indigenous communities and preserve their languages. So, building on this extensive mandate and our key partnership with ICANN, UNESCO positions UA as a key enabler of inclusive digital transformation and AI development. Next slide, please.

So, that's why we have recently delivered this policy brief. It not only identifies the key challenges and barriers for UA adoption, but provides actionable recommendations for all stakeholders. Now the policy brief is in English, but it's being translated to all UN official languages, Portuguese and other languages such as Swahili as well as indigenous languages such as Quechua. You can all download it from our website and also, I encourage you to translate to your own local language. Next slide, please.

The brief gives a holistic perspective on the benefits and importance of UA that's crucial. In addition to its economic value known to most stakeholders, we like to highlight the vital role of UA plays in safeguarding the world's linguistic diversity and cultural diversity, as well for the education delivery online, which should never be underestimated. So, a key message is that to achieve UA is not only a technical issue, but it requires human dimensions and a significant policy development to be in place. Next slide, please.

That's why the brief offers a strong recommendation tailored for different stakeholders, governments, technology, community, civil society, and international organizations, including for UNESCO ourselves. I'd like to flag here since we have other civil society actors here, that the important role of civil society, academia, and the language committees in advancing UA adoption in so many areas, such as raise public awareness, advocate for UA implementation, document and share the good practice of success

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stories, collaborate, involve the indigenous communities, and enhance digital literacy and UA literacy. Next slide, please.

The effective implementation of UA also depends on systematic monitoring. Another significant contribution of this policy brief is that we have offered on page 24 a set of indicators to measure the progress of UN adoption in a country. It's focused on four dimensions to measure awareness, policy support, implementation, and capacity development. So, I also encourage our stakeholders, our civil society academia to use them to conduct assessments which can be very instrumental to help advancing policy and the UA adoption. Next slide, please.

At the UNESCO level, we have taken concrete actions to implement UA. For example, we integrate a UA indicator, as you can see, to our ongoing monitoring of instrument recommendation 2003, basically asking all the members to report on the UA adoption in this monitoring process. And next slide, please.

We also mainstreaming UA to our related initiatives, such as the plan of action for advancing multilingualism in digital era. One action I like to quote is about integrating UA to education system and curriculum. I recently attended the UA celebration event for Africa, organized by AFRALO, and I heard a lot of great progress in this area. Really, congratulations for that, too. Next slide, please.

We are also advocating UA in our initiative on international decade of indigenous languages. And Sarmad, our colleague here, he has been invited to give a UA presentation to our last global task force

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meeting of IDIL to raise awareness and involvement to raise the readiness of UA among the indigenous communities. So, last slide, please.

So, given the time limit, I stop here. Looking ahead, I mean, 2030 SDGs are drawing near at the corner. Let's leave no one behind. Let's leave no languages and scripts behind in the digital and AI era. So, I am here and look forward to more discussions. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Dr. Hu, and indeed, we will have more discussion later. And now we move to Dr. Sarmad Hussain.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you, Hadia, and good afternoon, everyone here. I will talk a little bit about the guidelines for advancing UA adoption. This is the work which is being done by UA Expert Working Group which has been set up from the community by ICANN. Next slide please.

Again, this is just a background. For those of you who do not know, Universal Acceptance means that all valid domain names and email addresses are supported by all Internet applications. And next slide we get right into the Expert Working Group just as a way of background. In March 2025, there was, ICANN board had resolved for ICANN org to evaluate and evolve strategies to support UA adoption work by ICANN org and the community and aligning that with the ICANN strategic plan for 26 through 2030.

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In response, ICANN President and CEO announced the establishment of UA Expert Working Group, which was tasked to provide guidelines for ICANN's future work on UA adoption. So, that's a background to how the UA Expert Working Group came together. Next slide, please.

So, following that, ICANN org announced, so there was an announcement to SOs and ACs for nominations. We've had SO, AC nominees to this working group. We also have a board liaison to this working group. Next slide, please. In addition to the nominees, I can also invite experts from across the industry to join the working group as well. And based on this, this working group was formed and has been working to put guidelines together. Next slide, please.

So, the UA Expert Working Group started its work in August of 2025. It was given 10 topics or focus on multiple stakeholders through a charter which was published. And it's worked transparently with all its deliberations published on a community wiki page with call recordings, meeting notes. They came up with 45 total guidelines to cover the 10 topics which they had to address. And these guidelines were published for public comment on 23rd of February, just before the Mumbai meeting, and they were then presenting and discussed with the community at the Mumbai meeting at ICANN85 as well. Next slide, please.

So, just to give you an overview of the topics which have been covered by the working group, it includes encouraging big tech

organizations, including or involving open-source communities, working with standards organizations and software development professionals, email administrators, DNS industry, hosting service providers, public sector, and academia. And the working group actually devised multiple guidelines for ICANN to look at and implement for each of these stakeholders, along with also suggesting some measurement indicators for Universal Acceptance. Next slide, please.

So, we received very large number of inputs, so there was a lot of interest in these guidelines. So, 37 individuals and organizations have responded, so thank you all for reading through these guidelines and providing us valuable feedback. And these public comments were then shared back with the Expert Working Group who are now currently deliberating through the public comment and updating the guidelines to address them. And basically, they will continue their work over the next few weeks and hope to finalize this work soon. Next slide, please. Can we go to the next slide? Okay.

So, just to share the next steps, as I just noted, the Expert Working Group is currently working to review the public comment input, and they are going to update and finalize the guidelines. They're also looking at the input provided on prioritization of these guidelines, and also looking at how to prioritize some of the guidelines they've actually developed. All this eventually will be finalized and published by the Expert Working Group. Many of

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those members are also in this room and once these are published, they'll obviously come back to ICANN org for implementation.

ICANN org will then look at these guidelines and the prioritization suggested and develop a plan for implementation. And as we implement them, we'll obviously keep the community updated on the progress. If you want to learn more about these guidelines, we have a more detailed session tomorrow, end of the day. Please come and join us and we'll dive deeper into the actual guidelines themselves. With that, thank you very much and back to Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Sarmad, and now we move to the showcasing of the UA projects. So, each of you, please, you have only three minutes and we start with Raymond Mamattah. The floor is yours, Raymond.

RAYMOND MAMATTAH

Thank you very much, Hadia. So, I'm giving a brief report on the Ghana UA Day. Next slide, please. So, the event was held on the 6th of May and the theme was Your Language, One Internet: Local Scripts, Global Access - UA for Ghana. Next slide, please.

The event was organized by four entities led by EGIGFA. The other entities are the Association of African Universities, UNESCO, and GDNR. Next slide, please. So, the main activities we undertook were registering an IDN and then hosting the email using the IDN and also set up a form on the IDN website to test whether the form

could accept EAs or not. And during the session, we also took the participants through how IDNs could be registered and how their systems could be made to accept EAs so that it would not reject them. Next slide, please.

One main discovery that we have gotten from the UA Day celebration is that currently we are now able to register IDNs using our local script. So, in our case, this was the website that we registered, and the characters that are highlighted in blue are local scripts. The character after W in our languages is O, which is the opposite of C, then the other one is E, which is the opposite of 3. In the past, we were not able to register any domains using any of our local scripts, but from this time forward, we are able to do that so that is one of the main discoveries for our UA Day celebration. Next slide, please.

Two challenges that we encountered were, one, we're not able to use our keyboard, the normal keyboards, to register the IDNs, since the keyboards don't have these characters. And the disaster is that if we use symbols instead of the characters, anybody who rather enters using the characters, the domain will not resolve. So that is one of the main challenges that we discovered. Next slide, please. And the second challenge was that the domain they registered is not able to display in the characters that they were registered in. Instead, they are displayed in Punycode. So, if you check on [wsko.com](http://wsko.com), it rather appears in this [CROSSTALK].

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HADIA ELMINIAWI Raymond, if you can please wrap up. I know this is the second challenge and the last, right?

RAYMOND MAMATTAH Okay, last slide. So, our next follow-up action that we want to release a press statement showing that currently we can now register IDNs using our local script. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI Thank you so much, Raymond, for sharing with us Ghana's experience. And now we move to India and Mohan Raidu to share with us also their experience.

MOHAN RAIDU Thank you, Michelle. Am I audible, please?

HADIA ELMINIAWI Loud and clear, yeah. Please, go ahead.

MOHAN RAIDU Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening to everyone. I am K. Mohan Raidu, President of Internet Society India Hyderabad Chapter. I founded this chapter in April 2021 and since beginning we have focused on Universal Acceptance. One of our biggest achievements was moving beyond UA awareness and focusing on capacity building.

Through collaboration with ICANN experts, we conducted UA curriculum meets, UA faculty development program, and successfully secured commitments from six major universities to introduce Universal Acceptance into their academic curriculum. It is my pleasure to share the successes, challenges, and future plans of our UA Day 2026 initiative conducted at Hyderabad, India on April 4th, 2026 with the support of ICANN, UNESCO, Microsoft, leading universities, industry organizations, and government stakeholders.

It is the third edition of our UA Day we have been organizing in Microsoft campus. The theme this year has been that Universal Acceptance for an inclusive digital future, driving Atmanirbhar Bharat, meaning self-reliant India. 366 participants attended this year, which is the only UA Day in India. We successfully demonstrated a working IDN website and EA enabled email environment. Participants experienced first-hand how multilingual domain names and email addresses can function in practice. The event generated significant interest among industry professionals and students.

The challenges and solutions during our UA implementation were first, WP forms rejecting Telugu language email addresses, SMTP delivery restrictions, Unicode and Unicode domain handling issues, and DKIM, SPE, and DNS alignment issues, NGINX internationalized domain name configurations, et cetera. By successfully overcoming these challenges, we were able to establish a fully functional Telugu language domain website. And

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please change my slide. Yeah, there you see the IDNs and Eis, you know, they're there.

I'm happy that ICANN has identified our chapter as a local initiative partner. Our focus now is to move from awareness to implementation. Please change the slide. Together with ICANN, academia and industry partners, we plan to expand UA training programs, increase university curriculum integration, promote UA-ready software development, encourage enterprises to adopt multilingual digital identities, support real-world implementation projects within the industry and government sectors.

I thank ICANN, UNESCO, Microsoft, our other academic partners and industry leaders, all volunteers who contributed to the success of our UA Day. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Mr. Mohan, and now we move to Regina, the floor is yours.

REGINA FUCHSOVA

Thank you very much, Hadia. Hello, everyone. I was asked to report or refer on another example of cooperation in the field to bring the topics of Universal Acceptance and internationalized domain names to a broader audience. Before I speak about this concrete event, let me put the topic a bit in perspective. Can I ask for the first slide?

One of the things EURid .u registry is doing is running the IDN World Report together with our partners, including UNESCO, but also CENTR and other regional ccTLD organizations. We published the new edition just two weeks ago, and among the key findings, it turned out that one of them, that market is very concentrated and is declining. Just for your imagination, about 75% of all IDNs are in the hands of top 10 registries as for the number of IDNs.

We still observe that even though technical readiness is improving, it's not translating into adoption and also, that awareness remains the biggest barrier. So, despite all the work also during Universal Acceptance days, this comes back again and again and needs to be addressed together with the adoption. It clicks together also with the findings, what we did in the Universal Acceptance Committee under ccNSO. We run consultations with our members, so it's not a scientific research. Of course, it's limited to the ccTLDs who participated. It was during ICANN meetings.

And here, what we had as the biggest barrier of Universal Acceptance and adoption of IDNs and use of IDNs was, first of all, a lack of demand and need. Actually, it's a problem where to start, because from our perspective as a technical community, ccTLDs, we hear from the registrars that they don't support IDNs because they don't see a demand from the users. And it's obvious, because they are commercial companies, so the decision to invest in the infrastructure it has to have some perspective on the market.

And then the registrants, they don't ask for IDNs because, first of all, they are very often even not aware that this is possible in many languages. The usage of Latin as a script on internets is so well-routed that people would answer to you if they know what a domain name is at all. That, of course, you cannot use very special characters when browsing websites.

And also, even if you are aware and register a domain name, for example, fully in Arabic, and if you are not able to use it in your daily life in all the applications you normally use, then it's a nice thing. You can send a few emails maybe to your friends who use a similar tool, but then in the end, you cannot use it fully for your online presence. So, this is also why we tried to involve more GAC and the policymakers, just to say one of the measures as Universal Acceptance being part of policy decision of procurement would help as well. And then, of course, the capacity issues within the ccTLDs.

So now to a bit more positive thing, the event on which we cooperated, next slide please, was on the occasion of the ITU Regional Development Forum for Europe, taking place in March in Prague. We teamed up with ICANN, obviously ITU, it was their event, and UNESCO. And used this opportunity to bring the topic to maybe not that obvious audience of policy makers mainly. There was a panel discussion which went more into detail. Then we also had two shorter let's say pitches to explain the positives for

the local communities and afterwards we also organized for the participants a networking cocktail.

You can see in the middle picture that we had our banners EURid and ICANN and we also run on the screen a loop from different events and activities connected to IDNs and Universal Acceptance, so that it draws attention of the participants. And we could explain them in detail what was happening and what events took place.

So, to conclude with, what we see that works is really partnering across the communities, not only technical, but all the members and keep working on this topic because it was mentioned it's part of the thesis process. And as long as we have the technical tools, we believe that we are obliged to use them in the benefits of the communities, and it's largely believed that this is the way how to bring the next billion of users online. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, and thank you for highlighting the cooperation between EURid and ICANN and ITU and the UNESCO. And now we move to El Salvador and Sandra Rodriguez.

SANDRA RODRIGUEZ

Thank you, Hadia. I'm going to speak in Spanish. I'd like to give you a brief summary of our event that we developed. This year it was called Initiatives and Challenges with Respect to Digital Transformation in the Academic Curriculum in El Salvador.

This event was developed April 15th, and we celebrated the fourth year of the Universal Acceptance Day. This event was consolidated by various actors, and we integrated different universities, important universities in our country, keeping in mind the internet governance, also higher studies, and it also involved strategy and the involvement of UNESCO. And that way we showed the values of Universal Acceptance and we also wanted to preserve the mother language throughout the world. Following the next slide, please.

Within some successes that we had, I'd like to mention that we had technical preparation, academic introduction. It was a calling, a strategic calling that we had and the main success that we had with this event is that we counted with the participation of fifth-year students within technology topics and we took advantage of the collaboration that existed within these groups.

Something that's important as well is the institution side, we wanted to take advantage of the participation of personnel and professors from the university, and especially within the field of science computation or computing science. And what we wanted to do was to include the theory part of it, and we also wanted to open up different curriculums between all these students for the Universal Acceptance.

As far as the history, since 2023 we've been having this event and we've had a sustained effort and we've also had previous collaborations with other experts like, for example, Daniel Fing and

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Gerardo and some of the challenges that we had with regards to the gap within real world adoption. I'd like to mention that the greatest challenge was the complexity of this adoption because of the timelines as far as incorporating this in a flexible way and including other universities and including the official curriculum.

Another important aspect has to do with a better coordination with the key actors in this because there's a gap between academic preparation and its technical adoption within the local infrastructure. We require greater effort to be able to link the developers, the software developers, the distributors of emails to be able to accept special character emails, both in Latin, Arabic, Cyrillic, or indigenous languages.

In 2024, in El Salvador, along with the university, we developed a study of 1,500 websites that accepted or did not accept these internationalized emails, and we expect to be able to update this for 2026. Also, there's a technical aspect. For example, standards and internet infrastructure and domain names, we wanted to include these commercial entities as well. Another working group with regards to Universal Acceptance and also the universities or education centers. There's also a technical side of this within ICANN within this topic, integrating also this program that includes eight modules.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

If you could please finish up.

SANDRA RODRIGUEZ

Okay. So, we wanted to do a type of virtual academy. If you can please show the next slide. Here you can see a little bit of the history that we've had since 2023 regarding the outreach, and we did some work with the universities in 2024. We did the technical side, and then we incorporated this in five different universities in El Salvador. Following slide, please.

I'd like to finish with these two quotes. Universal Acceptance is for all of us and it's time to be able to look for the partnerships and strategies so that Internet can be inclusive and multilingual, and it can become, not just a noun, but an action verb, and that way this could be our own sphere of influence in our own roles. Also, Ibarra has supported me these four years for this event, along with ICANN and those that had trust in our work.

While Universal Acceptance affects Spanish with accented vowels and the letter ñ, which could seem relatively minor, it's important that all the colleagues, partners, and friends around the world, including Spanish and Portuguese speakers in our region, can fluently write their email addresses in their native languages. In conclusion, Universal Acceptance is a global solidarity exercise to be able to support the internet. Thank you.

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HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Sandra, and this is Hadia for the record and indeed Universal Acceptance is for all. And now we move to Canada and Glenn McKnight, Glenn, the floor is yours.

ZULQAR NAYEN

Hi, everyone. So, our CIO, Glenn McKnight, would be leading this, but unfortunately, he couldn't join this morning so I'm here on behalf of the team. My name is Zulqar Nayen. I'm with the Internet Society Ontario chapter and the Virtual School of Internet Governance, VSIG. I don't think this is the right deck. Is it okay if I share my screen from my end?

MICHELLE DESMYTER

Hi, Zulqar. Yes.

ZULQAR NAYEN

Okay. Let me send you a request. Thank you.

MICHELLE DESMYTER

Thank you. Ali, could you please promote him? Thank you.

ZULQAR NAYEN

Thank you. Okay, perfect. Let me share.

MICHELLE DESMYTER

Thank you and Zulqar, we do have three minutes for your presentation. Thank you.

ZULQAR NAYEN                      Understood. Got it, got it. Yeah, I'll try to be as quick as possible.  
Can everyone see my screen?

MICHELLE DESMYTER              Yes.

ZULQAR NAYEN                      Okay, okay. So, just to give you a background, back in March, our team organized and hosted a half-day UA Day, 2026 event here in North America, together with NARALO and ICANN's At-Large community. We brought together four sessions. One, a keynote from ICANN, a session on the Endangered Languages Project, an update on the Native Canadian Language Scripts from Internet Society Quebec, and our own session on online translation and volunteer capacity building. And the last session is the one I want to focus on today.

So, the reason it matters is because Bengali is the fifth most spoken language in the world so this project is to localize a full internet governance curriculum into Bengali. So, we have over 300 million Bengali speakers, but yet almost none of the foundational internet governance education exists in their language so we set out to change that.

So, we took V6, Virtual School of Internet Governance, our complete 10-module curriculum on internet governance and localized it into Bengali. And I want to be clear, this was never just

translation, it was building a complete learning product in Bengali. So, we did this with an AI-human hybrid workflow. So, we used AI for the first drafts and humans for accuracy and maintain the natural flow and we used a simple three-part rule for every technical term. We translated, we transliterate it, or we keep it in English so whichever serves the learner best.

Then we did something I'm really proud of. We partnered with the University of Dhaka. It is one of the most respected universities in South Asia, and we ran a live pilot. We had 38 students enrolled, 18 completed the entire course and passed every squeeze, which is a 47% completion rate.

For context, you know, most online courses globally see 5 to 15% completion rate so this was a very good turnout. And the impact reached beyond the classroom. The work we picked up, you know, this work was picked up by national media in Bangladesh and the Internet Society published our session recordings across its chapters. So, for a small volunteer team, seeing this recognized at a national level was a real milestone, but here's the finding I really want to put in front of the group, because it speaks directly to today's theme, the gap between technical readiness and real-world adoption.

So, we set out to do a localization project, but the moment we deployed it, we ran straight into Universal Acceptance failures, which we never expected. The clearest one was email, you know, email address internationalization, or EAI. So, our automated

course emails, enrollment confirmations, quiz reminders, all of these silently fade. Whenever the mail chain hit internationalized address configurations, the servers couldn't handle the SMTP UTSA extensions, and the messages didn't bounce. They didn't throw an error. They just disappeared. So, we only found out because the students told us they weren't getting any emails from us.

So, think about that, like a textbook EI failure core Universal Acceptance, all this happening silently, which on a real learning platform, and which is serving real learners. So, if students hadn't spoken up, we'd never have known that. We also hit Bengali script rendering problems. We had conjunct characters stored correctly in the database, but they were stripped at the display layer, which actually changed the meaning of words so that is also internationalization. Not strictly UA, but here's our takeaway.

So, these failures, internalization and UA failures, these failures travel together. So, a platform that can't render Bengali in a paragraph is almost certainly going to fail at accepting Bengali script domain name. So, localization projects like ours turn out to be some of the best UA readiness audits you can run. So, we were just testing the platform. We were kind of teaching a course and all these gaps surfaced on their own.

I'll be honest about the challenges too. This whole thing ran on about \$2,000 and a lot of volunteer time. Again, I'd like to appreciate, you know, thank ICANN for providing the fund. So, inter-governance education doesn't fit neatly into any one

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government's mandate. So, for now, this grassroots coordination that we had, this is really the only hope, the only path.

We're now extending the same model to Urdu with a pilot plan in Pakistan, and we have turned everything we've learned into a five-pillar framework so any language community can replicate what we did and what we succeeded on. So, that's our story. Thank you very much. I'll drop a link to our session recordings for our UA Day in this chat for anyone who would like to see a deeper version. Thank you everyone. I'm going to stop sharing my screen.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much. This is Hadia Elminiawi for the record and please stay with us for the discussion. And now we move. I just want to note that we do have a question in the chat, but we will take this during the engagement with the community, that's item number seven and now we move to the discussion about practical application of the UNESCO ICANN policy brief, and the recommendations of ICANN's UA Expert Working Group in bridging the gap between readiness and adoption.

And our panelists are Dr. Hu from the UNESCO, Dr. Sarmad Hussain from ICANN, Abdalmonem Tharwat Galila, GAC, Edmon Chung from the At-Large community, and Nabil from the Security and Stability Advisory Committee, Nitin Walia for the Generic Names Supporting Organization. He's joining us remotely, and Sami Mohamed Ali, country ccNSO. So, thank you all for being with us today and I start with the first question, which is, what are the key operational and

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ecosystem barriers preventing Universal Acceptance from progressing from technical readiness to widespread real-world implementation? And I start with Dr. Hu.

XIANHONG HU

Thank you. This is a very important question. Yes, very often that UA is treated as a technical issue rather than a policy priority for multilingual digital inclusion. So, let me just briefly mention three major non-technical ecosystem-wide barriers as this policy brief also set out.

First is a huge awareness gap. Not only IT managers, service providers remain uninformed about UA, but many governments, regulators, public institutions, private platforms, service providers have not yet integrated UA to their digital plans, procurement rules, and public service standards.

Second barrier, obviously, the capacity and education issue. There's such a lack of training and education on UA concepts and UA literacy, even within the computer science and engineering education. The curricula taught are not sufficiently addressing the issues. That's why when the students graduate and the new talents, they are not equipped with the necessary knowledge skills to build a UA-ready digital service by default.

Third huge gap varies at the policy and the regulatory level. Authorities often focus on priorities on the cybersecurity, privacy competition. Yeah, fair enough, but there needs to be sufficient

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addressing of the UA as a necessary condition to support the variety of languages and scripts online. And there's also an uneven pace of the adoption of UA across jurisdictions worldwide and many governments and regulators have not updated their policy framework of procurement and that's why there are still some other more, but I'd like to address these three to kick out the discussion. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Dr. Hu, and now I move to Dr. Sarmad, and the same question.

SARMAD HUSSAIN

Thank you. I'll be brief and I'll focus more on the technical side. So, at a standards level, there has been a lot of work and that has now matured and the underlying standards are available to a very large extent. They are also implemented by a host of technology organizations to different level of different degrees, but that's improving over time significantly.

I think the main technical barrier is more on then adoption by the broader set of technical developers who develop software applications, websites, and also deploy email servers. They need to be aware of the technology which is already available and integrate that technology into their solutions which they are developing and deploying. So, I think that's one area which needs

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to focus on that obviously requires awareness, capacity building, to some extent even public sector intervention. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Dr. Sarmad, and Abdalmonem, same question.

ABDALMONEM GALILA

Thank you very much. Actually, we are talking here about the Debye Context. The time we are talking about Debye Context for Universal Acceptance that is related to ensuring that valid domain names, valid email addresses, scripts, languages, and the character set work as well across all application devices and systems. In particular, in practice, there is a compatibility and inclusion layer of the Internet, ensuring that all the digital services don't silently, as said by my colleague from Canada, silently reject users because of their languages for their script, and the legacy technical assumptions.

So, from the point of view of the government, the regulator, and public institutions, they are playing a crucial role in enabling the use of Universal Acceptance. For one reason, that the issues that are related to Universal Acceptance show up first as the digital public services so the rules of the government, regulator, and public institution like that.

For the government to set Universal Acceptance compliance as a baseline requirement for public digital services, we know that government consider one of the big buyer of software system

within their area. So, they could drive the market adoption through procurement policies, and government could also coordinate with global governance and technical bodies like ICANN UA initiatives, IETF standards, cooperation with national and regional entities in order to harmonize the adoption of Universal Acceptance.

At the time we are reaching out to technical standards and interoperability guidance, we reach out to regulators. Where the regulator is the best ones to promote the adoption of ITF standards, to promote the national and the regional guidance related to Universal Acceptance, and also to certify the UA compliance software and platforms within their area. So, who is the biggest operator for all of these, for the standard and for the digital services offered by the government is the public institutions where public institutions could lead by example through government digital infrastructure the more adoption of Universal Acceptance by upgrading the legacy system to be UA compliant and to also normalize Universal Acceptance support.

And also, we need to recognize that Universal Acceptance is a digital inclusion issue, not just a technical upgrade. Also, public institutions could help to protect inclusion and linguistic diversity as a policy matter. And finally, it could help to support awareness, capacity building with the support of open-source libraries to train the government ITs, and publish best practices of Universal Acceptance adoption. Thank you very much. The floor is yours, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Abdalmonem, and now we move to Edmon, and maybe I will state the question once more. What are the key operational and ecosystem barriers preventing Universal Acceptance from progressing from technical readiness to widespread real-world implementation? Thank you.

EDMON CHUNG

Thank you, Hadia, and Edmon here, very excited to talk about UA all the time and it is something that is ongoing. It's definitely not a short-term thing. Well, I want to share a little bit about the discussion from the EWG, the Expert Working Group, and one of the findings I think is very important is to put this UA issue in the right part of the tech stack, and it is really the broader umbrella of the internationalization work.

Earlier, Zulqar mentioned something that I think nails it, which is, if you find that the Bengali is not acceptable in typing out the paragraph, then most likely Bengali email addresses will not be accepted and they are related issues in the overall internationalization thing. And the other thing that the group found, and I think there's good agreement as Abdalmonem just mentioned, is we need a good prioritization on engagement with governments, because that's where we break the issue of market failure, which I think Regina earlier mentioned because the demand cannot be seen.

The demand cannot be surfaced. Even if a registrant wants to register it, even if he or she registers, it's hard to host the domain. All of these barriers creates the issue. So, the three things I wanted to particularly highlight from myself is to admit and address the issue of market failure, and therefore policy intervention is going to be important to break this chicken and egg issue.

The next thing that I want to highlight is the concept that Sandra actually earlier mentioned, it is a global solidarity. This is an issue, not just about implementing technical, not just about the market conditions and so on, it is about language justice. UA itself is and definitely should be a foundation for the multilingual Internet, for meaningful access and digital inclusion. So, we need to change the mindset into a multilingual first mindset and that requires a kind of movement, requires a solidarity movement so that people can think of building systems with multilingual first instead of English first, right?

And the last thing I want to mention is that this is something that I've mentioned a few times, but it's really important to break through because a multilingual internet, I truly believe, makes for a safer internet for the global majority. Why? We've been talking about DNS abuse here all the time, phishing. What's the first defense against phishing? Telling people to look at the domain name, the email address that someone sent to you. Right? Before clicking, check the domain name. If it's all in ASCII, it's very difficult

for my dad, who doesn't speak very well English, to actually discern whether that's a safe thing to click on.

So, the first thing that we teach people about cybersecurity, we need to make sure that the domain name and email address can be expressed in languages that people can understand and can see the nuances. So, these are the three things I think, you know, address the market failure, think of it as language justice. We need a multilingual first approach. And then thirdly, multilingual internet really makes for a safer internet. If we can get this across to the engineers and companies, I think we have a fighting chance.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you, Edmon, and Nabil, same question.

NABIL BENAMAR

Thank you, Hadia. So, this is Nabil for the record from SSAC. So, as it has been raised by my colleagues in the Experts Working Group, UA is no longer conceived as a research problem. The standards are there, the specs are there from a long time ago, but it's rather a deployment problem, and we need to deploy this in the whole layers of the stack.

So, UA cannot be achieved through isolated fixes in different front-end changes alone. This is something that should be deployed and implemented and fixed in all the layers of the stack, from the operating system to all other software applications that we are using on a daily basis whether it's from the front end or server side.

So, the lack of internationalization support on key technologies it still impedes the UA, since UA is dependent on internationalization. And definitely we will find out that we need some other experts and trainers that can train the next or the existing engineers and students on internationalization. This is one of the outcomes of our report that has been published, and it will be updated later on this month.

So, mainly collaborative testing environments and shared interoperability exercises may further help identify implementation gaps across platforms and applications. And second, we need also to meet developers where they already work. Something that we have also mentioned before, examples of Stack Overflow, GitHub, GitLab, the Web Summit, IETF, for example, to make sure that any new spec will take into account the Universal Acceptance principle and that the protocol, the standard, the algorithm being developed will be compatible with UA and will help achieve in these noble goals.

And also, as we have mentioned before, we have noticed that the pool of internationalization experts is shrinking and ICANN should look into this and invest in training faculty, identifying experts we need to mentor so that we can continue this and producing localized multilingual training materials like multiplying hackathons, awards, collaborative forums, et cetera.

And at the end, which is not the final thing, it's mainly the academia. We need to continue our work on academia. ICANN has

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already developed a set of curricula that will make it easy for any faculty to deploy this and insert it in the current curricula so that Universal Acceptance principle is seen as the normal thing, not a special case or just another movement into updating software.

The normal one is that any application should be able to implement and assess and process Universal Acceptance and any script smoothly without any problem. So, one of the experiences that we have listened to today was in one of UA Day, they have deployed this and tried the form, to write a form, and to see if the form can accept an international domain address or email address. So, I was curious about which one of the existing software has been tested to make sure that all of them --

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Nabil, if you may please wrap up. Thank you.

NABIL BENAMAR

Yeah, it's already done. Thank you. Over to you, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Nabil, and now we move to Nitin Walia. The floor is yours.

NITIN WALIA

Thank you, Hadia. This is Walia for the record from GNSO. Can I have the question, please, Hadia?

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Sure. So, the question is, what are the key operational and ecosystem barriers preventing Universal Acceptance from progressing from technical readiness to widespread real-world implementation?

NITIN WALIA

So, thank you for the question, Hadia. So, basically, you know, as my fellow speakers have already covered a lot of things about this, I want to add that, you know, the challenge is not the technology, which has been mentioned by everyone. The challenge is prioritization.

Universal Acceptance is not simply a technical enhancement, actually. It is a digital inclusion, an imperative and business growth opportunity for everyone. So, until organizations recognize that billions of users prefer to communicate into their own local language and scripts, UA adoption will not reach to the full potential. And UA adoption will succeed when inclusion becomes business priority and not just a technical priority.

In fact, we all have seen that in the past one decade, a significant amount of work has been done in terms of UA awareness. However, when it comes to implementation and adoption on the ground level, a few of the things which we have seen as coming as a challenge and which has also been covered into our UA expert group document that the big tech companies and the government

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along with the academia and open source and other verticals have to prioritize UA into their work.

Specifically, government when we talk about, they are the key policy decision makers. So, unless they don't bring this thing dedicatedly into their public procurement system, things will not shape in the way we all are looking in. So, that's my short answer for this. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Nitin, and now we move to Sami Mohamed Ali and same question. Let me know if you need me to repeat it.

SAMI MOHAMED ALI

Hi everyone, this is Sami Mohamed Ali from Bahrain, representing ccNSO. Thank you Hadia, and being the last in the panel really, most of the points are going to be repetitive, so I want to keep it short in terms of lack of awareness, I think is one of the key factors that people are still not aware of the Arabic language or any other languages being available online. And English being the main online communication language is one of the key challenges that is there.

But other than that, legacy systems which are in place are also a problem because what happens is nobody wants to upgrade their systems when it comes to government or other organizational structures. And it will take time because there is a lot of investment that has gone in, may it be banking system or any other. When it

comes to business demand as our colleagues have already mentioned, that is another challenge because there is a financial implication on that. And insufficient testing, ecosystem fragmentation are some of other points that were mentioned and I agree with them.

Bahrain perspective that I would like to share from Universal Acceptance is that we have been working with ICANN for the last three years, and as Nabil mentioned, that UA curriculum has been developed and Bahrain was the first country to implement it with the American University of Bahrain. The curriculum which is very much helping out in terms of sharing this information and sharing this knowledge to the students and building the capacity that is required when it comes to know-how of Universal Acceptance in the country.

Other than that, policy-driven implementation from the Telecom Regulatory Authority itself, we have you been encouraging the use of Universal Acceptance. And another initiative that hopefully we will work with ICANN is on building something similar to gmail.com, we will have barid.albahrain which will be a generic email for anybody to go on and register using that domain soon enough. This is something that we are working on currently.

Part of the digitalization of the country, we have developed policies where everything needs to go online and due to that, Arabic is one of the easiest way to communicate and that's why we are working with Universal Acceptance and promoting it. So, the idea here is

like the market might not be in demand right now, but if we start sharing the right approach and bringing it into trend, what happens these days is like WhatsApp brought in the Arabic typing and Facebook also allows you to type in Arabic and so on. So, this kind of language initiatives will help promote, the content will be there and then the need of the IDN and Universal Acceptance will flourish with this. Thank you.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Sami, and thank you to our panelists. We do have one question in the chat, but we don't have time for interaction now, but the question, we will answer it, have our panelists answer it and post it on the wiki. And now I give the floor to Mutegeki for the key takeaways. I've noted some and Mutegeki, do you want to start, or do you want me to start with some of the points that I noted?

MUTEGEKI CLIFF

Well, I could start and thank you so much, Hadia. I'll be quite brief though and I really appreciate the wealth of knowledge we've gained from this session, from the experiences of the UA Days activities that were done by the different organizations. And then also hearing from the Expert Working Group was really enriching. Coupled with the timely publication of the policy brief, was also quite enriching. But from the conversations today, we see one thing being highlighted out, that Universal Acceptance is no longer just a technical issue. And a lot more has to be done to see that

implementation goes beyond the current efforts that we are currently working on.

And that the technical foundations are largely in place and adoption across systems, services and institutions remains uneven. And moving towards the awareness and adoption in the different institutions especially coming to universities, I believe will play a huge role in ensuring that there is widespread implementation of UA. Because when knowledge is gotten widely in the different universities and institutions, it would be easy for implementation to move forward. Thank you so much. Over to you, Hadia.

HADIA ELMINIAWI

Thank you so much, Mutegeki, first for this conclusion. Also, thank you for proposing this session and putting it together and making it possible to happen. So, some of the points that I have noted, multilingual internet is a safer internet, the importance of continuing to work with academia, acknowledging market failure and thus the need for policy intervention.

Prioritization also is a point that I would say all of our panelists pointed it out. The need for standards to mature and also where the UA sits on the technical stack this also is an important point. And with this, we are already three minutes past our time, but again, thank you all, and the discussion continues. I hand the floor to staff to close this session. Thank you to our interpreters. Thanks.

MICHELLE DESMYTER

Thank you so much, Hadia, and thank you, everyone, for joining today's session. And the questions in the Q&A pod, we do have two of them, they will be addressed and answered. We will be posting these on the wiki, so they will be addressed. Thank you so much, everyone. Meeting adjourned and please stop the recording.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]**