Next Steps for Single Character Han Script gTLDs

Executive Summary

The GNSO's Final Report on the new gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process (Final Report) (SubPro) recommended that single character gTLDs "**may be allowed"** [emphasis added] for ideographic scripts if they **"do not introduce confusion risks that rise above commonplace similarities"** [emphasis added], consistent with Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC) and Joint ccNSO-GNSO IDN Report Workgroup (JIG) reports (Rec. 25.4). The GNSO's Phase 1 Final Report on the Internationalized Domain Names Expedited Policy Development Process (IDN EPDP Phase 1) affirmed the SubPro recommendation and further elaborated that the only script that meets the criteria is the Han script. The recommendation further noted that "applications for single-character gTLDs that are ideographs **must not be accepted** [emphasis added] until relevant guidelines from the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean [CJK] Generation Panels [GPs] are developed, finalized after Public Comment…" (Rec. 3.17). CJK GPs stated that the work done in the Root Zone Label Generation Rules (RZ-LGRs) sufficiently addresses the concerns around string similarity for single character Han script gTLDs. However, the majority of the public comments on the CJK GPs' statements opposed moving forward with single character Han script gTLDs, sharing concerns that it would cause end-user confusion due to the multiple meanings of single characters. Similar concerns on single character Han gTLDs were received through the public comment on the draft Applicant Guidebook sections, which included the section for IDNs.

ICANN org discussed the community feedback with the Implementation Review Team (IRT) IDN Sub-Track. The Sub-Track concluded not to move forward with the single character Han script gTLDs given the community input. ICANN org discussed this further with the SubPro IRT. The SubPro IRT suggested a decision to not move forward should be taken to the GNSO Council for consideration.

Feedback from the community suggests that single character Han script gTLDs present a semantic ambiguity issue which will result in end user confusion. In light of this community input, ICANN org believes that the recommendation for the new gTLD round should not be implemented in 2026 because no solution has been identified which would clearly meet the conditions in SubPro Recommendation 25.4 and IDN EPDP Phase 1 Recommendation 3.17. If the GNSO Council agrees with this conclusion, the Council could advise on a mechanism which could be pursued for the future.

Introduction

The GNSO's Final Report on the new gTLD Subsequent Procedures Policy Development Process (Final Report) (SubPro) recommended that single character gTLDs may be allowed for ideographic scripts:

> ***SubPro Recommendation 25.4:*** *Single character gTLDs **may be allowed** [emphasis added] for limited script/language combinations where a character is an ideograph (or*

*ideogram) and **do not introduce confusion risks that rise above commonplace similarities** [emphasis added], consistent with SSAC and Joint ccNSO-GNSO IDN Workgroup (JIG) reports.*

Further details are available in Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC) [SAC052](#) and [Joint ccNSO-GNSO IDN Report Workgroup (JIG)](#) reports. The GNSO's Phase 1 Final Report on the Internationalized Domain Names Expedited Policy Development Process ([IDN EPDP Phase 1](#)) affirmed the SubPro recommendation and elaborated on it:

> ***IDN EPDP Phase 1 Final Recommendation 3.17:*** *The EPDP Team affirmed the Recommendation 25.4 in the SubPro PDP Final Report that single-character gTLDs may only be allowed for limited scripts and languages where a character is an ideograph. At the time of the EPDP Team's deliberations, t**he only script that meets the criteria is the Han script** [emphasis added], which is used in the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean languages. Nevertheless, applications for single-character gTLDs that are ideographs **must not be accepted** [emphasis added] until relevant guidelines from the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Generation Panels are developed, finalized after Public Comment, and implemented in the New gTLD Program. In the event that the Generation Panels determine such additional guidelines beyond the analysis already provided in the RZ-LGR unnecessary, applications for single-character gTLDs in the Han script shall be accepted.*

Following the relevant recommendations, ICANN reached out to the chairs of the CJK GPs, who met several times to discuss the matter of single character Han script gTLDs in more detail and also consulted with the GP members. CJK GPs stated that the work done in the Root Zone Label Generation Rules ([RZ-LGRs](#)) addresses the technical concerns for string similarity for single character Han script TLDs.

Public Comments Not Supporting Single Character Han Script gTLDs
ICANN published the [statements from CJK GPs](#) for [public comment](#) on 27 June 2024. Of the 16 comments received, 13 opposed moving forward with Han single character gTLDs and one supported, and two raised other comments. Respondents cited various concerns including potential end-user confusion due to the multiple meanings of single characters and the perception that their use may not be culturally appropriate. The Chinese GP co-chair noted in public comment that "C[hinese] GP LGR addressed the issue of variant label generation for variant characters and visually identical characters. The semantic ambiguity issues have never been within the scope of our work," adding that "In response to the feedback from CGP members, I hold the view that, as a team, CGP, should NOT, and has NOT be involved in registration policy discussions on single character issue, ICANN should introduce other mechanisms to reduce the risk of single-character TLD rather than just relying on LGR." Therefore, further guidance from the CGP may not be available.

On 10 September 2024, ICANN org published the second set of draft Applicant Guidebook sections for [public comment](#), which included the section for IDNs. Many additional comments

were received reiterating that single character Han script gTLDs should not be implemented at this time as these cause end user confusion due to semantic ambiguity. The feedback indicates that more work needs to be done by the community before deciding on if and how these single character gTLDs should be allowed.

Summary of Discussion by IRT IDN Sub-Track
On the [Implementation Review Team (IRT) IDN Sub-Track call](#) held on November 26, 2024, a total of 21 community members joined and discussed options for the Han Single Character gTLDs, most from the Han script community. The discussion included the context of the relevant SubPro recommendation (25.4) and the IDN EPDP Phase 1 recommendation (3.17). Based on the public comment input, the IDN Sub-Track IRT was asked for input on the next steps.

Concerns were reiterated by the members about the complexity of the Han script and it was noted that a single character **may have multiple meanings which may evolve and change over time, potentially causing end-user confusion**. During the call, two participants strongly opposed moving forward with the recommendation while another suggested postponing the inclusion of single-character gTLDs at least in the immediate next round, leaving the possibility open for reconsideration in future rounds. There was no support expressed by members for moving forward with the inclusion of Han single character gTLDs in the application process for the next round.

Summary of Discussion with SubPro IRT
Given the concerns raised by the community in public comments on moving forward with implementing the single character Han script gTLDs, ICANN org presented the above summary during the [SubPro IRT call](#) on 3 December 2024. The SubPro IRT was asked by ICANN org to advise on the following:

1. Whether or not to pursue this recommendation further for implementation?
    a. If yes, then advise how to proceed.
        i. And in case of proceeding, suggest if it is ok to not allow Han script single character gTLDs in the next round of new gTLDs in 2026, given the limited time for implementation.
    b. If no, then if/how the GNSO Council needs to be informed.

The SubPro IRT suggested that if ICANN org is considering not moving forward with implementation of the recommendation in the next round of new gTLDs in 2026, with the rationale that the conditions for implementation are not met based on community input, ICANN should inform the GNSO Council.

ICANN Org Recommendation
Feedback from the community indicates that single character Han script gTLDs present a semantic ambiguity issue which will result in end user confusion. As a result, ICANN org believes the recommendation should not be implemented for the new gTLD round in 2026 because no solution has been identified which clearly meets the the condition in SubPro Recommendation 25.4 and IDN EPDP Phase 1 Recommendation 3.17. If the GNSO Council

agrees with this conclusion, the Council could advise on a mechanism which could be pursued for the future.

ANNEX I: Background

Han script is used when writing Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages and is unique from other scripts because its characters can represent a word (at times with different meanings) and combination of characters may form additional words. Such scripts are called ideographic scripts. (Other examples of ideographic scripts include Egyptian Hieroglyphs, which is now extinct in its use).

Domain names in different languages and scripts are called Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs). Such domain names contain at least one non-ASCII character[1]. Top-level domains (TLDs) are those which come after the last dot in a domain label, e.g. "org" in "icann.org". Single character IDN TLDs which are formed by using only one non-ASCII character.

Single character TLDs for Han script were considered by the Joint ccNSO-GNSO IDN Working Group (JIG) in the JIG Final Report on Single Character IDN TLDs, published in March 2011. The ICANN Board resolved in August 2011 that further work on this topic should be conducted as all of the technical and policy considerations (including those raised by the JIG) must be addressed prior to the delegation of any single-character IDN TLDs.

The SSAC looked into the matter further and published the SSAC Advisory on Delegation of Single-Character Internationalized Domain Name Top-Level Domains (SAC052) in January 2012. SSAC recommended a conservative approach to the delegation of single-character IDN top-level domains. In particular, SAC052 recommended that ICANN should disallow by default the delegation of all single-character IDN TLDs in all scripts; exceptions are possible, but only after careful consideration of each individual case. The SSAC also noted ongoing efforts by technical and linguistic communities on string confusion and variant analysis which can inform this work.

Following these discussions, since 2013, the ICANN community took up a detailed analysis of code points and their variants for TLDs following the Procedure to Develop and Maintain the Label Generation Rules for the Root Zone in Respect of IDNA Labels (the RZ-LGR Procedure). The work resulted in the publication of the Root Zone Label Generation Rules (RZ-LGR). RZ-LGR proposals for each script went through multiple public comment periods to gather input from the broader ICANN community. Detailed considerations for each script are explained by the panels in their supporting documents. Chinese, Japanese and Korean script communities, which use Han script, also formed their Generation Panels and conducted this work and published their proposals for the RZ-LGR. These proposals have since then been integrated into the RZ-LGR version 5.

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[1] ASCII-based domain names are those formed by only using letters A-Z, a-z, digits 0-9 and hyphen.