

Variant Top-Level Domains (Variant TLDs)

The Registrar Stakeholder Group has developed this high-level overview of what Variant TLDs are, where they may be used, and how they affect registrars.

What are Variant TLDs?

- Variant TLDs are top-level domains that are considered equivalent to another TLD because the characters (“labels”) represent the same word
- For example, in the Chinese language many words written in Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese have different characters but mean the same thing. Users understand them as the same word, allowing the Variant TLDs (if they exist) to be used interchangeably
- Where a Variant exists, the user can be confident that all related domains will be managed by the same registrar and registrant
- Registering a domain does not mean that the Variant is registered; it is reserved for the same entity but it does not have to be registered

Where are Variant TLDs used?

Variants are used in Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs). They can help with:

- Supporting users in their local language where characters have multiple established forms or the same meaning or sound, e.g. Chinese or Arabic
- Preventing and/or reducing look-alike or deceptive domain names

Examples:

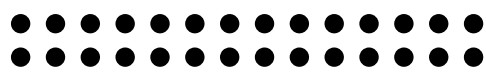
.语言 has an allocatable Variant .語言
.straße has an allocatable Variant .strasse

What’s changing in 2026?

Variants have been available at the second level for many years. The changes in early 2026 include:

- Applications for Top-Level Variants can be submitted in the upcoming 2026 gTLD round. This round is the first time Top-Level Variants will be available.
- Rules governing Variants are now more clearly defined and are standardized across scripts





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How do Variant TLDs affect registrars?

- Registrars are not required to support Variants
 - If a registrar chooses **not** to support Variants, nothing changes
 - They cannot accidentally register or transfer Variants
 - They will not receive Variant domains unexpectedly
- Variant management is expected to become more standardized over time
- There is a new [EPP extension](#) in development that can be used both for TLD and second-level domains (SLD) Variants

What does the RrSG think?

- There is positive impact for registrants to have domains in local languages
- Variants can be a selling point for registrars that implement them, as not all registrars will opt in to offer Variants
- Variants do mean additional effort for registrars as it requires implementation of a registry-defined EPP extension, software and database changes, and likely increased customer support needs

What else should registrars know?

- Variant sets are treated as group block and must have common registration data and registrar, but individual names in the Variant set may have different DNS; the registrant is not required to have them point to the same website
- Variants across TLDs can be complicated, but the increased burden of implementation is heavier for registries than registrars
- Registrars who opt in can retrieve the required information via EPP

Where to read more

- [Root Zone Label Generation Rules - ICANN](#)
- [Second-Level Reference Label Generation Rules - ICANN](#)
- [ICANN85 TechOps presentation](#)
- [ICANN New gTLD Program](#)

