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The EDNS(0) Padding Option  
draft-mayrhofer-edns0-padding-01

## Abstract

This document specifies the EDNS(0) 'Padding' option, which allows DNS clients and servers to pad request and response messages by a variable number of octets.

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[1.](#) Introduction

The Domain Name System (DNS) [[RFC1035](#)] was specified to transport DNS packets in clear text form. Since this can expose significant amounts of information about the internet activities of an end user, the IETF has undertaken work to provide confidentiality to DNS transactions (see the DPRIVE WG). Encrypting the DNS transport is considered as one of the options to improve the situation.

However, even if both DNS query and response packets were encrypted, meta data of these packets could be used to correlate such packets with well known unencrypted packets, hence jeopardizing some of the confidentiality gained by encryption. One such property is the message size.

This document specifies the Extensions Mechanisms for DNS (EDNS(0)) "Padding" Option, which allows to artificially increase the size of a DNS message by a variable number of bytes, significantly hampering size-based correlation of the encrypted packet.

[2.](#) Terminology

The terms "Requestor", "Responder" are to be interpreted as specified in [[RFC6891](#)].

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in

### 3. The 'Padding' Option

The EDNS(0) [RFC6891] specifies a mechanism to include new options in DNS packets, contained in the RDATA of the OPT meta-RR. This document specifies the 'Padding' option in order to allow clients and servers pad DNS packets by a variable number of bytes. The 'Padding' option MUST occur at most once per OPT meta-RR.

The figure below specifies the structure of the option in the RDATA of the OPT RR:

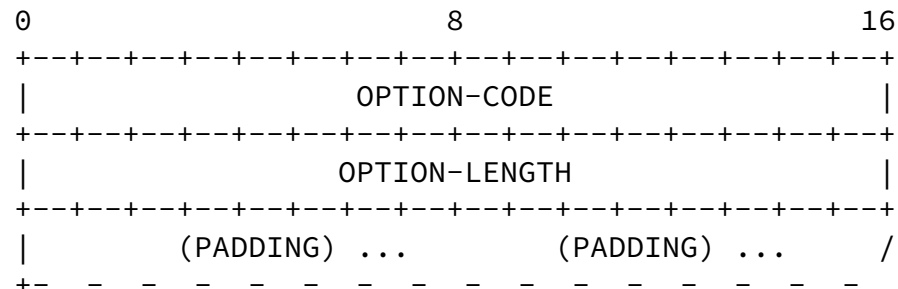


Figure 1

The OPTION-CODE for the 'Padding' option is [[TODO-IANA]].

The OPTION-LENGTH for the 'Padding' option is the size (in octets) of the PADDING. The minimum number of padding octets is 0.

The PADDING octets MUST be set to 0x00. If a Responder detects non-0x00 octets in the padding of a query, a FORMERR (RCODE=1) MUST be returned.

### 4. Usage Considerations

This document does not specify the actual amount of padding to be used, since this depends on the situation in which the option is used. However, padded DNS messages MUST NOT exceed the respective

UDP payload size (see [Section 6.2.3](#) and 6.2.4 of [\[RFC6891\]](#)).

Responders MUST pad DNS responses when the respective DNS query included the 'Padding' option, unless doing so would violate the maximum UDP payload size.

Responders MAY pad DNS responses when the respective DNS query indicated EDNS(0) support of the Requestor.

Responders MUST NOT pad DNS responses when the respective DNS query did not indicate EDNS(0).

## [5.](#) IANA Considerations

IANA is requested to assign an EDNS Option Code (as described in [Section 9 of \[RFC6891\]](#)) for the 'Padding' option specified in this document.

## [6.](#) Security Considerations

Padding DNS packets obviously increases their size, and will therefore lead to increased traffic, can lead to increased number of truncated packets when used over UDP-based transport.

The use of the EDNS(0) Padding provides only a benefit when DNS packets are not transported in clear text. Implementations therefore SHOULD avoid using this option if the DNS transport is not encrypted.

The payload of the 'Padding' option could be used as a covert channel. In order to prevent this, padding octets are required to be set to 0x00. It shall be noted that variations in the OPTION-SIZE itself could still be abused for expensive and low-bandwidth covert communication.

## [7.](#) Acknowledgements

This document was inspired by a discussion with Daniel Kahn Gillmor during IETF93, as an alternative to the proposed padding on the TLS layer.

## [8.](#) Changes

### [8.1. draft-mayrhofer-edns0-padding-01](#)

Changed minimum padding size to 0, rewrote Usage Considerations section, extended Security considerations section

### [8.2. draft-mayrhofer-edns0-padding-00](#)

Initial version

## [9. Normative References](#)

- [RFC1035] Mockapetris, P., "Domain names - implementation and specification", STD 13, [RFC 1035](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC1035, November 1987, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc1035>>.

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- [RFC2119] Bradner, S., "Key words for use in RFCs to Indicate Requirement Levels", [BCP 14](#), [RFC 2119](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC2119, March 1997, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2119>>.
- [RFC6891] Damas, J., Graff, M., and P. Vixie, "Extension Mechanisms for DNS (EDNS(0))", STD 75, [RFC 6891](#), DOI 10.17487/RFC6891, April 2013, <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc6891>>.

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