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Council of Europe ISBN Guidelines

What is an ISBN?

The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is a 13-digit number that uniquely identifies books and book-like (digital) products published internationally.

The purpose of the ISBN is to establish and identify one title or edition of a title from one specific publisher and is unique to that edition, allowing for more efficient marketing of products by booksellers, libraries, universities, wholesalers and distributors.

What is the format of the ISBN?

Every ISBN consists of thirteen digits and whenever it is printed it is preceded by the letters ISBN. According to ISO standards, the thirteen-digit number is divided into five parts as follows:

1. The prefix "978"
2. Group or country identifier; for example "2" for France, "3" for Germany and "92" for International NGO Publishers and EU Organizations.
3. Publisher identifier which identifies a particular publisher within a group; "871" for the Council of Europe
4. 4 digits title identifier which identifies a particular title or edition of a title;
5. Check digit is the single digit at the end of the ISBN which validates the ISBN.

Therefore all books published by the Council of Europe will bear an ISBN with the following format 978-92-871-XXXX-Y.

Why do we need ISBNs?

The ISBN being the standard ID number used to identify books by booksellers, libraries, book wholesalers and distributors. You need an ISBN if you plan to sell your book in bookstores, to libraries or wholesalers, or through online retailers like Amazon.co or GooglePlay.

When don't I need an ISBN?

Council of Europe documents and reports, and other communications materials, regardless of length, do not require ISBN unless they are to be sold and distributed through commercial channels.

There are no legal requirements that ISBN numbers must be assigned to publications published and circulated in Europe. For publications printed and issued only to a closed circle of people and which are not made available or promoted to the public, neither in printed nor electronic form, no ISBN is necessary or relevant.

Therefore, Council of Europe communications materials and specialised documents or reports, regardless of length, do not require ISBN unless they are to be sold and distributed through commercial channels.

How do I use the ISBNs?

An ISBN should be assigned to each individual title.

- Each language version is a different product with a new ISBN.
- Each format or binding must have a new ISBN (i.e. hardcover, paperbound, e-book format, etc).
- A new ISBN is required for a revised edition.

Once assigned, an ISBN can never be reused (except for reprints without change). An ISBN is printed on the lower portion of the back cover of a book above the bar code and again on the copyright page.

Who is in charge of Council of Europe ISBNs?

The Directorate of Communications is the central authority assigning ISBN for the Organisation (publishing@coe.int) and is in charge of the publishing policy.

What are the criteria to apply for a CoE ISBN number?

Assignment of ISBNs is subject to the respect of Council of Europe's publishing quality control standards, in English and French. The publications are approved by the Directorate of Communication.

Because ISBNs provide visibility, Council of Europe only issues ISBNs to publications that fulfill the Organisation's quality control criteria. These include editorial standards, technical standards, compliance with the graphic charter, compliance with rights criteria, and link with a market and/or a clear distribution plan.

What about co-publishing projects?

Co-publishing agreements define the responsibilities of each party and the shared copyright. Depending on their terms;

- one party can propose its own ISBN scheme and therefore be in charge of the commercial dissemination,
- or, a double ISBN can be registered for the title, and both parties are responsible of the dissemination of the work through both commercial networks.

And if I publish the manuscript with a third party (publisher)?

Programme managers, and field offices staff in particular, may build partnerships with local/national publishers who will be in charge of publishing and disseminating on their market some genuine publications or translations of previous publications.

A publishing agreement shall then define the obligations of each party including the transfer of copyright, insertion of a disclaimer and CoE logo layout, reference to the original CoE copyrighted version and the non-official nature of the translation if relevant.

In this case, the local/national publisher is responsible for granting an ISBN to the publication if disseminating through the book trade (ISBN with a national radical and the single publisher identifier).

Council of Europe Offices and Programme Offices should not register to a national/regional ISBN agency.

The Council of Europe in Strasbourg holds the copyright for all Council of Europe publications. Using the CoE ISBN number means the Offices and staff are protected for copyright laws.