

IFLA Statement on Open Access in Intergovernmental Organisations

Intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) play a significant role in our economies and societies, with a mission to improve the situation of humanity. They agree treaties and conventions, set standards and recommendations, and publish research and statistics that support research, and shape and inform the policies of Member States. The United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, sets out a comprehensive set of priorities for governments around the world.

In parallel, the Open Access movement has become an established part of the scholarly publications landscape. More people in more countries have access to more publications than ever before. Governments and other funders are increasingly creating open access mandates for publicly funded research. They justify this by the fact that open access enables reading and re-use by other researchers – in particular those who cannot afford academic subscriptions or one-off licence fees – and the principle that the public should have access to work for which they have paid.

It follows that there is a strong argument for immediate open access publication of research and data by IGOs. Removing paywalls means that money is no longer a barrier to access and re-use of publications and research outputs which offer important insights, showcase best practises, and inform government policy.

Moreover, as organisations funded by Member States – and so by their citizens' taxes – IGOs are covered by the argument that people should have access to work for which they have paid. In addition, by providing the widest possible access to information, organisations work towards the public interest goals for which they were established. They should implement Articles 19 and 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as the torch bearers of the values this historic document represents.

Finally, IGOs also provide an important example for Member States, and have, for example through the Sustainable Development Goals and the G7 Open Data Charter, also made explicit calls for access to information.

Nevertheless, it is clear that removing paywalls is only a partial solution. For works produced by IGOs to be truly accessible, they need to be discoverable. Well-constructed platforms and effective use of metadata are essential. So too is the possibility to search and download works.

The use of standardised open licences, such as the Intergovernmental Organisation licences stewarded by Creative Commons, is advisable. Providing clear, open licensing information simplifies the work of researchers, librarians and others in determining what uses are permissible.

Moreover, digital publishing activities within IGOs need to be strengthened and modernised, and shift their focus towards greater impact using free online publishing and marketing tools, as well as measuring research uptake by policy (and vice versa). In order to support this, there must be investment in discoverability tools, such as catalogue records.

IGOs should set an example in their adoption of accessible formats, as well as promoting machine-readable formats that enable text and data mining. In order to facilitate the work of librarians and others, information about open access policies and licensing should be easily found, and as consistent as possible. The provision of additional services for a transparent fee is acceptable, and may well add value, but should not come at the cost of the core offer.

In line with IFLA's Statement on Public Access to Government Legal Information, Intergovernmental Organisations should also ensure that works they publish – especially where they have legal effect – have authentication measures built in, and are subject to a comprehensive preservation policy.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS SHOULD:

- Adopt and publish open access policies, including for publications produced in partnership with other organisations¹, using standardised open licences, no embargo periods as far as possible, an offer of meaningful discovery tools², and ensuring that users, at a minimum, can search and download files in accessible, machine-readable formats, while respecting privacy where appropriate.
- Where paid for services are launched, these should not compromise good open access to works (as set out above), but rather offer the added-value that may warrant the introduction of a reasonable fee.
- Authorise and task IGO organisational units with coordinating and implementing comprehensive preservation policies, and, in collaboration with other involved stakeholders, ensure possibility to authenticate organisational research/data output in publications.

MEMBER STATES SHOULD:

- Ensure sufficient support and training for (digital) publishing to ensure good quality publishing, publishing platforms and marketing.
- Ensure training and support, including funding, for long-term ICT digital preservation solutions.
- Apply existing open access mandates to publications from the IGOs they fund.
- Require OA mandates from IGOs they fund when relevant OA policies do not exist.

Agreed by the IFLA Governing Board, December 2018

¹ Including with commercial partners, as far as possible

² This should include facets by type of publication, country and subject