

Global action, global access? The IGO Licensing Landscape

- *The Intergovernmental Organisation (IGO) space continues to be characterised by a diversity of approaches to licensing of the materials they publish, including between different materials from the same organisation*
- *Despite the limits this places on possibilities to reuse and apply insights from their publications, many IGOs continue to use restrictive terms. Nonetheless, there are possibilities to strengthen the uptake of standardised open licences (such as Creative Commons)*
- *A more harmonised approach to licensing, as well as investment in repositories and clearer information would also support reuse of UN work. This would be in line with the UN 2.0 agenda.*

In its 2018 Statement on Open Access in Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs), IFLA called for these entities to commit to open access to the materials that they publish. In particular, it highlighted the value of:

- Standardised licences
- Zero embargo periods or paywalls
- Possibilities to search and download materials

In addition, we noted the need for comprehensive preservation policies and authentication tools.

In a notable piece of news earlier this year, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) adopted a new Open Access Policy. This is significant as the OECD had previously led in promoting a ‘freemium’ model which offered free read-only materials, while keeping downloadable publications behind a paywall.

In the light of this, as well as the emphasis in IFLA’s own [2022 Open Access statement](#) that access should be understood as including possibilities for reuse, it is worth looking at how well the different parts of the intergovernmental system are doing.

This research is based on an analysis of 58 IGOs, including 46 UN agencies, commissions or other associated bodies), 6 development banks, 3 regional organisations (the European Commission, African Union and Association of South East Asian Nations), and 2 plurilateral organisations (the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and International Energy Agency) and the World Trade Organisation (which has relations with the UN). The analysis was carried out in August 2024, and full data is included in annex.

In each case, we started by looking for a general copyright statement for their website and related content. We also consulted recent publications for copyright notices, as well as repository and data portals where available.

In each case, we first looked for an established licence (Creative Commons), and otherwise classified these by the rights that they gave users. We also took note of the following issues:

- How easy it was to find copyright information
- Apparent inconsistencies in copyright information
- The existence of a published open access policy

The below offers a set of conclusions from the analysis carried out. The full notes on the licensing practices of each organisation is provided in annex, alongside a glossary of the acronyms used for the different organisations.

1: Different versions of boilerplate text are in widespread use

Perhaps understandably, in setting their copyright policies, UN agencies and other IGOs appear to take inspiration from each other. There are two relatively standard sets of terms in use. Unfortunately, neither of these is particularly permissive, and fall a long way short of open access. One in fact is little more than a statement of all rights being reserved, and demanding that all uses be subject to permission (15 of the 58 use this), and the other allows only downloads and personal and private research uses (21 use this). A variation on this allows for educational uses as well (an additional 11).

***Takeaway:** standardised texts appear to be powerful, even if it is clear that there is no effort yet to enforce uniform copyright policies across the UN system. While currently this appears to be working against OA, the reverse could also be true with the right push at the right level.*

2. There remains a tendency towards maximalist/anti-access policies

As indicated in the previous section, over half of the organisations assessed (34) still maintained relatively restrictive policies which do not allow for any meaningful re-use of materials. Examples of these texts are provided below:

None of the materials provided on this web site may be used, reproduced or transmitted, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or the use of any information storage and retrieval system, except as provided for in the Terms and Conditions of Use of United Nations Web Sites, without permission in writing from the publisher. Source: UNCTAD

A similar text is used by: WFP (for publications), UNWTO (for publications), UPU (for their website), WMO (for publications), ITU (for their website), UNRWA (for some publications), UNHCR, UNU (some publications), UNOPS (some

publications), OPCW, ITC, EBRD (for publications) and UNECA (for publications, where there is a notice)

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Similar texts feature in the copyright notices for: UNDP, UN Habitat, UNICEF, UNEP (for their website), WFP (for their website), UNTWO (for their website), ICAO (for their website), WMO, UIS (for their website), UNOPS (for their website), ICC (for their website), ASEAN (for most outputs), ADB (for their website), AfDB (for their website), EBRD (for their website), AU (for those publications with a copyright notice), IsDB, UNESCAP, UNESCWA, UNECE and OHCHR.

There are some variations on this. For example, UNCTAD makes clear that copying and reuse of its press materials is subject to looser restrictions (presumably given a desire to make it easier for journalists to pick up on its work).

News-related material can be used as long as the appropriate credit is given and the United Nations is advised. Source: UNCTAD

The AU and IOM also have such texts.

There are also some IGOs which make clear that beyond personal research, it is possible to use materials for educational purposes:

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission from the copyright holder provided acknowledgment of the source is made. The United Nations Environment Programme would appreciate receiving a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source. Source: UNEP

Other organisations with such text are: UNFPA (for their website), FAO (for their website), IFAD (for their website), WHO (for their website), UNAIDS, UN Women, UNITAR, UNFCCC (for their audiovisual material), CBTBO and AfDB (for their publications).

However, others like the International Monetary Fund, while saying that educational uses do not require payments nonetheless oblige users to go through the Copyright Clearance Centre. The European Central Bank, while

generally very permissive (see more below), requires permission for any reprints or republications of articles with named staff authors.

More permissive (but non-standard provisions) include broader permissions for use inside organisations, including for commercial purposes (UPU – which makes sense given that many of their members are postal services).

There are a cluster of organisations offering general permissions for non-commercial copying and use, without using a CC-BY-NC licence: IFAD (for publications), WTO and IADB. The latter looks to restrict framing. Beyond this, there are 5 IGOs which explicitly use a CC-BY-NC or CC-BY-NC-SA licence: WHO (for its own publications), the World Bank (for some publications and most photos), the ITU (for some of its publications), UNU (for its website and some publications) and UNFCCC (for photos)

The World Bank (for its website) and UIS (for its website and content) set out rules along the lines of a CC-BY-NC-ND licence, ruling out derivative works. 5 organisations explicitly use the CC licence: WMO (for video content), the World Bank (for some publications), the IOM (for post-2021 publications), the ADB (for joint publications) and the IDB (for some data). Meanwhile, the FAO (for publications) and ILO (for audiovisual content) use a CC-BY-ND or CC-BY-ND-SA licence.

The IEA, in its Policies and Measures database also underlines that any uses should not compete with the original.

Others are more permissive, allowing more or less any use with attribution: UNFPA (for its publications), FAO (for its news stories), IAEA, OECD (for pre 1 July 2024 publications, with the exception of commercial translations), ASEAN (although they also want copies of works based on theirs sent to them), and the ECB (with no framing, and the exception set out above).

Organisations which have explicitly adopted CC-BY or CC-BY-SA licences are: FAO (for data), the WHO (for publications published externally), WIPO, the World Bank (for datasets and some publications), UNESCO (for publications), OECD (for publications post 1 July 2024), the IEA (with some exceptions), ADB (for data and its own publications), IDB (publications), AfDB (Data) and the European Commission.

Finally, the UNFCCC and WTO are the only organisations which explicitly underline that their official documents are in the public domain.

Takeaway: *there are some clear leaders in the IGO space, including two of the organisations which might otherwise be expected to take a more hostile approach towards more permissive copyright – UNESCO and WIPO. However,*

there remains a lot of progress to be made in order to ensure that work carried out 'for the people' is properly available to them.

3. Take-up of standardised licences is inadequate, but there is little reason not to expand

As already hinted at in the previous section, there remain relatively few IGOs using CC licences – just 16 in total for at least part of their outputs. However, as also set out, there are 11 organisations which are using licences which are broadly similar to CC licences for some or all of their materials, and so which could rapidly move to adopt these (given that the OECD has done so for materials going forwards, we do not include them in this 11). This would have the benefit of helping those working with materials to understand more quickly what is possible with them

***Takeaway:** while uptake of CC licensing remains relatively low, it would be possible to expand this rapidly if those IGOs using similar terms for access to and reuse of their materials were to adopt them. This of course does not solve the issue of the use of CC licences which are sometimes seen as not being truly open (NC and ND).*

4. There remains a lot of inconsistency in approaches taken across materials

A number of names appear in multiple sections above, underlining that IGOs often take different approaches to licensing different elements of their outputs. For example content on websites is often subject to different provisions as publications or data – sometimes more permissive, sometimes less so. This can make it more difficult for those using data to understand what they can do rapidly, costing time and effort. To some extent, this makes sense – for example, data may be better suited to a more open licence. However, either way it adds complexity, and raises the question of whether this is the result of deliberate decision-making, or different parts of an organisation taking decisions about different content.

***Takeaway:** it could be valuable to look at differences in copyright treatment of different outputs, and to verify if there is a good reason for these to exist. If not, these should be harmonised, ideally in the direction of more permissive licences.*

5. There are still IGOs that do not provide clear or consistent information

A worrying feature is that it is not always easy to find copyright information, in particular for website content. While most IGOs do include this as part of their terms of use, terms and conditions, and wider legal provisions, 8 IGOs do not, either making it difficult to find (for example, the WHO includes it as a hyperlink behind their name), just make a general copyright claim (such as UNIDO), include something less helpful like the ITC: 'copyrights © 2024', or have a broken link (UNECA). Often this then means that it's necessary to go

publication by publication to work out what is possible, which does not help in establishing possibilities of re-use of website material.

A further complication comes where there are different rights – for example a claim of ‘all rights reserved’, and then the provision of some rights to users (UN, UNDP, UN Habitat, UNICEF, WHO). WMO applies a CC licence to video, but then tries to prevent distribution, while UIS suggests that only non-commercial reuse is permitted, but then applies a CC-BY-SA licence. Finally, the IMF proposes an odd definition of fair use which is not consistent with that in US and other law.

***Takeaway:** IGOs should have clear copyright policies which give information about what it is possible for people to do with works. In doing so, they should check that their policies are consistent.*

6. There are positive – but rare – examples of IGOs that positive encourage use

More positively, some IGOs start their copyright policies with a positive reference to the importance of access and reuse, for example in the case of the IAEA:

To ensure wide dissemination of its information, the IAEA is committed to making its content freely available and encourages the use, reproduction and dissemination of the text, multimedia and data presented.

Similar texts are in place for the FAO, IFAD, WTO, the World Bank’s Open Knowledge Repository, the ADB, the AfDB and UNFCCC’s video content.

These are certainly welcome given the positive focus on permission and reuse, rather than simple permission, that they give. They are also, arguably, consistent with the goal of IGOs to benefit humanity as a whole.

***Takeaway:** there are strong – but still rare – examples of actively taking a positive approach in policies, not just allowing but encouraging use and reuse of materials. This sends a positive signal to users, and could be worth spreading more widely.*

7. There is a growing core of IGOs that have Open Access policies

Similarly, there are now 6 IGOs as a whole that have an explicit open access policy: FAO, WHO, ILO, WIPO, OECD and ADB. This makes sense, given their role as significant producers of research, although it raises the question of why others are not also adopting such approaches.

Within these, there are – in particular – cases of explicit coverage of articles published in external journals (such as the WHO’s policy), looking to contribute

to wider efforts to accelerate a transition towards open access by enforcing adoption of CC-BY licences.

***Takeaway:** Some IGOs are following the model of the wider research sector and establishing open access policies. Given the role of IGOs in producing research (much of which is unique, given their reach), it would be powerful to encourage wider uptake of this idea.*

8. The potential benefits of harmonisation and standardisation

An overall conclusion from this work is that there remains a lot of variation in IGOs' approach to copyright, both between and within organisations. The result is that anyone working with their materials cannot rely on a simple rule (as for example is the case when a national government establishes that its work is under a permissive licence), requiring time and effort to resolve. The low uptake of commonly used licences such as Creative Commons, even when terms are already well aligned, makes things more complicated than they need to be too.

However, harmonisation could hardly be described as a success if it were to be around less permissive terms, such as those set out in the boilerplate texts mentioned in the first point above. IGOs exist in order to serve humanity as a whole, and so there is a strong argument that their work should be available to all. In particular, adopting licences such as CC-BY or CC-BY-SA also make it easier to use IGO texts on Wikipedia for example.

Fortunately, there are strong examples – both of permissive licensing, but also of a positive approach to access and use, as well as open access policies – that could and arguably should spread.

***Takeaway:** the current landscape of IGO licensing remains unnecessarily complicated and closed. In line with the UN's focus on better knowledge management and support for public access to information, it is time to address its own practices here, and ideally move in the direction of a shared, open approach. This can be backed up with further work to standardise repositories and open access policies.*

Conclusion

The picture of licensing practices amongst IGOs remains frustrating. While there are some positive examples – notably the OECD – many continue to take a restrictive-by-default approach to copyright. To some extent, this may be driven by a lack of focus on the question, with individual agencies simply following the example of others.

Already in the academic sector, there is a growing consensus – and evidence base – in favour of openness not only as a positive for equity, but also as an accelerator of dissemination and uptake. Given the focus on better use of knowledge and knowledge sharing in the Pact for the Future, the public funding

of UN agencies, and the UN's emphasis on leaving no-one behind, the case is strong for a more purposeful approach to adopting open licensing.

ANNEX: Data

	Agency	Clear policy?	Licence	Link	Notes
1	United Nations (UN)	Yes	All Rights Reserved (ARR) at bottom of homepage Download and copy for personal, non-commercial use. No derivative works etc.	https://www.un.org/en/about-us/copyright	The United Nations grants permission to Users to visit the Site and to download and copy the information, documents and materials (collectively, "Materials") from the Site for the User's personal, non-commercial use, without any right to resell or redistribute them or to compile or create derivative works therefrom, subject to the terms and conditions outlined below, and also subject to more specific restrictions that may apply to specific Material within this Site.
2	UN Development Programme (UNDP)	Yes (T&C)	ARR at bottom of homepage Download and copy for personal, non-commercial use. No derivative works etc.	https://www.un.org/copyright-terms-use	As UN
3	UN Habitat	No	ARR at bottom of homepage Download and copy for personal, non-commercial use. No derivative works etc.	None (need to go by report)	ARR

4	UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)	Yes (Legal)	ARR Download and copy for personal, non-commercial use. No derivative works etc.	https://www.unicef.org/legal#copyright	ARR
5	UN Environment Programme (UNEP)	Yes (Terms of Use)	Website: Download and copy for personal, non-commercial use. No derivative works etc. Publications: Allows education, non-profit uses	https://www.unep.org/terms-use	As UN But also: This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission from the copyright holder provided acknowledgment of the source is made. The United Nations Environment Programme would appreciate receiving a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source. No use of this publication may be made for resale or for any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior permission in writing from the United Nations Environment Programme.
6	World Food Programme (WFP)	Yes (Terms of Use)	Non-commercial, personal use on the website On the AR, ARR	https://cdn.wfp.org/legal/terms/	On website: as UN On publications: ARR
7	UN Population Fund (UNFPA)	Yes (Terms of Use)	ARR initially, with quotation, research, private study, larger	https://www.unfpa.org/terms-use	As WHO

			parts for education and np Publications: ARR but also CC-BY (ND?)		On a publication: Copyright © 2024 United Nations Population Fund, all rights reserved. Reproduction is authorized provided the source is acknowledged.
8	Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)	Yes (T&C)	Repo: CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO DB: CC-BY 4.0	General – https://www.fao.org/contact-us/terms/en/ Repository – https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/eeb0bb78-3208-4888-9d9f-191173c7995f/content Database – https://www.fao.org/contact-us/terms/db-terms-of-use/en/	Content on the FAO website is protected by copyright. To ensure wide dissemination of its information, FAO is committed to making its content freely available and encourages the use, reproduction and dissemination of the text, multimedia and data presented. The use of publications and documents available in the FAO Document Repository , is governed by an Open Access policy . Please consult this policy for detailed terms and conditions applicable to the use of FAO publications and documents. Specific statistical databases are covered by the Open Data Licensing Policy, and governed by the Statistical Databases Terms of Use . All other content on the FAO website (except where otherwise indicated), may be copied, printed and downloaded for private study, research and teaching purposes, and for use in non-commercial products or services, provided that appropriate acknowledgement of FAO as the source and copyright holder is given and that FAO's endorsement of users' views, products or services is not stated or implied in any way. FAO encourages unrestricted use of news releases provided on the

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9	UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO)	No	No info	Just states that they have copyright	Nothing
10	World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)	Yes (C) notice	Website: Download and copy for personal, non-commercial use. No derivative works etc. Publications appear to be paywalled	https://www.unwto.org/copyright Repository: https://www.e-unwto.org/copyright	As UN Repository even stricter: Copying and/or transmitting portions or all of this work without permission may be a violation of applicable law.
11	International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)	Yes (Terms of Use)	Personal, non-commercial Worse on the repository – needs registration or paying	https://www.icao.int/pages/disclaimer.aspx https://elibrary.icao.int/pages/icao-copyright	As UN eLibrary: Copyright © ICAO 2023. ARR – As UNCTAD
12	Universal Postal Union (UPU)	Yes (C)	Publications and website: super restrictive on	https://www.upu.int/en/Copyright	As UNCTAD, but...

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13	International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	Yes (Legal)	Print, download and copy for personal or educational, non-commercial	https://www.ifad.org/en/legal	All information, documents, data and materials (the "Materials") that appear on IFAD's website (the "Site"), ifad.org, are its exclusive property unless otherwise indicated. IFAD encourages users to print, download, or copy information, documents and

			<p>No selling, redistributing, creating derivative works for commercial purposes.</p> <p>Pubs: repro for non-commercial purposes with attribution, but need to send a copy to IFAD</p>		<p>materials from the website exclusively for non-commercial use, whether personal or educational.</p> <p>Users are restricted from reselling, redistributing or creating derivative works for commercial purposes without the express, written consent of IFAD. All photographs, video/audio clips and other multimedia material appearing on IFAD website are likewise the exclusive property of IFAD.</p> <p>On pubs: This publication or any part thereof may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes without prior permission from IFAD, provided that the publication or extract therefrom reproduced is attributed to IFAD and the title of this publication is stated in any publication and that a copy thereof is sent to IFAD.</p>
14	World Health Organisation (WHO)	Not super easy (hiding behind their name)	<p>Website allows quotation, reproduction, translation for research, private study (np). Reproduction of significant parts OK for education and np.</p> <p>Strong OA policy on articles (CC-BY 3.0 IGO)</p>	<p>https://www.who.int/about/policies/terms-of-use</p> <p>OA: https://www.who.int/about/policies/publishing/open-access</p> <p>Copyright: https://www.who.int/about/policies/terms-of-use</p>	<p>Website: © Copyright World Health Organization (WHO), 2021. All Rights Reserved.</p> <p>The information in the various pages of the WHO web site is issued by the World Health Organization for general distribution. The information presented is protected under the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literature and Artistic works, under other international conventions and under national laws on copyright and neighbouring rights. Extracts of the information in the web site may be reviewed, reproduced or translated for research or private</p>

			But stuff they publish is CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO	https://www.who.int/about/policies/publishing/copyright	<p>study but not for sale or for use in conjunction with commercial purposes.</p> <p>Any use of information in the web site should be accompanied by an acknowledgment of WHO as the source, citing the uniform resource locator (URL) of the article. Reproduction or translation of substantial portions of the web site, or any use other than for educational or other non-commercial purposes, require explicit, prior authorization in writing. Applications and enquiries should be addressed to the programme responsible for the page used.</p> <p>Proper OA policy, explicitly connected to Plan S</p> <p>But seem to be a lot slacker on their own copyright (NC-SA)</p>
15	International Labor Organization (ILO)	Yes (Rights and permissions)	<p>CC-BY (pubs and DBs after May 23)</p> <p>AV CC-BY-ND</p>	<p>https://www.ilo.org/rights-and-permissions</p> <p>Has an OA policy: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/genericdo</p>	<p>From May 2023, publications and databases are under CC-BY 4.0</p> <p>Proper OA policy, explicitly connected to Plan S</p>

				cument/wcms_878728.pdf	
16	World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)	Yes (Terms of Use)	CC-BY mainly	https://www.wipo.int/tools/en/disclaim.html	To support the implementation of the Open Access Policy, WIPO applies Creative Commons (CC) licenses. CC licenses are a set of copyright tools and model agreements that facilitate open access to creative content. Except for some content published under more restrictive terms, new WIPO online publications and other online content are issued under an Attribution 4.0 International CC license (CC BY 4.0) . This allows anyone to reproduce, distribute, adapt, translate and publicly perform content published online under WIPO's name, without explicit permission, provided that such use is accompanied by an acknowledgement that WIPO is the source, and clearly indicates if changes are made to the original content.
17	International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Yes (C)	ARR on the front of the website Very much about personal (personal research), NC use only. No resale, redistribution or derivative works.	https://www.imf.org/external/terms.htm (update 2020) No additional information in publications	The International Monetary Fund (the "IMF") maintains websites and mobile apps (the "Sites") to provide direct access to its information, documents, data and materials (collectively, "Content") to those who choose to access and use the Sites ("You" or "Users"). The IMF maintains the Sites for informational purposes only. Some Content available on the Sites, in particular statistical data produced by the IMF and not owned

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