About ISNI in English

Here you can find answers to the most frequently asked questions about ISNI.

The questions are divided into the following topics: General, Use and benefits of ISNI, Distribution of ISNI and Incorrect data and data processing.

In addition, the information package has a separate section on using ISNI in Copyright Management Organisations.

If you cannot find the answer you are looking for on this page, please contact us at toimijakuvailu-posti@helsinki.fi.

General

ISNI (*International Standard Name Identifier*) identifies the public identities of persons and organisations globally, uniquely and permanently. ISNI brings together the variants and forms of a person's or organisation's name (e.g. different transliterations of the name) and allows to distinguish between persons and organisations with the same name.

ISNI belongs to the same identifier family as ISBN or ISRC, for example. While ISBN identifies books and ISRC sound recordings, ISNI unambiguously identifies persons and organisations associated with a book or recording, for example.

An ISNI identifier consists of 16 characters and can be written either with spaces (0000 0001 2147 8925) or without spaces (0000000121478925). ISNIs can also be presented in the form of a URL: https://isni.org/isni/0000000121478925 (ISNI for the Finnish writer Tove Jansson).
Yes.

The principles of forming an ISNI are defined in the ISNI Standard ISO 27729 (link to the standard produced by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO)).

There is also a Finnish translation (SFS-ISO 27729) available of the standard, produced by the Finnish Standards Association SFS (link to the SFS webstore).
According to the ISNI standard, public identities refer to names used by parties to create, produce, manage and distribute information content in media, for example.

Therefore, a public identity is the name form a person uses in public.

If a person publishes works under both his or her own name and a professional name, both are public identities and have separate ISNIs.

If a person publishes works under a professional name only, then only the professional name is a public identity.
A public identity can have different spellings or name forms. These are all collected under a single ISNI identifier.

For example, Russian names may have many different transliterations and spellings. All the different names of Pyotr Tchaikovsky below are collected under a single ISNI (https://isni.org/isni/0000000121449518).

- Tsaikovski, Pjotr
- ajkovskij, Petr
- Tchaikovsky, Peter
- Tshaikovski, Pjotr
- Tjajkovskij, Peter
- ,
- ,
-
-

An agent refers to a person or organisation related to published scientific or artistic material, or manuscript or archive material, for example. A agent may be, for example, a writer, composer, musical group or publisher.

It may also be a person or organisation that is the subject of a book, such as a royal person, political activist, wartime battalion or local company.
Yes, they can.

If an author publishes books under his or her own name and under different pseudonyms or pen names, he or she will have more than one public identity. Each of them may have a separate ISNI.

An example:

- real name: **Pirkko Saisio** https://isni.org/isni/0000000081572780
- another identity: **Jukka Larsson** https://isni.org/isni/0000000045929754
- another identity: **Eva Wein** https://isni.org/isni/0000000081505780.

The ISNI International Agency (ISNI-IA) governs ISNI-related activities and is based in London (UK). More information on the organisation's governance can be found on the ISNI-IA website: https://isni.org/page/governance/.

The ISNI Assignment Agency (ISNI-AA) is responsible for the database and its technical maintenance. The content of the ISNI database is maintained by the ISNI Quality Team (ISNI QT), which consists of experts from the British Library and Bibliothèque nationale de France. Each Registration Agency is responsible for the timeliness of the data sent to the database. More information on the ISNI-IA activities is available on its website at https://isni.org/page/how-isni-works/.

Only the ISNI Registration Agencies may submit requests for new ISNI assignments. The Registration Agencies have unrestricted read access to the ISNI database. A list of the ISNI Registration Agencies can be found on the ISNI-IA website: https://isni.org/page/isni-registration-agencies/.

The Registration Agencies forward ISNI applications to the international ISNI database on behalf of customers and advise them on what information is needed for an ISNI application.

Currently, the National Library of Finland is the only Finnish ISNI Registration Agency. It means that the National Library does not assign ISNI identifiers. Instead, it serves as an interface between applicants (e.g. a copyright organisation or publisher) and the ISNI Assignment Agency, the assigning body.

Use and benefits of ISNI

ISNI identifiers are used to unambiguously identify agents (e.g. authors, publishers, composers) associated with scientific or artistic material.

ISNI brings together the name variants and forms related to a agent.

With the help of an ISNI, search results can be reliably limited to the desired agent.

An ISNI can be used to distinguish between identical and similar names without the need to process birth years or other sensitive personal data in public services.

The ISO standard-compliant identifier facilitates machine-readability and serves as a link between different systems.
ISNIs are used in databases to unambiguously distinguish between persons or organisations with the same name. ISNI plays a bridging role between databases by providing reliable information on parties.

ISNIs are used, for example, by Wikipedia and Wikidata, many national libraries (e.g. the National Library of Finland, the French national library BnF) and various copyright organisations. The use of ISNIs is also becoming more common among publishers and book agents.
ISNI stands for *International Standard Name Identifier* and ORCID for *Open Researcher and Contributor ID.* There are many similarities, but also some differences.

Similarities

- Both are permanent and unique identifiers intended to distinguish persons with the same name from each other, combine the different spellings of names and resolve other confusions related to different name forms.
- Both identifiers consist of 16 characters.
- The use of both identifiers is becoming more widespread worldwide.

Differences

- ORCID is mainly aimed at researchers, while ISNI can be assigned to both scientific and artistic creators.
- An ISNI can only be applied for through an ISNI member organisation or Registration Agency; an ORCID can be applied for by the party themselves. Since ISNIs are created centrally, parties may not always know that they have an ISNI.
- ISNIs are intended for both organisations and persons and can be used to identify both deceased and living persons. ORCIDs are aimed at active scientists.
- ISNIs are used by copyright organisations, national libraries, book publishers and agents, and online music services, for example. ORCIDs are mainly intended for the identification of researchers.
- In Finland, the ORCID coordinator is CSC, while the National Library is responsible for ISNI activities. CSC and the National Library are currently exploring possible forms of cooperation.

Using ISNI in Copyright Management Organisations

The ISNI project improves the metadata of Copyright Management Organisations in the creative industries by obtaining international ISNI identifiers for creators. The project was launched in February 2022 and will continue until the end of 2023. Gramex, Kopiosto, Kuvasto, Sanasto, and Teosto are involved in the project. You can find more information about the project on the National Library's website: https://www.kansalliskirjasto.fi/en/projects/adoption-isnis-copyright-management-organizations.
Many contributors to the creative industries already have ISNI identifiers, even though they may be unaware of this.

The National Library has applied for ISNI identifiers for all the creators in its author database, and there are already approximately 176,000 identifiers. The National Library's author database will describe the authors and creators of all materials published in Finland.

You can find the ISNI identifiers in the author database at Kanto.
An ISNI is comparable to an IPI or IPN number.

The ISNI's purpose is to unambiguously identify the persons and organisations associated with any creative work, e.g. writers, performers, visual creators, producers, or publishers.

In the long term, using a global identifier allows closer cooperation and better service for the customers of Copyright Management Organisations.

The ISNI improves the reliability and interoperability of a creator's data.

The adoption of ISNIs develops the use, accessibility, and management of digital data in the arts.

Adopting ISNIs will also improve the Copyright Management Organisations' metadata quality.
The previous section answers the question 'How is an ISNI beneficial?' in a general way. If we consider the benefits from a creative professional's perspective, we can add the following benefits:

- The ISNI works across industries, so every creative professional can apply.
- The ISNI is especially helpful for receiving copyright royalties from foreign copyright holders.

- The use of ISNIs is becoming more widespread among CMO partners, particularly in the music industry.

The **ISNI** *International Standard Name Identifier* is an identifier administered by ISNI-IA, which identifies persons and organisations globally, uniquely, and permanently. An ISNI can be assigned to both scientific and artistic creators. The ISNI facilitates access to information and creator data – nationally and internationally between different organisations.

IPI *Interested Party Information* is an international identifier for creators administered by CISAC, which is used to manage the rights to their works. The IPI identifier is used by composers and publishers in particular. Copyright Management Organisations can use this identifier to direct copyright royalties to creators.

The **IPN** *International Performer Number* is used for international cooperation by CMOs and other music industry operators to identify the artists performing in audio recordings.

Similarities

- The identifiers are intended to unambiguously identify and differentiate people with the same name. They are permanent and individual.
- The identifiers are used extensively internationally.

Differences

- ISNIs can be used to identify creators in various industries, whereas IPNs are primarily used to identify various actors in the music industry.
- An ISNI is public, while IPI and IPNs are only known to Copyright Management Organisations and their customers.
- IPI and IPN identifiers are assigned to a person's real identity and pseudonyms, whereas ISNIs are for both a person's public identity and organisations.
- The ISNI brings together the name variants and forms associated with the author or creator.

Even though there are differences between these identifiers, standardised identifiers complement each other and improve metadata quality and the identification of copyright royalty recipients. The ISNI plays a bridging role between parties who use different internal identifiers, and just like other industry identifiers, ensures that the creators associated with a work can be identified unambiguously.
The ISNI can be used to reliably, securely, and internationally identify contributors to creative works, regardless of their artistic discipline.

The ISNI plays a bridging role between parties who use different internal identifiers, and just like other industry identifiers, ensures that the creators associated with a work can be identified unambiguously.

In an increasingly networked world, and especially in international connections, the ISNI facilitates the unambiguous identification of the work's creator, which helps direct copyright royalties to and from overseas.

The use of ISNIs is expanding. Global operators such as Apple, Google, and Spotify have already adopted ISNIs.

Distribution of ISNI

ISNI identifiers can be freely searched in the database maintained by the ISNI International Agency (http://www.isni.org/search).

The National Library of Finland's Agent Database is included as open data in the Finto service. ISNI identifiers related to Finnish production of publications can be searched in Kanto (KANTO – National Agent Data https://finto.fi/finaf/en/). Individual identifiers are searched by using the creator's name.

Melinda libraries can search ISNI identifiers directly in the Asteri database of authorized names.
An ISNI may be assigned to any public identity or party that performs creative or scientific work.

An ISNI may be registered, for example, for an author, a musician's stage name, a publisher or a research unit.
All ISNI identifiers are generated in a single database maintained by the ISNI Assignment Agency (ISNI-AA).

New ISNI identifiers can be applied for through the ISNI Registration Agencies. An up-to-date list of the ISNI Registration Agencies can be found on the ISNI International Agency website at https://isni.org/page/isni-registration-agencies/.

Currently, the National Library of Finland is the only Finnish ISNI Registration Agency. The National Library cannot assign ISNI identifiers directly. It is a Registration Agency that can forward ISNI applications to the international ISNI database. Parties cannot send their data to the ISNI database directly.

More detailed information about the necessary description data can be obtained from the Agent Metadata Service at toimijakuvailu-posti@helsinki.fi. The data below is required for an ISNI.

Not all the data is mandatory, but the data provided must be comprehensive. The data marked with an asterisk is strongly recommended.

Persons:

- first and last name of the person*
- any other forms and/or spellings of the name
- year* and place of birth
- information about any professional name or pseudonym*
- country or countries related to the person (place of residence, place of business, etc.)
- sector(s) in which the person is or has been employed
- any other standard identifiers (e.g. ORCID, VIAF)
- online sources of information (e.g. Wikipedia, homepage)
- key publications related to the person*.

Organisations

- organisation name*
- other forms of the name (abbreviations, forms in other languages, etc.);
- year of establishment of the organisation*
- possible year of closure of the organisation
- place related to the organisation (e.g. location of the office, registered office of an association, place of establishment of a musical group)
- organisation's industry*
- any other standard identifiers (e.g. business ID)
- online sources of information (e.g. homepage, Wikipedia)*
- key publications related to the organisation*.

More detailed information about the necessary description data can be obtained from the Agent Metadata Service at toimijakuvailu-posti @ helsinki.fi.
No, not entirely.

ISNI applications are subject to the payment of a fee by the Registration Agencies. The Registration Agencies may decide to charge service fees.

Currently, private individuals may apply for ISNIs for parties related to publications produced in Finland free of charge.

When ISNIs are applied for a collection of names maintained by an organisation, the price will depend on the ISNIs applied for.

More detailed information can be obtained from the Agent Metadata Service at toimijakuvailu-posti @ helsinki.fi.
The processing time for an ISNI identifier is from two working days to four weeks. We aim for a processing time of a maximum of ten working days (excluding the holidays).

New ISNIs for public identities related to publications produced in Finland can be obtained quite quickly.

ISNI applications that concern more than one person and/or organisation at a time may take longer to process and may require the signing of a service agreement concerning the disclosure of information.

Incorrect data and data processing
If you notice that your personal data is incorrect, incomplete or inaccurate, you may ask us to correct it.

If you find an error in the ISNI database (https://isni.org/page/search-database/) (e.g. publications of a person with the same name as you are displayed for you), make a correction request.

One way to make a correction request to the database administrators is to use the yellow box found in the search results displayed in a search interface (on the left side of the page). Correction requests must be written in English.

Alternatively, you can contact us at toimijakuvailu-posti @ helsinki.fi. The National Library can correct and modify data submitted through the National Library. All data submitted by the National Library is accompanied with the data supplier identifier NLFIN (National Library of Finland).
All personal data contained in the ISNI database is processed in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation.

More detailed information on the principles of data collection and storage, for example, can be found in the ISNI Data Policy: ISNI Data Policy (PDF file, 544 KB).

Do you still have a questions?

If you did not find an answer to your question on this page, please contact us at toimijakuvailu-posti @ helsinki.fi.