



Music Metadata: The Hidden Infrastructure of Fairness

DIGITAL RIGHTS AWARENESS MODULE 7

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Why Metadata Matters

- Each identifier serves a distinct purpose:

ISRC	ISWC
Identifies the sound recording.	Identifies the musical composition (often missing at release; no shared registry exists).
IPI	IPN
Identifies authors, composers, and publishers (often unknown even to them).	Identifies performers, relevant mainly for broadcasting and public performance.

- When these codes align, royalties flow correctly; when they don't, **money disappears into "black boxes."**



International Identifiers of Recorded Music

As things stand, ISWCs do not usually exist at the point of creation (or release) of a sound recording. There is also **no "ISRC-ISWC Registry"** that record producers can access to retrieve ISWCs, when they are later allocated by CMOs.

As regards IPIs, the right-holders normally do not know their own identifiers and, what is more, record producers have no access to IPI Numbers.

IPNs are currently relevant to broadcasting and public performance revenues paid via collective organisations, but not to streaming (where session musicians do not have a statutory remuneration right, at least in the vast majority of EU jurisdictions).

Fair MusE: **no data, no fairness** — accurate metadata is essential for fair payment.

The Chain of Responsibility



Tools developed by companies like **BMAT** and **Unison** help, but reconciliation remains slow and incomplete.

The Cost of Data Fragmentation

Each stakeholder keeps separate databases



Duplication, inconsistency, and lost visibility

- Well-resourced creators get paid faster; **independent and minority artists often vanish from reports.**
- New formats — remixes, livestreams, short videos — **multiply errors and mismatches.**
- Fragmentation is not only technical but **structural**, reinforcing inequality through data.



Metadata Governance

Metadata governance is now central to copyright policy.

Interoperability is the foundation of fair remuneration.

Standards like **DDEX** improve data exchange and accountability.

The EU could create a **public-interest music data infrastructure**,
ensuring openness and auditability.

A Music Copyright Data Infrastructure

Such a system could:

Require **universal identifiers (ISRC, ISWC, IPI, IPN)** at upload.

Use **open formats** so that data can be verified and tracked.

Provide **quality indicators and creator dashboards** to follow royalties.

Enable **cross-platform recognition**, linking a song used on TikTok, YouTube, or Spotify.

Make fairness **a built-in feature** of the rights system, not a matter of goodwill.

The Legal Landscape

EU law recognises **transparency as a right**, via:

DSM Directive (Art. 19)

Regular reporting on earnings.

Collective Rights Management Directive (2014/26)

Information-sharing duties (Art. 17-22)

But these rules assume data already exist; they regulate reporting, not infrastructure.

Result: transparency is mandated in law **but optional in practice** — a key paradox.



Key Actors and Their Relation to Metadata Today

Creators have a **right to information** but no way to verify or fix their metadata.

Labels/publishers generate metadata but keep it siloed and inconsistent.

Platforms accept incomplete files because they are **not required to enforce** metadata quality.

CMOs rely on upstream data but **cannot force corrections**.



Toward a Legal Architecture for Metadata

Fair MusE proposes clearer, shared responsibilities:

Mandatory Metadata at Upload

Identification of Unmatched Works

Linking Works and Recordings

Greater Transparency for Licensing Hubs and IMEs

EU-Wide Oversight

Performer Remuneration Linked to Data



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