IPFN: Free-to-Creator Registration

A practical European pilot

Problem: Useful attribution should not depend on a creator's budget.

Proposal: Fund the public record, and keep basic creator access free.

IPFN began with a publishing problem. We needed a way for someone seeing an image to find who claimed it and inspect the evidence. An ISBN gives a book a number that different people can use to identify it. IPFN applies that practical idea to images and makes the identifier work as a web address. We now want to make that service available to creators who cannot justify paying for a separate registration every time they make something.

We propose a European institutional pilot with free basic registration for participating creators and free public verification. This is a proposed funded model. It is distinct from the current beta's paid registration workflow and does not announce a change to live checkout pricing.

1. Make one useful promise

A creator should be able to record a claim, receive an identifier, share its public address, and export the supporting record without transferring rights. Someone receiving the work should be able to follow that identifier and inspect the claimant information and evidence without buying an account.

The service should show what was claimed and checked. Registration remains voluntary. A matching file or earlier timestamp is useful evidence, not an automatic verdict about authorship.

2. Borrow the useful part of the ISBN model

An ISBN lets publishers, booksellers and libraries identify the same publication, edition and format. They can use one number instead of inventing a new description for every transaction. It does not grant copyright. [1]

IPFN applies that practical idea to images. Existing ISBNs and national copyright records keep their roles.

3. Pay for the infrastructure where the costs arise

Free to the creator does not mean cost-free infrastructure. The pilot budget must cover registration support, storage and continued pinning, public resolution, anchor operations, security, disputes, privacy work, independent testing, and maintenance.

Daily batching reduces one component of that bill. Many registration records share one ledger commitment, so each work does not require its own blockchain transaction. The operating cost of the registry, storage, and review still grows with use. There is no claim of unlimited throughput or unlimited free storage.

Institutional sponsorship could fund basic access, with fees for optional bulk ingestion, preservation commitments or monitoring. Declining an optional service should not cost a creator their identifier or access to their evidence.

Before launch, publish the actual unit-cost model. Calculate cost per successful registration, annual cost per retained record, public-resolution cost, dispute cost, and independent oversight cost. Report failures and support burden alongside volume. A low blockchain fee is not a complete operating budget.

4. Start with a 90-day bounded evaluation

The purpose of the first pilot is to establish whether the model works outside its originating publishing ecosystem. We propose a small photography or visual-archive cohort, including at least one participant independent of Blinding Visuals Press, and a fixed dataset approved for public use.

During the first 30 days, agree the dataset, controller roles, publication fields, evidence levels, rights/contact vocabulary, export schema, retention, accessibility requirements, and acceptance tests. Inspect the current reference implementation rather than rewriting an identifier system from scratch.

During days 31-60, register the approved works, test public resolution on ordinary desktop and mobile browsers, export the records, and map a sample to the institution's metadata requirements. Check exact-file matches, transformed-image nonmatches, duplicate submissions, conflicting claims, delayed anchoring, and temporary gateway failure.

During days 61-90, conduct an independent evaluation and publish the findings. The report should measure what succeeded, what failed, what it cost, what data was processed, and whether another operator could verify and preserve the exported evidence.

This is a proposed schedule from an agreed start date, contingent on a partner, resourcing, data agreements, and review. It is a commitment to a disciplined pilot design, not a promise that EU adoption can be completed in 90 days.

If the first phase passes its acceptance checks, a separately agreed 12-month evaluation can test larger cohorts, independent registrars, long-term availability, correction and dispute handling, and the actual cost of keeping creator registration free. That longer evaluation requires its own resources and decision to proceed.

5. Connect to the work Europe is already doing

EUIPO's CopyrightView initiative is exploring access to existing copyright information sources. That makes interoperability the right first institutional conversation. IPFN can offer a live reference implementation and a small, inspectable visual-work dataset for evaluation. It can ask what an accepted source record needs to contain, how disputed information should be represented, and what an independent provider must demonstrate. [2]

The proposed role of the IPFN Agency is to maintain common identifier and registrar rules under an agreed public-interest governance model. Blinding Visuals Press would contribute the reference technology and operating experience. Independent archives, publishers, creator groups, and institutional reviewers should help decide how the model develops. No exclusive European mandate, official recognition, or existing EUIPO partnership is claimed.

The ask

Give us a technical and policy counterpart, an agreed test cohort, and a route to evaluation. We can work in months because the reference technology already exists. The next task is to prove that it can serve creators beyond our own publishing house, under governance that institutions can trust.

We built this to solve a problem we had. We now want to test whether it can help solve a problem the creative world shares.

References

[1] International ISBN Agency, What is an ISBN?

[2] EUIPO, Mapping of EU databases and metadata standards, 28 May 2026; EUIPO, 2026 Work Programme.