

საქართველოს სტანდარტი

სსკ: 03.060

ფასიანი ქაღალდები და მასთან დაკავშირებული ფინანსური ინსტრუმენტები-
ფინანსური ინსტრუმენტების (CFI) კოდის კლასიფიკაცია

საინფორმაციო ნაწილი. სრული ტექსტის სანახავად შეიძინეთ სტანდარტი.

სსტ ისო 10962:2021/2021

საინფორმაციო მონაცემები

1 მიღებულია და დაშვებულია სამოქმედოდ: სსიპ-საქართველოს სტანდარტებისა და მეტროლოგიის ეროვნული სააგენტოს გენერალური დირექტორის 17/06/2021 წლის № 37 განკარგულებით

2 მიღებულია „თავფურცლის“ თარგმნის მეთოდით: სტანდარტიზაციის საერთაშორისო ორგანიზაციის (ისო) სტანდარტი ისო 10962:2021 „ფასიანი ქაღალდები და მასთან დაკავშირებული ფინანსური ინსტრუმენტები-ფინანსური ინსტრუმენტების (CFI) კოდის კლასიფიკაცია“

3 პირველად

4 რეგისტრირებულია: სსიპ-საქართველოს სტანდარტებისა და მეტროლოგიის ეროვნული სააგენტოს რეესტრში: 17/06/2021 წლის №268-1.3-020621

წინამდებარე სტანდარტის ნებისმიერი ფორმით გავრცელება სააგენტოს ნებართვის გარეშე აკრძალულია

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD

ISO 10962

Fifth edition
2021-05

Securities and related financial instruments — Classification of financial instruments (CFI) code

*Valeurs mobilières et autres instruments financiers concernés —
Classification des instruments financiers (code CFI)*



Reference number
ISO 10962:2021(E)

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ISO copyright office
CP 401 • Ch. de Blandonnet 8
CH-1214 Vernier, Geneva
Phone: +41 22 749 01 11
Email: copyright@iso.org
Website: www.iso.org

Published in Switzerland

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 68, *Financial services*, Subcommittee SC 8, *Reference data for financial services*.

This fifth edition cancels and replaces the fourth edition (ISO 10962:2019), which has been technically revised. The six-character hierarchical structure remains unchanged from the previous version.

The main changes to the previous edition are as follows:

- The CFI code list has been removed from the specification and moved to an external code list.
- The structure of the CFI and content of the code list are captured in the form of a machine-readable semantical model of the code lists and their values. It is important to understand that this is a semantic representation of the CFI hierarchical structure and not a canonical semantic classification of financial instruments, which is beyond the scope of this document.
- The CFI external code list is maintained and published by the ISO 10962 maintenance agency, which is responsible for managing the modification and enhancement of the code lists, their values and corresponding descriptions. The maintenance agency is responsible for publishing the CFI code list. The CFI external code list is published in a selection of human-readable and machine-readable data formats [e.g. spreadsheet, PDF, comma-separated values (CSV), JSON-LD, TTL] at the discretion of the maintenance agency. See https://www.iso.org/maintenance_agencies.html#81140.

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Introduction

The classification of financial instruments (CFI) code was developed to address several problems that concerned the financial community. With the growth of cross-border trading, the requirement to improve communication of information among market participants had become critical.

The business problems centred around an inability to obtain information on financial instruments due to the lack of a consistent and uniform approach to grouping financial instruments. With the explosive growth over the previous 20 years in new instruments and features attached to financial instruments, a serious communication problem had developed.

Many market participants were using similar terminology for instruments having significantly different features. This problem was compounded when market participants looked beyond their own national markets where they encountered the same words used to describe instruments with significantly different features. Where the terminology was in a different language, market participants encountered additional problems of translation, which can also be misleading.

In addition, the customs and practices of local markets varied considerably in how they structured financial instruments, often leaving foreign participants perplexed. On careful analysis, it was often found that the characteristics and features of these instruments were similar to domestic instruments. However, most market participants did not have the time and resources to do this analysis.

The inability to group financial instruments in a consistent manner was another problem encountered by market participants. Reports of holdings by different sources for similar financial instruments often resulted in those instruments being categorized differently. This not only affected comparability but caused a credibility issue with the reader. When relative performance is measured, the ability to properly categorize holdings is essential if true comparisons are to be made.

A twofold solution was developed to address these problems. One was to establish a series of codes that classify financial instruments having similar features. The other was to develop a glossary of terms and provide common definitions that allow market participants to easily understand the terminology being used.

The benefits derived are many:

- The CFI code system provides a set of codes for financial instruments that can be used globally for straight-through processing by all involved participants in an electronic data processing environment. For example, readers of portfolio holdings see reports from different sources using the same categories, groups and attributes, making the comparison of instruments more credible.
- The use of these codes increases the efficiency, reliability, data consistency and transparency of financial services transactions for both market and reference data. Classifying financial instruments in a consistent, structured and standardized way is also beneficial for regulatory reporting requirements.
- The broadened scope and coverage of CFI codes encourages market participants to take advantage of other International Standards, particularly international securities identification numbers (ISINs).
- It is intended that the improved understanding of the characteristics and categorization leads to a better understanding of financial instruments. This leads to more active markets and improved market liquidity. In addition, these codes are displayed on websites using internet technology, which has allowed the growth of e-issuing, e-trading and e-settlements.
- The CFI code system can further serve as a basis for the classification of financial instruments for industry risk aggregation and regulatory reporting.

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