

Working with currency, number and date formats

When translating financial texts – and often when working with legal and commercial texts – currency symbols and number separators are something you can easily trip up on. Get these wrong, and you could be skewing your figures by orders of magnitude.

In this quick guide, we'll take you through the key things you need to know about working with number and date formats across different locales.

Points to consider

The main things to bear in mind when working with numbers across locales are the following:

- Currency symbols
- Decimal separators
- Thousand separators
- Date formats

We use the term ‘locales’ as there can sometimes be variations from country to country within the same language. This is most visible in date formats, which vary between the US and the rest of the world, and can often be a point of confusion.

In many non-English speaking European countries, the customary currency symbol follows the amount, and is preceded by a space, whereas in English there is usually no space and the symbol for the main unit comes before the amount.

Currency symbols

For many currencies, two parallel sets of symbols exist: the customary ones used within a nation and the ISO 4217 currency code (see right). The exact usage and placement of these symbols varies by locale.

Consideration should be given to whether the customary symbols are clear and unambiguous in an international context. For financial texts, it's best to err on the side of caution and clarity and use the ISO 4217 code.

Currency	Customary symbol	ISO 4217 code
British pound	£	GBP
Euro	€	EUR
US dollar	\$, US\$	USD
Canadian dollar	\$, CA\$, Can\$, C\$	CAN
Danish krone	kr.	DKK
Icelandic króna	kr.	ISK
Norwegian krone	kr.	NOK
Swedish krona	kr.	SEK
Japanese yen	¥	JPY
Chinese yuan	¥, 元	CNY

Customary symbol placement

£1,674.80

United Kingdom

1 674,80 €

Rest of Europe

Decimal separators

The decimal separator or radix character is the symbol used to separate integers from fractional numbers.

27.25

English-speaking countries,
Mexico, Japan, China

27·25

English-speaking countries
(older)

27,25

Francophone Canada,
most other countries

In handwriting and older print, an interpunct is used in many English-speaking countries for clarity, as the point would sometimes not be visible if written on a line, although this usage has fallen out of favour since the advent of computing.

Thousands separators

The thousands separator or delimiter allows for rapid reading of longer numbers. Some countries use alternative grouping systems.

7,468,692

English-speaking countries,
Mexico, Japan, China

7.468.692

Denmark, Iceland, Germany,
Spanish-speaking countries

7 568 692

Finland, Norway, Sweden,
Central and Eastern Europe,
French-speaking countries

7'568'692

Switzerland, Liechtenstein

India

In India and surrounding countries, the terms *lakh* (100,000) and *crore* (1,000,000) are the most common terms for expressing large numbers. This affects digit separation, so instead of grouping all large numbers by three digits, only the rightmost three digits are kept together and the remaining digits are grouped in twos to enable the number to be read in lakh and crore.

China

There is no standardised digit grouping system in China. Traditional systems based on multiples of 10,000 are used, along with the Western system of separating by thousands with commas or spaces.

Names for big numbers

English stands out from many other European languages in the names it uses for larger numbers. Historically in UK English, a billion was known as a *milliard*, a trillion was a *billion* and so on. Now UK usage has aligned with US usage, but other European languages retain the word *milliard* and start counting billions once another thousand is added.

Number	English	Danish/ Norwegian
1,000,000	million	million
1,000,000,000	billion	milliard
1,000,000,000,000	trillion	billion

5,00,000
five lakh

500,000
five hundred thousand

12,12,12,123
twelve crore, twelve
lakh, twelve thousand,
one hundred and
twenty-three

121,212,123
one hundred and twenty-
one million, two hundred
and twelve thousand,
one hundred and
twenty-three

Indian system

Western system

Dates and times

Date formats vary widely by locale and context. They also have high potential for generating misunderstanding if overlooked.

Time

In the US and Canada, 12-hour clock is the most common time format. In the rest of the world, 24-hour clock prevails. When 12-hour clock is used in the UK, the *am* or *pm* is usually written in lower case, without full stops.

3:25 P.M.

United States, Canada

15h25

French-speaking countries

3:25pm

United Kingdom

15:25

Rest of world

A tale of two standards

The linguistic situation in Canada is unique and poses some particular problems for expressing the date. The country is officially bilingual, with English and French both recognised at federal level. French-speaking Canada follows standard French date and time notation, with the day coming before the month. However, in English-speaking Canada, a mixture of British and American notations is used, commonly causing confusion between the day and the month, for example 04/10/2020 could be read as either 4 October or 10 April 2020. Because of this, the Canadian government now recommends using the ISO 8601 standard, which would render this date as 2020-10-04.

Date

In the US and Canada, the month normally precedes the date in both long and short forms. When the short form is used, this often creates an ambiguous situation. To avoid this, use the long form or the ISO 8601 standard (YYYY-MM-DD).

In many European languages, days and months are not capitalised.

Short form	10/4/2020	04/10/2020	04/10/2020
Long form	Sunday, October 4, 2020	Sunday, 4 October 2020	dimanche le 4 octobre 2020
Pronunciation	Sunday October fourth two thousand twenty	Sunday the fourth of October two thousand and twenty	dimanche le quatre octobre deux mille vingt
	US, Anglophone Canada	Other English-speaking countries	French-speaking countries

04.10.2020

sondag (den) 4. oktober 2020

sondag den fjerde oktober to tusind og tyve

Denmark

2020年10月04日

2020年10月04日 星期日

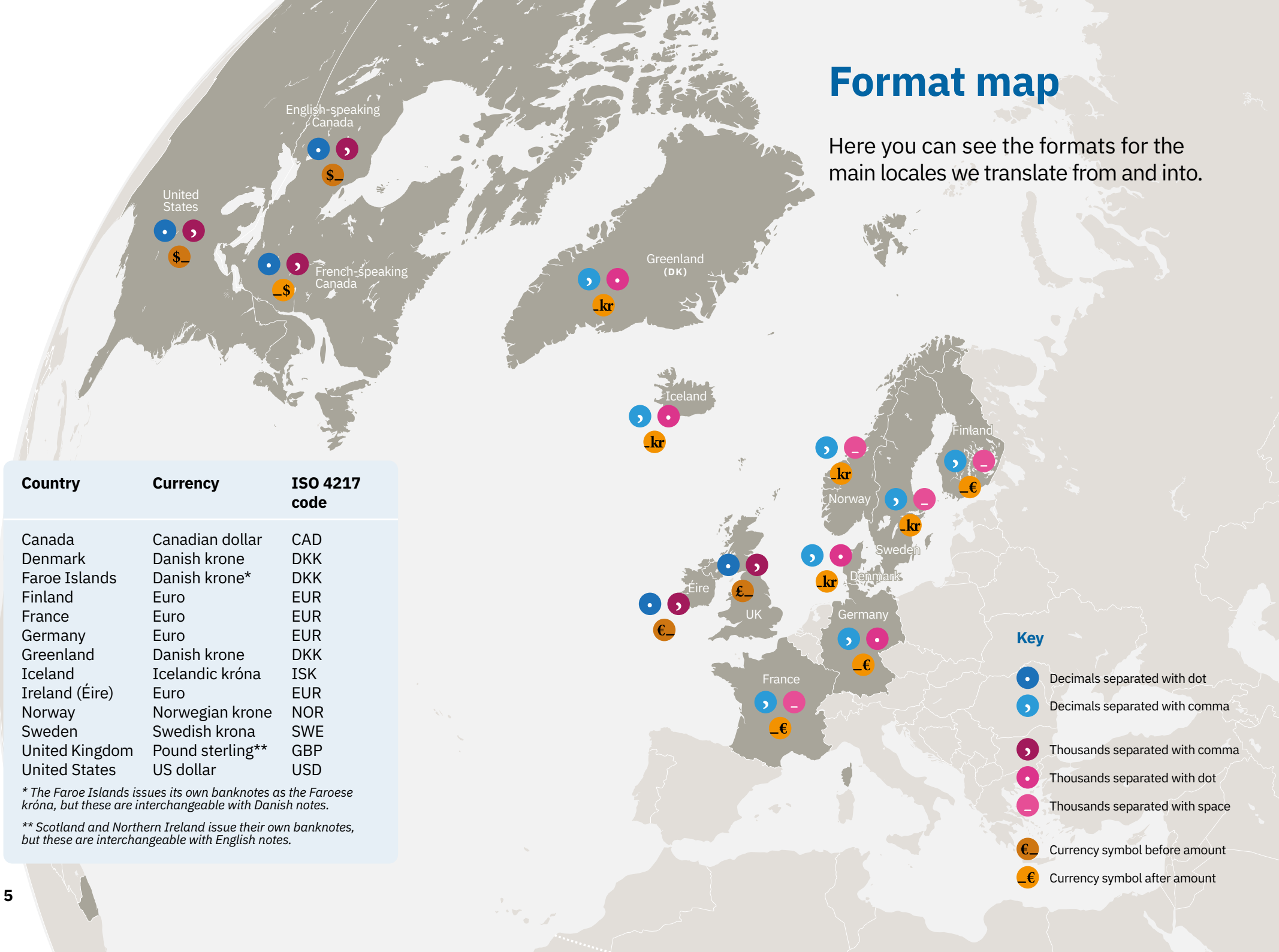
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China (Mandarin)

In China, the date is generally read as single digits followed by the words for year, month and day, respectively. The pronunciation translates as 'two zero two zero year, ten month, four day, Sunday'.

Format map

Here you can see the formats for the main locales we translate from and into.



Country	Currency	ISO 4217 code
Canada	Canadian dollar	CAD
Denmark	Danish krone	DKK
Faroe Islands	Danish krone*	DKK
Finland	Euro	EUR
France	Euro	EUR
Germany	Euro	EUR
Greenland	Danish krone	DKK
Iceland	Icelandic króna	ISK
Ireland (Éire)	Euro	EUR
Norway	Norwegian krone	NOR
Sweden	Swedish krona	SWE
United Kingdom	Pound sterling**	GBP
United States	US dollar	USD

* The Faroe Islands issues its own banknotes as the Faroese króna, but these are interchangeable with Danish notes.

** Scotland and Northern Ireland issue their own banknotes, but these are interchangeable with English notes.

- Key**
-  Decimals separated with dot
 -  Decimals separated with comma
 -  Thousands separated with comma
 -  Thousands separated with dot
 -  Thousands separated with space
 -  Currency symbol before amount
 -  Currency symbol after amount