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Site in several languages or countries: hreflang and avoiding duplicate versions

URLs, Redirects & Technical SEO

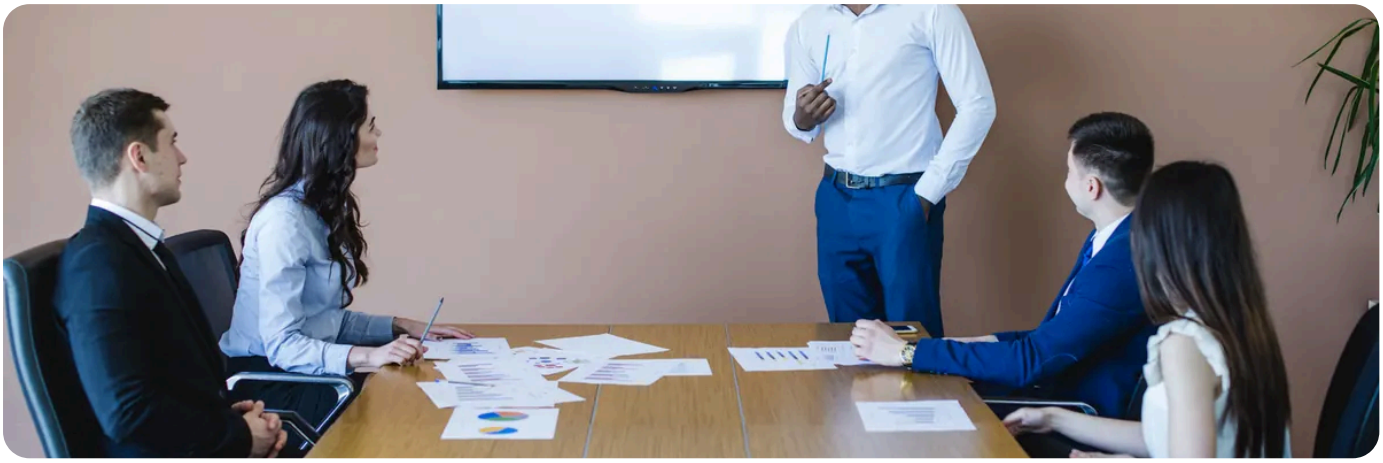
CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
RLX-INT-KB-3702	v2026.10.10	International · English

MozOut International
RLX Holdings (Pty) Ltd. · Group RLX Holdings
Tax no. (SARS) 943 907 6234 · Registration no. (CIPC) 2025/667953/07

https://www.my.mozout.com/knowledgebase/3702

Site in several languages or countries: hreflang and avoiding duplicate versions

URLs, Redirects & Technical SEO Created on **October 10, 2026** 3 min read



If the same site exists in Portuguese and English, or in different versions for different countries, Google needs to know **which pages are the same, in another language or for another country**. The `hreflang` tag tells it. Without it, it may show the wrong version to a searcher, or treat the versions as duplicates.

How it works

Each page lists, in the `<head>`, **all of its versions, including itself**:

```
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="pt-PT" href="https://yourcompany.com/pt/" />
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="en" href="https://yourcompany.com/en/" />
<link rel="alternate" hreflang="x-default" href="https://yourcompany.com/" />
```

Part	What it is
The language code	Two letters, such as `pt` or `en`. The region is optional and goes after a hyphen: `pt-PT`, `pt-BR`. A region on its own is not accepted.
`x-default`	The page for those who fit none of the versions, such as a language chooser.
Reciprocity	If page A lists B, B must list A. Without the return, Google ignores the pair.
Full addresses	With `https` and the domain, and equal to each version's canonical.

Setting up a multilingual site

1. **Give each language its own address**: a folder (`/pt/`, `/en/`), a subdomain or a country domain. A folder is the simplest to maintain.

2. **Translate the page, not just the menu.** An English page with Portuguese text is a useless duplicate.

3. **Put hreflang on all versions**. On WordPress, a language plugin usually writes it for you; confirm in the page source (Ctrl+U) by searching for `hreflang`.

4. **Each version points its canonical at itself**, not at the main version. See **the canonical tag**.

5. **Let the visitor choose.** A visible language selector is better than sending people automatically by country: Google visits from various places and may never see the other version.

6. **Put the versions in the sitemap** and hand it to Google. See **robots.txt and sitemap.xml**.

One language, several countries

If you have the same language for different countries (Portuguese for Portugal and Brazil, say), hreflang says which to show to whom. The text must really be adapted to the country: vocabulary, currency, contacts. Two pages almost identical in everything is the case where Google most often folds them into one. Choosing the domain by country is in **how to choose the right domain**.

The usual mistakes:

A missing return (A lists B, B does not list A), a wrong code (`pt_PT` with an underscore instead of a hyphen, or the country name instead of the language code), an address that redirects, and versions that robots.txt blocks. hreflang *helps* Google choose, but does not force it.

Test with samples.

Pick two pages, view each one's source and confirm each lists the other. Then check in Search Console, in URL Inspection, that both are read.

NEED A HAND?

Want to put your site in two languages and need to know how the server should be organised? Tell us the domain and what you have.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- The canonical tag
- How to choose the right domain
- robots.txt and sitemap.xml
- Domain registration

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