# LLVM relicensing explained: what Apache-2.0 with the LLVM exception means for your toolchain

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Short answer: the LLVM project has declared its eight-year relicensing effort finished, according to a summary by Kristof Beyls reported by LWN.net on 20 November 2026. New contributions have been under Apache-2.0 with the LLVM exception since 19 January 2019, and the project says more than 99.5% of all lines ever contributed are covered, too small for copyright, or no longer in the repository. It matters to anyone shipping software built with LLVM tools, because the licence terms affect redistribution and patents.

**TL;DR The short version**

- LLVM is wrapping up its move of old code to Apache-2.0 with the LLVM exception, the licence new contributions have used since 19 January 2019.
- The project chose not to chase the last tiny fraction of uncovered lines forever.
- Anyone shipping LLVM-based tools should list those components and check the licence files and SPDX identifiers in the versions they ship; this is not legal advice.

Read online, listen to it, or change the text size: https://blogs.iictp.org/llvm-relicensing-apache-2-llvm-exception-explained

## What is the LLVM relicensing effort?

LLVM is a compiler infrastructure project. Code contributed before 19 January 2019 was under earlier licences: UIUC/NCSA, plus MIT for some runtime libraries. To move that code to the newer licence the project needed permission from authors, so since 2018 it asked past contributors to relicense their work. This was reported by LWN.net quoting Beyls's summary on the LLVM discussion forum.

## How the licence situation works

- **Since 19 January 2019:** new contributions come in under Apache-2.0 WITH LLVM-exception.
- **Before that date:** the older licences applied unless the author signed a relicensing agreement.
- **What the project now says:** over 99.5% of all lines ever contributed are covered by the new licence, too small for copyright to apply, or no longer in the repository.
- **Remaining authors:** contributors who have not signed and do not want their code under the new licence can contact the project so their code gets the correct SPDX identifier.

## What the exception is

The LLVM exception is an addition to Apache-2.0 that the project has used since 2019. We did not read its text for this post, so we do not describe its terms here; read the licence file in the LLVM repository before you rely on it for a legal conclusion.

## Why wrapping up is a deliberate trade-off

The project chose not to “chase the last tiny fraction forever”, in the words quoted by LWN. Declaring success trades a small residual of legacy-licensed code for a clear policy and an end to the campaign.

## Limitations and open questions

- We read LWN’s short item, not the original forum post.
- This is not legal advice. Licence compatibility depends on how you link, distribute and modify.
- The 99.5% figure is the project’s own, and covers lines, not files or authors.

## How to check your own exposure

1. List the LLVM-based components in your build, including runtimes.
2. Read the licence files and SPDX identifiers in the versions you ship.
3. Record them in your SBOM.
4. Ask counsel about any mixed-licence code you redistribute.

## What it means for build and release engineers

Licence metadata is part of supply-chain hygiene. A uniform identifier makes scanning easier, and an explicit end to the relicensing campaign gives auditors a stable baseline to cite.

## Frequently asked questions

- **When did LLVM start using Apache-2.0 with the LLVM exception?** For new contributions, from 19 January 2019, per the project’s summary.
- **Is every line now under the new licence?** No. The project says more than 99.5% is covered, too small for copyright, or removed.
- **What if I wrote pre-2019 LLVM code and object?** The project says to contact it so the code carries the right SPDX identifier.

## Related reading

- What is an SBOM?
- What is DevSecOps?
- What is CI/CD?
- Certified Technical Practitioner

## Sources and currency

Sources were read on 23 November 2026. Products, rules and standards change, so check the linked originals before you rely on any detail.

Related credential: Certified Technical Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

### Sources and further reading


1. LWN.net (jzb), quoting Kristof Beyls. Beyls: Wrapping up LLVM's relicensing effort. 20 November 2026. lwn.net/Articles/1108818.



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