

•• OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION GROUP

STRENGTHENING EUROPE THROUGH **PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

How sustained investment
in public libraries and their
multiple roles delivers
social, cultural and
democratic returns



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How sustained investment in public libraries and their multiple roles delivers social, cultural and democratic returns



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ON THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES



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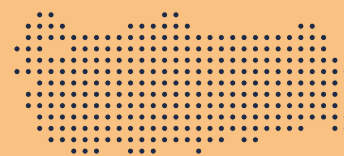
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FOREWORD

A child's first visit to a public library is often a defining moment – when curiosity is sparked and new possibilities begin to unfold. For many of us, it becomes a lasting childhood memory. In our respective cases, this means the George Barițiu library in Brasov, Romania and the Kalkara Public Library in Malta. That sense of discovery and opportunity is what makes public libraries a unique space for learning, culture and community.

We remember the excitement of asking if the book we'd been waiting for was finally available. If the new volume of the adventure series we'd been following had finally arrived.

And as we looked at the rows and rows of books, the themed sections, the activity spaces, the comfy seats for story time and, most importantly, the friendly helpful faces, we recognised why this space is unique. It is so because it fulfils a multitude of roles: cultural space, democratic space – all in the public interest, in the interest of the community.

That is what this report celebrates. And what it aims to protect, preserve and promote across Europe. With 67 000 public libraries, 170 000 employees in the sector, 757 million visitors and 75 million registered users each year, the role of public libraries in European society is precious. Public libraries are a vital asset for Europe and Europeans in responding to pressing social, cultural and educational challenges.

In 2023, the Council of the European Union approved a mandate for an Open Method of Coordination Group to draft this report. What it, and the 36 experts from the 33 Member States

and non-EU European countries behind it, does so well is not just illustrate what vital roles the modern library plays, but it also outlines what needs to be done to preserve this treasured space.

From marketplace to laboratory, from sanctuary to community hub, the authors propose why libraries should make this a European-wide effort. And like all services in the public interest, libraries are there in good times and in bad.

The report illustrates the role of public libraries in crisis, like the example cited of Ireland during COVID, when librarians were designated key workers and continued to deliver essential services to people, or even in conflict, with the 'Library of the Ukrainian Warrior' campaign providing books for wounded and rehabilitating soldiers. It shows how, as volunteer assembly points or even as bomb shelters, public libraries are part of our preparedness infrastructure.

But, of course, the main role of public libraries is in enriching the everyday, acting as a portal to cultural experience or digital skills, or even both. The SMILES project funded by Erasmus+ is a great example: a project that focuses on helping young people combat fake news and disinformation with partners in Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands working together with libraries and schools to promote media literacy. This is just one example of how libraries combine knowledge and social cohesion.

The European Commission remains committed to enhancing public libraries as vibrant, inclusive forums, promoting access to information, quality of life and shared European values. Libraries are

partners of EU initiatives such as the 'Literacy coalition' and European Authors Day, promoting a culture of reading and reinforcing educational frameworks. Libraries are financially supported by different EU funding programmes (Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Horizon Europe, structural funds), reflecting their multifaceted roles.

This report is an inspiration for policymakers at the local, national and European levels, encouraging them to **share knowledge to build knowledge**.

Across Europe, we can integrate libraries into broader strategic goals beyond cultural and educational topics. Libraries should be recognised for their contribution to social cohesion, health and well-being, competitiveness, digital innovation and environmental sustainability. Libraries can be central to our flagship policies, building a union of skills, delivering on digital education, strengthening our European Democracy Shield and implementing the Culture Compass for Europe.

It is imperative that libraries of all sizes – small, medium and large, in urban or rural settings – receive appropriate financial, human, and policy support. Together, we are proud to support public libraries. We will never forget how libraries helped spark our curiosity. How they developed our skills. And how they build a community.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The modern role of public libraries

In recent decades, public libraries across Europe have undergone a significant transformation, evolving from primarily collection-centred institutions into vibrant, multifunctional ‘third places’ that play a key role in community life. While continuing to safeguard access to knowledge, they now offer an increasingly broad range of services – from civic participation and cultural programming to digital skills and lifelong learning – reflecting changing societal needs.

With an estimated **67 000 public libraries serving 757 million visitors and 75 million registered users each year**, public libraries represent a significant asset for Europe and Europeans in addressing social, cultural and educational challenges. This role is reinforced by strong public support, with Europeans recognising libraries as trusted, inclusive institutions that contribute to well-being, skills development and social cohesion. Yet this potential remains underused. Not all libraries have the resources, skilled staff or facilities required to fulfil multiple roles to the fullest extent.

In 2023, the Council of the European Union approved a mandate for an Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group to examine how to strengthen and promote the multiple roles of public libraries. In doing so, the Council recognised the need to better understand and document the cultural, societal and democratic roles that libraries play in society. The OMC Group brought together **36 experts from 25 EU Member States**, with input from non-EU countries including Georgia, Iceland, Moldova, Norway, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

The OMC Group identified 10 key societal challenges for which libraries across Europe fulfil multiple roles and take local responsibility to address the needs of their communities. By reviewing library legislation, national and regional strategies and over 100 best practices, the OMC Group captured the output and impacts of libraries across Europe in addressing these challenges.

The OMC Group sees substantial potential for policymakers to better leverage public libraries across a broad range of policy areas. This report aims to stimulate informed debate among policymakers on enabling public libraries to contribute most effectively to societal challenges through their multiple roles. It identifies policy fields that would benefit most from strengthening libraries, showcases examples of libraries supporting the achievement of national or regional policy ambitions and provides recommendations to enhance their impact.

Despite their reach, libraries operate in varied legal, strategic and financial contexts. **Around 70 % of Member States** have dedicated library legislation embedding principles of free access, inclusion and lifelong learning, while roughly half have national strategies driving digital and social innovation. Funding remains mainly local, contributing to disparities both across Europe and within individual Member States. Staffing has remained around **170 000 professionals** over the past decade, even as libraries serve eight million more users and adapt to the evolving needs of their communities. Data collection reveals strong usage – one billion physical loans and **160 million e-loans** annually – but the lack of EU-wide data harmonisation severely limits evidence-based policy.



Meeting Europe's societal challenges: leveraging libraries

Public libraries fulfil multiple roles across education, culture, community and democratic life. They combat declining literacy and support lifelong learning through national reading strategies and programmes for children and young people. Libraries provide devices, training and guidance on emerging technologies such as AI, while promoting media literacy to counter disinformation. They are part of democracy's core infrastructure, offering free and safe spaces for knowledge, debate and the development of democratic competencies, while serving as access points to culture and heritage.

Economically, libraries provide business support, job-search resources and financial literacy training. Environmentally, they promote sustainability through seed libraries, repair cafés and events focused on the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs). In the health sector, they cooperate with healthcare services and host well-being programmes. As community hubs, libraries reduce loneliness, integrate newcomers and empower vulnerable groups. They have been vital in stimulating urban renewal with iconic multifunctional buildings, while also fostering social cohesion in rural areas with mobile services and outreach programmes. In times of crisis, war or natural disaster, libraries provide essential social infrastructure by responding to local community needs, offering information, shelter and spaces for reflection and recovery.

Libraries are therefore uniquely positioned to deliver a meaningful and far-reaching contribution to the EU's capacity to address the following key societal challenges identified by the OMC Group.

- 1 ➤ enhancing lifelong learning in a literate and skilled society;
- 2 ➤ ensuring access to culture and promoting a rich, diverse cultural ecosystem;
- 3 ➤ fostering social cohesion and building communities;
- 4 ➤ narrowing the digital divide;
- 5 ➤ strengthening the resilience and the functioning of democracy;
- 6 ➤ stimulating economic competitiveness, development, employment and growth;
- 7 ➤ contributing to environmental sustainability;
- 8 ➤ improving health and well-being;
- 9 ➤ supporting urban and rural development;
- 10 ➤ building resilience for crises and disasters.

The report explores each challenge in detail, highlighting how public libraries, with their multiple roles and community reach, address them effectively. It highlights best-practice examples from urban and rural areas, nationwide initiatives and local programmes and cross-border projects where library organisations collaborate across Europe. The report also examines how public libraries in Ukraine have responded to Russia's full-scale invasion and showcases the sector's response during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the OMC Group demonstrates how the multiple roles of libraries align with the objectives of EU strategies in various policy fields, including the European skills agenda, the Democracy Shield, the preparedness union strategy, the European Green Deal and the cultural compass.

The multiple roles of libraries: **a constant evolution**

Public libraries continue to be central cultural and educational institutions, but the more diversified libraries demonstrate that they can offer far more. With low barriers to access, broad thematic coverage, welcoming and safe environments, strong connections with other sectors and openness to innovation, libraries serve as a ‘third place’ for many individuals – a shared public good without parallel among public institutions. Their strength lies in their ability to simultaneously address multiple societal challenges, working in an integrated way with diverse societal partners.

The report explores the evolving functions of libraries through four **metaphors** for the library and seven **roles** for library professionals, illustrating their adaptability as they increasingly evolve into accessible, multifunctional community spaces.

- **Marketplace.** The library as a collection of people, books and services.
- **Laboratory.** The library as a platform for co-creation, sharing skills and discovering talents.
- **Sanctuary.** The library as a safe space for solitude, shelter and finding support.
- **Hub.** The library as a versatile, transformative space and a key community connector.



While the metaphors illustrate the diverse functions libraries perform, it is the expertise and adaptability of library professionals that make them possible. The following seven key roles enable this potential.

- **Community builder.** Connects people, ideas and resources.
- **Storyteller.** Promotes reading, culture and inclusion.
- **Guide.** Aids navigation and empowers users of all ages.
- **Facilitator.** Combines organisational expertise with community engagement.
- **Protector.** Safeguards access to information and democracy.
- **Catalyst.** Sparks curiosity and stimulates co-creation.
- **Motivator.** Encourages participation and creates inclusive, open environments.

This evolution has also introduced uncertainties for library staff integrating and managing diverse roles and skills. In reviewing examples of best practices, the OMC Group observed that not all

libraries are currently able to realise their full potential due to legal, workforce and financial limitations. Bridging the gap between Europe's underused and under-resourced libraries and those exemplifying best practices requires coordinated attention at the EU, national, regional and local levels.

To inform this analysis, the OMC Group collected data on legislation, national strategies and funding structures. [Annex 1](#) offers a **practical framework to support the future development of public libraries**. It provides guidance for libraries and decision-makers on fostering innovation, expanding services and strengthening the contribution of libraries to European values and societal goals. [Annex 2](#) provides a **country-by-country overview of the legislative and strategic landscape** for public libraries across Europe, while [Annex 3](#) presents a **curated list of best-practice examples demonstrating the roles libraries play across the identified societal challenges**, along with a list of projects supported through various EU programmes.

The OMC recommends a multilevel strategy for libraries

The OMC Group firmly believes that a multilevel approach is essential to fully unlocking the potential of public libraries. As non-commercial, democratic and community-oriented spaces, libraries are unique institutions that support lifelong learning, cultural participation, social inclusion and democracy-building. Their presence in both urban and rural areas, combined with their capacity to adapt to changing community needs through an integrated approach, makes them key partners in addressing societal challenges and implementing European policy priorities.

The OMC Group emphasises, first and foremost, that it is vital for public libraries to be recognised by the EU, Member States and regional and local governments as essential services for which free access must be guaranteed. This right of access should be grounded in the European Pillar of Social Rights.

However, recognising the roles of public libraries is only the first step toward maximising their impact. To strengthen their capacity to address societal

challenges, libraries need robust policy frameworks that define their roles and enshrine their value, ensure adequate and sustainable funding and promote skilled library staff and leadership to fulfil and maintain their multiple roles.

The findings of the OMC Group reflect a modern library paradigm and present opportunities for local, regional and national authorities to ensure the delivery of high-quality, modern library services, aligned with international best practices while also responding to regional and local needs and priorities.

The OMC Group recommends the implementation of six high-level enablers essential for strengthening and future-proofing public libraries. These enablers provide both a policy vision and practical guidance for policymakers at all levels to maximise the societal impact of libraries. For each enabler, specific recommendations are provided for all stakeholders to support the multiple roles of public libraries across Europe.

1. A robust legal and policy framework

Libraries must be recognised in national and regional legislation, as well as embedded within national strategies, as essential public institutions that guarantee the right to access information, culture, education and digital participation, serving as a foundation for economic, urban and rural development and supporting local social and health initiatives. The OMC Group recommends that legal and strategic frameworks should cover the following areas.

- Define the public service mission, roles and responsibilities of libraries, while safeguarding their institutional autonomy and independence.
- Mandate universal access and inclusion, particularly for marginalised and underserved groups.
- Stimulate local library authorities to create long-term strategies that acknowledge and strengthen the multiple roles of libraries in their local communities, supported by regional and national authorities.



- Establish annual library data collection and reporting obligations to ensure consistency, comparability and evidence-based policymaking across regions and Member States.
- Integrate libraries into broader policy agendas, including education, the digital transition, climate adaptation, health and social cohesion. Cross-sectoral collaboration between libraries and these sectors should be promoted at all levels of government to address societal challenges more effectively.
- Recognise libraries as part of strategic national infrastructure, contributing to democratic resilience and community well-being.
- Embed libraries in crisis preparedness planning, particularly in relation to emergency response and societal recovery.

Legal and strategic frameworks provide libraries with the legitimacy, stability and visibility needed to build cross-sector partnerships and to contribute meaningfully to public policy outcomes.

2. Multilevel responsibility and sustainable funding

Libraries must be supported by all levels of government, which share a multilevel responsibility to maintain and strengthen the network of public libraries, including through sustainable funding. Libraries provide local solutions to European societal challenges, placing a shared responsibility on each level of government to safeguard the well-being of the library sector. Without stable and adequate financing, libraries cannot meet growing community expectations or fulfil their strategic roles in societal transformation. The OMC Group therefore recommends that policymakers:

- ensure long-term core operational funding at the local level to ensure continuity of basic library services;
- stimulate regional and national investment in infrastructure, digital transformation and innovation, replacing fragmented funding with long-term, multiannual commitments wherever possible to reduce regional disparities in library expenditures;

- improve access to European funding, specifically to support staff training, professional exchange, innovation and the development of the multiple roles of public libraries;
- explicitly identify libraries in European funding programmes – including Erasmus+, the European structural and investment funds and the European Social Fund Plus, Digital Europe, Creative Europe, Horizon Europe, the citizens, equality, rights and values programme (CERV) and, later on, AgoraEU – as catalysts for cross-border collaboration, structural investment, professional development and innovation in support of EU policy priorities.

Funding for public libraries should be stable, diversified and aligned with long-term policy goals. Multilevel responsibility and funding – local, regional, national and European – should be stimulated.

3. Data-informed decision-making

To strengthen and promote the multiple roles of libraries across Europe, the OMC Group sees significant potential in EU-level cooperation on data-informed policymaking. While most Member States collect library data annually to monitor trends and develop strategies, they could particularly benefit from collaboration in measuring the new and emerging roles of libraries. To remain responsive to rapidly evolving societal needs, libraries must be equipped to collect, analyse and apply data for planning, evaluation and advocacy. The OMC Group therefore makes the following recommendations.

- Promote data-informed decision-making through harmonised quantitative and qualitative data collection on public libraries at the EU level. This requires the development of a long-term strategy to identify and maintain a set of harmonised and comparable statistics and shared research goals across the EU that reflect the multiple roles of public libraries.
- Collect national and European indicators to enable benchmarking, trend analysis and informed policy choices.

- Stimulate cooperation among Member States and neighbouring European countries to strengthen the broader European library network, specifically in regard to all aspects of data collection and analysis.
- Build capacity for local libraries to conduct community needs assessments to guide programme design and service delivery.
- Implement outcome-based evaluation frameworks to measure and demonstrate the social, cultural and economic impact of public libraries.
- Encourage academic research at the national and European levels on the social impact of libraries.

Data-informed policymaking is key in effectively strengthening the multiple roles of libraries. Investing in data literacy, evaluation skills and digital tools will allow libraries to move from anecdotal to evidence-based narratives, enhancing their ability to remain adaptable to societal needs while amplifying their voice in public discourse and policy planning.





4. A skilled, valued and forward-looking workforce

To enable public libraries to evolve and meet future challenges, it is essential to invest in a strong and versatile professional workforce. Library staff are not merely service providers; they are storytellers, guides, motivators and community builders. To support this expanded mission, the OMC Group recommends:

- clearly defining professional roles and competence profiles that reflect the multifunctional nature of libraries;
- providing funding for and access to continuous professional development, with a particular focus on digital skills, AI, inclusion, community engagement and leadership, supported by a European platform for exchange and learning;
- ensuring fair and competitive salaries that recognise the complexity and societal value of library work;
- stimulating cross-sectoral mobility, job-shadowing and exchange opportunities at the national and EU levels, including through opportunities in Erasmus+, to promote innovation and peer learning;

- developing frameworks for cooperation with complementary professionals, such as youth workers, social workers and community organisers;
- encouraging engagement with partners, local communities and volunteers, who play a vital role in enhancing the multiple roles of libraries;
- strengthening regional, national and European networks of library staff through active participation, funding and exchange.

Library leadership at all levels is vital to sustain innovation, manage change and foster inclusive participation, with particular attention to leadership training and succession planning, especially in small or rural libraries.

5. Sustainable and inclusive public spaces

Library buildings must offer safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces that are accessible to all and situated close to the communities they serve. Library locations should reflect environmental values, accommodate diverse user needs and be equipped with adequate facilities that support sustainability. The OMC Group therefore recommends:

- ensuring that library services are located in close proximity to citizens, taking into account local demographics, population density and composition, so that all residents across Europe have equitable access;
- constructing, renovating and designing library spaces according to sustainability standards, ensuring energy efficiency, accessibility and flexible use;
- supporting the diverse roles and uses of library services by offering flexible layouts, stimulating community involvement in the creation or improvement of spaces and engaging users to shape public spaces and services;

- investing in a pluralistic, up-to-date and diversified collection that meets the needs of all users;
- maintaining secure and well-organised areas for the storage and preservation of physical collections within library buildings.

Library buildings serve as the heart of the community and a powerful symbol of the library's role at the local level. Maintaining and enhancing these spaces is crucial for libraries to deliver on all of their multiple roles effectively.





6. Digital maturity and innovation

The ongoing digitisation of society has a significant impact on the dynamics of the multiple roles of public libraries. European libraries reach hundreds of millions of users online while maintaining shared, community-centred physical spaces that provide access to information, collections and social connections. In the current digital age, public libraries must continuously develop their online presence with innovative approaches. The future public library is hybrid, combining physical and virtual services that mutually reinforce each other. The OMC Group recommends:

- investing in modern digital infrastructure, reliable connectivity and secure platforms that are accessible to all users, especially people with disabilities, based on public values;
- stimulating the creation and maintenance of shared services and consortia at the regional or national levels, such as digital platforms that support smaller or rural libraries;
- integrating digital skills training, media literacy and cybersecurity awareness into core library services;

- equipping library staff and users to adapt to evolving technologies and navigate digital environments independently, ensuring meaningful participation in the digital society, and particularly encouraging experimentation with emerging technologies (e.g. AI, XR, makerspaces) in inclusive and ethical ways;
- investing continuously in adaptability and innovation to strengthen and enrich the multiple roles of libraries, enabling them to address future societal challenges effectively;
- promoting the long-term digital preservation of collections and ensuring digital autonomy for staff and users.

Public libraries must be digitally mature institutions, supporting staff and users in navigating the digital society. Continuous investment in digital infrastructure and staff skills is the only way to guarantee that libraries can sustain these vital services into the future.



Framework for the future

This report aims to stimulate a Europe-wide debate on how to better leverage libraries to address societal challenges. The report builds bridges between policymakers and library professionals and offers guidance on fostering innovation, expanding services and strengthening the contribution of libraries to European values and societal goals. It showcases best-practice examples of libraries providing local solutions to 10 societal challenges, using an integrated approach aligned with European, national and regional strategies.

The OMC Group recommends continuous European cooperation between Member States to promote and strengthen public libraries and stimulate library development. This should include a follow-up to the current group in the EU work plan for

culture 2027–2030, followed by relevant Council conclusions. By 2030, all libraries should be on a trajectory to fulfil multiple roles across most of the 10 societal challenges, with an outlook for library strategies covering 2030–2040.

Discussions at the European level should focus on demonstrating the impact of the multiple roles of libraries, strengthening cooperation on data-informed policymaking and skills development and sharing strategies to ensure universal access to public libraries.

Finally, the OMC Group recommends establishing an annual European Week of Libraries to celebrate libraries and their multiple roles while promoting cross-sectoral cooperation at all levels.





INTRODUCTION

Public libraries are widely recognised by Europeans as key institutions within the continent's social, cultural and educational landscape. They make a significant contribution to democracy-building, citizen engagement and public participation activities across the EU, including in rural and remote areas. Libraries welcome diverse groups, develop programmes reflecting current societal challenges and provide access to pluralist, reliable information and cultural content in safe and accessible environments. They are essential gateways to local and indigenous knowledge, research and culture ⁽¹⁾.

In recent decades, many public libraries across Europe have undergone a significant transformation, evolving from primarily collection-centred institutions into vibrant, multifunctional 'third places' that play a key role in community life. While continuing to safeguard access to knowledge, they now offer an increasingly broad range of services – from civic participation and cultural programming to digital skills and lifelong learning – reflecting changing societal needs. The relevance of libraries is not only reflected in policy and practice, but also in the strong public recognition of the social value of libraries across Europe.

With an estimated more than **67 000 public libraries** serving **757 million visitors** and **75 million registered users** each year, public libraries represent an asset for Europe and Europeans in addressing the many social, cultural and educational challenges facing society. However, this potential is underused and not all libraries have the resources, skilled staff or facilities needed to fulfil multiple roles to the fullest extent.

Recognising this, the EU work plan for culture 2023–2026 has identified public libraries as a priority. In 2023, an Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group on public libraries was established, comprising 36 experts from 25 Member States. The OMC Group includes policymakers from national and regional governments and representatives of national and public libraries. This report outlines the current challenges and opportunities for public libraries in fulfilling their multiple roles across Europe and makes recommendations on how policymakers can enable them to do so.



Mandate of the OMC Group

The tasks of the OMC Group are to:

- focus on how to promote and strengthen the multiple roles and visibility of libraries as key facilitators for democracy-building and citizen engagement, and as access points and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values;
- identify and explore the different dimensions and areas in which public libraries can play a societal role;
- collect examples of best practices from public libraries in Europe and good examples of policy at the local, regional, national and European levels.



Methodology

The OMC Group conducted a literature review and drew on shared experiences to define **10 key societal challenges** for which public libraries fulfil one or more roles. These challenges form the foundation of the report and provide the basis for the group's recommendations.

The OMC Group has also engaged in close cooperation with EEA and EU Neighbourhood countries, including observers from Norway and Türkiye, input from Georgia, Iceland, Moldova, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom, and consultations with the Federation of European Publishers, EU-Read, Eurocities and the European Cultural Foundation, along with library organisations Public Libraries 2030 (PL2030), the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) and the National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe (NAPLE) Forum. Representatives of the OMC Group have participated in conferences, events and roundtables during the Hungarian, Polish and Danish EU presidencies. Its members have presented preliminary findings during international, European and national library conferences and engaged with researchers, other expert groups and officials during the writing of the report.

Best-practice examples were collected to illustrate both how libraries respond to the 10 societal challenges through their multiple roles and how policymakers leverage and enable libraries to contribute to broader policy objectives. A full list of the collected best-practice examples can be found in [Annex 3](#).

To understand the **structural and policy context** supporting these roles across Europe, the OMC Group also examined library legislation, EU strategies and relevant national and regional policy initiatives and strategies aimed at promoting and strengthening the multiple roles of public libraries. The group then compiled a **country-by-country overview** of the legislative and strategic frameworks in place for public libraries, provided in [Annex 2](#).

The OMC Group found that no formal, uniform European-level data collection exists for public libraries. There are significant disparities in the extent of data collection across countries and regions, and in how data is used to inform policymaking. To address this, the OMC Group gathered **comparable data** for 2012, 2017, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to identify trends across Europe when it comes to library facilities, staff, budget, visitors, activities and loans.

Through a systematic review of best practices, together with an assessment of current data, legislation and strategies across Member States, the OMC Group has identified gaps between best practices and sector realities.

The group also identified the key enablers necessary to bridge these gaps and formulated recommendations to support libraries – regardless of size, structure or resources – in fulfilling their multiple roles.



Key definitions

The scope of this publication is **public libraries**. Public libraries work and coexist in a broader ecosystem of libraries, including national libraries, school libraries, research libraries and special libraries in museums, prisons or other institutions. In this report, the term 'library' refers to 'public library' as defined by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)– UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (2022):

“The public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. It is an essential component of knowledge societies, continuously adapting to new means of communication to fulfil their mandate of providing universal access to and enabling meaningful use of information for all people. It provides publicly accessible space for the production of knowledge, sharing and exchange of information and culture and promotion of civic engagement.

Libraries are creators of community, proactively reaching out to new audiences and using effective listening to support the design of services that meet local needs and contribute to improving quality of life. The public has trust in their library and, in return, it is the ambition of the public library to proactively keep their community informed and aware. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, language, social status or any other characteristic. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, poor digital or computer skills, poor literacy abilities or people in hospital or prison.’⁽²⁾



In some Member States, legislative and policy competence for culture and public libraries lies primarily at the regional or federal state level, rather than the national level. In this report, **references to action or policy at the ‘national level’ should be understood to include regional and federal state levels of government.**

Key principles

The OMC Group has formulated key principles that underpin the public library sector and should guide the implementation of each recommendation in this report.

- **Independence and trust.** Public libraries serve all members of society without bias; independence is a core public value underpinning their work.
- **Collaboration.** Partnerships with local authorities, cultural organisations, education providers, welfare services and democratic institutions are essential for public libraries to fulfil multiple roles.
- **Serving the community.** Public libraries reflect and respond to the needs of their local community, embedded in its history, present and future and **forming part of vital social infrastructure** alongside schools, social services and healthcare, promoting well-being, protecting vulnerable groups and ensuring equitable access to basic services.

In some contexts, the term ‘regional’ is used to refer to cooperation among groups of countries within Europe. This report uses these terms with this distinction in mind, to ensure clarity while respecting the diversity of governance structures across Member States.

- **Co-creation.** Public libraries are shaped by both library professionals and the communities they serve, encompassing activities inside and outside the building, in physical and digital spaces, and in collaboration with local partners.



Objectives of the report

The OMC Group sees substantial potential for policymakers to leverage public libraries to achieve results across a broad range of policy themes. This report aims to stimulate a comprehensive debate among policymakers and library professionals on how together they can enable public libraries to best contribute to key societal challenges through their multiple roles.

The report identifies policy fields that would benefit most from promoting and strengthening libraries and showcases how various Member States already use libraries to achieve national or regional policy ambitions.

While noting that no library-specific EU funding lines currently exist, the report shows how libraries can access funding under EU and cross-national programmes in order to stimulate library development.

Recognising that not all libraries are yet equipped to fulfil multiple roles, the report provides guidance and '**A path for growth**' ([Annex 1](#)) for all stakeholders to engage in the sector's development, serving as a bridge between policymakers and library professionals.

Structure of the report

- [Chapter 3](#) examines how public libraries address the 10 identified societal challenges, providing examples of best practices to illustrate their impact. It further explores the relevance of public libraries to EU policies, emphasising the need to integrate libraries into EU strategies and policymaking.
- [Chapter 4](#) explores the evolving functions of libraries through four **metaphors** for the library and seven **roles** for library professionals, illustrating their adaptability as they increasingly evolve into accessible, multifunctional 'third places' that address diverse social challenges and connect communities.
- [Chapter 5](#) analyses the library landscape, identifying the facilitating factors and barriers that shape service delivery. It reviews national and regional legislation, strategic frameworks, governance models, funding structures, data collection and the importance of cooperation among libraries at the local, national and European levels.
- [Chapter 6](#) outlines six high-level enablers essential for strengthening and future-proofing public libraries. These enablers provide a policy vision and practical guidance for policymakers at all levels to maximise the societal impact of libraries. For each enabler, specific recommendations are made for all stakeholders to support the multiple roles of public libraries across Europe.

The report also includes three annexes.

- **Annex 1** – A path for growth: developing the multiple roles of public libraries. This illustrates how libraries can progress from a foundational to an advanced level of development, and provides a starting point for authorities and libraries to stimulate this development.
- **Annex 2** – Library legislation and development strategies: a country-by-country overview.
- **Annex 3** – Best-practice examples: libraries tackling Europe's key societal challenges. This is a curated list of best-practice examples demonstrating the roles libraries play relative to the identified societal challenges, along with a list of projects supported through various EU programmes.



3



MEETING EUROPE'S SOCIETAL CHALLENGES:

Leveraging libraries

Introduction

The EU is facing a wide range of significant challenges, from social inequality and demographic change to environmental pressures, technological transformation and economic uncertainty. The experts of the OMC Group have found that public libraries make a substantive contribution to addressing these challenges.

There is considerable potential for European policymakers at all levels to strengthen their response to these challenges by embedding the role of libraries more firmly within its strategic policies, both in the cultural and creative sectors and beyond. Several Member States already recognise and engage libraries as partners in national and regional strategies in areas such as AI, healthcare, education and crisis resilience. However, their multiple roles remain largely overlooked in many strategies, from the local, regional and national levels to the EU level.

This chapter identifies 10 key societal challenges and demonstrates how public libraries can help to address them. These challenges were identified through extensive discussion among the experts of the OMC Group, a review of relevant literature and analysis of best practices from across the library sector (a full list of which can be found in [Annex 3](#)).

Many of the challenges align with key EU policy priorities, underscoring the relevance of public libraries within broader policy frameworks. The chapter also presents the perspectives of EU citizens on the societal impact of libraries. Taken together, these insights reinforce the OMC Group's call for EU policymakers to recognise and fully leverage the multiple roles of public libraries in maximising their societal impact.



Key societal challenges in Europe

Public libraries fulfil multiple roles across education, culture, community and democratic life. They are therefore uniquely positioned to deliver a meaningful and far-reaching contribution to the EU's capacity to address the following key societal challenges identified by the OMC Group.



The following sections explore each challenge in detail, highlighting how public libraries, with their multiple roles and community reach, are uniquely positioned to address them. The multiple roles are not performed in isolation: the strength of libraries lies in their ability to simultaneously respond to multiple societal challenges. This integrated approach enables libraries to work effectively with a diverse set of societal partners.

1 ▼

Enhancing lifelong learning in a literate and skilled society

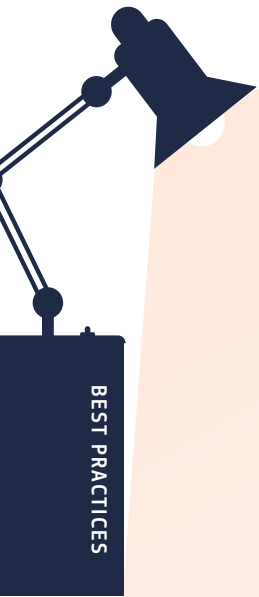
Literacy, long regarded as a universal skill, is increasingly under pressure in the digital age. Reading proficiency among children and young people in Europe shows concerning trends. EU monitoring reports, drawing on data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 2022 PISA study, indicate that **26.2 % of 15-year-olds** across the EU were low achievers in reading, with similar declines observed in mathematics and science since 2018 ⁽³⁾. These figures reveal that many young people complete basic education without the skills needed to progress successfully in further education.

This situation presents challenges for higher education and for the future of European research, innovation and workforce development. Limited literacy skills can marginalise individuals and restrict their ability to participate fully in society. Beyond personal development, reading and literacy are essential foundations for active citizenship and the functioning of a democratic Europe. The relevance of this challenge is highlighted by the 'Pact for skills' of the European skills agenda, which set clear targets to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills to succeed in the labour market ⁽⁴⁾.



Public libraries play a vital role in addressing these challenges. They promote reading and literature while ensuring access to resources for people of all ages and backgrounds. Libraries support multilingual literacy, particularly in mother tongues, through inclusive and diverse collections. National reading programmes and strategies underscore the importance of reading and reinforce the role of libraries within communities. Complementing the vital work of schools, libraries help to sustain and strengthen literacy skills. They offer a wide range of opportunities for lifelong learning, providing spaces where individuals can continue to learn and enhance their skills beyond formal education.





National literacy strategy 2030

The vision of Finland's national literacy strategy is to make Finland the most multiliterate country in the world by 2030. The strategy aims to create a society in which the importance of literacy is widely recognised across all sectors, and in which everyone's literacy skills are supported and strengthened throughout their lives. Recognising literacy as the foundation of well-being and lifelong learning, the strategy constitutes a comprehensive national initiative that promotes access to reading across all age groups through public libraries, schools and community organisations.

The strategy is implemented through a set of specific measures, including:

1. establishing systematic, long-term management and visible coordination of programmes at the national and local levels;
2. developing national indicators to assess the effectiveness of literacy initiatives;
3. ensuring that legislation and other binding guidelines support national, regional and local literacy work;
4. guaranteeing access to professionally delivered public library services for all residents;
5. strengthening and using the competence and expertise of library staff in literacy work, with attention to the needs of different target groups.

The implementation of the strategy is supported by the state-funded 'Reading municipality' programme, through which municipalities develop their own literacy strategies or action plans. These are created through a structured process that includes mapping needs, setting objectives, defining actions, assigning responsibilities and monitoring progress. The programme requires cross-sectoral involvement – bringing together early childhood education, schools, libraries, social services and other relevant services – and aims to secure long-term municipal commitment to sustained funding and resources for literacy work.

The strategy is also supported by the national 'Read to a child' programme, which includes the 'Book bag to every baby' initiative. Through this programme, families receive a book bag during routine child health clinic visits. The bag contains a storybook for babies and a bedtime story collection for toddlers, along with an invitation to visit the public library and a fun growth chart with information on language development at different stages in a child's life. Since 2019, the programme has positively influenced family reading habits and raised awareness of the importance of reading. From 2025, the programme has been included in the Finnish national budget. The strategy is further supported by national media literacy guidelines.



For more information, see:

<https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics-and-publications/publications/national-literacy-strategy-2030>



Small book – Great person

The Polish Book Institute's 'Small book – Great person' is a social campaign that highlights the benefits of shared family reading from the very first months of a child's life. The campaign accompanies a nationwide initiative under which, since December 2017, new parents in maternity wards have received special 'reading starter kits': a book designed in both form and content for children aged 0–3 and an informational brochure for caregivers explaining the invaluable role of books in a child's development.

The second stage of the campaign targets preschool children and their parents, encouraging them to visit libraries regularly and read together every day. Preschoolers who visit a participating library receive a reading starter kit of a book and a 'little reader's card'. For each loan of a children's book, the little reader is awarded a sticker and, after collecting 10 stickers, they receive a diploma personalised to their reading interests.

The third stage of the campaign is designed for all children beginning primary school. With a specially prepared book, first-graders are invited to embark upon the extraordinary adventure of recognising letters, combining them into words and sentences and ultimately discovering the joy of reading – both with the support of their loved ones and through independent exploration.

Each month, nearly **30 000 parents** of newborns in over **90 % of hospitals** in Poland receive a reading starter kit. The preschooler's reading starter kit is available in nearly **7 000 libraries** across Poland. In 2024 alone, the Polish Book Institute distributed around **800 000 reading kits**. Since the launch of the campaign in 2017, **more than six million books** have reached children across various age groups.



For more information, see:

<https://wielki-czlowiek.pl/en/>



2 ✓

Ensuring access to culture and promoting a rich, diverse cultural ecosystem

Participation in cultural activities is a cornerstone of vibrant and cohesive societies. The 2023 culture and democracy report, published by the European Commission, shows a clear and positive correlation between citizens' participation in cultural activities and indicators of civic engagement, democratic participation and social cohesion ⁽⁵⁾. However, the report also highlights that inequalities in cultural participation persist, reflecting broader socioeconomic divides. The Commission's culture compass also recognises widening participation in and access to culture as a fundamental pillar of democratic and inclusive societies ⁽⁶⁾.

Beyond facilitating access, libraries are central to the preservation, dissemination and promotion of the cultural heritage of their communities. They provide platforms for communities to express and share their identities – for example, through co-created exhibitions or living archives in public history projects. In doing so, libraries foster a shared sense of culture and belonging within the community.

Libraries play a pivotal role in fostering cultural participation. As accessible public spaces, they provide opportunities for all European residents to share, experience and co-create culture without barriers. Libraries also facilitate serendipitous encounters with both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, offering the freedom to explore literature, arts and knowledge in all their forms.





Belgium

UiTPAS programme

UiTPAS is a programme that has been run by Publiq and financed by the government of Flanders since 2013. It provides an UiTPAS personal benefit card for culture, youth, sports and leisure, with the aim of giving everybody the opportunity to enjoy their free time, regardless of their budget. The card is used in over 160 libraries in Flanders. Research shows that UiTPAS has a big impact on lowering the threshold of participating in cultural and other leisure activities, particularly for people with lower incomes.

When using their UiTPAS cards, people can gather points when participating in various activities, which can then be exchanged for discounts, gifts

and other extras. People in poverty receive extra benefits with their UiTPAS card and can participate in activities at a reduced rate of 80 %.

The UiTPAS is a card for everybody, so it does not stigmatise people in poverty; it therefore helps to break through cultural and social barriers and gives everyone the opportunity for cultural development. The UiTPAS encourages users to (re)discover the various possibilities at public libraries, leading to a more diverse group of visitors. It also enhances local cooperation between culture, youth and sport organisations. In 2024 there were over **560 000 users** and **5 000 participating local organisations**.



For more information, see:

<https://uitpas.be/wat-is-uitpas/>





Hungary

Complex music and native language education for all ages

The Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library in Budapest offers complex, age-specific programmes that foster musical, linguistic and artistic development.

The 'Singing Library' welcomes children aged 0–3 and their parents for biweekly Monday morning sessions with rhythmic games, poems, nursery rhymes and live music. 'Snail-Tales' targets 4–8-year-olds and includes storytelling, music and handicrafts. Participation is flexible: families engage freely based on the child's needs and mood.

The intuitive nature of singing encourages bonding, regardless of musical background. Parents and grandparents can learn simple games and tunes to use at home. Family Saturdays expand on this format with creative, themed events – for example, exploring Botticelli's *Primavera* through storytelling, dress-up crafts and Renaissance dance.



These experiences support early childhood development, intergenerational learning and audience engagement. All programmes integrate access to library services. Additionally, moderated concerts and educational podcasts extend the reach of these initiatives, offering long-term cultural enrichment and fostering a vibrant library community.



For more information, see:

<https://fszek.hu/en/services>



3

**Fostering social cohesion
and building communities**

European societies have undergone profound changes in recent decades. Demographic evolutions caused by ageing populations, urbanisation, migration and increasing individualisation have transformed the social fabric of many communities. An increasing number of people across Europe report feelings of loneliness and isolation, particularly among low-income individuals and minority groups, which have a significant impact on social cohesion ⁽⁷⁾. Various groups within communities struggle to participate in social life. At the same time, many communities across Europe have become increasingly diverse. When coupled with social exclusion and inequality, these shifts can contribute to radicalisation and societal polarisation ⁽⁸⁾.

European libraries form a network in close proximity to nearly every local community. They promote the principle that everyone deserves to have a role in society, proactively engaging with diverse social groups to foster connection and inclusion. They work with and on behalf of local communities, acting as hubs in both rural and urban areas and providing safe and accessible spaces where both individuals and groups can meet.

Libraries give special attention to groups and individuals with specific needs, including those living in poverty, refugees, individuals with disabilities and prisoners. Through targeted support and resources, libraries empower people to participate fully in society and cultivate active citizenship. For newcomers and refugees, they offer guidance in language learning and navigating life in a new country. In increasingly diverse societies, public libraries encourage mutual understanding and dialogue between communities and individuals.





Netherlands

Elders in the neighbourhood

Public libraries in the four largest cities in the Netherlands – Amsterdam, Utrecht, The Hague and Rotterdam – joined forces to develop ‘Elders in the neighbourhood’, a programme aimed at reducing social exclusion among older people with low disposable incomes. Supported by EU funding (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived / European Social Fund Plus), the programme seeks to expand participants’ social networks, raise awareness of available local support and strengthen personal and digital skills.

In partnership with local organisations, libraries organised movie nights, lectures, social gatherings and courses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, activities were adapted to online and outdoor formats or delivered through telephone circles. Digital skills acquired prior to the pandemic enabled many participants to remain socially connected despite the restrictions.



Evaluation of the programme showed a reduction in social isolation and loneliness, alongside measurable improvements in the skills and confidence of participants. Active user engagement by libraries and their local partners also helped to increase the accessibility and visibility of library services, strengthened outreach to seniors and supported the development of programmes tailored to the interests of older adults.

Following its success, the programme has been permanently incorporated into the offerings of the local libraries. The key outcomes and lessons learned have been shared across the Netherlands and adopted by other library organisations.



For more information, see:

<https://www.bibliotheeknetwerk.nl/artikel/de-bibliotheek-voor-senioren>





Sensory services in Irish public libraries

Ireland's public library strategy, 'The library is the place', recognises the importance of sensory services through its ambition that people who need assistive technologies, literacy resources and sensory equipment will be able to find them at the library. The availability of these services expanded significantly since 2019, when EUR 691 000 in funding was provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development, and has facilitated the engagement of neurodivergent people. This has made the library space more accessible and inclusive, offering a safe and enjoyable space for all.

Over 200 public libraries offer a collection of toys and resources that are designed to support the development of important skills. Library members can borrow these resources without going to the expense of purchasing them. This equipment is beneficial in several ways: helping to stimulate the brain, creating neural pathways and improving sensory processing systems. It also improves social skills such as communication and cooperation.



Many libraries provide sensory pods and sensory rooms which improve emotional regulation and enhanced focus and learning. Social stories / visual guides for library branches are also widely available to support those with autism and many libraries schedule dedicated weekly sensory times for patrons who require a more flexible environment.



For more information, see:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-rural-and-community-development-and-the-gaeltacht/policy-information/public-libraries/#sensory-libraries>



4

Narrowing the digital divide

In recent decades, Member States have experienced substantial digital advancement and transformation. Increasingly, Europeans rely on digital technologies not only for administrative procedures but also for basic everyday activities such as opening and managing bank accounts, booking healthcare appointments, purchasing goods and services and managing household utilities. The EU's Digital Decade targets aim for all essential public services for businesses and citizens to be fully available online by 2030 ⁽⁹⁾. However, progress is uneven: in 2023, Eurostat reported that only 56 % of people in the EU possessed 'at least basic' digital skills ⁽¹⁰⁾. Moreover, the challenge of digital development varies according to factors such as age, education, income and geography (e.g. rural versus urban areas), and is further complicated by accessibility barriers for users with disabilities.

Public libraries play a fundamental role in narrowing the digital divide across European societies and supporting populations in the digital era. Traditionally serving as spaces for accessing information and knowledge, libraries now promote digital development through initiatives such as digital literacy training, access to digital resources (including the internet, devices, e-books, e-journals and databases), and offer opportunities for users to engage with emerging technologies – all within safe, welcoming and inclusive environments.





Denmark

The citizen in the digital transformation

In 2023, topics such as AI and digital citizenship dominated library professional discussions and public debate in Denmark. During 2023–2025, the Danish central libraries led the sector in ‘The citizen in the digital transformation’, uniting public libraries around digital development to benefit citizens. The initiative fostered strategic discussions and concrete actions on AI, coding, information literacy, media literacy and other digital skills.

In collaboration with the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies and library staff nationwide, central libraries explored the role of public libraries in an AI-driven future. The result was a joint vision built on four pillars: citizens’ digital literacy, libraries’ understanding of technology, the digital foundation of libraries and fostering a national conversation about AI.

The programme also focused on children with the ‘Children, tech and play’ course, developed with partners including Aarhus University, Design School Kolding and Coding Pirates. The course equips children’s librarians with tools to introduce technology to children and parents through play and storytelling, making complex topics like AI accessible and fun.

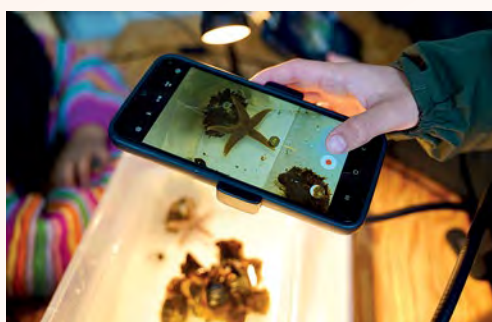


Danish citizens are also encouraged to improve their skills online via [ekurser.nu](https://www.ekurser.nu). This is an online learning platform with short videos and courses on all things digital in the everyday lives of Danes, such as digital ID, online payment, taxes and using digital libraries. It is run by public libraries and sponsored by the Ministry of Digital Government. It has recently expanded to include vocational education and training, along with upper secondary education in fields such as mechanics and engineering, healthcare and social services.



For more information, see:

<https://www.cifs.dk/cases-stories/a-shared-ai-vision-for-collective-library-sector>





Digital Zebra

Digital Zebra is a project run by Berlin's public libraries to promote digital inclusion, participation, resilience and sovereignty across the city. It enables people of all ages to enter digital worlds and access digital services, relying not on new technologies but on the empathy, knowledge and digital expertise of library staff and partner organisations, including district centres and senior citizens' leisure centres.

The programme operates in all of Berlin's districts, with a total of 22 participating libraries. The service is continuously evaluated and developed with a focus on user-friendliness. 'Digital navigators' receive training through shadowing and 60 workshops on topics from accessibility to cybercrime, preparing them to support users for 20–30 hours per week. They assist with digital government services, booking appointments, e-learning, purchasing cultural tickets and accessing services from utilities or health insurers. Complementary workshops and events, such as the Digital Café, strengthen skills and encourage social interaction under the motto 'Digital together'.

The project encourages people to actively participate and train as digital guides, empowering them to share their knowledge and fostering digital inclusion. The project also offers civil society stakeholders opportunities to host programmes and events within the libraries, creating space for diverse perspectives and promoting creative exchange.

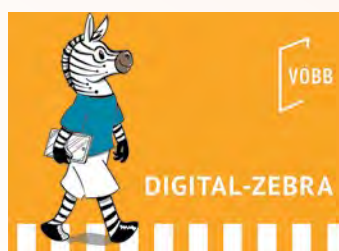


Digital Zebra is run by the Association of Public Libraries of Berlin and funded by the cross-resort community initiative and the 'Culture and libraries in the district' programme of the European Regional Development Fund. It also raises awareness of digital participation across the city and in the media, with coverage by TV broadcasters RBB, ARD and ZDF.



For more information, see:

<https://gemeinsamdigital.berlin.de/de/massnahmen-der-strategie/digital-zebra/>



5 ✓

Strengthening the resilience and functioning of democracy

A critical challenge facing European societies is the erosion of trust in institutions, including governments, courts, the media and scientific institutions ⁽¹¹⁾. This growing distrust contributes to political disengagement and undermines democratic legitimacy. The spread of disinformation and misinformation, particularly through social media, intensifies the problem by distorting public opinion, polarising societies and weakening confidence in democratic processes. Political polarisation further deepens divides, creating ideological rifts that hinder consensus-building and heighten the risk of extremism. Emerging technologies (including AI), while offering significant possibilities, may also exacerbate these trends by introducing new means of manipulation and further eroding public trust.

These issues are compounded by a decline in civic education, leaving many people less informed about how democratic systems function ⁽¹²⁾, along with external interference in electoral processes ⁽¹³⁾, which undermines equal representation. While social media can enhance scrutiny of democratic processes, it often creates echo chambers that reinforce biases and distort public discourse. At the same time, socioeconomic inequalities and the digital divide limit access

to the tools and knowledge required for full participation in democracy. Recognising this, the Commission presented the European Democracy Shield, setting out concrete measures to promote strong and resilient democracies across the EU ⁽¹⁴⁾.

While the European Democracy Shield unfortunately does not incorporate the role of libraries, it does highlight the importance of media and digital literacy as being critical for democracy, along with access to reliable information. Additionally, one of the proposed measures is empowering Europe Direct centres as 'local micro-hubs of democracy – open, lived-in spaces where communities meet, exchange and act together, supporting inclusive dialogue rooted in their everyday realities. In partnership with local authorities, they can host activities that turn discussion into shared experience – from community evenings to neighbourhood skill-shares or local podcasts.' This is the quintessential role of libraries in fostering democracies, whereas many Europe Direct centres are already located within libraries. In recent Council conclusions, the crucial role of public libraries is recognised for addressing the societal challenges of safeguarding democracy by fostering informed citizenship, literacy, civic participation and social inclusion ⁽¹⁵⁾.



In line with the objectives of the Democracy Shield, libraries play a crucial role in safeguarding democracy and the information space by promoting informed citizenship, civic participation and social inclusion. They serve as accessible, neutral spaces that bridge divides and empower communities – a function that is especially relevant in an era marked by significant threats to democratic systems.

Libraries combat disinformation and support information integrity by providing trusted information sources and media literacy programmes that equip individuals with the critical skills required to navigate the complexities of the modern information landscape. They also foster civil dialogue through community forums, debates and discussions that reduce polarisation and encourage mutual understanding. In addition, libraries play a vital role in civic education, offering workshops and programmes on democratic processes, voting rights and public policy.



CLAD – Citizens and libraries against disinformation

The CLAD – ‘Citizens and libraries against disinformation’ – project is a European initiative funded by CERV and implemented between 2024 and 2026. Coordinated by the Goethe-Institut in partnership with the Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists, Information and Documentation Professionals, the Department of Culture of the Bratislava – Old Town District and the General-Directorate for Books, Archives and Libraries, CLAD aims to strengthen the role of public libraries as active spaces for combating disinformation and promoting democratic participation.

The project is based on the recognition that information overload in the 21st century makes the ability to distinguish facts from falsehoods critically important, affecting personal, professional and civic decision-making. It also acknowledges that libraries can act as social, educational and information literacy agents. To this end, it brings together librarians from

Portugal and Slovakia and disinformation experts to develop practical guidelines, training activities and community events that empower professionals and citizens to detect and counter fake news and promote critical skills.

Planned actions include the creation of the ‘Citizen forum framework’, which is designed to harmonise transnational initiatives and facilitate the exchange of experiences, along with the organisation of forums, training sessions and workshops in public libraries, using materials and methodologies adaptable to different local contexts. These activities address a wide range of topics, including minorities, household issues, health, well-being and climate change. CLAD thus seeks to create scalable and replicable solutions across Europe, consolidating public libraries as spaces for information literacy, civic participation and resistance to disinformation.



For more information, see:

<https://www.goethe.de/prj/cld/en/index.html>





Strengthening democracy – the library as a democratic platform

The public library is Sweden's largest cultural institution. Before the Swedish elections in 2022, the City of Landskrona launched the 'Borrow a democracy ambassador' initiative, allowing organisations and individuals to engage with trained democracy ambassadors. Following the election, a local librarian, a cultural developer and a project manager with expertise in sustainable urban development initiated a democracy-focused project, supported by the Region Skåne.

The project explored how libraries can strengthen local democracy and foster civic participation, particularly between elections. It was developed in co-creation with visitors, partners and a range of local actors, with a focus on young people and residents with Swedish as a second language – groups with historically lower voter turnout. The project focused on two socioeconomically challenged areas in Landskrona: Karlslund and Öster.

Using an experimental and playful approach, the library and its partners developed methods and subprojects to understand and implement democracy-strengthening practices. Starting from residents' perspectives, the library developed a toolbox for local democracy initiatives, using culture as a catalyst for conversation and participation. The lessons learned were documented in a publication by Landskrona Stad and Region Skåne, providing guidance and inspiration for libraries and other organisations seeking to actively promote democratic participation and community engagement.



For more information, see:

<https://utveckling.skane.se/publikationer/publikationer/stark-demokratin-med-biblioteket-som-plattform/>

6

Stimulating economic competitiveness, development, employment and growth

Economic competitiveness, employment and sustainable growth are interlinked pillars of a prosperous society, relying on individuals having opportunities to participate in productive economic activity, whether through employment, self-employment, entrepreneurship or other forms of economic participation. In an era of rapid technological advances, evolving labour market needs and growing inequalities, supporting skills development and economic inclusion has become a critical societal challenge. According to the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan, at least **60 % of all adults** should participate in training annually by 2030; in 2022, only **39.5 % of adults** were participating in learning activities each year. In 2025, the Commission presented the [competitiveness compass](#) and introduced the union of skills strategy to boost economic growth by strengthening high-quality education, training and lifelong learning across the EU ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Libraries provide free and open access to a wide range of resources, including databases, research materials and digital tools that support learning, job-seeking and business development. They also serve as centres for teaching the essential skills for navigating the modern workforce, from basic literacy to digital proficiency. Through workshops on CV writing, job search strategies and the use of digital platforms, libraries help to bridge skills gaps and enhance individual competitiveness in the labour market.

Many libraries extend their offer to include business incubators, meeting spaces, access to business databases and one-to-one coaching. By combining access to information, digital literacy training and support for business and employment initiatives, libraries contribute directly to economic empowerment and inclusion.





Libraries as engines of economic recovery and growth

The British Library's Business & IP Centre (BIPC) network is transforming libraries into engines of innovation, economic growth and social mobility in the United Kingdom. The BIPCs are physical hubs where people can come together to learn, network and access free and low-cost advice and support for protecting and commercialising a business idea. The BIPC network celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2022. Many libraries have offered business information and support to industry for well over 100 years.

The national network has proven the potential to create essential knowledge-based businesses and jobs in devolved cities across the United Kingdom at a relatively low cost, due to its consolidation of existing resources, knowledge and public buildings, along with its unique public-private partnership model. By positioning libraries as community hubs and harnessing their knowledge and resources, the network aims to embed enterprise and innovation at the heart of UK cities, creating opportunities for people of all backgrounds to engage in entrepreneurial activity and contribute to economic growth.

Regardless of size or longevity, one of the great successes of the BIPC network is its collocation with and signposting to other support services. By working closely with local authority economic development departments, adult education services and youth education services, along with external support services such as Jobcentre Plus (Department for Work and Pensions) and Growth Hubs, the networks ensures that beneficiaries from a variety of backgrounds and needs are effectively guided and supported.

Many BIPC customers (43 %) accessed business support for the first time through their library. The BIPC local centres attracted a higher percentage of aspiring entrepreneurs (60 %) compared with the regional centres, with customers citing an increase in their general awareness of business support and greater business confidence. With flexible opening hours and accommodating spaces and staff, BIPCs make it possible for parents to grow their business skills while juggling parenting responsibilities.



For more information, see:

<https://www.bl.uk/bipc/>

and the report *Democratising Entrepreneurship 2.0 – Libraries as engines of economic recovery and growth*,

<https://www.bl.uk/business/bl-bipc-democratising-entrepreneurship-2023.pdf/>



Financial literacy through public libraries (Finlit)

The Finlit project sought to enhance financial literacy among adults by leveraging public libraries as non-formal educators and lifelong learning institutions. The project consortium was formed by four organisations from four Member States in central and eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovenia. Two of the partners were libraries while the other two were foundations working with public library networks at the national level.

The project focused on equipping librarians to teach basic financial literacy skills to senior users (55+), who often face challenges navigating an increasingly complex and risky financial landscape. Special emphasis was given to librarians in small towns and rural areas, where lifelong learning opportunities and educational initiatives are particularly needed.

The project forms part of a broader regional strategy to improve adult financial literacy in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovenia.

An open-resource training programme for adult educators and library users was developed and piloted, with results shared on EPALE – the European multilingual platform for adult learning professionals – allowing libraries across Europe to adopt the programme and adapt it to local needs. The project was co-financed by the EU Erasmus+ programme.

Similarly, Milan's public library provides financial education workshops led by qualified financial educators, supporting citizens in budgeting, debt protection and investments using professional tools. These sessions are conducted in partnership with organisations involved with the library system, such as 'eQwa', a social enterprise supporting community well-being through welfare tools, and 'WeMi – Financial education', a project launched by the Milan municipality.



For more information, see:

<https://finlit.eu/>;

<https://milano.biblioteche.it/library/sistema-bibliotecario-milano/cal/educaz-finanz-feb-2022/>





7 ▼

Contributing to environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability is a global challenge that affects all sectors of society, with wide-ranging impacts on natural ecosystems, infrastructure, public health and economic stability ⁽¹⁷⁾. In recent years, the cultural and creative industries, along with the cultural heritage sector, have increasingly positioned themselves as active participants in addressing global crises, including climate change. As presented in the 'European cultural heritage Green Paper' ⁽¹⁸⁾, culture and education offer effective avenues for tackling the major issues outlined in the European Green Deal. In December 2025, an OMC report on culture and sustainability was published, highlighting the cultural sector's contributions to environmental sustainability and identifying measures to strengthen its green transition, with particular attention to the role of libraries as hubs for environmental education ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Libraries act as gateways, access points and facilitators for sustainability initiatives. Through both their operations and services, libraries

advance the UN SDGs. By providing free access to books, spaces and other shared resources, libraries inherently support the principles of a circular economy, with libraries across Europe also implementing measures to reduce their carbon footprint. Many libraries offer practical opportunities for residents to increase their environmental 'handprint' through initiatives such as seed and tool libraries, repair cafés and makerspaces.

Libraries have become vital platforms for raising awareness about the climate crisis, using their resources, programmes and community reach to foster environmental consciousness. By offering educational activities, workshops and access to sustainability-related literature, libraries help individuals to understand the urgency of climate change. This empowers individuals to make environmentally responsible choices in their daily lives and encourages collective action within communities.



Denmark

WEEK17 – the national library week for SDGs

WEEK17 (week number = 17 SDGs) is a prize-winning nationwide theme week focusing on the 17 UN SDGs. The initiative combines national coordination with grassroots, citizen-led activities in local libraries, fostering partnerships among libraries, organisations, institutions and civil society. Local libraries serve as hubs where knowledge about the SDGs is translated into community action, demonstrating how culture can create commitment to the green transition.

In 2025, over 80 of Denmark's 98 municipal libraries took part in WEEK17, collaborating with more than 350 local partners. The initiative is supported centrally through agreements with national partners and the provision of shared promotional materials, posters and press releases. WEEK17 was awarded the National Sustainable Development Goals Award in 2025.

The initiative has inspired over 30 library pilots outside Denmark, with participation in 2025 from Czechia, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the United States. By 2026, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, South Korea, Spain, Thailand and Ukraine are expected to join.

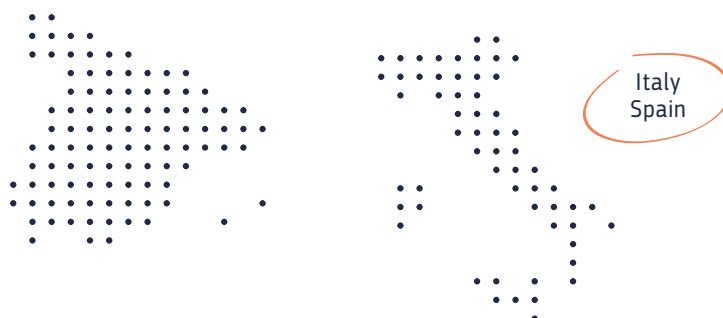
To align with the UN report *[Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations](#)* and UNESCO's Futures Literacy framework, libraries have incorporated future workshops into WEEK17 activities. These workshops empower citizens by fostering hope and inspiring local climate action, reinforcing libraries as catalysts for sustainable and forward-looking community engagement.



For more information, see:

<https://db2030.dk/week17/>





Seed libraries

Valdagno Library of Seeds (Italy)

Founded in 2018 at the Villa Valle public library, the Valdagno Library of Seeds promotes environmental care, sustainability, active citizenship and knowledge of local biodiversity. The seeds are stored in envelopes with sowing and harvest information, which users can borrow and return once the plants have reproduced.

The project engages users of all ages, combining seed exchange with educational resources such as books for adults and children, workshops, local field trips and courses on horticulture, pruning, beekeeping, wild herbs and sustainable practices. Valdagno has also become a 'bee-friendly city', featuring an educational apiary in the public park and 16 flowered lawns, many near schools involved from the outset. In 2023, the seed library received the IFLA Green Library Project Award (second prize).

Libraries and seeds (Spain)

'Libraries and seeds' (*Liburutegiak eta haziak*) is a project of the Network of Public Libraries of Navarra in collaboration with the Network of Seeds of Navarra. The project connects urban and intellectual culture with rural and ancestral knowledge.

Libraries across the Navarra area participate in the network, providing access to seeds and organising courses, conferences and activities.



In any Navarra public library, users can also find information relating to horticulture, food sovereignty, ecology and many other topics relating to the project. Users can use a metasearch engine and enjoy guides, stories, field notebooks, experiences, stories, horticultural techniques and traditions.

With the creed '*Resembrando semillas y palabras*' ('Sowing seeds and words'), the library network invites users to replant words, phrases and expressions alongside local knowledge, songs and traditional practices. The aim is to stimulate individuals and communities to better understand and interpret the land they inhabit, while learning from the wisdom, experiences and practices of previous generations.



For more information, see:

<https://bibliotecavaldagno.it/la-biblioteca-dei-semi/>;
<https://www.bibliotecaspublicas.es/eu/Bibliotecas/pamplona-sanfrancisco/Actividades/Biblioteca-de-semillas.html>

8

Improving health and well-being

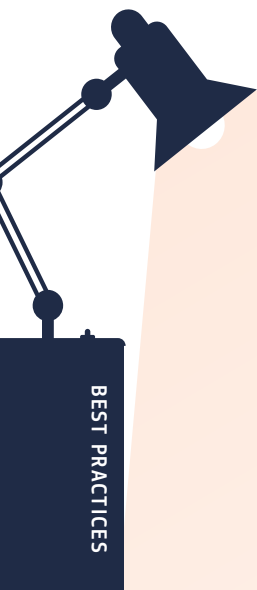
Health and well-being are fundamental to societal stability, yet many communities continue to face challenges such as social isolation, physical and mental health issues and limited access to reliable health information. A 2023 Eurobarometer survey found that 46 % of respondents across the EU had experienced emotional or psychosocial issues – such as feeling depressed or anxious – within the previous 12 months ⁽²⁰⁾, and EU statistics on income and living conditions from 2024 indicate appreciable disparities in healthcare needs being met across Europe ⁽²¹⁾. Furthermore, as healthcare services increasingly move online, the digital divide further exacerbates inequalities in access to care and information.

Libraries can play a crucial role in disseminating reliable health information, including guidance on disease prevention, healthy lifestyles and mental well-being. They foster community engagement through social programmes that support active ageing and help to combat loneliness, such as reading groups, memory cafés and intergenerational projects. Libraries also offer dedicated support for individuals and caregivers,

serving as reference points for people with dementia and offering safe spaces for women experiencing domestic violence. Practices such as bibliotherapy, storytelling and shared reading have proven effective in supporting mental health.

Increasingly, libraries are recognised as key actors in public health, promoting physical and mental well-being through innovative and inclusive services. Through partnerships with healthcare providers, including assisting communities in accessing healthcare, libraries help to strengthen community support systems and ensure more equitable access to health resources. Building on this, the recently published OMC report on culture and health recommends pairing cultural institutions, including libraries, with health institutions to integrate culture and health at a structural level and promote intersectoral collaboration ⁽²²⁾.





Healthy Ireland at your library

The 'Healthy Ireland at your library' (HI@YL) programme is part of the national Healthy Ireland strategy to improve health and well-being. The programme is available across all 30 library authorities and aims to support individuals and communities access information and resources to manage their own health.

HI@YL includes a book collection (books, e-books and e-audiobooks) and a HI@YL coordinator at each library who organises a programme of free Healthy Ireland events throughout the year. HI@YL is a consistent and reliable source of health information across Ireland's 330 library branches. The collection is reviewed and added to annually by a selection process involving the coordinators under a national steering group chaired by the Department of Health, and the selection of event topics and speakers are led by Department of Health guidelines.

Since its launch in 2017, engagement has grown steadily. In 2024, 1 633 events were held under the programme, compared with 1 034 in 2023, and a total of 19 851 people attended a programme event in 2024 (compared with 16 532 in 2023). Event topics in 2024 included healthy eating, mindfulness, women's health issues, sport and physical exercise, children's health, eating disorders and alcohol consumption.



For more information, see:

<https://www.librariesireland.ie/services/healthy-ireland-at-your-library>



Libraries of emotions

The 'Libraries of emotions' connected 'Love for Livres' with four European public libraries (in Anderlecht, Lodz, Kaunas and Kranj) and PL2030 to develop new practices for audience engagement, enhance libraries as cultural spaces and explore bibliotherapy to promote social well-being and inclusion. Focusing on young people, the project assessed bibliotherapy's impact on social capital while creating an open-source methodology highlighting the role of emotions in reading and audience development.

Bibliotherapy uses books and literature to support mental health. It is a form of creative arts therapy; it considers that books influence human emotions and provide emotional connection, insights and comfort. The project applied Love for Livres' Key Emotion Indicator, centring six core emotions (love, joy, surprise, sadness, anger and fear) within the reading experience. The project focused on five key elements.

1. **Empower librarians** through intensive interdisciplinary training in cognitive science, emotional education and bibliotherapy, enabling cross-border collaboration and co-created services.
2. **Design and implement inclusive bibliotherapy services** using emotional AI to personalise reading experiences and make mental health and emotional support more accessible through literature.

3. Each partner library will host a dedicated '**Library of emotions**' space and deliver guided bibliotherapy sessions, reaching diverse and often marginalised audiences: war victims in Ukraine, migrants and women in Poland, isolated seniors in Lithuania, young people and non-native speakers in Belgium and individuals with disabilities in Slovenia and Tunisia.
4. **Conduct research on culture and mental health** with Ghent University, producing the first evidence-based study of bibliotherapy in the European cultural field. The research will explore how curated reading experiences affect mental health, emotional regulation and civic engagement, contributing to the growing intersection of cultural and health policies in Europe.
5. **Promote local literature** through a European creative writing contest, generating stories centred on inclusion, care and sustainability, while enhancing digital capabilities and sustainable library services.

The project was co-funded by the Creative Europe programme.



For more information, see:

<http://librariesofemotions.eu/>



9

Supporting urban and rural development

Urban and rural areas across Europe face distinct yet interconnected challenges. Rural communities often experience lower employment rates, limited access to services and difficulties accessing internet services ⁽²³⁾. Residents in rural, remote and disadvantaged areas also encounter barriers to cultural participation, as cultural infrastructure is frequently concentrated in urban centres ⁽²⁴⁾. Similarly, adults in cities are more likely to engage in lifelong learning (16.5 %) than in rural areas (10.1 %) ⁽²⁵⁾. Conversely, while urban areas offer more diverse opportunities, some face high risks of poverty and social exclusion ⁽²⁶⁾. These disparities can undermine social cohesion and hinder both economic and cultural development across communities.

Public libraries act as catalysts for education, social inclusion, cultural exchange and economic development in both urban and rural contexts. By providing access to essential services and resources for all European residents, libraries help to bridge the urban–rural divide and are therefore invaluable in modern urban and regional development. Reports produced under the aegis of the urban agenda for the EU’s Culture and Cultural Heritage Partnership action plan call for greater awareness of public libraries and their evolving roles and contributions at both the European and national levels ⁽²⁷⁾.

In rural areas, where educational and cultural offerings are often limited, libraries frequently serve as the sole cultural institutions and key access points to diverse information and learning opportunities, both formal and informal. Mobile library services extend this reach, providing access to cultural content in sparsely populated or hard-to-reach areas where permanent services are not feasible. In regions with limited or unstable internet access, libraries offer crucial opportunities for individuals to engage with digital technologies and online resources.

New and refurbished libraries also contribute significantly to urban and rural regeneration, strengthening community life and supporting regional development. Architecturally distinctive library buildings enrich quality of life, become landmarks of civic pride and host a variety of cultural and economic events. Investment in modern library infrastructure strengthens local economies, attracts investment, highlights the uniqueness of the local environment and generates added value for the surrounding real estate and complementary commercial activities.





Travelling library

Only 4 % of Romanians read daily, and less than 10 % read at least once a month. One in five Romanians reports never having read an entire book, most often citing lack of time as the main barrier. Sălaj County Library has been tackling this issue by introducing the 'Books on streets' initiative in rural locations across the county.

The programme travels to 40 rural localities, hosting open-air public reading sessions for children, alongside creative workshops that use engaging techniques to encourage children to express themselves freely and share their own ideas, helping to boost their self-confidence. Books featured in the initiative also contribute to a 'travelling library' for children and community members. Since its launch, the initiative has engaged an estimated 3 000 children, working closely with librarians, authors and parents, and demonstrating the transformative power of reading and creative expression.

The initiative was part of the Europe Challenge of the European Cultural Foundation and has contributed to the development of more creative and resilient local communities. Despite high illiteracy rates, people are more deeply drawn to books and everything relating to them. The work generated interest from the mayor and local councillors, which led to additional funding. As well as improving public reading services and encouraging reading, the initiative also carries out advocacy at the local government level, with the aim of helping to restore funding for libraries.



For more information, see:

<https://theeuropechallenge.eu/travelling-library/>





Netherlands

Urban multifunctional public libraries

In various Dutch cities, public libraries have been transformed from traditional collection-centred buildings into inspiring examples of urban architecture. In particular, four award-winning library facilities have played a key role in urban renewal, revitalising their neighbourhoods and serving as prominent city libraries.

1. The LocHal Library is housed in a former train depot previously used for train repairs and construction. Located next to the main train station in the city of Tilburg, the building was named World's Building of the Year and received the Europa Nostra Award in 2019.
2. Forum Groningen is a newly constructed multifunctional building that has significantly reshaped the dynamics of Groningen's city centre. The forum was named 'Best Building' of the Netherlands in 2020 and won the international Frame Award in 2021.
3. Bibliotheek de Boekenberg, known as 'Book Mountain', is located in the city of Spijkenisse and has contributed to the revitalisation of the city centre. The pyramid-shaped library is widely regarded as a leading example of futuristic and climate-neutral architecture and was awarded the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture in 2013.



4. School 7, the public library of the harbour city of Den Helder, is located in a former school building dating back to 1904. Positioned between the city centre and Willemsoord, the former Royal Navy shipyard, the library opened in 2016 as a key component of Den Helder's urban regeneration strategy. In 2018, School 7 was named Public Library of the Year by IFLA.

Together, these buildings have redefined library typology in the Netherlands and are recognised as landmarks within the public library landscape. More broadly, public libraries across the country are increasingly integrated into multifunctional facilities that combine cultural, educational and social functions, including theatres, event venues, archives, social services and museums.



For more information, see:

The LocHal Library: <https://www.lochal.nl/>

Forum Groningen: <https://forum.nl/en>

Bibliotheek de Boekenberg: <https://www.bibliotheekzhe.nl/informatie/welkom.html>

School 7: <https://www.kopgroepbibliotheken.nl/openingstijden/bibliotheek-school-7/historie/about-school-7.html>





10▼

Building resilience for crises and disasters

European societies face an increasing range of crises, from geopolitical tensions and conflicts to hybrid and cybersecurity threats, foreign information manipulation, frequent national disasters and extreme weather conditions. These challenges highlight the urgent need for the EU to protect residents and safeguard the societal functions essential to democracy and everyday life.

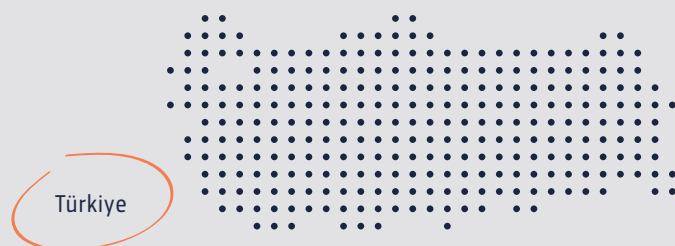
In March 2025, the Commission presented the [preparedness union strategy](#), designed to strengthen societal resilience to crises through a whole-of-society approach, in which all sectors, organisations and individuals play a role. Research underscores the importance of strong social infrastructure for the health and well-being of EU residents – particularly to safeguard vulnerable groups and ensure their access to basic services during crises.



Unfortunately, libraries were not included in the strategy despite being a fundamental component of this vital social infrastructure. Recent Council conclusions stipulated the importance of continuing to integrate libraries and other cultural infrastructure into crisis preparedness planning, for example in emergency response planning ⁽²⁸⁾.

Beyond their everyday roles, they play a crucial part in protecting vulnerable groups and ensuring continued access to basic services during emergencies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and periods of conflict, libraries have demonstrated remarkable versatility in identifying and responding to local community needs. In some countries, they serve as climate shelters during extreme weather events, such as heatwaves or cold snaps. Libraries help to organise communities by providing a reliable flow of information and offering spaces for reflection and recovery once a crisis has passed.





Strategic earthquake response – the role of public libraries in post-disaster Türkiye

Following the catastrophic twin earthquakes of 6 February 2023 in Türkiye, the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications (KYGM) launched a swift, coordinated and innovative response to support affected communities. Mobilising 48 high-tech mobile libraries, over 250 trained librarians and psychosocial support initiatives, KYGM provided critical digital services, emotional support and cultural continuity across disaster zones.

Mobile libraries provided internet and computer facilities that enabled citizens to complete essential e-government transactions. They also offered child-friendly spaces and served as coordination points for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and responders, delivering

more than 73 000 rehabilitation activities. KYGM also established libraries in tents, containers and prefabricated buildings in temporary settlements, ensuring continuity of services in the absence of permanent infrastructure. Despite the damage to 10 libraries, 14 new facilities were built within a year, with 43 more planned by 2026 – demonstrating a strong commitment to rebuilding cultural infrastructure as a core pillar of post-disaster recovery and community resilience.



For more information, see:

<https://kygm.ktb.gov.tr/TR-410116/6-subat-depremleri-sonrasi-kutuphane-hizmetlerinin-surdurulmesi-ve-yeniden-yapilanma-sureci.html>



Public libraries and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine

At the start of the war, over 14 350 Ukrainian public libraries formed an interconnected national network of institutions of varying sizes and capacities, reflecting the needs of the communities they served at the village, city, district (rayon) and regional (oblast) levels. According to the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications, since 24 February 2022, Russian shelling has damaged or destroyed 2 302 cultural infrastructure sites, including 808 Ukrainian libraries. In this context, Ukrainian public libraries have become a vital component of community infrastructure, assuming multiple roles to support local populations during wartime.

Libraries are bomb shelters. From the first days of the war, many libraries have provided physical protection for civilians. For example, the Central City Library for Children in Mykolaiv is a 24/7 bomb shelter that can accommodate up to 180 people at a time. Libraries are also equipped with generators and alternative energy supplies in the event of blackouts.

Libraries are volunteer centres. Many libraries have become hubs for volunteer activity. Librarians, library users and community members work together to prepare meals for injured soldiers receiving treatment in local hospitals.

Together with volunteer organisations, librarians and community residents collect, produce and distribute clothes and goods for refugees and frontline support. Through these activities, a community of practice is being built – providing a sense of unity, social integration and security for new members of the community who left their homes to escape the war. Alongside weaving camouflage nets, people are creating social nets within library spaces.

Libraries help displaced people. Cooperating with state authorities, charity foundations, state structures, employment centres and psychological, social, and legal services, libraries support displaced people by helping them find temporary housing and employment, access information about their rights and ways to exercise them, renew social ties, get access to the internet and computer equipment to continue studying, attend language courses, improve and acquire IT skills, and more. Libraries serve as local logistical centres for internally displaced persons.

Libraries are hubs of digital education.

Approximately 6 000 libraries have joined Ukraine's national digital literacy campaign. Following the signing of a memorandum on cooperation between the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Library Association, many libraries have become digital education hubs.



Libraries are media literacy training centres.

An important aim of libraries is to increase the level of media literacy and the formation of critical thinking of the population, which is essential during this era of information warfare. Many libraries organise lectures, trainings and webinars, and participate in media literacy weeks. Libraries joined the nationwide media literacy project from the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. One of the latest initiatives supported by the Ukrainian Library Association is the recording of a series of conversations with famous Ukrainians about information hygiene and its role in everyday life through the lens of cultural, historical and personal experience.

Libraries are sites of remembrance. Libraries are spaces where memories of the past are housed. As noted by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, the ongoing war has intensified debates around cultural characteristics, spiritual values and shared ideals that shape community identity. In this context, the library is a memory institution that collects and preserves documented historical and cultural heritage. Libraries are integral to the politics of memory, helping people protect their values and identity. Many libraries also organise therapeutic and commemorative events for victims of the war.





Library of the Ukrainian Warrior

The 'Library of the Ukrainian Warrior' campaign was initiated by the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications of Ukraine to provide psychological support to Ukrainian military personnel. Anyone who wishes to participate can bring or send books to the Yaroslav Mudryi National Library of Ukraine or other collection points listed in the announcement. The all-Ukrainian 'Library of the Ukrainian Warrior' campaign is implemented on an ongoing basis.

The campaign aims to promote moral and psychological support for combat and mobilisation readiness among the armed forces, along with patriotic education within the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other law enforcement agencies. This includes raising the educational level of military personnel and organising meaningful leisure activities for them. It also aims to promote military service among young people.

During the campaign, books are collected and sent to libraries within military units, military hospitals in all regions of the country and military educational institutions, among other places. The collection includes Ukrainian and translated world literature, popular science books on Ukrainian history and culture, publications on international military experience and works addressing the psychological aspects of combat operations, leadership secrets, recovery from trauma and more.

For more information, see:

<https://nlu.org.ua/article.php?id=152#>



Public libraries and the COVID-19 pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2020, public libraries across Europe were forced to close their doors but quickly adapted to continue serving their communities. According to a report by NAPLE, libraries developed innovative ways to maintain access to information, deliver both online and limited physical services, support national healthcare efforts and help counter misinformation about the virus ⁽²⁹⁾.

Public libraries in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic

Irish libraries reacted quickly to the challenges of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. While library buildings were temporarily closed, the sector continued to deliver essential services throughout this period. Library staff were recognised as key workers in a speech by the Taoiseach in March 2020 and played a central role in community response forums established in local authorities.

Home book delivery services were introduced nationwide to support people who were 'cocooning' and isolated, alongside click-and-collect services at library branches. A swift pivot to the increased provision of e-books and e-audiobooks led to more than 150 000 new digital library users in 2020 and over

200 000 in 2021. Library staff adapted quickly, becoming digital presenters and social media communicators, delivering online storytimes for children and virtual local history talks that reached tens of thousands of users in Ireland and internationally.

Libraries also became tutors to first-time, older users of digital library services through the 'Age-friendly digital ambassadors' programme. These actions, together with two major campaigns, 'Ireland reads' and 'Grow it forward' (a grow-your-own-food programme), raised the profile of public libraries during successive lockdowns. A renewed focus on outdoor library activities further extended their reach. By 2022, the sector had emerged with expanded staff skill sets, a broader user base and new opportunities for growth in a changed environment.





Libraries as a solution: the voice of Europe

The OMC Group notes that the EU and the Member States have yet to fully capitalise on libraries as a resource. This situation persists despite consistent public support for the EU to take a proactive role in promoting culture and cultural exchange. A Special Eurobarometer from 2025 on Europeans' attitudes towards culture found that 87 % of Europeans believe culture and cultural exchanges should have a very important place in the EU, promoting understanding and tolerance, while 86 % see culture and the arts as important for welfare and economic development ⁽³⁰⁾. This widespread public endorsement underscores the strategic potential of public libraries as a strategic vehicle to address societal challenges.

Europeans already recognise libraries as solutions to many of the challenges outlined above. A 2024 European study conducted in six Member States (Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Austria) surveyed over 160 000 adults and 22 600 children and adolescents from more than 1 000 libraries ⁽³¹⁾. The study collected local-level data on library usage, perceptions and barriers to access across diverse communities. It found very high satisfaction among library users with services, staff and infrastructure. The impact of libraries on the well-being of users is very positive; they are seen as a safe haven, providing perspective, stimulating creativity and playing a strong role in the community. They also positively impact reading, writing, language and digital skills and are commonly seen as places of cultural inclusion. Those who do not use libraries similarly acknowledged the value and impact of libraries for broader society.



Conclusion – bridging the gap

Across the EU, there is growing recognition that cultural institutions make significant contributions to many areas of public life. Libraries, in particular, have evolved into multifunctional institutions that remain dedicated to making culture and information accessible to all, while also operating at the intersection of other key policy areas such as skills development, social cohesion and democracy-building, health, digital inclusion, environmental sustainability and crisis response. By supporting learning, participation and access to opportunity in an inclusive and trusted environment, libraries strengthen the foundations of a more skilled, engaged and competitive citizenry – an impact clearly recognised by European residents themselves.

Despite these contributions, the OMC Group finds that the multiple roles of libraries are largely overlooked and underused in the development and implementation of national and EU strategies. Strengthening recognition of these roles and fully embedding them within strategic policymaking would enable libraries to realise their full potential as essential actors advancing societal priorities across Europe.

The following chapters build on this perspective, exploring these multiple roles in practice. The next chapter examines the evolving functions of libraries and their staff, illustrating their adaptability and impact with further examples of best practices from across Europe, and setting the stage for a renewed, strategic vision of public libraries in Europe.





THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF LIBRARIES:

a constant evolution

Introduction

Libraries are valuable because they support learning, culture, social cohesion and democratic participation across diverse communities. Over time, they have evolved into multifunctional institutions, expanding their services beyond traditional collections to include digital tools, outreach programmes and workshops, and even 3D printing and coding kits, while maintaining their core mission of providing access to knowledge, culture and information.

This chapter outlines **four ‘metaphors’** that libraries inhabit to fulfil these functions, as well as **seven distinct ‘roles’** that library staff play in enabling them. Collectively, these illustrate the sector’s flexibility and adaptability, as libraries

continue to uphold their traditional functions while also providing inclusive, welcoming public spaces where people can connect, exchange ideas and participate in shared cultural and educational activities. These functions and roles are interconnected; activities rarely fit neatly into a single metaphor but often overlap, creating an integrated local approach to addressing the identified societal challenges as best suits their specific communities. What makes libraries unique as a policy tool is that they are able to deliver an integrated approach to the different multiple society challenges.



The public library as a metaphor

Both the traditional and evolving functions of public libraries can be captured through four key metaphors that extend beyond the familiar ‘bookshelf’:

- the **marketplace**,
- the **laboratory**,
- the **sanctuary**, and
- the **hub**.

Few libraries embody all four metaphors to the same degree. While these roles are not entirely new, their significance has grown considerably. The extent to which each role is realised depends on local context and available resources, with some roles taking precedence over others. Activities rarely fit neatly into a single metaphor; more often, they overlap and contribute to several simultaneously. Nevertheless, examining these four metaphors helps to illustrate the diverse ways libraries serve their communities and the unique value – and potential – they offer. They also provide a useful framework for policymakers to understand and leverage libraries in addressing societal challenges.

Marketplace

Public libraries are marketplaces of knowledge, ideas and culture. Once focused primarily on lending books and media, they now offer events, digital resources and opportunities for collaborative learning and informal exchange, supported by professionally trained staff and local partners. Unlike a traditional marketplace, knowledge and culture is not bought or sold, but shared as a commons – an inexhaustible, collective resource.

In this role, libraries promote informed discourse and strengthen democracy. With more than 67 000 libraries across Europe offering access to reliable information, guided by information professionals, libraries help counter disinformation and safeguard freedom of expression. They also promote equal opportunities, enabling people to access information to support personal and economic development according to their own interests and at their own pace.

Like a market square, libraries bring together people of all ages, genders and cultures, fostering exchange and peaceful, respectful coexistence.





Latvia

Ogre Central Library

Nominated for the IFLA Public Library of the Year Award in 2022, the Ogre Central Library has gained national and international recognition. It is widely regarded as one of the most modern and beautiful libraries in the Baltics, seamlessly combining sustainability principles with contemporary services. The library was awarded Best Building in Latvia 2022 in the categories Public New Building and Timber Building.

The project was characterised by strong community involvement throughout the co-creation and co-design process, along with active support from the municipality, which played a key role in realising this innovative approach. To ensure the building responded effectively to diverse community needs, a wide range of user groups were involved in the brainstorming and planning process. Designers engaged with nearby schools, youth organisations and local cultural centres, and conducted a survey within a local Facebook group for mothers. This participatory process led to the inclusion of features such as a dedicated baby play area with adjacent care and feeding facilities, along with a traverse rock-climbing wall in the children's games room.

The library provides a broad range of services for young people and families with children and shares its premises with other municipal services, fostering collaboration and a sense of community under one roof. The building also houses a conference hall and the Civil Registry Department of Ogre, where the marriage room is designed with a glass altar overlooking a surrounding pine forest.

Currently the largest public wooden structure in Latvia, Ogre Central Library is an outstanding example of sustainable architecture. Built according to passive or zero-energy building standards and funded through the EU Emission Allowance Auction Instrument, the library embodies the integration of environmental responsibility with modern public services.



For more information, see:

<https://www.visitogre.lv/en/cultural-history-and-architecture/646/ogre-central-library>



Laboratory

Libraries are spaces for experimentation and innovation, where individuals and groups develop new ideas, skills and projects – whether for personal or professional growth, leisure or local community initiatives.

When appropriately equipped, libraries take on the role of a laboratory: makerspaces, 3D printers, digitisation tools, traditional craft and design courses, repair workshops and even seed or plant exchanges provide opportunities for hands-on learning and creative exploration. Digital training

initiatives further strengthen the technical and creative skills of residents. Across these activities, libraries apply the principles of the circular economy – sharing and reusing resources and spaces to sustain community benefit and reduce waste.

Beyond practical creation, libraries offer a space for intellectual innovation, debate and collaboration, often in collaboration with local partners. They allow users and communities to explore new perspectives, exchange ideas and identify common ground.





Peer-to-peer learning in libraries

In addition to their educational mission, public libraries increasingly function as platforms that enable users to meet and exchange skills. In France, peer-to-peer learning has become an established practice in a number of public libraries. In the city of Rennes, the '4C' (conviviality, cooperation, capacities, commons) meetings bring together groups of people around shared interests. Participants discuss, play, support each other and learn together through activities that take various forms, including book clubs, creative workshops, foreign language conversation groups, discussion circles and board games. The initiative demonstrates how genuine human engagement can create the conditions for sharing knowledge and expertise and developing creative intelligence. Through the 4C events, members of the public are invited to become programme organisers themselves, taking ownership of library spaces and engaging in participatory reflection in complete independence. In practice, regardless of the activity, these meetings foster valuable social interaction where people pay attention to one another. These meetings take place at varying frequencies, ranging from once a month to several times a week.



Another example is the 'Meeting of heroes' initiative in the city of Lezoux. From the establishment of the library, local residents were invited to participate in workshops to collectively discuss and shape the future library and its services. This initial outreach evolved into a sustained practice, with users regularly contributing their skills, objects, collections and expertise – such as knitting, cooking or tool sharpening – to share and pass on. These meetings now take place several times a week, with approximately 100–150 gatherings each year.



For more information, see:

<https://www.leschampslibres.fr/participer/les-rendez-vous-4c>; <https://www.mediatheques-entre-dore-et-allier.fr/index.php/taxonomy/term/99>



Sanctuary

As sanctuaries, libraries are defined by their welcoming nature. They provide safety, comfort and focus – a familiar ‘third place’ without obligations, where users can retreat to study, explore interests or seek guidance confidentially. With support from library staff, people can learn new technologies, improve literacy, address health and well-being challenges or develop early-stage business ideas.

Libraries also protect vulnerable groups, serving as safe spaces or even as ‘emergency entrances’ for acute protection against intolerance, violence or natural disasters, including those linked to climate change. By combining accessibility with privacy, they enable self-organisation, personal growth and opportunities that may not be available at home, school or work.



The Shelters (i Rifugi) initiative

The Shelters (i Rifugi) initiative is a network of bookstores and libraries that have trained their staff on **gender-based violence** and how to actively support its prevention. Staff working in participating institutions are equipped to provide reliable information and initial assistance to individuals in need, in connection with the territorial anti-violence network. The 2025 edition of the initiative is supported by the **Giulia Cecchetin Foundation**.

The project was launched in 2023 by the publisher Settenove, in collaboration with **Percorso Donna APS** and **Emme Promozione**, on the occasion of the publishing house's 10th anniversary. Its objective is to establish a widespread network of local anti-violence points and create or strengthen informal territorial partnerships among

organisations committed to addressing gender-based violence. Staff from participating libraries and bookstores completed training courses on gender-based violence and its prevention, and these structures now function as safe, accessible spaces where women experiencing violence can find trained staff and receive information about nearby anti-violence centres and support services.

More than 60 public libraries in Italy belong to the Shelters network, which offers a stigma-free first point of contact across approximately 250 cultural institutions.

In 2024, the initiative was carried out under the high patronage of the European Parliament.



For more information, see:

<https://www.settenove.it/i-rifugi>

Hub

Libraries act as dynamic hubs, connecting communities with diverse partners and using their spaces flexibly to respond to users' expressed needs. As essential social infrastructure with deep local knowledge, they build on traditional relationships with educational institutions – from day-care centres and schools to universities and vocational schools – while many also collaborate with family centres, senior centres, sports clubs, music schools, cultural associations and local businesses. Throughout the day, libraries may adapt their spaces to host a variety of activities, such as early-morning programmes for young children, afternoon reading for seniors and creative workshops or podcast studios for young people in the early evening.

Their proximity to residential areas and density across Europe allow libraries, when adequately staffed by library professionals, to develop strong local knowledge, expand their networks and identify opportunities for collaboration, thereby contributing to urban and rural development. The library building can be a digital hub for the community, providing free access to the internet and digital services, along with professional guidance and support. Services also extend beyond library walls through mobile units and outreach initiatives for prisons, hospitals and retirement homes, fostering cultural participation and social cohesion.

In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries often serve as key points of contact, providing access to essential resources, support for self-help and community reorganisation and facilitating recovery.



Mediateka MeMo in Łódź

Mediateka MeMo in Łódź is a dynamic library space that blends traditional collections with modern technologies, offering something for everyone, regardless of age or interest. The library provides professionally equipped sound recording and editing studios for content creators, a gaming zone with the latest PlayStation and Xbox consoles, a virtual reality system and flight and racing simulators for gaming enthusiasts. LEGO fans can unleash their imagination in the dedicated 'Lair', while comic and manga enthusiasts have access to over 4 000 publications. Music lovers can enjoy the collectible Oscar gramophone and a wide selection of musical instruments.

Cultural programming takes place in the library's central patio, hosting concerts, author meetings and discussion panels. Film enthusiasts can join a film club that features discussions and participate in regular screenings and film marathons.

All of these services are available to members of the City Library in Łódź – with the library card, members can enjoy everything MeMo has to offer.



For more information, see:

<https://memo.lodz.pl/>



The multiple roles of library professionals

While the metaphors illustrate the diverse functions libraries perform, it is the expertise and adaptability of library professionals that make these possible. The OMC group has outlined seven key 'roles' that library professionals play to realise the potential of these metaphors in practice:

- the **community builder**,
- the **storyteller**,
- the **guide**,
- the **facilitator**,
- the **protector**,
- the **catalyst**, and
- the **motivator**.

By embracing these roles, library professionals enable libraries to operate as multifunctional tools tackling societal challenges across Europe.

Community builder

Library professionals connect people, ideas and resources, fostering inclusive and engaged communities. They collaborate with schools, NGOs and local organisations to make knowledge and culture accessible.

Through initiatives such as the 'Human Library', cultural events and dialogue spaces, library staff create opportunities for users to encounter diverse perspectives. By bridging individuals, groups and networks, they strengthen social cohesion, promote civic and cultural participation and help communities thrive.



Netherlands

Community librarians

In the Netherlands, a growing number of libraries employ 'community librarians' – professionals who enable citizens to help shape the library services according to local needs and wishes. Library buildings are being constructed or renovated based on the outcomes of dialogue with the community, and activities and collections are also shaped in co-creation with citizens.

In the northern region of Fryslân, the local concept of *mienskip* – a term originating from centuries of Dutch efforts to manage water – captures the ideas of interconnectedness, trust and solidarity. Libraries in the region are designed around shared values, with community members actively

involved in organising activities and encouraging peers to participate. Libraries also extend their presence beyond the physical building, connecting with healthcare facilities, churches and market squares.

The Association of Dutch Public Libraries supports this movement through training and peer development initiatives. The approach is informed by the work of Professor David Lankes, including *The Atlas of New Librarianship*.



For more information, see:

<https://www.bibliotheeknetwerk.nl/maatschappelijke-en-culturele-programmering/community-librarian-libraries>



Storyteller

Library staff bring stories to life in multiple formats, fostering literacy, language skills and cultural understanding. At a time when literacy levels are declining among both children and adults across Europe ⁽³²⁾, library professionals support early readers, help to develop narrative skills, nurture reader identities and cultivate future library users while building cultural capital.

By offering activities in multiple languages, including foreign and national minority languages, library professionals promote inclusion in diverse communities. In their role as storytellers, they preserve cultural traditions and local histories and, through intergenerational reading events, build bridges across age groups.





Croatian Book Month

Croatian Book Month is a long-standing national event organised by Zagreb City Libraries since 1995. A defining feature of the event is the cooperation of a large number of public libraries, school libraries and other cultural institutions – more than 250 in total – which together organise over 2 200 thematic events with the aim of promoting the multiple roles of libraries and encouraging a strong culture of reading. It takes place annually from 15 October to 15 November and includes a wide range of activities across the country.



The event is organised at two levels. National-level programmes include the opening and closing ceremonies, round-table events, a national quiz and other initiatives of particular significance, such as the opening of a new library in a local community. At the local level, participating institutions – usually libraries – design and deliver their own programmes focused on books and reading. Croatian Libraries Day is celebrated on 11 November to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the first Croatian Library Act in 1960.

The 30th edition of Croatian Book Month, which took place in 2025, highlighted the essential role of librarians in contemporary society. The opening ceremony featured a performance by the *Ladalice* vocal ensemble, showcasing Croatian folklore and cultural heritage. The programme also marked two major library-related anniversaries: the 120th anniversary of the birth of Eva Verona, ‘the Croatian library diva meriting international recognition’, and the 85th anniversary of the founding of the Croatian Library Association.



For more information, see:

<https://nsk.hr/en/news/croatian-book-month-2025-kicks-off-in-sisak-with-librarians-in-the-spotlight/#:~:text=Traditionally%20taking%20place%20from%2015,librarians%20in%20the%20contemporary%20society>



Guide

Libraries are trusted sources of reliable knowledge, and library professionals help users navigate physical and digital collections. Trained in organising information across various systems using metadata, they make content accessible and assist users in finding what they need efficiently. Library staff support digital services, guide children and students in information-seeking in collaboration with schools, and help individuals who face challenges with tasks such as online healthcare or accessing tax and social benefit systems.



By tailoring guidance to diverse needs and user groups, library professionals strengthen media and information literacy, empowering users of all ages to explore, learn and engage with confidence in an era marked by the challenges of misinformation and disinformation and the opportunities of AI.





Slovenia

The Health Exchange

The CKZ Bežigrad unit of the Ljubljana Community Health Centre and the Ljubljana City Library (LCL) began close collaboration in 2021. Each year, they jointly plan content designed to reach various population groups and address a wide range of health-related topics for the general public. In parallel, the library offers monthly health measurements and counselling for visitors, a service that has become well-established among patrons.

The LCL recognises health literacy as a universal need across all generations. By including vulnerable groups in its programmes, the library supports the acquisition of essential knowledge that facilitates social integration. Operating under the name *Borza zdravja* (Health Exchange), the initiative operates within the LCL as a credible provider of health information. Regular events are held in all LCL branches, each following a monthly thematic focus. Topics span preventive health areas, such as dementia, diabetes and addiction, and commemorate international health observances. The programme also promotes solidarity and social responsibility through themes including organ donation, sports, nutrition and support for people with disabilities.

The library complements these activities with recommended materials across non-fiction, fiction, children's and youth collections, along with relevant films. Partnerships are central to the initiative, with



ongoing collaboration with the National Institute of Public Health, the Centre for Health Promotion and the Slovenian Red Cross. The library also invites experts and institutions from diverse fields to contribute.

Each year, the library also organises a series of events as part of the same project, titled 'Let's colour the grey matter', focusing on a specific health topic while highlighting the library's role as a space for information, dialogue, tolerance and learning. Topics have included children with special needs, art therapy, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and the benefits of movement and exercise for mental and physical well-being.



For more information, see:

https://www.mklj.si/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025_zbornik_Knjiznica-srce-mesta.pdf

Facilitator

Library professionals combine organisational expertise with community engagement. They plan and manage events, workshops and cultural activities, ranging from language cafés and exhibitions to workshops and theme days. Beyond the leadership, financial and human resource skills required to manage collections and operations, these activities demand event management expertise, including networking, marketing, communication and even content creation for social media and podcasts.

By collaborating with schools, cultural institutions and local organisations, library staff expand access to culture and lifelong learning opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach, ensuring the library remains a vibrant and inclusive part of its community.





Des livres à soi (Books of your own)

‘Des livres à soi’ is a nationwide initiative co-financed by the French Ministry of Culture and local authorities. At the local level – often in disadvantaged neighbourhoods – the scheme relies on close collaboration between book and reading professionals, social and childcare workers and local social structures.

The programme targets parents who themselves face challenges with reading, aiming to prevent illiteracy among children. It offers workshops to help parents discover, handle and engage with children’s books. These workshops are accompanied by visits to libraries, bookshops and literary fairs and festivals, and the provision of book vouchers for families.

The core principle is to support and train these parents in developing the confidence and skills to read with their children. Even parents who recognise the value of books often feel powerless in using them effectively within the family context. Through workshops led by social and educational professionals, parents begin with reading through images and gradually acquire storytelling skills, enabling them to share books confidently with their children.

By involving professionals who usually engage with families for social support – such as schooling assistance or childcare guidance – the programme introduces a new, positive approach to language and reading, free from the pressures that can make literacy feel daunting. Some parents choose to become ‘trainers’ themselves in subsequent years.

For more information, see:

<https://www.culture.gouv.fr/actualites/Des-Livres-a-soi-faire-a-son-enfant-le-cadeau-d-une-lecture-a-haute-voix>

Protector

This role reflects the longstanding responsibility of library professionals as custodians of providing access to up-to-date physical, and now digital, collections and public spaces. Managing both print and digital resources requires specialised expertise, including knowledge of licensing and copyright issues ⁽³³⁾.

Library staff base their activities on shared democratic values and long-term strategies, providing a stable foundation for the multiple roles of libraries and safeguarding them against financial pressures or other policy decisions that could threaten their mission.

In daily practice, library professionals ensure open access to information, uphold intellectual freedom and educate users about the principles of freedom of expression. Libraries are a key partner in safeguarding the democratic fabric of European society.



Democracy as a strategic theme

Libraries are important places of community, especially in rural areas. In Germany, the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) launched the project 'Land schafft Demokratie' (Land Creates Democracy) to increase the visibility of libraries in both urban and rural communities and to transform them into centres for exchange and dialogue.

The project supports rural libraries in providing services that promote democracy, dialogue and diversity in their regions. It aims to equip library staff with tools to implement programmes for civic education, facilitate public discourse and strengthen local media literacy skills. In this way, political education initiatives can be sustainably embedded in smaller libraries over the long term.

In Denmark, the Aarhus Public Library has adopted democracy as a strategic theme. The library positions itself as an arena for democratic debate and civic conversation, approaching democracy not merely as a political system but as a lived, participatory practice.

As essential democratic spaces, the libraries in Aarhus promote democratic literacy and confidence among young people, empower homeless and vulnerable individuals by giving them a voice, facilitate political debates that connect citizens with policymakers and organise activities that encourage children to engage with democratic decision-making in their own lives. Library staff work as trainers, facilitators and democracy developers, collaborating with diverse groups in society and using library spaces as inclusive venues for a wide range of participatory activities.



For more information, see:

<https://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/reihen/522086/land-schafft-demokratie/>;
<https://www.nextlibrary.net/the-democracy-initiative-at-arhus-public-libraries/#:~:text=For%20a%20period%20of%20two,activities%20on%20their%20democratic%20potential>



Catalyst

Library professionals spark curiosity and encourage exploration. They promote lifelong learning and personal development through workshops, makerspaces, study circles, book clubs and opportunities for contemporary creation, along with activities such as video games and board games. They also foster active citizenship by organising events that bring people together for open dialogue on local decision-making.

In addition, library staff cultivate new networks and collaborations, both locally and more broadly. For example, municipal reading programmes rely on the leadership of library professionals to inspire, coordinate and guide multiple actors towards shared goals.



Debutantscen Malmö

Debutantscen Malmö is rooted in the region's literary scene and connects debuting authors with local audiences. The city and its libraries have become key promoters of new, local and young literature, with many authors having their beginnings in one of Sweden's writing programmes.

In a short time, Debutantscen Malmö has become a vibrant platform for young writers and aspiring literary talents. Interest from publishers has grown, with the project team frequently contacted about authors that publishers wish to promote. This initiative has laid the foundation for a sustainable platform for debut literature, largely authored by young people.



For more information, see:

<https://www.grandmalmo.se/calendar/debutantscen2025>

Motivator

Library professionals encourage participation, learning and connection, recognising when users need guidance, inspiration or simply a safe space to support their health and well-being. They create inclusive, open environments that combat isolation, particularly in rural areas, balancing encouragement with respect for privacy and solitude.



From language cafés that help newcomers integrate to makerspace tools that inspire new career paths, library staff empower individuals to engage in community life, develop skills at their own pace and gradually explore all that libraries have to offer.

Literacy for the climate transition

The Climate Transition Literacy Club, launched at the Municipal Library of Póvoa de Varzim, serves as a local hub to support community action and debate on climate issues. The library has curated a collection of publications on sustainability and hosted capacity-building activities with experts, local businesses and practitioners to share knowledge and practical skills. In parallel, the community group collects and maps positive, inspiring stories of local individuals, projects and businesses already implementing sustainable practices. These stories will be photographed and compiled into a library exhibition and a publication, contributing to a broader awareness-raising campaign.

The initiative provides citizens with a space to voice solutions to local environmental challenges, which are then presented to the municipal

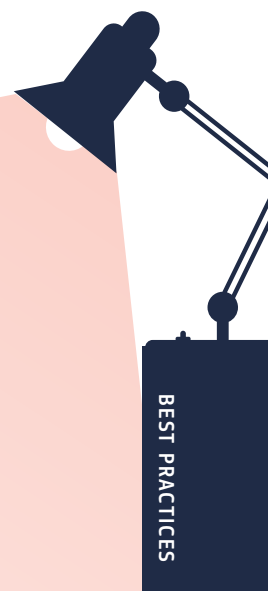
authorities for potential integration into climate planning. Participants have seen their ideas publicly recognised: one person, upon seeing her proposal in a booklet and on a billboard, noted, 'I never thought that my work, my life, would be important enough to be in a book, here, for so many people.' The community interest has generated new collaborative projects. The Climate Transition Literacy Club maintains a growing dedicated book collection and a designated space where visitors can write their own 'What if...?' proposal for the library.

The initiative was part of the Europe Challenge of the European Cultural Foundation.



For more information, see:

<https://theuropechallenge.eu/literacy-for-climate-transition/>



Conclusion – adapting to societal needs

The transformation of European public libraries and their staff in recent decades demonstrates their immense potential as multifunctional instruments within the public sector, capable of understanding and addressing a multitude of social challenges. While public libraries continue to be central cultural and educational institutions, the more diversified libraries demonstrate that they can offer far more. With low barriers to access, broad thematic coverage, welcoming and safe environments, strong connections with other sectors and openness to innovation, libraries serve as a ‘third place’ for many individuals – a shared public good without parallel among public institutions.

At the same time, this evolution has introduced uncertainties for library staff around integrating and managing their diverse roles and skills. In reviewing examples of best practices, the OMC Group observed that not all libraries are currently able to deliver their full potential, due to a combination of factors including legal frameworks, workforce development and financial resources. Bridging the gap between Europe’s underused and under-resourced libraries and those exemplifying best practices requires coordinated attention at the EU, national, regional and local levels. The following chapter explores what is needed by examining the current conditions under which Europe’s libraries operate.





5



SHAPING THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF LIBRARIES:

Europe's Library landscape

Introduction

This chapter explores the landscape in which public libraries operate and considers the key elements that support the effective delivery of library services. It examines the conditions under which libraries fulfil their multiple roles, identifying the factors that enable success and the barriers that hinder further development.

An overview of the legislative and strategic frameworks governing libraries at the national level is followed by an examination of the associated governance, funding and management structures in place across European countries. The crucial role of library staff in service delivery is highlighted, along with the use of data collection to support decision-making and the value of

cooperation among libraries at the local, regional and international levels in achieving outcomes. Funding mechanisms that encourage such collaboration across Europe are also reviewed.

To inform this analysis, the OMC Group collected data on legislation, national strategies and funding structures. [Annex 2](#) provides a country-by-country overview of the legislative and strategic landscape for public libraries across Europe, also incorporating input from non-EU countries, while [Annex 3](#) presents examples of projects supported through various EU programmes, illustrating the roles libraries play across the identified societal challenges.



National legislation: safeguarding the mission of libraries

Across Europe, public libraries form a critical part of the social infrastructure that underpins democratic societies. They provide access to information, support lifelong learning, foster social inclusion and promote cultural diversity. However, libraries can only reliably fulfil these roles when they operate on a stable foundation, ideally enshrined in legislation that secures their existence, funding and missions.

The OMC Group emphasises that library legislation goes beyond defining operational frameworks; it is a prerequisite for unlocking the full potential of libraries as partners in addressing key societal challenges. Library legislation affirms libraries as a public good, establishes their fundamental values, guarantees equitable access to knowledge and often provides the structural financing and monitoring mechanisms necessary for sustainable development.

Effective policymaking does not solely depend on 'hard' legislation, as highlighted in a 2020 [EBLIDA report](#) ⁽³⁴⁾. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that, to date, around 70 % of Member States have enacted legislation governing libraries. In several Member States, national or regional laws explicitly define the status and responsibilities of libraries. In Bulgaria and Croatia, for example, libraries are recognised as educational, informational and cultural institutions of national importance, ensuring free and equal access for citizens while strengthening democracy, economic development and participation in the information society.

Fundamental principles embedded in legislation

Recalling the Council of Europe Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on library legislation and policy in Europe ⁽³⁵⁾, which was adopted in 2023, libraries are an essential and irreplaceable component of the social, cultural and heritage information infrastructure of a sustainable society where freedom of expression, public access to information and democratic participation are guaranteed. While specific legislative provisions vary among national contexts, EU Member States consistently converge around a set of fundamental principles which position libraries as powerful enablers of public policy goals in education, digital transformation, social inclusion and community development. Common values reflected across national library acts and strategies include the following.

- **Free and equal access.** Ensuring that every resident, regardless of background, can access information and cultural resources without discrimination, with particular attention to persons with disabilities and national minorities.
- **Lifelong learning and literacy.** Recognising the unique role of libraries in building literacy, promoting reading and the status of literature, and supporting continuous personal and professional development.
- **Preservation and diversity.** Safeguarding national heritage while promoting diverse voices and pluralism in an independent space, ensuring libraries can curate and provide content free from external influence.

- **Social inclusion and cohesion.** Positioning libraries as community hubs where people connect, learn and participate in civic debate.
- **Digital inclusion.** Increasingly, legislation and strategies recognise the need to support digital literacy and provide equitable access to digital resources and skills.

In practice, certain legislative elements consistently enhance the capacity of libraries to fulfil their modern and evolving roles. Mandating free and equitable access to public libraries prevents the exclusion of marginalised groups ⁽³⁶⁾ and ensures that libraries remain inclusive, welcoming spaces ⁽³⁷⁾. For example, the Polish Library Act explicitly states that access to public libraries must be free of charge and that every local commune is required to operate a public library. Similarly, the Spanish Library Act stipulates that access to basic library services must be free of charge and available to all citizens, regardless of personal or social circumstances, or place of origin or residence.

Professionalisation requirements – such as those embedded in the library legislation of Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France and Norway – help equip staff with the skills necessary to respond to evolving user needs, particularly in digital environments. Provisions requiring data collection on library usage, services, staff and funding, as found in Bulgaria, Estonia, France, the Netherlands and Austria, are also widespread and play a crucial role in monitoring the reach, impact and development of library services, thereby enabling evidence-based policy decisions (see below).

The Swedish Library Act further illustrates how legislation can embed democratic and community values in the work of libraries. It emphasises the role of libraries in fostering a democratic society by promoting the transfer of knowledge and the free formation of opinions. Since their emergence over 120 years ago, Swedish public libraries have practised an enduring ethos of community librarianship – encouraging collaboration with users, local partners and community groups on library service issues ⁽³⁸⁾, and including non-users and traditionally underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. In an era of deepening political divides and escalating geopolitical tensions, maintaining access to safe spaces and information across various media remains essential for upholding the shared values of Member States.

Together, these shared principles and legislative measures underscore the fundamental role of libraries in European society. Understanding how these values are implemented at the local, regional and national levels can open pathways for stronger cross-national cooperation and the development of more inclusive and responsive library systems. Secure legal foundations empower libraries to tackle a wide range of societal challenges – from bridging digital divides and countering disinformation to strengthening social cohesion.



National strategies supporting library development

In addition to library legislation, clear national strategies can directly influence the growth and quality of library services by guiding investment and policy coherence. Around half of the Member States have adopted a national library strategy, many of which have had a tangible impact on library services. For example, Ireland's [‘The library is the place \(2023–2027\)’](#) and France's [‘Plan bibliothèques’](#) have led to increased funding for public libraries, demonstrating how aligning objectives with targeted development goals can unlock additional resources.

The OMC's review of national and regional library strategies across Member States reveals **growing recognition of libraries as dynamic instruments for education, social cohesion and digital transformation, rather than merely repositories of books**. Austria's 2024 strategy, for example, explicitly aims to increase library visitation by engaging broader segments of society, with a focus on inclusion and outreach to underrepresented groups. Similarly, strategies in Ireland and [Latvia](#) position libraries as central community spaces tasked with promoting public participation in cultural, educational and research processes, along with developing digital skills and social engagement, with targeted actions for marginalised or rural populations. In Spain, the 4th strategic plan of the Library Cooperation Council (2024–2028) highlights sustainability, universal accessibility, professional development, the advancement of rural libraries and the strengthening of media and information literacy as key priorities.

Strategies in Czechia (‘Library development strategy 2021–2027’) and Estonia (‘Culture 2030’) advance a shared mission of transforming

libraries into hubs for lifelong learning and civic participation, emphasising the concept of libraries as ‘third places’. Estonia, in particular, envisions libraries as proactive agents of societal transformation, with plans for innovative service models, expanded digital access and partnerships supporting media literacy, youth engagement and inclusion.

A strong emphasis on digital transformation is evident in several national strategies, recognising that modern libraries must not only preserve physical collections but also facilitate access to digital resources and nurture digital literacy. Croatia's [‘National culture and media development plan \(2023–2027\)’](#) includes detailed objectives for digitisation, metadata management and developing a unified digital library system. France's strategy similarly prioritises digital literacy while extending library hours and services to underserved areas, ensuring both technological and physical accessibility. This strategy has also been successfully deployed in the Netherlands. These approaches reflect a shared European understanding of libraries as key actors in bridging the digital divide and enabling equitable participation in the knowledge society.

Another common mission found in many strategies highlights the **role of libraries as partners in broader social policies**. Berlin's [‘Library development concept \(2021–2025\)’](#) stands out as a best practice for participatory planning, integrating public feedback to position libraries at the heart of strategies for social inclusion, education and cultural engagement. Ireland's strategy similarly places libraries at the heart of lifelong learning, skills development, sustainability and cross-border cooperation.



Embedding libraries in broader societal strategies

Throughout the EU, the OMC Group has identified a range of strategies addressing broader social or policy challenges in which libraries are incorporated as important actors. In these strategies, the role of libraries is seen as part of the solution for the specific challenges that are addressed.

1. In Finland, the '[Security strategy for society](#)' provides a common framework for comprehensive preparedness, response and recovery in crises, identifying libraries as key actors for situational awareness, skills development and post-crisis recovery.
2. In Ireland, the '[National counter disinformation strategy](#)' includes libraries as part of a lifelong approach to empowering citizens with media literacy, training and awareness. Libraries are highlighted as key players in ensuring public access to trustworthy, reliable information in the public interest.
3. Luxembourg's '[Accelerating digital sovereignty 2030](#)' incorporates libraries and cultural spaces to promote a human-centred, value-based approach to AI and automation. Libraries contribute to fostering creativity, inclusion, skills, digital literacy and critical thinking, while raising public awareness of potential challenges.
4. In the Netherlands, the '[National spatial planning strategy 2025](#)', outlining choices and directions for the coming decades, recognises libraries as vital social infrastructure with a direct impact on quality of life.



The OMC Group observes that national strategies increasingly aim to transform libraries into modern, community-centred institutions. Well-designed strategies enable libraries to address societal challenges – ranging from digital divides and disinformation to social fragmentation – and to contribute fully to national and EU strategies for inclusive, resilient and knowledge-based societies.

Key elements of effective strategies include concrete implementation measures, dedicated funding and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. Across the EU, such strategies have demonstrably increased library visitation, expanded access for underrepresented groups, strengthened lifelong learning, supported digital inclusion and reinforced the role of libraries as accessible and inclusive community hubs.

Strategies for public library development are often most effective when grounded in, and working in synergy with, a strong legal framework. In Norway, for example, the Library Act was modernised in 2014 to include two key provisions: promoting the spread of information, education and other cultural activities through active dissemination, and framing libraries as independent meeting places and arenas for

public discussion and debate. These provisions were subsequently supported by two national strategies (2015–2019 and 2020–2025), backed by state funds, to implement and advance these objectives.

Significant variation, however, remains.

In some Member States, strategies are underdeveloped or absent, despite strong legislation, limiting the ability of libraries to realise their full societal potential. Conversely, some countries implement strategies without fully embedding libraries in legal frameworks or ensuring adequate funding and evaluation. This unevenness constrains the societal impact of libraries and risks overburdening other sectors, such as education or health, in addressing shared challenges. In contrast, Estonia, Ireland and France provide clear strategic directions and establish mechanisms for implementation, data collection and periodic review – factors which are crucial for sustained progress. Moreover, while many strategies recognise libraries' social roles, only a few integrate comprehensive sustainability goals, positioning libraries as contributors to climate action and environmental awareness.

Governance and funding: anchoring libraries

Library management in Europe is typically shared across multiple layers of governance, and how these responsibilities are allocated can have a significant impact on library coverage and service consistency. While funding predominantly comes from local sources – primarily municipalities in most Member States – the capacity of libraries to function effectively depends on coordinated support across governance levels. Higher-level policy frameworks and strategic guidance are essential to empower local authorities to leverage libraries as tools for public policy.

Where governance is more decentralised, disparities in library access and service quality can arise at the regional and national levels. In Finland, for example, municipalities have broad discretion in allocating resources, which can lead to potential regional differences in library services depending on local priorities and budgets. Similarly, in Denmark, Germany and Italy, library legislation is often decentralised to the regional levels, producing significant variations in the protections and funding libraries receive, which can affect service consistency.

These examples illustrate that funding and long-term strategic planning vary considerably across Member States – and, more concerningly, across regions within them – leading to notable differences in the resources available to libraries. Disparities can arise in how small municipal libraries justify their funding and other resources – such as personnel, facilities and infrastructure – to funding authorities. As local institutions, libraries rely heavily on municipal budgets: a 2020 EBLIDA report found that in 13 of the 22 countries reviewed, local funding accounted for 51–100 % of the total funding for public libraries ⁽³⁹⁾.

National legislation can play a central role in providing a stable funding framework. In Bulgaria and France, structural financing is embedded in library legislation, ensuring predictable support that allows libraries to meet community needs more effectively. Similarly, Sweden's [National](#)

[Library Act](#) ensures that libraries are supported across all administrative levels – national, regional and municipal. Coordinated, multi-level responsibility within legislation of this kind provides stability and can inspire a European approach to library governance and policy.

The OMC sees significant potential in applying the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights to this approach. The pillar sets out 20 principles to support labour markets and welfare systems for a strong, fair and inclusive Europe, affirming that everyone has a right to lifelong learning, equal opportunities and access to essential services. This framework can recognise public libraries as essential services and help ground the right to free access at the European level. The EU can further support this through its funding mechanisms, targeted strategies and service obligations ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Library professionals: the engine room

Several fundamental building blocks make a library function effectively, and one of the most crucial is its staff: educated and skilled library professionals. According to the OMC Group's data collection, Europe's public libraries currently employ approximately 170 000 library professionals. While this figure has remained broadly stable between 2012 and 2024 (although regional and national variations exist), the number of Europeans served by public libraries has grown by around 8 million during the same period.

As [Chapter 4](#) demonstrates, the role of librarianship has evolved dramatically over recent decades. Examples of best practices collected by the OMC Group confirm that this transformation occurs across Europe, regardless of library size, staffing levels, facilities or resources. To address the multiple societal challenges across the EU, library professionals increasingly employ a diverse set of skills and ethical values ⁽⁴¹⁾, enabling them to design and deliver activities that meet the needs of users of all ages in the 21st century and beyond.



Libraries are broadening their expertise by incorporating other professionals in their workforces, such as youth workers, pedagogues and community organisers. In many municipalities, however, opportunities to recruit these additional professionals are limited. In numerous libraries, a single staff member must manage all the multiple roles required – facilitating access to collections, supporting digital literacy, organising community activities and fostering inclusion – placing substantial demands on individual staff members.

Supporting professionalisation

All members of the OMC Group report a pressing need to invest in robust organisational structures that can support frontline library staff. Well-staffed teams are essential, to coordinate partnerships, implement digital strategies, plan and maintain buildings and services and ensure that libraries can fulfil the wide range of functions society expects of them. **Without such support, disparities between smaller, under-resourced libraries and larger, better-equipped institutions are widened.**

Across Member States, various organisations and professional associations are responsible for organising further education (e.g. tutoring, mentoring, job-shadowing and peer-learning partnerships between libraries) for public library professionals. These may include national libraries, regional libraries or other national organisations. For example, Slovenia's 'Public libraries development strategy 2022–2027' prioritises defining key competencies and advancing the professional work of librarians. In 2024, a joint group was established to coordinate national training, bringing together the National Library, the Ljubljana City Library (the country's largest public library and a competence centre since 2021), the National Computer Library Service, the Ljubljana University's Department of Library, Information Science and Book Studies and key national library associations.

Other national approaches to professionalisation include **national digital learning** platforms, where library professionals create and share distance-learning digital courses with their peers, promoting the exchange of knowledge and best practices in the field. For instance, in Sweden, the Swedish Arts Council and National Library support **Digiteket**, a learning platform, knowledge bank and guide for library staff who want to deepen their digital knowledge. The Baltic Urban Knowledge Center developed the **4C Toolkit**, which ensures that public spaces remain flexible, adaptable and capable of evolving alongside societal changes, technological advancements and shifting user needs. This research-based resource guides the participatory design of hybrid, flexible informational spaces and was co-funded by the EU under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme.

At the European level, a number of programmes exist that can strengthen professional education, facilitate exchange between professionals and support peer learning between countries and cities. While many of these are outlined in the section 'Opportunities for library funding at the EU level', several cross-national and European initiatives specifically target the professional development of library staff, including the following.

- **NordPlus.** A programme under the Nordic Council of Ministers that enables projects and provides opportunities for library collaboration.
- **NAPLE Sister Libraries.** A programme under NAPLE that facilitates collaboration on joint activities.
- **The Europe Challenge.** An annual programme by the European Cultural Foundation that brings together libraries and communities across borders and addresses key challenges.
- **Lighthouse Libraries.** A PL2030 initiative connecting forward-thinking public libraries across Europe.

- **European Library Associations Network.**

Led by EBLIDA, the Creative Europe project European Library Associations Network aims to build and strengthen the capacities and professionalisation of library associations across Europe.

It is society's responsibility – often defined through legislation – to support the cultural and educational needs of residents, ensuring that

everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in society and evolve through lifelong learning. This responsibility is increasingly fulfilled by libraries, whose evolving roles have driven – and continue to drive – a growing demand for professional skills and ongoing staff education. This underscores the need for continued investment in library staff training, organisational support and cross-national initiatives to ensure libraries can meet society's evolving expectations.

European library data and key metrics: the numbers

Data collection is a vital tool for increasing the visibility of libraries and demonstrating their contribution to societal development. For example, mapping catchment areas helps to determine where services are most needed, while analysing proximity to public transport can improve accessibility planning. Data on user demographics, programme attendance and digital engagement provides crucial insights for adapting library services to evolving community needs and supports evidence-based policymaking.

The OMC Group has found that **there is currently no formalised system for harmonised data collection on public libraries at the European level**. Significant variations exist both in the scope of data collected and in the extent to which it is used to inform policy. Existing methods often diverge from the recommendations of professional library organisations, such as the IFLA guidelines for public libraries. Data collection on the evolving roles of public libraries is particularly limited and inconsistent across Member States. To address this gap, the OMC Group has collected data for selected years (2012, 2017, 2022, 2023 and 2024). Among the 25 Member States represented in the OMC Group, 21 have sufficient data that can be used to identify trends and support evidence-based policymaking. Gathering consistent and comparable data remained challenging, but the resulting dataset allowed the group to identify

key developments and assess opportunities to further strengthen the European library network. Additional data was collected from England, Georgia, Northern Ireland, Norway, Scotland, Switzerland and Ukraine for comparison, revealing broadly similar trends.

Drawing on the data from Member States, the OMC Group found that there are approximately 67 000 libraries across Europe, which together recorded an estimated 757 million visits in 2023. Notably, 56 % of Member States offer free library registration, and in 2023 there were 75 million registered users. In other Member States, registration is often free for certain groups, such as children, young people or low-income residents, ensuring broader access across the population.

While these figures are encouraging, they also reveal persistent structural challenges. From the data obtained, since 2012 approximately 3 000 library service points have closed, with only four countries – France, Croatia, Portugal and Slovenia – reporting net increases. Library staff numbers, by contrast, have remained relatively stable, with around 170 000 employees serving over 450 million Europeans. This consistency reflects both the resilience and continuing relevance of libraries, even amid shifting resources and priorities.



Evolving roles and services captured in data

The data reflects a rapidly evolving library landscape. Although the number of library branches is declining, libraries are taking on more complex roles. The rise of fully automated open library systems that enable users to access facilities outside staffed hours – along with [similar library concepts](#) – makes it increasingly evident that libraries are evolving beyond their traditional role as simple repositories of books.

However, digital innovation must not diminish the importance of a continued physical presence in communities. Libraries remain essential community hubs, fostering social cohesion, building competencies and supporting equitable access to knowledge. The expansion of roles underscores the need for increased funding mechanisms and structural support for public

libraries; in some Member States, insufficient funding has caused roadblocks and limited development.

Library visits and loans further highlight their societal relevance.

While the number of visits declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, recent data indicates recovery. Library loans remain consistently strong – exceeding one billion annually across Europe – demonstrating that libraries continue to play a vital role in society and, far from being outdated, they still fulfil this core and also ever-evolving role. The lending of e-books is increasing year on year across the EU, reaching new and younger audiences through digital library platforms, although the legal framework for some of these services remains unclear. Annually, libraries reach over 800 million online visitors and register over 160 million e-loans of digital books.



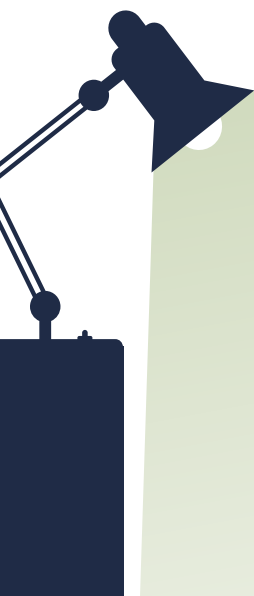
The National eLibrary

The National eLibrary is a shared digital service provided by the National Library of Finland in cooperation with public libraries. Available to municipalities across Finland, the service enables residents to borrow e-books, audiobooks and digital journals. While the collection primarily includes content in Finnish and Swedish, materials in other languages are also available.



For more information, see:

<https://www.kansalliskirjasto.fi/en/e-library>



The OMC Group found that countries take different approaches to collecting data on the new roles of libraries.

Finland registered a total of 55 904 events in 2024 with a total of 449 957 participants. Events are categorised by age and thematic categories. German public libraries reported a total of 410 000 events, guided tours and exhibitions hosted by public libraries in 2024. This included approximately 200 000 events for children that were designed to promote reading skills and media literacy. France registers the number of events and categorises whether they are cultural, indoor or outdoor, and by class visits. In 2024, the registered number of **library events** was 978 693, with an average of 89 events per establishment. Dutch data shows a quadrupling of activities organised by public libraries in the last decade, from 75 000 activities in 2015 to 440 000 in 2024. The Netherlands uses five different categories to divide **activities**, based on the library functionalities that are described in national legislation. Finally, in Poland a total of 177 300 stationary events were held in public libraries, attended by 5.6 million participants. In addition, one library spent an average of 54 hours per year on organising various training and educational activities.

Recovery, adaptability and resilience

Despite the challenges of the OMC Group's data collection process, it has provided valuable insights into a highly diverse European library landscape. Some libraries are managed by a single staff member valiantly covering multiple responsibilities, while others operate as large institutions with expanded staffing and renewed post-pandemic investment. This diversity illustrates resilience amid demographic shifts and emerging geopolitical challenges, but also reflects funding disparities across various regions in Europe.

Importantly, the decline in physical branches does not equate to a reduction in services;

libraries are evolving into multifunctional spaces, requiring updated infrastructure and increased staffing to meet broader community needs. Average proximity remains strong, with most European residents living only a few kilometres from a library, underscoring the enduring relevance and reach of these institutions.

The OMC Group sees great potential in using data across Europe to enhance data-informed policymaking. Given the fact that library development across Europe, including non-EU countries, shows great similarity, data can provide valuable insights to strengthen library policies.

Data is also key in creating more visibility on the multiple roles and the impact of public libraries.



Library cooperation and EU funding: levers for change

The OMC Group has found that the development of the multiple roles of libraries is occurring in similar ways across the EU, neighbouring countries and globally, with comparable trends in how libraries respond to societal challenges. This alignment presents significant potential to strengthen and benefit from enhanced European policy, cooperation and funding.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a marked increase in the accreditation of public libraries for Erasmus+ mobility, reflecting a strong desire for peer learning, innovation and sectoral development. European library organisations such as EBLIDA, NAPLE and PL2030 have seen sustained and active engagement from their members in the same period, underlining the importance library professionals place on being able to consult with, and learn from, their peers. The highest-performing libraries across Europe are strategically leveraging both funding and cooperative opportunities to improve service delivery and drive innovation.

At the same time, the OMC Group recognises the gap in capacity between small and large libraries. Smaller libraries report significantly lower access to essential innovation skills, networking opportunities and funding. This is noted by the research of Librarian⁽⁴²⁾, an EU-funded project exploring value co-creation between libraries and the public.

Funding opportunities for libraries at the EU level

In exploring the landscape of EU funding opportunities for libraries, the OMC Group has identified two primary objectives under which libraries can secure financial support: **(i) strengthening library professionals and library networks, and (ii) enhancing projects and programmes for European residents.** By aligning with these objectives, libraries can make effective use of available resources to advance their key roles and services. While most funding opportunities are distinctly oriented towards one objective, some programmes serve dual purposes. Libraries can strategically leverage these funds to both build professional capacity and deliver impactful services to their communities, thereby reinforcing their multiple roles as cultural and educational hubs.

Although there is no European strategy to strengthen the multiple roles of public libraries, the EU and EU-wide organisations have supported this transition with various funding mechanisms in recent years. In 2025, a synergy info pack by CORDIS⁽⁴³⁾, commissioned by the Commission, was published on the evolving role of public libraries in Europe. The Info Pack presents 14 EU-funded projects – supported by Creative Europe, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+ and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund – that showcase this modern, multifaceted mission of public libraries across Europe. The OMC Group has identified nine European funding programmes that public libraries or library networks have successfully accessed.

EU PROGRAMMES

- ↳ Creative Europe programme;
- ↳ Erasmus+ programme;
- ↳ Horizon Europe programme;
- ↳ EU structural funds:
 - ▶ European Regional Development Fund,
 - ▶ European Social Fund Plus;
- ↳ Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund;
- ↳ CERV;
- ↳ the rural development programmes.

OTHER EUROPEAN PROGRAMMES

- ↳ The Europe Challenge (European Cultural Foundation);
- ↳ EEA and Norway Grants.

Although library-led projects represent only a small share of the projects funded through these programmes, they demonstrate that libraries can effectively contribute to a wide range of EU priorities when they have access to suitable funding instruments. Looking ahead, the structure currently envisaged for the next multiannual financial framework (2028–2034) continues to emphasise objectives closely aligned with the strengths of public libraries. The programmes expected to be grouped under AgoraEU – CERV and the Creative Europe ‘culture’ strand – will support democratic participation, cultural development, professional mobility, social cohesion, economic development and the digital and green transitions.





Strengthening young people's democratic competencies: 'Our democratic Europe' and SMILES – Erasmus+

Libraries across Europe have collaborated to enhance young people's democratic competencies, supported by the Erasmus+ programme.

Four local libraries across the EU in Belgium (Roeselare), Denmark (Herning), the Netherlands (Middelburg) and Poland (Gdansk) joined forces for the project 'Our democratic Europe'. The project reached 100 teenagers aged 14–19 attending schools or high schools that were recruited through open calls or in cooperation with schools. This group reflected a diverse range of ages, genders and social, cultural and economic backgrounds, including youngsters with fewer opportunities. Participants developed knowledge of democratic procedures, policymaking, tools for event organisation and communication and discussion facilitation.

Regional and international seminars stimulated personal empowerment, intercultural understanding, language skills and social awareness, with the libraries serving as facilitators and meeting spaces.

SMILES (Innovative methods for media & information literacy education involving school and libraries) focuses on helping young people combat fake news and disinformation. Partners in Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands, including professionals from libraries, media literacy organisations and research institutes, developed and piloted a series of workshops aimed at students aged 12–15, delivered in libraries and schools, to equip young people with skills to identify and counter fake news.



For more information, see:

<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2016-2-DK01-KA347-022381>;
<https://smiles.platoniq.net/>

The findings of this report underscore the added value that libraries bring to these policy domains. The OMC Group has collected examples of library participation in EU projects, which can be found in [Annex 3](#). These examples illustrate the wide variety of partnerships formed between public libraries, schools, civic organisations, universities and local and regional authorities. Enhancing access to these funds for public libraries, as the next multiannual financial framework takes shape, would unlock significant potential for libraries to support EU priorities, both by strengthening the profession and by delivering high-quality, impactful services to European residents.

Organisation for library cooperation at the EU level

The OMC Group also recognised the important role that library organisations play in supporting the profession and service delivery in Europe. Five major organisations currently work on library issues from different perspectives, alongside others focused on more specialist areas. These five are mature organisations with networks spanning all Member States and beyond.

1. **EBLIDA** is the community and networking hub for all library, information and documentation associations and institutions in Europe. Based in The Hague, it promotes a sustainable, democratic and equitable society. EBLIDA receives funding from the Creative Europe programme to strengthen the capacity of the sector at the EU level.
2. The **NAPLE Forum** is an international non-governmental association pursuing the interests of national public library authorities in Europe, promoting principles and strategies for public library policies. Membership in NAPLE is open to all national public library authorities or their closest equivalents. NAPLE has a rotating secretariat and is currently chaired by the Local Government Management Agency in Ireland.
3. **PL2030** is a Brussels-based organisation working for over eight years to build connections between innovative library practices and build recognition of the library sector's contribution within EU institutions. PL2030 curates EU projects around democracy, sustainability and digital futures, working with a network of 40 innovative and dynamic Lighthouse Libraries across more than 20 Member States.
4. **IFLA** is an independent, international, non-governmental, not-for-profit, public benefit organisation founded in 1927 and based in The Hague. IFLA advances the interests of library and information associations, libraries and information services, librarians, and the communities they serve worldwide. IFLA has a European Regional Division with a committee of members from 20 different countries in Europe.



5. Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche (Association of European Research Libraries) is the voice of Europe's research library community. Based in The Hague, it represents around 420 national, university and other research libraries, and its wider network includes goal-oriented partnerships with other organisations across Europe and beyond. It recently led 'Librarin', a Horizon Europe project developing participatory management and sustainable finance models for European libraries.

The support and expertise provided by these organisations, both to their members and between members through active networks, is crucial to the continuing development of libraries in Europe. The significant number of projects delivered by them, some with support from European funding programmes but often only with in-kind contributions from volunteer professionals, has enhanced the professional environment for librarians in Europe and, by extension, the quality of services delivered to users. Supporting these organisations to solidify and expand their networks would provide a robust foundation for European library development and create stronger partners for implementing the OMC Group's recommendations.



Conclusion

[Chapter 5](#) has outlined the landscape in which public libraries operate across Europe and the conditions that allow them to deliver diverse services to their communities. A robust legal framework – though varying in form across countries – consistently underpins a thriving library sector, particularly when paired with stable funding, targeted national strategies and coordinated governance.

As libraries' roles evolve, investment in staff development becomes increasingly important. Resource disparities, especially in smaller or under-resourced libraries, remain a key challenge in ensuring the roles of libraries evolve for all communities across Europe. Cooperation among libraries and library professionals – supported by international organisations and EU funding – strengthens capacity and enhances libraries' ability to address societal challenges, as illustrated in [Annex 3](#).

The OMC Group's data collection offered valuable insights on library numbers, visits, staffing and loans, but highlighted a lack of harmonisation in European library data. Inconsistencies and gaps – particularly regarding emerging roles – limit the ability to compare trends, evaluate impact and inform policy, underscoring the need for more consistent data collection. The OMC Group expresses concern that some countries or regions have no recent data on libraries at all.

On the basis of these findings, the OMC Group has developed a multilevel strategy, setting out enabling conditions and recommendations to address key challenges in the current library landscape and support the continued development of libraries in fully realising their multiple roles for communities across Europe. This is complemented by 'A path for growth' ([Annex 1](#)), which illustrates how libraries can progress from a foundational to an advanced level of development and provides a starting point for authorities and libraries to engage in dialogue on how to operationalise the multilevel strategy.



6



CALL TO ACTION: a multilevel strategy for libraries

The mandate of the OMC Group called for a better understanding and documentation of the multiple cultural, societal and democratic roles libraries can play in Europe. It also established the task of identifying how these roles can be supported at the local, regional, national and EU levels, including through funding mechanisms, regulatory frameworks and cooperation with relevant authorities. Finally, the mandate called for the OMC Group to make specific recommendations on how to promote, strengthen and enhance the visibility of the multiple roles of libraries.

The OMC Group firmly believes that a multi-level approach is key to fully unlocking the potential of libraries. Public libraries are widely recognised as accessible and trusted institutions across European societies. As non-commercial, democratic and community-oriented spaces, they provide services that support lifelong learning, cultural participation, social inclusion and informed citizenship. Their presence in both urban and rural areas, and their capacity to adapt to changing community needs with an integrated approach, make them important partners in addressing societal challenges and implementing European policy priorities.

The OMC Group emphasises, first and foremost, that it is vital that public libraries be recognised by the EU, the Member States and regional and local governments as essential services for which free access must be guaranteed. This right of access should be grounded in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Recognising the roles of public libraries is only the first step towards maximising their impact. To strengthen their capacity to address societal challenges, libraries need robust policy frameworks that enshrine their value, along with adequate and sustainable funding to ensure long-term capacity and leadership that promotes innovation, inclusion and equity. To support these objectives, the OMC Group recommends embedding six high-level enablers across European, national, regional and local policy frameworks. These enablers would provide both a strategic vision and practical guidance for policymakers, ensuring that libraries can evolve into inclusive, innovative and future-ready institutions capable of delivering local responses to shared societal challenges.





1. A robust legal and policy framework

Libraries must be recognised in national and regional legislation, along with being embedded within national strategies, as essential public institutions that guarantee the right to access information, culture, education and digital participation, serving as a foundation for economic, urban and rural development and supporting local social and health initiatives. The OMC Group recommends that legal and strategic frameworks should:

- define the public service mission, roles and responsibilities of libraries, while safeguarding their institutional autonomy and independence;
- mandate universal access and inclusion, particularly for marginalised and underserved groups;
- stimulate local library authorities to create long-term strategies that acknowledge and strengthen the multiple roles of libraries in their local communities, supported by regional and national authorities;
- establish annual library data collection and reporting obligations to ensure consistency, comparability and evidence-based policymaking across regions and Member States;
- integrate libraries into broader policy agendas, including education, the digital transition, climate adaptation, health and social cohesion; cross-sectoral collaboration between libraries and these sectors should be promoted at all levels of government to address societal challenges more effectively;
- recognise libraries as part of strategic national infrastructure, contributing to democratic resilience and community well-being;
- embed libraries in crisis preparedness planning, particularly in relation to emergency response and societal recovery.

Legal and strategic frameworks provide libraries with the legitimacy, stability and visibility needed to build cross-sector partnerships and contribute meaningfully to public policy outcomes.



2. Multilevel responsibility and sustainable funding

Libraries must be supported by all levels of government, which share a multilevel responsibility to maintain and strengthen the network of public libraries, including through sustainable funding. Libraries provide local solutions to European societal challenges, placing a shared responsibility on each level of government to safeguard the well-being of the library sector. Without stable and adequate financing, libraries cannot meet growing community expectations or fulfil their strategic roles in societal transformation. The OMC Group therefore recommends that policymakers:

- ensure long-term core operational funding at the local level to ensure continuity of basic library services;
- stimulate regional and national investment in infrastructure, digital transformation and innovation, replacing fragmented funding with long-term, multiannual commitments wherever possible to reduce regional disparities in library expenditures;
- improve access to European funding, specifically to support staff training, professional exchange, innovation and the development of the multiple roles of public libraries;
- explicitly identify libraries in European funding programmes – including Erasmus+, the European structural and investment funds and the European Social Fund Plus, Digital Europe, Creative Europe, Horizon Europe, CERV and, later on, AgoraEU – as catalysts for cross-border collaboration, structural investment, professional development and innovation in support of EU policy priorities.
- Funding for public libraries should be stable, diversified and aligned with long-term policy goals. Multilevel responsibility and funding – local, regional, national and European – should be stimulated.



3. Data-informed decision-making

To strengthen and promote the multiple roles of libraries across Europe, the OMC Group sees significant potential in EU-level cooperation on data-informed policymaking. While most Member States collect library data annually to monitor trends and develop strategies, they could particularly benefit from collaboration in measuring the new and emerging roles of libraries. To remain responsive to rapidly evolving societal needs, libraries must be equipped to collect, analyse and apply data for planning, evaluation and advocacy. The OMC Group therefore makes the following recommendations.

- Promote data-informed decision-making through harmonised quantitative and qualitative data collection on public libraries at the EU level. This requires the development of a long-term strategy to identify and maintain a set of harmonised and comparable statistics and shared research goals across the EU that reflect the multiple roles of public libraries.
- Collect national and European indicators to enable benchmarking, trend analysis and informed policy choices.

- Stimulate cooperation among Member States and neighbouring European countries to strengthen the broader European library network, specifically with regard to all aspects of data collection and analysis.
- Build capacity for local libraries to conduct community needs assessments to guide programme design and service delivery.
- Implement outcome-based evaluation frameworks to measure and demonstrate the social, cultural and economic impact of public libraries.
- Encourage academic research at the national and European levels on the social impact of libraries.

Data-informed policymaking is key in effectively strengthening the multiple roles of libraries. Investing in data literacy, evaluation skills and digital tools will allow libraries to move from anecdotal to evidence-based narratives, enhancing their ability to remain adaptable to societal needs while amplifying their voice in public discourse and policy planning.



4. A skilled, valued and forward-looking workforce

To enable public libraries to evolve and meet future challenges, it is essential to invest in a strong and versatile professional workforce. Library staff are not merely service providers; they are storytellers, guides, motivators and community builders. To support this expanded mission, the OMC Group recommends:

- clearly defining professional roles and competency profiles that reflect the multifunctional nature of libraries;
- providing funding for and access to continuous professional development, with a particular focus on digital skills, AI, inclusion, community engagement and leadership, supported by a European platform for exchange and learning;
- ensuring fair and competitive salaries that recognise the complexity and societal value of library work;
- stimulating cross-sectoral mobility, job-shadowing and exchange opportunities at the national and EU levels, including through opportunities in Erasmus+, to promote innovation and peer learning;
- developing frameworks for cooperation with complementary professionals, such as youth workers, social workers and community organisers;
- encouraging engagement with partners, local communities and volunteers, who play a vital role in enhancing the multiple roles of libraries;
- strengthening regional, national and European networks of library staff through active participation, funding and exchange.

Library leadership at all levels is vital to sustain innovation, manage change and foster inclusive participation, with particular attention to leadership training and succession planning, especially in small or rural libraries.

5. Sustainable and inclusive public spaces

Library buildings must offer safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces that are accessible to all and situated close to the communities they serve. Library locations should reflect environmental values, accommodate diverse user needs and be equipped with adequate facilities that support sustainability. The OMC Group therefore recommends:

- ensuring library services are located in close proximity to citizens, taking into account local demographics, population density and composition, so that all residents across Europe have equitable access;
- constructing, renovating and designing library spaces according to sustainability standards, ensuring energy efficiency, accessibility and flexible use;
- supporting the diverse roles and uses of library services by offering flexible layouts, stimulating community involvement in the creation or improvement of spaces and engaging users to shape public spaces and services;
- investing in a pluralistic, up-to-date and diversified collection that meets the needs of all users;
- maintaining secure and well-organised areas for the storage and preservation of physical collections within library buildings.

Library buildings serve as the heart of the community and a powerful symbol of the library's role at the local level. Maintaining and enhancing these spaces is crucial for libraries to deliver on all of their multiple roles effectively.



6. Digital maturity and innovation

The ongoing digitisation of society has a significant impact on the dynamics of the multiple roles of public libraries. European libraries reach hundreds of millions of users online while maintaining shared, community-centred physical spaces that provide access to information, collections and social connections. In the current digital age, public libraries must continuously develop their online presence using innovative approaches. The future public library is hybrid, combining physical and virtual services that mutually reinforce each other. The OMC Group recommends:

- investing in modern digital infrastructure, reliable connectivity and secure platforms that are accessible to all users, especially people with disabilities, based on public values;
- stimulating the creation and maintenance of shared services and consortia at the regional or national levels, such as digital platforms that support smaller or rural libraries;
- integrating digital skills training, media literacy and cybersecurity awareness into core library services;

- equipping library staff and users so they can adapt to evolving technologies and navigate digital environments independently, ensuring meaningful participation in the digital society, and particularly encouraging experimentation with emerging technologies (e.g. AI, XR, makerspaces) in inclusive and ethical ways;
- investing continuously in adaptability and innovation to strengthen and enrich the multiple roles of libraries, enabling them to address future societal challenges effectively;
- promoting the long-term digital preservation of collections and ensuring digital autonomy for staff and users.

Public libraries must be digitally mature institutions, supporting staff and users in navigating the digital society. Continuous investment in digital infrastructure and staff skills is the only way to guarantee that libraries can sustain these vital services into the future.



Framework for the future

As a complement to this chapter, [Annex 1](#) ('A path for growth') provides a practical framework to support the future development of public libraries. It offers guidance for libraries and decision-makers on fostering innovation, expanding services and strengthening the contribution of libraries to European values and societal goals.

The annex breaks structured library development across three stages – 'Fundamental', 'Intermediate' and 'Advanced' – and introduces the first building blocks of a toolkit to help libraries and their partners to strengthen services in a sustainable and coordinated way. Building on this framework, the OMC Group puts forward the following recommendations.

- Develop a comprehensive **library development toolbox** to support strategic planning and strengthen the enabling conditions for libraries at all levels.
- Set a strategic target for libraries across Europe to reach at least the 'intermediate' level of development by 2030 in relation to a majority of the 10 identified societal challenges.
- Lay the groundwork for library strategies for the 2030–2040 period. Effective strategies typically span 5 to 10 years and include clear objectives, key performance indicators, timelines and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.
- Include a follow-up to the current OMC Group in the EU work plan for culture 2027–2030, followed by relevant Council conclusions. Discussions at the European level should focus on developing methods to measure the impact of the multiple roles of libraries, strengthening cooperation on data-informed policymaking and skills development and sharing strategies to ensure universal access to public libraries by removing barriers to participation.
- Host an annual **European Week of Libraries** to celebrate libraries and their multiple roles beyond reading, through thematic activities and events in libraries all across Europe, promoting cross-sectoral cooperation at all levels.



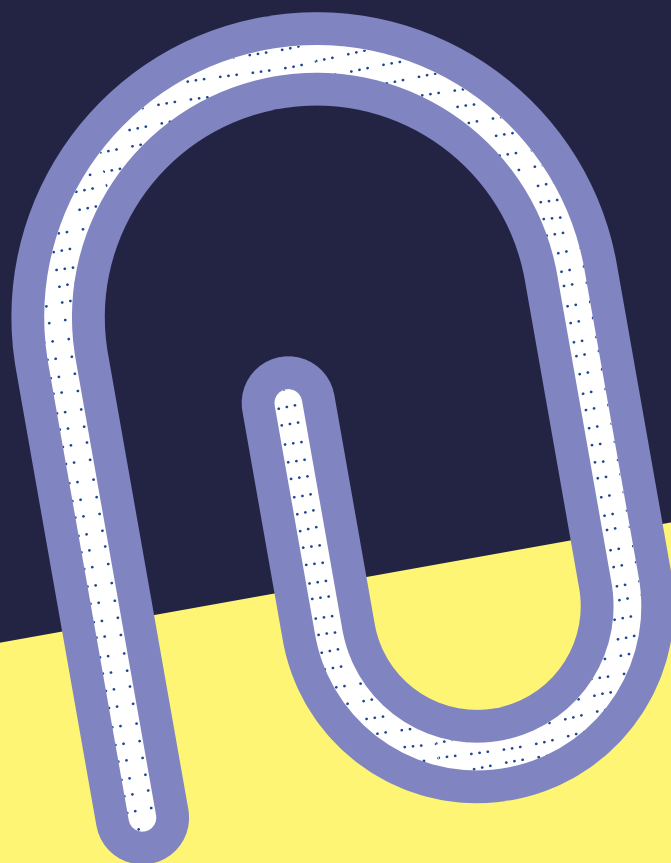


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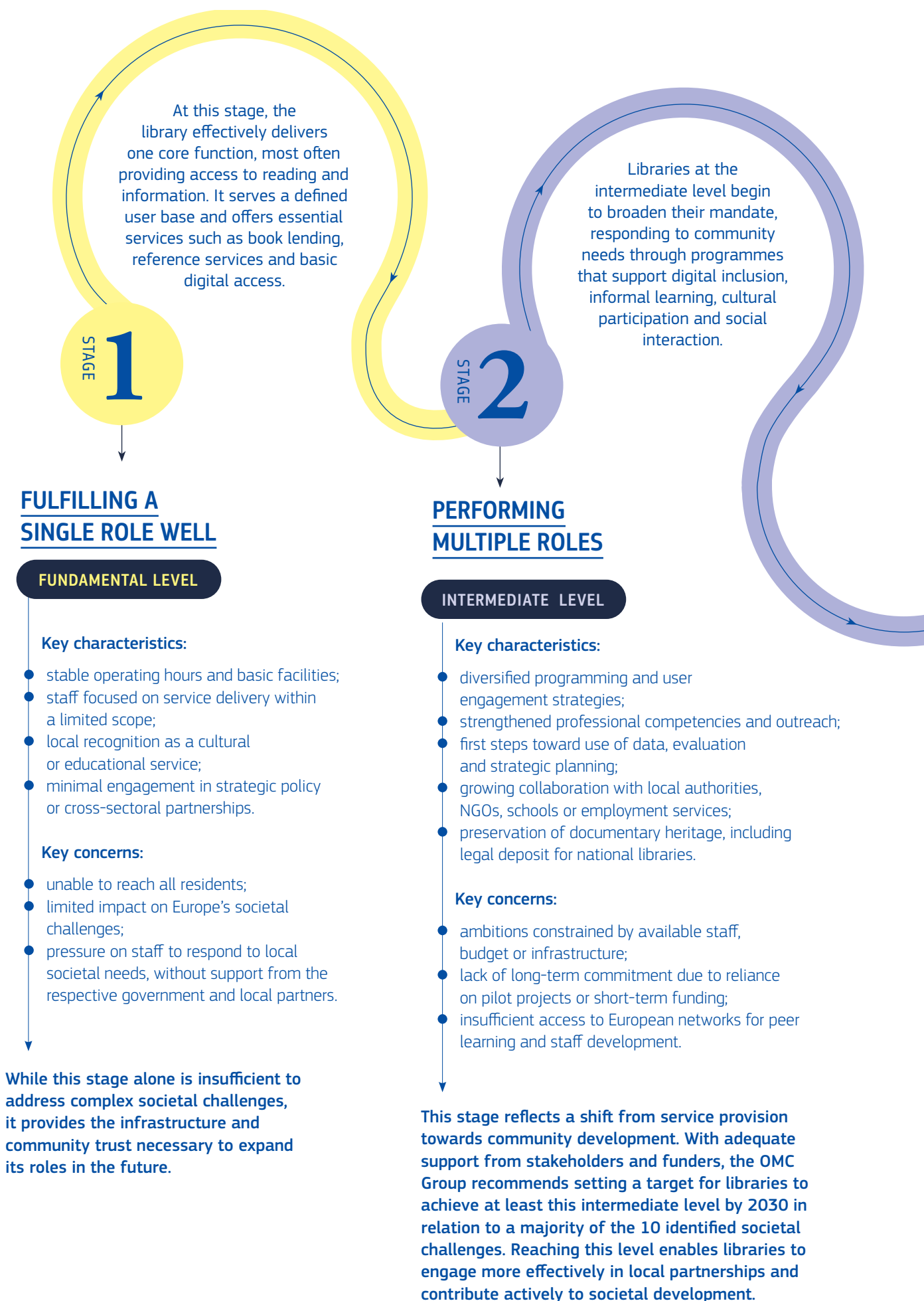
ANNEX 1

A PATH FOR GROWTH: DEVELOPING THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Public libraries across Europe operate in highly diverse environments – urban and rural, well-funded and resource-constrained, digitally advanced and underserved. The OMC Group recognises that there is no single blueprint for success. Instead, a flexible development model is needed – one that acknowledges a library's starting point and offers a path for growth towards assuming and connecting multiple societal roles.

The framework below identifies three stages of development, based on the range and integration of roles undertaken by public libraries. It offers structured recommendations for library development across Europe, guiding libraries on how they can expand their societal impact and adopt roles beyond their basic functions.

Individual libraries, networks or library systems at different levels will not achieve the same stage across all roles, due to differences in resources, political support and local needs. Nevertheless, strategic support across all key roles remains critical to maximise societal impact. The three-stage model serves as a flexible planning and evaluation tool, adaptable to different contexts and supporting the continued development of libraries across Europe.



At this level, the library functions as a dynamic, multi-role institution, interlinking its cultural, educational, digital, social and environmental functions. It is embedded in local strategies and contributes actively to national and EU policy goals.

STAGE 3

INTEGRATING AND CONNECTING ROLES

ADVANCED LEVEL

Key characteristics:

- a clear strategic vision aligned with policy frameworks;
- strong, multidisciplinary teams with shared leadership;
- coordination of networks of libraries and partners;
- evidence-based service development and advocacy;
- participatory design with and for communities;
- systematic involvement in regional, national and European projects.

Libraries at this stage act as catalysts for societal transformation and resilience. They collaborate strategically with partners at the local, national and European levels, implement projects aligned with broader policy goals and use evidence-based approaches to service development and advocacy.

TOWARDS A PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK: A TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL LIBRARIES AND MUNICIPALITIES

The OMC Group recommends the creation of a comprehensive library development toolbox to support strategic planning and strengthen the enabling conditions for libraries. This toolbox should include, at a minimum:

- strategic dialogue questions: a set of guiding questions to facilitate structured conversations between libraries, funders, stakeholders and community partners, addressing vision, priorities, enabling conditions, community needs and development goals;
- a policy and investment checklist for local authorities: a concise framework for municipalities and regional authorities, covering governance, accountability, dedicated budgets, multi-year planning and incentives for innovation, partnerships and evaluation.

By providing these tools, the toolbox would enable libraries and their partners to move beyond ad hoc service improvements toward coordinated, policy-aligned development, supporting evidence-based decision-making, community engagement and sustainable investment.

As the first, concrete step for this toolbox, the annex includes a self-assessment matrix. This structured template allows libraries to assess their current position along the developmental path across key strategic domains (governance, funding, workforce, partnerships and digital maturity). By providing descriptors for basic, intermediate and advanced levels, the matrix serves as a practical starting point to stimulate internal reflection, collective discussion and baseline strategic planning. It helps libraries identify strengths and gaps, forming the foundation for more targeted development and future engagement with the other toolbox elements.

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THEIR MUNICIPALITIES

This self-assessment matrix is designed to help public libraries and their local authorities evaluate their current stage of development, identify strengths and gaps and plan strategic next steps. It supports reflection and dialogue, not ranking or competition. It can be used individually or in workshops with staff, stakeholders or community partners.

Each domain is rated across three stages:

- 1. Basic** (foundational),
- 2. Intermediate** (expanding), and
- 3. Advanced** (integrated and strategic).

DOMAIN	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
Strategic vision and role	Library fulfils one clear role (e.g. lending, reading) without strategic planning.	Library expands into multiple roles (e.g. digital, inclusion, learning), with some planning processes.	Library has a strategic plan aligned with local policies, reflecting multiple interconnected roles.
Legal and policy recognition	Minimal legal or policy recognition.	Library mentioned in local or sectoral strategies.	Strong policy support; included in national/regional/local strategies with clearly defined responsibilities.
Funding	Basic funding for operations and staff.	Mix of local and project-based funding; some innovation support.	Multi-year funding aligned with strategic goals; access to national and EU programmes.
Workforce and leadership	Staff deliver basic services; limited access to continuing professional development (CPD).	Staff engaged in outreach, programming and some digital services; occasional CPD.	Staff have defined roles, ongoing CPD, leadership training; strategic and community-focused competencies are supported.
Community engagement	Users come to the library; no structured engagement with non-users.	Library conducts outreach and partnerships with schools, NGOs or local groups.	Participatory service design, partnerships across sectors, strong community embeddedness.
Digital maturity	Basic access to internet and PCs.	Digital inclusion programmes; staff with some digital competencies.	Digital strategies, innovative tech use, cybersecurity awareness; digital mentors on staff.
Space and infrastructure	Building meets minimum standards, with limited flexibility.	Spaces support diverse activities (e.g. learning, co-working, exhibitions).	Sustainable, inclusive and flexible infrastructure, aligned with New European Bauhaus and green goals.
Data and evaluation	No systematic data collection or use.	Some data collected for reporting; occasional user feedback.	Data used strategically for planning, advocacy, impact reporting; alignment with national/EU indicators.
Partnerships and ecosystem	Few or no active partnerships.	Library builds local partnerships (e.g. education, social care, employment).	Library acts as a connector across policy sectors; involved in regional, national or EU initiatives.

Instructions for use.



Reflect

individually or as a team on each domain.



Mark

your current level (basic, intermediate, advanced).



Discuss

where do you want to grow next? What would it take to move forward?



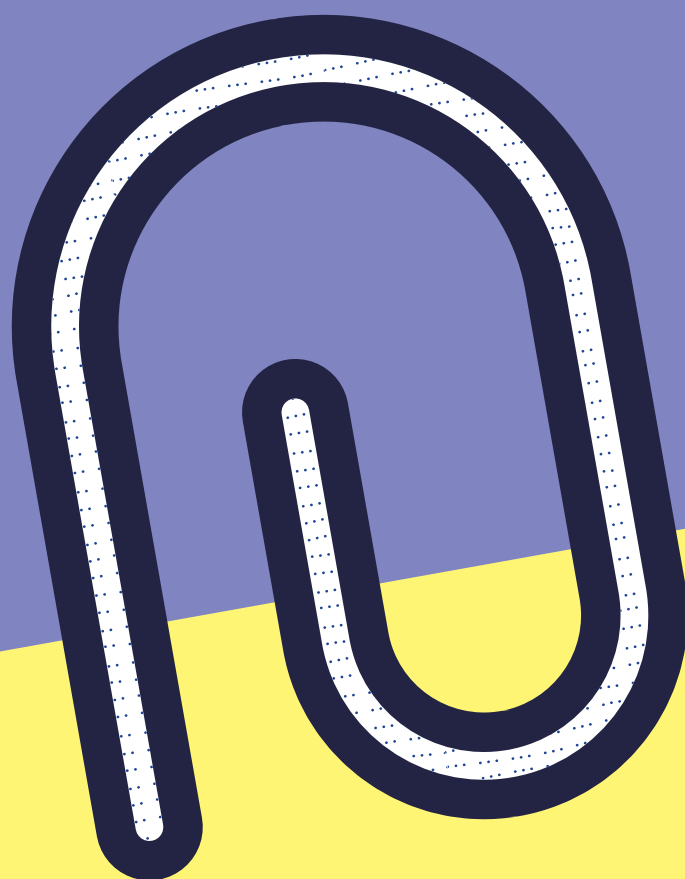
Plan

concrete actions or needs (e.g. funding, training, partnerships) for each priority area.



Use

results to engage funders, policymakers and stakeholders in conversations about support and development.



ANNEX 2

LIBRARY LEGISLATION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – A COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY OVERVIEW

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Austria

#1



Legislation

Existence of legislation	No
Updates ongoing	N/A
Includes structural financing	N/A
Mandates data collection	N/A

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2024)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry for Culture**

Stakeholders consulted: **Austrian federal provinces; nationwide representative survey of library visitors on the personal value of libraries; workshops with representatives of federal and state administrations, librarians and international experts**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**



Strategic priorities

Based on a high level of satisfaction among library visitors, the national strategy aims to encourage more people to visit public libraries. The national strategy 'Library for all' focuses on increasing the visibility of libraries, establishing them as community centres, places of creativity and inspiration, and involving them in national and regional reading promotion activities by supporting literary and other events in libraries, formats for increased citizen participation and measures to promote reading.

Goals

A significant increase in library visits. The current figure is well below 10 %; the aim is to reach 15 % within the next five years. The strategic goal is to establish libraries as indispensable elements of community infrastructure.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Federal funding for public libraries has been increased.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

The success of the strategy is reflected in the annual statistics on public libraries.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Funding is provided by a 100 % increase in federal funding for public libraries.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#2

Belgium



(FOR DUTCH-SPEAKING LIBRARIES IN FLANDERS)

Legislation

Existence of legislation	No (since 2016); thematic legislation
Updates ongoing	N/A
Includes structural financing	Only general funding for municipalities
Mandates data collection	No



Main goal(s) of the legislation

Flanders has no general public library law, though provisions exist for people with reading disabilities, hospital patients, care centre residents and prisoners. Municipalities organise and fund libraries autonomously, with no obligation to allocate government funding.

Data collection is not mandatory, but all public libraries use an integrated system that tracks transactions. The Department of Culture, Youth and Media (DCYM) gathers a limited set of data every three years, but libraries are not required to submit it.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **No general strategy, but specific ones on reading promotion (2024–2029) and the digital library (2023–2033)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Flanders DCYM; Department of Education; Department of Well-being (reading promotion strategy) DCYM; Cultuurconnect (digital library strategy)**

Stakeholders consulted: **Public libraries (digital library strategy)**

Dedicated budget: **Reading promotion – under discussion; digital library – EUR 3 309 634.26**



Strategic priorities and goals

Public libraries play a key role in the strategy on reading promotion, and are the central focus of the strategy for the digital library in Flanders and Brussels.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? No.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

The reading promotion strategy is led by Literatuur Vlaanderen and Iedereen Leest, which coordinate targeted actions across education, culture and well-being. Cultuurconnect oversees the digital library strategy.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

The reading promotion strategy is monitored by separate evaluations of the actors involved, and the digital library strategy is assessed annually by the Monitoring Committee using policy indicators.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

The reading promotion strategy relies on input from the domains of culture and education, which is not guaranteed in the long term. Cultuurconnect is funded by the Flanders government to implement the digital library strategy.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

Reading Promotion will be reviewed each policy period; the digital library strategy is reviewed in five-year cycles.



(FOR DUTCH-SPEAKING LIBRARIES IN BRUSSELS-CAPITAL)

Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2012)
Updates ongoing	New legislation coming into force in 2027
Includes structural financing	See below
Mandates data collection	Yes



Main goal(s) of the legislation

Guarantee the presence of Dutch-speaking public libraries and support the Dutch-speaking Community in the bilingual area of Brussels.

Municipalities receive specific funding from the Flanders government for their Dutch-speaking libraries, if they meet certain conditions. Otherwise, the municipalities are fully autonomous in organising and funding libraries. Dutch-speaking libraries in the Brussels-Capital region are required to submit data and the Department of Culture, Youth and Media collects a limited set of data annually.

National strategy

Strategy exists: No, except for the reading promotion strategy and the strategy for the digital library (2023–2033): see the entry on Dutch-speaking libraries in Flanders.

(FOR THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY)

Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1994)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	Only general funding for municipalities
Mandates data collection	No



Main goal(s) of the legislation

The decree on public libraries and their Advisory Board regulates the board's work. Since 2009, municipalities in the German-speaking Community have full autonomy over organising and funding public libraries, receiving general government funding for libraries but setting their own distribution criteria.

The Centre for Media Literacy, funded annually by the German-speaking government, supports all libraries in the region.

National strategy

There is no general public library strategy, but transforming the library landscape is one of the goals of the **digital strategy for the German-speaking Community**, published in 2024. Therefore, development of an internal strategy on reforming public libraries is ongoing.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#2

Belgium



(FOR FRENCH-SPEAKING LIBRARIES
IN WALLONIA-BRUSSELS FEDERATION)

Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2009)
Updates ongoing	2023
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes



Main goal(s) of the legislation

The decree focuses on public reading, prioritising the development of reading and writing practices via the public reading and library network rather than on collection management or loans. It instructs libraries to stimulate demand and design strategies for developing reading among target groups, in consultation with partners in their local areas.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2024–2029)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (FWB) via the Ministry of Culture**

Stakeholders consulted: **Cultural governance bodies of the FWB, Consultation Chamber for Territorial Action, professional associations, Network of Central Libraries, General Direction of Public Reading (FWB administration)**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**



Strategic priorities and goals

Cultural rights; reducing territorial and social inequalities; strengthening mediation and partnerships with schools and social and cultural actors; and consolidating the public library network. Libraries are positioned as local services that support inclusion and empowerment.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

A legal framework defining the conditions for recognition, funding and public service obligations of libraries. Five-year plans prepared by public libraries and validated by the FWB translate strategic priorities at the local and network levels, supported by steering and guidance from the Public Reading Directorate.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

For libraries, progress is monitored through five-year plans, annual activity reports and quantitative and qualitative indicators. At the FWB level, the Public Reading Directorate collects and analyses data, publishing regular reports on the state of the network and territorial diagnostics. Political oversight includes evaluations of the decree, parliamentary debates, advisory body opinions and analyses by professional associations and support operators.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

The FWB provides approximately EUR 23 million annually for staffing and operating costs. Local authorities (municipalities, provinces, intercommunal bodies) complement this by covering most infrastructure and overhead costs, and a significant share of staffing costs.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Bulgaria #3



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2009)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Law on Public Libraries regulates the roles, funding and structure of public libraries as educational, informational and cultural institutions. It mandates preserving literary heritage and ensuring free, equal access to materials and IT services. The law defines a national network of libraries – including the National Library and regional and community libraries – and their activities. Other libraries (scientific, university, school) are regulated separately. Libraries may collaborate, form branches and offer mobile services. The law requires maintaining a public Register of Public Libraries with data on funding, loans, visits, services, etc. Libraries with collections exceeding 200 000 items provide activity data to the National Statistical Institute, while all other public libraries submit data to the National Register of Public Libraries maintained by the Ministry of Culture, which oversees public library policy.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Draft strategy for the development of Bulgarian culture 2019–2029, including goals for libraries (not adopted yet)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry for Culture**

Stakeholders consulted: **N/A**

Dedicated budget: **N/A**



Strategic priorities

The draft strategy aims to set long-term priorities and activities for 2019–2029 to develop Bulgarian culture and identity, reflecting stakeholder input. It guides programmes, resource use and progress, while supporting cultural processes, creativity, access to culture, copyright enforcement, personal growth and shared values.

Goals

To prioritise culture at the national level by preserving cultural values, meeting international conservation standards and ensuring transparent management. It seeks increased funding to modernise libraries and other cultural institutes and expand library and community activities. It aims to develop digital platforms for knowledge exchange, promote Bulgarian culture as part of European heritage and improve digital access to heritage and visual arts.

Libraries are mentioned in two other national strategic documents.

1. National development programme 'Bulgaria 2030' – includes the preservation of and access to written cultural heritage.
2. 'Digital transformation of Bulgaria for the period 2020–2030' – incorporates digital inclusion through libraries.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#4

Croatia



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2019)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes

🎯 Main goal(s) of the legislation

Ensure the delivery of library services to promote and develop literacy, culture, education, science and excellence, and to preserve national literary, artistic and scientific creativity. Ensures access to information to foster democracy, economic growth, science and digital inclusion.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2023–2027)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia**

Stakeholders consulted: **Representatives from the major professional associations and institutions, the ministry overseeing heritage institutions and the scientific and professional community**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**

🏰 Strategic priorities

Developing the systems set by the legislation and strengthening professional capacities and infrastructure. Financial support is required to develop systems, staff training and infrastructure for digital transformation. The Croatian Digital Library plays a key role as a central database and legal deposit for digital materials. The Digital Library also requires central coordination of digitisation and the development of tools for data analysis and improving digital content quality.

🎯 Goals

Measures are planned to improve the management, preservation and accessibility of materials, along with strengthening libraries' professional and infrastructural capacities. Libraries collaborate through shared development programmes, and the systematic funding of central advisory services at county and university libraries has established a development activity to improve the efficiency of advisory services for all types of libraries.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

The strategy aims to connect information systems to enable e-services, improve interoperability and support research, documentation and management. It also promotes staff expertise through ongoing training and the adoption of modern methods and technologies.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

The share of digital materials in library collections, the number of physical and virtual visits to public libraries and the number of professional staff employed will all be monitored.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Primarily through national and EU funds, with some measures co-financed by local resources, depending on the founding authority of each library.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Czechia #5



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2001)
Updates ongoing	Yes (partial amendments)
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

Ensure conditions for the provision of public library and information services to all citizens without discrimination through libraries.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2021–2027, with possible extension to 2030)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture – the strategy is approved by the government**

Stakeholders consulted: **Central Library Council of the Czech Republic (advisory body to the Minister of Culture), library associations, National Library, Moravian Library in Brno, regional and other central libraries**

Dedicated budget: **No**

Strategic priorities

Developing the library system under three pillars: (i) libraries as pillars of civil society and natural centres of communities; (ii) libraries as educational and education-supporting institutions; and (iii) libraries as custodians of cultural wealth and knowledge.

Goals

63 specific strategic objectives divided into five areas, to which measures and indicators of successful implementation are attached: libraries as community, educational and cultural centres; library information services in analogue and digital environments; permanent preservation of traditional library documents; construction of libraries, support of ICT infrastructure in libraries; and education of library staff.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

The strategy is generally advisory. For state-operated libraries, the strategy usually sets specific tasks. Various subsidy programmes (state, regional, EU) support the implementation of the strategy. Library associations and individual libraries implement the strategic objectives and priorities according to their strategic documents.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

The National Library of the Czech Republic, in cooperation with the Central Library Council, carries out an annual evaluation of the fulfilment of the objectives of the strategy, and a report is submitted to the Ministry of Culture.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

It is primarily based on the regular budgets of individual libraries. Additionally, libraries can use various subsidy programmes (ministries, regions, EU) for their development and to meet the objectives.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#6

Denmark



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2000)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	No



Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Danish Libraries Act requires all 98 municipalities to run public libraries. It describes the state's role in promoting public library cooperation, financing regional (central) libraries and providing development funding for public and school libraries. The act also ensures that nationally funded libraries (education, research and university libraries) provide access to all, including services for the German minority and those with print disabilities.

The Legal Deposit Act (revised in 2004) ensures the preservation of Danish cultural heritage (publications, internet sites and radio and television broadcasts) at the Royal Library.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **No**

Responsible entity/ies: **N/A**

Stakeholders consulted: **N/A**

Dedicated budget: **N/A**

There is no overall national strategy for the Danish public library sector. However, strategic documents with a national scope exist. For example, the strategy of the Digital Public Library (an association composed of all Danish municipalities, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Slesvig) guides the national direction of digital library services.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Estonia

#7



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Public Libraries Act (1998)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes



Main goal(s) of the legislation

The act, along with the National Library Act (2011) and the Legal Deposit Copy Act (2017), provide a framework for public access, preservation and promotion of knowledge and culture. The Public Library Act mandates free access to information and lifelong learning. The National Library Act defines the national library's role in supporting Estonian culture, European values and democracy. The Legal Deposit Act governs the preservation of all Estonian publications, including digitally.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2021–2030)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture**

Stakeholders consulted: **Estonian Librarian's Association, University of Tartu Library, National Library, public library representatives, Estonian Libraries Network Consortium**

Dedicated budget: **No**



Strategic priorities

Free access to information, modern governance, improved collection access, media literacy, youth engagement, libraries as community hubs, innovative and accessible spaces, tech advancement, collaboration, staff development and sustainability.

Goals

A modernised legal framework; a unified library system; cultural access; environmental awareness; better infrastructure and accessibility; a comprehensive training system; strengthened leadership; best practices; and a modern image, while increasing lending, satisfaction, visits and young people's reading rates.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

New performance metrics; annual action plan from the Ministry of Culture; digital action plan; grant rounds (e.g. the Public Library Accelerator); expanded National Library role; legal updates; Advisory Council renewal; and a reorganisation of state responsibilities.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

New performance metrics covering areas such as user satisfaction and digital transformation. The Ministry of Culture summarises progress in an annual internal activity report.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Primarily through the state budget – which provides operational support and various funding programmes for public libraries – and EU structural funds (e.g. for digital transformation).

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

Yes (annually).

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#8

Finland



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2017)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	Partly
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Public Libraries Act sets provisions for public library operations. It defines roles, objectives, responsibilities and operational guidelines, and covers library cooperation and government financing. Its goals are to promote equal opportunities for everyone to access education and culture and support reading, literacy, lifelong learning, active citizenship, democracy and freedom of expression. The aim is a well-managed, well-resourced library system with educated staff in every municipality. Libraries must offer access to materials and culture; maintain collections; promote reading and literacy; offer information services; and provide spaces for learning and activities.

Municipalities are responsible for implementing the act and deciding the sufficient level of services. They also decide how much of the government's transfers for basic services are allocated to libraries.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **No**

Responsible entity/ies: **N/A**

Stakeholders consulted: **N/A**

Dedicated budget: **N/A**

The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the national library policy. Public libraries are responsible for some activities of the national democracy programme 2025, the national literacy strategy 2030 and the implementation of the cultural policy report.

Is public library data gathered annually at a national and/or regional level? Yes.

How is development monitored?

Municipalities are legally required to evaluate their library services. The six regions of the Regional State Administrative Agencies (Finnish Supervisory Agency from the beginning of 2026) monitor and assess the implementation of the Public Libraries Act.

Who is responsible for public library development?

The Public Library Act defines roles and responsibilities for every actor on the national, regional and local level regarding library development. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for national library development. The Supervisory Agency supports library operations regionally by organising short-term training for library staff, granting aid and offering guidance and information.

Finland has one library which oversees the development of national library services.

Nine regional libraries support development and offer short-term training.

Funding availability for public libraries: applications for project funding can be submitted to the ministry or the Supervisory Agency. This primarily supports specific aspects of library development, aligning with the Public Libraries Act.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

France

#9



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2021)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

Define state-local roles; ensure free, unrestricted access; promote diverse, evolving collections; share decision-making power between professionals and local officials; strengthen librarians' qualifications; support intermediary library networks; and preserve written and graphic heritage.

National strategy

Strategy exists: Yes (2018–2027, updated 2023)

Responsible entity/ies: Ministry of Culture (public libraries); Ministry of Higher Education and Research (university libraries)

Stakeholders consulted: Parliament, state administration, local officials, professional associations, trade unions

Dedicated budget: Yes

Strategic priorities

Extend library opening hours; diversify library missions; ensure independence; improve staff training; increase visibility; support ecological transition; and ensure copyright compliance.

Goals

Enhancing training; promoting library careers; prioritising underserved audiences (young and disabled people) and areas (underprivileged rural and urban areas); and advancing digitisation and digital literacy.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Increased state support (EUR 80 million in 2017 to EUR 95 million in 2018) through specific funding dedicated to public libraries, included in the 'general decentralisation grant' (DGD Bibliothèques); dedicated funding, for example for youth, heritage, networks; support for policy formalisation; national libraries day; free online training and guides on library careers; national digital infrastructure development, for example for digitisation and disabled access. Two national schools for librarians.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Annual statistical reports, specific studies and the *Atlas of Public Libraries*.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

National: EUR 95 million in 2024 for projects including construction, renovation, equipment, heritage spaces, digital development, digitisation, mobile services and extension of opening hours.

Local authorities (communes and departments) spent EUR 1.3 billion in 2022 on the operational and investment costs of public libraries.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

Yes. The state administration answers questions from parliament annually, and the impact of policies is regularly reported to the government.

The financial aid received is regularly assessed by the financial supervisory authority.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#10

Germany



Legislation

Library legislation is the responsibility of the federal states; there is no national legislation or strategy. Nine of sixteen federal states have library-related laws. Six have dedicated library laws: Thuringia (2008), Saxony-Anhalt (2010), Hesse (2010, updated 2016), Rhineland-Palatinate (2014), Schleswig-Holstein (2016) and Bremen (2023). Three have broader cultural laws: Saxony's Cultural Areas Act (2018), North Rhine-Westphalia's Cultural Code (2021) and Lower Saxony's Cultural Promotion Act (2022). The states have their own legal deposit laws. Existing legislation promotes freedom of information and the professional independence of public libraries. It establishes them as essential infrastructure for social, cultural and educational services.

National strategy

Strategy exists: Public library strategy is the responsibility of the federal states. Some states, for example Berlin, have regional development plans

Responsible entity/ies: State ministries of culture, education or science; Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder; BKM (Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media/Minister of State to the Federal Chancellor)

Stakeholders consulted: German Library Association e.V. (DBV), Association of German Librarians e.V. (VDB), associations at the state level

Dedicated budget: No



Strategic priorities and goals

Strengthen public libraries as educational and information institutions supporting freedom of information, lifelong learning, reading promotion and media literacy. Develop their diverse role in culture,

education, democracy, social cohesion and sustainable urban development. Position libraries as meeting places for communication, integration and creativity, with diverse programmes. Support rural libraries. Extend opening hours, promote digitalisation and expand digital services.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Federal states establish state offices for public libraries. The DBV provides expertise and cooperation through committees and working groups.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Annual statistical reports.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Not applicable nationally; local authorities fund strategies through the ordinary budgets of the federal states and communities.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

Additional information

The German National Library (DNB) is the central depository library and maintains the German National Bibliography. It administers the Integrated Authority File (GND), which is jointly managed with all library networks of German-speaking countries and participating libraries, the German Union Catalogue of Serials and other institutions. Libraries use the GND to catalogue publications, while archives, museums, cultural/academic institutions and researchers increasingly use it. Some public libraries and their users benefit from interlibrary loan of the DNB if no other copies of a publication can be found in German libraries.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Hungary #11



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1997)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	Yes (from the central budget of Hungary)
Mandates data collection	Yes (by a different government decree)



Main goal(s) of the legislation

Outlines the basic requirements of public libraries, including: must be accessible to all; have suitable premises; be open at least 25 hours/week at convenient times; employ qualified staff; offer free basic services; provide data; annually produce a professional work plan and activity report; and extend basic cultural services.

Also outlines the main duties, including: must maintain a mission statement; develop, catalogue, preserve and ensure access to collections; provide access to other libraries' resources and digital materials; and engage in document exchange. They must also support users' digital, information and lifelong learning skills; meet educational, training and scientific research needs; organise cultural, community and educational programmes; contribute to quality of life and national competitiveness through services and cultural mediation; and apply quality management principles.

The legislation also covers the Library Supply Service System, ensuring public library services in villages with less than 5 000 people through agreements between county libraries and local municipalities. The municipalities provide staff and venues; county libraries provide the library materials.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **No**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture and Innovation, Department of Public Collections**

Stakeholders consulted: **N/A**

Dedicated budget: **N/A**

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#12

Ireland



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2001)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	Not specifically
Mandates data collection	No

Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Local Government Act (2001) aimed to renew local government and its financial systems and promote community involvement. It designated county and city councils as library authorities, outlining their roles. The act extended An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (the Library Council), which was later dissolved in 2012. Public library services are funded mainly by local authorities.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2023–2027)**

Responsible entity/ies: **The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRC DG), the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), the County and City Management Association (CCMA) and local authorities**

Stakeholders consulted: **Public consultation (2 993 respondents); focus groups, interviews, workshops with library staff, key stakeholders**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**



Strategic priorities

'The library is the place' is a five-year strategy with three themes: people, spaces and connections. It outlines 66 actions across nine objectives, including expanding reading programmes, outreach and access, digital and life skills; positioning libraries as community

hubs; and supporting library infrastructure (e.g. libraries capital programme), sustainability, digital services and access, cross-border cooperation, staff resources and development and marketing.

Goals

The focus is on improving visibility and universal access, supporting literacy and inclusion, community engagement and lifelong development. Key values: quality and excellence, universal accessibility, equality, inclusivity and diversity.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Implemented by local authorities with support from the Libraries Development Unit of the CCMA, LGMA and DRC DG, using an implementation plan with steps for each action.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

The Libraries Development Committee monitors implementation, comprising representatives from local authorities, city and county librarians, the LGMA and DRC DG. Progress is regularly assessed using an outcomes framework. A formal review is due in 2027.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Libraries are primarily funded by local authorities, with DRC DG grants supporting the strategy, including the libraries capital programme, library leases, LGMA and the Dormant Accounts Fund. The Urban and Rural Regeneration Funds also support objectives.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Italy

#13



Legislation

Existence of legislation	No (not nationally; regional legislation exists)
Updates ongoing	N/A
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	No

Main goal(s) of the legislation

Library legislation in Italy falls under cultural heritage, governed by Legislative Decree 42/2004. The state oversees preservation, while regions legislate on promotion and manage local systems. The Ministry of Culture, through the General Directorate of Libraries, coordinates and funds 46 state libraries, bibliographic services and reading promotion. Civic and regional libraries are financed by local and regional governments. The Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) collects data on reading and libraries.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **No**, but Law 15/2020 and the national action plan for the promotion of reading include elements focusing on libraries

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture via CEPELL (Centre for Books and Reading)**

Stakeholders consulted: **(National action plan) Minister of Education, Universities and Research**

Dedicated budget: **(National action plan): yes, via the CEPELL Fund**

CEPELL, reporting to the Directorate General of Libraries, implements national policies under Law 15/2020 on the promotion of books and reading. This law fosters collaboration between schools, libraries and cultural institutions and establishes a national action plan for the promotion of reading. Regional laws assign libraries roles in reading promotion, local publishing and bibliographic coordination, sometimes including lifelong learning and digital skills.



Strategic priorities and goals

Law 15/2020, via local reading pacts, highlights public and school libraries, citing the IFLA-UNESCO Manifesto. The action plan covers the book sector, positioning libraries as hubs for language, literature, learning and intercultural engagement.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level?

ISTAT surveys are national but not related to the reading strategy. Some regions monitor reading through libraries.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

At the regional level, objectives are implemented through multi-year planning documents.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

CEPELL monitors implementation, conducts surveys and raises awareness of the library network. Some objectives (e.g. 'promoting library and bookshop attendance') are monitored via ISTAT.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

The national action plan for the promotion of reading is financed by a special fund managed by CEPELL.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

The national reading promotion plan is revised every three years, as is regional planning.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#14

Latvia



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1998)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

Defines public relationships in the library field to ensure library operations and facilitate the preservation and development of Latvia's cultural heritage. It applies to all libraries receiving state or local funding, directly or indirectly, and to registered private libraries.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2023–2027)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture**

Stakeholders consulted: **Latvian Library Council, the National Library of Latvia, the Latvian Association of Librarians, Culture Information Systems Centre**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**

Strategic priorities

Develop libraries as key resources for smart, sustainable societal growth; preserve and provide access to Latvian cultural heritage; improve public and information literacy; ensure civic participation; support culture, education and science; strengthen social cohesion and resilience; and ensure access to state and local government services. Focus areas cover policy development, the sector's legal framework, future librarians, quality of collections and services and public participation and co-creation.

Goals

There are four strategic goals with related actions: ensuring library sustainability through improved operations, collection and data management, and research; developing the next generation of librarians by enhancing education and skills; increasing access to cultural, educational and research resources via modernisation and support services; and fostering public participation by positioning libraries as community strengtheners, aligned with SDGs, promoting inclusive, democratic and cohesive societies.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

An action plan, with identified achievable results for each goal and key performance indicators.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Monitored annually by the National Library using indicators such as average visits per capita, percentage of residents using services, loans per capita, library expenditure on collections per capita and percentage of staff with a library education.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

No separate funding is allocated solely for the strategy goals, but strategic directions influence state and local funding allocation. For instance, state funding was allocated to promote reading in libraries.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Lithuania #15



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1995)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

Establish and maintain a publicly accessible, modern and effective library system that guarantees all individuals equal and free access to information, knowledge and cultural heritage, thereby supporting education, research, personal development and civic participation.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2016–2022; the 2026–2028 strategy is under development)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture**

Stakeholders consulted: **Representatives from government agencies, community organisations, academic institutions, professional associations**

Dedicated budget: **No**

Strategic priorities

The 2016–2022 strategy defines three strategic directions: the role of libraries in supporting lifelong learning for society; the contribution of libraries to the social and economic well-being of the community; and the development and governance of libraries in accordance with public needs and principles of effective management.

Goals

Ensure the diversity, accessibility and quality of services; establish a modern physical and virtual environment; promote and expand reading initiatives; upgrade ICT infrastructure; develop services that support innovation, economic modernisation, entrepreneurship and the dissemination of best practices, research findings and innovations; evaluate the impact of activities on society and the library system; provide systematic and continuous professional development for library specialists; and strengthen library representation and collaboration.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Targeted funding for disabled access, infrastructure modernisation, staff training, collection expansion, media and information literacy, organising the Year of Libraries and Annual National Library Week, and national digital infrastructure (e.g. digitisation).

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Through annual statistical reports and the national survey 'Population participation in culture and satisfaction with cultural services', which is conducted every three years.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Primarily through state and local authority budgets, along with EU, regional and Lithuanian Council for Culture funds.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#16

Luxembourg



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2010)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	No



Main goal(s) of the legislation

Ensure equal access to knowledge, culture, information, civic education and lifelong learning, and promote public library development throughout the country. The legislation sets conditions for libraries to receive state funding and provides libraries with modern communication technologies. It supports library professionalisation and strengthens collaboration between municipal, associative and school libraries by establishing regional public libraries.

National strategy

Strategy exists: No
Responsible entity/ies: N/A
Stakeholders consulted: N/A
Dedicated budget: N/A

The first national cultural development plan (KEP 2018–2028) gives limited attention to libraries, focusing on freedom of expression and creative spaces to improve quality of life.

The 2010 Library Law established the Higher Council of Libraries (CSB), leading public libraries to seek accreditation and join, involving migration into Luxembourg's digital library network. The current national cultural development plan, a public consultation launched in 2022, along with opinions on the Library Law and high-level exchanges with the sector in 2023 and 2024, have enabled positive discussion of the sector's future, with increasing calls for a national library strategy.

Responsibility for a national library strategy is a key question, as some of the current CSB members are volunteers or run one-person libraries. The desire for a central body for studies, strategies and statistics on public libraries is being widely discussed.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Malta #17



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2011)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	Yes



Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Malta Libraries Act, Chapter 511 of the Laws of Malta, mandates the legal deposit of all local publications to the National Library repositories through the National Bibliographic Office and oversees the administration and management of public libraries. It ensures the maintenance of library standards and responds to evolving community needs.

Though there is no national library strategy, Malta Libraries liaise with and receive feedback from the Local Councils Department, local councils (through co-operation agreements), the National Literacy Agency, the Institute for Education, state and church schools and several NGOs for its operational duties.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level?

Although there is no national strategy, library operations include data collection for public library loans (including e-books), new members (including overseas guests) and book donations, at the national level.

National strategy

Strategy exists:	No
Responsible entity/ies:	N/A
Stakeholders consulted:	N/A
Dedicated budget:	N/A

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#18 Netherlands



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2015)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

Establish a clear public library organisation network with defined roles and a digital library framework. Services are free for people under 18. Organisations uphold five core values, and libraries must provide knowledge, support education and reading, connect people with culture and foster social cohesion. Responsibilities are shared across governmental levels. The National Library manages the digital library, strengthens the network, assists users with reading disabilities, gathers data and distributes subsidies.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2021–2027, updated in 2024)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Education, Culture and Science**

Stakeholders consulted: **Dutch Association of Municipalities, Association of Provinces of the Netherlands, Dutch Association of Public Libraries, National Library, Cooperation of Dutch Provincial Organisations**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**

Strategic priorities

Strengthen the public library network and ensure universal access, with a modern facility in every municipality. Promote school/childcare collaboration via funding for 'Bookstart' (baby books, digital tools, parent meetings) and 'Library in school' (consultants,

collections, activities). A covenant with government bodies supports literacy, digital inclusion, access and lifelong learning.

Goals

Open 50 new libraries; upgrade sites, services and hours in 250 existing libraries; cooperate with municipalities on local needs. The covenant aligns goals to boost the network, cooperation and innovation.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

A targeted subsidy supports new and existing libraries, requiring new ones to open at least 15 hours weekly with professional staff and collections, and existing libraries to add 10 hours. It prioritises municipalities lacking libraries, with a distance over 3.2 km to libraries, or with higher illiteracy and inequality. Subsidy funds cover local needs, including collections, renovation, staffing, education and IT.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

The National Library collects annual data on public library numbers, opening hours, staff, collections and municipal subsidies.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Libraries are primarily funded by local authorities. The ministry provides EUR 60 million annually to municipalities to maintain the network. Additionally, the ministry invests EUR 25 million annually in libraries to support cooperation between libraries, schools and childcare.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Poland #19



Legislation

	Yes (1997, minor changes in later years)
Existence of legislation	
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	No



Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Act on Libraries sets out general principles of library operations and details the roles of national, public, science, school and professional libraries. It establishes the nationwide network of libraries, the National Library Resources Committee and the National Council of Libraries. Polish law requires each of the 2 479 communes to have at least one public library; these are funded by local governments. The Ministry of Culture consistently funds and supervises only one library: the National Library of Poland. Provincial governments must run at least one provincial library, totalling 18 libraries. Public library services are free and open to all.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **No (under development)**

Responsible entity/ies: **N/A**

Stakeholders consulted: **N/A**

Dedicated budget: **N/A**

A strategy for public libraries is currently being planned, taking into account the Law on Libraries and the current needs of all library types. Development is led by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the National Library, the Book Institute and the National Centre for Culture.

A related strategy to help libraries and readership is the national reading development programme, the largest multi-year programme run by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, along with the Ministry of National Education. It involves three key institutions – the National Library of Poland, the Book Institute and the National Centre for Culture – along with the Education Ministry's Department of Curricula and Textbooks. Programme priorities include: improving public library collections and services; investing in public library infrastructure; purchasing new publications for preschool facilities and school and pedagogical libraries; and a grant programme for libraries and reading promotion.

Funding programmes available for libraries

The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage offers two grant programmes: the 'Partnership for the book', to support access to books in all formats and the cultural role of bookstores and libraries; and 'Reading promotion', to boost reading's social status, enhance reading skills and expand access to key Polish and world literature.

The Book Institute offers 'Discussion book clubs', fostering community engagement and reading activities since 2007; and 'Computers for libraries', promoting equal digital access.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#20

Portugal



Legislation

Existence of legislation	No
Updates ongoing	N/A
Includes structural financing	N/A
Mandates data collection	N/A



Main goal(s) of the legislation

N/A

National strategy

Strategy exists: Yes

Responsible entity/ies: General Directorate for Books, Archives and Libraries (DGLAB)

Stakeholders consulted: N/A

Dedicated budget: Yes

A dedicated funding programme for public libraries supports the implementation of a national public library strategy. A more detailed and comprehensive strategy for public libraries is currently under development, taking into account the OMC report and the 40th anniversary of the National Public Library Network in 2026.



Strategic priorities

Encouragement and support are provided for the creation of regional library networks within regional authorities and municipalities, with the aim of promoting resource-sharing, joint management and coordination among libraries in the delivery of networked services to the population.

DGLAB, under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, offers the PADES programme. This programme supports the development of public library services within the National Public Library Network, organised through regional library networks. It provides funding for library collections, mobile libraries, information technologies services, professional training for librarians and multiliteracy activities for users.



Goals

Enhance the quality and consistency of library services and strengthen the performance of library data.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

The strategy is implemented through the creation of regional library networks in all regions and through regular funding of approved library service projects aimed at improving library data performance.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

DGLAB collects data from the National Public Library Network and publishes an annual monitoring report.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

DGLAB provides up to 60 % of total project costs, subject to project-specific limits. The remaining costs are covered by regional authorities and municipalities.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? N/A.

Romania #21



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2002)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	Yes

🎯 Main goal(s) of the legislation

A new library law is under discussion in the Romanian Parliament to include modern library services and strengthen the national network. The current law establishes a network covering the National Library, the Academy Library and public, school, university and specialised libraries. It defines library functions, ensuring free access to collections and databases. Library services, acquisitions and management operate independently of funding institutions. The law also regulates collection development, financing, structure, staffing, public regulations and the National Library Commission, with representatives from all library types, professional associations and relevant ministries, appointed for three-year terms.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2018–2026, updated in 2024)**

Responsible entity/ies: **National Library Commission**

Stakeholders consulted: **Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, professional associations**

Dedicated budget: **No**

Only the National Library Commission has a formal strategy. Individual libraries are led by managers who implement cultural and development programmes for periods of 3–5 years.

🏰 Strategic priorities

The 2024–2027 action plan focuses on statistics; professional development; informatisation and digital heritage; valorisation of cultural heritage; and legislation. All 21 National Library Commission members, along with 26 expert specialists, implement the plan.

🎯 Goals

The National Library Commission proposes policies for library development and promotion nationally and in Europe; coordinates information and documentation activities in the national library system; develops programmes and methods for computerising the system; establishes framework rules for libraries funded by local authorities and public-law libraries, to be approved jointly by the Ministers of Education and Culture; and recommends initial and continuing library and information science training to the Ministry of National Education and funding authorities.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

The National Library Commission holds monthly meetings on established topics, to make decisions and approve the reports of the specialised commissions. Specialist working groups conduct studies and research, and draft reports according to strategic priorities.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Through annual reports published on the National Library Commission's website.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

By the National Library Commission secretariat and members' monthly payments. Projects and programmes are financed by interested entities.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#22

Slovakia



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2015)
Updates ongoing	Yes (most recently in 2022)
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	No

Main goal(s) of the legislation

Defines the establishment of libraries, the rights and obligations of libraries and their founders, the library system of Slovakia, the scope and performance of professional library activities and the declaration, registration, protection, availability, import and export of historical library documents and the historical library fund.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **No (previous strategy 2015–2020)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture**

Stakeholders consulted: **Slovak National Library, University Library of Bratislava, Matej Hrebenda Slovak Library for the Blind, and the State Research Libraries of Banská Bystrica, Kosice and Presov, Central Library Council**

Dedicated budget: **No**

Current status

The overarching strategy for culture and the creative industries 2030 has been adopted; however, the task to prepare an action plan for 2024–2026 (which was also supposed to include a library strategy) and for the subsequent periods up to 2030 has been cancelled. At the same time, the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic has requested background materials for the vision and strategy for the development of Slovakia until 2040 – ‘Slovakia 2040’ (the document has not yet been published).



Strategic priorities

N/A.



Goals

N/A.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

N/A.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Annual frequency (assessment based on the previous strategy for the development of Slovak librarianship 2015–2020).

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

The previous strategy (2015–2020) was not financed in any way. It had a recommendatory character, and none of its points were supported by an action plan or had financial coverage.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

No.



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2001), updated in 2015, 2022, 2023
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

The legislation ensures effective public library operation, mandating public libraries as a municipally funded public service providing free access to basic services for all. It sets founding and financing guidelines for sustainable, quality services supporting cultural heritage protection, digital integration, lifelong learning, community engagement, cooperation and policy input through library networks.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2022–2027, action plan 2023)**

Responsible entity/ies: **No government departments; Slovenian Public Library Association**

Stakeholders consulted: **Librarians, directors, mayors, other stakeholders; National Council for Library Activity informed of strategy development**

Dedicated budget: **No**

Strategic priorities

Ensure public libraries remain relevant amid societal and technological change, focusing on improving organisation and governance, networking and collaboration, innovation and adaptation and sustainable development.

Goals

Improved organisation and governance for professional development and empowering regional libraries. Networking and collaboration to promote partnerships with decision-makers, schools, civil society and international networks to improve advocacy, service integration and best practices sharing. Innovation and adaptation address misinformation and inequality with information literacy services. Sustainable development promotes awareness of and contribution to the SDGs through community programmes.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Competency models and centres for professional development; ongoing management training; collaboration with the Public Library Association; encouraging local and international collaboration; and embedding SDGs in public libraries via global initiatives. Emphasis on optimisation through national and regional research.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Methodology to evaluate impact with key performance indicators and regular reporting, competence centre oversight and stakeholder feedback.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Funded mainly by municipal and state sources, supplemented by library revenue and potential EU grants; libraries are encouraged to seek other funding, but municipal funding remains the primary source. Regional disparities exist.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

#24

Spain



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2007)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	No



Main goal(s) of the legislation

Strengthen libraries as essential public services, promoting reading and ensuring free, equal access to information and culture.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2024–2028)** – the 4th strategic plan of the Library Cooperation Council; also, the ‘Book, libraries and reading law (2007) RD 403/2025’ regarding functions in culture

Responsible entity/ies: Spanish Library Cooperation Council (for RD 403/2025: Ministry of Culture)

Stakeholders consulted: Spanish Library Cooperation Council members; all Spanish libraries

Dedicated budget: **Partially**



Strategic priorities and goals

- Sustainability and universal accessibility of libraries – create guidelines and models for sustainable, accessible practices; improve access through youth usage studies, partnerships and increased visibility.
- Professionalisation – update roles; develop training, advocacy and recognition; explore formal degrees for assistants.
- Conservation, digitisation and dissemination of bibliographic heritage – build training alliances; create conservation guidelines; digitise unique items; promote legal deposit.

- Optimisation of data and technologies – use data to improve services; refine collection protocols; explore the use of AI.
- Development of rural libraries – train rural staff; adapt models; collaborate on local cultural projects.
- Strengthening of media and information literacy – tackle misinformation with programmes, partnerships and critical content creation tools.
- Improvement of the functioning of the Library Cooperation Council.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Technical committees and working groups within the Library Cooperation Council, with representatives from libraries, territories and thematic experts.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Annually, by the Cooperation Council's Permanent Commission and Plenary, based on progress reports from the working groups.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

The ordinary budgets of the Ministry of Culture and Autonomous Communities, for regular library operation, are expected to cover the plan's required funds.

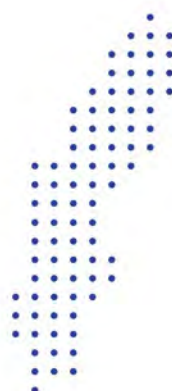
Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

Yes (annual).

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

EU MEMBER STATES

Sweden #25



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2014; previously in 1996)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	No

Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Swedish Library Act sets the framework for all publicly funded library activities, highlighting the promotion of democracy, knowledge and freedom of opinion through universal access to information, in line with IFLA and UNESCO principles. Municipalities are responsible for public libraries and must maintain at least one, with diverse collections and free loans. Libraries support reading, digital skills and youth language development and are accessible to all, focusing on those with disabilities, national minorities and non-Swedish speakers. County councils oversee regional development. Municipalities and county councils must adopt library plans. The National Library oversees national coordination.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2022–2025)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture**

Stakeholders consulted: **National Library Association, Swedish Arts Council, Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, National Library**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**

Strategic priorities

Consolidate state efforts and build a sustainable sector, improving universal access to literature and information.

Goals

Address sector challenges and development needs. Define libraries as inclusive spaces with free access to literature and information, and hubs for democratic dialogue, knowledge-sharing and freedom of opinion. Three focus areas, with related targets and activities, include accessibility and relevance; engagement with societal development; and improving national infrastructure.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Several subtargets and activities relating to the three focus areas are outlined.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Annual discussions between the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and the National Library.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

SEK 10 million to the National Library annually (2022–2024) for sector coordination, and SEK 10 million annually from 2021 for national minority libraries. Separate from the strategy, the ‘Strengthened libraries’ grant provided SEK 250 million (2018–2020), SEK 150 million (2021–2022) and SEK 75 million (2023) to expand library service access nationwide.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

Yes – by the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

NON-EU COUNTRIES

#26

Georgia



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1996)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	Yes (2020)
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

The legislation regulates library organisation and the relations of individuals and institutions in accordance with the principles of international law. Georgia has two national libraries: the National Library of Georgia, operating under the law, and the National Scientific Library of Georgia, whose strategy is publicly accessible online.

National strategy

At present, there is no published strategy for the National Library of Georgia. There is a strategy for the National Scientific Library.

Strategy exists: **Yes (2025)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture; Parliament of Georgia; National Library; regional municipalities; National Scientific Library in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth; National Scientific Foundation**

Stakeholders consulted: **Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia; Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation; GRENA, GILISC, and other tech consortia; international partners: European Open Science Cloud, IFLA, EU funding programmes**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**



Strategic priorities

Institutional leadership, organisational development, technological innovation, service quality and accessibility, public engagement and heritage preservation.

Goals

Improve visibility and universal access, support literacy, inclusion, community engagement and lifelong learning. Key values: quality and excellence, universal accessibility, equality, inclusivity and diversity.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

The National Library supports culture and education through collection growth, digital services, partnerships and staff training. Funded mainly by the state, it engages the public through programmes, exhibitions and events. The National Scientific Library works with the Education Ministry and technology partners to build digital platforms and improve infrastructure. It invests in staff training and secures diverse funding. It regularly uses feedback, data and public engagement to improve services.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Through key performance indicators, user feedback, surveys, periodic reporting, external audits, staff assessments and stakeholder consultations.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Primarily through the state budget, supplemented by national science foundation grants, international donors and project-based funding.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

NON-EU COUNTRIES

Moldova #27



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1994; 2017)
Updates ongoing	Updated 2023
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	Yes



Main goal(s) of the legislation

The law regulates the organisation, functioning, development and protection of libraries as public institutions. It establishes the legal framework for all types of libraries, defining their status, responsibilities and principles of activity. It ensures the protection and promotion of library collections in all formats, treating them as part of institutional heritage. The law promotes modernisation and innovation, encouraging digital resources, integration of new technologies, internet access and expanded electronic services. It emphasises professional standards, including continuous training, staff evaluation, library assessment and ethical conduct. Recognising libraries as community and cultural centres, it fosters social inclusion and civic participation. It provides a framework for state and local funding – public libraries by local administrations, national libraries by the state – while enabling private and international support, though no dedicated long-term investment fund exists. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for the formulation and implementation of the legislation, while the National Library and the National Librarianship Council act as the main implementing and coordinating institutions.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Currently no; previous strategy 2017–2020**

A national strategy for culture and heritage 2035 is under development. In developing the national strategy for culture and heritage 2035, consultations were held with stakeholders from various cultural and creative sectors, including performing arts, visual arts, music, cinematography, written culture, artistic education, research and innovation, and the creative industries, along with independent and non-governmental cultural organisations and local cultural policy representatives.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

NON-EU COUNTRIES

#28 Norway



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1985)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

The legislation outlines the objectives and activities of libraries and requires every municipality to have a library with a qualified chief librarian. It contains provisions for lending cooperation, submission of statistics and the duties of county libraries. The central government is responsible for areas of special importance to the maintenance of a national library system. The act was revised in 2014 to include active dissemination and to frame the library as an independent meeting place and arena for public discussion and debates.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2020–2023; extended to 2025)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture and Equality for formulation; National Library for implementation**

Stakeholders consulted: **Reference group of approximately 15 key stakeholders, with four thematic workshops; regular meetings with the National Library Advisory Board consisting of 15 library heads**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**

Strategic priorities and goals

Three main strategic priorities: (i) active dissemination, to strengthen library and staff efforts to improve access and promote the diversity of collections; (ii) cooperation and development, with funding to strengthen cooperation and resource sharing between libraries and other institutions and administration levels; and (iii) infrastructure, to strengthen and develop the National Library's shared physical and digital infrastructure for libraries.

From 2023, two new areas were added:

(iv) reading promotion and dissemination, linked to the strategy for reading enjoyment (2025–2030); and (v) national digital infrastructure, for the purchase and dissemination of digital content in libraries.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? **Yes.**

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

The National Library is responsible for implementation and monitoring, with implementation also regularly discussed with other stakeholders.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Through biannual meetings with the National Library Advisory Board, where updates and major issues are discussed. A final evaluation is carried out by an external company.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

National lottery fund profits are distributed to sports and culture. Approximately NOK 50 million has been given annually throughout the duration of the strategy, split between the three strategic priorities by the National Library. 50–70 % is for project funds; the remainder is for infrastructure development.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? **No.**



Legislation

Existence of legislation	No
Updates ongoing	N/A
Includes structural financing	N/A
Mandates data collection	N/A

National strategy

Strategy exists:	No
Responsible entity/ies:	N/A
Stakeholders consulted:	N/A
Dedicated budget:	N/A

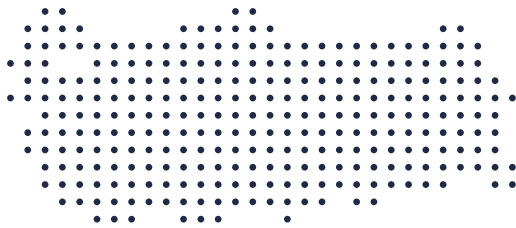
In Switzerland, there is neither national legislation nor a national strategy for libraries. Some of the 26 cantons have established cantonal legislation for public libraries. Only the Canton of Valais/Wallis has developed a formal strategy for public libraries, including a system of cantonal funding.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

NON-EU COUNTRIES

#30

Türkiye



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (2012)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	Yes

⦿ Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Regulation on Public Libraries sets principles for establishing and managing public, children’s and specialised libraries under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The 2012/07 Library Services Circular defines operational standards for services, data collection, performance, cataloguing, collaboration and accessibility. Financing is handled under separate legislation.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Included in the Ministry of Culture strategic plan (2024–2028)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture and Tourism – Directorate-General for Libraries and Publications (DGLB)**

Stakeholders consulted: **Internal teams; academics, local governments, NGOs, other public institutions**

Dedicated budget: **Yes**

♙ Strategic priorities

Strengthening access to knowledge and culture; supporting creative industries and reading culture; ensuring equal cultural participation across regions and

groups; and improving institutional capacity, data-driven management and international cooperation. Primary focus areas: library network and collection expansion, and digital and technological integration.

⦿ Goals

(i) Increase library branches from 1 292 to 1 392, and mobile units from 81 to 106; (ii) upgrade 198 libraries in 2024, reaching 358 by 2028; (iii) expand centrally acquired publications from 1.5 million to over 10 million; (iv) raise active library users from 28 million to 193.5 million; and (v) broaden access to audio books, e-publications and smart library systems, and develop inclusive content and workshops, including for persons with disabilities.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

Performance indicators and action plans guide implementation under the DGLB. Risks such as facility or procurement delays are mitigated through contingency planning and coordination. Budget and project management frameworks ensure timely delivery.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Progress is tracked through indicators (library branches, users, workshops, etc.). Annual reports compile data from provincial units, supported by periodic assessments, audits and user feedback. Workshops and review meetings enable continuous improvement to keep services inclusive and user-centred.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

Through central government allocations and dedicated project funds.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered?

Dependent on monitoring and evaluation outcomes.

(United Kingdom) **England** #31

Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1964)
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	No



Main goal(s) of the legislation

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 places a duty on:

- library authorities (upper tier local authorities) to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who live, work and study in the area;
- the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by councils in England and to secure the proper discharge of the statutory duties on councils.

The act does not mandate data collection, but includes provision for every library authority 'to furnish such information, and provide such facilities for the inspection of library premises, stocks and records, as the Secretary of State may require for carrying out his duty under this section'.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **No**

The previous national strategy for public libraries was *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021*, published by the Libraries Taskforce (consisting of representatives from the central government, the local government, the sector and important library partners). It was the first national strategy for libraries in England to be sponsored and endorsed by both central and local governments.

COUNTRY FACTSHEET

NON-EU COUNTRIES

#32 Scotland (United Kingdom)



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes
Updates ongoing	No
Includes structural financing	No
Mandates data collection	No

A short-term working group is reviewing how to define 'adequate' library provision and examining global best practices for quality public library services and evidence-based assessment. Recommendations on achieving consistent national standards were expected by the end of 2025.

⦿ Main goal(s) of the legislation

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a public library service under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994. This act incorporated earlier legislation, including the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, in which Section 163 specifically required authorities to 'secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area'.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2021–2025; strategy refresh planned for 2026)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC)**

Stakeholders consulted: **Public Library Strategy Advisory Group, with actors across the library sector and stakeholder organisations**

Dedicated budget: **Grant funding is available to libraries through the Public Library Improvement Fund (PLIF), aligned with the strategy**



Strategic priorities

People, place and partnership, based on five foundations: data-driven service design; equality, diversity and inclusion; a seamless customer journey; staff culture; and sustainability.



Goals

- **People.** Support people and communities to reach their full potential and use unique staff skills.
- **Place.** Recognise libraries as valued spaces with community-led design.
- **Partnership.** Deliver on local and national priorities through strategic collaboration and partnership. The strategy also promotes sustained investment and demonstrates the contribution of libraries to meaningful outcomes in every community.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? Yes.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

An implementation group with key stakeholders oversees delivery and monitors progress.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

Quarterly implementation group meetings, an implementation tracker for local progress, annual public library data framework collection and a formal external evaluation due in 2026.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

The SLIC coordinates with the Scottish government's culture teams, administering grant funding to public libraries through the PLIF, aligned with the strategy.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? Yes.



Legislation

Existence of legislation	Yes (1995)
Updates ongoing	Yes
Includes structural financing	Yes
Mandates data collection	Yes

Main goal(s) of the legislation

The legislation defines the status of libraries, their services and legal and organisational principles in Ukraine. It guarantees the right of free access to information and knowledge, and the values of national and world culture, science and education preserved in libraries.

National strategy

Strategy exists: **Yes (2016–2025)**

Responsible entity/ies: **Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications**

Stakeholders consulted: **National libraries of Ukraine, Ukrainian Library Association; public consultations with the professional community**

Dedicated budget: **No**

There are no plans to adopt a library strategy after 2025; specific provisions for libraries are included in the strategies for the development of culture (2025–2030) and the development of reading (until 2030).

Strategic priorities and goals

The strategy focuses on improving the regulatory framework for library activities and harmonising standards with international norms. It aims to ensure guaranteed budgetary funding, reform revenue mechanisms and establish an integrated national library system based on universal access. Key priorities include professional development and

updating library education; modernising material, technical and technological infrastructure; and updating library and information resources in traditional and electronic formats. The strategy also seeks to promote reading through social partnerships, preserve Ukraine's cultural and documentary heritage, provide scientific support for qualitative development and strengthen communication within the library community and with external stakeholders. These efforts aim to build a flexible, sustainable and high-quality library system that meets social needs, enhances access to information, fosters professional enrichment and supports cultural and intellectual enrichment.

Is data gathered annually at the national and/or regional level? No.

Implementation mechanisms for the strategy

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has issued a decree appointing those responsible for implementing the strategy.

How is the progress of the strategy monitored and evaluated?

N/A.

How is the implementation of the strategy financed?

No separate funds are allocated for implementing the strategy. Individual measures are financed from relevant local or state budgets.

Is a periodic review of the strategy considered? No.

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