



# WSIS Report 2019

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## Contribution by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

### Part I: Summary

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institution (IFLA) is the global organisation for libraries and library associations, representing over 1500 members in around 150 countries. IFLA has been involved with WSIS since the 2003 Geneva Summit, which had outlined the 11 Action Lines. In 2015, IFLA participated in the 10-year review and consultation process, and continues to submit annual progress reports on relevant Targets and Action Lines.

IFLA advocates for the importance of public access to internet and ICT, as well as broader access to information, as a key means of achieving sustainable development and digital inclusion. This work is most closely affiliated with WSIS Target 4: “connect all public libraries, archives, museums, cultural centres and post offices”. IFLA activities are also intrinsically linked with Action Line 3 (Access to information and knowledge), 4 (capacity building), and 8 (cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content).

In these areas, one of the key trends affecting the work of library sector in 2019 was the slowing growth of the internet connectivity rate and the recognition of public access’ role in bridging the digital divide in several policy strategies and frameworks. Libraries continue to explore the possibilities of enlarging public access through such approaches as hotspot lending or using TV White Space to expand their WiFi coverage. Moreover, evolving online information ecosystems impact the library sector’s understanding of what digital and information literacy-building efforts they need to extend to their users.

IFLA activities in 2019 include releasing materials to inform and support the library sector in pursuing public internet access solutions and engaging within the international fora to promote public access and digital skills training in libraries. IFLA’s specialised Professional Units have also been active in facilitating exchanges of experiences and good practices in a number of relevant areas, from digital services to publishing and open access.

### Part II: Trends and experiences in 2019

With the rate of internet connectivity growth slowing, and many people still lacking a way to go online, the importance of public internet access solutions remains. The Alliance for Affordable Internet’s 2019 Affordability Report shows, for example, that a number of countries in Southeast Asia have actively implemented public access solutions to narrow the digital gap.

In delivering public access, libraries can offer a unique value proposition, often providing free or nearly-free internet connectivity, ICT workstations, one-on-one help for users with less ICT skills, digital literacy and skills training, and access to digital sources through library channels. This is reflected, for instance, in the use of libraries as one of the facilities involved in implementing the TECH4ED government initiative in the Philippines - a national program to establish a large network of publicly available ICT centers.

Similarly, the updated Broadband Strategy of Kenya, released in 2019, points out the role of libraries as public access points and sets out several targets which support library connectivity. Such trends towards the recognition of libraries’ potential to provide public access and enable meaningful connectivity are welcome.

Building on the trends set out in the 2018 report, there are further examples of libraries experimenting with new forms of broadening public access. These can range from laptop and WiFi hotspot loans to making use of TV White Space to provide internet access beyond the library

location. Some notable examples of libraries utilising unused spectrum for connectivity are the Beyond the Walls and Library SecondNets projects in the US.

Beyond the Walls is currently seeing five libraries install equipment and extend their WiFi network to offer connectivity in remote locations. The Library SecondNets project is relying on both TVWS and a mesh network to create a backup connection between libraries and other key anchor institutions in case of disasters, with portable equipment components which can be used to provide connectivity in other locations. The latter project also points to an emergence of a discussion, particularly in the US, on the role of libraries in responding to crisis scenarios, particularly by offering access to digital communication.

The need for digital skills and ICT capacity-building to ensure meaningful access remains important. The UNESCO Internet Universality Indicators framework, now endorsed, published and to be applied in a first round of country assessment reports, incorporates digital, ICT, information and media literacy skills. Alongside formal educational curricula, it points to information and media literacy training (including their digital aspects) for adults, implemented by governments and other stakeholders. This is particularly relevant for libraries around the world working to offer digital literacy and ICT skills learning opportunities, especially for people who might not have access to formal education and training.

Related to libraries' role in digital literacy capacity building is a reflection on what digital and informational literacy skills users need in an increasingly complex digital information environment. The Toronto Public Library, for instance, is working to develop an approach to public education on algorithmic literacy and artificial intelligence. Many libraries throughout the world deliver media literacy programmes with a focus on digital information sources.

### **Part III: Actions and initiatives in 2019**

In 2019, IFLA has continued promoting public internet access in libraries as an important measure to help more people get online and enjoy the benefits of better access to information. Many activities are aimed at producing and distributing materials which inform and support library and LIS sector professionals working to deliver public access and other services in the information society. The Public Access Policy Toolkit, first described in the 2018 report, has been updated and published in late 2018-early 2019. IFLA will be organizing a webinar and other materials in the coming month.

IFLA has also released formal Guidelines on Public Access. The finalised Guidelines set out overarching principles (e.g. transparency, privacy, accessibility) and practical suggestions and examples (e.g. on staff training and computer skill education for users) for LIS professionals and other decision-makers working on public access in libraries. The Guidelines draw on input from IFLA professional units and a broad range of stakeholders across different sectors, evidence-gathering and research. They aim to resolve points of uncertainty which can hold libraries back from providing access, as well as offering a reference point when decisions are challenged.

Another set of formal IFLA Guidelines published in 2019 – Guidelines for Setting Up a Digital Unification Project – are relevant to library activities in the areas of digital preservation of, and access to, cultural heritage (in line with Action Line C8). The guidelines offer instructions and advice on assembling scattered collections through digitisation, and a large number of project examples and case studies to draw on.

Together with the Technology and Social Change Group of the University of Washington, IFLA has published a second instalment of the “Development and Access to Information” report. The 2019 report evaluates worldwide progress towards meaningful access to information in the following areas: connectivity infrastructure and use, social contexts, and legal and policy environments. It

emphasises the role of access to information and public internet access in libraries towards achieving SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16 – those reviewed at the UN High-Level Political Forum in 2019.

At the international level, and in addition to its broader work to promote access to information, IFLA continues to promote public access in libraries and access to information as a way to bridge the digital gap and promote development. Examples include IFLA's participation in the UN High-Level Political Forum, its comments on the European Union-Africa Digital Economy Taskforce report and the Somalia Information and Communications Technology Policy & Strategy. In both responses, IFLA highlighted the potential of public access in libraries to improve meaningful internet access in Africa.

IFLA also continues to engage with the broader internet governance field to promote public access, the importance of digital skills training, and intellectual freedom. For example, IFLA submitted a response to the Council of Europe's Draft Recommendation on the Human Rights Impacts of Algorithmic Systems and contributed to a European reply to the UN High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation report, "The Age of Digital Interdependence".

As a member of the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access, IFLA continues working within the Internet Governance Forum space to promote public access and digital skills training in libraries. A current DC-PAL project is looking into how libraries feature in various national broadband policies.

Within the framework of the Partnership for Public Access, IFLA participates in discussions and exchange of ideas and good practices on digital inclusion through public access (e.g. in libraries), Community Networks and Offline Internet.

The work on the Library Map of the World continues, and more data is being added to the database. Alongside the SDG Stories function described in the 2018 report, a new feature has been added – country profiles. Among other things, the profiles offer metrics on library use, internet access in libraries, e-book loans, overall internet infrastructure, and overviews of key policy and legislation.

In addition, IFLA has contributed to NGO Public Libraries 2030's initiative on compiling factsheets on library statistics in Europe. The factsheets include data on crucial aspects of library sector's role in the information society, such as the percentage of libraries offering internet access, the digital skills of the population, and e-book loans per country. This should facilitate understanding of the role of libraries in promoting connectivity and skills at the macro level.

Various IFLA Professional Units have also been active in highlighting and promoting the role of libraries in the digital age. For example, the Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Section and the New Professionals Section, jointly with the American Library Association, have organised a webinar "Library Services to Teenagers in the Digital Age".

The Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section have dedicated an instalment of their regular newsletter to library practices across the world in connecting youth with digital technologies. Meanwhile, the Academic Research and Libraries section hosted a webinar on library publishing and open access, thereby supporting the availability of relevant content online for all.