



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS
FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DES ASSOCIATIONS DE BIBLIOTHECAIRES ET DES BIBLIOTHEQUES
INTERNATIONALE VEREINIGUNG BIBLIOTHEKARISCHER VERBÄNDE UND EINRICHTUNGEN
FEDERACION INTERNACIONAL DE ASOCIACIONES DE BIBLIOTECARIOS Y BIBLIOTECAS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ ФЕДЕРАЦИЯ БИБЛИОТЕЧНЫХ АССОЦИАЦИЙ И УЧРЕЖДЕНИЙ
国际图书馆协会与机构联合会
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات ومؤسسات المكتبات

HE. Ms Michele Bachelet,
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 GENEVA 10,
Switzerland

Dear High Commissioner,

Please find below a joint submission from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, Prins Willem-Alexanderhof 5, 2595 BE, The Hague, The Netherlands, www.ifla.org) and the Associazione Italiana Biblioteche (AIB, CP 2461 - Ufficio Roma 158 – Via Marsala, 39 – 00185 Roma, Italy, www.aib.it) for the 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review for Italy.

IFLA is the global organisation for libraries, created in 1927 with members in around 150 countries, representing the world's over 2.3 million libraries. We work both to promote libraries, and to strengthen the ability of our members to deliver equitable access to information to all as a driver of development.

AIB is the library association of Italy, created in 1930, with a mission to advocate for libraries and to support the development of the profession through networking and learning possibilities.

Overview

Official statistics indicate that there are 13 995 libraries in Italy¹, of which 7 240 are public libraries, 2 649 are academic libraries, and 1627 are ecclesiastical libraries, in addition to 46 national or provincial libraries. However, it is believed that some of them are closed or no longer active, with public and ecclesiastical libraries most likely to suffer this fate.

There are no recent statistics about services (the latest (incomplete) data refers back to 2014²), but we do know that libraries have, in recent years, seen significant cuts in funding. We know of hundreds of libraries which have no budget to buy new books, and a dramatically decreasing number of professional librarians.

This is not the case everywhere, however, and there are new or restored libraries which perform well. There is also investment in some parts of the country: for example, the Puglia Region, in 2018, set aside €100 million for projects to create Community Libraries, with 123 projects accepted. Nonetheless, library services in Italy do not always match international standards.

Of the 7.3 million adults who use public libraries every year, 43% take part in educational activities. Two thirds of Italy's public libraries offer internet access, with 800 000 adults using library computers (not including WiFi) a year. A quarter of public libraries offer information literacy courses which help address challenges around online disinformation and research skills.

¹ Ministry of Cultural Heritage <https://anagrafe.iccu.sbn.it/it/>

² <https://www.cepell.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/III-Indagine-sulle-biblioteche-di-pubblica-lettura.pdf>



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Italy's efforts to spread literacy and build reading habits would be helped by special laws on the topic, as exist in other countries. Thanks to the efforts of some Members of Parliament, this is again on the agenda³.

The Italian Library Association works both to defend the profession, and to promote high ethical standards in service delivery. It works through encouraging debate amongst its members, and engagement with decision-makers⁴.

Libraries, Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Access to Information

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets out the right to free expression, as well as to seek, impart and receive information. This is a core function of libraries, whose work has long meant that everyone is able to exercise this right, regardless of their wealth or social position. When libraries are inadequately supported, or their freedom to provide their users with books is restricted, this risks standing in the way of the fulfillment of rights.

In the past few years in Italy, librarians have faced different cases of censorship, mostly in public libraries and concerning LGBTQ or sex or religion.

The latest and most famous instance was the so called Todi case. The City Councilor of Family and Culture issued a directive asking the Director of the library to evaluate and report texts that discussed gender ambiguity. The Director refused to move books on this topic from the children's section to the adult section of the library, as demanded by the Council, which resulted in her being removed from her post at the library. The colleague was supported in this by the Italian Libraries Association (AIB)⁵, as well as by the International Federation of Library Associations⁶.

In 2015 May 23 during BiblioPride in Milan, the AIB performed readings from prohibited books (18th-20th Centuries) in the presence of Sinnika Sipilä, then President of IFLA. More recently, the AIB also created a monitoring Group about censorship⁷. This will next meet on 6 May 2019 for a meeting on the subject of 'The banality of censorship', organised in cooperation with the AIPH (Italian Association for public History) and on 10 May 2019 there will be readings of texts from books burned in Berlin in 1933.

This work, we believe, is necessary in the current political climate. Beyond documented instances of censorship, the phenomenon may in fact go much deeper, with a high risk of self-censorship by librarians anxious to avoid trouble with politicians or communities. We believe that this trend may be on the increase.

³<http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/pdl/pdf/leg.18.pdl.camera.478.18PDL0007610.pdf>

⁴See <https://www.aib.it/categorie/attivita/comunicati/>

⁵ In 2019 March the AIB intervened in the legal case promoted by the Director against the Municipality of Todi in order to defend the dignity and ethics of the librarian's profession. See <https://www.aib.it/attivita/comunicati/2019/73765-demansionamento-mobbing-aib-sostiene-ex-direttrice-biblioteca-todi/>

⁶See the letter from the Secretary General of the International Federation of Library Associations and institutions:

<http://www.aib.it/attivita/2018/69434-todi-public-library-censorship-ifla-comment/>

⁷<http://www.aib.it/struttura/osservatori/osservatorio-censura/>



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Libraries and Cultural Rights

Libraries play an important role in delivering cultural rights, as highlighted by [IFLA's submission](#) on the 10 year anniversary of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

Cultural services are not well distributed in Italy. The data on reading show that at a national level only 40% of the population read books. In 2017 a study showed that South Italy had many fewer readers than Central and North Italy. Only Sardinia stood out, with better data even than richer parts of the country. One reason for this is that in Sardinia there is a strong network of public libraries, while in South Italy and in Sicily there are several areas with no active libraries.

In the last 40 years some members of Italian Parliament have tried to arrange a law for libraries without success. More recently, there has been discussion of a law on reading⁸ where we may find some support to actions in favour of children, disadvantaged people (people with disabilities, or those in difficult social and economic conditions) or those coming from other cultures and language groups.

Libraries have served as important cultural outposts in difficult and peripheral areas. Set up both by public and private bodies. For example, the [library of Scampia](#), created with the support of the Italian Society of Authors and Publishers (SIAE)⁹, occupies the site of a former mafia warehouse for drugs and weapons. It has been created by volunteers, and its opening was celebrated on national television¹⁰.

There are other good examples of libraries ensuring the cultural rights of people in deprived areas, for example the [Il Pertini Cultural Centre](#) (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano), the lifelong learning programme run by the [Biblioteca San Giorgio of Pistoia](#), there is provision of information about the services of the [public libraries of Modena](#) in 7 languages in order to reach out to newcomers, and a home-delivery service for users who are not able to get to the [library in Foggia](#).

A particular good example in peripheral areas of Italy¹¹ is *BiblioHub* – a collaboration between the AIB and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage¹². This special “culture truck” travels throughout Italy, following a first trip in summer/autumn 2018, bringing new ideas and creativity to often neglected areas¹³.

Rights of people with disabilities

Libraries have been active in their work to deliver on the right of access to information set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through the provision of [materials and services](#). IFLA has been particularly active around the Marrakesh Treaty, which promises to remove unnecessary barriers to the making and sharing of accessible-format books. These, until now, have created major market failures, given the relatively low buying power of people with print disabilities.

⁸ <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/pdl/pdf/leg.18.pdl.camera.478.18PDL0007610.pdf> ; see article 2. point 3 e) and f) letters and point 5 a) b) and c) letters

⁹ This support will expire in 2020

¹⁰20 December 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22s0UQIQPwg>

¹¹ A survey done by Parliament tell us that in most of the peripheral areas of Italy Public bodies shows difficulties to do effective projects, while Charity , Volunteers organization and private bodies do more. https://www.labparlamento.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Documento-finale_Inchiesta-periferie.pdf, pp. 69-70 ; something may change in the next future because last governments support recovering of such areas of Italian big cities

¹² This project (Alterstudiopartnes- Milan) was first presented at 15 International Architectural Exhibition2016 “Taking care”

¹³ See the video: <https://youtu.be/J-EnrZ2GNPq>



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Italy, as a member of the European Union, has ratified the Marrakesh Treaty, but [appears](#) to have retained provisions obliging organisations serving people with disabilities to register before they can make use of the Treaty’s provisions. This is contrary to the Treaty itself (the Agreed Statement to Article 9), and risks limiting the number of libraries and other bodies who can help provide access to information.

Beyond the new possibilities brought by Marrakesh, libraries have long worked to ensure that people with disabilities benefit from access to information¹⁴. For example, “Easy reading – all may read in the library” is a project of [Biblioteca of Tortoli \(Nuoro\)](#), “A book for all” is run at the [Library of Spinea \(Venezia\)](#), “Glasses on loan” takes place at the [Library of Ledro \(Trento\)](#), and the [Library of Rozzano \(Milan\)](#) runs “Nobody out!”. The [Municipal Library of Villa Urbani](#) in Perugia organizes weekly activities for disabled boys and girls¹⁵.

There is also cooperation between associations for people with blindness, associations for people experiencing dyslexia and dyspraxia and libraries in order to provide special books, digital books and so on, for example digital talking books (with the [Italian Dyslexia Association](#)), work with the [Italian Blind Union](#), and [cooperation](#) with the Italian Publishers Association to make accessible format books available for sale.

Rights of Children

Libraries are [key actors](#) in delivering the rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, notably the right to access information through a choice of media, by providing tailored collections and a welcoming space for all.

In spite of cuts in public libraries, Italian librarians try hard to improve spaces for children and teens, and offer books and other relevant activities in libraries. The project [Nati per Leggere](#) (Born to read) has seen strong uptake across the country for example.

Different regions support libraries’ projects for children and young adults¹⁶ and in 2018, 10 projects presented by libraries were funded with EUR 1 million¹⁷ from a national funding pot. A few years ago, the AIB’s Children’s Libraries Commission counted around 1000 Libraries (or sections of libraries) working specifically to serve children.

However, as mentioned earlier, there are thousands of citizens in Italy who have no libraries, including children. It has been necessary for organisations such as Save the Children to open so called [Punti Luce](#) (Light Spots) in order to fight against cultural and educational poverty¹⁸.

¹⁴ Similar activities were supported by national funding in 2018 with € 150.000 for 2 projects
<https://www.cepell.it/it/lettura-per-tutti-2018-pubblicata-la-graduatoria/>

¹⁵ See also the wider activities of the library: <http://turismo.comune.perugia.it/articoli/viva-villa-urbani>

¹⁶ See Friuli Venezia Giulia Region’s projects : “Leggiamo 0 – 18” (Let’s read 0 – 18)
<http://www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/cms/RAFVG/GEN/progetto-leggiamo/>

¹⁷ See <https://www.cepell.it/it/on-line-la-graduatoria-del-bando-leggimi-0-6-2018/>

¹⁸ In Italy the educational poverty is big social problem; In Italy more than 1 child on 10 alive in absolute poverty, over the half he/she doesn't read books and more than 40% it doesn't make sport (see Save the Children Report 2018 (Italy)
<https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/nuotare-contro-corrente-poverta-educativa-e-resilienza-italia.pdf>



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Rights of Displaced Persons and Migrants

Libraries can be important players in the welcome and integration of refugees and other newcomers. As venues for language-learning, places to get online and stay in touch with family and friends, and simply a quiet space, they can make a major positive difference to people's lives.

Already in the 90s, Italian libraries were focusing more and more on providing services to multicultural populations. For example, the [Libraries Institution of Rome](#) and the [Lazzerini Library](#) of Prato led the way, and have been supported by national and regional events such as the [festival](#) of specialized libraries in Bologna, 9 – 22 february 2019, which offers an interesting panorama of what libraries of any kind (public, private, religious bodies, academic) can do in Bologna and beyond. A particularly strong example is the [Silent Books: from the World to Lampedusa and Back](#) project, run by IBBY International.

In the specific case of migrants, AIB carried out a short enquiry in 2015 about libraries, migrants and refugees, with the results contributing to a [European level report](#). This demonstrates a number of examples of initiatives and action to support migrants and refugees.

For example, the [Quarantotti Gambini Library of Trieste](#) offers language courses, in cooperation with ARCI (Italian Association for free time and culture), a major cultural association working with refugees..

The [Ilaria Alpi library](#) of Municipality of Parma organizes reading clubs bringing together Italian and foreign-born mothers on a regular basis.

It is worth taking into account that in Italy refugees are often not free to leave the centres where they are first accommodated and registered, and so it is difficult to go to the library. Moreover, they often don't want to live in Italy, but move on to another part of Europe. However, for those who do stay and want to access libraries, recent new rules have introduced restrictions not just on migrants and refugees, but also on the organisations who help them. This risks having a major negative impact on the cultural rights of this group.