

## **Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries: annual activity report (April 2020)**

*The Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries (DC-PAL) has formally operated within the Internet Governance Forum since 2012. It is dedicated to catalysing action, collecting data and facilitating an exchange of good practices on public access in libraries (and similar facilities) to support digital inclusion. The focus of the DC spans different aspects of the public access practice and policy (e.g. digital literacy, affordability, long-term sustainability, its role in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals, etc.)*

Over the last 12 months, the coalition members have worked both jointly and individually to contribute to the goals of the DC. Some of the key joint outputs for DC-PAL were the substantive thematic paper “The Role of Libraries in National Broadband Plans and Policies” (attached) and the IGF 2019 session.

### **THE 2019 IGF SESSION AND THEMATIC PAPER**

The report is an outcome of a joint study carried out by a dedicated working group from DC-PAL. The aim of the study in its first phase is to compare how formal national broadband plans engage and implicate libraries, highlight the different roles policymakers envision for libraries in providing broader internet access, and the types of support libraries can receive. This, in turn, paves the way for a more in-depth examination of the impacts of different policy approaches to supporting digital inclusion through libraries in reality (a second phase, forthcoming in 2020).

The study was initiated in June 2019, and the first draft was finalised by the working group in November 2019. The work had been coordinated through a series of conference calls (approx. 5) and several feedback rounds. Once the first draft had been completed, it was shared with the attendees of the 2019 IGF DC-PAL session. The members of the DC have been invited to submit further feedback on the draft, and to offer inputs on the policy situation in their countries for follow-up case studies. The work on the second phase of the study is ongoing.

The 2019 DC-PAL session focused on the contribution of public internet access to public policy success. The session explores the role of public access in libraries in broadband policies, affordability and development strategies, as well as practical interventions to deliver on their potential, drawing on the examples of Kenya, Uganda, and other countries.

The coalition members have also relied on the DC-PAL mailing list to ask for feedback on draft documents (e.g. a draft briefing on community network for libraries) and share information about relevant publications or events (e.g. a summary of the 2019 report of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, a briefing on EdTech for libraries, etc.).

### **WORK OF INDIVIDUAL COALITION MEMBERS**

In 2019, EIFL has collaborated with international partners, library consortia and individual libraries in 53 countries to expand access to high quality information resources that enables education, research and community livelihoods in developing and transition economy countries.

EIFL has continued focusing on Africa in advocacy efforts with governments and the private sector to improve public access infrastructure in libraries, and carried out train-of-trainers programmes for public libraries in four countries – Kenya, Namibia, Zambia and Uganda – to build the groundwork for digital inclusion through public library networks to improve lives and livelihoods within communities.

EIFL also carried on negotiating affordable pricing for subscription-based electronic journals, books, and databases in libraries, advocated for open access policies, raised awareness of good practices and

trained students, researchers and faculty to share their work in open access to advance openness in science and research.

EIFL and IFLA worked hand-in hand supporting libraries, and their governments, in adopting the Marrakesh Treaty to break down the barriers for libraries to reproduce printed works in accessible formats to open access to knowledge to people with print disabilities. In 2019, we held the first regional workshop operationalizing the Marrakesh Treaty for persons with print disabilities in five countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus and Russia), and developed and translated the Marrakesh ‘Getting Started’ practical guide for librarians for the national copyright laws of five countries. EIFL also worked to strengthen participation of civil society at WIPO events on access to knowledge issues, including libraries and archives, education, disabilities and the broadcast treaty at WIPO’s copyright committee. Progress was made on achieving wide acknowledgement that copyright laws in many countries are falling behind in the digital age, and clear recognition that limitations and exceptions are intrinsic to a balanced copyright system.

Many activities by IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations, are aimed at producing and distributing materials that support libraries in delivering – and advocating for – public access and related digital services. IFLA has created and updated a Public Access Policy Toolkit aimed at supporting advocacy by libraries for public access, and through its Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) committee released formal Guidelines on Public Access to help public libraries offer this.

The second instalment of the “Development and Access to Information” report, prepared by IFLA and the Technology and Social Change Group of the University of Washington in 2019, examines the progress made towards meaningful and equitable access to information in since 2017. Finally, IFLA continues to collect statistics on libraries, as well as public access and digital services in libraries, worldwide (“The Library Map of the World”) and examples of how libraries and public internet access can help deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (“SGD Stories”).

#### MOBILISING AND MONITORING THE GLOBAL LIBRARY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DC-PAL key partners have joined the global efforts to help ensure that education and research continue despite disruptions, and that the scientific and health sectors have access to the widest range of trusted resources to support their work while the crisis continues.

We have signed the ICOLC statement on the Global COVID-19 Pandemic, which calls on publishers and content providers to make any relevant information and data sets about COVID-19, Coronaviruses, vaccines, antiviral drugs, etc. open access immediately, as well as temporarily lift paywalls on subscribed content or to develop alternative methods for off-campus authentication. IFLA has led a multi-stakeholder initiative to draft an open letter to the World Intellectual Property Organization, urging the Director General to take action and ensure that IP laws and practices are supportive to the efforts to combat the pandemic and address its consequences.

EIFL and partner library consortia contacted publishers asking them to lift paywalls on e-resources subscribed by libraries in around 40 developing and transition economy countries, to enable continuation of teaching, learning and research online, while universities are closed.

Key DC-PAL partners have also monitored the response of the global library field to the COVID-19 pandemic. With a large amount of work and educational activities shifting online in affected countries, the issue of digital inclusion is particularly prominent. As part of this, access to key relevant content is a key part of meaningful connectivity – and libraries around the world have worked to ensure broader access to crucial educational, research and cultural content.

Drawing on the observations of key DC partners, we can highlight different initiatives to ensure equitable and broader access to key digital content:

**OFFERING MORE DIGITAL MATERIALS.** This ranges from raising the number of digital loans per user (e.g. some libraries in Denmark), purchasing more licenses to e-materials (e.g. in Finland), adding more items to their digital platforms (e.g. in Denmark, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Spain). A government survey in France has also indicated that libraries are likely to reallocate budgets to meet the rising demand for digital materials. Some libraries in the United States, through the services of *Hathi Trust*, are able to offer access to digital versions of materials they only have in hardcopy, although have faced complaints from lobbying organisations for rightholders.

**REACHING MORE PEOPLE.** Libraries have also worked to ensure that more people can gain access to the digital materials they are offering. In the Netherlands, for example, libraries have developed an app offering free access to many books which is available for all, not only library users. Many libraries (e.g. in the US, Germany, Ireland, Ghana and more) have developed easier ways for people to become members and make use of the digital collections and services – e.g. by joining electronically. IFLA’s own Health and Biosciences Section is holding a webinar on digital health inclusion to focus on how to pursue libraries’ traditional role in digital inclusion.

**EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS IN FOCUS.** There are, of course, initiatives which place particular emphasis on ensuring better access to educational content. The National Library in Spain, for example, promotes content that can be used for educational purposes; in Norway, the Ministry of Culture and the National Library cooperate to ensure better access to digital resources for the educational sector.

Academic libraries’ efforts are of course focused on better access to research and educational materials as well. In Bangladesh, for example, the East-West University offers remote access through online book requests, while the library of the Rhodes University in South Africa established call-in hours.

**ADVOCACY AND COOPERATION WITH PUBLISHERS AND VENDORS.** Many libraries and library associations have advocated for broadening access to copyrighted digital materials – e.g. in the UK, France, and Italy. In the Czech Republic, the National Library has reached an agreement with the national collective copyright administrators, making over 200000 digitized periodicals and monographs – including those protected by the copyright law – available to both private and public university students and teachers through the National Library application.

In Australia and Ireland, library organizations (The Australian Library and Information Association and Libraries Ireland) have reached agreements with national publishers and authors, allowing public libraries to carry on their story-time activities online. Elsewhere, publishers have been less ready to make such broad commitments, even only for the duration of the pandemic.

Broadly, during the COVID-19 pandemic libraries saw a sharp increase in demand for digital materials – as much as six-fold in some areas. Governments in some countries (e.g. Ireland and Norway) have worked to offer financial support to help them increase their digital offering, and in the United States, libraries will benefit from the economic stimulus package.

The pandemic has pushed many libraries to expand their efforts to ensure equitable access to digital content, and it remains to be seen how the lessons of the crisis will affect their working models – and the policy environment – in the long term. With it already clear that re-opening will likely be a long and gradual process, the need for innovate ways of ensuring inclusive access will continue to be vital.

## **The Role of Libraries in National Broadband Plans and Policies**

### **Abstract**

Public internet access in libraries is an important tool to help bring more people online. Including libraries in national broadband plans and policies is a way to support and enable their work towards digital inclusion – and more than 30 national broadband policies today already contain references to libraries.

The aim of this project is to compare how national broadband plans currently engage and implicate libraries, highlight the different roles policymakers envision for libraries in providing broader internet access and the types of support libraries can receive.

Different broadband plans and policies engage libraries to achieve a number of goals: support public internet access; deliver digital literacy and ICT training; promote e-learning and support formal educational institutions; and create local content by digitising heritage materials.

Many plans contain measures to support libraries in fulfilling these tasks: connecting libraries to broadband infrastructure, equipping them with ICT hardware and software, or helping them bear internet subscription costs. A number of plans rely on private-public partnerships and Universal Service Funds to deliver this support; and various soft instruments can be employed to encourage digitisation efforts.

## Introduction

### Public Access to Connect the Next Billion(s)

The often-cited milestone of having more than half of the world population online has been passed,<sup>1</sup> yet stark differences in connectivity rates between different world regions remain,<sup>2</sup> and the rate at which more people come online has slowed in the recent years.<sup>3</sup> Connecting the next billions is an urgent and crucial task, but the world may be decades away from universal and affordable internet access.<sup>4</sup>

An important solution for bringing more people online in the meantime is public internet access – shared connections available in public or community organisations,<sup>5</sup> which are low-cost or free of charge.

The importance of public access today has gained recognition – for example, the UNESCO Internet Universality Indicators suggest measuring the number of available public access facilities in proportion to how many people lack individual access. Another suggested indicator is whether public access is included in a universal access strategy in a given country.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development has recommended that public access programmes be included in universal access initiatives and national broadband plans.<sup>7</sup>

These two examples highlight that it is important for public access solutions to be codified in national policy frameworks that set out internet, ICT and broadband strategies. In both cases – and elsewhere – libraries are mentioned as one of the key public access facilities.

#### *The case of libraries*

Libraries often offer free or low-cost internet access to those who cannot afford an individual connection; they can help reach marginalised and underserved populations. Given the right support from the government for connectivity, hardware and personnel training, libraries are particularly well-positioned to offer internet access alongside basic ICT skills training and individual support for people who are less confident in their internet use.

As many people only have the possibility to get online via handheld devices,<sup>8</sup> the availability of ICT workstations in libraries also remains crucial. Compared to mobile connectivity, public computers in libraries offer a wider range of opportunities: using the internet for educational, creative, productive or entertainment purposes, which would be less effective or more costly through mobile access.<sup>9</sup> The Alliance for Affordable Internet's (A4AI) Meaningful Connectivity standard, for example, sets a requirement for online access through at least one device with a keyboard - and, notably, underlines that these devices can also be shared or public.<sup>10</sup>

There are examples of libraries in different parts of the world fulfilling these roles – from public access, to ICT skills training, to helping users take advantage of digital opportunities – whether in employment,

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, as announced in <https://news.itu.int/itu-statistics-leaving-no-one-offline/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://internethealthreport.org/2019/more-than-half-of-the-world-is-online-but/>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, <http://webfoundation.org/docs/2018/11/The-Case-For-The-Web-Report.pdf> and <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2019.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://a4ai.org/affordability-report/report/2019/>

<sup>5</sup> The impacts of public access in such venues as libraries, cybercafés and telecentres are explored, for example, in the 2013 Global Impact Study by the Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington Information School; the benefits of public access include digital inclusion and developing ICT skills of users: <https://tascha.uw.edu/publications/connecting-people-for-development>

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/internet\\_universality\\_indicators\\_print.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/internet_universality_indicators_print.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.20-2019-PDF-E.pdf](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.20-2019-PDF-E.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/03/07/mobile-connectivity-in-emerging-economies/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/EndingDigitalExclusion\\_dig.pdf](https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/EndingDigitalExclusion_dig.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://a4ai.org/meaningful-connectivity-a-new-standard-to-measure-internet-access/>

education, health, or other areas.<sup>11</sup> As part of an established and existing infrastructure in many countries, libraries can offer a cost-effective way to provide public access.

In light of this potential, libraries feature in broadband plans and policies of many countries. The *Broadbandpolicy.org* project, which uses artificial intelligence and natural language processing solutions to analyse different national broadband policy documents, shows that broadband policies in at least 38 countries (out of 92 countries analysed) refer to “library” or “libraries”.

### **Why National Broadband Plans?**

This brings us back to the point made by the Broadband Commission: it is important to include public access solutions – in this case, public access in libraries – into national broadband plans and universal access initiatives.

The importance of national broadband plans and strategies was emphasised when, in 2011, the Broadband Commission set a target for all countries to have a broadband plan (an updated target calls for funded broadband plans).<sup>12</sup> Such a plan outlines a country’s vision for broadband development, often on both supply and demand sides, and can take many forms: a Broadband, ICT or Communication policy, strategy, or plan, a Digital vision or agenda, or others.<sup>13 14</sup>

Each year, more countries adopt new broadband plans or update existing ones. These policies can have a significant impact: the progress of the two most improved countries in the most recent A4AI Affordability Report/Affordability Drivers Index, for example, is linked to the adoption of new national broadband plans.<sup>15</sup>

### **What is the role of libraries and public access in national Broadband Plans?**

Broadband plans can therefore be a powerful tool for broadening and supporting public internet access, particularly in libraries. Analysing and comparing how libraries have been included in broadband plans to date can show the range of goals they have been recognised as fulfilling, and the support they would need to carry out these roles.

The goal of this project is to map out how current national broadband plans engage and implicate libraries, and to highlight examples of enabling policy environments which support public access in libraries (as well as other library roles which support meaningful internet access).

Using the 2019 *State of Broadband* list of national broadband plans and the *Broadband Policy* project, tool, we have examined broadband policy documents which contain references to libraries. Analysing and comparing these references across different national contexts highlights the different roles policymakers envision for libraries in providing broader internet access, the types of support libraries can receive, and the functions they are expected to carry out.

*The full methodology for selecting national policy documents and scanning the content is spelled out in Annex I. Annex II contains the list of policy documents examined to date.*

---

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access’ submission to the Internet Governance Forum’s “Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion(s)” process: [https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/topics/info-society/documents/cenb\\_iv\\_ifla-eifl\\_contribution.pdf](https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/topics/info-society/documents/cenb_iv_ifla-eifl_contribution.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> One of the five target set by the Broadband Commission in 2011 was initially phrased as follows: “By 2015, all countries should have a national broadband plan or strategy or include broadband in their Universal Access / Service Definitions” (<https://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/BD-BBLS-report-2012.pdf>). The updated 2025 target reads: “By 2025, all countries should have a funded National Broadband Plan or strategy or include broadband in their Universal Access and Service (UAS) Definition” (<https://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/wef2018.pdf>).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.broadbandcommission.org/documents/reportNBP2013.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.20-2019-PDF-E.pdf](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.20-2019-PDF-E.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://a4ai.org/affordability-report/report/2019/>

## **Part 1: The Different Roles of Libraries**

The first takeaway from comparing the national broadband strategies was that libraries come into play in several distinct contexts. The public access function of libraries, as expected, was highlighted in many plans. However, there was a variety of other roles that different libraries were seen as being ready to take on in an information society – from creating local content to promoting digital literacy. Below is an overview of the different contexts where libraries come into play in broadband strategies.

### *1. Public access*

Many national broadband plans highlighted the role of libraries as public access facilities – for example, in Zambia, Kenya and Nigeria, among others. Public access in libraries can help bridge the digital divide within countries, even in cases where individual connectivity is the policy priority (as it is, for instance, in the Broadband plan of Mauritius). The policy in Nigeria emphasises the use of established and pre-existing infrastructure to ensure broader access, libraries being one of the key available facilities.

In some cases, public access was framed as a response to affordability challenges on an individual level: the costs of access devices and/or internet services (e.g. in Angola or Nigeria). A different perspective on digital exclusion focuses on broader patterns, and emphasises the needs of different vulnerable groups: disadvantaged families, unemployed people, older people, and others (for instance, in Hungary). A third perspective on digital exclusion focuses on under- or unserved areas (rural areas, for instance) and emphasises the need to ensure availability of public access facilities in these locations (e.g. in Botswana).

As an additional function of public access, some plans and policies also highlight its role in improving access to e-government and public services, or e-commerce (e.g. in Zambia, Bulgaria or Canada).

### *2. Digital literacy and ICT skills*

Digital literacy and ICT skills are key to supporting the demand for broadband and enabling meaningful access. Many broadband plans engage libraries in digital literacy efforts – for instance, in Hungary, Turkey, Botswana and elsewhere.

In some cases, concerted educational efforts in libraries (often among other anchor institutions or public access centres) are envisioned - for instance, in Turkey or Botswana. The broadband strategy of Botswana, for instance, discusses a “train-the-trainers” model, where the staff members in public access facilities funded by the government are trained to deliver a basic ICT skills curriculum.

Libraries can also serve as a location for digital literacy initiatives carried out by other entities: the Digital Literacy Exchange program described in Canada’s Innovation and Skills Plan, for example, envisions digital literacy initiatives carried out by non-profit organisations in pre-existing facilities such as libraries.

In a different case in Hungary, the broadband plan points out the role of libraries when discussing the need to develop ICT skills and digital literacy of public service employees and educators. The need for ICT skills training of library professionals themselves is acknowledged, for example, in the Bulgarian broadband plan, which proposes developing a system of educational courses for the staff of libraries, community centres, theatres and related institutions).

### *3. Supporting educational institutions*

Several broadband plans refer to libraries with an emphasis on broader educational goals. The broadband policy of Mauritius, for example, links improved connectivity for both libraries and schools to fostering efficiency and innovation in e-learning, digital educational content and personalised

learning. Similarly, in Ethiopia's Policy and Strategy, the goal of increasing the use of ICT in public libraries is linked to e-learning and educational goals.

A reference to digital educational materials appears in Cameroon's strategic plan: libraries (academic, research and school libraries specifically) are encouraged to digitise educational materials and make those available online.

Meanwhile, in Ethiopia the strategy includes establishing electronic links between academic institutions and libraries to ensure broader access to learning materials for students and teachers. In other cases, measures envisioned in broadband plans target formal educational institutions (schools and/or universities) and encourage them to build digital libraries (e.g. in Bangladesh or Cambodia). Such measures can encourage more school and academic libraries to be established and supported.

#### *4. Heritage digitisation and local content creation*

Other broadband strategies highlight the role of libraries in digitising and providing access to heritage materials – for example, in Slovenia, Turkey or Switzerland. To this end, some plans and policies engage many libraries in such initiatives – e.g. in Turkey or Gambia – while in Qatar or Mali, for example, it is only the National Libraries that are involved in these efforts.

Local content creation can be particularly important for non-English speaking countries. The need to generate content in local languages though both digitisation and content creation is highlighted, for example, in broadband plans in both Portugal and Turkey.

Finally, some plans and policy documents referred to library connectivity in broader situational analyses and assessments of national strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for internet adoption growth. For example, libraries feature in such assessments in the policy documents of both Hungary and Colombia.

**To summarise, different national policies highlight several roles that libraries play in broadband strategies. They can act as public access points (supporting underserved and vulnerable populations and ensuring access to government and public e-services and e-commerce), carry out and assist digital literacy initiatives, support educational institutions and e-learning, and create local content through digitisation of heritage materials.**

**Naturally, libraries can take on more than one of these roles within a single plan or strategy. In Turkey's Strategy and Action Plan, for example, libraries are referred to in both public access, literacy and digitisation contexts, while the plan of Botswana emphasises the combination of public access and digital literacy initiatives.**

## Part 2: Policy Interventions

For libraries to fulfil the roles outlined above successfully, the majority of broadband plans include policy interventions and strategies to support them. Naturally, the approaches that different nations take vary, and the policy interventions aimed at libraries differ in focus, scope and content. However, across the 32 countries examined, there were commonalities and recurring elements. Below is an overview of key similarities and differences across the policy interventions.

### Policy focus: defining library connectivity needs

To deliver on their potential as public access facilities, digital literacy or e-learning facilitators or providers of digital content, libraries need to be equipped with sufficient connectivity themselves. For that reason, the policy focus of many interventions targeting libraries aims to improve their connectivity. This can entail different elements:

- *Connectivity infrastructure.* In many broadband plans, the starting point is making sure that libraries are connected to the broadband network. This goal is put forward, for example, in the policy documents of Jamaica, Egypt, Czechia or Mauritius.
  - o *Electricity supply* can be defined as a sub-category of infrastructural needs. The plans in both Kenya and Botswana point out the need to ensure electricity supply to libraries.
- *Internet subscription costs.* Alongside connectivity infrastructure, several broadband policies seek to address the *ongoing costs of internet service subscriptions* for libraries. A number of policies envision partial subsidies or pledge to develop strategies to offer lower-cost subscriptions for libraries - for example, in the United States or Mauritius.
- *Computers and hardware.* Some broadband plans focus on *providing connectivity hardware, computers or other communications technologies* to libraries (such as those in Nigeria, Jamaica, Kenya, Bahamas or Bangladesh). Such interventions are usually integrated with internet connectivity and infrastructure efforts.
- *Library staff skills.* Finally, in rarer cases, the need to equip library staff with necessary ICT skills has also been recognised – one example is the Broadband Infrastructure Plan in Bulgaria.

Notably, when it comes to infrastructure and internet services, some policies put emphasis on connecting more libraries, while others also raise the question about the quality of connectivity. Mauritius, for example, discusses setting a minimum speed threshold for libraries, Kenya's Strategy discusses the need to improve broadband speed and reliability, and both Belgium and Canada make the case for connecting libraries to ultrafast internet.

The Canadian Connectivity Strategy particularly sets out the reasons for prioritising ultrafast connectivity for libraries, among other anchor institutions. It explains that the connectivity needs of such facilities are greater because (a) more people use the shared connection simultaneously and (b) the connection could be used for more sophisticated and intensive applications.

Meeting these library connectivity needs is crucial to ensure library e-services, as well as to meet the goals of public access, digital literacy and e-learning. For the policies focused on digitisation, the focus has often been broadly defined either in terms of the amount of digitised content (e.g. in Mali), organising and coordinating digitisation activities (e.g. in Turkey), or on creation of digital platforms and e-libraries (e.g. in Qatar or Cameroon). Plans in Rwanda and Cameroon, for instance, mention the creation of national digital libraries.

## Policy Mechanisms

Having defined the areas of intervention – connectivity infrastructure, subscription costs, digital platform creation or others – many plans spell out or indicate how these should be carried out.

*Subsidies and direct interventions targeting libraries at large.*

Such interventions as connectivity cost subsidies, provision of ICT equipment or connecting libraries to broadband networks are often set to target libraries in general or public libraries at large (e.g. Bahamas or Bangladesh).

Among such broad interventions, financial mechanisms are not uncommon: for example, subsidies or internet service discount rates for libraries at large. Several plans include commitments to develop a mechanism which would deliver discount subscription rates for libraries (e.g. in Egypt or Botswana).

Financial support is also sometimes made available for ICT technology procurement (e.g. in the US). Some of the policy documents do not specify the procurement mechanism for ICT hardware or other technologies, but a goal or commitment to equip libraries with necessary technologies is included.

Similarly, financial assistance can be employed for digitisation efforts – for example, the policy in Slovenia suggests co-financing the process of heritage digitisation.

- *Public Access Point projects.*

In other policy documents, instead of tackling an entire category of institutions, the starting point is the need to establish public access facilities for communities. Such initiatives aim to select various community or public institutions in specific locations and fully equip them to function as free or low-cost public access points (e.g. Puntos Vive Digital in Colombia)

Libraries are often listed among institutions which can accommodate such initiatives; other commonly referenced facilities. In some cases – for instance, in Turkey and Botswana– the Public Access Points are also set to deliver digital literacy education.

- *The role of Universal Service (Access) Funds*

In some of the plans, the suggested mechanisms for improving library connectivity involves a Universal Service/Universal Service and Access Fund. In the Botswana Broadband strategy, for instance, the Universal Service Fund is intended to subsidise internet connectivity and access for libraries. In Jamaica, the Fund is intended to provide libraries with hardware and software; and the definition of universal service/access in Jamaica includes connectivity services to public libraries.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the USPF in Nigeria is used for the *E-library* intervention, which targets existing public libraries to establish digital libraries and databases.

- *The role of Public-Private Partnerships*

A number of plans also intend to make use of public-private partnerships to achieve the goals they set out. Zambia's policy, for instance, plans to transform public libraries into Public Access Points with the help of both private sector and civil society. Similarly, Jamaica's Sector Plan sets out a goal to encourage public-private partnerships to establish connectivity and internet access to community access points.

---

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.itu.int/itu-d/apis/clients/res/pdf/country\\_profile/report\\_JAM.pdf](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/apis/clients/res/pdf/country_profile/report_JAM.pdf)

An interesting example is the Colombian Puntos Vive Digital project, where the PAPs in libraries (among other anchor organisations) were subsidised for several years, after which government support ended and libraries were expected to form PPPs with internet service providers.

Angola, meanwhile, also calls on PPPs to subsidise equipment and services for digital inclusion infrastructures, but the policy leans towards building a network of “Media Libraries” – new entities, as opposed to drawing on the existing infrastructure.

Public-private partnerships can also be utilised for infrastructure rollout – Canada’s Connect to Innovate program, for instance, deploys high-capacity network infrastructure to connect both households and anchor institutions such as libraries through a public-private partnership. Similarly, Jamaica’s Plan to accelerate connectivity to such public institutions as libraries and post offices is set to be achieved by strategic cooperation with public and private sector actors, as well as sponsors.

#### *Soft instruments and other mechanisms*

In other plans, the approaches to achieving digitisation goals at times relied on softer instruments and/or mechanisms. The policy in Turkey, for instance, aims to coordinate digitisation efforts; and, similarly to the Portuguese Digital Agenda, discusses the need to adopt interoperable formats and open standards which would facilitate digitisation efforts.

#### **Policy Scope and Specificity**

The identified mechanisms differed in their scope: in some cases, the policies target all libraries (or all libraries of a specified type), or select libraries. For example, targets related to e-learning at times were specifically focused on academic and school libraries (e.g. in Cameroon); meanwhile, Qatar’s digitisation initiative only involved the National Library.

Finally, a broad distinction between policies can be made based on the level of specificity of proposed interventions and targets. Some plans indicated support for library connectivity as a broad objective, while others set out specific targets and/or time frames – for instance, the Bangladesh National Broadband Plan includes a goal of 100% broadband connectivity goal for public libraries, while Botswana sets a deadline to provide WiFi access in “100% of strategic public areas (bus ranks, shopping malls, airports, hospitals, stadia, libraries)”.

Another example of specified targets is Nigeria’s “E-library” project, which aims to cover 10 public libraries a year. Similarly, some of the interventions focused on digitisation have set out concrete targets: these are present, for example, in both Mali and Hungary’s policies.

**To summarise, policy interventions aimed at libraries most frequently focused on different aspects of library connectivity needs: infrastructure, ICT equipment, software and hardware, and broadband services;**

**The mechanisms to deliver these objectives often entailed direct interventions aimed at libraries at large; in other cases, a number of libraries could be involved in a specific project or programme among other anchor institutions.**

**In some cases, broadband plans relied on Universal Service Funds or public-private partnerships to implement the proposed activities;**

**For digitisation and e-learning objectives, soft instruments were employed at times: endorsements, standards adoption, coordination of activities or similar.**

**Finally, the documents varied in their scope and specificity. The scope ranges from covering all libraries to a few selected ones. Some broadband plans broadly described the intention to provide connectivity to libraries and encourage digitisation, while others have set concrete targets and/or timeframes.**

Having analysed the policy documents on the basis of these criteria, a few conclusions can be drawn:

Most country policies in this set pursue two or three policy targets in relation to libraries simultaneously. This could imply an understanding that basic connectivity needs of libraries are multifaceted. Understandably, specific library needs can depend on the local context, and should be prioritised accordingly.

For example, Slovenia's assessment of current digitisation activities, including those carried out by libraries, leads to a conclusion that ICT tools and optimised business processes are needed; and Zambia's ICT policy includes a note on the current state of libraries, process made to improve library connectivity to date and prescribes further action.

In some cases, libraries at large were the lead beneficiaries of specific policy interventions (e.g. subsidies or infrastructure development projects) and/or could also participate in PAP-type projects. There were also cases where PAP projects were introduced alongside library connectivity targets, and libraries were not intended to be included in such projects, but rather offered standalone public access solutions.

In the given dataset, public libraries were frequently the lead beneficiaries, but several strategies made no such distinction and targeted libraries in general. In addition, some policies focused on national, academic or school libraries specifically.

### **Part 3: Conclusion and further research**

Based on the inclusion of various policy elements in national broadband plans, several broad types of approaches towards libraries can be suggested:

- Policies to improve connectivity of all (or most libraries) in the country.
  - o A subcategory of this type could include policies which leverage a Universal Service Fund towards this objective.
- Public Access Point projects, where selected libraries (among other institutions and facilities) are transformed into public access facilities through provision of ICT and internet connectivity.
- Projects and policies that include digital literacy initiatives - either uniquely in libraries, or in libraries amongst other providers.
- Digitisation initiatives and other soft instruments.

These categories reflect the most common ways libraries are engaged in broadband plans and strategies. As the Broadband Commission's latest report recommends that public access be included in broadband plans, it is useful to reflect on how libraries have already been included in broadband plans and strategies to date. Such an overview reveals the scope of activities libraries can carry out, and the types of support they may need to do so.

Moving forward, the suggested next step is to see the effects and impacts of including libraries in broadband plans. Comparing the impacts across and within the categories outlined above would offer more information on how different approaches play out and what results they have achieved, as a basis for identifying good practices for making the most of the potential of libraries in support of digital policy goals. Such insights could then be useful for policy-makers who are considering Broadband Commission's recommendation and including public access in libraries in Broadband Plans.

For more information or any questions about the working document, please feel free to contact Valensiya Dresvyannikova at: [valensiya.dresvyannikova@ifla.org](mailto:valensiya.dresvyannikova@ifla.org)

Draft version

## Annex I: Methodology

The initial sample is a set of 38 countries and 41 policies highlighted by the *Broadbandpolicy.org* project keyword search for “library” and “libraries”.

The key broadband policy documents for these 38 countries were assembled based on the list of national Broadband Plans published in Broadband Commission’s 2019 *State of Broadband* report.

If the policy document(s) indicated in Broadband Commission’s list did not contain the quote highlighted by Broadbandpolicy project’s tool, an exact phrase search was used to identify the policy document that contains the reference(s).

- If the identified document was:
  - (a) a national policy document with a focus on broadband, ICT, communications or digital development (or if the section of the document containing the reference was dedicated to any of those themes);
  - (b) issued by a national authority or agency, and
  - (c) the latest available version of the document (i.e. no newer versions of the document have been published), then the policy document was included in the sample.

Several policy documents were excluded from the sample if: (a) the references to libraries were not substantial (e.g. did not contain policy goals, targets, objectives, initiatives, or actions; or feature as part of a situational analysis), or (b) if the document could not be located in a translatable format.

Two broadband policies that have been released recently and contained references to libraries – the broadband plans of Kenya and Cameroon – have been added to the sample manually. If you are aware of any other national broadband policies that contain references to libraries, please let us know.

This resulted in a sample of 32 countries.

All policy documents were then scanned for the following keywords:

“library”, “libraries”;

“public access”, “access point”; (“public”, “community” OR “anchor”) AND (“institutions” OR “organisations”)

“school”, “universit\*”, “hospital”, “post\*”, “museum” – to see if policy actions focused on various anchor institutions can apply to libraries as well (if the list of eligible institutions is open-ended).

In addition, if the paragraphs containing those keywords included references to specific projects or programmes, further information about these initiatives was sought.

## Annex II: List of Broadband Plans, Policies and Strategies Included in the Analysis

Angola	Livro Branco das Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação 2019-2022; “The commitment of Angola in the Communications and IT sector according to the Recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society.”
The Bahamas	Electronic Communications Sector Policy (2014); Policy Statement on Electronic Commerce and the Bahamian Digital Agenda (2003); Framework for the Clarification and Implementation of Existing Universal Service Obligations (USO) (2013)
Bangladesh	National ICT Policy (2009); National Broadband Policy (2009)
Belgium	Digital Belgium - Plan for Ultrafast Internet in Belgium 2015-2020
Benin	eNNOV Benin (Atelier sur la stratégie de développement de l'économie numérique au Bénin Cotonou - Rapport de Synthèse) (2016)
Botswana	National Broadband Strategy (2018)
Bulgaria	National Broadband Infrastructure Plan for Next Generation Access; Roadmap for the implementation of the National Infrastructure Plan for Next-Generation Access Plan
Cambodia	Cambodian ICT Master Plan 2020 (2014 – Summary by the Korean International Cooperation Agency)
Cameroon	Strategic Plan for a Digital Cameroon by 2020 (2016)
Canada	Digital Canada 150.2; High-speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy (2019); Canada's Innovation and Skills Plan (2017)
Colombia	Plan Vive Digital 2014-2018
Czechia	National Plan for the Development of Next Generation Networks (2016)
Dominican Rep.	Agenda Digital 2016-2020 (2015)
Egypt	eMisr National Broadband Plan Phase 1 (2011)
Ethiopia	The National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy and Strategy (2016)
Gambia	The Gambian ICT4D-2012 Plan (2008)
Germany	Digital Agenda 2014 – 2017 (2014)
Hungary	National Infocommunication Strategy 2014-2020 (2014)
Jamaica	Vision 2030 Jamaica - Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Sector Plan 2009-2030 (2009); Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy (2011)
Kenya	National Broadband Strategy 2018-2023
Mali	Plan Mali Numerique 2020 (2015)
Mauritius	National Broadband Policy 2012 –2020 (2012)
Nigeria	National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy (2012); Universal Service Provision Fund Strategic Management Plan 2018-2022
Portugal	Agenda Portugal Digital (2012)
Qatar	National Broadband Plan for the State of Qatar

Rwanda	SMART Rwanda Master Plan 2015-2020
Serbia	Strategy of Broadband Network and Service Development in the Republic of Serbia by 2016
Slovenia	Digital Slovenia 2020 – Development Strategy for The Information Society Until 2020 (2016)
Switzerland	Digital Switzerland Strategy (2018)
Turkey	Information Society Strategy and Action Plan 2015-2018 (2015); National Broadband Strategy 2017-2020 (2017)
USA	Connecting America: The National Broadband Plan (2010)
Zambia	National Information and Communication Technology Policy (2006)

Draft version