

# Report on the State of Libraries in Germany

## Facts and Figures 2021/2022



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## Dear Readers,

The pandemic has highlighted two things: digital applications enable us to work, learn, communicate and be entertained without leaving our homes. Electronic media lending and the wide range of digital services available meant that libraries could be used from home more extensively during the lockdown. But all these opportunities are only available if people have the technical infrastructure and the necessary knowhow to be able to use them. Many people do not.

At the same time, the long time we have spent in lockdown has shown us how much we miss the places where we can be part of a community, experience things, learn things: cultural and educational institutions such as libraries. Both of these things show that libraries continue to fulfil key functions and tasks in the digital age. They enable people to access the digital world and support them with devices and media, free Wi-Fi and advice, teach them digital and information technology skills and provide open access and open science offerings. They are also highly-appreciated physical places where people can exchange information, learn things and share their creative efforts.

Libraries need adequate funding if they are to fulfil their social mission with up-to-date services. With public budgets under strain due to the pandemic, the risk of cuts is high.

The take-up of the federally funded support programmes implemented by the German Library Association – “Vor Ort für alle” (There for everyone), “Total Digital!” (Totally digital!) and “WissensWandel” (Knowledge shift) – indicates just how great the need is for financial support. Additional federal and state funds provide important impetus. The support of sponsors is essential, particularly for municipal libraries. The COVID-19 crisis must not lead to a library crisis. Libraries create social cohesion, which we need more than ever.

I wish you an informative and enjoyable reading!

Best wishes,  
**Prof. Andreas Degkwitz**  
Federal Chair of the German Library Association (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband – dbv)

# What the politicians say



We in Europe consider the developments in the field of digital education and the resulting political obligations to be a priority. The potential of digital technologies for the development of quality education have not yet been fully exploited.

Quality and inclusive education in Europe is our common goal and digital competences play a crucial role in this. In this context, equal access to digital education needs to be ensured – meaning that everybody should have the ability to acquire competences in the field of digital technologies, which will be crucial for their future well-being. Libraries, which have long been central places for reading and learning, play a crucial role. They allow for access to knowledge for all – no matter the origin, financial resources or age. Driving the digitisation of our libraries, including at a European level, is an important building block towards efficient digital education for all. All of us at the Committee on Culture and Education at the European Parliament are continuing to work towards this to the very best of our abilities.

### **Sabine Verheyen, MEP**

Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education in the European Parliament



Digitisation and medialization have led to critical changes in all areas of our lives and working places. The accompanying social and cultural changes impact on both teaching and learning processes. Additionally, they impact the way how children, adolescents and young adults manage and shape their lives and work processes. In the light of this development, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs has the responsibility to ensure children's, adolescents', and young adults' self-determined participation in our digitally shaped society.

Particularly, public libraries and also increasingly university libraries are important partners in the education system. They provide information for children and young people in the diverse world of media and thereby extend school-based learning processes with what they have to offer. With their age-tailored events and programs, they also contribute significantly to language and reading promotion and can be especially helpful addressing learning gaps caused by the corona pandemic. In addition, they are furthermore an important component in supporting and promoting lifelong learning.

### **Britta Ernst**

President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany, 2021



Reading is considered a key skill of knowledge society. Libraries indisputably assist with this, as they are so much more than just places where people can read and borrow books. In this age of digital change and increasing diversity, libraries can teach important media skills and be active settings of social debate.

Libraries ensure free access to diverse sources of information and are also playing an increasingly important part in the social changes being brought about by digitisation, developing into coworking spaces. Test labs can be created in this way, where participative ideas for a third place forming a key cultural hub can be trialled, particularly in rural areas, and libraries can develop into lively cultural venues where people can meet up.

Local authorities are still required to reinforce "their" libraries in their role as cooperative and participation-oriented cultural venues.

### **Dr. Gerd Landsberg**

President of the German Association of Towns and Municipalities

# Libraries in Germany

## Figures from German Library Statistics for 2020

**The COVID-19 pandemic posed major challenges for libraries in the 2020 year under review. They had to close their doors to the public during the first and second lockdowns. As expected, this has subsequently reduced numbers of library visits, to 104 million visits from 223 million in 2019.**

Although on-site use was possible only to a very limited extent, both public and academic libraries succeeded in continuing to provide people with media and other library services in a very short time. A great deal of creativity was applied in order to devise solutions for low-contact lending options.

Municipalities in many places waived fees, thereby enabling people from all walks of life to access knowledge, information and media during the lockdown. For advisory services, there has been a broad shift to telephone and email. Videoconferencing tools were used to support students at academic libraries in particular. Many libraries also created online tutorials on a wide range of topics, as well as events that could be livestreamed by attendees. Libraries' online media offerings were expanded too, of course.

### 223 million physical borrowings at public libraries

The importance of public libraries to people, especially in times of crisis, is indicated by the lending of **223 million physical media assets. 46 million e-media assets**<sup>1</sup> have been borrowed via Onleihe alone, too. Borrowing of digital media via Onleihe increased by 24% compared with 2019: for many, this was the only way they could use their libraries during the pandemic.

### Digital media for academic, research and teaching purposes

In 2020, academic libraries have once again stepped up their efforts to expand digital opportunities for teaching and research. A total of **233 million euros** was invested in the **acquisition of e-media. 297 million** accesses on the digital media offering show that a well-developed digital offering is indispensable when it comes to academia, research and teaching.

### High demand for training and events

More than **140,000 events and training courses** were held by public and academic libraries in 2020 despite restrictions on account of the pandemic. With around **64,000 events** taking place, public libraries have highlighted the promotion of reading and media skills among children. At academic libraries, around **306,000 people** took part in training courses, guidance initiatives, teaching events and online seminars.

Source:  
The figures are taken from German Library Statistics (DBS) for 2020. The data for the year under review is not comparable with the data for the previous year on account of the

# The German Library Association calls for: Increased support for local authorities and promotion of local education cooperation



**The extensive support offered by the federal and state governments was the only reason why local authorities were able to conclude 2020, the first year of the pandemic, in a positive way in financial terms.<sup>2</sup> They were able to implement their plans almost unchanged and make the necessary investments. However, as things currently stand, much of this aid will not be continued: no further aid for local authorities had been decided on before the summer break.**

It is already becoming apparent that many cities and municipalities will have to make drastic cuts in coming years, partly due to reduced tax revenues. This will affect important investments in day-care centres and schools; but also libraries, which are considered voluntary services. Cuts jeopardise the necessary further restructuring of libraries, which are undergoing digital transformation. The federal funding for libraries that will still be available in 2021 can only provide additional impetus here.

People rely on the services offered by their local authorities. Their quality of life is affected directly if these services are cut or cancelled. Moreover, local authorities should promote even better cooperation between their extracurricular cultural education institutions so as to secure educational opportunities even with tighter budgets, enabling all people to participate in culture. Cultural policy is shaped locally by local authorities.

This is why the German Library Association calls for federal and state governments to ease the burden on local authorities, as the bodies responsible for libraries, in the next few years.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Municipal Budget 2021. Ed. Bertelsmann Foundation, <https://www.bertelsmannstiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/kommunaler-finanzreport-2021-all-1>

## The German Library Association calls for: Greater investment in libraries as third places



**Libraries can make an important contribution when it comes to dealing with the impact of the pandemic, such as helping people to improve their reading skills. They can also help to revitalise city centres, provided that they are supported in their efforts to expand the flexibility of their services with their own situations in mind, focusing on both digital and analogue initiatives.**

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a strong push towards digitisation at libraries too, ensuring that innovative ideas were deployed in order to continue with media lending, advisory services and training courses in many places. Library staff showed creativity and flexibility when it came to developing delivery or collection services and switching to digital support or online events.

As a result, the opportunities offered by the library as a physical space were missed most. Libraries had begun to reposition themselves even before the pandemic. They are increasingly being redesigned as "third places" – meeting venues and places where various services can be provided. The emphasis here is on people and their needs. Libraries are freely accessible facilities, open to everyone with no obligation to buy anything. You can meet others there, or keep yourself to yourself. Nowhere else do so many different social groups meet up in such a stimulating environment.

This is why the German Library Association calls for local authorities to continue promoting these low-threshold locations with appropriate investments.

# The German Library Association calls for: Immediate investment to promote reading through libraries in order to ensure more equal opportunities in education



**Developing your potential is difficult if you are unable to read well. Whether it is at school, when training or at work, reading provides the foundation for participation in society through self-determination. Studies have shown that even before the pandemic, far too many children were not learning to read properly, handicapping them for the rest of their lives.**

The latest PISA special assessment has confirmed this.<sup>3</sup> Only people who can read well are also capable of making the best use of digital technologies. The difficult learning situation in schools during the pandemic has led to fears that reading abilities among children has deteriorated even further. This is why it is particularly important to invest in promoting reading right now.

Systematic promotion of reading from birth onwards is essential – in the family, at day-care centres and at school.

This is also the aim of the National Reading Pact initiated in 2021 by Stiftung Lesen and Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (German Publishers & Booksellers Association), in which the German Library Association participates. This is because libraries, with their expertise and range of services, are important partners when it comes to teaching people to read. Reading promotion initiatives in and out of school must be coordinated with one another and closely interlinked. Libraries need additional staff and higher budgets if they are to achieve this.

This is why the German Library Association calls for the federal and state governments and local authorities to provide the necessary resources to promote reading in libraries.

<sup>3</sup> PISA special assessment "21st-Century Readers": Developing Literacy Skills in a Digital World, [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/21st-century-readers\\_a83d84cb-en#page4](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/21st-century-readers_a83d84cb-en#page4)

# The German Library Association calls for: **Enabling copy delivery of newspaper articles and thereby facilitating historical research**



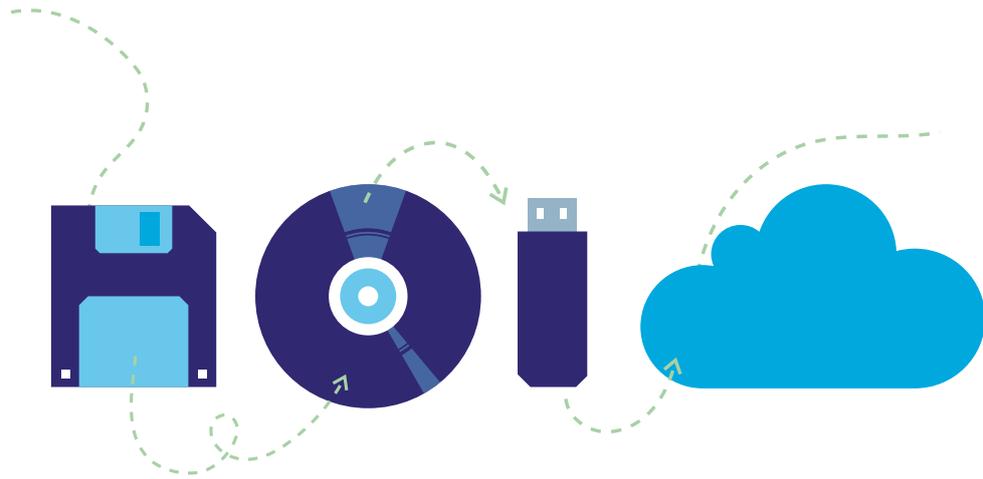
**Historical newspapers are an important source for historical research studies. However, under current copyright law, newspapers and popular magazines - unlike academic journals - can only be consulted on-site at libraries and cannot be sent to researchers as copies. This impedes education and research and is not a modern approach, given digitisation efforts in these fields.**

How were social issues reported in the post-war period? What opinions were expressed in the public discourse, and how? Analysis of these important questions would be unthinkable without consulting contemporary historical sources such as historical daily newspapers. To gain insights into these contemporary historical testimonies, researchers still have to visit local libraries under current copyright law in order to access historical newspapers and magazines. This is even the case with "unavailable" newspapers, which are unavailable in print and cannot be accessed in commercial online newspaper archives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that a sustained push towards digitisation in education and research is urgently needed. The fact that researchers still have to travel in order to consult historical newspapers or popular magazines is in stark contrast to the efforts made to facilitate digital access to education and research. There is no conflict with publishers' current monetary interests, particularly when using "unavailable" newspapers.

Therefore, the German Library Association calls for the delivery of analogue and digital copies of newspapers and popular magazines to be made possible.

# The German Library Association calls for: **Understanding digital long-term archiving as an ongoing task**



**Libraries, archives and museums take on the responsibility of ensuring that cultural records and information on the present are preserved for posterity. The long-term archiving of digital content brings with it new challenges: maintaining the rapidly-increasing volume of information and knowledge requires permanent changes in the technical processing of these items. Much of this content will be irretrievably lost otherwise.**

The digital shift has significantly increased the amount of digital information and items available. The question of long-term usability arises for digital photos and videos, emails, blogs and messages on Twitter, as well as e-books, online newspapers and research data.

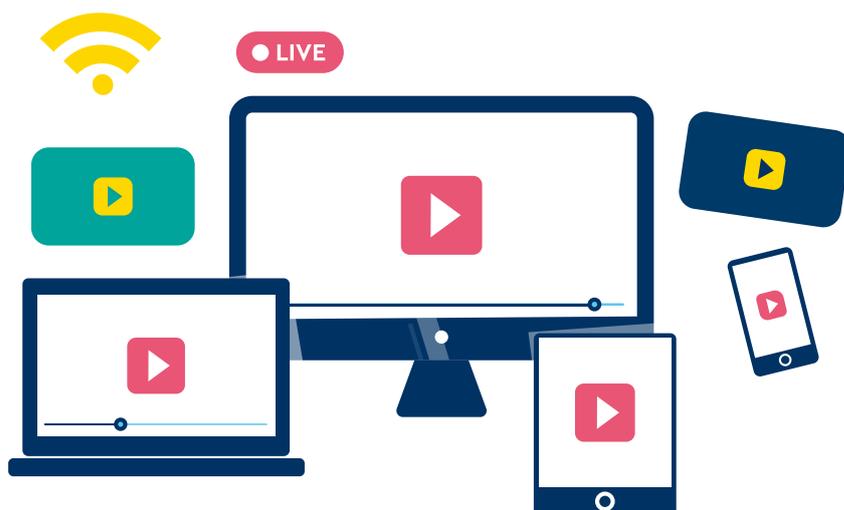
That said, there is a great deal of complexity involved in continuing to make this knowledge available: digital content is subject to rapid technical developments and changes. Archiving such content is cost-intensive. In many cases, there are no reliable

legal frameworks. Responsibilities and roles are not always clearly defined. Infrastructures have already been created at libraries – often in cooperation with high-end data centres – where some of the existing materials are stored.

However, there is an urgent need for action in order to prevent the irrevocable disappearance of the majority of digital items. Libraries can play an important part in selecting and preparing digital materials and assessing them to ensure their continuing usability, as well as archiving them. This requires sustainable funding, binding guidelines and clear responsibilities.

This is why the German Library Association calls for long-term digital archiving to be understood as an ongoing task and implemented as a national infrastructure.

# The German Library Association calls for: Improvement of digital equipment at libraries for digital participation



**Digitality shapes all aspects of our lives. This has been reinforced once more by the pandemic: videoconferencing, digital learning and streaming platforms, specialised digital information and digital cultural heritage have become part of working, learning and entertainment. To be able to participate in this regard, digital terminals and access to fast Internet services are not the only things needed.**

Knowledge and skills are also needed for confident use of digital technologies, as well as expertise when it comes to being able to find, assimilate and – above all – assess information found online.

Not everyone has these skills and resources. To prevent an even deeper digital divide in society, conditions must now be created to ensure that everyone can participate actively in the digital world.

Libraries offer the best opportunities for this. They offer non-commercial spaces with Wi-Fi and equipment, as well as expertise on using digital applications and promoting information skills.

A coordinated strategy is needed if politicians want to reinforce digital education in society. Libraries must be taken into consideration from the outset here, as they reach people of all age groups and provide fundamental infrastructures for education and science.

The German Library Association therefore calls for long-term investments in technical equipment at libraries so as to advance the expansion of contemporary digital educational opportunities.

## The German Library Association calls for: **Reinforcement of educational opportunities via libraries, particularly in times of crisis**



**The pandemic has worsened the opportunities available to people who were already having problems with accessing educational opportunities. Extracurricular institutions such as libraries must be reinforced in order to counteract the risk of growing educational inequalities. Lack of investment and funding cuts have a negative impact on opportunities for participation, and thus on social cohesion.**

Not only do libraries support day-care centres and schools by promoting reading and cultural activities, they also offer people of all ages a variety of educational opportunities on a continuous and low-threshold basis.

However, this year's survey of members of the German Library Association on the financial situation of public libraries<sup>4</sup> shows that libraries are increasingly under pressure to save money; which is having an adverse impact on the development of innovative opportunities and services: 30% of participating libraries are affected by budget consolidation measures.

16% are subject to a complete budget freeze. Reductions in funding have been implemented or are planned for around 22% of libraries. The total budget is falling for more than 17% of libraries, while the media budget is down for over 16%. 45% of the participating institutions need additional funding in order to provide and expand the range of digital opportunities they can offer. As public institutions, libraries are better suited than any other institution to provide much-needed digital education and make new technologies accessible to all.

For libraries to be able to fully exploit their potential for contemporary educational work and fulfil their educational mandate, the German Library Association calls for nationwide investment in digital media, further training for staff and supplementary recruitment of lateral entry staff such as IT specialists or media educators at libraries.

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