

Report on the State of Libraries in Germany

Facts and figures
2022/2023

dbv deutscher
bibliotheks
verband



Dear Readers,

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally changed the situation in Europe. We must continue to stand in full solidarity with the people of Ukraine. However, the war has resulted in a serious energy crisis in Germany that it will not be possible to master over the short term. This, together with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, will present us with major challenges in the winter of 2022/23. Libraries are already assessing how they can reduce their energy consumption in a spirit of solidarity with the rest of society.

The scale and importance of the numerous free services offered by libraries is now being made particularly apparent. People spend their free time here, work and learn, take part in workshops, exchange ideas and use the various services offered on site – from makerspaces to the provision of free access to newspapers. Nowhere else do so many individuals of different age and social groups come together every day.

Throughout Germany, libraries are preparing to temporarily take on additional tasks as the current situation worsens and to serve as "warm refuges", for example, and

as meeting places for all those who have been particularly hard hit by the crisis. Such community-building spaces are essential to ensure social cohesion and promote cultural participation.

Libraries must remain open despite rising energy costs if they are to continue to fulfil their important role as places where people can meet up and learn even in these difficult times. Not only this, but they need political support now more than ever so that they are in a position to be able to continue to offer modern, user-friendly services in the future.

In this status report, we outline the topics and activities that are currently of particular importance for libraries, and the resulting political support that is required.

I hope you find this report informative.

Volker Heller
Federal Chair of the German Library Association (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband – dbv)

What the politicians say



Libraries are special places. Without them, we would have no concept of culture. They offer solutions to every question and information on every field of knowledge, and people of all ages can access them easily. This is something we want not only to maintain but also to improve. This is why the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media provides funding to the dbv programme "Vor Ort für Alle" (A place for everyone) to support libraries in rural areas as "third places". This term for places other than the home or workplace is very fitting because it acknowledges that libraries are places for personal interaction and communication, which enables people to take part in the democratic process. Libraries strengthen the media literacy and reading skills of their users and thus their ability to engage in critical dialogue. In addition, technology has the potential to offer even more opportunities – opportunities for more education, experience and skills, more communication and interaction. In short, libraries are essential places for democracy.

Claudia Roth,
Member of the German Bundestag
Minister of State for Culture and the Media



The digital transformation is changing the ways in which we read, research and teach. The range of responsibilities handled by libraries is thus increasing. Not just books, CDs and journals, but now e-books, audiobooks and e-papers too. In addition to lending out literature, they now perform a range of new tasks on top. Libraries play a key role in the open access transformation. They provide support and advice for researchers about academic publishing, provide a platform for publications, develop new services at the intersection between analogue and digital formats and also conduct their own research. Libraries help to use and archive digital data as fuel for research and digitalization. This holds enormous potential for new technologies or business models. At the same time, libraries still remain faithful to their primary objective: facilitating access and opening up new horizons.

Bettina Stark-Watzinger,
Member of the German Bundestag
Federal Minister of Education and Research



The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) works to strengthen and defend our democracy and the social cohesion of our country. Extremism and all forms of hatred and hostility to democracy are an attack on our open society. We cannot accept such attacks. That is why the Federal Government is developing a comprehensive strategy for strengthening democracy and fighting all forms of extremism. Our new legislation to promote democracy also provides a legal foundation for the excellent work of civil society. It is important to keep our attention focused on both sides of this issue: on the one hand, strengthening democracy from within by means of democratic involvement, civic education and prevention; and on the other hand, effectively preventing threats to our democracy. Such a comprehensive approach supported by our entire society is the only way to ensure protection for our open society. Libraries, as places of education and democracy in action, play a crucial role in these efforts.

Nancy Faeser
Federal Minister of the Interior and Community

Libraries in Germany Figures from the German Library Statistics for 2021¹

As in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the work and services of libraries in the 2021 reporting year. The lockdown meant that libraries had to temporarily close their doors to the public or restrict their services. When libraries reopened, high COVID incidence rates deterred many people from visiting libraries as usual. As might be expected, this meant that the number of library visits was significantly lower, with 78 million visits in 2021 compared to the pre-pandemic figure of 223 million visits in 2019².

Just as in 2020, public and academic libraries responded creatively to the restrictions and found alternative ways to ensure the widest possible use of their holdings in order to ensure access to information and media for all. Many library and advisory services were provided digitally. There was a corresponding increase in the services provided through online media.

249 million borrowings from public libraries

Despite the restrictions, **249 million items** were borrowed from public libraries in 2021, of which **46 million were e-media**. This demonstrates impressively how important online services were for the provision of media and information to the population during the pandemic but also shows the continuing importance of analogue media.

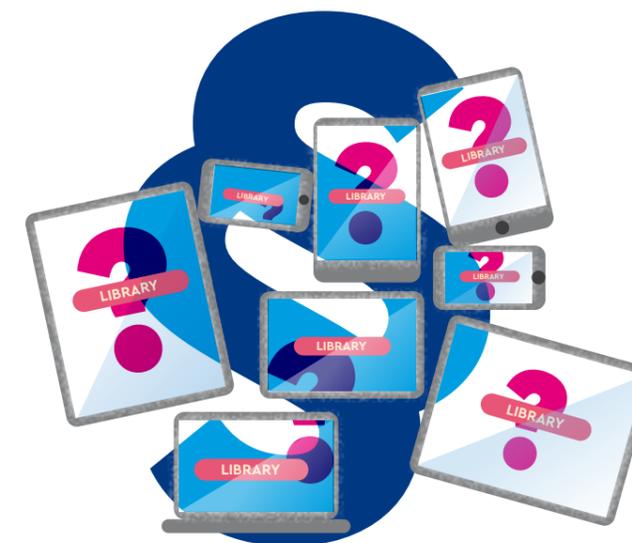
Digital media for academic, research and teaching purposes

Teaching and research services provided online once again gained in importance at academic libraries in 2021. Approximately **€231 million** was invested in the **acquisition of e-media**. Holdings of e-media have grown from just over 55 million items (2020) to about **63 million items** (2021); thereby proving that well-developed digital resources are indispensable when it comes to the acquirement of knowledge, research and teaching.

High demand for training and events

Despite the pandemic, more than **132,000 events and training courses** were provided by public and academic libraries in 2021. In their important field of promoting reading skills and media literacy public libraries offered **more than 58,000 events for children**. Some **370,000 individuals** took part in **training courses, guided tours, teaching events and webinars at academic libraries**.

The German Library Association calls for: A legal basis for lending e-books with fair conditions for everyone



Publicly-funded libraries are required to fulfil their social mandate of providing access to information and thus also to recent electronic publications, an aspect of increasing importance. At present, copyright holders can prevent library users from having unimpeded access to information from freely accessible sources although there is a fundamental right to such access.

The German Library Association therefore stands by its key demand: the lending of e-books must be given the same legal status as the lending of printed books. The European Court of Justice decided in 2016 that the lending of e-books is also subject to the requirements of the Rental and Lending Rights Directive (2006/115/EC). The lack of national implementation is now to be examined by means of a pilot project implemented under the auspices of the European Parliament. This includes allowing libraries to acquire new electronic publications as soon as they are published, within the limits allowed by their

holdings policies and budgets. Transparent remuneration structures and appropriate remuneration rates for copyright holders must be defined in this context.

The German Library Association therefore advocates that the "digital revolution" as defined in the coalition agreement be taken seriously, and that a standardised legal basis be created for the lending of e-books by libraries on the basis of valid facts and figures. Moreover, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Federal Government must extend and fundamentally increase library royalties – which are currently paid only for physical media – to cover the lending of e-books.

Source: German Library Statistics (DBS). Despite the high participation rate by libraries, the German Library Statistics (DBS) make no claim to be fully comprehensive as participation is voluntary.

¹ The German Library Statistics (DBS) data for 2021 cannot be compared with previous years because of the closures resulting from the pandemic. As a result only 8,872 public and academic libraries were able to provide information for the DBS in 2021.

² Cf. DBS reporting year 2019.

The German Library Association calls for: **The promotion of libraries as places of political education, particularly in rural areas**



The political events and social developments of recent years have made it clear: democracy cannot be taken for granted, it must be actively defended. The values on which it is based need to be communicated to society. Well-informed citizens are better placed to participate in the political opinion-forming process. Social cohesion needs encounters and exchange on an equal footing.

As public educational institutions, libraries have many opportunities to promote and bolster the democratic community. They provide access to verified knowledge, impart the skills necessary to evaluate and classify information, offer a variety of educational and training formats and provide platforms for exchange and discussion. They are visited by all social groups and generations, which makes them ideal places for individuals to meet and interact.

As they are sometimes the only local cultural institution, especially in rural areas, libraries have an important part to play in the development of local democracy.

The German Library Association therefore welcomes the programme of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) that involves cooperation with libraries in rural areas and the use of their potential to reach broad sections of society. In addition to this, however, libraries must also be systematically included in other political education programmes and their role as places of education and discourse must be augmented.

The German Library Association calls for: **Further enhancement of the ecological transformation in libraries and consolidation of their role as multipliers of sustainability**



From seed libraries and libraries of things through to sustainability workshops in cooperation with daycare centres, schools and local associations and selected media collections for ecological education – libraries are important multipliers of the ecological transformation. To be able to play this role even more prominently in society, libraries have to be supported so that they themselves can operate more ecologically and sustainably.

Libraries, like other cultural and educational institutions, cause carbon emissions and thus contribute to climate change. If libraries want to become more climate-neutral, not only do they need financial support for their infrastructural transformation, they must also be integrated into political processes and the strategies of their patrons.

The decision as to whether to construct a new, environmentally friendly library building or appropriately renovate an existing one, as to what form of lighting

is to be used and whether the electricity should be green is dependent to a large extent on the sponsor or funding body in question, be it the city or the municipality, the university or the state.

The German Library Association therefore advocates the ecological transformation of libraries to be expedited by local, federal and state governments, and for libraries to be actively involved in sustainability strategies and campaigns. Libraries must be involved from the very beginning, particularly in the development of the proposed German "Green Culture Desk" as envisaged in the coalition agreement, which aims to support the ecological transformation of cultural institutions.

The German Library Association calls for: Investment in the digital expansion of libraries and implementation of appropriate funding measures



The range of online services and digital infrastructures of public libraries has been enhanced by the German NEUSTART KULTUR COVID-19 aid programme of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The immense over-subscription of the German Library Association's funding programme "WissensWandel" is proof of this. There is a widespread need among institutions for basic digital infrastructure, as well as funding for digital media and outreach formats. This need for funding is now far from being met following the phasing-out of the aid programme.

Further investments are necessary so that libraries can fulfil their mission in terms of providing the necessary basic service – that of access to knowledge and information – in our digital society and help shape digitalisation in a manner that is orientated towards the common good. Their online services are in high demand – and that not only during the pandemic.

Academic libraries use up-to-date forms of services to facilitate academic work and publishing despite the way these have changed. Public libraries make an important contribution to the digital involvement of the population thanks to their diverse online services. A reliable legal framework, an up-to-date technical infrastructure, competent staff and the further expansion of digital services are needed for this.

The German Library Association therefore calls upon federal, state and local governments to continue to promote the digital expansion of libraries in order to meet the needs of our digital society, and to include libraries in digitalisation strategies at all political levels.

The German Library Association calls for: Drive forward the open access transformation in libraries



The coalition agreement of the current Federal Government provides for the establishment of open access as the standard for academic publications. Libraries need further financial support and appropriate legal frameworks if they are to adequately fulfil their role as drivers of the open access revolution.

Academic publishing and its funding form a complex system, and the transformation of this system requires a longer transition phase. The open access share of publications in the German research landscape has already been significantly increased in recent years thanks to corresponding projects. The "DEAL" project has contributed significantly to this by concluding contracts with major publishers.

The German Library Association calls upon the federal and state governments to provide academic libraries and their sponsor institutions with adequate funding in order to establish sustainable open access as the standard for academic publications. At the same time, the establishment and expansion of independent, quality-assured and academically valid publication infrastructures must be financially secured in order to do justice to the diversity of subject cultures through various publication models. The reduced tax rate of 7% must be continue to apply to digital publication services in future.

The German Library Association calls for: The promotion and development of libraries as places of inclusion and diversity



Libraries are public spaces for everyone, regardless of their age, background, educational attainments or physical abilities. The German Accessibility Reinforcement Act (BFSG) which will come into force in June 2025, aims to promote the equal and non-discriminatory participation of those with disabilities, other forms of incapacity and older people.

Many libraries have been steadily expanding their inclusive services for years. This includes building up holdings of media in different languages, the provision of freely accessible websites and information in simplified language, readings in sign language and the supply of induction loops for the hearing-impaired. In addition, this will require the removal of physical barriers by constructing lifts or ramps, for example, and the installation of guidance systems for the visually impaired. This development of inclusive services is a process that is actively shaped by libraries.

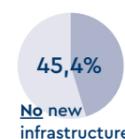
The aim is to make inclusivity a natural part of the library environment and to ensure libraries are freely accessible local centres. However, 97.41%¹ of libraries state that no financial resources are available in their budget to implement the measures necessary for inclusivity and to make them barrier-free.

To make sure that they can actually realise these requirements, the German Library Association calls on federal, state and local governments to contribute to the promotion of libraries as places of inclusion and diversity. In addition to further education and training for library staff, there is a need for more funding programmes so that physical and digital barriers in libraries can be removed, thus providing even more people with the opportunity to use libraries as meeting places.

The German Library Association calls for: The promotion of libraries as public places of education in times of crisis



With their available budgets, the surveyed libraries cannot finance their related needs:



Investments in libraries in times of crisis are investments in the education of citizens and their opportunities to socially participate and thus of the future of our society as a whole. Library funding has stagnated for years. Due to inflation and sharply rising costs, the budgets have actually fallen. Furthermore, pressure on public budgets has increased by the pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine. This has an impact on the already low level of funding of libraries, and thus on their ability to meet the educational needs of citizens satisfactorily in accordance with their public mission.

The current survey of the financial situation of public libraries among the members of the German Library Association shows¹: With the existing budgets libraries can neither undertake urgently needed infrastructure improvements, provide and enhance their digital services and educational measures for important target groups (people who have difficulties accessing education, senior citizens, people with disabilities, refugees, etc.) nor hire additional staff.

The strong oversubscription of the two federal funding programmes for libraries that are being implemented by the German Library Association demon-

strates the extent of the funding deficit at a local level. Even though savings have to be made everywhere in times of crisis, the funding of libraries is not a luxury: it is fundamental as it is a way of providing everyone in Germany with access to education and opportunities for participation. At present these public spaces are undertaking other key tasks as well as executing their educational and cultural mandate: they act as points of contact for refugees, they disseminate information on how to reduce energy consumption, and they provide locations that those reliant on freely accessible places can use. However, despite the fact that libraries have for years been assuming a whole range of new tasks and there has been ongoing price inflation across the board, 90% of our respondents stated that their total budget for 2022 had stagnated or even decreased.

The German Library Association therefore calls upon library sponsors to ensure that their institutions enjoy stable budgets by compensating for inflation and to increase these in the future. Additional support through federal funding programmes is still urgently needed for future-orientated investments, particularly with regard to digital services, infrastructure renewal and construction measures.

¹ German Library Association survey of 1,387 public libraries, July 2022

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