

Libraries in Germany

2025

Issues
Figures
Demands

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verband

Dear readers

Democracy needs encounters. In a world that is becoming increasingly complex and is characterised by crises, threats and social isolation, places at which encounters are possible are essential for ensuring social cohesion.

Democracy needs knowledge. It is only when they have free access to information that individuals are able to form their own opinions and participate actively in societal debates. If understanding is to be fostered, people must be aware of the facts. Only those with information and media literacy are able to recognise fake news for what it is and have the confidence to reject it. And it is libraries that can supply what is necessary for all this.

As publicly financed hubs of education, knowledge and culture, their daily activities provide individuals with the opportunity to learn, gain insights, actively engage with culture, integrate and interact within the social sphere. Libraries are thus an indispensable facet of the public infrastructure and services – in both urban and rural settings.

Responsible political action is necessary if libraries are to continue to provide the tasks required to help maintain a stable democratic society in future.

We call on the federal and state governments and the local authorities to make sure that libraries are provided with appropriate financing over the long term and that this funding is made future-proof by means of targeted investments.

At the same time, a legal framework must be put in place that enables libraries to provide up-to-date services and to react to the needs of the population. This also means that public libraries should finally be allowed to open on Sundays. Libraries must be taken into account and consulted with regard to all relevant national strategy concepts when it comes to educational and cultural policies as well as the development of the research infrastructure, digitalisation, the support of democracy and the fight against loneliness.

Outlined on the following pages, you will find information on our current issues and our political demands. We hope you will become actively involved in helping us achieve our aims!

Antje Theise
Federal Chair of the
German Library Association



Image: © ITMZ/University of Rostock

Figures from the German Library Statistics for 2024¹

In the whole of Germany, there are more than **8,700 public and academic libraries** that were visited over **182 million times** in 2024.

A high level of demand for physical media in public libraries

Despite the continuously increasing amount of material available online, there continues to be a pronounced demand for analogue media in libraries. In 2024, more than **270 million physical media** were borrowed from public libraries. It is thus apparent that the core mission of libraries – namely the provision of media and information in print and digital forms to the population – is still of considerable significance.

More training courses and library-based events

Libraries are not only there to lend out books and other items. They also offer a wide range of cultural and educational events designed to appeal to various target groups of all ages. For this purpose, they cooperate with many local partners. More than **410,000 events, guided tours and exhibitions** were hosted by public libraries in 2024; these included approximately **200,000 events for children designed to promote reading skills and media literacy**. In 2024, more than **495,000 individuals** took part in **training courses, guided tours, teaching events and webinars** offered by **academic libraries**.

Increasing relevance of digital media for academic, research and teaching purposes

The importance of the role played by digital media in terms of teaching and research continues to grow. The **digital collection held by academic libraries** consisted of a total of some **97 million e-media** in 2024. Of the **entire budget of €416.5 million spent on acquisitions and publications** in 2024, **nearly €200 million was used for the purchase and licensing of e-media** while some **€116 million were spent on generating open access publications and the transformation to open access**.

¹ The German Library Statistics (DBS) for 2024 are only comparable to a limited extent with those from previous years because of the measures that had to be put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: German Library Statistics (DBS). Despite the high participation rate by libraries, the figures recorded for the German Library Statistics (DBS) make no claim to be fully comprehensive as participation is voluntary. In the 2024 reporting year, a total of 8,771 public and academic libraries sent figures to the DBS.

Securing local authority funding for the educational services provided by libraries

Sunday is library day! Libraries are not only places where leisure activities are possible but also sites of learning and encounters. They enliven drab city centres and represent the only surviving cultural hub in many rural communities. However, the budgets made available to public libraries have been decreasing or stagnating for years. As the contributions made to them by local authorities are voluntary, their existence is particularly threatened by the financial status of these bodies. Only if there is a turnaround in the financial situation of local authorities will it be possible for libraries to continue to offer state-of-the-art educational services over the long term.



As non-commercial facilities for learning and interaction with others, public libraries are a vital feature of the public service infrastructure. They provide free access to information, which is a right anchored in the German constitution – not only this, but they also promote media literacy and reading skills. It is in libraries that individuals of different origins and of all ages can come together. Hence, libraries foster participation in the cultural and societal activities that are the cornerstones of our democracy.

It will not be possible to continue to offer services like this unless sufficient financing of the infrastructure and personnel is provided. Local authorities need the necessary funding to enable them to invest in and suitably shape their regions. German Library Association survey of 1,394 public libraries in May and June 2025.

In this year's survey² among members of the German Library Association, 37% of responding public libraries reported that they are being impacted by fiscal austerity measures. It seems that 23% are facing a global spending freeze while 28% are struggling with budget cuts. In fact, the overall budgets of 85% of the participating libraries are either stagnating or decreasing. This, of course, means that the educational services offered by libraries are suffering as a result. Among the responding libraries, 88% are struggling to keep their collections up to date because of rising costs and a decreasing or unchanged budget. Of the participating libraries, 41% are finding it impossible to employ the full number of personnel they really need while 50% do not have the money to upgrade their infrastructure and 43% lack the financial means to make digital services available.

The German Library Association calls for → local authorities to provide secured funding to ensure that public libraries are future-proof and to make sustained investments to provide them with modern facilities. It is only when this is the case that libraries will be able to develop their full potential for educating individuals and providing life-long learning. And the local authorities need balanced budgets for this. We thus call on the federal and state governments to provide financial support to the local authorities.



² German Library Association survey of 1,394 public libraries in May and June 2025.

Allow public libraries to open on Sundays

Libraries are the most frequently visited cultural and educational facilities. However, unlike museums, theatres and swimming pools, public libraries are not permitted to open on Sundays and public holidays. Sunday opening is prohibited because of the provisions of the German Working Time Act (Bundesarbeitszeitgesetz). This is despite the fact that Sunday opening pilot schemes have shown that this day of the week attracts the most visitors to libraries, in the form of families, the elderly and the young.



Local and municipal authorities need places that are open to all and that are commerce-free; where people can simply come together and exchange views. The gap created by the decline of other public meeting spaces in many places is filled by libraries. It is beyond dispute that infrastructures where people can encounter each other and that promote social cohesion are of major significance. It is thus all the more important to foster their effects with the aid of appropriate political policies.

The State of North Rhine-Westphalia has already recognised the potential of allowing public libraries to open on Sundays. It promulgated a law in 2019 (the Bibliotheksstärkungsgesetz) designed to promote the cultural function of libraries and allowing them to open on Sundays using their own employees. And public libraries are also permitted to open on Sundays in Berlin and other major cities, although this is currently only possible through authorised pilot projects. To date, it has been

illegal for public libraries to open on Sundays using their own personnel, although this is not the case for any of the other cultural facilities in Germany. It has been shown that libraries are very well attended on Sundays and are on this day popular with young people as non-commercial places to meet.

The German Library Association calls for → the option of Sunday opening proposed in the German coalition agreement to be urgently addressed by the federal government. All public libraries that can and wish to be open for their users on Sundays and public holidays must be permitted to do so.

"Public libraries are havens of peace, accessibility and inspiration. It is both easy and free to enter them. Working persons, families, school children, students and elderly people find here spaces where they can read and chat, where they can concentrate on learning and even play with others. Binding regulations must be put in place that do away with restrictions on when these valuable educational hubs can open their doors – particularly enabling them to open on Sundays."

Sven Lehmann, Member of the German Bundestag
Chairperson of the Bundestag Committee on Cultural and Media Affairs



Promote libraries as meeting places that encourage social cohesion

Loneliness is a growing problem in our society and it has both individual and collective impacts. People of all ages can feel isolated, resulting in their suffering from a lack of social connectedness. Libraries provide a valuable contribution towards countering loneliness at a time in which more and more individuals in Germany are becoming socially isolated. As accessible and vibrant meeting places, they extend a welcome to everyone.



It is not just elderly people who often feel lonely. According to the results of a survey undertaken by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, almost one in every two young adults also claims to feel lonely. This is frequently accompanied by decreasing confidence in politicians and democracy, so that loneliness not only represents a social problem but is also a risk to the political/democratic status quo. The recommendations following this and other studies of loneliness are all essentially the same: more public meeting spaces are required in which people can come into contact with each other.

As places familiar to the public, libraries can undertake exactly this task. They bring people together and generate a sense of belonging. Libraries enjoy a very high level of trust among the population because they are open to and readily accessible by everyone and have an appeal for people in all age groups and from all backgrounds. Chance encounters between ac-

quaintances can occur in libraries while strangers can enter into brief exchanges. At the same time, through their outreach work, libraries specifically come into contact with elderly people in their living environments – in their homes and retirement homes. In rural regions, libraries are often the only public meeting spaces available and here the multifaceted services on offer foster cultural participation and the understanding of what democracy means.

The German Library Association calls for → libraries, as indispensable places where people can come together, being of particular relevance in this respect in rural areas, to be supported and included in corresponding federal programmes and political strategies. As places of social encounter, they need to be taken into account in the Strategy to Counter Loneliness of the federal government and the related measures.

“Libraries are more than hubs of knowledge – they are also social points of contact. As places open to everyone and readily accessible, they promote encounters, interaction and participation. They provide events, talks and digital access within a protected setting in which individuals – irrespective of their age, origin or circumstances – can come into contact with others and in which the effects of loneliness can be effectively combated.”

Saskia Esken, Member of the German Bundestag
Chairperson of the Committee on Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

More information:



Use libraries to foster digital participation

Libraries provide individuals of all ages with access to information and knowledge of validated quality even in the digital sphere. They thus make a major contribution to digital inclusion and participation. In order to also fulfil their missions with regard to culture and education in terms of the digital world, libraries need fair access to e-media.



Libraries provide free, readily accessible and professional guidance on the use of digital media, information, devices and applications. Their wide range of services is tailored to the needs of the broadest possible spectrum of target groups and includes digital literacy courses for kindergarten- and primary school-age children, gaming facilities for young people, smartphone clinics for the elderly through to access to online specialist journals for students and researchers. Libraries are thus important partners when it comes to the promotion of digital maturity among individuals. They make extensive contributions to fostering digital skills across a broad base that are designed to effectively work towards eliminating the digital divide in our society.

Access to e-media in libraries is becoming increasingly important, as reading on digital devices is becoming more and more common. Digital media provide those who do not live in the immediate vicinity of a library or have limited mobility with opportunities for participation and education. Moreover, e-books with their interactive elements are also particularly suitable for fostering reading and language skills.

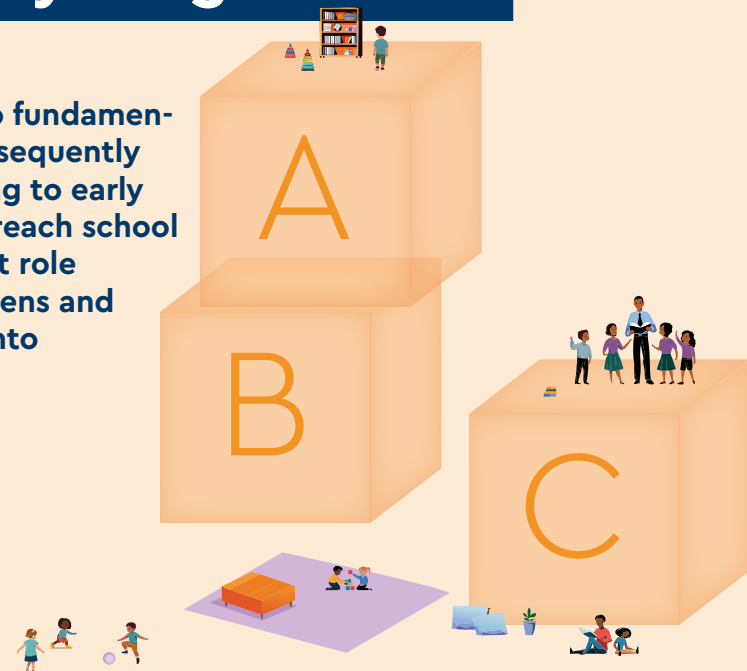
The German Library Association calls for → Libraries must actively be included and supported in the cross-generational digital skills offensives of the federal government. In addition, the societal mission of libraries to promote participation and equal opportunities for all in the digital sphere and to encourage reading must be maintained by providing libraries with free and fair access to e-media. This requires unequivocal political support.

More information:



Systematically implement strategies for promoting reading by young children

Even in their youngest years, children undergo fundamental developments that influence how they subsequently learn to read and write. Such core skills relating to early literacy thus need to be fostered before they reach school age. In this context, libraries play an important role as hubs for families and partners of kindergartens and schools, facilitating a systematic integration into the educational system.



If we wish to continually reduce the numbers of primary school children who fail to achieve the minimum standards in reading, writing and arithmetic, investments in services provided outside primary schools will be necessary. There must be targeted utilisation of the six years prior to school entry to help children develop the necessary preparatory skills at an early stage that are essential to enable them to learn properly at school.

Libraries not only offer families age-appropriate reading materials but also stimulating, commerce-free spaces where they can enjoy recreational activities with their children. Providing fun events such as picture book screenings, storytelling theatre, poetry for toddlers and even books for babies, libraries help familiarise parents together with their young children with the reading (aloud) experience from the very beginning. Working in cooperation with kindergartens, libraries advise and support preschool teachers by providing, among other things, themed media boxes and help

with developing educational programmes, while collaborative projects are also realised. Even at kindergarten age, children can thus discover that libraries are places with diverse educational and recreational attractions that they can utilise to further their own interests throughout the whole of their lives.

The German Library Association calls for → In order to support children regardless of their background and to enable successful educational biographies, early education offerings and their infrastructures need to be expanded, as well as better integration of the stakeholders. Local authorities will require support to enable them to provide more assistance to the local libraries providing services designed for children and young people and these need to be firmly established as part of the local educational landscape. At the state level, the services provided by libraries should be designated as mandatory aspects of the educational plans for kindergartens. The coope-

ration with libraries must become a firmly established facet of policies for language and reading skills promotion covered by planned federal programmes for the kindergarten sector.

"Libraries with their well-qualified personnel are able to provide support to their local kindergartens and primary schools when it comes to the promotion of language and reading skills and the safe use of media. This interplay becomes particularly important if we wish to think of education in holistic terms and not just as a concept that should be restricted to certain phases of life. The cooperation between libraries and kindergartens and primary schools can really get something moving in this connection."

Karin Prien
Federal Minister of Education,
Family, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth

More
information:



Appropriate access to collections of statutory copies of digital publications

Publishers in Germany have, over hundreds of years, been obligated by law to supply so called legal deposits of works, a requirement that has always been indispensable, as it ensures the preservation of our cultural heritage. The legal deposit regulations by the state and the federal governments ensure that at least one publicly accessible copy of each printed work is safeguarded for the future, so that the corresponding cultural legacy is permanently secured for use by society and in research.



In its 'Bonn Declaration' (Bonner Erklärung) the Working Group of German Regional Libraries (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Regionalbibliotheken) of the German Library Association calls for the establishment of up-to-date regulations that would facilitate a form of access to statutory copies of digital publications that is suitable for our times, thus making it possible to meet the demands of our increasingly digital world.

The requirement to supply legal deposits and the corresponding rules need to be successively updated so that they are pertinent to the new digital media and forms of publication. In particular, the spatial restriction of digital media use to reading rooms is no longer appropriate nor justifiable. Registered users should be allowed remote access to these.

Clarity in terms of the legal standards is also required when it comes to the challenges involved in collecting, archiving and making available the dynamically developing digital publication forms and online offerings that are becoming increasingly important, beginning with websites, through blogs, e-books and so on, through to social media content. Aspects of copyright and accountability, in particular, need to be clearly defined.

The German Library Association calls for → the federal and state governments to create the necessary legal frameworks and legal certainty for libraries so that the digital statutory publication collections of the state and federal governments can fulfil their societal purpose to the full.

More
information:



Provide for greater accessibility of libraries

Equal access to knowledge and information for those with disabilities is essential if social participation for all is to be achieved. The spatial, technical and content-related features of libraries must be designed to be inclusive. This is because the basis for social participation and inclusion is determined by free access to information and services in both the physical and digital spheres.



If libraries are to be there for everyone, they must be readily accessible for those with limited mobility, visual impairment, cognitive disabilities, hearing loss and also those who speak German as a second language.

When it comes to libraries, strategies to promote inclusion and accessibility extend to areas such as the welcoming culture, the signage, the structure of catalogues, the analogue and digital communication, the training of personnel and the way services and events are designed. Underlying all this are specific legal regulations, such as the Declaration of Human Rights, the German Act on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz) and the German Ordinance on Barrier-Free Information Technology (Barrierefreie-Informationstechnik-Verordnung).

The Accessibility Improvement Act (Barrierefreiheitsstärkungsgesetz) came into force in Germany in June

2025. Since then, new e-books and e-readers must be designed to be fully utilisable for those with disabilities, so that they, like their non-disabled counterparts, also have access to the corresponding media. This can be achieved with the help of assistive technologies or technical means of facilitating reading, such as the ability to change fonts and sizes, character and line spacing, or apps that allow two senses to be used concurrently, so that a text can be both read and listened to.

The German Library Association committee responsible for customer-orientated and inclusive services (Kundenorientierte und inklusive Services), in collaboration with the Berlin School of Library and Information Science of Humboldt University, undertook a Germany-wide survey in 2023. Among the results was the finding that 50% of responding libraries had insufficient funding to implement the necessary accessibility measures. Despite the legal requirements, 14% of sites have no

barrier-free entryways while 49% have no or only partially disabled-accessible gangway systems.

The German Library Association calls for → the federal and state governments, together with local authorities, to provide the necessary funding from the corresponding investment packages to enable libraries to be made accessible. The aim must be to facilitate free access by everyone to media and information to enable their social, societal and cultural participation, so that libraries can fulfil their responsibilities towards the public.

More information:



Save the date!

March

21 March 2026

World Poetry Day

April

23 April 2026

World Book and Copyright Day

May

3 – 10 May 2026

Freedom of Expression Week (nationwide)

Juni

5 May 2026

European Protest Day for Equality for People with Disabilities

19 – 22 May 2026

114th BiblioCon in Berlin

20 June 2026

Day of the Open Society (nationwide)

September

26 June 2026

'Bundesweiter Digitaltag' to promote digital participation by everyone

15 September 2026

International Day of Democracy

18 Sep. – 8 Oct. 2026

German Sustainability Action Days

Oktober

28 September 2026

International Day for the Universal Access to Information

24 October 2026

Day of the Libraries (nationwide)

November

20 November 2026

Federal Reading Aloud Day (nationwide)

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