



Libraries

2026

Issues
Figures
Demands

dbv

deutscher
bibliotheks
verband

Dear readers,

Libraries help hold society together. They are open to everyone, locally accessible, commerce-free and dependable. In a time in which people are searching for orientation, the information overload increases and there is exacerbation of loneliness and digital uncertainty, libraries are the gateways to knowledge, education, culture and non-partisan information.

The fact that libraries were visited more than 188 million times in 2025 is an impressive testament to the importance they hold for people in Germany. This figure reflects the trust put in them by families, pupils and students, researchers, professionals, older people and those seeking support or a public space for social interaction.

A significant political milestone is the decision by the Coalition Committee of the Federal Government that will enable public libraries to open with staff on Sundays, effective from 1 January 2027. This would be a major success for the dbv, the German Library Association. We have campaigned for this for many years. For if libraries are to be hubs of culture, education, social interaction and participation, it must be possible for them to open when families, working people and those with limited free time can actually use them.

At the same time, the option to open on Sundays provides new creative possibilities, but is not a formal

obligation. The decision to open must be made locally, particularly as many libraries are already operating at full capacity.

That is why every decision requires the involvement of staff, and models that prioritise work-life balance and occupational health, supported by the right organisational conditions.

Our demand is clear: libraries must be acknowledged as vital information infrastructures and places of learning, and be equipped accordingly. Libraries need staff, space, digital infrastructure, professional independence and reliable funding. Those who value educational equity, digital sovereignty, democracy and social cohesion must work to foster libraries.

The importance of public spaces for social interaction is demonstrated in the "Gemeinsam in der Bibliothek" ('Together at the Library') campaign month that we will be holding in November 2026 together with the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ). We will be raising awareness of loneliness and highlighting where community thrives: in libraries.

Explore our current priorities and policy demands in the following pages.

I hope you find this a stimulating read!

Antje Theise
Federal Chairperson of the German Library Association



Image: © Thomas Burmeister

Figures from the German library statistics for 2025

Throughout Germany, there are more than **8,600 public and academic libraries** that were **visited over 188 million times** in 2025.

Physical media still in high demand

Even in 2025, physical media continued to play a significant role in the provision of information and literature in public libraries. In addition to a growing online offering, the inventory of physical media comprised **102 million items**. These were borrowed over **274 million times**.

The services provided by libraries reach many people

Libraries do more than just provide physical media to fulfil their educational and cultural mandate: Training courses, events and workshops in libraries reach target groups of all ages and are tailored to the needs of local communities. To achieve this, libraries cooperate closely with numerous partners. In 2025, public libraries staged **more than 448,000 events, tours and exhibitions** on a wide range of topics, including approximately **217,000 events focused on promoting literacy and media competence in children**. More than **495,000 people** participated in **training courses, tours, educational sessions and webinars in academic libraries in 2025**.

Academic libraries support the digitisation of research

Digital media are central to scholarship, research and teaching: The **digital media collection in academic libraries** comprised around **99 million e-media items** in 2025. Of the **total expenditure for acquisitions and publications, amounting to more than €382 million** in 2025, the **purchase and licensing of e-media accounted for around €186 million**; approximately **€117 million** was spent on **open access publications and open access transformation**.

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 2025 reporting year, a total of 8,661 public and academic libraries reported their figures to the DBS.

Addressing library funding now

Despite rising visitor numbers and the continuous expansion of their remit, libraries have been underfunded for years. The combination of rising costs and budgets that have been falling or stagnating for years fundamentally endangers the valuable educational work of libraries and their overarching functions as places for leisure and social interaction.



Libraries guarantee the fundamental right to freedom of information. They play a key role in educational policy, contributing to the promotion of literacy, media education and the development of information literacy skills. They serve as spaces for learning and working, providing people of different generations and backgrounds with easy access to opportunities for social interaction and exchange, as well as numerous leisure activities. In doing so, they directly counteract social fragmentation and create places of belonging that are used by everyone.

In order to be able to undertake these important tasks, libraries require secure financial resources. This year's financial survey among the members of the dbv¹ proves the opposite: 24% of the participating public libraries are subject to global budget freezes.

Some 46% of respondents are already implementing or planning budgetary consolidation measures. Total budgets are stagnating for 60% of libraries, decreasing by up to 10% in 16% and falling by more than 10% in 11% of cases. This means that 87% of public libraries must, in effect, accept budget cuts. This has an immediate impact on the range of media and events offered. The media budget is stagnating for 64% of libraries, while 25% are seeing a decline. Moreover, 13% of libraries have been forced to permanently reduce what they offer in the form of events while another 14% had to at least partially cut their spending in this regard. This negative trend has been apparent for years.

The dbv demands → In order to fulfil their role as places of education and social interaction and to offer solutions to current challenges in education and cultural policy, funding for public libraries must be secured. Due to constrained municipal budgets and the fact that library funding is categorised as a discretionary service, this is not possible.

An urgent change of course is essential: the federal and state governments must provide assistance for the budgets available to local authorities. In times of declining literacy, disinformation and a lack of digital skills, there is an urgent need to promote the library sector as a public facility that provides for education and social interaction.

Ensuring digital participation in libraries by means of consortial acquisition

For over two decades, libraries have faced the challenge of ensuring that information is also available to their users in digital form. Unlike academic libraries, public libraries currently lack the infrastructures required to provide contemporary information services and relevant digital offerings.



Libraries contribute to the digital inclusion of the population. This can only succeed if digital information provision and the delivery of digital educational offerings are ensured based on user needs. In negotiations with licence holders of digital options, some of whom operate globally, public libraries, as municipal entities, are mostly unable to negotiate suitable conditions. The market overview, order volume and bargaining power available to public stakeholders are insufficient to enable them to achieve favourable terms. This is not in the spirit of economical use of public funds, endangers digital media and information provision, and leads to a reduction in library offerings due to unnecessarily high costs for individual services.

Cost-effective procurement can only be supported at a national level. To achieve this, a central consortium office must be established to negotiate framework agreements and national licences for public libraries. This

nationally based body must work closely with the federal states, their professional library agencies and local libraries. Successful examples of consortium operations in the field of academic libraries already exist.

The dbv demands → In view of the ongoing progress of digitalisation, the establishment of a consortium office for the procurement of digital offerings is urgently required to ensure the future viability of public libraries. Setting up an overarching consortium office will require a joint national initiative. The federal states are called upon, through their cooperation in the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education, Science and Cultural Affairs (KMK), to establish and permanently fund a consortium office for the procurement of digital options for public libraries. The federal government should contribute financially to its establishment, thereby promoting and ensuring digital inclusion in Germany.

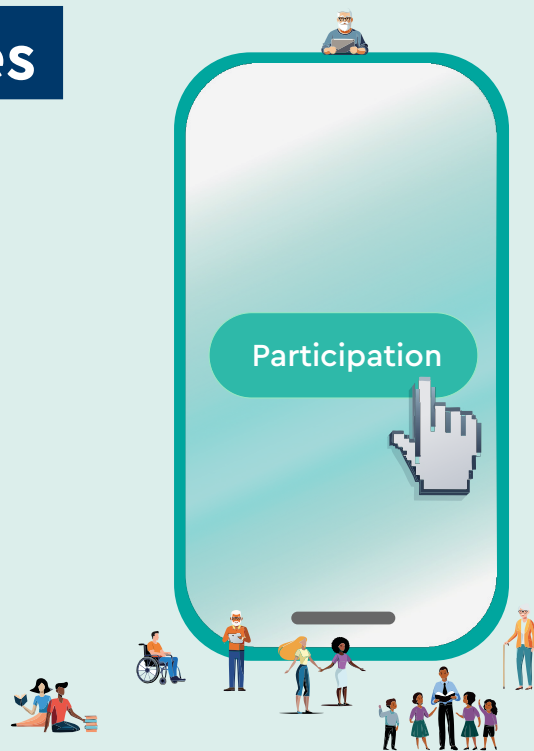
"Digital inclusion must not be a luxury. To date, our public libraries have often been left on their own to face up to publishing corporations that, in certain cases, are active in the global arena. A national consortium office for public libraries would provide for bargaining power that is more fairly weighted. This would allow us to ensure the provision of contemporary, cost-effective information and create genuine educational equality."

Lars Rohwer, Member of the German Bundestag and Chairperson of the Library Association of Saxony (dbv Sachsen)

¹ Survey by the dbv of 1.385 public libraries from June to July 2026.

Systematically fostering digital skills through libraries

Digitalisation is increasingly transforming all social spheres, from communication and education to the world of work, administration and healthcare. Access to digital services and information requires basic digital skills. At the same time, numerous studies show that significant portions of the population in Germany possess only limited digital proficiency.



Digital skills are essential for social inclusion, professional success and democratic formation of opinion. The German digital industry association Bitkom regularly points out significant differences in digital competence between age groups and social backgrounds. Both the European Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) and studies by the D21 Initiative reveal that digital service usage is notably lower among older people, individuals with low levels of formal education and lower-income groups, who also tend to have a greater need for support.

This is where libraries come in: with their widespread infrastructure, high level of social acceptance and ease of access, they are key partners in promoting digital participation. They support the use of digital devices and online administrative services, and offer media literacy training and advisory services relating to artificial intelligence (AI).

The aim is to help people of all ages navigate the digital world skilfully and confidently. In this way, libraries make a significant contribution to digital participation.

The federal government's Digital Skills Offensive represents an important political facet of the support available to individuals to help them keep pace with the digital transformation. The objective of the undertaking is to ensure that, throughout Germany, citizens of all ages have the necessary basic digital skills.

The dbv demands → In order to ensure that basic digital skills, as an essential need, are effortlessly embedded in the population in general, libraries must be included in the rollout of the federal Digital Skills Offensive from the outset. This requires long-term funding for digital educational services, investment in modern technical equipment and high-performance digital infrastructure for libraries, and professionally qualified library personnel provided with continuing education.

"They make available digital pen readers that convert printed text into speech and thus can even encourage very young children to explore the world of books on their own, fact-checking services that reveal fake news and advice sessions that can be accessed with a smartphone: as such, libraries are places where people can try out digital tools and learn new things – entirely free of charge and without any fear of making mistakes. As modern third places, they provide easy access to digital media, thereby supporting lifelong learning and digital participation."

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

More
information:



Promoting libraries as community hubs

Loneliness can affect anyone and endangers not only individual health, but also social cohesion. As public community facilities, libraries create spaces for encounter, participation and belonging.



Current studies show that loneliness affects people across all age groups and walks of life. At the same time, it can undermine trust in democratic institutions and contribute to social polarisation. This underscores the need for accessible third places where people can interact freely.

Libraries fulfil this task every day. They are free to enter without any commercial pressure, are rooted in their local communities and are highly trusted. These are places where no one has to feel alone. People can participate in a wide range of events for all age groups or simply read, work and relax in the company of others. In this way, libraries also act as a preventative measure against loneliness. Every day, they offer

a place where people feel welcome, are seen and feel they can return – both in cities and in rural areas.

The dbv is a primary signatory and member of the Alliance Against Loneliness ('Allianz gegen Einsamkeit') of the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ). In November 2026, libraries will be at the centre of the campaign month designed to counter loneliness, a collaboration between the dbv and the BMBFSFJ. Under the heading "Gemeinsam in der Bibliothek" ('Together in the Library'), the campaign will showcase libraries as community hubs, championing greater connection and social cohesion.

The dbv demands → The long-term fostering of libraries as social infrastructures and essential places of social interaction; their role in preventing and alleviating loneliness must be consistently taken into account in the political strategies and funding programmes of the federal government, states and municipalities.

More
information:



Systematically integrating libraries into early years education

The trajectory for long-term educational success is determined at an early age. During the first six years of life, children acquire key pre-literacy skills, which are crucial for their capacity to learn and the course of their educational development. Libraries help children and their families by providing early language and literacy support, while also acting as key partners for childcare facilities.



The German National Report on Education (Nationale Bildungsbericht), published in June 2026, demonstrates the need for political action. The educational gap begins at birth and continues to widen until the age of 6. Differences in children's achievement levels are directly linked to their families' social and financial resources. An increasing number of children are failing to meet minimum standards in reading, writing and maths. Support for children facing educational disadvantages must therefore begin from birth.

By hosting events for families with newborn children up to the age of three years, focusing on picture books, rhymes and dialogue, read-aloud sessions and storytelling theatre, picture book cinema sessions and media kits for childcare facilities, libraries promote language development through play and provide an early introduction to books and age-appropriate media. They provide guidance to parents and institutional childcare providers on reading aloud and media literacy, supporting the entire educational journey through their range of services.

The dbv demands → In order for libraries to optimally support families and childcare providers in early childhood education and thereby enable opportunities for participation, libraries must be systematically integrated into educational planning and their services must be an established part of the education system. To ensure widespread coverage, existing services must be expanded and additional funding provided. Only with sufficient staff and material resources can libraries make their substantial contribution to early childhood support.

More information:



Ensuring the professional independence of libraries

What went unchallenged for a long time is now increasingly being called into question: the professional independence of libraries. This requires a fundamental clarification, which must come from the political sphere. Free and unhindered access to information, as guaranteed by the German constitution, must not itself become a subject of political pressure – regardless of whether it comes from society, the political class or other groups.



The core task of libraries is to ensure free access to information. In this way, libraries enable the formation of opinion and a diversity of perspectives. They make decisions on the selection, acquisition and management of information based on professional criteria. Against this backdrop, libraries are facing new challenges, not only in Germany.

Direct hostility, destruction of media, disruption of events and issues caused by parliamentary inquiries – such attempts to exert influence on libraries are increasing and taking on different forms. What they all have in common is that they show that free, independent access to information is becoming a political issue. An essential precondition for democratic opinion-forming is thus itself becoming a subject of political contention. This weakens the institutional foundations of our democratic society.

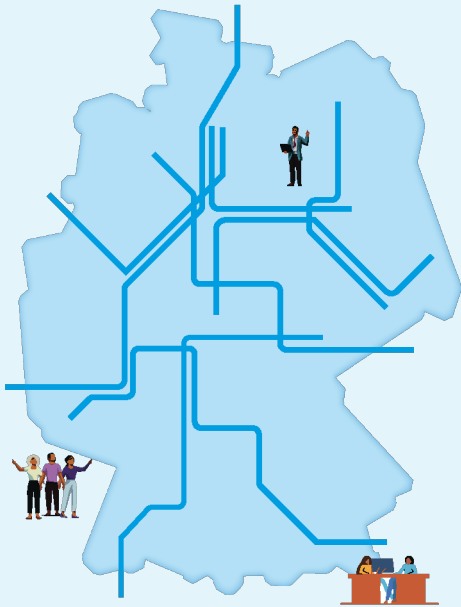
The dbv demands → In order to protect libraries against external pressure being exerted on their acquisition activities and to safeguard their provision of events, services and programmes, a confirmation of their independence in terms of their educational activities is required. This must occur both at the state level through legislation designed to promote libraries and culture and also through clear policy statements at the federal level. There can be no doubt that, in a liberal democracy, libraries must be enabled to carry out free and independent cultural and educational activities.

"Libraries are repositories of knowledge, cultural hubs, touchpoints for education and pillars of our society. They promote media literacy, support reading and contribute to the establishment of an active and informed society. For this, libraries need stability, security and nationwide recognition as places that are truly open to everyone – reliably funded, legally protected and with their public role strengthened."

Katrin Göring-Eckardt, Member of the German Bundestag
Former Vice-President of the German Bundestag

Enhancing the self-organisation capacity of academic libraries

Academic libraries are vital information infrastructures for research and society. They ensure access to reliable knowledge, preserve scholarly findings and create the foundation for research, innovation and education. In doing so, they play a crucial role in ensuring Germany's digital sovereignty.



By offering expertise with regard to information provision, research data management, publication services and Open Science, academic libraries facilitate an effective and networked knowledge environment. To ensure they can continue to fulfil these tasks in the future, they require reliable financial and staffing resources.

The growing demands of the digital transformation can only be met collectively. Academic libraries must coordinate their services on a supra-regional level, develop shared standards and manage digital infrastructures cooperatively. Robust self-organisation is essential for the efficient use of resources, driving innovation and safeguarding the international competitiveness of the research landscape.

The dbv demands → The federal government, states and university administrations must ensure long-term, predictable financing for supra-regional library services and infrastructures. At the same time, they must create the framework conditions that promote cooperation and ensure sustainable support for federated, supra-regional solutions. Only strong academic libraries in a cooperative organisation can ensure that research and society remain resilient, innovative, and digitally sovereign.

"Academic libraries must be understood as a strategic infrastructure of the knowledge landscape. They support research in publication processes, research data, Open Science and digital sovereignty. This is why they need robust cooperative structures, reliable resources and increased recognition by university management."

Dr. Jens-Peter Gaul
Secretary-General of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Save the date!

January

24 January 2027

International Day of Education

March

21 March 2027

World Poetry Day

April

14 April 2027

International Provenance Research Day

May

23 April 2027

World Book and Copyright Day/
2nd federal 'Night of the Libraries' (Germany)

3–10 May 2027

Freedom of Expression Week (nationwide)

June

18 June 2027

'Bundesweiter Digitaltag' to promote digital participation by everyone

September

19 June 2027

Day of the Open Society (Germany)

22–25 June 2027

115th BiblioCon in Nuremberg

15 September 2027

International Day of Democracy

October

28 September 2027

International Day for Universal Access to Information

24 October 2027

Library Day

November

19 November 2027

Federal Reading Aloud Day (Germany)

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