

IFLA Reference and Information Services Section Statement on Libraries and Development

A Statement from the [Reference and Information Services Section](#)

Reference and information services are at the heart of library operations and represent the public face of access to information. In a complex and information-abundant environment, these services are essential as they provide a means for library users to efficiently and accurately access information. They represent the greatest assets of libraries – librarians and library personnel. Reference services, in particular, provide a means for users to navigate the complicated information ecosystem with the help of professionals trained in accessing and evaluating information. Committed to core library principles of freedom of inquiry and freedom of access, reference librarians do not discriminate against either individual users or their information needs.

These services include:

- Reference: in the form of general or specialized help in refining information queries, locating information, accessing information, and interpreting information.
- Circulation: the ability to access physical materials for use outside of a library.
- Interlibrary loan: which connects users to materials not available in their home libraries.
- Instruction: assistance in the use of various technologies that can be used to access, use and manipulate information within or outside of the library.

As core library functions, many of these services cut across all types of libraries:

- In public and school libraries, information seekers of all kinds can receive personal assistance on a variety of topics from librarians.
- In academic libraries, librarians assist students with information literacy instruction and research queries and provide in-depth reference and research assistance to faculty.
- In special libraries, librarians provide extremely specialized reference and research assistance to doctors, attorneys, government officials, and others.

Reference, Information Services, and Development

Access to information is essential for development. IFLA's [Statement on Libraries and Development](#) notes:

Access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support sustainable development. The library is the only place in many communities where people can access information that will help improve their education, develop new skills, find jobs, build businesses, make informed agricultural and health decisions, or gain insights into environmental issues. Their unique role makes libraries important development partners, both by providing access to information in all formats and by delivering services and programmes that meet the needs for information in a changing and increasingly complex society.

Further, in the same statement, IFLA points to librarians as expert guides to development through the information landscape:

Library staff are trained, trusted intermediaries dedicated to guiding people to the information they seek. Librarians provide training and support for the media and information literacies people need to better understand and participate in the information society. They are also cultural stewards, curating and providing access to cultural heritage and supporting the development of identity.

The new [Sustainable Development Goals](#) specifically include access to information in target 16.10:

Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

Helping users refine and articulate their information needs, and then connecting them to the information that can help them meet their needs, is the role of the reference librarian in development. Access to information underpins all of the Sustainable Development Goals. In order for individuals to make informed decisions about their lives, livelihoods, and communities, reference and information services will continue to play a key role in both individual and community development. Access to information, including online information, legal information, human rights information, government information, economic information and health information; training on ICT use; access to reading material, including newspapers; commitments to the privacy of all users; and in-depth research assistance make librarians key partners in development.

Specific examples of development supported by reference and information services include:

- In **Qatar**, the [Qatar National Library](#), in partnership with the British Library, digitized over half a million cultural and historical heritage materials. The maps, manuscripts, photographs and sound recordings in the Qatar Digital Library provide free access for academic, researchers and the public on topics related to the Arabic Gulf and wider region, maintaining cultural preservation and national identity and supporting SDG #11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities.
- **Norway's** [Bergen Public Library](#) features lifelong learning programs including coding clubs, music composition classes, and the Language Cafe, which connects groups of Norwegian speakers with new language learners. The library's Learning Centre assists users with everything from finding books to setting up email addresses to registering for kindergarten. This program supports SDG #4 – Quality Education.
- The [Dublin City Central Library](#) in **Ireland** partners with the National Adult Literacy Agency to provide a lending and reference collection to support the professional development of adult literacy practitioners. In this way, the library meets the needs of literacy professionals as well as the patrons they serve. The Central Library's program for adult literacy professional development supports SDG #4 - Quality Education.

- In the **United States**, the [Milwaukee Public Library](#) supports economic and personal development through its Drop-in Job Help service. The library provides extended access to computers and internet for job seekers and has developed training sessions for patrons who need help with many aspects of the job seeking process. At all thirteen locations, individuals can connect with trained library staff who can help them set up an email address, search for jobs online, and create or update a resume. The MPL's job seeking services support **SDG #8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth**.
- [Glasgow Women's Library](#) in **Scotland** received funding for a new project, In Her Shoes, a program that provides prejudice reduction resources to organizations and institutions on the topic of women's experiences of intersectional hate crime. Resources include online resources, films, workshop plans, and training sessions, and support **SDG #5 - Gender Equality**.
- In **Egypt**, the [Bibliotheca Alexandrina](#) has established Embassies of Knowledge in all Egyptian universities, the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology's regional branches, several exploratory centers affiliated with the Ministry of Education, and a number of public libraries and institutions interested in the dissemination of science and culture in Egyptian society. Through the Embassies of Knowledge users have access to many digital collections, including the Digital Assets Repository (DAR), the largest Arabic digital library, the, Memory of Modern Egypt project, and the Science Supercourse. Users are also able to stream quality live and archived webcasting of all the conferences, lectures, and events taking place at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. The Embassies of Knowledge support **SDG #4 – Quality Education**.
- The Newcomers to **Canada** program, provided by the [Edmonton Public Library](#) through a partnership with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, is an example of the kinds of services public libraries around the world undertake to support newcomers. Newcomers to communities around the world require additional support to help them integrate into their new homes and societies. Through the work of Community Librarians and Settlement Practitioners, newcomers to Edmonton can gain help with common questions about finding shelter, employment, legal rights, language programs, education, social networks, health care, government funds, as well as citizenship and immigration support. This program supports **SDG #4 – Quality Education**.
- In **Nigeria**, the Anambra State Library Board in collaboration with two NGOs, the Nigerian Book Foundation and the Justice Development and Peace Commission in Onitsha, are involved in rural projects to develop the nation. The Nigerian Book Foundation gathers indigenous knowledge, translates and transcribes it into other local and foreign languages, and then prints and circulates it to local libraries and the wider public. The Justice Development and Peace Commission on the other hand, focuses on community information and development. They educate rural people on policy issues including agriculture, land rights, and women's rights. The Anambra State Library Board's activities support **SDGs #2, #4, and #5 – Zero Hunger, Quality Education, and Gender Equality**.