



Minorities, Equal Participation, Social and Economic Development, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Submission by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for the opportunity to contribute to this dialogue and ongoing efforts to tackle inequalities and promote and protect the human rights of minorities. IFLA is a global organisation for libraries and information services; and drawing on the global library field's experiences with working to provide equitable access to information for development and wellbeing, we would like to offer inputs on the following questions:

1. Please provide any information of the promising policy and programme approaches at the national and international level to protect the human rights of minorities and strengthen their inclusion, especially minority women, in the context of efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda [...]

5. Please provide any information of the discrimination, marginalization and exclusion experienced by national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, especially minority women in the context of efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda, in particular in SDG 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11 and 16 so that 'No one is left behind'. Please provide examples of good practices to address these situations of recognized marginalization or exclusion of minorities.

Key barriers

Access to information and knowledge is an important driver for sustainable development, and is intrinsically linked to at least 20 SDG targets. These include, for example, access to market information, access to the internet and ICT, knowledge-sharing and access to science, technology and innovation, and others.¹

There are, however, key **inequalities in access to information**, knowledge, and learning opportunities which national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities in different parts of the world are experiencing. Addressing these gaps is therefore an important step to ensuring that sustainable development efforts benefit the more at-risk minority groups as intended.

These inequalities and gaps can include the following:

At a fundamental level, **uneven access to connectivity infrastructure and ICT** often reinforces existing social inequalities – which can also manifest as a digital divide impacting minority groups. For example, in some country and regional contexts, national minorities and members of indigenous communities as well as migrants, refugees and displaced persons can make up parts of underserved social groups who do not enjoy the same levels of access to connectivity.² This inequality can be particularly severe for women, who are less likely to have access to meaningful connectivity in the first place, in light of the persistent gender digital divide.

¹ <https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/91780>

² <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2020/11/internet-governance-forum-calls-for-bridging-digital-divides-harnessing-the-internet-to-support-human-resilience-and-build-solidarity-amid-covid-19/>; e.g., <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/20/smartphones-help-blacks-hispanics-bridge-some-but-not-all-digital-gaps-with-whites/>

Research on the use of digital tools by refugees also points out that, while many (as high as two-thirds) actively use smartphones, there are several key barriers to mobile ownership and internet use. These include affordability, digital and literacy skills, and the ability to charge their devices.³

Beyond the possibility to get online or not, a key part of the digital divide which minorities – particularly linguistic minorities – can experience disproportionately is unequal **access to relevant content**. A 2020 report by the Internet Governance Forum *Best Practice Forum on Local Content* highlighted the need to further alleviate language barriers online, particularly through facilitating the availability of content and information in minority, indigenous or lesser-used languages.⁴

Inequalities in access to content can also manifest themselves in the broader digital, media and information ecosystems. For instance, the 2020 “Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era” report points to comparatively high risks of falling short of social inclusiveness goals and targets when it comes to access to media for minorities in different European countries.⁵ This is based on legal provisions for minorities’ access to airtime and how these are applied in practice; and highlights that the risks are particularly prominent for minorities which are not legally recognised.

Inequalities in access to content can have a particularly direct negative effect when it comes to information enabling the use of **key services, the realisation of fundamental rights, and overall wellbeing**. The need to ensure that speakers of regional and minority languages can receive important messages and information has been highlighted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g. by the Council of Europe’s Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.⁶ Similarly, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the need for targeted information campaigns for communities of ethnic and national minorities.⁷

There have been, of course, notable good practices on delivering key information in languages spoken by minority communities – both directly by states,⁸ and by such community organisations as libraries, and library networks.⁹

Conversely, a lack of access to relevant information may disproportionately prevent members of ethnic minorities and indigenous communities from accessing key services or fully exercising their rights – for example, to access social protection services.¹⁰ Examples range from lower connectivity rates among minority communities impacting their enrolment for a COVID-19

³ <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Digital-Lives-of-Refugees.pdf>

⁴ https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/filedepot_download/5005/2321

⁵ <https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/67828/MPM2020-PolicyReport.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y>

⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/covid-19-minority-languages>

⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1065272>

⁸ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/>

⁹ E.g. <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=4589a8b3-62dd-40da-896d-737b73dfc321>

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2018/07/Chapter-VII-Indigenous-peoples-and-ethnic-minorities.pdf>

vaccination,¹¹ to the need to provide access to legal information for national minorities in a language they understand (sufficiently well) as part of their right to access to justice.¹²

Good practices

The above illustrates some of the types of barriers and inequalities that members of ethnic, national and linguistic minority communities may face disproportionately due to challenges around access to information. These, in turn, can impact the ability to fully benefit from efforts to advance the UN 2030 Agenda, from other available opportunities, or to exercise their rights. There are, of course, known good practices which seek to address these challenges:

Meeting the information needs of minority groups through dedicated initiatives. In a more narrow sense, information needs can of course span access to books, publications and other texts. These can be key to realising the cultural and economic rights of minorities, particularly linguistic minorities.

For example, access to learning materials in minority languages can have a significant impact on engagement with the educational process; there are examples libraries working to ensure their communities have access to such materials.¹³

Other information needs may be more broad, and go beyond cultural or educational needs. For example, immigrants, migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees can, of course, also belong to linguistic, religious, or ethnic minorities – and some evidence is available on how library and information services help address their needs as they familiarise themselves with a new country, culture and/or language.

A recent survey run by an IFLA committee, focused on *International Guidelines for Library Services to Refugees*, has shown that across respondents from 32 countries, a majority (ranging from 93% to 53%) offer various services to help meet the information needs of refugees. These range from access to the internet and relevant resources to various learning opportunities, story time events, and others.¹⁴

Similarly, libraries are active in **facilitating the inclusion and empowerment of such groups through events and programmes** – from language classes and clubs to women’s groups and other social activities.¹⁵ It is crucial that such opportunities are offered free of charge and are open and welcoming, to be able to reach and engage their target audiences.

Some of these practices are carried out in a networked and coordinated approach across many locations, such as the Libraries of Sanctuary movement - first launched in the UK and recently introduced for the first time in Ireland (linked to the City of Sanctuary movement).^{16 17} Another

¹¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/02/internet-vaccine-racial-ethnic-minorities-covid-coronavirus-pandemic/>

¹² <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/c/340066.pdf>

¹³ https://ifla.org/files/assets/hq/topics/libraries-development/documents/ifla_submission_on_minority_language_education.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.ifla.org/node/93156>

¹⁵ See e.g. <https://librarymap.ifla.org/stories/Germany/DIALOGUES-FOR-INTEGRATION:-HAMBURG-LIBRARIES-HELP-REFUGEES-FIND-THEIR-WAY/131>; <https://www.thelocal.no/20201217/how-norway-is-using-libraries-as-integration-hubs/>; <https://librarymap.ifla.org/stories/Canada/TORONTO-PUBLIC-LIBRARY-AND-GOVERNMENT-COLLABORATE-TO-WELCOME-AND-SUPPORT-SYRIAN-REFUGEES/153>

¹⁶ <https://www.libfocus.com/2021/04/libraries-of-sanctuary-supporting.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/sites/default/files/COS-Library-resource-pack.pdf>

example is the Human Library movement, first introduced in Denmark in 2000 and adopted in many countries (see e.g. Kazakhstan) to help build social cohesion and fight stigmas for persons experiencing discrimination – including, among others, religious and ethnic minorities.¹⁸

Such initiatives can be targeted to support specific minority groups. One example is library-based educational and learning opportunities for Roma children and youth in Croatia – seeking to address various learning needs, like computer skills and information literacy. Some of the interventions were carried out jointly with other key stakeholders, for example social workers, employment services, kindergartens and schools.¹⁹

These examples highlight the potential of open community spaces such as libraries to help meet the information needs of ethnic, national, linguistic and religious minorities, and so power development, promote inclusion and help deliver on their key rights.

¹⁸ <https://librarymap.ifla.org/stories/Kazakhstan/%E2%80%9CHUMAN-LIBRARY%E2%80%9D-IN-KAZAKHSTAN-PROVIDES-SAFE-SPACE-FOR-DISCRIMINATED-COMMUNITIES/138>

¹⁹ https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/ifla_submission_for_the_croatia_universal_periodic_review_3rd_cycle.pdf