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IFAP ISSUE BRIEF

Global Network of Libraries and Local Impact

A Policy Roadmap to Build an Inclusive Digital Future

IFAP Issue Briefs Series: *Within the framework of implementing the Information For All (IFAP) Strategic Plan 2023-2029, the IFAP Secretariat launches this foresight-oriented Issue Briefs Series in order to sensitize and support Member States and other stakeholders in formulating information policies and sharing experiences and lessons learned, aimed at building inclusive, equitable and sustainable Knowledge Societies, including harnessing the opportunities offered by the frontier technologies and mitigating eventual risks.*

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UNESCO re-affirmed its belief in the public library as a driving force for building knowledge societies and fostering digital literacies, critical thinking, creativity, and global citizenship. That is why the Intergovernmental Council of Information for All Programme has endorsed both the IFLA–UNESCO School Library Manifesto (2025) and the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (2023).

In light of today's pressing digital challenges, UNESCO is committed to promoting multi-stakeholder partners and empowering libraries for enabling access to information as a public good, ultimately benefitting everyone.

Tawfik Jelassi, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication

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Billions of people remain unconnected to the Internet and all the potential it brings for access to information. Moreover, there are billions more who are unable to make the most of the connectivity that they have. Libraries are essential partners to address this gap, both for their means to reach people where they are, and for their unique ability to turn connectivity into meaningful digital inclusion.

Vicki McDonald, IFLA President 2023-2025

Executive Summary

The 21st century has witnessed human societies' increasing reliance on digital technologies for essential services, education, access to information, employment and many other aspects of daily lives. It is therefore crucial to explore opportunities and harness the potential of digital technologies in equitable ways, ensuring that the benefits of the digital transformation are shared broadly and do not deepen existing inequalities.

Libraries have long been central to the development of knowledge, evolving into a global network of millions across the world in response to the digital age. They have expanded their functions—offering Internet access, digital skills, and online resources (e.g., Open Educational Resources (OER) and a variety of digital services)—and have also formed strong partnerships with governments to help connect communities to vital public information and services.

The Issue Brief explores the advantages and opportunities of mobilizing the global library network at different levels to achieve digital inclusion objectives, serving as an entry point for engaged policymakers and other stakeholders. The Brief portrays the potential of libraries in addressing the growing digital divide that separates those with from those without access to the Internet, a divide which threatens to undermine the Internet's endless opportunities to benefit society.

Processes like the Summit of the Future, the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and WSIS+20 review process are reevaluating the way governments and non-State actors approach connectivity as an essential part of sustainable development. In light of such processes and as a contribution to them, this brief explores **six Core Policy Areas** and provides **56 tailored recommendations and actions** for Member States and stakeholders., as follows:

Core Policy Area 1: Meaningful Access, Affordability and Gender Divide
Core Policy Area 2: Digital Literacy and Capacity Development
Core Policy Area 3: Multi-stakeholder Collaboration
Core Policy Area 4: Trust and Safety in the Digital Environment.
Core Policy Area 5: Preservation of Information Integrity
Core Policy Area 6: AI and Emerging Technologies

In order to illustrate the recommendations and actions, two main case studies are conducted:

South Africa: where public libraries play a key role in transferring digital and business skills to farmers in rural areas of the country.

Tunisia: where the equalizing power of libraries translates into promoting opportunities for women.

The Issue Brief concludes that libraries can play a pivotal role in the acceleration towards digital inclusion and should therefore become an integral part of governmental strategies in this field. This Issue Brief meets the need of Member States and stakeholders to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries in the digital age. This includes the strategic development and dissemination of digital public goods—OER and Open Access scholarly communications—to support equitable, inclusive, and sustainable knowledge access.

This Issue Brief was developed by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in partnership with UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) in line with its IFAP Strategic Plan 2023-2029 and within the framework of IGF Dynamic Coalition on Measuring Digital Inclusion. It is the result of the close collaboration between IFLA and IFAP on a shared mission towards the development of knowledge societies and the realization of equal and inclusive access to information for all.

1. Introduction: Libraries as key drivers of digital inclusion

> **Digital inclusion is defined as 'equitable, meaningful, and safe access to use, lead, and design digital technologies, services, and associated opportunities for everyone, everywhere'.**
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> United Nations, Digital Inclusion Definition, Tech Envoy Roundtable on Digital Inclusion

While global connectivity has seen a steady increase throughout the past years, an estimated 2.6 billion people are still unconnected, and many others are facing challenges in terms of accessibility.[1] This gap becomes more evident when we consider the 80% of people in high-income countries who have access to the Internet, compared to only 35% in lower-income economies. This widening digital gap threatens to exclude the most vulnerable from many opportunities. Today, many groups are in situations of marginalization including Indigenous communities, have become some of the most digitally excluded people in the world.

The Global Digital Compact (GDC), endorsed at the United Nations Summit of the Future in 2024, pursues the objectives of closing digital divides and provides guidance on how to build "an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for all."

For centuries, libraries have historically served as vital pillars of information and the development of knowledge. Today, the vast library network extends to over 2.8 million libraries globally staffed

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1   International Telecommunication Union. (2021). https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2021.pdf

by over 1.6 million full-time personnel and over half a million volunteers[2]. This number includes libraries of all kinds: public, national, academic, school, community libraries and many others. Beyond numbers, the library field is characterised by its diversity and represents a community connected across geographic and political boundaries.

As a result of this, the nature of libraries has changed drastically in an effort to adapt to this new digital era. They have redefined their spaces and approaches to provide Internet access, digital skills, resources, and many other Internet-related services to people all over the world. Consequently, many public libraries and governments around the world have cultivated a symbiotic relationship where they rely on each other to help connect people to public information and resources.

The Issue Brief focuses on six core policy areas and cross-cutting issues of the digital inclusion landscape. It puts forward a series of policy recommendations that offer solutions to many of the presented challenges, as well as two case studies shedding light on libraries' contribution to digital inclusion over the past years.

1. **Meaningful Access, Affordability and Gender Divide** → Meaningful Access to affordable and reliable Internet is a fundamental component of digital inclusion. Libraries play a pivotal role in this area by providing free or low-cost access not only to the Internet but also to devices and digital infrastructure. This policy area explores strategies for expanding library-based meaningful connectivity initiatives and ensuring that these initiatives are both inclusive and sustainable in the long term.

2. **Digital Literacy and Capacity Development** → Digital literacy, knowledge, and overall skills are essential for individuals to fully participate in today's economy and society. This policy area builds on the extensive global efforts led by libraries to advance digital skills and emphasizes coordinated action between policymakers and librarians to strengthen capacity development and inclusive access.

3. **Multi-stakeholder Collaboration** → Achieving digital inclusion requires cross-sector collaboration. Libraries, as community hubs, are well placed to participate and lead in multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide. This policy area examines diverse recommendations to achieve successful collaboration on digital inclusion initiatives with the help of libraries.

4. **Trust and safety in the Digital Environment** → Working towards a trustworthy and safe online environment means that challenges to trust, including anti-competitive behaviours, diminishing transparency, online violence and attacks, and worries about the loss of privacy or choice must be addressed, while safeguarding freedom of expression and access to information. A safe and trustworthy Internet can be achieved by introducing accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content, but also by urgently prioritizing investment in media and information literacy skills.

5. **Preservation of Information Integrity** → Information integrity, or the importance of access to high-quality and reliable information, is both a goal in itself and an enabler of wider sustainable development progress. Libraries represent an essential infrastructure for promoting and ensuring information integrity. A healthy information environment requires investment to ensure that there is the maximum flow of diverse, verified information to a population with an appreciation of and the competencies to recognize this verified information. Libraries are excellently positioned to do both.

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2   According to figures presented in IFLA's mid-term report on their work on Leaving Libraries Stronger, made possible through the Gates Foundation via Stichting IFLA Global Libraries. The research indicates 1.6 million full-time staff and over half a million volunteers but also recognizes that the true figures are likely to be far higher. Libraries are at times staffed partially by part-time staff or entirely by volunteers, hence why there are more libraries than full-time staff members recorded.

6. **AI and Emerging Technologies** → Artificial Intelligence and other emerging technologies are significantly influencing connectivity and the digital information environment. AI tools offer many opportunities but also come with the risks of amplifying existing problems and biases. Libraries can therefore help implement media and information literacy initiatives as well as capacity building and awareness campaigns for communities to gain a better understanding of the advantages and risks of using AI tools.

UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) has been given the mandate to support Member States and stakeholders in building inclusive and sustainable Knowledge Societies. IFAP advocates for libraries as a driving force for building knowledge societies and enabling access to information and knowledge as a public good, in line with its Strategic Plan (2023-2029) and the implementation of GDC.

The present Brief complements the implementation of the IFLA-UNESCO School Library Manifesto and the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, which were endorsed by the Intergovernmental Council of IFAP in 2025 and 2023 respectively. Both Manifestos recognize the critical role of libraries in fostering information literacy.

Following the Oxford Statement on Importance of Access to Information and Digital Connectivity, this Brief departs from the valuable guidance of the IFLA's 2024 Internet Manifesto, the UN Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations, the UNESCO Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s most recent report on Digital Inclusion in a Dynamic World.
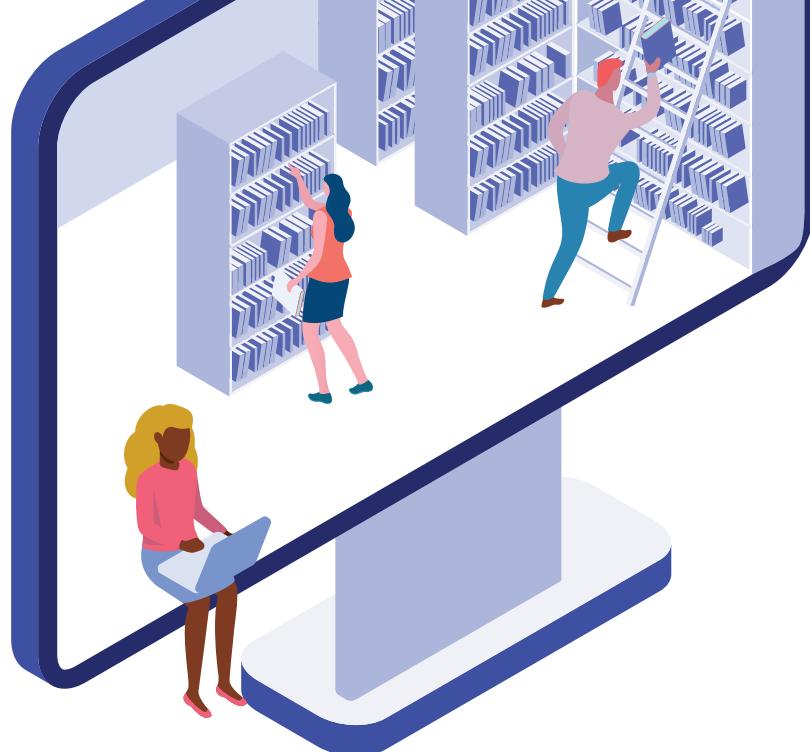
2. Findings and Recommendations in Six Core Policy Areas

2.1 Meaningful Access, Affordability and Gender Divide

In 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council declared Internet access a fundamental enabler of human rights.[3] Since then, several countries have formally recognized this fact; however, the reality is that many individuals and communities still lack access to it today. Overall, access is expanding around the world, but two of the main barriers that stand in the way of achieving meaningful access and an inclusive digital space remain: the lack of connectivity infrastructure and the affordability of connectivity and devices.

Rural and remote communities are disproportionately affected as they tend to lack adequate broadband infrastructure. As reported by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the European Commission, the urban-rural gap has barely improved over the past years. At the same time, while cities often have better infrastructure and higher Internet penetration rates, not all urban areas have access to reliable connectivity. Urban settlements in low-income countries often struggle just as much as some rural communities in terms of access.

The affordability of connectivity and devices also comes hand in hand as it is often a barrier for low-income households to access information.

The twin issues of meaningful access and affordability usually intersect with other challenges. Libraries support meaningful access by providing a supportive environment to effectively use information for personal and community development. They enable Internet access for those who cannot afford it and promote digital skills development within their communities.

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3   United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue (16 May 2011) A/HRC/17/27

For example, in some countries, the gender digital divide remains severe, with only 20% of women in low-income countries having access to the Internet as compared to 34% of men,[4] not to mention the exacerbation of long-standing disparities among other vulnerable population groups, such as those affected by conflict, youth, Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, historically marginalized groups, and many more.

The reality is that, in our current world, those without reliable ICT access will miss out on valuable educational and employment opportunities and will not be able to participate in the global digital economy. As a result, their potential for civic engagement and well-being is also negatively impacted.

In this new digital era, governments and decision-makers need to find cost-effective and efficient ways to ensure that citizens are able to realize their full potential through Internet access. **Libraries can contribute to this mission**.

In the face of growing demand for online information and resources, libraries continue to be key allies in facing access-related challenges as trusted institutions with skilled staff that provide free access to connectivity and devices. Public libraries (and other types of libraries) serve today in their modern role as multi-purpose institutions and hubs for economic and social change.

In reality, and despite the existence of private Internet access, public access remains very relevant today and offers opportunities for people who would not otherwise have access to connectivity, knowledge and resources.

Through initiatives that include OER-based programmes, public libraries provide inclusive access to quality learning materials and empower users with tools for lifelong learning and digital participation. This aligns with the UNESCO 2019 Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OER), which calls for Member States to support the development, use, and adaptation of openly-licensed educational materials, as a means to expand access to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

IGF Dynamic Coalitions: Public Accesses in Libraries & Measuring Digital Inclusion

Through a joint effort by IFLA and Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) with a broad network of partners, the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries (DC-PAL) was established with the aim to enhance library access for diverse user groups—including children, young people, the unemployed, the elderly, and communities in situations of marginalization. Within the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the coalition addresses Internet governance issues related to public access and explores how libraries' expertise, networks, and infrastructure can support the goals of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process. Currently, 28 partners from civil society, governments, business, and other fields have joined the coalition to cooperate on public access in libraries.

To advance inclusive digital ecosystems, IFAP, jointly with the Global Digital Inclusion Partnership (GDIP), and other key stakeholders have created the IGF Dynamic Coalition on Measuring Digital Inclusion (DC-Digital Inclusion) in 2024. At the heart of the coalition's mission lies a commitment to integrate mainstream policies for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable knowledge societies into national development plans and digital transformation processes. The Coalition also aims to address gender divides in digital access, literacy, and participation, while fostering opportunities for women's participation and leadership in the digital age.

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4   International Telecommunication Union, Measuring digital development Facts and Figures (2021) https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2021.pdf

Table 1: Tailored Actions for Targeted Stakeholders

Access, Affordability and Gender Divide

Targeted Stakeholders	Tailored Actions
Governments and policymakers	▶ Include libraries in national broadband policies or strategies in a way that enables them to contribute to ICT access, digital skills learning opportunities and related services, particularly for underserved users. ▶ Prioritize efforts to address the digital divides within the library profession itself, particularly in developing countries, and leveraging library connectivity to broaden access to e-government services. ▶ Build on and invest in existing infrastructure, such as existing libraries, in order to respond to each region, country and community's contextual needs, increasing inclusion of groups in situations of vulnerability and addressing gender gaps. ▶ Introduce policies to reduce Internet subscription costs for libraries. A number of policies offer partial subsidies or pledge to develop strategies to offer lower subscription costs for fixed periods. ▶ Implement policy measures to set up or expand public access in libraries and adapt library services to meet the needs of groups in situation of marginalization, such as women and girls, persons with disabilities or linguistic minorities. ▶ In establishing partnerships, budget-holders should ensure the long-term financial sustainability of digital inclusion programmes in libraries, especially in resource-constrained environments and in developing countries. ▶ Enable in-country coordination by engaging national library associations to together take stock of available library facilities and their needs to help, ensuring that a policy intervention remains sustainable in the long term. ▶ Explore policy implementation through dedicated government-led projects and partnerships with public library systems, or with the help of Universal Service Funds, through public-private partnerships, and other measures. ▶ Partner with public libraries to measure the economic value of public access to the Internet and raise awareness of the high value of public Internet access despite the existence of private access. This can be achieved via communication and surveying campaigns in collaboration with libraries and library associations ▶ Adopt an evidence-based approach and develop measurements and indicators for measuring meaningful access and the gender divide and for monitoring the effectiveness and impact of library-led digital inclusion initiatives, such as CETIC's initiative of Assessing Universal and meaningful connectivity in BRICS countries.
Library partners	▶ Support both the supply and demand sides of connectivity in their communities, through free or low-cost access to the Internet and ICT, digital skills, learning opportunities, and overall meaningful connectivity by creating local content and supporting e-learning. ▶ Leverage libraries' proven ability to steward public funding in ways that are responsive to the specific needs of their communities through locally tailored approaches

2.2 Digital Literacy and Capacity Development

Online learning and digital skills development have become one of the most, if not the most, essential skills for individuals to participate meaningfully in society.

The UN's Global Digital Compact and OECD 2023 Skills Outlook recognize the development of digital skills as *"one of the most impactful areas for government investment to help societies anticipate rather than react to future adverse events"*. Today we see a growing demand for digital skills across a range of professions, not just for those that are categorized as 'technology' roles.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize high-quality education as a key driver of sustainable development, and digital learning has come to be a critical component of that objective. However, access to digital learning opportunities remains uneven, and a lot of people find themselves at risk of being left behind in the digital economy without the necessary competencies to thrive in the workforce of the future.

As highlighted by Point 35 of the UN Pact for the Future, UN Member States have committed to "Design and roll out digital media and information literacy curricula to ensure that all users have the skills and knowledge to safely and critically interact with content and with information providers and to enhance resilience against the harmful impacts of misinformation and disinformation (SDGs 3 and 4)".

UNESCO supports the development of Media and Information Literacy and Digital Competencies for all people to enable their ability to engage critically with information, safely and responsibly navigate the online environment, and ensure that there can be trust in our information ecosystem and in digital technologies. UNESCO has launched the Media and Information Literacy Alliance as a network of networks dedicated to fostering international collaboration to advance Media and Information Literacy for all.

The global library network is uniquely positioned to address these challenges as it has a long history in the development of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) competencies to help ensure that users get the most out of connectivity.

Libraries also play a key role in building capacities for all age groups. In a workshop on meaningful connectivity co-organized by IFLA and IFAP at the WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event 2024, participants highlighted the importance of libraries and librarians in applying human-centric approaches to AI development and empowering individuals. It was noted at the workshop that 73% of libraries are located in developing countries, making their role irreplaceable in bridging the digital divide.

Table 2: Tailored Actions for Targeted Stakeholders

Digital Literacy and Capacity Development

Targeted Stakeholders	Tailored Actions
Governments and policymakers	▶ Provide specialized training for library staff to become proficient in digital tools, media literacy education, and privacy management. This allows them to better assist users in responsibly navigating digital environments. ▶ Include libraries and librarians in planning, decision-making and/or evaluation of interventions to support digital literacy, for example, by engaging libraries to help assess the population's digital skill levels. ▶ Develop and invest in library-based digital skills programmes considering the varying levels of digital literacy across different regions, countries and communities; the vastness of the global library network and its staff provides endless opportunities in terms of digital skills development. Policymakers can ensure that libraries are at the heart of government strategies in the field by collaborating with the relevant national library association or public library authority. ▶ Feature libraries in national education and digital skills strategies which can make information and digital technologies more accessible to women and girls, while empowering women and girls as well as vulnerable populations. These can serve as cost-effective venues for the delivery of digital education, particularly in areas where formal educational institutions are lacking. ▶ Support opportunities for professional development including ICT/digital skills and Media and Information Literacy (MIL) training catered to library staff. ▶ Implement media and information literacy programmes in close collaboration with key actors including libraries and librarians and encourage platforms to do the same. Specific measures should be taken for users and non-users, and especially audiences from vulnerable and marginalized groups. ▶ Design Media and Information Literacy (MIL) programmes with an emphasis on the empowerment of users and ensure that they have the skills and knowledge that will enable them to interact critically and effectively with in all forms of media content and all information providers—including libraries. ▶ Organize interviews and focus groups with public access (library) users to shed light on current digital inclusion and literacy challenges as well as opportunities at regional, national and local levels.
Library partners	▶ Tailor digital literacy programmes and media and information literacy programmes with libraries that meet the specific needs of their communities, including those of women and girls, persons with disabilities, and linguistic minorities. ▶ Assist libraries in providing inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse populations. They commonly offer targeted support to ensure that all users have equal opportunities to develop digital skills regardless of their level.

Library partners	▶ Collaborate with libraries in curating collections and resources, with a focus on openly licensed learning materials – OER – and open access to scholarly communications. Libraries care for collections, digitize local knowledge and support content creation. They empower individuals not only to consume digital information but also to contribute to it, which fosters a sense of ownership in the digital space. ▶ Create cooperative platforms or tools for digital national literacy training through libraries. Previous case studies in the Netherlands and Uganda have reported the setup of online platforms, tools, and a national educational network to facilitate, inter alia, sharing educational materials and resources in e-libraries. ▶ Encourage libraries to oversee usability testing for digital skills with individuals representing diverse demographics, abilities and backgrounds. This helps identify potential barriers to more inclusive capacity building programme designs at a national or local level. ▶ Leverage libraries' capacity to assist with digitizing, translating, and providing access to diverse and localized cultural and documentary heritage materials. This may be particularly impactful for individuals from non-English speaking countries.

2.3 Multi-stakeholder Collaboration

A strategic approach to advance digital inclusion requires coordinated efforts from a diverse array of stakeholders. Some of these include government, private sector entities, civil society organizations, academic and research institutes, international bodies and many more who have a role to play in ensuring that everyone can access and benefit from digital technologies.

With strong community ties and a tradition of promoting access to information, libraries are ideally positioned to act as drivers of inclusive collaboration around digital access.

Table 3: Tailored Actions for Targeted Stakeholders

Multi-stakeholder Collaboration

Targeted Stakeholders	Tailored Actions
Governments and policymakers	▶ Strengthen partnerships and effective leadership between libraries, library associations, ministries of education, urban planning authorities, educational institutions, and the private sector. ▶ Encourage involvement in collaborative frameworks in cross-sector working groups which include libraries, national library associations, and other community organizations.

Governments and policymakers	▶ Leverage libraries in cities and urban spaces to drive media and information literacy and community empowerment, especially for women and girls as well as vulnerable or marginalized groups: for instance, by organizing public awareness campaigns, fielding visits of school students to public libraries, and empowering citizens to critically engage with information and participate in informed public discourse.
	▶ Encourage municipal, provincial, and other subnational government cooperation with library authorities at that level for a more localized approach.
	▶ Ensure that libraries have a seat at the table in digital inclusion decision-making processes.
	▶ Support joint funding mechanisms for library-led digital inclusion projects with a sustained impact.
Private sector	▶ Engage in public-private partnerships to subsidize and establish connectivity and access points. Diversify public-private partnerships and mitigate the potential risks of libraries' overreliance on private sector partnerships for digital inclusion initiatives.
	▶ Explore partnerships around infrastructure roll-out to deploy high-capacity network infrastructure to connect both households and community anchor institutions such as libraries and post offices.
Library partners	▶ Host forums/workshops and participate in collaborative projects. As library work intersect with many fields and themes, particularly with ones aligned with human rights, education, and freedom of access to information; libraries can serve as a space to foster dialogue and build consensus around shared goals for digital inclusion and user empowerment.
	▶ Engage in community-driven collaboration that targets local audiences, particularly women and girls, as well as vulnerable or marginalized groups, in the planning and implementation of digital inclusion initiatives. This will ensure that these efforts are publicly accessible, locally relevant, and responsive to those they aim to serve.
	▶ Leverage library resources and expertise to support governments and stakeholders in their digital inclusion efforts. Libraries can serve as knowledge feeding spaces in cities and urban spaces—where citizens can access books, digital resources, news, and information with guided assistance from the librarians[5].
	▶ Promote collaboration across sectors to create and share openly licensed learning materials, including OER tailored to local and cultural contexts.

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5   Operational guidelines: constructing UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Cities https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391748

2.4 Trust and Safety in the Digital Environment

In the digital landscape, trust and safety have emerged as critical issues that impact how individuals and communities engage with online platforms' products and services. Public trust in the reliability and accuracy of media is declining, coupled with the proliferation of disinformation and misinformation. Such attacks on scientific consensus threaten public confidence in evidence-based information, advice and policy.

In line with the UNESCO Guidelines for Governance of Digital Platforms, a safe and trustworthy Internet can be achieved if tech companies: a) perform human rights due diligence and align the design, promotion and deployment of digital products and services to international human rights principles, b) adhere to standards of transparency and accountability in their operations, as well as of their systems and processes, c) provide users with tools that enhance their control over their engagement with digital products and services.

With the appearance of AI and other emerging technologies, trustworthy and safe engagement with digital services and products will become foundational to the success of digital inclusion efforts. In this landscape, the role of the library as a trusted institution becomes vital to providing access and tools that enable individuals to navigate digital environments in a secure and confident way.

Table 4: Tailored Actions for Targeted Stakeholders

Trust and Safety in the Digital Environment

Targeted Stakeholders	Tailored Actions
Governments and policymakers	▶ Initiate collaboration between governments and industry leaders to develop and enforce standards, in line with International Human Rights Law, that ensure the safety of users in digital environments, particularly the safety of women and girls, as well as that of other groups in situations of vulnerability and marginalisation, in which libraries play a key role in dissemination and implementation of these standards at the community level. ▶ Support library-led digital safety initiatives to raise awareness about misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and the risks of harmful content at a local level, in cooperation with relevant local authorities, working with national library authorities to design such interventions. ▶ Encourage libraries to participate in human rights and due diligence assessments to determine systemic risks and to define and evaluate mitigation measures.
Library partners	▶ Promote digital safety literacy and critical thinking by developing content and materials that empower individuals and communities to make informed decisions. This role extends to educating the public about data protection and safe online practices. ▶ Support national, regional and international level advocacy efforts to protect individuals' privacy and digital rights. Libraries must continue to offer secure and protected access to the Internet for all people. They should reject electronic surveillance and any type of illegitimate monitoring or collection of users' personal data that compromises their privacy

2.5 Preservation of Information Integrity

Information integrity refers to the accuracy, consistency and reliability of information. The UN recently released five global principles both as a priority and a pathway to enhance information integrity during the coming years. These principles envision an information ecosystem that prioritizes societal trust and resilience, healthy incentives, public empowerment, independent, free and pluralistic media, and transparency and research. They are also inextricably tied to UNESCO's Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms.

The Global Digital Compact emphasizes the importance of ensuring information integrity as a critical endeavour to foster an inclusive, open, safe, and secure digital space that respects, protects, and promotes human rights. To achieve this goal, the Compact underscores the need for international cooperation to address the growing challenges of misinformation, disinformation, and online hate speech.

The work of libraries intersects with all of these principles. Libraries historically have understood the need for reliable, verifiable, and accurate information, and they play an active role in delivering it. Therefore, they have much to contribute to any future policy frameworks in this area.

Table 5: Tailored Actions for Targeted Stakeholders

Preservation of Information Integrity

Targeted Stakeholders	Tailored Actions
Governments and policymakers	▶ Initiate and support collaboration between decision-makers, Internet stakeholders, the private sector, and libraries to develop and implement technological solutions that promote information integrity, such as tools for verifying content among other options. ▶ Recognize libraries and library associations as key advisors to states and other stakeholders by offering knowledge and best practices in managing digital assets. This includes assessing the reliability of cloud providers, developing strategies for mitigating risks, and promoting ethical standards in data stewardship. By actively engaging in these areas, librarians can help build more resilient and trustworthy information ecosystems. ▶ Collaborate with research libraries to prevent censorship, for they play a critical role in advocating for laws, policies, and regulations that advance information integrity (e.g. ensuring that research security requirements do not inhibit fundamental research), in alignment with International Freedom of Expression Standards. ▶ Promote open access, open science, open government and open data initiatives, and the adoption of OER, with a view to maximizing not just the availability of information, but also its discoverability and usability. ▶ Advocate for reform to copyright and other laws that hamper libraries' ability to support access to reliable information. ▶ Engage with media and the journalistic community to ensure people can distinguish between reliable from non-reliable information and, in particular, whether information is from a journalistic source or not.

Library partners	▶ Support the principle of open access. Open access enables reusing data, building on the work of others, and advancing the world's knowledge. Quality metadata, applied by librarians, makes this data more easily discoverable.
	▶ Contribute to an evidence-based approach and curation of digital content. Librarians are trained to identify and evaluate information sources that will help people make independent, well-informed decisions about critical issues. Trained staff tends to consider the source, credibility of the author, wider context, and supporting evidence in order to authenticate information.
	▶ Preserve digital archives and establish robust guidelines for due diligence, transparency, and accountability in the use of cloud services in line with UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation concerning the preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage including in digital form. Librarians possess unique expertise in organizing, safeguarding, and providing access to information, making them invaluable contributors to these efforts. Their involvement can help ensure that digital materials remain accessible and secure over time.

2.6 AI and Emerging Technologies

AI and other new technologies possess immense potential in the context of digital inclusion. It can provide tools that simplify access to information, improve personalized learning and many other things, but it can also, unfortunately, deepen the digital divide by making already excluded people invisible in training datasets, due to coded biases and other factors.

UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, adopted in 2021 by all Member States, lays out core principles and key areas for policy actions to promote ethical AI use. UNESCO recommends Member States "to encourage museums, galleries, libraries and archives at the national level to use AI systems to highlight their collections and enhance their libraries, databases and knowledge base, while also providing access to their users".

Ensuring that AI contributes to, rather than detracts from, digital inclusion requires thoughtful planning, human rights and ethical considerations, and active involvement from all sectors of society. Like many other institutions, libraries have developed a strategic response to the challenges and opportunities that are being delivered by AI and are already implementing AI use in documentation centres, collection development, inventory development, curation reference assistance, and many more sectors.

The information in this section may be complemented by another IFLA-IFAP Issue Brief on "Partnering with Libraries on Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence" under development, which will describe the use of a human rights-based approach to AI with the help of libraries.

Table 6: Tailored Actions for Targeted Stakeholders

AI and Emerging Technologies

Targeted Stakeholders	Tailored Actions
Governments and policymakers	▶ Ensure that national library associations collaborate with national and local governments, and that they are included in the development and implementation of cross-sectoral AI programmes and strategies, in line with UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. ▶ Ensure that libraries or library networks have the required infrastructure and technologies[6] to be able to adopt and make use of AI technologies and have the requisite competencies to use AI with an informed and ethical approach. ▶ Refer to the UNESCO IFAP-IFLA Issue Brief on Libraries and Ethical AI for more in-depth policy recommendations for libraries and stakeholders.
Library partners	▶ Support high-quality, ethical AI research. Trained libraries can lend their expertise in data storage and licensing, data quality assessment, and safe and ethical information storage to help researchers address some of the concerns around data and citing AI in their work and research. ▶ Educate users about AI and help them thrive in a world where AI is becoming ever more pervasive, by integrating OER-based AI literacy materials into public learning programmes.

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6   Refer to IFLA's Statement on Libraries and Artificial Intelligence (2020) https://repository.ifla.org/items/8c05d706-498b-42c2-a93a-3d47f69f7646

3. Case Studies

Case study #1:
Library gives rural farmers access to ICT, skills and support to grow their business

"Libraries empower farmers and contribute to improve their socioeconomic conditions " by Nelisiwe Nodada is licensed under CC BY 4.0

In Edenville, a small rural farming community situated in the Free State Province, South Africa, people rely mostly on commercial farming to survive. With support from their local library, farmers were able to increase agricultural production and improve their financial situation to grow their businesses.

In 2013, a group of unemployed young men and women living in the area decided to form a farming cooperative aiming to create employment for themselves and for members of their community. It was the beginning of the Edenville Farming Projects Cooperative (EFPC). The Cooperative, consisting of eight members based in Edenville, leased 386 hectares of land from the municipality and began planting maize and sunflowers. The lease was awarded to the Cooperative on the condition that their progress was to be inspected annually; insufficient development meant the cancellation of the lease.

Among the challenges faced by the Cooperative after acquiring the lands were a lack of technical and business skills, such as ICT proficiency, typing, and marketing, in addition to a lack of knowledge of farming in general.

In order to overcome these obstacles, the local library teamed up with the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) to provide assistance. Initially, the library designed and delivered a computer literacy training programme for farmers, which enabled them to communicate with stakeholders and compile reports and other correspondence.

To this day, the library continues to support the Cooperative by providing space for farmers to hold regular business meetings with other stakeholders, as well as providing access to ICT equipment such as computers and projectors at no cost. Thanks to this work, and that of SEDA to help farmers develop their businesses, there have been noticeable positive results.

One of the farmers, Petrus Moloka, offered his testimony: "*Being unemployed meant that none of us had access to the Internet for accessing things like emails, which we now do. We were able to almost double the number of crops since having Internet access via the library for finding information on the production of sunflower and maize corn. We have learned a lot about marketing which is good for business, and we can communicate with other stakeholders and donors like Agri-SA and submit reports via email*".

Today, the library continues to cooperate with SEDA, for example, they host business training sessions for other agricultural stakeholders. The Cooperative prepares regular presentations about their work using the library's ICT equipment and holds meetings with stakeholder organizations in the library's community hall. Meanwhile, the library has expanded its ICT training classes to other community groups.

Case study #2:
Tunisian library digital skills course promotes opportunities for women

"Women at the computer literacy club " by Erriadh Public Library is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Tunisia faces not only a relatively high illiteracy rate of 19.1% but also a large number of early school leavers. Tunisia has recorded an increase among the total population, from 29.7 % in 2021 to 32.4 % in 2022, according to the European Training Foundation. Connected to this is Tunisia's high unemployment rate, standing at 22.79% for women and 12.55% for men. Much of the problem of early school leaving is concentrated in rural areas of the country.

One such area is the island of Djerba in southern Tunisia. The Erriadh district, in the middle of the island, is home to 14,426 inhabitants according to 2018 census figures. While there are a number of small factories and shops, the district faces similar challenges to other parts of the country. However, it is rich in civil institutions, including a library and other cultural, educational, and social organizations which work together for the benefit of all.

Given its commitment to sustainable development, the Erriadh Public Library has, therefore, sought to help primarily illiterate women develop digital skills by launching a computer literacy club. This initiative is aimed at giving those who have left school without skills a second chance to build their employability by providing them with the knowledge and support to become computer literate. The club placed a particular emphasis on inclusive life-long learning, gender equality, and access to decent jobs and economic development.

There was a specific focus on building partnerships with like-minded organizations such as the National Union of Tunisian Women and the Djerba Solidarity and Development Association. The National Union of Tunisian Women, for example, not only offers training to unemployed women in different fields such as sewing and embroidery but also encourages them to take part in the computer literacy club offered by the library as it may greatly help them in their future careers.

As a result of the conducted lessons, the assessment at the end of the last training sessions showed that 90.62% of the participants passed the course with good grades. Specific outcomes included the advancement of work opportunities, with several participants reporting that they were able to expand their work or that of their family.

4. Conclusion

Libraries with their unique expertise and global infrastructure stand as powerful allies in constructing digitally inclusive information societies. Positioning them at the heart of digital policy should be a top priority for governments, organizations, policy makers and individuals that want to ensure that the benefits of the digital transformation are universal and human centric.

Their catalytic power as powerful intermediaries with global presence, skilled staff and infrastructure is available to everyone who wants to shape a digital future that serves all equally, not just a privileged few.

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