Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries: 2022 annual activity report

The Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries (DC-PAL) has formally operated within the Internet Governance Forum since 2012. It is dedicated to catalyzing action, collecting data and facilitating an exchange of good practices on public access in libraries (and similar facilities) to support digital inclusion. The focus of the DC spans different aspects of the public access practice and policy (e.g. digital literacy, affordability, long-term sustainability, its role in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals, etc.)

In the course of 2022, the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries has continued to bring together institutions and organisations which both see the value of public access – in particular though libraries – as playing a role in the successful achievement of wider internet governance goals, and in exploring how to maximise the inclusiveness and effectiveness of this. Despite a staffing gap reducing our capacity in 2022 (due to be filled shortly), we have nonetheless continued to advance the missions of the Coalition.

In terms of collaborative activities, the Coalition has carried out the following:

The Coalition's **session at the 2022 Internet Governance Forum** (see report) focused on the connection between public access and how to ensure that citizens are able to play an active role in internet governance discussions (i.e. how decisions are made that affect their experience of the internet and all that they do through it).

We heard experiences from Kenya, where projects centred on libraries have made it possible to develop key skills and confidence necessary to use the internet and engage with government, as well as about successful programmes around citizen engagement in Lithuania and Nigeria. We also discussed work taking place in particular in Canada, where libraries partnered with an NGO to ensure that citizens understood the basics of internet governance. We are following up, in 2023, with the network in order to identify examples and lessons from across the DC-PAL membership.

The Coalition also engaged in other sessions, notably those organised by UNESCO around the ROAM-X indicators, highlighting the contribution that public access solutions can make to internet inclusivity, around the world.

The Coalition also finalised its **report on the impacts of public access to the internet** (link). This aims to offer libraries and other stakeholders an easy-to-use overview of recent evidence, good practices, and methodologies for public access impact assessment.

It follows DC-PAL network consultations held in April 2021, which identified evaluation of public access to computers and internet in libraries among priorities for the DC-PAL working agenda for 2021-2022. A first draft was prepared on the basis of inputs provided by Coalition members, and then presented at the 2021 Internet Governance Forum. Subsequently, a consultation across the DC-PAL network in 2022 took place in order to seek comments and improvements, which were subsequently incorporated.

Finally, we held a consultation call in early 2022 looking at potential priorities for future work, inviting along Coalition members. This confirmed interest in work on impacts, and Universal Service and Access Funds (see below).

Work going into 2023 includes the finalisation of efforts currently underway in order to look at how Universal Service and Access Funds (USAFs) are being used to support public access. This is intended to provide insights for other USAFs about how to make best use of public access to achieve their own goals.

We are also commissioning a series of insights into the evolution in what public access means over the 20 years since the importance of public access and public access centres was recognised in the WSIS Plan of Action. This is intended, also, as an opportunity to reconnect with and extend the network.

Concerning activities by different Dynamic Coalition members:

IFLA has continued its work to engage in wider internet governance processes in order to make the voice and priorities of the world's >2.5M libraries and their users heard. It has participated actively in internet governance events, for example running a session on innovation in digital inclusion initiatives at the 2022 WSIS Forum (link), on assessing critically the effectiveness of media literacy programming as a response to fake news at MozFest 2022 (link), and on how to upscale digital rights interventions in libraries at RightsCon 2022 (link). It submitted comments in September on the Global Digital Compact, based on a survey engaging its membership (link), and raised the contribution of libraries to delivering on digital rights at the World Urban Forum (link).

It has also focused on building awareness amongst its members of the different contributions that libraries can make to a people-centred internet, for example with a statement on cybersecurity (link) (focusing both on adoption of good practices, and building skills among users), or through survey work and reporting on specific themes like libraries' role in upholding children's digital rights (link). Finally, it has highlighted good examples at the national level of library engagement in internet governance, such as in Italy (link).

EIFL's work in promoting innovative approaches to making the most of the internet in public libraries continues. The organisation works closely with local libraries and telecommunications ministries and regulators in order to design and implement impactful public access programmes that make a real difference to library users. There has been particularly strong work in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, not just to strengthen connectivity, but also to do more with it though providing hardware, skills and planning. A particular programmes have focused on using the internet to improve skills and employment among women (link).

They have also continued to celebrate the strongest examples from around the world, announcing the winners of the 2022 Public Library Innovation Award (coming from Kenya, Bangladesh and Uganda) (link). These highlighted, in particular, how public access supported education recovery. A call for 2023 award winners took place in 2022, with results due to be announced soon, with a strong focus on helping children benefit from possibilities to play.

Gigabit Libraries Network has emphasised the potential of making the most of new technologies – and in particular Low-Earth Orbit satellite connectivity – in order to establish or strengthen public access. GLN has worked closely with providers and libraries in order to establish pilot projects in the US, and is now looking to globalise this work in countries where the regulatory environment permits. Furthermore, it has continued the series of regular webinars looking at how connected libraries are supporting the recovery from COVID-19, both through sharing practical experiences, and calling on key thinkers from the wider internet governance space.