

Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries: 2023 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.)

Over the course of 2023, the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries has provided a platform for discussion on the role of public access to the internet at the global level, and in particular through libraries. In light of the WSIS+20 and IGF+20 processes (and in particular the 20th anniversary of the inclusion of reference to the importance of public access centres in the original WSIS Action Lines), the work of the Dynamic Coalition in 2023 placed a focus on exploring how public access has evolved over the last two decades.

Within this wider discourse on the evolution of public access, the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries has continued to bring together institutions and organisations that believe in the ongoing value of public libraries for maximising the inclusiveness and effectiveness in efforts to achieve wider internet governance goals, promoting good practice and exploring different aspects of the place of public access in the wider internet governance and sustainable development agendas.

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

A zero draft of the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries' report on 20 years of public access ([download here](#)) was the main output of the Coalition in the past year. It summarises expert views – notably with insights from the Internet Society and UNESCO – on how the nature and place of public access in libraries in wider connectivity strategies has evolved since it was first included in the WSIS Plan of Action in December 2003.

The preliminary findings suggest that public libraries remain relevant to providing public access to the internet, complementing rather than competing with private access, helping to enhance public resilience to shocks, and demonstrating potential as a place for the public to experience new technologies.

As WSIS+20 starts to accelerate, this is an opportunity to evaluate progress against the goals set out in the previous decades, as well as to evaluate the ongoing relevance of public access to the agenda. The final report will be submitted to those negotiating the Global Digital Compact, as well as the IGF+20 and WSIS+20 processes.

The zero-draft was intended to trigger discussion, which informed subsequent Coalition activities, and will continue to be expanded in 2024, drawing on views from both inside and outside of the library field, with a particular emphasis on how public access can represent a pillar of wider strategies for achieving digital inclusion and broader development goals.

Using the zero-draft as a basis, DC-PAL's **session at the 2023 Internet Governance Forum** ([overview here](#)) focussed on exploring how public access has evolved, and what this has meant for its contribution to the goal of a people-centred internet. In light of the imperative for universal meaningful connectivity set out in the Global Digital Compact, as well as the need for clear definitions and an action plan to delivery, this session invited Dynamic Coalition members to share insights into changes over time. It also recognised the importance of public access providers being able to work in ways that fit with the strategies used by other actors in this space.

An expert from **EIFL** showcased challenges and good practices identified in the evolutions of public access report ([link](#)) by comparing the case studies of Canada and Uganda. Speakers from **TASHA**

discussed the state of inclusive connectivity and meaningful access to information via the DA2i report ([link](#)), and speakers from **Gigabit Libraries Network** ([link](#)) shared insight from their network and their commitment to closing the digital divide.

The results of this session fed into follow-up activities on the zero draft of the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries' report.

Work going into 2024 includes expanding the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries report, including by inviting further stakeholder inputs, and further developing the zero draft with additional input and gather additional information that may serve as a complement for the 'Libraries in National Broadband Plans and Policies' & 'Evolutions in Public access' reports.

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. In this engagement, IFLA advocates for policies related to digital cooperation, connectivity, digital inclusion and capacity building to explicitly mention libraries along other public access facilities like schools, hospitals, post offices, and other public institutions.

In 2023, IFLA worked to disseminate the 'Evolutions in Public Access' report ([link](#)) and the report on the Role of Libraries in National Broadband plans and policies ([link](#)) amongst our global network of experts and partners.

IFLA submitted a report to the WSIS Forum on progress made to implement the outcomes of the WSIS ([link](#)) which also served as a space to link to the work of the Dynamic Coalition. This report stresses that libraries have continued to play a pivotal role in the delivery of the wider WSIS agenda by serving as gateways for the population to access information in a more meaningful manner, and that they have been adaptable in the face of societal challenges and new technologies.

Similarly, IFLA submitted a contribution to the UN Global Digital Compact consultation ([link](#)). Among the principles highlighted in IFLA's contribution is the importance of including library connectivity in digital inclusion planning, while also complementing connectivity with efforts to build access to content and skills.

IFLA further advocated for these positions with an intervention at the UN consultation on the Global Digital Compact ([link](#)), and joined Partner2Connect, with pledges to develop work around geolocating libraries and their level of internet connectivity, as well as developing a handbook of examples of how libraries can engage in digital inclusion strategies in different parts of the world.

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.

EIFL wrapped up their project, **Digital skills @ your local library** ([link](#)), which was implemented by EIFL and partners in Uganda from 2021-2023. They carried out an impact survey that asked women and youth who underwent digital skills (ICT) training in public and community libraries how they have been using computers and the internet since the training, where they use the internet, and what role their local library is playing in facilitating ICT use and skills.

The resulting **report** ([link](#)) found that 81% of respondents (330 total) use the computers and the Internet in a public or community library nearly on a daily basis. 94% of respondents reported that the library training significantly improved their ICT skills, which helped improve their academic results and communication, among other benefits.

The Gigabit Libraries Network continued to drive forwards its work to bring together practitioners looking at the intersection of the work of libraries and digital inclusion through regular webinars – these will soon reach their 100th edition, and have already celebrated their fourth anniversary. GLN is also closely engaged in setting up opportunities to test out of the feasibility of Low Earth Orbit satellite connectivity as a means of enabling (better) public access.