What's the impact of libraries?

Libraries respond to multiple societal challenges at the same time - that's an important strength. It also means libraries can work effectively with a diverse set of societal partners.

Let's embrace the full potential of libraries as places where our common future is built.

Enhancing life-long learning in a literate and skilled society

Ensuring access to culture and promoting a rich, diverse cultural ecosystem

Building resilience for crises and disasters

Fostering social cohesion and building communities

Narrowing the digital divide

Improving health and wellbeing

Stimulating economic competitiveness, development, employment and growth

Strengthening the resilience and the functioning of democracy

Contributing to environmental sustainability

Supporting urban and rural development

Call to Action: Let's work together for stronger libraries!

We need coordinated action on the European, national, regional and local level to make libraries future-ready and maximise their impact. Join experts from 32 European countries in asking for these changes.

Embed public libraries in national and regional strategies. Recognise them as **essential infrastructure** with guaranteed free access.

Secure stable **local funding**. Invest for the long term. Make European funding easier to access.

Support Europe's library professionals with continuous training, fair pay, and strong exchange, partnership, and networking opportunities.

Harmonise **data collection**. Build capacity for local libraries to better assess needs.

Invest in modern digital infrastructure and digital staff training. Maintain libraries as **digital innovation centres**.

Ensure everyone has a **welcoming library nearby**: sustainably built or renovated, flexible for community use, with diverse up-to-date collections.

Host an annual '**European Week of Libraries**', inviting all libraries and communities to join in a big celebration to shine a spotlight on the European social network of libraries!

EU public libraries today

Libraries are part of everyday experience of millions of people living in Europe. The European network of libraries deserves recognition as our critical social infrastructure.

170,000 library staff

75,000,000 registered users

67,000 public libraries

750,000,000+ library visits per year

These figures correspond to EU libraries. Other findings in the report refer to a broader network of European libraries.

Libraries at the heart of Europe

This infographic is based on the report **Strengthening Europe through public libraries**, by the *OMC* (Open Method of Coordination) expert group. We encourage you to read the report and join forces with others shaping the future of European libraries, whether as library professionals, policy makers, community leaders or people using and loving libraries.

Libraries for Europe

powered by European Cultural Foundation

How is the role of libraries changing?

The four metaphors below illustrate different ways in which libraries serve their communities. We hope they can help us better understand and leverage the role of libraries in addressing societal challenges.

Laboratory

A buzzing space where new ideas, skills and projects are developed, stimulating curiosity and advancing circular economy

Libraries are spaces for experimentation and innovation. Makerspaces, 3D printers, digitisation tools, traditional craft and design courses, repair workshops, and even seed or plant exchanges provide opportunities for hands-on learning and creative exploration.

Marketplace

A communal space where exchange of knowledge, ideas and culture takes place on a daily basis

Unlike a traditional marketplace, knowledge and culture is not bought or sold, but shared as a commons – an inexhaustible, collective resource. Library professionals bring together people of all ages, genders, and cultures, enabling exchange and peaceful, respectful coexistence.

Sanctuary

A space of retreat providing safety, comfort and focus, a welcoming community and a familiar 'third place' without obligations

By combining accessibility with privacy, libraries enable self-organisation, personal growth, and opportunities that may not be available at home, school, or work. They also provide a safe space for vulnerable groups, offering protection, access to emergency services or confidential guidance.

Hub

A space that can become what the community or individual needs it to be, built on deep local knowledge and relationships

Libraries act as dynamic hubs, connecting communities with diverse partners and using their spaces flexibly to respond to changing needs. They can become exhibition spaces, voting stations, and so much more. Thanks to mobile units and outreach initiatives, you can also meet librarians beyond the library walls!

Meet the people making it happen

Libraries are changing thanks to the adaptability and expertise of library professionals. What are the typical roles librarians play?

Community-Builder

"When strangers meet in a library, community begins."

Storyteller

"If people can see themselves in stories, they find their place in society."

Guide

"In a world full of noise, my job is to lead people to what they can trust."

Facilitator

"A library only comes alive when people start doing things together."

Protector

"Free access to knowledge isn't a luxury—it's a democratic necessity."

Catalyst

"Give people space, tools, and curiosity, and they'll surprise you."

Motivator

"Sometimes all people need is encouragement— and a place that believes in them."