Invitation to contribute to a European reply to the report "The Age of Digital Interdependence"

Response from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

In its capacity as the global organisation for libraries and library associations, IFLA works extensively with libraries and associations in Europe, alongside other major regions. Based on IFLA's experiences cooperating with both library and public sector institutions in Europe, we would like to take this opportunity to contribute to the European reply to the report "Age of Digital Interdependence".

We would like to thank EuroDIG for their efforts in initiating this call for contributions and preparing a European response to this landmark report. We would also like to express gratitude to the UN Secretary-General for initiating the creation of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, and thank the High-Level Panel for their dedicated work in preparing this report.

Libraries have a longstanding interest in pursuing inclusive and well-functioning digital and technological advancement. We look forward to a continued dialogue that aims to realise the benefits and address the challenges of an increasingly digitalised society. Please see below the initial comments of IFLA on the report "The Age of Digital Interdependence".

ON DIGITAL SKILLS AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

Paragraphs 40 through 42 of the section "Supporting Marginalised Groups and Measuring Inclusiveness" discuss some key barriers to meaningful access, including affordability, accessibility, the gender divide, and the lack of relevant local content for indigenous populations. It is also important to acknowledge skills and literacies as a crucial barrier between internet/digital access and use.

For example, the 2018 After Access survey shows that not knowing how to use the internet is a bigger barrier to internet use in Latin America than associated costs or lacking access to a device. Similarly, ITU's 2018 Measuring the Information Society Report points out that digital skills are key in determining if people can meaningfully benefit from ICT and internet access.

This points to an important link between recommendations 1.A and 1.C. While digital skills training may be highly relevant to (and could be included in) efforts recommended in 1.C (targeting women and traditionally marginalized groups), digital literacy training may also be needed for many first-time users and newly connected people that recommendation 1.A envisions. Many libraries seek to address this by offering digital literacy training and assistance. There are intervention programmes that target vulnerable or marginalized groups, but many digital literacy learning opportunities in libraries are open to everyone, helping to ensure that people do not feel labelled or stigmatised.

As such, it is important to address the digital skills and literacy needs of the next billion(s) alongside connectivity access and affordability, as suggested in recommendation 1A. We would therefore propose that digital literacy efforts be incorporated in both recommendations 1A and 1C.

Investment in digital skills and literacy would also be crucial to raising public awareness of both the benefits and risk of digital technologies, and inviting public participation in a meaningful and inclusive policy dialogue about such technologies. This implies that action on digital literacy also contributes to some of the recommendations concluding the "Human and Institutional Capacity" chapter.

Digital health and financial resources

To provide an example, recommendation 1.A highlights access to digital finance and health services. In these use cases, access alone may not be sufficient, and many new users can benefit from assistance and/or training. For example, the OECD PISA 2018 Financial Literacy report points out that new digital financial services can expose people to new risks, highlighting the importance of relevant financial literacy efforts. Similarly, the WHO Resolution on Digital Health urges to build digital skills to enable people to access and trust digital health solutions.

Many libraries strive to address these needs. For example, the financial literacy programmes in the 'Lyuben Karavelov' Regional Library in Bulgaria include access to digital financial services. The Digital Health Literacy Program in Bundaberg Regional Libraries in Australia helps participants develop relevant skills to make use of digital health services. This ranges from navigating health information online to telehealth communication. In fact, the 2014 Digital Inclusion Survey showed that over 50% of libraries in the US help patrons find and assess health information online and provide access to subscription-based online health databases.

This shows the demand for assistance and capacity-building when it comes to digital health and financial services. Developing relevant digital literacies and skills would help ensure that new users make informed and safe choices in using these services. Different libraries around the world strive to address this gap, and further efforts and support are needed.

ON CREATING A DIGITAL PUBLIC GOODS PLATROFM

As highlighted in the "Development and Access to Information" series of reports, IFLA strongly supports the view that access to information is crucial to achieving the SDGs. This link is implicitly also part of the reasoning behind the High Level Panel's report's proposal to create a pooled platform of public digital goods – at the very least, this applies to digital content, "from data to educational curricula".

Libraries have a long experience of working to make information in digital formats more widely available, pursuing both cultural and educational objectives that span several SDGs. This includes the various collaborations between libraries and Wikimedia communities. Based on these experiences, one suggestion for a prospective digital public goods platform would be to build on the work carried out in the digital knowledge commons area. Digital knowledge commons projects like Wikimedia Commons and Open Street Map encourage non-proprietary data access, sharing and maintenance by design.

We would therefore suggest that efforts to build a digital public goods platform, as suggested in recommendation 1B, draw and build on the work of various digital knowledge commons projects, and in particular of the resources already made available through libraries.

In addition, when it comes to data as digital public goods, we would like to reiterate the importance of ethical data collection, retention and use practices which paragraphs 22-25 and recommendation 1B touch upon. In using data to achieve the SDGs, privacy and ethical guidelines are particularly important in the light of such challenges as insufficient or ineffective data anonymization, or racial and gender biases in datasets. One example is the privacy concerns raised about the Aadhaar system associated with the India Stack project mentioned in paragraph 31.

ON BUILDING TRUST

Paragraph 3 of the "Trust and Social Cohesion" chapter points out the role of the generation and promotion of misinformation online in eroding societal trust. As explained in the IFLA statement on 'fake news', attempts to regulate misinformation online can risk being deeply harmful to freedom of expression. In the light of this, we welcome the report's suggestion that "training on assessing information credibility and sources" could provide a solution.

Media and information literacy educational programmes can offer a solution which builds up critical thinking competencies and fits into the UN 2030 Agenda targets on education. This is also one of the measures suggested in the 2017 Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda.

Paragraph 12 of the "Trust and Social Cohesion" chapter suggests that information literacy training should be incorporated into educational systems and offered to students. However, in promoting information literacy, it would also be important to reach many other target groups and society at large. For example, as the report states in chapter 3.1 paragraph 5, older people can be

more vulnerable to online misinformation. **We would therefore suggest expanding the recommendation in chapter 3.2 paragraph 12 to refer to other target groups alongside students, and to include a more diverse set of learning opportunities (including both formal, non-formal and informal adult education).**

The IFLA guidelines on information literacy in lifelong learning, for example, include assessment strategies, key theories, instruction management and other practical suggestions on effectively delivering such training. The lack of participation barriers in libraries also makes them well-suited to reach the most vulnerable and at-risk populations. The 2016 European Parliament report on libraries and media literacy spells out recommendations on the best way to implement such literacy efforts in libraries.

We therefore suggest highlighting information literacy efforts as crucial in reversing the deterioration of societal trust, and invite governments to draw on the experience of the library and information sector to extend such efforts to the population.

ON THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ENTERPRISES IN PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS ONLINE

As paragraphs 7 and 8 of the chapter "Human Rights and Human Agency" reiterate, universal human rights apply online as well as offline. We welcome the view that, in working to address human rights violations online, social media companies should work with human rights experts, civil society and governments (Recommendation 3B).

As far as social media companies could in the future consider content moderation (particularly content moderation at scale and algorithmic moderation) among the possible tools to address violations (especially to prevent human rights violations), adequate safeguards for freedom of expression should to be in place. It is absolutely clear that some instances of free speech online are unacceptable and illegal. Yet it is important that the response to these violations, in this case from media companies, is both transparent and proportionate, and minimises the damage to the rights of others. It would also need to avoid such issues as algorithmic deletion of evidence of human rights violations.

Based on this, we would suggest that efforts carried out by social media enterprises to address human rights violations (including potential violations) need to be implemented with due care to avoid negative externalities, such as the loss of evidence of human rights violations or chilling effects on intellectual freedom of others.

ON LIFELONG LEARNING

Paragraphs 7-8 in the chapter "Rethinking How We Work and Learn" refer to the importance of lifelong learning in helping people adapt to possible labor market changes in the digital age. In searching for lifelong learning solutions that are both affordable and accessible to all, libraries can provide one possible solution.

Libraries frequently work to offer lifelong learning opportunities, including the key competencies the report highlights: digital literacy, information literacy, and various soft skills. Some of the documented efforts deliberately aim to help users improve their employment chances.

As such, partnerships with libraries can be a resource-efficient way for governments to deliver such training. **We would therefore encourage the report to include the library and information sector in the list of stakeholders which can play a role in delivering lifelong learning, as described in paragraph 7 of the chapter "Rethinking How We Work and Learn".**