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

Background information about the DC

The Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries (DC-PAL) has been working within the Internet Governance Forum platforms since 2012. The Coalition facilitates action and policy dialogue to leverage public access – shared, low-or no-cost access to the internet and ICT in libraries and similar facilities – to power digital inclusion.

Similarly, the DC is a hub for learning and exchange around the ways public access solutions are leveraged to support key policy goals in the information society – including digital skills-building, equitable access to digital content, sustainable development, employment and education, and others.

Activities conducted in the past year

a) Activities within the IGF

At the hybrid 2021 IGF, DC-PAL hosted a session on the way public access can power and support community-level models of inclusion and development. The session benefitted from a wide range of perspectives offered by the invited guest speakers and participants – both in terms of sectors and geographical regions. It highlighted a range of existing good practices and local digital inclusion solutions, as well as some possible pathways to innovating public access delivery, and its broader roles in the community - e.g. as both a primary and secondary source of community access, emergency connectivity and backup during crises, etc. The session report details the key discussions and findings from the session.

DC-PAL also participated in the 2021 *DC Main Session*, reflecting on the connections between the Coalition's work and the IGF 2021 issue areas. As part of broader DC coordination, DC-PAL submitted a response to the 2021 survey collecting information about the history, organisation, work, and key outputs and achievements of the DCs.

Coalition members have also continued to engage with IGF platforms and activities individually – e.g. the *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions* hosted a session at the 2021 *Asia-Pacific Internet Governance Forum*, focusing on regional experiences with public access-based digital skills building.

b) *Activities beyond the IGF*

Members of DC-PAL collaborated with *Biblioteka Śląska* in Katowice to organise a hybrid bilateral learning and exchange meeting between Polish and international library field representatives working in the field of digital inclusion. The event took place the day after, and built on, the discussions at the annual DC-PAL IGF session - to explore the role of libraries and public access in helping build people-centred connectivity.

Prioritising user perspectives and putting people at the heart of connectivity strategies has been highlighted as a priority by a range of key stakeholders in the internet governance field in 2021. In light of this, the bilateral meeting offered interested stakeholders an opportunity to compare notes and learnings from their own library-based initiatives which target different

elements of people-centred connectivity (e.g. affordability, digital literacy and equitable access to relevant content). Examples include, for instance, the [work of the Information Society Development Foundation in Poland](#), the ['Digital literacy and inclusion through libraries in Uganda](#)' project, and the [S.U.R.E](#). media literacy campaign in Singapore.

Other examples of the work of individual DC-PAL members to expand the knowledge and good practice base in the area of universal access and meaningful connectivity include:

- *Gigabit Libraries Network* in collaboration with SpaceX's Starlink started a pilot of a low earth orbit (LEO) satellite broadband system in three libraries in USA, as a way to improve connectivity for remote and most difficult to reach communities.
- *Electronic Information for Libraries* (EIFL) continued capacity-building for librarians to support digital transformation, through training-of-trainers activities and advocacy for public access connectivity in Uganda, also by developing and promoting supporting resources, such as '[Foundational Digital and Mobile Skills: Trainer's Guide for Public and Community Libraries](#)', '[Digital Research Literary Training Programme Outline](#)' for trainers and facilitators.
- The *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions* (IFLA) has continued its work to support advocacy, create easy-to-use resources and engagement opportunities for global library field members, and data collection around library-based public access as a tool to build a more equitable and inclusive digital environment: e.g. around [digital rights](#), [media literacy](#), [online safety and wellbeing](#), and others.

c) *Any outputs produced and/or research/studies conducted*

DC-PAL has expanded and finalised its [2-part report on the role of libraries in broadband policies](#). The first section of the paper is scoping analysis of state-level broadband policies which seek to engage libraries – highlighting the range of policy goals behind such engagement, and the policy mechanisms leveraged to help libraries achieve these objectives. The second section focuses on policies seeking to leverage public access in libraries for digital inclusion, and presents a series of country-level case studies detailing how these have been implemented in practice, their outcomes, and lessons learned.

DC-PAL also presented a new draft report in 2021, *[Impacts of Public Access in Libraries](#)*. The report reviews recent published evidence around usage patterns and the extent of impacts and benefits which public access facilities generate. This includes, for instance, national and local-level library data documenting which user groups tend to take advantage of public access services more often, people's reasons for using these facilities, and what purposes they are most often used for (ranging from job-seeking to learning to personal communications). These also offer information on documented impacts of public access (e.g. in terms of improved learning outcomes, creative projects completed, social cohesion, etc.) and value-added services it enables.

The second chapter of the report outlines a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches to capturing and estimating the impacts of public access. It illustrates the types of information and insights which can be drawn from different data sources. For instance, data from public access providers can offer insights on the infrastructure, broad user traffic patterns, and the range of value-added services offered. Meanwhile, data capturing user perspectives can help understand public access benefits and impacts, as well as more granular use patterns – e.g. frequency and purposes, motivation, or the demographic markup and digital skills levels of

users. Non-user and general population surveys can help gain insights on, inter alia, perceptions and the broader context of public access impacts – while a range of established methods have been employed to estimate the economic value generated by public access.

d) *Updates on internal processes*

The working draft has been distributed through the DC-PAL mailing list, which remains the key platform for outreach and announcements among the coalition members. A dedicated working group drafting this year's substantive paper met and coordinated through conference calls throughout the year.

Following the release of the working draft in December 2021, DC-PAL is holding an open consultation period until 15 February, where all coalition members and other interested stakeholders are invited to send feedback or suggest further additions and changes to the report – or to get involved in the initiative in another manner.

In addition, in April 2021, DC-PAL piloted a small-scale agenda-setting consultation to define key priorities and tasks for the year. The consultation was open to all DC-PAL members, as well as other stakeholders interested in public access and internet governance. To offer flexible channels for participation, the consultation gave interested stakeholders the option to submit their suggestions and ideas via a short survey and/or by attending an open online meeting. The results of this agenda-setting consultation determined the focus of DC-PAL 2021 thematic paper, as well as other short- and middle-term priorities for DC-PAL.

Priorities/objectives for the following year

 DC-PAL priorities for 2022 include (but are not limited to):

- expanding the DC-PAL network and exploring more approaches to facilitating active engagement;
- finalising the *Impacts of Public Access in Libraries* report;
- building up evidence-gathering and policy dialogue around ways to effectively leverage public access to meet current connectivity and digital inclusion needs – including ideas and recent developments communicated during the 2021 IGF DC-PAL session.