



International
Federation of
Library
Associations and Institutions

10 years of the IFLA open access statement: a call to action

Full and immediate free access to research outputs and publications ensures that everyone - including researchers, policy makers, citizens, scientists, and the public - has the data, evidence, and knowledge they need to address societal, environmental, and global challenges. *Open access* (OA) moves research towards the goal of full access by removing paywalls and broadening global access across disciplines. OA seeks to make research globally available and discoverable for the long-term and not only in times of crisis.

IFLA defines open access in its 2011 statement¹ that in turn endorses the Budapest Open Access Initiative definition². IFLA recognizes and supports that the open distribution of scholarship needs to be more inclusive of marginalized research communities and actively foster bibliodiversity through a range of models, languages, and means of publishing.

This 2022 document reviews the steps taken towards the vision articulated by IFLA in 2011 and identifies new areas in need of urgent action. Libraries provide critical support for the development of open access as a societal good. Libraries are uniquely positioned to support the equitable and inclusive development of publishing opportunities, including serving as infrastructure for publishing initiatives and educating authors about pathways for publishing their works open access.

Recalling IFLA's statement on libraries and intellectual freedom³ now, when misinformation and disinformation have become significant obstacles to the sharing of facts and information, open access enables people to realise their right to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" as outlined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

OA supports access to quality research that informs the public and broadens the evidence base for policy reform, it makes information available that supports decision making in everyday life, medicine, agriculture, and other pursuits. OA also makes a significant contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals including target 16.10 which seeks to, "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements". Furthermore, OA should be viewed as a means of addressing 'information poverty' which identifies gaps in information skills and is, "further characterized by a lack of essential information and a poorly developed information infrastructure."⁴ OA ensures fair and equitable access to information which is integral to the information society.

¹ IFLA Statement on Open Access (2011) Clarifying IFLA's position and strategy
<https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/2030>

² "By 'open access' to this [research] literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution and the only role for copyright in this domain should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited."
<https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/boai15-1>

³ IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom (1999)
<https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1424>

⁴ Britz, J. J. (2004). To Know or not to Know: A Moral Reflection on Information Poverty. *Journal of Information Science*, 30(3), 192–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551504044666>

OA is much more effective when principles of inclusivity and equality including respect for indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, regional participation, and multilingualism are adopted. OA is underpinned by policies and infrastructure respecting the FAIR Principles to ensure that research is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable.

In turn, OA is part of and makes an essential contribution to the larger movement towards Open Science⁵ that seeks to broaden access to all parts of the scientific research process. OA is therefore not only about equitable access to information but also about inclusive and equitable participation in the global research and scholarly communication system. Investment in skills, infrastructure, and internet connectivity are essential to ensure that everyone has the skills needed to access information, and so that research is discoverable and preserved for future generations.

Some 20+ years into the OA movement, urgent action and not words is needed. The COVID-19 pandemic and other health, economic, and social crises have shown both the critical need for OA in all disciplines of research, and the barriers that still prevent it becoming a reality.

To date, IFLA has taken action to:

- Promote OA to international organisations. IFLA has engaged with the United Nations, World Bank and others to promote the adoption of OA policies by Intergovernmental Organisations⁶
- The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a major area of focus for IFLA and libraries worldwide. IFLA successfully advocated for the inclusion of universal literacy and access to information (encompassing open access and other forms of access) in Goal 16.10. The SDGs provide an important platform to advance OA that goes beyond access to government information, and considers the impact of other types of information
- Transition IFLA conference papers to OA, and some of its publishing arrangements

IFLA and its members will take further action to:

- Raise awareness about the rights-based dimensions of OA and how it contributes to intellectual freedom and freedom of expression through the work of IFLA's Advisory Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression, submissions to UN processes, and national advocacy
- Advocate at an international level including rights retention in favour of researchers and their institutions, permissive licensing practices, and sustainable business models that reflect OA mandates and laws, the role of public, trusted knowledge in society, bibliodiversity and the need for diverse routes to OA in a highly-constrained budgetary environment so that outcomes are equitable for libraries and their users
- Build partnerships and coalitions with other organisations and utilise existing advocacy opportunities to advance these positions, reflecting the alignment of OA with other issues including information poverty, media and information literacy, open government, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and copyright reform
- Collaborate to promote sustainable investment in the infrastructure underpinning OA
- Lead by example, and complete the transition of IFLA's publications to OA in 2022⁷

⁵ It is acknowledged that other terms including Open Research and Open Scholarship are preferred in some regions and communities

⁶ IFLA Statement on Open Access in Intergovernmental Organisations (2019)
<https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1207>

⁷ Or at the time of the next renegotiation of IFLA's contract with de Gruyter