

Regional Library Fields by the Data – an Overview

This paper offers an overview of data from the [IFLA Library Map of the World \(LMW\)](#), aggregated at the regional level¹. The idea is to give a sense of the insights that this can give us, and that can potentially stimulate discussions about the diversity that exists in library fields around the world. This can feed into discussions both around priorities for different parts of the world, as well as what types of support and coordination may be useful.

Data on the Library Map of the World is not complete. Not every country provides information about all library types, or all indicators under this, such as staff, connectivity, loans and beyond. As such, it is not meaningful to provide analysis in all areas, but rather in those where there is enough data to work with. Even in those areas where there is some data, it is not certain that this is complete, meaning that the averages provided here may well underestimate numbers of libraries and librarians. We hope that by publishing this analysis, we will provide an incentive to provide more complete data for the Map.

The report provides data on the following questions:

1. How many people are there per public or community library?
2. How many people are there per public or community library worker?
3. What is the share of public/community library users in the population?
4. How many public/community library workers are there per library?
5. What share of public/community libraries offer internet access?
6. How many people are there per academic librarian ?
7. How many researchers are there per academic librarian?
8. How many academic librarians are there per institution?

1. People per Public or Community Library

First, we look at the number of people that each public or community library has to serve. This is done by comparing LMW data on public libraries with population data from the World Bank. It provides an indicator of the density of the public library network – i.e. how present they are able to be in communities.

Globally, each public or community library on average services 15 230

Table 1: people per public or community library

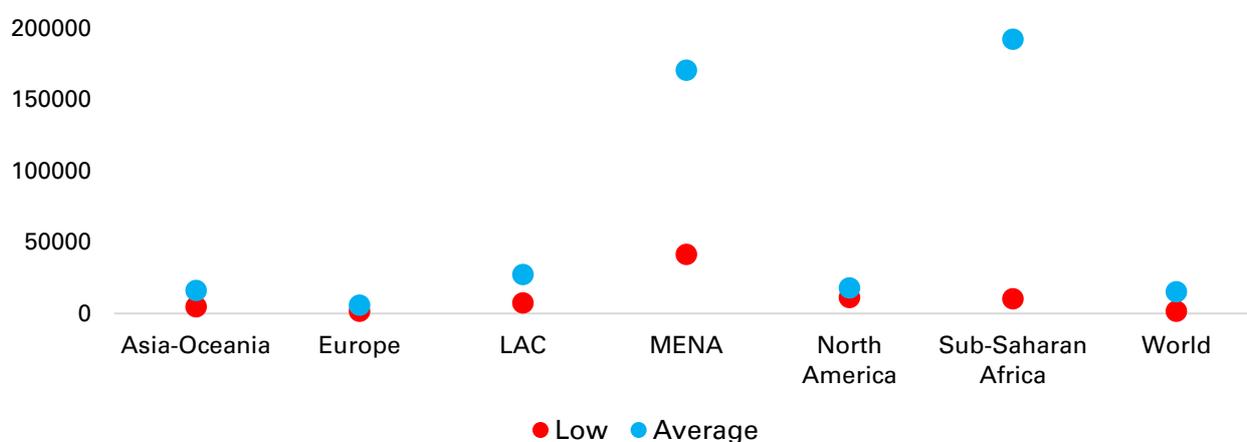
	Low	Average	High
Asia-Oceania	4842.54	16244	523787
Europe	1723.33	5884	265294
LAC	7454	27414	1541511
MENA	41602	170855	852258
North America	11332	18032	19347
Sub-Saharan Africa	10487	192463	1632054
World	1723.33	15230	1632054

¹ The regions used are the same as those covered by IFLA's own Regional Divisions – Asia-Oceania, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, and North America

people. However, this varies strongly between regions, going from less than 6000 people on average in Europe to over 170 000 people in the MENA region and over 190 000 in Sub-Saharan Africa.

We also provide data for the highest and lowest averages – for example the Czech Republic has one public or community library for every 1723 people, while there are plenty of countries where there is only one public library per 200 000 people or more, at least according to the data we have. Digging into individual data, we see differences – for example in North America, there is a big gap between the US and Canada, where libraries serve on average 19 347 and 11 400 people respectively.

Graph 1: People per Public or Community Library per Region



2. People per Public or Community Librarian

Following on from the above, it's also worth looking at the number of people that each public or community librarian is expected to serve. This may even be more meaningful, given that it is library and information workers who are essential to delivering on libraires' potential.

Looking at the data, we can see that on average, globally, each public or community librarian (taken as shorthand for library and information workers) serves just under 9000 people.

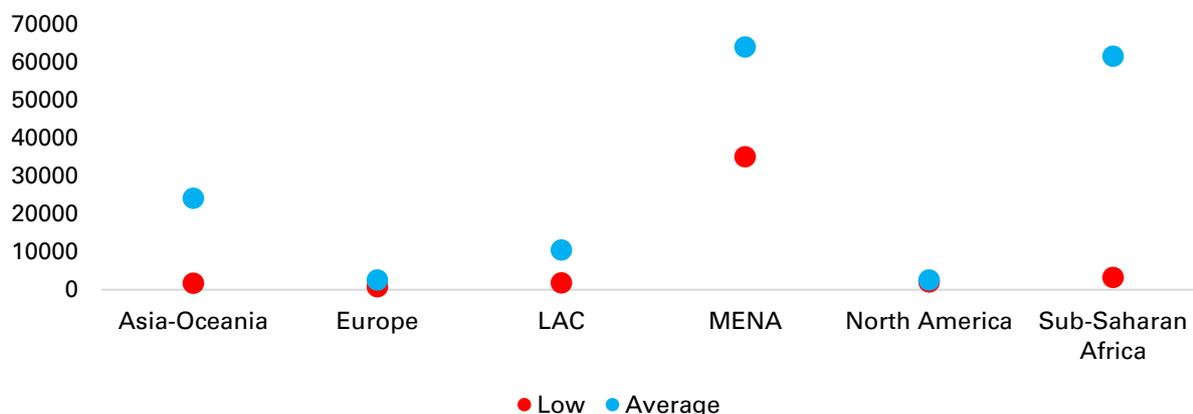
The lowest average regionally is Europe, where there is a public librarian for every 2 607 people (with North America only a little behind, on 2620 people), while the MENA and Sub-Saharan regions have the fewest librarians; here, there is only one public or community librarian for every over 60 000 people. Within regions, we can see that the highest share of librarians in the population tends to be in former Soviet states,

Graph 2: People per Public/Community Librarian

	Low	Average	High
Asia-Oceania	1826.08	24196.12	760725.4
Europe	832.23	2607.14	70745.19
LAC	1867.46	10578.91	484338.9
MENA	35164.29	64214.20	240380.5
North America	2098.56	2620.03	19348.86
Sub-Saharan Africa	3335.33	61760.17	6444788
World	832.23	8975.44	6444788

with all of Armenia, Moldova and Lithuania having more than one public librarian per 1000 people. At the same time, there are also counties where each librarian serves over half a million people.

Graph 2: People per Public or Community Librarian



3. Public and Community Library Users in the Population

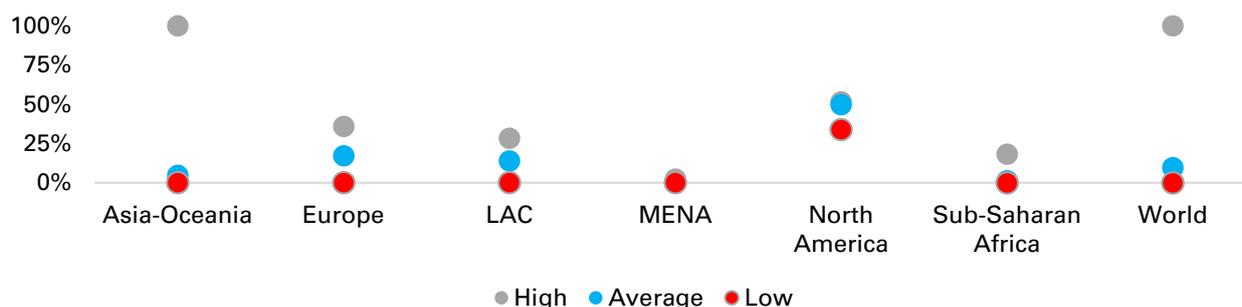
Another relevant indicator for public and community libraries is what share of the population is a registered user.

Table 3: Share of Public/Community Library Users in the Population

	High	Average	Low
Asia-Oceania	100.00%	4.77%	0.02%
Europe	35.84%	17.27%	0.06%
LAC	28.43%	13.94%	0.06%
MENA	2.28%	0.15%	0.09%
North America	51.55%	49.69%	33.82%
Sub-Saharan Africa	18.28%	1.25%	0.01%
World	100.00%	9.61%	0.01%

The data here is more variable, but based on what we have, we can see that just under 10% of the world population is registered with a public or community library. The average varies from almost half in North America to 0.15% in MENA. At the country level, there are some countries which report that everyone is a registered library unit, while in other countries, only 1 in every 10 000 people is registered.

Graph 3: Share of Population Registered at a Public or Community Library



4. Public and Community Library Workers per Public/Community Library

We can get a further sense of how public and community library fields are structured by looking at how many people on average are working at each institution.

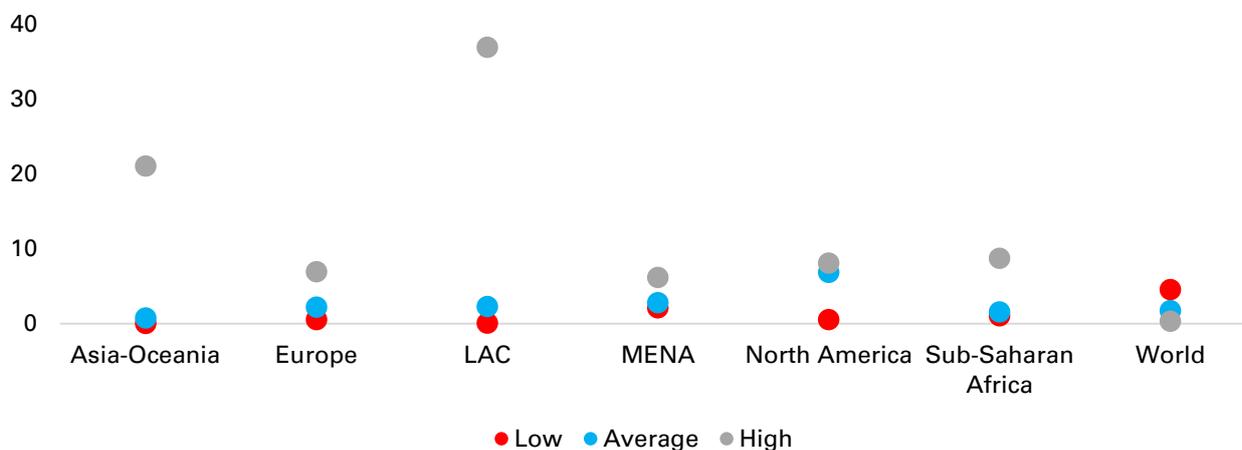
Table 4 and Graph 4 provide an overview of this, showing that at a global library, each public or community library has on average 1.77 staff. At the regional level, this varies from 0.8 per library in Asia-Oceania to 6.88 per library in North America. There is a relatively similar average number of staff per library in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, while Sub-Saharan Africa is closer to the global mean.

Table 4: Public/Community Library Workers per Institution

	Low	Average	High
Asia-Oceania	0.06	0.80	21.10
Europe	0.58	2.25	7.00
LAC	0.13	2.32	37.00
MENA	2.15	2.86	6.23
North America	0.59	6.88	8.13
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.08	1.61	8.79
World	0.06	1.77	37.00

We also share data for the lowest and highest numbers per library. There are clearly some extreme results in here, but it is interesting to see the gap in Latin America and the Caribbean, running from 0.13 (Paraguay) to 37 in Antigua and Barbuda, where the public library also serves as a national library. Similarly, there is a big gap between the averages for Canada (0.59) and the United States (8.13).

Graph 4: Public/Community Library Workers per Institution



5. Public Libraries Offering Internet Access

The Library Map of the World includes data on the number of libraries offering internet access. Not all countries provide data on this, alongside the number of public and community libraries, and so we need to work with a smaller subset of countries. Nonetheless, it offers some useful data.

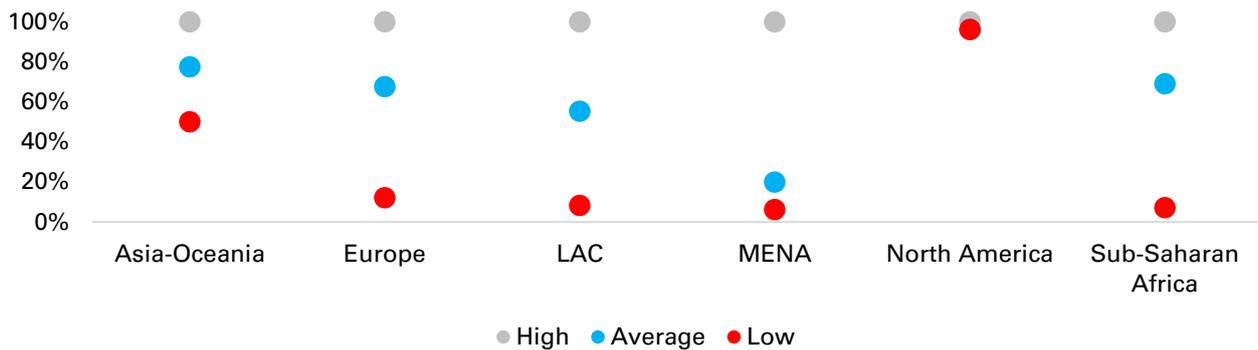
On average, we can see that almost 70% of public and community libraries, where data is available, do offer internet access. The figure ranges from over 96% in North America to barely 20% in the MENA region.

Looking within regions, each one has one or more countries where all public and community libraries offer internet access. Meanwhile, at least among the countries for which we have data, the lowest share of libraries offering such access is in Asia-Oceania, with just 50%, but the LAC, MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa regions all have countries where fewer than 10% of libraries offer access. Interestingly, within Europe too, there are still countries with very low shares of libraries allowing people to go online.

Table 5: Share of Public Libraries Offering Internet Access

	High	Average	Low
Asia-Oceania	100%	77.62%	50.22%
Europe	100%	67.69%	12.23%
LAC	100%	55.44%	8.33%
MENA	100%	20.05%	6.25%
North America	100%	96.18%	96.17%
Sub-Saharan Africa	100%	69.14%	7.24%

Graph 5a: Share of Public Libraries Providing Internet Access

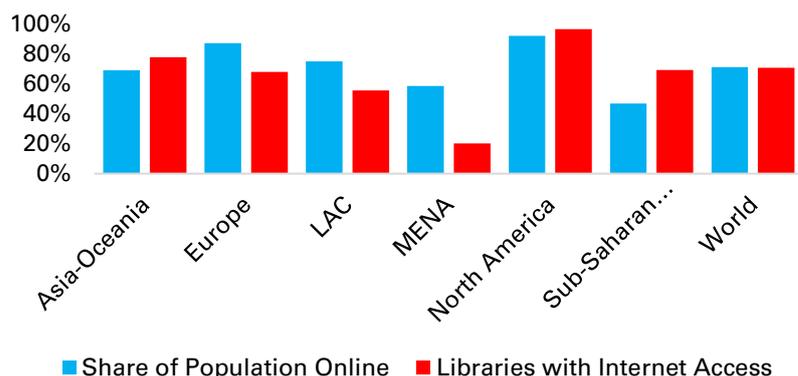


It is interesting to compare this data with overall data on the share of the population considered to be online (Graph 5b)(although this is a low bar – it refers to the share of the population which has been online in the past month).

The data relates only to the countries where we have both data on libraries and wider internet access, so the data will vary from global figures.

For example, here, we can see that the overall share of people online, and of libraries connected to the internet, is quite similar. Meanwhile, in Asia-Oceania, North America

Graph 5b: Online Population vs Public/Community Libraries Offering Internet Access



and Sub-Saharan Africa, a larger share of libraries offer internet access than the share of the population using the internet. The reverse is true in other regions, with a particular difference in the MENA region.

6. People per Academic Librarian

Turning to the academic library sector, we can look at the share of academic librarians in the population. It makes more sense potentially to look at this, given that the way in which academic libraries are organised varies strongly from country to country and region to region (although see below for more on this).

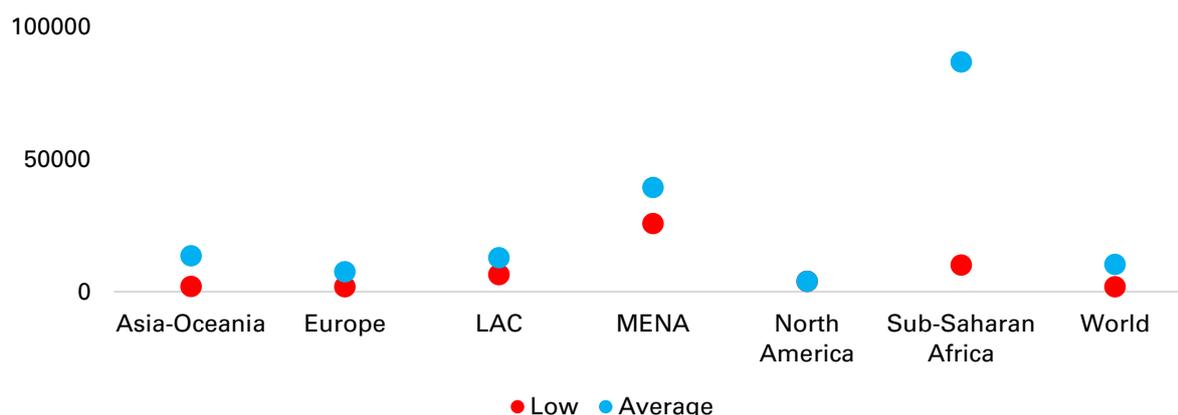
Looking at the data for countries where data is available, there is one academic librarian (library and information worker) for every 10 384 people on average. This varies from one for every 3964 people in North America to one for every 86 676 people in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Asia-Oceania and Europe, there are countries with more than one academic librarian per 2000 people, but also situations where there is fewer than one librarian per 1.5 million people, at least on available data.

Table 6: People per Academic Librarian

	Low	Average	High
Asia-Oceania	1962.197	13594	676174.6
Europe	1860.903	7513	203835.1
LAC	6455.199	12803	109248.1
MENA	25757.74	39321	1531664
North America	3886.645	3964	56661
Sub-Saharan Africa	10100.18	86676	1574986
World	1860.903	10384	1574986

Graph 6: People per Academic Librarian



7. Researchers per Academic Librarian

It is also possible to use World Bank Data for the number of researchers in the population and compare this with the number of academic library workers to get a sense of the relative size of the academic library and research sectors. While not all

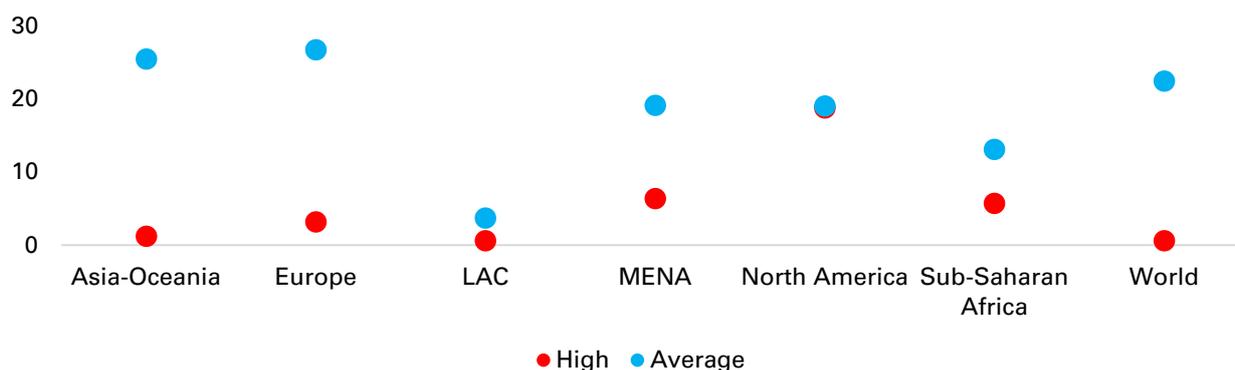
researchers are based in universities, this does give an idea of how well-supported the research sector is by librarians.

The data here shows that on average, there are 22.42 researchers for every academic librarian worldwide. Regional averages range from just 3.7 researchers per librarian in Latin America and the Caribbean, to 26.69 per librarian in Europe. At the national level, the lowest number of librarians per researcher is in Colombia (0.6), while Finland seems to have the highest at over 354 researchers pre librarian. Of course, these data also are affected by the broader research-intensity of economies.

Table 7: Researchers per Academic Librarian

	High	Average	Low
Asia-Oceania	1.235892	25.42	225.384
Europe	3.186695	26.69	354.48
LAC	0.603956	3.70	18.58196
MENA	6.382644	19.08	21.58446
North America	18.7384	18.98	21.5544
Sub-Saharan Africa	5.695613	13.08	43.85543
World	0.603956	22.42	354.48

Graph 7: Researchers per Academic Librarian



8. Academic Librarians per Academic Library

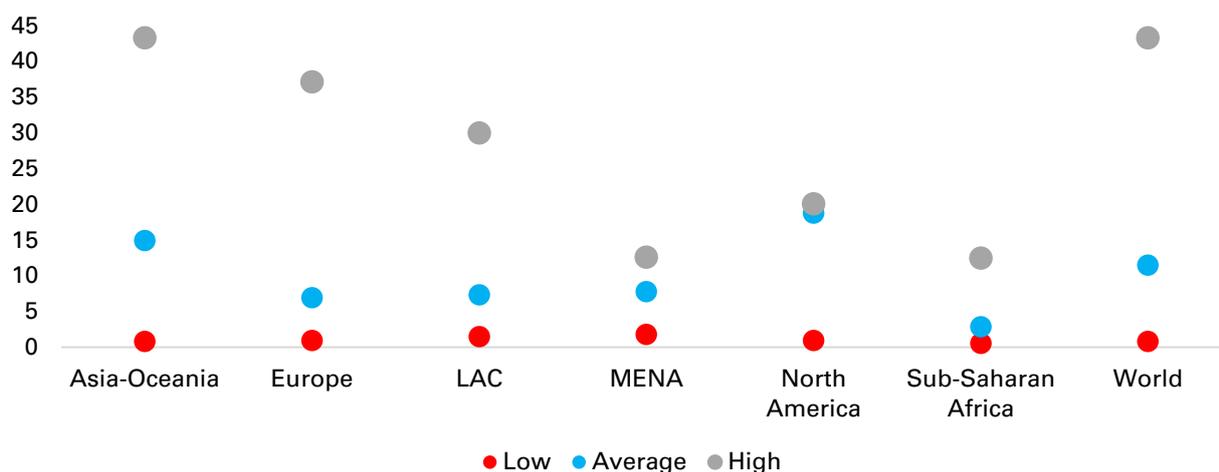
As highlighted above, the differences in the way in which academic libraries are structured means that it does not make so much sense to look at how many people there are per library. However, we can explore these different structures by exploring how many librarians there are per institution.

Table 8: Academic Librarians per Institution

	Low	Average	High
Asia-Oceania	0.86	14.96	43.33333
Europe	0.998498	6.97	37.14286
LAC	1.52	7.35	30
MENA	1.833333	7.79	12.625
North America	1	18.79	20.10127
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.566038	2.90	12.5
World	0.86	11.50	43.33333

The data here shows that globally, there are 11.5 academic library workers per academic library. This varies from 18.79 per library in North America, down to 2.9 per library in Sub-Saharan Africa. This underlines the very different levels of resource per library. In terms of national averages, the highest number of librarians per library is in Hong Kong, China, with over 43 librarians per library, while in Kiribati, the data suggests that six librarians need to spread over seven libraries.

Graph 8: Academic Librarians per Library



9. Conclusions

This data starts to offer some high-level insights into how library fields vary from one field to the next, helping to build a sense of the diversity of libraries globally. It is clear, for example, that to serve public/community and academic libraries alike, we need both to be able to offer support that works for libraries with very limited staff, as well as those with more librarians. Similarly, some regions may have greater need of support to help libraries there work with much large populations, while elsewhere, libraries can be ‘hyper-local’, servicing communities of just a few thousand each.

As highlighted at the beginning, and in addition to the fact that defining averages by necessity means that variation within regions disappears, it is worth noting that the depth and accuracy of insights provided here is limited by the availability of the data. In some regions (notably the Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa), only a few countries have data available, and the numbers provided may well be an underestimate. To the extent that this means that in reality, each library has more staff, and has to serve a smaller population, this is of course welcome, although it makes the data provided here less useful.

We hope that, through publishing this report, we can encourage libraries, library associations and library authorities around the world to update and expand their provision of data to the Library Map of the World, and so help it fulfil its potential.