

Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners

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Abstract:

This paper describes the writing of the Fourth Edition of the IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners. The importance of the document is explained, along with a brief description of the processes undertaken to produce the Fourth Edition. Some of the challenges faced by the group of writers are described along with the solutions that were put in place to manage these challenges. Many new sections have been included in the Fourth Edition and these are identified in the paper. The writing group and the Guideline's reviewers are acknowledged.

Keywords: Prison libraries, Guidelines, Minimum Standards, Special Needs.

In March 2021, the IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners Working Group met via Zoom to commence work on developing the fourth edition of the Guidelines. The group consisted of members from thirteen countries, each of whom had expertise, practical experience, and knowledge regarding the provision of library services to prisoners. The brief of the Group was to develop the Fourth Edition of the *IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*, updating the Third Edition, published in 2005 by Vibeke Lehmann and Joanne Locke. This meeting was followed by many others before the final draft of the *Guidelines* was submitted to IFLA to be taken through the Standard Approval Process in June 2022.

The importance of the document

As with all IFLA guidelines, the *IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* is an important document that not only serves to provide guidance regarding a library service at an international level, but also acts as a starting point and template for individual countries, professional associations, and correctional facilities when determining how the people their judicial systems determine should be incarcerated are offered a library service. The Third Edition of the *Guidelines* has served this duty well and the Fourth edition will continue this work.

The processes undertaken

The Third Edition of the *Guidelines* was the starting point for the working group in recognition of its past authority and relevance. The working group was tasked with locating as many examples of prison library guidelines from across the world as possible, and along with the Third Edition this collection informed the group of appropriate sections, headings and content for the Fourth Edition. This process led to the creation of a framework from which the group began the process of writing new content for the Fourth Edition.

The process of writing was guided by the areas of expertise held by members of the working group. Members with expertise and knowledge in particular areas took responsibility for the writing of content for the corresponding section or chapter. As each section or chapter was written, drafts were circulated to the whole Group for review and comment. Once a section or chapter was accepted by the Group, it would be incorporated into a full draft, finally resulting in a complete draft of the Fourth Edition. Once each full draft was completed, it would be circulated amongst the Group for reading and revision.

Each time the draft was reviewed, Group members met online to resolve questions and revisions suggested by individual members of the group. Any changes required were made by the Guidelines editor and revised drafts were then circulated. Four full drafts were written before the final submission to IFLA. The third full draft was circulated beyond the Group to international experts for feedback and recommendations. Further changes to the draft were made in consultation with the Group based on this feedback.

The fourth and final full draft was sent to IFLA to undergo the Standard Approval Review process. Further changes were made to the draft Guidelines in response to the IFLA review prior to a resubmission to IFLA for final approval.

The challenges we faced

Some of the challenges faced by the Working Group included working across time zones and languages. Although the Group met frequently much of the individual work to produce the new edition occurred between meetings at times most convenient to individuals. To facilitate communication between meetings and to allow the sharing of resources among the group, a WhatsApp Group was established and continues to support this network of collaborators beyond the production of the Guidelines.

Another challenge to be overcome was writing the Guidelines to be applicable to carceral contexts that differed greatly from each other. The Guidelines need to be as useful to a prison in a developing country as they are to a prison in a more affluent country. Likewise, they need to be as useful to prisons who are at the initial stages of creating a library as they are to prisons who have well-established libraries available to their users. To ensure a broad applicability across such varied contexts, an appendix titled 'Minimum Standards for Prison Libraries' was included in the Guidelines. It was important to the Group and to those that reviewed the draft *Guidelines* that this section stressed these Minimum Standards were not a default level of provision. Instead, they are to be considered a basic and minimum starting point from which a full library service should be developed.

The use of language was also a challenge to be overcome by the Group. Although the Group wrote in English or produced English translations of draft writing in languages other than English, the terminology used to describe particular elements of the Guidelines differed between the countries of the writers and the reviewers. Of particular concern to the Group

was the choice of word to be used to describe the people who are the main users of libraries in prisons. A word that is derogatory in one country was sometimes considered appropriate in another. After much thought, the Group elected to use the term ‘prisoner’ to describe a person from this user group, recognising that it was not acceptable to some writers and reviewers. To explain the terminology choices taken by the Group, a Glossary of Terms was included in the Fourth Edition of the *Guidelines*.

New sections included in the Fourth Edition

Along with each of the sections included in the Third Edition of the *Guidelines*, the Fourth Edition included sections that were new to the *Guidelines*. Many of these new sections focus on the provision of library services to specific user groups. There are now sections relating to users from diverse ethnic, faith and linguistic backgrounds, users with low literacy levels, and users with disabilities or other special needs. There are now sections devoted to incarcerated children, parents and the elderly, along with political prisoners, and gender and sexuality diverse prisoners. Other new sections relate to the provision of a library service to prisoners living in segregation, prisoners nearing the end of their sentences, and students who are studying from prison.

Conclusion

The writing of the Fourth Edition of the *IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* has been an exercise in collaboration and joint effort. The updated and modernized edition will support the provision of library services to prisoners for many years but will of course need to be revised and reviewed as has been done with previous editions. The process of writing these guidelines has brought together like-minded people from across the world and has resulted in friendships and collaborations that are highly valued by all. As the editor of the Fourth Edition of the *IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*, I wish to thank all the people who participated in the task, but in particular Lisa Krolak and Gerhard Peschers for inviting me to take on the role of editor.

Acknowledgments

This Fourth Edition of the *IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* is the result of a collaborative effort between many individuals from many countries. The writing team consisted of the following authors, each of whom contributed to the Guidelines as much as they were able: Padma Bandaranayake (Sri Lanka), Adamu Bashiru (Nigeria), Syeda Batool (Pakistan), Sanjica Faletar (Croatia), Jane Garner (Australia), Eldon Ray James (USA), Edmore Kapumha (Zimbabwe), Purity Kavuri-Mutuku (Kenya), Lisa Krolak (Germany), Geert Lievens (Belgium), Gerhard Peschers (Germany), Rebekka Pilppula (Finland), Miguel Angel Rivera Donoso (Chile), Laura Sherbo (USA), Samira Zahra (Germany).

Following the writing of an early draft of the Guidelines, feedback was sought across the general IFLA library community, the IFLA Library Services to People with Special Needs Section and the international prison library community. Feedback was gratefully received from: Jeanie Austin (USA), Sarah Ball (USA), Edmund Balnaves (Australia),

Jessica Bates (Northern Ireland), Erin Boyington (USA), Stacy Burnett, (USA), Kendra Cowley (Canada), Jayne Finlay (Northern Ireland), Lesley Gaj (Kurdistan), Susannah Hanlon (UK), Timothy Ireland (Brazil), Emily Jacobson (USA), Luisa Marquardt (Italy), Andreu Sulé Duesa (Spain), and the Prison Librarians from Washington State (USA). Their feedback and comments were addressed wherever possible, and the Guidelines have benefitted greatly from their input.

(Video presentation: <https://youtu.be/xbBpx5QfOvA>)