Germany - country profile

1 General background and who’s who. The German Library Association (DBV) undertakes the following with regard to the SDGs: firstly, it makes SDGs and their importance for library work known within the libraries themselves through providing information material, showing best-practice examples and offering training to library staff. This includes information for library users to help them to learn more about SDGs as well as including SDGs in their own working life. Secondly, the DBV is active in advocacy with the goal of including libraries and their role concerning SDGs in political strategies and programmes at national and federal level. As a result, libraries increasingly engage with SDGs: there are now many best-practice projects on what libraries can do to engage with SDGs, libraries actively participate in activities of partners such as the “Aktionstage Nachhaltigkeit” and SDGs are increasingly included in library development plans of the federal states (Bundesländer). Nevertheless, the German library picture is quite heterogeneous and therefore this statement does not apply to all libraries. There is no overall quantitative data on libraries’ activities in the field of SDGs, but the German Libraries Association is collecting best-practice examples on its website www.biblio2030.de.

2 SDG priorities and policies in German libraries. German libraries engage with SDGs through a wide range of projects. Library activities may include, for example:

- debates on SDGs with citizens,
- library collections, Library exhibitions on SDGs,
- projects in co-creation with partners/citizens (digital inclusion; digital citizenship),
- pursuing green library objectives (such as energy saving infrastructure, waste management, SDG policy with staff).

An overview of best-practice examples can be found here: www.biblio2030.de and in a brochure of the DBV.

Examples of projects through which libraries participated in the “Aktionstage Nachhaltigkeit 2020” can be found here.

Libraries provide access to knowledge and information, they are open to all ages and societal groups and they promote reading skills. The DBV therefore considers that through their basic mission, they thus contribute to all of the SDGs. The focus of the DBV has been to make libraries aware of this strong interconnection between the basic mission of libraries and SDGs, to showcase how they can include SDGs in their strategies and to provide best-practice examples for successful SDG-projects and to use these activities by becoming more visible and needed. When advocating for the inclusion of libraries and their contribution to SDGs into political strategies and activities at national level, particular emphasis has been put on the role of libraries as multipliers. Libraries as low-threshold institutions have the potential of reaching all groups of society and all ages and they are spread all over the country. As such, they hold the potential to make SDGs known to large parts of society.

1 https://www.tatenfuermorgen.de/deutsche-aktionstage-nachhaltigkeit
2 See for example the library development plan of Baden-Württemberg: https://dbv-cs.e-fork.net/sites/default/files/2021-07/dbv_Bibliotheksentwicklungsplan_BW_2021_WEB.pdf
SDG 4: Libraries promote access to information and promote reading skills. As such, quality education is one of the core SDGs for libraries.

SDG 11: Several SDG-projects in Germany relate to the inclusion of migrants (see for example). As such “Sustainable and inclusive cities and Communities” is a frequently-mentioned SDG for German libraries.

SDG 13: Climate Action: Regulating and reducing emissions and promoting renewable energy. See for example the following project.

3 SDG-oriented projects

1. Ernte Deine Stadt (Harvest your city) (SDG 13). In 2015, the Bad Oldesloe City Library made use of the political and social trend towards “urban gardening” as an occasion to organise for series of events on gardening in urban areas. Their aim was to spread knowledge about the cultivation of food in the city, to deal with the question of the origins of food and to stimulate discussion within the community. Since then, the series of events, which has been expanded to include additional topics from the sustainability spectrum, has been successfully continued every year — for example through the construction of an insect hotel, photo exhibitions, or food sharing campaigns. The library hence becomes a place of encounter and creativity. It works closely with local actors, institutions, associations and initiatives.

2. Treffpunkt Deutsch (SDG 11). The Heilbrunner Stadtbibliothek has set up a project on language skills of immigrants through conversation with volunteers. These services have been very helpful in providing free and open access for all, computer and internet workstations, literature for learning German, personal advice. Refugees with a temporary residence status receive a free library card and there have been around 1500 that have been delivered since summer 2015. Learning a language works better when there are more opportunities to communicate with “native speakers”. The Heilbronn “Treffpunkt Deutsch” (German Meeting Point) is born to meet this need, with volunteer “mentors” reaching users through flyers and, above all, through personal contacts with “guests” in the library, every week for 90 minutes to talk and learn. More than 2200 guests have visited the meeting place since then, which is no longer a place for refugees, but for people from all over the world who want to learn German. By profession, they are bakers, hairdressers, computer scientists or philosophers and they come from 40 countries, mainly from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq and Afghanistan, but also from Peru, Nepal and Belarus.

3. Wie kommt das W in den Baum? (SDG 4). The Potsdam City and State Library at the Bildungsforum, Potsdam developed a creative integration initiative for children, where twelve German and refugee children took part together in a reading promotion project lasting several weeks. In cooperation with institutional and associated partner organisations, children between 9 and 11 year-old created large-format photos with tablets, digitally edited them, creatively alienated them, added texts and finally presented them in a joint exhibition.

3 https://www.biblio2030.de/%20ernte-deine-stadt-in-badoldesloe
4 https://www.biblio2030.de/treffpunkt-deutsch-stadtbibliothek-heilbronn
On the theme “How does the “W” get into the tree? A letter journey through Potsdam”, children went on an excursion to discover letters in the city. In trees, cracks in walls, on banks, on houses or buildings. In the sky, on the ground or at eye level. Together, they used tablets to search for clues, literally got to know their common (new) hometown in a different way and photographed their finds. In group work, the sites were then documented and the letter pictures digitally transformed artistically and literarily. All children’s artistic works and a portrait photo were presented in large format in the library.

4. Dialogues for Integration: Hamburg Libraries Help Refugees Find their Way (SDG 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 17). Since 2015, Europe has seen the arrival of an almost unprecedented number of people fleeing war and poverty. A particularly large number of them have come to Germany, with over a million registrations for asylum, and almost half a million more applications in 2015 alone. Between 2015 and 2017, the city-state of Hamburg in particular, with a population of around 1.83 million, received around 66,000 refugees. This number adds to an already diverse population, with over a third — and almost a half according to some estimates — coming from migrant backgrounds.

For these newcomers, a key priority after shelter, food and medical care is language acquisition. Yet many have no way of attending language classes as they are often expensive and not open to all refugees and migrants. This is where libraries can make the difference.

As a key part of the city’s ‘Refugee Help Forum’, the Hamburg Public Library System, Bücherhallen Hamburg, joined forces with the as the Volkshochschule adult education centre to support refugee language acquisition. Bücherhallen Hamburg do this through their ‘Dialog in Deutsch’ volunteer project, which is the largest volunteer language acquisition project in Hamburg. Through 109 conversation groups across 33 libraries, refugees and migrants are able to apply and practice their German speaking skills.

The groups are open and free of charge and are currently run by around 270 volunteers; no enrolment or registration is required. The ‘Dialog in Deutsch’ volunteers do not give language lessons, do not hold tests but rather gives topics to discuss during a ‘Dialog in Deutsch’ session to enhance oral skills.

Every year around 40,000 participants, from all migrant backgrounds benefit from the ‘Dialog in Deutsch’ conversation groups. In order to meet the dramatic increase in demand from refugees and migrants, 25 groups especially for beginners had been added in 2016 and 2017. To support language acquisition, the library also expanded its media collection to include books for children and young adult in Arabic, boxes of games, dictionaries, board books, and other materials for learning German. In addition, the library introduced a scheme using donations to allow refugees to gain access to varied library e-media services and WiFi. This provides a key means of keeping in contact with family and friends, especially given that many accommodation facilities do not have WiFi access.

Meanwhile, 600 professionally trained and supervised volunteers work in the Bücherhallen and play a key role in integrating refugees in other areas.6

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5. Stadtbibliothek Bremen provides Future Training Opportunities for refugees and other newcomers (SDG 4, 8, 10, 17). In 2010, the Bremen City Library (Stadtbibliothek Bremen) anchored a diversity strategy in its mission statement. The Library expanded its intercultural offerings to patrons, carried out an extensive series of training courses for intercultural openness for all employees and implemented a staff position for diversity management. For these endeavours, in 2015, the Library was awarded the Bremen Diversity Prize.

Even though the library excelled in serving its population, the community’s cultural diversity was not represented in the library team. In 2015, 28% of the Bremen population held a migrant background, the Bremen public service rate was around 13% of employees, and the library’s rate was only at 2.5%.

It can be challenging for people with a migrant background to enter skilled professions, such as librarianship, especially if they speak little German. Applicants must speak and read German at a B1-level before institutions will offer a job on contract, and applicants must have qualified vocational training to secure a position that is paid an appropriate, living wage. Labour and residence laws pose additional challenges for refugees in Germany, as many young people are not offered trainings without a determined residence status.

In 2014, the city of Bremen developed a project called “Future Training Opportunities” (Zukunftschance Ausbildung), targeted to help those with refugee status gain entry-level qualification (EQ, Einstiegsqualifizierung) with accompanying language lessons and socio-educational support. In addition to acquiring language skills, the vocational qualification is essential for successful and sustainable integration into the labour market in Germany. The EQ prepares refugees and asylum seekers for an apprenticeship and a dual training programme in Bremen public service and in private companies. The library joined this city-wide project as an apprenticeship site in 2015.

For those who choose to apprentice in the Library, it means training to become qualified specialists in media and information services. During their dual-study programme, apprentices work three days per week in the library, and spend two days at the vocational school to learn necessary theoretical knowledge and to study the German language. After completing the programme, newly-qualified media and information specialists can begin working on contract at the library.

Since the beginning of the project, six people have selected the library for their apprenticeship — a woman from Syria and a woman from Turkey, and four men who came to Germany from Guinea, Syria, Afghanistan, China — all six trainees have completed their entry qualification. Three of them have already completed their dual training programme and are now working as members of the Bremen Library team.”

6. German Library Associations’ initiatives. Two programmes that are implemented through the DBV provide funding projects that can be seen in relation to the SDGs (they were not however originally conceived with SDGs in mind).
— The emergency aid programme “Vor Ort für Alle” (On Site for All), GLA promotes contemporary library concepts in municipalities with up to 20,000 inhabitants nationwide. The aim is to strengthen libraries as “third places” also in rural areas and thus contribute to equal living conditions.º (SDG 11)

8 https://www.bibliotheksverband.de/dbv/projekte/vor-ort-fuer-alle.html
“Total Digital!” provides funding opportunities for the creation of digital scavenger hunts, the discovery of picture books using multimedia, programme robots or the elaboration of original stories to be filmed. (SDG 4, 10, 11)

The German Library Association and the regional Library Associations of the Bundesländer play a coordinating role in the implementation of SDGs in libraries. As a result, SDGs are implemented in a convincing and active way; more and more libraries are interested in the topic. Nevertheless, the German library picture is quite heterogeneous and therefore this statement does not apply to all libraries. There is no overall data on libraries’ activities in the field of the SDGs. The only institution where a great amount of data is available is the German Digital Library (DDB) in relation to the preservation of cultural heritage.

4 Funding sources and evaluation. Financial sources for SDG-oriented projects are normally are provided by educational and cultural departments of the Bundesländer. Additional funding often comes from national programmes for Libraries, such as “Vor Ort für alle” and “Total Digital”. Evaluation is performed according to standard library procedures.