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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
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Subject:	Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group of Member States' experts on Building bridges: strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values – Approved Mandate

Delegations will find attached the mandate of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group of Member States' experts on Building bridges: strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values, as approved by the Cultural Affairs Committee (CAC) on 13 October 2023.

**Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group of Member States' experts on Building bridges:
strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works,
skills and European values**

set up under the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026

**Priority B: Culture for the people: enhancing cultural participation and the role of culture in
society**

A. BACKGROUND

1. The EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026¹, under priority B Culture for the people: enhancing cultural participation and the role of culture in society, provides for the creation of an Open Method of Coordination (OMC) group of Member States' experts focusing on Building Bridges: strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values.
2. There are over 65 000 public libraries in the EU and over 100 million people visit them every year. Libraries have a long tradition of offering access to information, be it in the form of books or, in response to technological developments, digital resources².

¹ OJ C 466, 7.12.2022, p. 1

² [Urban Agenda for the EU, Libraries on the European Agenda, How can the EU leverage the potential of public libraries to tackle European challenges?](#)

3. Libraries in general are much more than repository of books. The Work Plan states that “Libraries play a key role in Europe’s democratic, social, cultural, and educational landscape at all levels. They make a significant contribution to building democracy, citizen engagement and public-participation activities across the EU, including in rural and remote areas, including the outermost regions. They welcome diverse groups, develop programmes and activities reflecting current societal challenges, and provide access to pluralist and reliable information and diverse cultural content in safe and accessible environments. They are essential gateways to local and indigenous data, knowledge, research and culture”.
4. In 2023, the Council of Europe and EBLIDA³ published Guidelines on library legislation and policy in Europe⁴. The Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on library and policy in Europe⁵ emphasises “that libraries have a crucial role to play as community hubs striving towards a democratic, cohesive, inclusive and equitable society and are an essential and irreplaceable component of the social, cultural and heritage information infrastructure of a sustainable society where freedom of expression, public access to information and democratic participation are guaranteed”. Moreover, the Recommendation clearly states that libraries should operate “within the European Agenda 2030 on sustainable development” and not only “within the book and information chain”.
5. Libraries all over Europe are the cornerstones for cultural diversity. There are many examples of good practices in Europe of how public libraries have developed new activities, revisited their practices, re-interpreted their cultural functions, recruited staff or invested in lifelong training in response to the challenges. Many public libraries have also invested in infrastructure or buildings to become sustainable and to offer new services and make themselves more attractive. They do this by steadfastly supporting reading culture in digital and physical environments.

³ The European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations

⁴ [Council of Europe/EBLIDA Guidelines on library legislation and policy in Europe, last version May 2022](#)

⁵ CM/Rec(2023)3

6. However, the comprehensive impact and outreach of libraries across Europe is poorly reported in statistics, which are essentially focused on library performances in the book field. What libraries do for informal and non-formal education and learning, sustainable development, community building, inclusion and participation is rarely assessed and often overlooked and insufficiently emphasized in legislation and policy documents.
7. There is therefore a need - at policy and operational level - to better understand and document the multiple cultural, societal and democratic roles libraries can play in Europe and determine how they can be supported at local, regional, national and European level in terms of funding, regulatory framework and relations with the relevant authorities at European, national and local level.
8. Most public libraries in Europe are funded by local and regional authorities but Member States have adopted different models and regulations at national level to structure public libraries, ensure balanced coverage and define funding obligations for local and regional authorities while ensuring curatorial freedom for librarians in the choice of books or themes for public activities and while respecting the intrinsic value of culture.

9. To develop activities and reach out to wider and more diverse audiences, libraries need partners. It is important that public libraries work in synergy with the local, cultural, (formal and informal) education, welfare, and democratic institutions as well as actors and professional networks of the book and wider media sector including authors, translators, publishers, booksellers and cultural institutions at local, regional, national or European level. They share similar objectives – enlarging the audience for books and literature and promoting European cultural and linguistic diversity – while developing different business and funding models. Relevant public policies on libraries (for instance book acquisition or lending rights) must therefore make sure that the interests of all parties are respected from a financial and legal point of view.
10. Under EU law, the owners of the copyright to a work are granted copyright protection in the form of a set of exclusive economic rights to their original works for a limited duration. Copyright is largely harmonised in the European Union. However, the lending of e-books (e-lending) is not fully clarified from a legal point of view. In view of the complexity of the issue, the Commission launched a pilot project and a study which will start before the end of 2023⁶. The objective of the pilot project is to understand the role of copyright in facilitating access to digital collections of public interest institutions such as libraries, in particular for the purpose of distance learning and education. The results of the study will be available at the end of 2024 but preliminary results can be presented during 2024 to the OMC Group.

⁶ Commission Decision C(2022) 1052 final of 25/02/2022 on the financing of pilot projects and preparatory actions in the field of "Communications Networks, Content and Technology" and on the adoption of the work programme for 2022.
<https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/83653>

B. SCOPE

1. The OMC Group will focus on how to promote and strengthen the multiple role and visibility of libraries as key facilitators for democracy-building and citizen engagement and as access points and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values, considering the evolution of those roles in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the face of the energy crisis and the Russian war against Ukraine.
2. The group will explore and identify the different dimensions and areas in which public libraries can play a societal role. For instance:
 - the cultural and social dimension of libraries as a community hub or third place;
 - democracy building, citizen engagement in libraries, and fighting disinformation;
 - sustainable development (education and learning, inclusion, participation, resilience of community and environmental issues);
 - digital, media, green and other forms of literacies;
 - promoting literacy and reading including promoting literature from other countries.
3. It will highlight the good practices implemented by public libraries in Europe and examples of public policies – at local, regional, national and European level - which have been put in place to support libraries in their transformations, including the transitions brought about by digitalisation. Examples of practices that could be highlighted include:
 - collecting data -at local, regional, national or European levels- on the impact of the libraries' cultural, social, democratic, educational and sustainable activities;
 - training and peer learning opportunities for library staff;
 - governance and management of public libraries;

- policy initiatives and funding for public libraries;
 - book and other relevant media acquisition and curatorial strategy of public libraries;
 - accessibility, coverage and regional disparities in library development and identification of potential measures to reduce them;
 - synergies and cooperation with local, regional or national partners including in the book and information or media sectors (authors, translators, publishers, booksellers).
4. The OMC Group should ensure complementarities and synergies with other relevant initiatives under the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, such as the peer-learning activity ‘Culture and promoting democracy: towards a cultural citizenship in Europe’ as well as other relevant Council preparatory bodies, expert groups and fora.
5. The OMC Group should build where relevant on the results and recommendations from the upcoming European Parliament’s Report on the future of the European book sector, the OMC group on Multilingualism and translation, the OMC Group on Promoting reading in the digital environment and other relevant EU initiatives, and the OMC Group on the Cultural dimension of sustainable development in EU actions. It should also build on the Report on the role of libraries in the Urban Agenda⁷ and bear in mind the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to Member States of the Council of Europe on library legislation policy in Europe⁸ and the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022⁹

⁷ [ACTION 5 - Libraries on the European Agenda - PL 2030_Final_0.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸ CM/Rec(2023)3

⁹ <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/2224>

6. The OMC Group should be composed of experts – policymakers and practitioners (such as librarians) –appointed by Member States from the relevant government entities responsible for public libraries at national, regional or local level. Experts should have relevant experience and /or current functions. Considering the relevance of the topics for countries from the EU neighbourhood, the OMC Group may also consider inviting experts from non-EU countries participating in the Creative Europe programme when relevant to the Group’s work.
7. The OMC Group should elect a chair and a rapporteur from amongst its members. The OMC Group may form smaller focus groups and use participatory methods when relevant.
8. The OMC Group should consult stakeholders that work on democracy-building from the whole value chain of the book sector and from other relevant sectors to complement its discussions and obtain their views on the topics. Corresponding print and media institutions, NGOs experts, representatives from civil society and professional networks in the field may be invited on an ad-hoc basis, if needed. Other international organisations, such as the Council of Europe may also be invited when relevant.
9. The OMC Group should involve services from the Commission responsible for organising the OMC, hosting meetings and providing logistical support.

C. OUTPUTS

1. Based on the findings resulting from its activities, the OMC group will provide a report which will be drafted by its members with technical support from the Commission. The report should reflect the current challenges and opportunities public libraries in Europe face in fulfilling their roles as key-facilitators for democracy-building and citizen engagement and as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works and skills and European values.
2. The report should also highlight good practices in public policy and library management and provide beneficial and operational recommendations to libraries and long-term policy recommendations (including examples of funding opportunities at different levels), which can be shared and used in all the Member States. This document could be the basis for future exchanges and policy development for the sector.

1. Topic:

Building Bridges: strengthen the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values

Working methods:

OMC group; workshops; conference

Rationale:

Libraries play a key role in Europe's democratic, social, cultural, and educational landscape at all levels. They make a significant contribution to building democracy, citizen engagement and public-participation activities across the EU, including in rural and remote areas, including the outermost regions. They welcome diverse groups, develop programmes and activities reflecting current societal challenges, and provide access to pluralist and reliable information and diverse cultural content in safe and accessible environments. They are essential gateways to local and indigenous data, knowledge, research and culture.

Target outputs:

Starting a comprehensive debate and explore fields for promoting and strengthening libraries; identifying different dimensions and areas with potential, and exploring funding lines under EU programmes; bringing together policy makers and library professionals; explore possibilities for training and further activities for professionals.