

# LIBRARIES AS CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DEMOCRACY

## Statement from the Nordic Library Associations 2025

**Democracy faces profound challenges. Rising polarization, misinformation, and declining trust in institutions – combined with the disruptive force of artificial intelligence (AI) – are putting modern societies under pressure.**

As one of our countries' most popular, open, and free cultural institutions, libraries are *the everyday greenhouses and workshops of democracy*. They are vital places where people can seek, create, and share knowledge and skills, bridging social, political, and cultural divides. This is fully in line with the principles of the Council of Europe/EBLIDA Guidelines on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe (2022)<sup>1</sup> and the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (2022)<sup>2</sup>, which emphasize the library's role in fostering informed, active citizenship.

We, the Nordic library associations, believe that libraries must be recognized and strengthened as *critical infrastructure for democracy*.

### This means:

- ▶ **Centres for free and equal access to information, knowledge, culture, and technology** – independent of political, commercial, or technological control.
- ▶ **Spaces for reflective, respectful dialogue** – where people meet around knowledge, art, and culture, and where reflection, respect for minorities, and the ability to disagree constructively can flourish. Libraries ensure freedom of speech and in doing so, they help sustain a functioning democracy.
- ▶ **Crucial hubs for both digital & information literacy and lifelong learning** - libraries are safeguards against misinformation and a foundation for active citizenship, offering a safe space for people to acquire new skills. Libraries help individuals build digital skills and understand AI in practice, ensuring no one is left behind in an increasingly digital society and emerging AI economy. This work directly supports UN Agenda 2030,<sup>3</sup> specifically Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).
- ▶ **Locally embedded civic institutions with global reach** – libraries connect local communities with each other and with the wider world, contributing to the UN's vision of inclusive knowledge societies.
- ▶ **Guardians of academic freedom and open access** – university, research, and similar libraries safeguard academic freedom by ensuring access to reliable knowledge. They support transparent and open science and facilitate the ethical and equitable dissemination of research. Their mission aligns with EU open science initiatives, including Horizon Europe's mandatory open access to peer-reviewed publications<sup>4</sup> and the Amsterdam Call for Action on Open Science advocating full open access for publicly funded research.<sup>5</sup>

In the Nordic tradition, libraries have always been a foundation for public enlightenment and participation – from making available book collections to the public to ensuring access to the open internet. *Today, the task is urgent: if democracy is to endure, it needs open, trusted institutions that every citizen can rely on* – not merely as a service, but as an indispensable part of democratic resilience.

<sup>1</sup> <https://kortlink.dk/eblida/2t9zp>. <sup>2</sup> <https://kortlink.dk/ifla/2t9zq>. <sup>3</sup> <https://kortlink.dk/un/2t9zr>. <sup>4</sup> <https://kortlink.dk/europa/2t9zs>

<sup>5</sup> <https://kortlink.dk/ouvrirlascience/2t9zt>



## We therefore call for:

1. Political recognition of libraries as part of democracy's core infrastructure on par with schools, courts, and free media.
2. Investment in libraries as free, safe, and neutral spaces for knowledge, debate, and learning both physical and digital.
3. Stronger Nordic cooperation to position libraries as a bulwark against threats to democracy and as active partners in developing the democratic culture of the future and the ethical use of AI, in line with IFLA and EBLIDA advocacy and the ambitions of the UN 2030 Agenda.
4. Protection and strengthening of academic libraries as guarantors of academic freedom ensuring open access to research, supporting evidence-based policy, and safeguarding the independence of education and science. These libraries must be supported to align with EU frameworks for open science, such as Horizon Europe mandates and the Amsterdam Call for Action.

**Libraries are not just places  
where books are borrowed  
– they are democracy's open workshops.**

**In a world marked by crises,  
they are part of the answer.**

**DANMARKS  
BIBLIOTEKSFORENING**



**Norsk  
bibliotekforening**



**Svensk  
biblioteksförening**

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