

HE. Ms. Michelle Bachelet,  
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 GENEVA 10,  
Switzerland

Dear High Commissioner,

Please find below a submission from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, Prins Willem-Alexanderhof 5, 2595 BE, The Hague, The Netherlands, [www.ifla.org](http://www.ifla.org)) for the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review in Greece.

IFLA is the global organisation for libraries and library associations, founded in 1927, at present with over 1500 members in more than 150 countries. IFLA works to represent the interests of library and information services and their users, and is committed to promoting the principles of universal and equitable access to information and freedom of expression as drivers of development and well-being.

We are grateful in particular to Georgios Glossiotis, Dr Evgenia Vasilakaki and Eva Semertzaki, information professionals from Greece, for developing this submission.

## Overview

1. In Greece, there are 166 public libraries, 25 academic libraries, and various special libraries (including subject libraries such as prison libraries). Their total collections consists of 17.852.484 volumes of books and other materials.<sup>i</sup>
2. Libraries' offer of information services and access to print and digital materials, and different types of cultural, educational and social activities and events, helps deliver on people's rights to cultural participation (codified in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and education (Article 26). In addition, libraries deliver on the rights to freedom of thought, opinion, access to information and ideas (Article 19).
3. Libraries help deliver equal access to available information in different formats for all; offer information services at no or low cost, collaborate with cultural heritage foundations/institutions, and organise cultural activities open for all; provide the infrastructure for preserving and ensuring access and availability of cultural materials and information.
4. The Association of Greek Librarians and Information Scientists was established in 1968 and is the recognised Panhellenic scientific association for Greek librarians. Among the main objectives of the Association are: recognition and promotion of library science and the recognition of the role of the librarian in the community, application of professional ethics, and discussion of librarianship issues at all levels in Greece; promotion of the development and modernisation of libraries in Greece to better meet the needs of the community for education, research, information, free exchange and flow of ideas, development and promotion of literacy programs to reduce illiteracy in Greece, publicity of authors and books.<sup>ii</sup>

5. This report draws on the experiences of Greek libraries with protecting and promoting human rights to note relevant trends and developments and good practices.

### **Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities**

*134.115 Promote increased autonomy to persons with disabilities in the fields of health, employment and education as additional steps following the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

6. *Trends and developments.* Globally, the book famine phenomenon refers to a shortage of published materials in formats accessible to people living with visual and print disabilities. Estimates suggest that, in developed countries, as little as 5% of all published books have been produced in accessible formats – e.g. audio, braille.<sup>iii</sup> This impacts access of people with visual disabilities to materials for leisure, culture, wellbeing, learning.
7. The Greek Law 4672/2020 (Government Gazette A 48/04.03.2020) incorporated the Directive (EU) 2017/1564 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2017 in the Greek legal order. This legislation focused on “certain permitted uses of certain works and other subject matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled”, and amended Directive 2001/29/EC on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society. These legal steps help improve and broaden access to information and culture for people with such disabilities.
8. *Good practices.* Alongside these policy developments, academic libraries in Greece have developed AMELib - *Accessible Multi-modal Electronic Library* - which aims to further remove barriers for the users with visual or print disabilities in Greek academic libraries.
9. AMELib is a web-based service that allows subscribed users to access digital publications in accessible formats – particularly Greek textbooks and teaching materials, and Open Access materials.<sup>iv</sup> In addition, AMELib offers accessible content through an equally accessible web application, based on the exemption provisions of the property copyright for print-handicapped persons, as specified in the copyright law.<sup>v</sup>
10. Alongside these measures, academic libraries in Greece (e.g. in Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and University of Patras) provide users access to technologies and other services ensuring better access to educational materials for students with print and visual disabilities. These measures help facilitate the participation of people with such disabilities in education.
11. Other initiatives include, for example, "I Read for Others" - an Intellectual Property Organization (OPI) certified audiobook manufacturer for people with visual or print disabilities. Its goal is fostering a society with equal access to reading and education. Since May 2019, the National Library of Greece (NLG) has been actively supporting the voluntary organization "I Read for Others" in producing audiobooks. Audiobook recordings are made on a weekly basis at the studios offered by NLG. To date, thirteen new audio books of five thousand (5,000) pages have been produced as a result of 650 hours of recording and 1,300 hours of editing.<sup>vi</sup>
12. *Recommendation: We encourage support to further develop and implement relevant services – e.g. in public, municipal and school libraries – that help secure the right to education and access to information for people living with disabilities.*

### **Rights of migrants and refugees**

*134.27 Continue to take measures to protect the rights of children, women and refugees*

*134.124 Continue the protection of the rights of migrants*

13. *Trends and developments.* According to the Project LIB(e)RO Intellectual Output 1 / Activity 2 National Analysis-Report Situation Analysis National Library of Greece Athens, August 2017<sup>(7)</sup>, since 2015, more than one million refugees and migrants have reached the Greek shore through the Eastern Mediterranean route, crossing the borders from Turkey to Europe, to flee war, terror, poverty, or repression. The majority of refugees originate from Syria and other neighboring countries namely Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and the Northern African countries.
14. The Activity report found that libraries serving refugees and migrants are located at a distance of 2 to 20 kilometers away from the refugee accommodation sites, thus making the access more difficult. The project recorded that refugee users had “weekly”, “seldom” or “no access” to nearby libraries. In addition, only a few libraries were equipped with books in refugees’ native languages, while no relevant dictionaries to Greek language were available.<sup>vii</sup>
15. However, when library visits take place, refugees and migrants use the computers, internet, board games, audiovisual material, reading rooms (especially for reading children’s books and travel guides) and participate in foreign language courses offered by the library. There are good practices indicating how this potential can be leveraged to help deliver on the rights of migrants and refugees.
16. *Good practices.* The Public Central Library of Samos in collaboration with UNCHR and NGOs offered library tours, creative activities and narration of fairy tales. The Central Municipal Library of Thessaloniki visited the “Diavata” accommodation site on a regular basis, to serve minor refugees with a mobile library. The Public Central Library of Veria liaised with secondary schools and offered creative writing workshops and cooking events focusing on traditional cuisine from Greece and their countries of origin. The Central Public Library of Serres worked with teachers to develop an educational program for local students to raise awareness and promote volunteer work to help refugees and migrants.
17. NGOs also helped to meet the cultural, learning and information needs of migrants and refugees in the country. For example, Praksis has created a library at the Homeless Reception Centre through donations; it holds almost 5.000 books. However, the library experienced some difficulty in acquiring new materials and finding volunteers to support its activities, making it more challenging to fully address users’ information needs (see Annex 1 for more information on these projects).
18. *RECOMMENDATION: In light of the known good practices and potential of library services to deliver on the socioeconomic and cultural rights of refugees, we suggest further support to enable libraries which are located close to Refugee Accommodation sites to enrich their collections with material in the languages of the respective refugees. We also suggest further facilitating collaboration between libraries and other authorities- local and non- or NGOs to develop programs addressed to refugees and migrants.*

**Cultural and educational rights of prisoners**

*134.78 Continue to improve conditions of detention, including through appropriate assistance from regional and international partners*

19. *Trends and developments.* The current Penitentiary Code of Greek legislation (Law 2776/1999) in Article 20, paragraph 6 includes a provision regarding library facilities in penitentiary institutions. The fifth chapter of the Penitentiary Code (Article 37) states that “the self-education of prisoners is connected with the Prisoner Education Advisor, who must develop a library,

which can also be an annex to a Municipal Library". The next paragraph of Article 37 refers to the internal management of the library by the institution, but also to the development of its collection.<sup>viii</sup>

20. At present, many prison libraries are operating on a basis of individual initiatives. There are many prison libraries which are not fully equipped or resourced to function at full capacity. Some research suggests that prisoners are not likely to visit the prison library - but those who do are regular visitors.
21. As such, there are measures that can be taken and good practice examples of prison library facilities that deliver on the rights of prisoners, - e.g. following one of the United Nations Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, "all prisoners shall have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality".<sup>ix</sup>
22. *Good practices.* An example of a well-organized library is the Agia Agrarian Detention Center (prison farm) in Creta Island, which continuously supports educational programs and enables access to books from the Municipality library (more information in Annex 2).
23. *RECOMMENDATION: The Greek State should take actions to implement the law to all prisons concerning prison libraries, in cooperation with other types of libraries.*

#### **Digital inclusion in focus**

24. *Trends and developments.* Initiatives are underway to bridge the digital divide in Greece.<sup>x</sup> Meaningful digital inclusion (connectivity access, and affordability, digital skills, relevant content and more) can help deliver on a range of human rights – as a means to exercise the right to freedom of expression, supporting the right to health, education, participation in science and culture. It is particularly important to continue working to ensure that digital exclusion does not replicate existing inequalities – e.g. along the gender divide.
25. *Good practices.* The majority of public and municipal libraries in Greece offer free internet access, helping address the question of connectivity affordability for all. In addition, all academic libraries in Greece offer public workstations with internet access, and free WiFi. Some public libraries lend access devices – e.g. tablets – to their communities.
26. There are also examples of leveraging ICT to deliver on people's cultural rights. For example, the National Library of Greece provides access to registered users to millions of electronic items.<sup>xi</sup> The NLG offers free lending of more than 2,500 Greek electronic books to all citizens registered in its platform. Another example is the digitisation project of a newspapers and journals collection, dating back to the 18th century until the present, owned by the Hellenic Parliament Library. This project digitized more than 25,000 microfilms which are now available online to all.
27. *RECOMMENDATION: In light of the increasingly important role digital inclusion plays in helping deliver on people's socioeconomic and cultural rights, we encourage continued measures to support meaningful digital inclusion; including support to enable all public and municipal libraries to upgrade their infrastructure and provide access to the internet.*

#### **Rights of children; the right to education, human rights awareness**

*134.27 Continue to take measures to protect the rights of children, women and refugees*

28. *Good practices.* "Diavazontas Megalono" is an interdisciplinary non-profit organization, founded in 2013 by librarians, educators, health professionals and experts in Reading, Literacy

and Literature areas. In collaboration with libraries (i.e. Municipal Library of Athens and Municipal Library of Athens for children), it runs a reading campaign for young children and their parents.

29. A major institution in Greece focusing on the rights of children is the “Network for children's rights (NCR)”. One of their key initiatives is “The Mobile Library of the Network” - a temporary library that can be set up in a few minutes in squares, schools, public gardens, reception and accommodation centres for refugees. It enables children to access books, read and listen to stories, play games and take part in a variety of creative activities designed to entertain, educate and raise awareness on a variety of issues, especially those that have to do with protecting children’s rights to education and access to information. It also provides parents the opportunity to participate in various activities, with the aim of encouraging them to read with and to their children. The Mobile Library is part of the “Child Protection Case Management for Refugee Children” programme, co-funded by the [UNHCR](#). (For more information on NCR activities see Annex 3).
30. It is also worth noting that academic libraries in Greece offer a variety of digital resources to the academic community, such as institutional repositories, subscribed databases including e-journals and e-books as well as e-learning programst. However, there are public school libraries which are not as well-equipped or resourced, or not available.
31. *RECOMMENDATION: The Greek state should take actions to ensure stronger connection between primary and secondary education and library services. Existing school libraries should seek collaboration with the neighboring academic, public or municipal libraries to enrich their services.*

### **Libraries and the right to health**

32. *Good practices.* Broadly, access to health information is an important part of people’s right to health. The Greek Academic Libraries (HEAL-Link), as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic began, developed and edited catalogues of sources, in order to support researchers and health workers.<sup>xii</sup> HEAL-Link signed the [ICOLC Statement](#) on the Global COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Library Services and Resources.<sup>xiii</sup>
33. During the current difficult situation with COVID-19, the HEAL-Link supports the medical staff of state hospitals by providing electronic articles. A prerequisite is that they should be registered users to the GR-NET network.<sup>xiv</sup> Notably, at present the libraries in Greek state hospitals can only offer services to the hospital medical staff, rather than patients and their accompanied persons and custodians – addressing this could broaden the scope and help further deliver on people’s right to access health information.
34. *RECOMMENDATION: The Greek State should eliminate any obstacles concerning the operation of medical libraries with extending the services to non-medical staff and the patients.*

### **Open Access and the right to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.**

35. *Trends and developments.* Although Greece has not yet adopted a national Open Access (OA) strategy, there are active OA advocates in the country, notably in the library sector, who push for developments in this area. This movement towards OA publishing in scientific and academic fields helps address economic inequalities in accessing scientific publications, helping more equitably deliver on the right to share in scientific advancement, and to education at large.

36. *Good practices.* “Kallipos” was the first serious and funded attempt to create OA digital textbooks in Greek language for higher education institutions. The initiative dates back to 2013, and facilitated several rounds of “call for interest”, with the most recent in 2020. So far it has funded several academics and researchers to transform their in-class notes to textbooks and offer these through the educational platforms (MOOCs) and institutional repository.<sup>xv</sup>
37. A key OA initiative in Greece today is *Openaccess.gr*. It was developed and supported by the National Documentation Center (NDC), and includes information on international and national developments in the field of open access as well as the NDC’s actions on open access. *Opendata* is a working group affiliated to Free Software/Open Source Software, supporting the open data movement. In the same context, there are various working groups focusing on different aspects of open access, namely open government, open standards, open source, open content, open hardware, creative commons licenses, open education resources.<sup>xvi</sup>
38. Similarly, the National Documentation Center undertook a series of projects digitizing and providing access to diverse content. It provides access to a series of open access journals and NDC selected resources, the national archive of PHD theses, the Argo portal (a bibliographic database), SearchCulture.gr, EKT digital database, EKT library e-journals and other resources. A full list can be found at the NDC website.<sup>xvii</sup>
39. *RECOMMENDATION: Developing and implementing a national OA strategy in Greece can help further deliver on the right to share in scientific advancement, and to education at large.*
40. **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:** *For all the above recommendations, actions should be taken in cooperation with the General Council of Libraries and the Association of Greek Librarians and Information Scientists.*
41. *Notably, at the moment, not all communities across the country have access to a public or municipal library or a network of libraries yet- meaning that there are communities that do not yet fully benefit from access to these services and resources. In light of the benefits that access to such services brings – from the right to education, culture, sharing in scientific advancements, and more – we recommend for the Greek State to take action to ensure such access for all.*

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority: [https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SCI06/-](https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SCI06/)
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.eebep.gr/en/about-us/activities/>
- <sup>iii</sup> <http://www.euroblind.org/campaigns-and-activities/current-campaigns/marrakesh-treaty>
- <sup>iv</sup> [http://library.ifla.org/2739/1/055-kakali-en\\_poster.jpg](http://library.ifla.org/2739/1/055-kakali-en_poster.jpg)
- <sup>v</sup> <https://amelib.seab.gr/>
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://www.nlg.gr/news/diavazo-gia-toys-alloys-stin-ethniki-vivliothiki-tis-ellados/>
- <sup>vii</sup> Project LIB(e)RO Intellectual Output 1 / Activity 2 National Analysis-Report Situation Analysis National Library of Greece Greece Athens, August 2017. Agoropoulou, A., and Lygnou, A. <https://www.libero.uni-passau.de/en/project-resources/>
- <sup>viii</sup> Villioti, E. and Vassilakaki, E. (2015). “The role of librarians working in prison libraries in promoting life-long learning in Greece”. In 1 st Panhellenic Conference in Life Long Learning, University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Greece, 27-28 June, 2015. (in Greek). <http://llc-ekp-pamak2015.gr/>
- <sup>ix</sup> Villioti, E. (2015) “Prison libraries and their role in lifelong learning”. Athens: TEI Athens, Thesis.
- <sup>x</sup> See e.g. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/policy/themes/sparsely-populated-areas/mountain\\_ruralbroadband.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/sparsely-populated-areas/mountain_ruralbroadband.pdf)
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://www.nlg.gr/news/provasi-se-ekatommyria-ilektronika-tekmiria-apo-tin-ethniki-vivliothiki/>
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://www.heal-link.gr/covid-19-%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B5%CF%83-%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B4%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%8A%CE%BA%CE%B5%CF%83-%CE%B2%CE%B9%CE%B2%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%B8%CE%B7%CE%BA/>
- <sup>xiii</sup> [https://www.heal-link.gr/librarians\\_files/other/ICOLC\\_Statement\\_en\\_March2020\\_COVID-19.pdf](https://www.heal-link.gr/librarians_files/other/ICOLC_Statement_en_March2020_COVID-19.pdf)
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://library.upatras.gr/news/covidinformation>
- <sup>xv</sup> <https://www.kallipos.gr/en/>
- <sup>xvi</sup> See e.g. <http://www.ekt.gr/>;
- <sup>xvii</sup> Glossiotis, G., Vasilakaki, E. and Semertzaki, E. (2019). “Changing Greek libraries: a continuous dialogue”, IFLA Journal, vol. 45, no.2, pp. 69-80.