



International
Federation of Library
Associations and
Institutions

Public Libraries Section

RESPONDING! PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND REFUGEES

INTRODUCTION

Libraries throughout the world have a strong history of responding to natural disasters and humanitarian crises providing a welcoming environment, a place of refuge for body and soul, and a source of information.

As we have watched the refugee crisis unfold in Europe we have been flooded with examples of how public libraries have responded in practical and heartfelt ways.

This document details examples from a number of European nations and has been compiled by members of IFLA's Public Libraries Standing Committee and their colleagues. It is not meant to be exhaustive but is more of a starting point for shared experience and inspiration.

The examples described here demonstrate the power of libraries to make a difference in people's lives.

EUROPE

'Throughout Europe, public libraries have a proud tradition of welcoming everyone, regardless of ethnic origin. Libraries welcome refugees arriving into European countries with plenty of activities for children and adults, as well as access to information and education' EBLIDA (The European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations) has created a special [page](#) on their web site with links through to news and stories on this subject. Worth keeping an eye on!

AUSTRIA

The Austrian Library Association believes that the question how we handle the current crisis is one of the biggest challenges for our society – and for libraries. Therefore we are start to support the Austrian libraries with services, special training, book packages etc.

Our latest Library magazine is focused on a culture of welcome for refugees in libraries. Have a look on it: https://www.bvoe.at/epaper/3_15/

We sent Welcome A1 -posters (in 30 languages) to our members - they are on the doors and walls of 2.800 Austrian libraries now. You can download it from our website:
<https://www.bvoe.at/sites/default/files/attachments/bvoe15-willkommen-plakat-rz.pdf>

We started the project "Reading without borders" with:

- Pool of best-practice-examples
- Training courses
- Book packages for libraries – e.g. Silent books
- Library Card Terms and Conditions for download in 20 languages:
https://www.bvoe.at/themen/grenzenlos_lesen/benutzungsordnung

Austrian Library Association

FINLAND

In Finland we have done also quite a lot for refugees, because a lot of them are coming here.

We have one very simple PP-presentation for people, who don't know anything about libraries. Also we have multilingual leaflets and also other help in our web pages.

I put you here the PP and links to our pages.

<http://kirjasto.tampere.fi/palvelut-ja-asiointi/maahanmuuttajan-kirjasto/>

<https://piki.verkkokirjasto.fi/web/arena/maahanmuuttajan-kirjasto>

With the help of Red Cross, our e-magazine vendor, libraries and telecommunication company we made possible in all refugee centers access to Press Display - foreign-magazines.

We also give our removed children books to centers. And of course we teach people to use libraries

Pirkko Lindberg, Director of Library Services, Tampere City Library.

FRANCE

Bibliothèque publique d'information (Paris)

- **a partnership with France Terre d'Asile**

The Bpi is regularly crowded by migrants from different geographical backgrounds, often very young and who can not speak neither French nor English nor Spanish. These "new" users appeared at the Bpi end of 2009, almost exclusively using the Internet for free. From this rose the idea of a partnership with France Terre d'Asile, an organization supporting the asylum seekers in France. After making a diagnosis of the needs and set targets of this social-interpreting mediation, an agreement, renewable annually, was signed between the two institutions. Thus, since July 2010, a mediator of France Terre d'Asile, polyglot, is present in the library, twice a week, on Thursdays and Fridays from 2PM to 5PM. It offers to migrant users a social, legal and administrative expertise.

- **French as a Foreign Language (FLE)**

Since 2010, the BPI conducts Conversation Workshops in FLE. Three workshops in FLE, lasting 1:15, hosting up to 15 people, are held every Friday at 14h, 16h and 18h. These workshops drain a diverse audience, including migrants or newcomers.

True places of exchange, rich in encounters and sharing, social connection tools, these workshops are very popular, especially among refugees who, through this, manage to master the basics of French to help them to understand their rights in France. In 2013, these workshops have involved 1343 participants.

As an extension or in addition to these workshops in FLE, the Bpi also organizes a series of workshops "special issue" for non-French speaking audiences, migrants in particular:

- Cine-FLE that enables non-Francophone users learning French to enrich their learning of the French language through watching a movie in French with French subtitles
- FLE The workshop "Beyond the Walls" in the Musée National d'Art Moderne (MNAM) Centre Georges Pompidou in this case. This time it is the discovery of art that is a starting point for discussions around the French encountered works.
- The animation Treasure Hunt which, in a fun way, allows users learning French to practice the language while visiting the library and discovering its spaces, its collections and its services.
- Finally, the program "From one bank to the other" connects two groups of migrants learning French in two different francophone countries (France and Canada) and allows them, at a meeting in videoconference, to exchange on their experiences in their respective host countries.

- **Partnership with social field associations**

As part of the development of public inclusive policy, Bpi offers, during its closing hours, regular and special welcomes to the beneficiaries of social field associations. This action was implemented in 2010, following the influx of migrants from Afghanistan and the many requests from associations that receive them.

Paris

The « Vaclav Havel Library » welcomes migrants and asylum seekers coming mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq and provides services targeted to them:

“French as a foreign language” workshops

- Literacy courses in Pharsi
- Meetings with the NGO “France terre d’asile” to provide help on asylum seeking process
- To enhance comprehension of the migrant’s situation by other users and multiculturalism, the library will take part in a festival organized by the NGO “Cimade”
<http://www.festivalmigrantscene.org/> (games, videos, “citizen’s games”, film “Welcome” and debate with the director)
- The library will also propose a reading club on immigration and an exhibition on a comics book “Magic Majid”

Plaine commune (suburb of Paris)

25 libraries in the north of Paris and a library bus

29% foreigners among the population, 134 different nationalities, with very different cultural, social, professional background and various reasons for immigrating

To provide services to all, especially people who don’t use easily cultural institutions, the City libraries network:

- Provides leaflets and brochures in the most used languages (for example Tamoul and Chinese), depending on the location of the library
- Offers books and materials in various native languages
- Promotes learning of French as a foreign language through an e-resources platform Médi@TIC and collections of dedicated books
- Organizes on a regular basis language workshops where users can improve their skills in a safe atmosphere
- Provides help about administrative proceedings in partnership with non-profit organizations.

Nancy (East of France)

As part of welcoming refugees in Nancy, the city libraries adapt their documentary section by offering the public a press title from the Middle East. They sought advice from the Foreign Ministry

to choose the "right" newspaper and have thus identified one of them which they will subscribe: it will be "Asharq Al-Awsat". They will also identify skills in Arabic and English in staff, to organize welcoming in coordination with structures dealing with refugees in the city.

Lorient (French Brittany)

François Mitterrand library of Lorient has a space for training and self-study (the Logithèque) dedicated to information and communications technology (ICT). One objective of this space is to enable an audience of migrants to learn French on digital learning platforms. This service is an important vector in terms of e-inclusion and social cohesion for the intended audience. For 3 years, a foreign audience, mostly newcomers who need to learn French, used the library. They are accompanied by volunteers from associations.

Compiled by Annie Dourlent and Philippe Colomb

GERMANY

Many public libraries in Germany have intercultural collections such as books in many different languages, German language courses, information material to get along in everyday-life in Germany, collections of world music and films. Some libraries alter their collections in 2015 in order to be relevant to the newly arrived refugees who stem mostly from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Eritrea.

There are already many intercultural services in German libraries for migrants such as language cafés, German courses (often led by volunteers), library tours for migrants and special target groups such as unaccompanied minors.

Some libraries provide free library cards, but most libraries require a certificate of registration which newly arrived refugees do not have. It is always possible though to use the media within the public library, in many libraries also the computers with internet access and/or wi-fi.

Libraries in big cities:

The **Association of Public Libraries in Berlin (VÖBB)** is the first German Library Association which provides library cards to refugees without demanding an official certificate of registration. A temporary resident permit or a certificate of the accommodation facility is sufficient. Refugees are allowed to check out items from any public library in Berlin and access digital services such as e-books and music streaming. Source: Press release:

<https://www.berlin.de/sen/kultur/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2015/pressemitteilung.364028.php>

The **Humboldt University of Berlin** invites refugees to join lectures and seminars as guest auditors and provides a consultation hours once a week for guest auditors. The **University Library** provides free access to all library services, e. g. text books for German as a foreign language and free internet access. Source: E-Mail

Bochum Public Library has expanded its collection in different languages and the media for German language acquisition using the slogan "Books saying welcome!" The library is supported by the local book trade with regard to book acquisition for the welcome-collection and has decorated its branch libraries accordingly. There are events for volunteers (and refugees) taking place in the library in order to provide an introduction to the offers of the library focussing especially on the collection in other languages and media for German language acquisition. The library invites people in refugee centers to the library and its free events, especially children with an accompanying person. The library approaches all local kindergartens and schools as well so that all refugee children get to know

the library. Source: E-Mail and newspaper article:

http://www.bochum.de/C125708500379A31/vwContentByKey/W2A2PH3L250BOCMDE/nav/966CW_U671BOCM

Hamburg Public Library has a campaign „Refugees welcome“: a student prints the slogan on t-shirts and sweaters and sells them online. The money is donated to the library program „Dialogue in German“. More than 200 volunteers are involved more than 80 hours a week in German classes for migrants offered in 33 libraries in Hamburg.

The library has furthermore a cooperation with the literary festival Harbour Front which spread the donation appeal at every event at the festival.

All branch libraries have contacted the social management of homes for asylum seekers/the refugee centers in their district. Summer parties of the homes are used as a possibility to get in touch with refugees and to disseminate information on library programs.

Hamburg Public Library provides online library cards to refugees financed by private donations. Apart from WiFi-access the online library card gives access to e-books in many different languages, music streaming and e-learning-courses of the library.

The Hamburg Public Library has many intercultural services and collections which are currently slightly altered in order to match with the background of the newly arrived refugees . Sources:
<http://www.buecherhallen.de/ehrenamt-blog-kampagne-refugees-welcome-2015/>, Journal-Article:
Barkow, Anne, Nadine Cicek, Martina Dannert, Yilmaz Holtz-Ersahin, und Susanne Schneehorst.
„Willkommen! Flüchtlingsprojekte in deutschen Bibliotheken.“ *BuB*, Nr. 08–09 (2015). <http://b-u-b.de/willkommen-fluechtlingsprojekte-in-deutschen-bibliotheken/>

Cologne Public Library opened the Intercultural Library Forum close to the Central Library. It is meeting point and learning facility for people from abroad as well as for people who are interested in intercultural exchange. It is especially a meeting point for the great variety of local welcome initiatives. In cooperation with these the Intercultural Library Forum aims at providing a diverse event programme, e.g. library introductions, initial information, a variety of consultation service, homework support, and multilingual readings for refugee children. The space can be used for group work as well as for individual study and support of volunteers who are godparents for extracurricular mentoring of refugee children or mentors for refugee families. The Forum contains group workstations as well as individual workstations, a reading lounge, a collection of media for German language acquisition, alpha studio, computers, a projector, and audio stations. The Intercultural Forum is run by volunteers in close cooperation with Cologne Public Library and is open every day except Sundays. The place can be used by volunteer initiatives outside opening hours. The Forum bundles already existent offers such as: information events for volunteers and welcome initiatives, information material for volunteers for German language support, media boxes, and multilingual readings for refugee children. Cologne Public Library has a programme for integration courses including library tours for the attendees and a free library card for three month. Source: E-Mail

Leipzig Public Library cooperates with the Refugee Council Leipzig in the program “Arriving in Leipzig”: the seminars for volunteers take place in the library. The volunteers get to know how refugees can use the library as a place of culture, education, and information focussing especially on language acquisition. Source: <http://www.bibliotheksportal.de/index.php?id=787>

Magdeburg Public Library presents a photo exhibition of a collaboration partner on the situation in homes for asylum seekers in Saxony-Anhalt. The library collaborates with an association in a creative program for refugee children: a social pedagogue and artist visits refugee centers and hands empty shoeboxes to the children which they fill with information from their homeland and their current

situation. The vernissage and presentation of the shoeboxes takes place in the public library. Source: <http://www.bibliothekspotal.de/index.php?id=787>

The **International Youth Library in Munich** has workshops for pupils from newly founded refugee classes and pupils from regular classes. It aims to get to know each other and to expand the knowledge of the cultural background of each other. Source:

<http://www.bibliothekspotal.de/index.php?id=787>

Bremen Public Library provides media boxes with content in five languages to homes for asylum seekers. The project is financed by the Bremen Senate. Source:

<http://www.bibliothekspotal.de/index.php?id=787>

Duisburg Public Library opened the „International Children's Library“ in 2011. The collection contains about 6.000 items in 17 different languages. The collection „Arriving in Germany“ offers information from migrant communities, cultural projects, and many other institutions, but also material for self study of the German language and life in Germany. The library provides a Language Café as well: refugees and volunteers get in touch drinking coffee or helping each other with language issues.

Duisburg Public Library started a pilot in 2015: a teaching unit called “German lesson in the library” for adolescent refugees. They get to know the library as well as learn about everyday life of German youth. The unit aims at reading and media literacy and German language acquisition—partly in cooperation with authors and artists (e.g. writing workshops). Source: Journal-Article: Barkow, Anne, Nadine Cicek, Martina Dannert, Yilmaz Holtz-Ersahin, und Susanne Schneehorst. „Willkommen! Flüchtlingsprojekte in deutschen Bibliotheken.“ *BuB*, Nr. 08–09 (2015). <http://b-u-b.de/willkommen-fluechtlingsprojekte-in-deutschen-bibliotheken/>; <http://www.bibliothekspotal.de/index.php?id=787>; E-Mail

Erlangen Public Library offers library tours which are altered depending on the attendees. The library provides language boxes: media for self study of the German language. Pupils of a special class for refugees has gotten a collection of books in different languages from the library. Source: <http://www.bibliothekspotal.de/index.php?id=787>

The **Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg** has a project called “Orientation on the study programme for refugees and asylum seekers”. It aims at preparing refugees for studying at the university so that they can start right away after the recognition procedures and the required German language course. It contains a orientation consultation, a student advisory service session, an intensive German language course, the attendance of selected free lectures, and a buddy-programme. The **University Library of Erlangen-Nuremberg** gives free library cards to the attendees providing access to all kind of analogue and digital media and the internet. There are guided library tours and library introductions for the attendees as well. Source: E-Mail

Essen Public Library asks for donations for refugees. People can bring books, games, CDs etc. to the library which distributes them to refugee centers. Source: E-Mail

Nuremberg Public Library visualized the information on using the library and has multilingual glossaries. Residents get a free library card. Source: <http://www.bibliothekspotal.de/index.php?id=787>

The **Nuremberg Asylothek** is a small library founded by volunteers in a home for asylum seekers in 2012. It grew to a educational hot spot: German language courses, homework mentors and many more services are provided by volunteers. Source: website: <http://asylothek.blogspot.de/> and Günter, Reichert. „Die Asylothek – eine gesellschaftliche Notwendigkeit.“ *Bibliotheksforum Bayern*,

Nr. Heft 3 (2015): 176–80, https://www.bibliotheksforum-bayern.de/fileadmin/archiv/2015-3/PDF-Einzelbeitraege/BFB_0315_05_Reichert_V05.pdf

Libraries in smaller cities:

The **Hof Asylothek** is a project similar to the Nuremberg Asylothek: volunteers built a library for refugees and provide German language courses aiming at empowering the refugees for every-day life. Source: newspaper article: <http://www.frankenpost.de/lokal/hofrebau/hof-stadt/Poesie-fuer-die-Asylothek;art2390,4295624>

Wilhelmshaven Public Library provides free library cards for refugees without demanding an official certificate of registration. A certificate of the accommodation facility is sufficient. It is possible to check out books and other items with the library card. Source: E-Mail

The **Straubing Public Library** provides media boxes to homes for asylum seekers. The boxes contains media for individual study of the German language, picture books, hidden object books, and board games. The library has a collection for non-German speakers as well.

They plan to install computers with arabic keyboard, headphones and microphones, German courses, and other material which might be relevant for asylum seekers in the library. Source: E-Mail

Dinslaken Public Library used their revenues of a book sale to acquired a new welcome-collection from the refugee centre Fliehburg which is close to Dinslaken. The collection contains board games, language courses, children's books, literature in simple German, and multilingual books on Dinslaken and its region. The collection was given as a permanent loan to the refugee centre hoping it will make the people want to come to the public library in the city centre.

A Language Café for volunteers and refugees was initiated in cooperation with the education centre and a professional moderator. Source: E-Mail

The **Catholic Public Library Erbach** offers writing workshop for children in primary school, among them also refugees, since 2013. In cooperation with the Foreign Office and a publishing house a free e-book by 120 young authors – 5 from Erbach – on the topic „My Home, Your Home“ was published containing stories of the kid's flight to Germany. Source: E-Mail and http://www.bistummainz.de/pfarreien/dekanat-erbach/pfarrei_erbach/koeberbach/aktionen/index.html?f_action=show&f_newsitem_id=49795

Press release of the Foreign Office: http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/AAMt/ZuGastimAA/TagDerOffenenTuer/150619-TdoT_EBook_node.html

E-Book: https://www.beltz.de/kinder_jugendbuch/produkte/produkt_produktdetails/30777-mein_zuhause_dein_zuhause.html

The **Public Library Norderstedt** provides library tours for asylum seekers and free library card for three months. The library collaborates with the union "Welcome team": they offer events for refugees in which they provide help with the paperwork. Source: <http://www.bibliotheksportal.de/index.php?id=787>

In **Hückeswagen Public Library** volunteers held German courses for refugees twice a week. Source: E-Mail

Community Library Echzell built an “Asylothek” within the library. It was financed by donations. It provides material to refugees and refugee aid workers. Source: E-Mail

The **Public Library Germeling** collaborates with the city's integration commissioner. The regular event “Living diversity” takes place in the public library: it is a workshop for refugees and volunteers in order to get to know each other and get information. The library has printed leaflets about the library and its services in different languages and/or with pictograms. Source: E-Mail

The **Public Library Lauf (a. d. Pegnitz)** made a book donation to a home for asylum seekers. The library gives free library cards to asylum seekers as well as library tours. The library acquired material for German language courses in consultation with the adult education center and volunteers. Source: E-Mail

The **Public Library Villingen-Schwenningen** provides free library cards and special library tours for asylum seekers. The library takes part in the district's “cultural walk for refugees” in which refugees get to know the cultural offers in the neighborhood.

Different events took place: reading sessions, an event for promoting art and language to refugee children. The library enlarged its German language collection and uses media boxes focusing on language acquisition for refugees of the regional education office. Source: E-Mail

Compiled by Sarah Dudek

In order to provide an accessible and appealing opportunity for refugees and immigrants to get into the local language, German libraries are starting to participate in the "[welcomegrooves](#)" project.

Welcomegrooves is a collaborative effort of more than 70 volunteers from the German creative industries and related sectors. Together, they have developed six lesson units "Learn German with Music". In cooperation with refugees, these units have been translated into 23 languages. For the sake of user-friendliness, they can be downloaded as MP3-files onto mobile phones/devices as well as used online. For both, libraries provide facilities and support.

The idea of welcomegrooves is to give a warm welcome to the people who found shelter in Germany and to help them to familiarise themselves with their host country.

Information provided by Guido Jansen from IFLA National Committee Germany

SWEDEN

Stockholm Public Library Welcomes Refugees

In recent weeks, there have been over thousand asylum seekers daily in Sweden, of which a great part in the Stockholm area and as well unaccompanied minors. The children's mobile library, the Children's Bookbus, visits asylum accommodations offering books and library information in various languages. The multilingual staff keep story-time sessions in English and Arabic and other current languages.

Stockholm Public Library allow people to obtain Library cards without ID or other official papers to be able to borrow books, read newspapers, use computers and internet free of charge. Other relevant activities in the libraries in Stockholm are study help in association with different non-profit organizations. Right now we try to organize our mini-mobile libraries/pop-up libraries at appropriate locations to read on site while awaiting asylum information or on their way to other destinations.

Stockholm Public Library

UNITED KINGDOM

In the UK CILIP has published [*Welcoming Refugees to the UK \(and to Libraries\): The role of libraries in times of crisis.*](#)

This site includes a link to [Welcome Statement](#) issued by The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) and the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) as well as links to [practical examples of what libraries can do](#). Bookmark this site and watch as it develops.