

eIFL in Europe: enhanced access to knowledge in the digital environment

eIFL.net (Electronic Information for Libraries, www.eifl.net) is a not for profit organization that supports and advocates for the wide availability of electronic resources by library users in transitional and developing countries. Its core activities are negotiating affordable subscriptions on a multi-country consortial basis, supporting national library consortia and maintaining a global knowledge sharing and capacity building network in related areas, such as open access publishing, intellectual property rights, open source software for libraries and the creation of institutional repositories of local content. Legally registered as an independent organization in the Netherlands since 2003 and with an operational base in Italy, the eIFL network of national library consortia includes 48 member countries across Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Africa, the Middle East and South-east Asia.

eIFL started in 1999 as an initiative of the Open Society Institute (OSI), a private grant-making and operating foundation, part of the Soros Foundation network. Its goal was to bring affordable and equitable access to e-resources to the countries and libraries in its network. In the 1990s, OSI made significant investments in library development and modernisation, especially in the post socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as the former Soviet Union. These countries traditionally had a sophisticated educational system and, undoubtedly, represented emerging markets for international providers of scholarly information. However, the high subscription costs and the relatively little awareness of the electronic alternative to print subscriptions presented significant barriers to access the wealth of international academic journals and databases. For this multi-country initiative, the national site license model was adopted: in return for the stated price per country, an unlimited number of libraries could register for access and an unlimited number of users could use the services simultaneously.

Over the years eIFL has not only managed to consolidate its foundational programmes but has also embarked upon additional programmes that aim to support and advocate for enhanced access to educational electronic resources by other means. In concrete, eIFL launched its eIFL Open Access initiative and its eIFL Intellectual Property Rights and Libraries programme nearly 3 years ago; the eIFL Free and Open Source Software programme kicked off last year. Although OSI funds still cover a large share of eIFL activities, we are being successful in attracting other international sponsors (i.e, UNESCO, EU Tempus programme, Koha Foundation) with whom eIFL shares synergies with regards to the expansion of fair and seamless access to knowledge worldwide.

E-resources negotiations

The negotiation of educational e-resources has been at the core of eIFL's mission and activities since its beginnings in 1999. As a response to a scenario of drastic increases in the prices for e-resources subscriptions and the growing digital divide between Western countries and the rest of the world, eIFL strives to become the premier multi-country negotiator for affordable prices and conditions for libraries and their users in transitional and developing countries. eIFL first deals enabled libraries from most Eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union to gain access to EBSCO for the first time, and as time has passed by, eIFL negotiations and spectrum of publishing partners have widened dramatically (see all publishers with whom eIFL has signed licence agreements at <http://www.eifl.net/cps/sections/services/negotiations>). Electronic resources have been incorporated into libraries collections and management little by little over the past

decade. Today this eIFL service is perceived by member countries as one that brings major benefits to their libraries and in fact these negotiations have allowed member countries to make overall savings of 95% of real prices, according to a recent eIFL savings estimations study.

The results are telling enough: libraries in member countries can afford paying the prices negotiated through eIFL and thus get access to a wealth of resources that previously were unattainable price-wise. While usage of e-resources was discreet amongst eIFL countries in the first years of negotiations, figures have picked up steadily, to the point that now they are in great demand in many countries where such a possibility was out of reach 10 years ago. By way of illustration, the table below shows the consolidated usage of EBSCO by library users in eIFL European countries from 2002 to 2006. This data reflects how quickly libraries in countries like Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia, for instance, have managed to catch up as far as access to electronic resources is concerned. These improvements in the digital environment have gone to the benefit of end-users (ranging from students to researchers and professors), contributing to narrowing the educational gap with more advanced countries and fostering research innovation, civic empowerment and economic development in their societies.

TOTAL	Searches					Total Full Text				
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Albania	1.582	1.312	3.850	2.823		1.228	1.151	1.574	2.998	
Bosnia	9.199	11.091	53.127	82.703	91.194	21.937	15.826	35.790	36.383	29.918
Bulgaria	59.841	72.757	151.300	196.002	268.222	59.041	68.744	78.226	84.376	91.368
Estonia	193.574	278.038	424.445	671.383	860.112	161.671	208.657	196.346	264.651	249.972
Kosovo	371	1.220	7.322	9.269	11.561	453	1.572	5.602	15.161	3.813
Latvia	52.603	84.259	183.923	376.575	358.430	48.150	69.292	89.501	154.606	111.168
Lithuania	132.352	221.646	386.813	637.361	863.531	139.885	186.292	205.354	305.264	241.707
Macedonia	2.523	2.865	3.298	5.279	18.333	2.330	1.612	1.444	1.905	6.387
Poland	274.373	573.413	1.275.544	2.329.653	3.182.015	305.852	478.222	566.832	897.022	852.608
Serbia	40.488	51.614	119.652	170.900	215.427	37.536	53.020	71.776	96.324	94.863
Slovakia	81.618	117.439	205.796	283.927	312.127	79.435	119.850	96.004	123.715	92.932
Slovenia	103.732	127.054	246.114	367.458	430.920	75.947	91.842	95.439	142.716	123.203

As part of the eIFL network, Slovakian libraries can benefit from the agreements that eIFL signs with publishers for enhanced access to e-resources at highly discounted rates and fair terms and conditions for libraries. However, due to discontinuous communication with the country in the few past years, eIFL feels that local libraries are not taking advantage of the e-resources offered to the full, resulting in opt outs in eIFL negotiations with new publishers (i.e. IEEE, Nature, Berkley Electronic Press, JSTOR, Project Muse, Science Online) or in renewals with existing ones (EBSCO, Cambridge University Press, Emerald, BioOne, Oxford Content Online and Oxford University Press Journals, Sage, Wiley InterScience, Institute of Physics, amongst others). The current situation can change to the better provided Slovakian libraries show an active interest in the new opportunities offered by eIFL.

In 2006 eIFL started to collaborate with Google on a variety of fronts in order to increase the visibility of e-content in member countries. Linking holdings of eIFL consortium members through the Google Scholar and using the free SFX link resolver to enable this opened this partnership. So far, at a European level, linking accounts have been set for libraries in Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine. Linking union catalogues through Google Scholar has become another field of collaboration offered by eIFL, and union catalogues of Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria and Poland are already benefiting from this opportunity. eIFL and Google Scholar interests also meet in making locally produced content in transitional and

developing countries freely visible worldwide. As a result, a range of Lithuanian, Bulgarian and Serbian scholarly journals have already been indexed by Google and the digitization of backfile journals that local publishers will provide to Google is the next step.

Library consortium building

Together with negotiating e-content on behalf of member countries, eIFL has put much emphasis on supporting the creation and development of national library consortia as an effective way to share costs and carry out activities within the library communities. eIFL work is based on the principle that a national library consortium per country can participate in its network, and in the case of large countries where there is more than one library consortium the coordination is channelled through an umbrella organization or coalition. A memorandum of understanding signed by eIFL and a new participating consortium details the rights and obligations of both parties. The country consortium designates an eIFL country coordinator who is the link between the consortium and the eIFL programme team. The country coordinator is responsible for the dissemination to the consortium libraries of information coming through eIFL channels and for keeping eIFL informed about in-country developments.

eIFL work in its European member countries dates back to the 1990s, and thanks to this long record of cooperation much progress has been made as regards library consortia building and consolidation by means of small start up grants, country visits, regional and topical workshops and seminars, trouble shooting meetings and continued knowledge sharing and information. Nowadays all eIFL countries in Europe have library consortia that act actively at the national and international levels in a variety of matters of relevance for library modernization. Some of these consortia are led by the national library, as it is the case of Kobson (“Serbian Library Consortium for Coordinated Acquisition”) or by a ministry, eg the Latvian State agency “Culture information systems”, whereas others share costs and responsibilities amongst members, such as the Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC).

Library consortia across countries also vary in level of development and priorities for their communities, hence there are consortia like the Lithuanian Research Library Consortium, the Polish Poznan Foundation of Scientific Libraries and the Consortium of Estonian Libraries Network (ELNET) that, in parallel with enhanced access to more e-resources and consortium sustainability, have taken up other eIFL services fully, such as the creation of institutional repositories containing the output of local research and content and the promotion and advocacy for open scholarship amongst stakeholders and policymakers by holding discussions with national ministries and academia and by taking part in EU-wide meetings and consultations. Finally, eIFL is glad to see that library consortia in more troubled countries are also succeeding in making substantial headways and broadening the scope of cooperation, as the case of the Macedonian Electronic Libraries Consortium (MEL) and the Consortium of Electronic Libraries in Kosova (CELK) prove despite harsh economic conditions, isolation and the poor state of libraries.

eIFL has been cooperating with Slovakia since its inception, via its national library. After a promising start, which witnessed the creation of the Libnet consortium with the support of eIFL funding and its active participation in eIFL deals with publishers for access to e-content, over the last couple of years the consortium has failed to keep abreast of all services and opportunities offered by eIFL, resulting in a low profile presence in the eIFL network. eIFL is willing to engage in open talks with the community of local university, research, academic and public libraries in the country to reestablish a multifaceted cooperation of interest to a variety of Slovakian libraries.

eIFL OA: Open Access and Institutional repositories

Through the eIFL Open Access programme, eIFL members build capacity on issues related to Open Access in order that libraries and their users can benefit from the content which is increasingly being made freely available through Open Access - as well as by ensuring that the local content produced within their countries is widely distributed. This is being addressed through the development of Open Access repositories and by encouraging authors within each country to publish their articles in Open Access journals. In a relatively short period of time eIFL OA has become a well known and respected advocate for open and free access to educational resources in the world on behalf of transitional and developing countries.

The advocacy and awareness raising efforts of the programme have been enabled through the organization of workshops and seminars, the distribution of educational material as well as through the creation of a pool of OA experts in member countries. In the last two and a half years, eIFL European countries have been amongst those to benefit the most from this programme, given the advanced level of their library and research communities and their diverse activities. Thus, to gain advantage of the momentum, eIFL OA has held seminars in Lithuania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Slovenia, Serbia and Russia, contributing to achievements such as the mandate on OA for publicly funded research passed by the Parliament in Ukraine and the approaches made by the Lithuanian and Polish consortia to policymakers and rectors of universities in favour of open access for public research.

eIFL OA is also actively present in OA initiatives on the international front. For example, last year eIFL-OA responded to the EU Commission consultation on open access publishing and in February eIFL participated in the petition to the European Commission for guaranteed public access to publicly funded research, with the attendance of Melissa Hagemann, eIFL OA programme coordinator, as well as eIFL country coordinators from Lithuania, Serbia and Ukraine. At the European level, eIFL also collaborates with other OA champions such as JISC, SURF and Key Perspectives to lobby for open scholarship in the digital environment.

Another important aspect of the eIFL OA programme is its Institutional repositories (IR) initiative. This action line matches with the general mission of eIFL, which is to facilitate access to e-resources, both from renowned international publishing houses as well as electronic content produced in member countries. Thus, eIFL IR intends to provide technical and logistic advice as well as training on how to proceed with the building of institutional repositories in developing and transitional countries. This initiative arrives in a suitable moment as, according to a recent survey carried out by eIFL, some member countries have already started with digital libraries' and institutional repositories' pilot projects. The eIFL consortium in Poland is developing strong activities in the building of digital libraries to make local cultural and scientific output visible worldwide. Belarus, Russia and Slovenia also offer remarkable efforts, whereas Lithuania, Serbia and Ukraine have announced their intention to implement government initiatives in the near future along these lines. eIFL IR seeks to provide high level consultancy alongside training and technical support for the multiplication and sustainability of open repositories.

eIFL IP: Intellectual Property Rights and libraries

While libraries in eIFL member countries are benefiting from access to new electronic resources licensed through eIFL, they are also affected by international policy making in copyright and trade agreements. Against a background of increasingly unbalanced and unfair copyright laws, librarians from the eIFL network need to be in a position to advocate for fair access to knowledge, as well as balance, proportionality and developmental awareness in copyright laws. The goal of eIFL-IP is

therefore to protect and promote the interests of libraries on copyright and intellectual property issues which affect member countries in such a way that librarians will become activists for fair and balanced copyright laws as well as leaders in promoting access to knowledge in the digital age.

To this end, eIFL-IP is creating an eIFL “model law” which will be used to advise national copyright officials when updating their copyright laws; eIFL has also created a network of library copyright specialists, builds capacity across the eIFL library community and advocates for national and international copyright law reform. In the European Union, for example, eIFL-IP has responded to the consultation of the i2010 European Commission Digital Library Initiative and made five recommendations to the European Commission on amending the Database Directive, in response to their consultation, thus making the eIFL network of libraries’ voice heard and considered. Joint statements with other like minded organizations such as EBLIDA and IFLA for the defence of library users’ rights stand as an effective complementary action line of this programme.

eIFL IP work in the European member countries has born fruit in its 2 and a half years of existence. A regional workshop on copyright and libraries was held in Tallin, Estonia, in December 2005, with the attendance of eIFL IP coordinators from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. Thanks to a continuous communication with the network of IP coordinators in member countries, the sharing of knowledge and educational resources (such as the handbook on copyright and related issues for libraries, the first of its kind) and the provision of legal advice, eIFL European countries are making substantial headways towards more awareness of the effects of copyright laws on libraries.

So far, accomplishments at the European level include support to the creation of a national copyright strategy plan in Slovenia and the provision of legal advice when literary readings in public libraries were stopped due to demands by collecting societies for performance fees; the participation of Polish and Lithuanian coordinators in the EBLIDA copyright meetings; the support to the Latvian consortium cooperation with the Copyright Division of the Ministry of Culture; and as a direct result of an eIFL talk at WIPO, an amendment to the Ukrainian copyright law for disabled people for AV material is now going through parliament. Besides, eIFL, as an accredited observer at WIPO, has been the first organization to bring librarians from transitional and developing countries to stage to voice their position towards a copyright law reform. Jan Kovacik, eIFL IP coordinator for Slovakia from the Slovak National Library, participated ins the WIPO Copyright Committee last May representing eIFL.

eIFL Free and Open Source Software Programme (FOSS)

This is the newest eIFL initiative, officially launched at the end of 2006. The goal of eIFL-FOSS is to allow eIFL member libraries to benefit from free and open source software. Software has become an integral part of modern libraries, but licensing proprietary software is often too expensive for eIFL libraries, and sometimes cannot meet the needs of libraries in developing and transition countries. As the knowledge and expertise needed to install and maintain open source ILS products is currently lacking in most eIFL libraries, eIFL has embarked upon the development of a software package to be called “Library-in-a-box,” which will consist of an open source ILS product, packaged so as to be easy to install on readily available hardware. eIFL-FOSS also envisages regional training opportunities for libraries wanting to implement Library-in-a-box in order to create self-sustaining communities of technical expertise and know-how within member countries. In parallel, eIFL is building a pool of local coordinators in FOSS to exchange and build knowledge and capacity.

eIFL Knowledge sharing network

Sharing information and knowledge and promoting cooperation amongst libraries is essential to capacity building and sustainable development. To this end, eIFL has developed into a vibrant global community of professionals interacting in different ways: within national library consortia, in expert networks such as eIFL-IP or eIFL-OA, throughout geographic regions, by special interest groups etc. At the core of eIFL's mission and underpinning its growing range of activities is the sharing of knowledge at all levels – global, national, local – in all areas relevant to eIFL's activities, both between eIFL stakeholders (the library, academic, research and policy making communities) and between East and West, North and South. The ultimate goal is to help libraries and librarians from member countries keep abreast and participate actively in the cutting edge developments in the digital environment of the librarianship and information sciences fields.

The eIFL Annual General Assembly is the major, most intensive and forward looking eIFL knowledge-sharing event. eIFL country coordinators and library representatives come together to discuss eIFL activities and strategies and to debate state-of-the-art issues and developments with internationally renowned resource persons, publishers and representatives from many relevant sectors and international initiatives. In 2007, this event will be hosted by our Serbian colleagues in Belgrade on 8-11 November.

Professionals interested in learning more about eIFL activities and initiatives, and our global network of people are most welcome to get in touch with the eIFL team to learn about opportunities to participate. Please visit our website to keep informed on further details and developments.