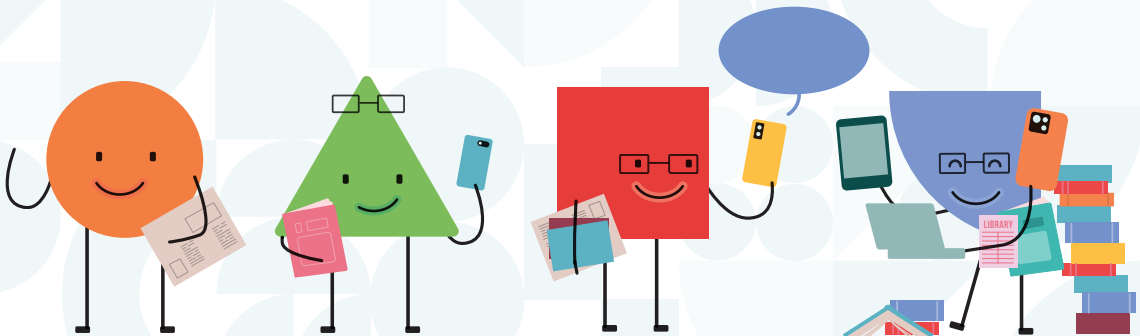


NATIONAL READING BAROMETER SOUTH AFRICA



NATIONAL READING BAROMETER SPECIAL ISSUE BRIEF: LIBRARIES





National Reading Barometer Special Issue Brief: Libraries

Introduction to the National Reading Barometer Project

The National Reading Barometer project describes adult reading culture and the broader reading ecosystem in South Africa. The project was led by Nal'ibali in partnership with the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) and includes two components:

- The **National Reading Survey** (NRS) is a nationally representative survey of the adult population aged 16+. It profiles adults' reading practices, preferences, and contexts, and includes questions on reading with children, digital reading, library use and language preferences. The Survey was designed to enable limited continuity with the 2016 National Reading Survey run by the South African Book Development Council (SABDC).
- The **National Reading Barometer** (NRB) is a new compilation of secondary datasets, plus selected data points from the NRS, that collates and tracks changes in the overall health of the South African reading ecosystem.

The National Reading Survey and Barometer will be repeated in 2026 and 2030.

The full Survey findings and Barometer findings reports can be found at www.readingbarometersa.org, along with technical reports on the methodologies used.

This special issue brief summarises the 2023 National Reading Survey and National Reading Barometer findings related to libraries.

Why are Libraries Important to the Reading Ecosystem?

Public libraries are crucial institutions for the support of reading cultures across the world. This is especially true for countries like South Africa, where high levels of inequality and poverty, coupled with a commercialised reading materials industry (selling locally published and imported materials/ books/ magazines/ etc), makes owning books and other reading materials unaffordable for the majority of the population.

In addition to providing access to reading materials, libraries also offer information and events dedicated to books and reading, create safe/ well-lit/ quiet spaces for reading which may not be otherwise available for many people, and illustrate in various other ways that reading is important enough for the state to invest public resources.

In the digital age, libraries around the world are transforming their operations and offerings by adding digital materials and internet access services, a trend that is also starting to reflect in South Africa. All South African public libraries have computers and 92% have internet connectivity and are providing internet access to the public (NLSA).

National Reading Survey Results

Questions concerning libraries addressed by the NRS include:

- How many and which people use libraries?
- How regularly do they use libraries?
- What are the barriers to public library use?
- For what purposes are libraries used? What percent of users use them as a source of reading materials versus other functions?

Libraries remain important places for reading material access, but are still not accessible to all, and many users don't borrow books.

National Reading Survey Methods

The National Reading Survey is a nationally representative survey of 4,250 South African adults aged 16 and above. The data was collected in late 2022 and early 2023. Participants were recruited through face-to-face stratified sampling and interviewed by phone or face-to-face. Survey results were weighted by age, race and province for analysis.

As a representative sample of the adult population rather than a survey targeting library users, the NRS allows for findings about the prevalence of library use and barriers to library use as well as the experiences of library users. However, the

Key Numbers on Library Use

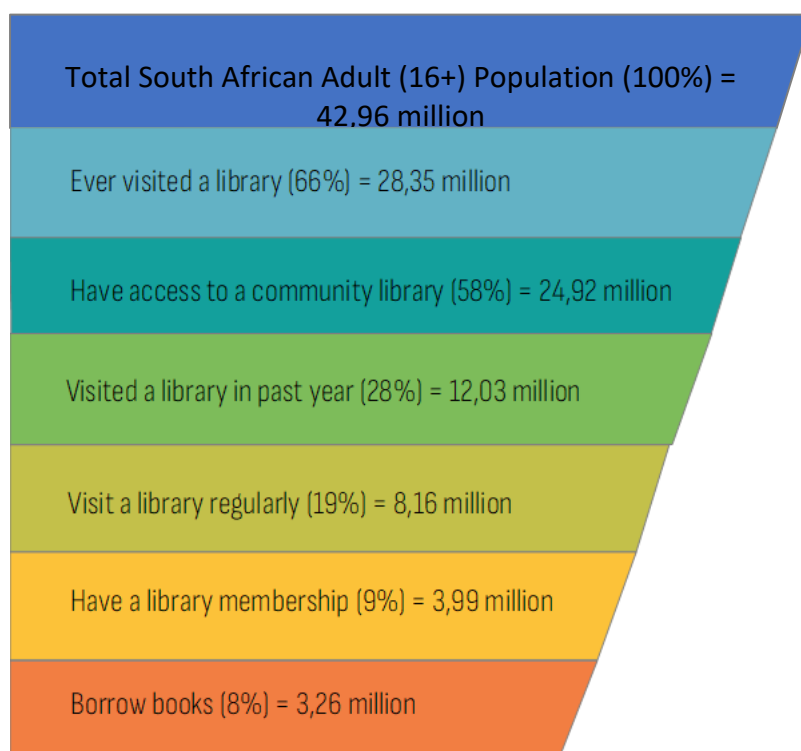


Figure 1: National Reading Survey Key Numbers on Library Use

Although two-thirds of South African adults have ever visited a library, only 58% current have access to a community library, meaning they are aware of a community library located near where they live.

Despite Covid-era closures, libraries seem to have “bounced back”: 28% of South African adults have visited a community library in the last year (27% in 2016). In international comparison, past year library use is 33% of adults in [Kenya](#) and 34% in [England](#) and [Australia](#).

Regular library use (several times



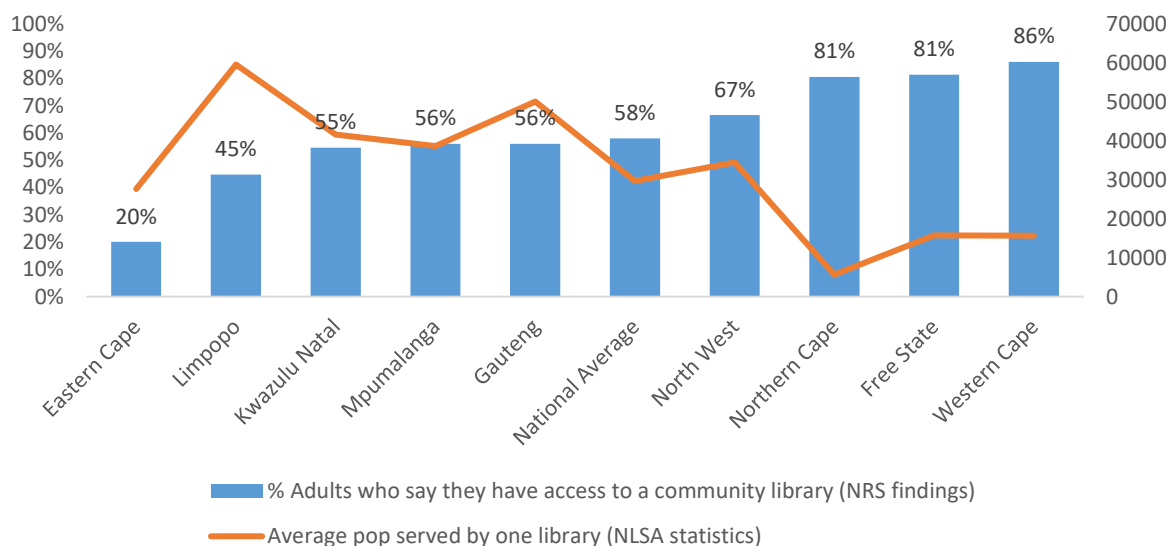
Library Access

58% of adults have access to a community library, but this is highly unequal by province. Those who need libraries most – people with less income, less education and in rural areas – have the least access.

The survey findings on library access should be considered in the context of a constrained resource environment for libraries nationally, with reduced overall budget allocations to the sector over several years and differential treatment of top-up library budget allocations by provinces (see section below on National Reading Barometer relating to library budget allocations).

The NRS results show that access to a community library is highly uneven by province (Figure 2). The Western Cape has the highest rate of access (86%) while the Eastern Cape has the lowest (20%). This is partly due to different per-capita library service levels per province, as shown by the orange line: in the Northern Cape there is one library per 5600 people, while in Limpopo one library serves an average of 56000. Per capita library numbers also do not tell the full story, since provinces have different settlement patterns which affect the ease of providing library services. Provinces with concentrated small towns like the Free State and Northern Cape are easier to serve than provinces with dispersed populations like Limpopo and the Eastern Cape.

Figure 2: Community Library Access by Province. (N=4240, all respondents excluding refused to answer)

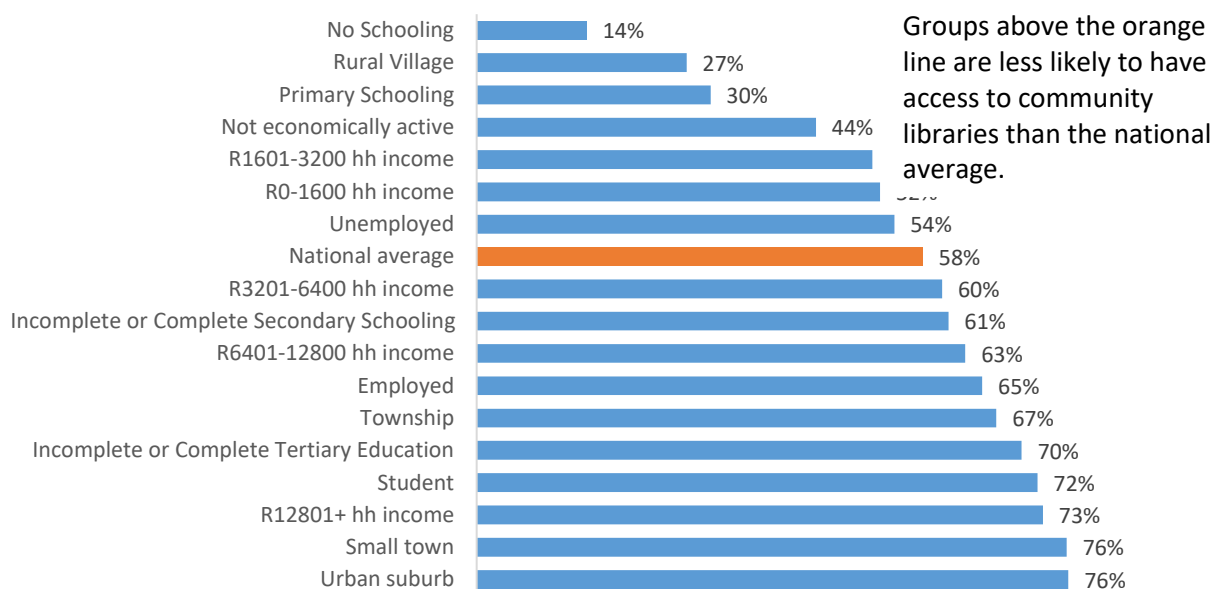


The accessibility of community libraries is regressive. Those who are most in need of free reading materials have the least access: by education level, area of residence, employment status and income level. As shown in

Figure 3 below, respondents with no or primary schooling, under R3,200 per month household income, who are unemployed, and who live in rural villages are less likely than average to know about a community library near them, irrespective of whether they use it.

The logistical and budget challenges of providing library services in rural communities are structural and so some of these access barriers are difficult to overcome. However, some of the access barriers relate to whether people know about the presence of a library, even if a library exists, and so can be addressed by awareness and information campaigns targeted at poorer households with low education levels about the presence of libraries, what they offer, and that everyone can access them for free.

Figure 3: Access to Community Library (N=4152, all respondents excluding refused to answer).



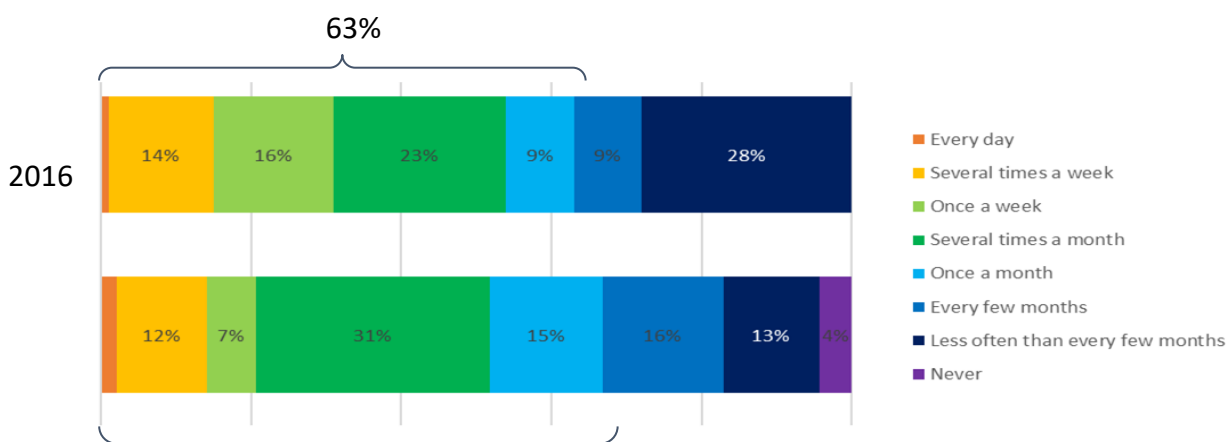
On the positive side, **young people and adults with children are more aware of the presence of a community library nearby**. 76% of 16-17 year olds and 62% of 18-24 year olds say they have access to a community library (compared to the national average of 58%). 62% of adults who live with children say they have access to a community library while 54% without children have access. There is no significant difference in access by gender.



Frequency of Library Use

Frequency of community library use has remained largely stable since 2016. 67% of those who use the library in 2023 use it several times a month or more, compared to 63% in 2016 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Frequency of Library Use (N=1216 those who visited a library in the past 12 months)

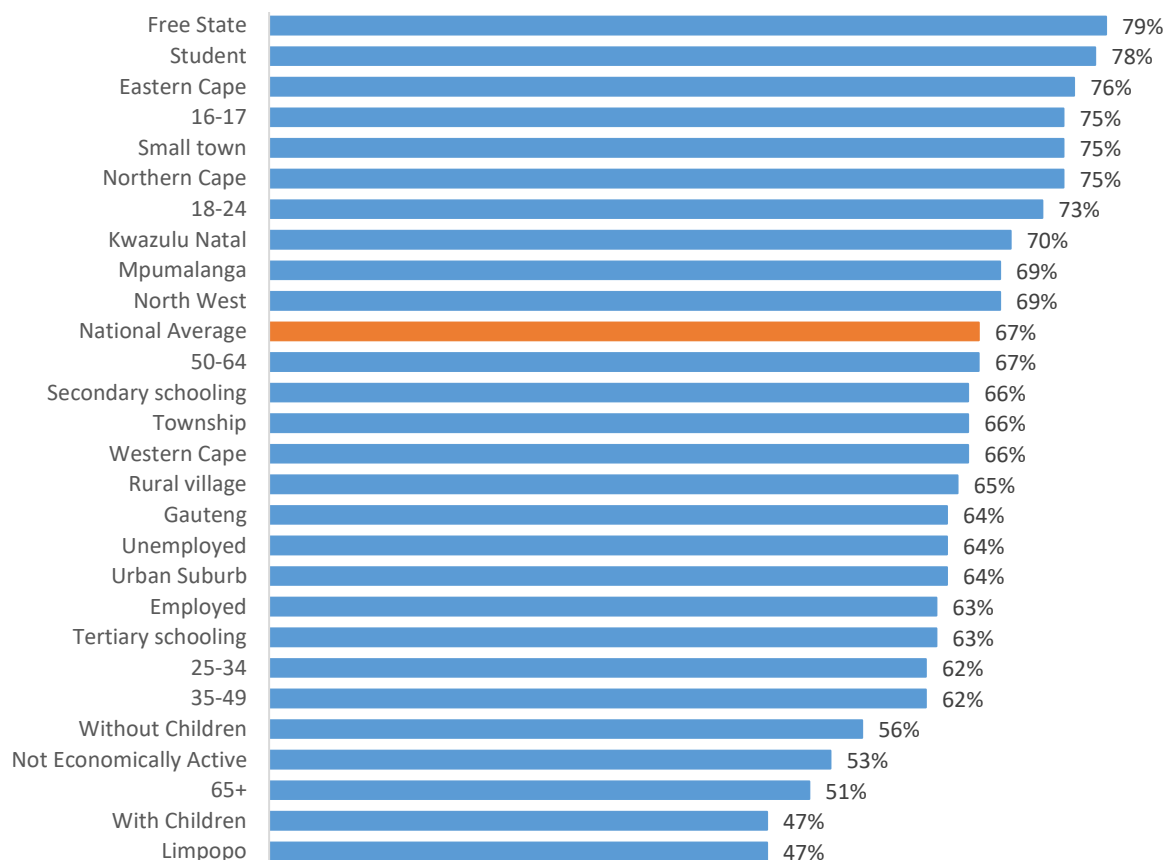


67%

Figure 5 below shows the prevalence of regular community library use among those who visited a community library in the past year. This does not consider interactions between variables (i.e. interactions between education level and employment status). The national average is 67%, shown by an orange line. Groups above the line are more likely to be regular library users and groups below the line are less likely to be regular library users.

Students, people with secondary education and young people, as well as residents of small towns, are the most likely to be regular library users.

Figure 5: Prevalence of regular community library use among those who visited a library in the past year. (N=1216 those who visited a community library in the past 12 months)



Groups who are less likely to use libraries regularly include both people who are disadvantaged¹ (unemployed living in rural villages) and people who are advantaged

¹ Regarding education levels, the sample of regular library users with no or only primary schooling is too low to look at the frequency of library use.

(employed with tertiary education living in suburbs). The former are likely to struggle to access libraries due to transport costs, while the latter are less likely to need library access since they can afford to have reading materials in their homes.

It is notable that the provincial distribution of regular library users (Figure 5) is different from the distribution of library access overall (Figure 3). The Free State and Northern Cape perform well in both accessibility and frequency of use, while KZN and Mpumalanga have regular users despite below-average accessibility.

What people do in Libraries

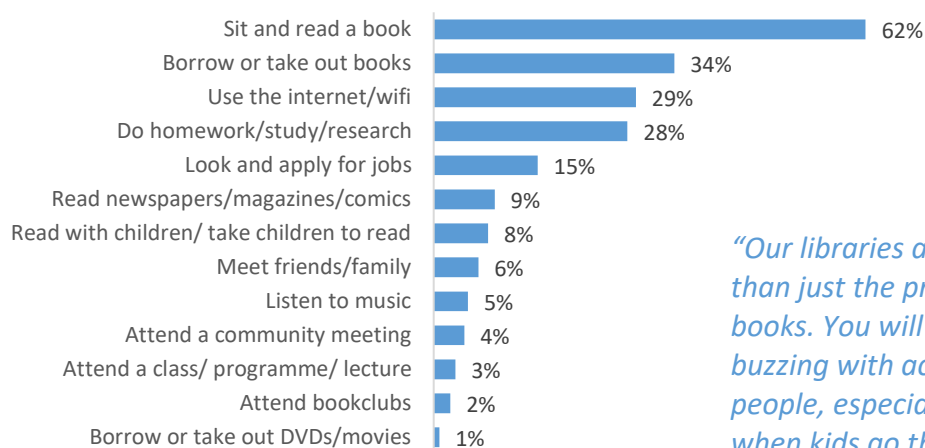


79% of adult library users use libraries for various activities related to reading books, including at least one of the following activities: reading books (62%) or newspapers (9%) in the library, reading with children (8%) or attending books clubs (2%) at the library, or borrowing books for reading at home (34%). This translates into 17%

of the total adult population who use libraries for activities related to reading books.

Internet access (29%), studying (28%) and job applications (15%) are also important uses of libraries.

Figure 6: Activities at Libraries (N=960 people who used a community library in the past year,



“Our libraries are much more than just the provision of books. You will find them buzzing with activities and people, especially after school when kids go there as a safe space.”

34% of those who visited a community library in the past year, borrow books from the library. This is 8% of the total adult population. 80% of those who borrow books from the library do so regularly (at least once a month). This represents an increase from 2016 (59%).

43% of people who visited a library in the past year have a library membership. This is a stable trend from 2016 (41% of library users with membership). 60% of frequent users and 47% of regular users have a membership, but even 28% of infrequent users (less than once a month) have a membership.

Of concern is that **only 8% of those adults who visited a library in the past year read with their children in the library**. This is an important area for further exploration and awareness raising.

Considering people who have ever visited a library (N=2753), what explains the difference between those who use libraries regularly for reading and borrowing books and those who do not (who either do not visit the library regularly or only use libraries for non-reading activities like community meetings)? A regression analysis comparing the two groups found that adults who use libraries regularly for reading are more likely² to:

- **Live in small towns.** Small town residents are 3 times more likely to use libraries for reading than rural residents. Suburban residents are least likely to use libraries for reading.
- **Own books.** Having any number of books in the home is associated with more library use than not owning any books, but the effect is smaller for those who own more than 20 books.
- **Have a monthly household income below R12,800.** This is possibly because households with higher incomes prefer to buy books than use the library.
- **Want their friends and families to talk about reading.** Social support for reading is important for library readers. People whose friends and family talk about reading are 2,5 times more likely to read in libraries.
- **Self-identify as occasional, regular or passionate readers.** People who consider themselves to be non-readers or aspiring readers are less likely to use libraries for reading.³

These findings do not mean that people outside of these groups do not read in libraries at all. They are just significantly less likely to do so than the average. When all other factors are held constant, the following characteristics have no significant effect on whether someone uses the library for reading: gender, race, age, education level, income differences under R12,800 per month household income, and whether the adult lives with children.



Satisfaction with Libraries & Barriers to Use

Current library users are overwhelmingly satisfied with the libraries they use. Three in four library users are happy with the library as it is, and 9% are concerned about external factors (such as the distance from home or the cost of transport) (Table 1).

For the 65% of adult South Africans who have not visited a library in the past year, **the main barriers to library use are disinterest in reading and the costs/distance of transport.**

² These factors are confirmed through regression analysis at $p < 0.05$ as significant predictors of using libraries for reading versus not visiting libraries or using libraries only for non-reading activities (such as accessing wifi).

³ In the National Reading Survey, respondents were asked what kind of reader they consider themselves to be (self-identified reader type), with the choices being passionate, regular, occasional, aspiring or non-reader. This self-categorisation is distinct from the 'reader personas' developed after the survey.

Table 1: Concerns with library services and barriers to use

	What concerns do you have about the community library? (current users) (N=961)	What reasons do you have for not visiting the library in the past year? (non-users) (N=2793)
I'm not interested		41%
No concerns. I am happy with the library the way it is now	75%	
It is too far away or transport is too expensive	9%	33%
It doesn't have new reading material or recent publications	9%	2%
It is not open at the times when I want to go	6%	7%
It doesn't have things to read that I like	3%	3%
The people who work there are not helpful	2%	1%
Applying for membership is too complicated	2%	1%
It doesn't have thing to read in the languages I want to read	2%	1%
It doesn't feel safe or welcoming for people like me	1%	1%
It is closed	1%	3%



Libraries as Sources of Reading Materials in Homes

As more avenues for accessing books have become available in recent decades, the percentage of people who usually get printed books from libraries has declined sharply over the course of the National Reading Survey series: 48% of book readers in 2006 said they 'usually' get their books from libraries, declining to 24% in 2016 to 17% in 2023 (Figure 7). Given that the percent of regular library users has remained stable from 2016 to 2023 (see above), this is more a reflection of the diversification of sources for reading materials (such as stationary shops and online sources) than a negative reflection on libraries.

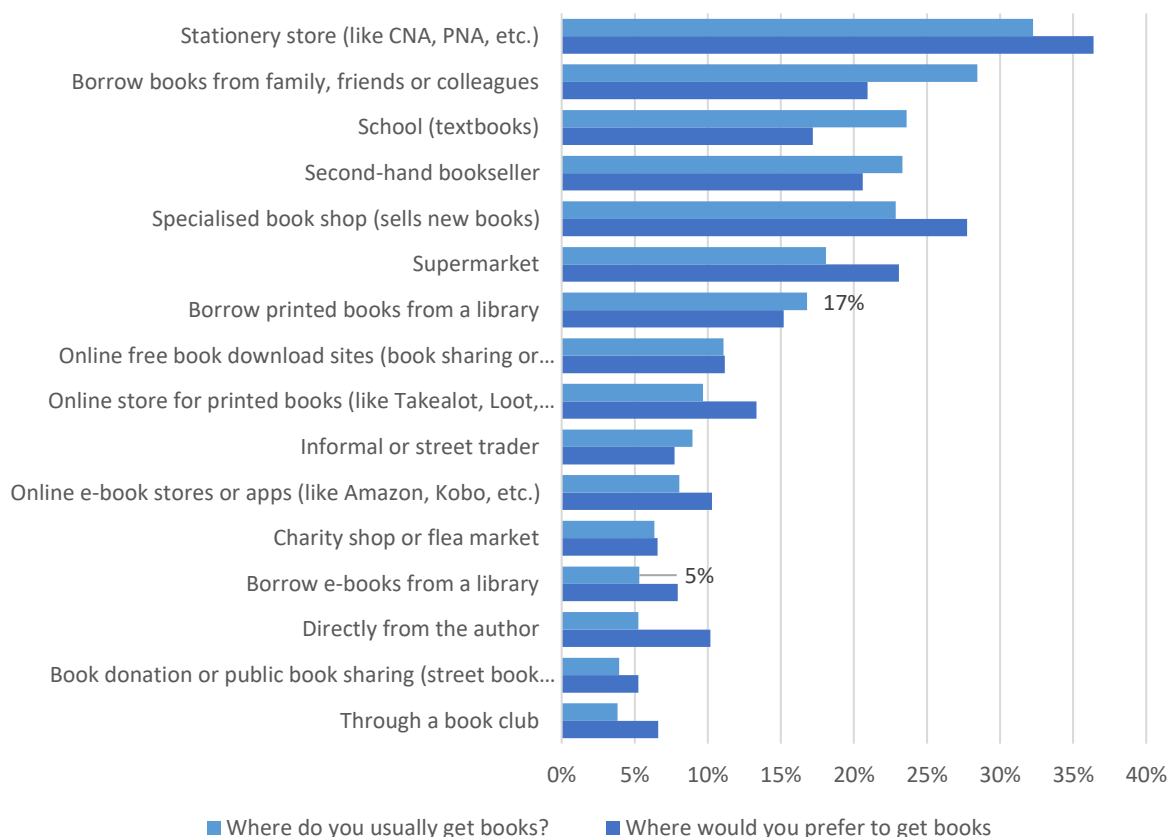
The importance of libraries as a source of reading materials is significantly related to household income, with mid-level income households (R3,201-R6,400 per month) using libraries the most as their usual source of books (23%, with lower levels among both lower and higher income groups) suggesting that libraries are important sources of reading material for people who have some books but do not have the means to purchase many books for themselves.

While digital and e-book lending services are a growing part of community libraries in South Africa, in terms of the growing

“Our e-book service usage has increased significantly from 1779 copies circulating in August 2021 when we launched to 17559 books checked out in April 2023. It steadily increases every month. We currently have 24,867 holds against e-books currently out on loan.”
Western Cape Libraries

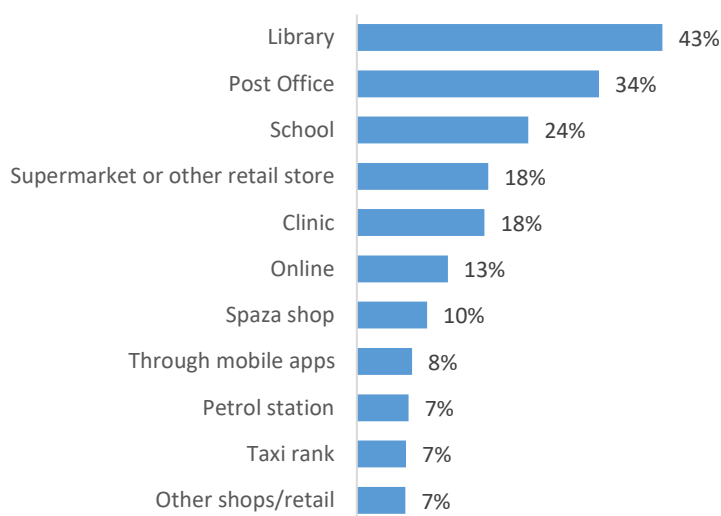
trend towards e-books, libraries are behind other sources, such as free book download sites and online e-book stores (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Current and Preferred Book Sources (N=2852 readers of any books)



In contrast, when asked where people would prefer to pick up free reading materials to keep and own, libraries are the top preferred location (Figure 8), suggesting opportunities for libraries to play a range of roles with regard to reading materials access and distribution.

Figure 8: Preferred distribution point for free printed



National Reading Barometer

Libraries are an effective but under-resourced public

For libraries to provide an enabling environment for individual readers, libraries themselves require an enabling policy and resource environment. The National Reading Barometer shows how libraries play a key role in the wider national reading ecosystem.

The 2023 National Reading Barometer includes twelve measures (out of a total of 55 measures included in the Barometer) that relate to libraries. Nine of these measures fall under the dimension of Reading Materials Access, and three under the dimension of Institutional Frameworks. These measures do not provide a comprehensive picture of the strength and health of the public library environment, but they have been selected, in consultation with the National Library of South Africa, as strategic ‘canary in the gold mine’ indicators. If these indicators improve, then public libraries around the country will be stronger and more able to play an enabling role for the wider reading ecosystem.

Out of the twelve measures, **half (6) are ‘constraining’**. This means they are significantly under target for the optimum contribution of public libraries to the national reading environment. A quarter (3) of the measures are ‘enabling’, which suggests there are strengths to build on. The final quarter is made up of two ‘emerging’ measures, meaning they are close enough to the ‘enabling’ target to be achievable through a directed effort. One measure has insufficient data.

National Reading Barometer Methods

The National Reading Barometer was created for the first time in 2023 and maps the health of the South African reading ecosystem. It brings together findings from the 2023 National Reading Survey and published secondary data, including data on both adult and child reading, to provide a holistic view of what enables and constrains reading in South Africa.

As an advocacy and awareness-raising tool, the NRB establishes a shared picture of the country’s current condition and trajectory related to reading. This shared picture enables a conversation across the reading and literacy sector concerning relevant dimensions of the reading ecosystem, but targets the adult sector.

Table 2: National Reading Barometer 2023 Libraries-related Measures: Access to Reading

#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
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RM1	Libraries per population: national ratio	NLSA	2022	1 : 31,000	Emerging
RM2	Libraries per population: number of provinces meeting target ratio	NLSA	2022	4	Constraining
RM3	Libraries budget as % of draft library Norms & Standards requirements	DSAC budget report + CLSG evaluation	2022/3	58%	Constraining
RM4	Number of new materials procured by public libraries (and as % of target)	DSAC CLSG evaluation	2022	276,031 (95%)	Enabling
RM5	Number of librarians (and average # per library)	DSAC budget report + CLSG evaluation	2022/3	2563 (1.3 per library)	Constraining
RM6	% of adults who have used a library in the past year	NRS	2023	28%	Emerging
RM7	% of library users satisfied with library services	NRS	2023	75%	Enabling
RM8	% of Public Ordinary Operational Schools with stocked libraries and/or classroom libraries	SMS	2022	n/a	Not available
RM12	Number of non-serial items deposited with National Library of South Africa	NLSA Annual Report	2022	10035 (165 per million)	Enabling

Table 3: National Reading Barometer 2023 Libraries-related Measures: Institutional Framework Dimension

#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
IF12	Library and Information Services Bill is passed	DSAC	2023	Draft done 2018, stalled in consultation	Constraining
IF13	Libraries Norms and Standards are in place and being progressively realised	DSAC	2023	Draft done 2013; never passed	Constraining
IF14	Library procurement processes enable flexible and timeous procurement	DSAC	2023	Bound by generic procurement rules	Constraining

The measures represent the mandates and decision-making authority of different actors in the libraries system:

- **Resourcing** decisions for public libraries at the national level (measure RM3) are made by the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture (DSAC, through budget applications for the Conditional Grant), but are dependent on National Treasury and budget trade-off processes. Some provinces and municipalities provide top-up budgets, but this is not consistent across the country.
- **Infrastructure and capacity investments** (measures RM 1, 2, 4, 5) by DSAC, and the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) within DSAC, are dependent on the resources made available (RM3) and the efficiency with which resources are used.
- The **policy environment** (IF 12, 13, 14) determines the ability of system to claim the required levels of resources (as determined by minimum norms and standards), and to monitor the consistent and equitable distribution of those resources throughout the system.

- Measures of **public use and satisfaction** (RM 6, 7) represent the outcomes of the decisions made by public libraries as a set of institutions. If these outcomes are positive even when resources and policy environment are constrained or emerging, this shows good management of limited resources.
- Some measures represent **opportunities for collaboration between the public libraries system and other actors**, including:
 - RM8 relating to school-based libraries: these are outside the mandate of public libraries (this rests with the Department of Basic Education at provincial and school level), but there are opportunities of improving both public and school-based service provision through joint/multi-purpose library spaces.
 - RM12 related to archiving of publications produced in South Africa: archiving is a core function of libraires (especially National Libraries). In addition, the role of archiving as a contribution to the national reading ecosystem is an opportunity for collaboration between those who produce publications (authors, self-publishers and the publishing industry) and those who archive and distribute (libraries).

The measures related to libraries are described in more detail in the Annex. This includes how the rating cut-off points are determined and notes on the interpretation of each measure.

Recommendations

The following recommendation emerge from the combined findings of the National Reading Survey and the National Reading Barometer. They are directed primarily at decision-makers in the National Library of South Africa, given the NLSA's ability to not only act within its own mandate, but also to convene other actors within government and across civil society on matters relating to libraries. One of the key goals of the National Reading Barometer project is to increase levels of collaboration and partnership in the reading and literacy sector.

Recommendations for Activities by and in Public Libraries

- **Create and implement awareness campaigns** about the presence of libraries, what they offer, and that everyone can access them for free. These campaigns should be **targeted at poorer households** with low education levels.
- Few library users bring their children to the library or read with them in the library. Public libraries can create **campaigns** to make existing library users aware **that children are welcome and the benefits of reading with children** and encourage caregivers in the community to become new library users with their children.
- Older learners and students are the most avid library users. Develop strategies to **retain young library users** as they grow older and leave school.
- Religious texts are the most frequently and widely read form of reading material in South Africa. Public libraries can consider stocking and profiling more religious texts as well as

engaging with potential new library users and readers through local religious organisations and networks.

- Interventions should be targeted and use different strategies for different types of library users: people who use the **space** (read and study in the library, etc.), and people who use the **services** (borrow books from the library, including in some cases digital access to e-books without needing to go to the library physically)
- Less than a quarter of library users borrow books. **Make it easier and more enticing for library users to borrow books** - for example, by streamlining sign-up requirements, running campaigns and removing late fines.
- Consider interventions to **increase access to books in rural areas**, such as mobile libraries, to address the survey finding that library access is currently lowest in rural areas. Another intervention for areas with large distances between residents and libraries (leading to high transport costs to reach libraries) is to adapt lending policies to reduce or waive fees, increase lending periods and otherwise enable book circulation for resource-constrained, distributed households.
- Considering the finding that small town residents currently use libraries the most and recognising that libraries play particularly important social and leisure functions in small towns, **libraries in small towns can focus resources on encouraging social activities around reading**, such as adult book clubs and author talks to build conversations about reading in communities.

Partnerships

- Libraries are adults' top preferred location to pick up free reading materials. **Libraries can collaborate with campaigns that give away free reading materials on a large scale**, such as the Nal'ibali campaign, Book Dash and others, to run campaigns and provide routine distribution. Most free reading materials are produced for children, however there is also an opportunity for adult reading materials to be produced and distributed for free through libraries, given this study's findings on the importance of adult reading. These should take into account adults' preferred languages, formats and content. Libraries benefit from free reading materials distribution since the NRS found that households with a few books at home are more likely to use libraries than households with no books.
- Public libraries can explore expanding existing pilots for the **joint provision of library services to schools and the public** (multi-purpose libraries), in partnership with the Department of Basic Education as well as civil society organisations working to increase the availability of reading materials for children in schools. Similarly, TVET colleges and other further education institutions, in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and Training, can be approached for partnerships around multi-purpose library facilities.
- The NLSA can explore partnerships and activities to **increase the proportion of publications deposited with NLSA in terms of its role as a statutory legal deposit library**. This especially includes communications campaigns for authors, self-publishing authors and small publication companies concerning deposits, making the deposit system simple and introducing incentives for self-publishing authors (and possibly other groups, such as

authors writing in under-represented indigenous African languages) to deposit their publications.

- Consider avenues through which **corporate CSI funding can support public libraries** in terms of staffing, materials, activities and community outreach as a contribution to the wider reading and literacy agenda.

Improving the Data

- **Consolidate existing budget and performance data** in the libraries sectors so that national, provincial and municipal budgets, staffing and service levels can be tracked and monitored more accurately.
- Ensure better **data availability** regarding the presence of libraries, classroom libraries and book boxes in all schools so that monitoring can be improved.

Policy Progress

- Consider convening a coalition of interesting parties across government departments and civil society to **increase the speed with which policy processes** such as the National Libraries and Information Systems Bill, the norms and standards discussions and the procurement process discussions **are conducted**.

Debate and Collective Action

NLSA can contribute to and/or convene discussions across the reading and literacy sector on towards collective action on strengthening the national reading ecosystem:

- As a literacy sector, **set clearer targets** for desirable reading outcomes (beyond Foundation Phase reading benchmarks) and clarify collective pathways to achieving those targets.
- **Increase the proportion of CSI education funding that is ring-fenced for literacy and materials access**, including children's literacy, adult reading and adults reading with children.
- Agree on an integrated approach to **increasing access to reading materials for adolescents and adults**, in appropriate languages, through a combination of incentive publishing (commercial, non-profit and self-publishing) and free materials distribution.
- Allocate **training, resources and monitoring to improve the implementation of existing policies** such as the Inclusive Education Policy, zero-rating of educational websites, the Language in Education Policy and the forthcoming National Reading Plan.

Further Research

The National Reading Survey dataset is open source and further research using the dataset is encouraged. Suggestions for further research, based on initial results from the NRS include:

- **Map the availability of libraries** against people's awareness of libraries by using the geolocation of libraries and geolocation of NRS respondents.
- **Explore the language preferences of library users** in relation to the use of available resources in those languages. The NRS results suggest that a high proportion of South Africans would like to read in African languages but anecdotal evidence from libraries is that reading materials in African languages are often not utilised.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A steering committee shaped the project's direction and strategy and provided governance and oversight. Its members represented basic education, libraries, literacy non-profits, academia, philanthropy, publishing and community activism, and included: Bafana Mtini (Khutsong Literacy Club), Catherine Langsford/Nadeema Musthan (Litasa), Dorothy Dyer (FunDza), Heleen Hofmeyr (RESEP), Janita Low (independent), Kentse Radebe (DGMT), Kulula Manona (DBE), Lauren Fok (Zenex Foundation), Lorraine Marneweck (NECT), Nazeem Hardy (Liasa), Nokuthula Musa (NLSA), Nqabakazi Gina (Nal'ibali), Ntsiki Ntusikazi (Wordworks), Smangele Mathebula (SAIDE), Stanford Ndlovu (Jakes Gerwel Fellowship) and Takalani Muloiwa (Wits University).

This policy brief was written by Tara Polzer-Ngwato of Social Impact Insights Africa.

Suggested reference: National Reading Barometer (2023). Special Issue Brief: Libraries. Nal'ibali Trust.

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Annex: Barometer Measures Relating to Libraries (Metadata)

Reading Materials Access

RM1: Libraries per population

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Libraries per population: national ratio
Data Source	National Library of South Africa
Year	2022
Performance	1 library per 31,000 people
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 1 library per 29,000 people or fewer Emerging: 1 library per 35,000 to 29,000 people Constraining: 1 library per more than 35,000 people Target of 1:29,000 is based on 50% of draft Library Norms & Standards, taking into account international comparisons, in consultation with NLSA – see below.
Notes	<p>The 2013 background research conducted to inform the costing of Norms and Standards for the National Libraries and Information Services Bill was never formally adopted. However, it provides a basis from which to debate appropriate targets for the number of public libraries in the country. The Norms and Standards study estimates the need for 4,170 libraries nationally, using ward-level population data and spatial libraries distribution. This represents a library to population ratio of 1:14,500 nationally (at 2022 population numbers).</p> <p>However, when considering global norms as points of comparison, we see that 1 : 14,500 is high for a Middle Income Country. In the United States, the ratio is approximately 1 library per 17,000 people. Comparative data from the UK puts the ratio at 1:18,400 in 2022. 2008 data from Latin America and Caribbean show that Venezuela, Chile and Brazil had an average of 1:25,000. Egypt's library per capita average is about 38,000 (2009).</p> <p>Overall, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) estimates the global average to be 6 public and community libraries per 100 000 people (1 : 16,000), with an African average of 0.54 libraries per 100 000 people (1 : 185,000).</p> <p>Therefore, instead of using the 2013 Norms and Standards estimation as is, the NRB uses 50% of their calculation, so a target of 2085 libraries and ratio of 1 library to 29,000 people nationally as an “enabling” target that is more appropriate for a Middle Income Country.</p> <p>The 2022 actual for South Africa is 1:31,000 (1,934 public libraries per 60.6 million estimated population), or 3 libraries per 100,000 (half the global average, but nearly six times the African average).</p>

RM2: Libraries: provincial distribution

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Libraries per population: number of provinces meeting target ratio of 1:29,000
Data Source	National Library of South Africa
Year	2022
Performance	4 provinces
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 8-9 provinces with ratio of 1:29,000 or better Emerging: 6-7 provinces with ratio of 1:29,000 or better Constraining: 5 or fewer provinces with ratio of 1:29,000 or better Target of 1:29,000 is based on 50% of draft Library Norms and Standards, taking into account international comparisons, in consultation with NLSA. Full details above.
Notes	This measure accompanies RM1 by considering the unequal distribution of libraries across provinces. In 2022, the Northern Cape had a library-to-population ratio of 1:5,992 while Limpopo's ratio was 1:55,840. The five provinces with a ratio above 1:29,000 are Limpopo (1:56,840), Mpumalanga (1:40,642), KwaZulu Natal (1:40,355), Gauteng (1:38,921) and North West (1:32,543).

RM3: Libraries budget

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Libraries budget as % of draft library Norms & Standards requirements
Data Source	Dept. of Sport, Arts & Culture (DSAC) budget report and Community Library Services Grant (CLSG) evaluation report
Year	2022/3
Performance	58%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Budget covers 80-100% of average minimum annual running cost per library Emerging: Budget covers 60-80% of average cost per library Constraining: Budget covers <60% of average cost per library Running cost calculated as per 2013 draft Public Library and Information Services (PLIS) Norms & Standards, which calculated that a public library would require a minimum budget of R1.252million per year in 2013. This would be the equivalent of R1.85 million per year in 2023 assuming 4% inflation.
Notes	The 2022 budget allocated to public libraries through the Community Libraries Services Grant was R1,601,400,000. In addition, Provinces allocated a combined R487,801,000 to public libraries from their Equitable Share allocation, as reported in the CLSG evaluation report. This comes to a combined budget of R2,089,201,000. When divided by the number of active public libraries nationally (1934), this comes to an average of R1,080,250 per library per year, 58% of the minimum per library budget as calculated above.

RM4: New library acquisitions

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	Number of new materials procured by public libraries (and as % of target)
Data Source	Community Library Services Grant (CLSG) evaluation report
Year	2022
Performance	276,031 (95% of target)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 90-100% of Conditional Grant target achieved (target 290,000) Emerging: 70-90% of target achieved Constraining: <70% of target achieved Context: This is a high target; IFLA guidelines recommend 172,000 new materials for a population of 43 million adults.
Notes	The CLSG Evaluation for 2021-2022 reports that a total of 276,031 new materials were procured, which represents 95% of the set target. This is an average of 143 new materials per public library. The NRB measure does not reflect on whether the original target is sufficient for the needs of readers or how it relates to Norms & Standards.

RM5: Librarian supply

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Number of librarians (and average # per library)
Data Source	Dept. of Sport, Arts & Culture (DSAC) budget report and Community Library Services Grant (CLSG) evaluation report
Year	2022/3
Performance	2,563 (1.3 per library)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: average of 3 or more staff members per basic public library (as per draft Public Library and Information Services Norms & Standards) Emerging: average 2 staff members per library Constraining: average <2 staff members per library The 2013 draft Public Library and Information Services Norms & Standards costing calculations estimated the minimum staffing requirement for a public library to be 3 people.
Notes	The DSAC budget report for 2022 shows that 2,563 staff members of libraries (2,495 positions maintained and 68 new appointments) were funded from the CLSG. The CLSG 2021-2022 Evaluation does not report any additional staff positions funded by provinces, although there may be some. Just considering

	the CLSG-funded positions, this represents 1.3 staff members per public library (1,934 public libraries).
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RM6: Library Users

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults who have used a library in the past year
Data Source	National Reading Survey (NRS)
Year	2023
Performance	28%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 33% or more of adults used public library services in the past year Emerging: 23-33% of adults used a library in the past year Constraining: <23% of adults used a library in the past year.
Notes	This measure is based on findings from the National Reading Survey 2023 which included asking a representative sample of adults whether they had visited a community library in the past 12 months. 28% responded that they had. The ratings cutoff points (33% as the target for an enabling user rate) are based on comparative results from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Library Map of the World , which estimates the global average library usage rates (for those countries which report) to be around 33%. This is also the rate for countries such as the UK (34% of adults visited a public library in the last 12 months), Australia (34%), and Kenya (33% in 2011). Brazil's user rate is 51% (2015).

RM7: Library user satisfaction

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	% of library users satisfied with library services
Data Source	National Reading Survey (NRS)
Year	2023
Performance	75%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 75% or more of users are satisfied with their library Emerging: 50-75% are satisfied Constraining: <50% are satisfied
Notes	This measure is based on findings from the National Reading Survey 2023 which included asking users of public libraries whether they had any concerns about the libraries they visited. 75% responded that they were happy with the libraries as they were.

RM8: School libraries

Rating	Not available
Indicator Description	% of Public Ordinary Operational Schools with stocked libraries and/or classroom libraries
Data Source	School Monitoring Survey
Year	2022
Performance	n/a
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 80-100% of schools have a stocked library or classroom libraries in most classrooms Emerging: 60-80% have a library or classroom libraries in most classrooms Constraining: <60% have a library or classroom libraries in most classrooms
Notes	The data for this measure is not available because the NEIMS data only includes full school libraries, not classroom libraries or book boxes, and the 2021/22 School Monitoring Survey, which should have collected data on classroom libraries, did not result in reliable data for this measure. Future iterations of the NRB should be able to draw on future School Monitoring Survey data for this measure.

RM12: Materials published in South Africa

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	Number of non-serial items deposited with National Library of South Africa
Data Source	NLSA Annual Report
Year	2022
Performance	10,035 (165 per million people)

Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Publication rate is >150 materials per million population Emerging: Publication rate is 100-150 per million Constraining: Publication rate is <100 per million
Notes	To measure the number of publications produced in South African annually, this measure uses the number of non-serial publications deposited with the National Library of South Africa in terms of its role as a statutory legal deposit library, so designated under the Legal Deposit Act 54 of 1997. Its mandate is to receive one copy of every item published in South Africa, be it a book, map, chart, poster, official publication, conference proceeding, audio book, newspaper, journal, or magazine; in the format, be it printed or electronic, in which it is made available for sale to the public (including self-published materials). In practice, many publications are not deposited with NLSA, especially self-published materials. There is a need for NLSA to gain capacity to collect all new publications through outreach to authors and publishers and simplification of deposit processes. Despite the available performance number being incomplete, a ratio of 165 publications per 100,000 in the population is comparatively high in international comparison (although comparative data is only available for 2009).

Institutional Frameworks

IF12: Library and information systems policy

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Library and Information Services Bill is passed
Data Source	Department of Sport, Arts & Culture
Year	2023
Performance	Draft done 2018, stalled in consultation with other government departments
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Bill is passed and implemented Emerging: Passed but not implemented Constraining: Not passed
Notes	Draft Bill produced in 2018 but stalled in consultation process with other government departments.

IF13: Library norms and standards

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Libraries Norms and Standards are in place and being progressively realised
Data Source	DSAC
Year	2023
Performance	Draft developed 2013, never passed
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Norms and Standards are adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	Draft Norms and Standards were produced, with preparatory feasibility and costing research conducted in the early 2010s in preparation for the Libraries and Information Systems Bill, but the process to finalise and pass Norms and Standards into policy has stalled.

IF14: Library procurement processes

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Library procurement processes enable flexible and timeous procurement
Data Source	Department of Sport, Arts & Culture
Year	2023

Performance	Bound by generic procurement rules
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Library-specific procurement processes are adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	Initial conversations with Treasury to adapt procurement process requirements for Libraries are underway, but discussions are in their infancy.