

Public Libraries in Europe and COVID-19: Re-opening Strategies Findings from NAPLE Members May-July 2020

Background

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) led to library buildings closing to the public at the start of March 2020. A previous report in April 2020 summarised the measures taken in response to the virus by public libraries in 20 NAPLE member countries¹, with specific focus on the extent of closures across Europe; the engagement of staff during closures; services offered to the public (both physical and online) while buildings were closed; quarantining of books and other health and safety measures; efforts by libraries to support national healthcare initiatives; and library efforts to address misinformation about the COVID-19 virus.

This follow-up report considers the move towards reopening and, like the previous report, is based on responses from NAPLE members submitted to a shared spreadsheet, and via email, up to July 3 2020. As such it should be seen as a snapshot of this time.

Executive Summary

Across Europe, public library buildings closed to users sometime in March 2020, either because of national guidelines or regional decisions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reopening of library buildings in most countries began between April – May 2020. In most cases, reopening is a phased process, and, in many cases, plans have been fluid and adjusted in response to evolving situations. Many of the reported safety measures for reopening were common across countries and generally followed national guidelines. Health and safety recommendations were generally adjusted regularly in response to changing situations.

In many cases, adjustments to the library space such as the removal of furniture, the addition of plexiglass barriers and of markers on the floor indicating safe distances were reported. Physical distancing queueing systems were also introduced outside libraries, to facilitate a controlled number of visitors being admitted to library buildings at any one time. Personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks and gloves was provided for employees (and in some cases also recommended or required for patrons, depending on national recommendations). In some cases, facemasks were recommended for indoor areas where social distancing cannot be maintained.

¹ Many thanks to NAPLE members and colleagues from the following countries: Belgium (Flanders); Croatia; Czech Republic; Denmark; England Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Ireland; Lithuania; Norway; Netherlands; Poland; Portugal; Scotland; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Wales.

The provision of hand disinfectant and reported regular disinfecting of equipment and surfaces was also widespread across countries and regions.

Guidelines for the quarantining of returned materials were commonly reported, particularly in the early phases of reopening. Many regions recommended a 72-hour quarantine period, but in some cases returned materials were quarantined for 5 days, a week, or in one case 2 weeks. In a handful of countries however, no quarantining procedures were introduced. Quarantining guidelines were generally relaxed as countries and regions moved through their reopening plans.

Other considerations as libraries prepared to reopen included provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and staffing shortages. Some libraries were also waiting for government guidance regarding procedures such as the quarantining of materials. In many cases, the gradual expansion of library services was dependent on the analysis of local risks and the decision of the municipality. Usually, national policy fed into local decisions around reopening.

Some further concerns in advance of reopening included questions around cleaning and sanitization, social distancing in the workplace, how to manage space, and whether users should book appointments in advance of visiting the library.

There was a huge focus on online services and digital content during the Covid-19 pandemic. A few responses mentioned the ongoing importance of this area. This surge in users of online library services and the explosion in online content is likely to have an ongoing effect into the future, even long after library buildings have reopened.

Main Report

This report is structured in the following way:

1. Reopening of Library Buildings
2. Safety Measures
3. Quarantining
4. Other Challenges and Considerations

1. Reopening of Library Buildings

Public library buildings in many countries closed to the public sometime in March 2020, in response to either national guidelines or regional decisions. Reopening of library buildings began in most countries between April – May 2020. In most cases, reopening is a phased process, and, in many cases, plans have been fluid and adjusted in response to evolving situations.

Not all library buildings closed completely to the public. In **Flanders (Belgium)**, for example, public libraries were categorised as an essential service by a national guideline and were expected to remain open during lockdown. This applied on weekdays only and for a limited 'take-away' service in which patrons came to collect materials on reserve only. Still, many municipalities had decided to close their libraries completely by decree of local mayors, but as time went on more of them partially opened to offer a 'take-away' service.

The Belgian National Security Council produced a phased exit strategy whereby public libraries could reopen to the public from May 18. The Flemish Library Association published guidelines for reopening in accordance with the National Guidelines from the National Security Council, and a basic protocol for the culture sector was published on June 10. Almost all public libraries have been open since July 1.

The phases were:

- Step 1 (lockdown): Limited service via a pick-up system from March 13
- Step 2: Restricted public access to libraries (access to the collections) from May 18
- Step 3: Reopening of the libraries' residential function for the public from June 8
- Step 4: Resumption of public activities from July 1

There were a lot of questions about the organisation of the operation during the Corona virus measures and during their phasing out. That is why the Flemish Library Association (VVBAD) worked out an exit strategy with the sector and provided practical advice. This sector guide appeared for the first time on May 7 and received several updates² The guide follows the guidelines of the National Security Council, was coordinated with the Cabinet of Culture and follows the line of basic protocol for the culture sector that was approved on June 10 and the second version of the basic protocol that was approved on June 25 and is valid from July 1.

Libraries in the **Czech Republic** were called on, along with all other cultural institutions and companies, to close their doors during the third phase of combating COVID19. According to the national plan on reopening institutions, libraries were to open on June 8. However, at a press conference on the evening of Thursday April 23 it was announced that libraries would be allowed to reopen on Monday April 27. With such a short time to prepare, 20-30% of libraries managed to open that Monday, with more opening over the following weeks. The National Library reopened on May 4. By May 11, about 90% of libraries in the Czech Republic had opened to provide basic lending and returning services. Quarantining books has not been necessary since the end of May. Also, organizing events for the public in libraries was allowed. The general obligation to wear facial masks in public premises was cancelled on July 1st as well as the need to keep social distance.

² <https://www.vvbad.be/vvbad-werking/professionalisering/beroepscode-competenties/sectorgids-exitstrategie-voor-de>

The libraries in **Denmark** closed as of March 13. The reopening of libraries physically in Denmark was a part of the controlled reopening of the country in several phases. From May 18 as part of the 2nd phase of Denmark's reopening, the libraries could open for lending and returning of books and other materials. The Danish Ministry of Culture released guidelines for opening libraries considering several aspects, e.g. distance requirements. As part of the 3rd phase of the gradually controlled reopening of Denmark, the libraries could as of July 22 open for further services for the public, e.g. browsing of bookshelves, usage of computers and staffless open libraries. The Danish Ministry of Culture released updated guidelines for this phase of the further reopening of the libraries.

After a long wait, the government in **England** finally confirmed that libraries could reopen from July 4. Services will gradually return after that date, with many starting with Order and Collect and Home Library Services, but some immediately reopening their doors for browsing and access to computers. Many libraries in **Wales** are already offering Order and Collect and at the time of writing are waiting for their First Minister to confirm the date they can reopen their doors. A full range of protective measures will be in place, as in other countries, with a focus on maintaining a 2 metre social distancing requirement, hand sanitising and removing staff from the library floor to behind plastic screens where possible. A particular issue has been toilets, and libraries have used local risk assessments to decide if they should open them, and whether they have the required levels of cleaning available. Libraries Connected published service recovery guidance³, with input from the government public health departments and they have also run webinars to share ideas on how to run a COVID secure library service.

With only 24 hours to go before re-opening, the government issued guidance that libraries need to record the name and phone number of everyone visiting the library for browsing and IT access. This is intended to support the UK's Test & Trace system, as libraries will need to share the records with the Health Service if one of their users or staff tests positive. This is quite a complex process to plan and deliver –so the short notice is causing some stress.

In **Scotland**, the First Minister announced on June 24 that libraries may open from July 15 2020 with appropriate Health and Safety advice being observed. Scotland is introducing a Test and Protect (contact tracing) initiative and users of public libraries will be required to sign into library venues as part of this when they re-open. Library authorities are unlikely to open on all their venues immediately and will be offering a "call and collect" service in the first instance. During lockdown, in addition to providing a home delivery service to people who were housebound or shielding, public library staff developed their online offer to include virtual storytimes, chatty chat craft sessions, techy teabreaks, quizzes, book groups and so much more. Many staff were redeployed within council areas to support the Community Hubs.

³ <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/resource/library-recovery-toolkit-june-2020-pdf>

A phased approach was also taken to reopening library buildings in **Estonia**. Services could be expanded gradually based on the analysis of local risks and the decision of the municipality, if all were in keeping with the instructions of the Ministry of Culture (coordinated with the Health Board). From May 15 libraries could offer visitors contactless lending and returning of publications, and outdoor reading room spaces. From May 25, libraries could offer these services along with indoor lending and returning of publications, indoor reading rooms, use of an internet computer, and outdoor public library events according to public meetings restrictions on the holding of events and the organisation of public events.

In **France**, libraries could begin reopening from May 11, in accordance with a national guideline. Reopening was different in every region and in keeping with the following 3 phases: Phase 1: Deliveries, or one or two people coming at a time to collect books. Phase 2: Buildings reopening to more people, but only for book collection (estimated to begin in July). Phase 3: Welcoming groups to the library and getting back to programmed activities (estimated to begin in September). In addition, school groups of up to 10 children aged 6-10 years were able to visit the library from May, in line with the reopening of schools.

In **Germany**, a common Federal Chancellery / Regional Ministers decision taken on April 15 stated that libraries could reopen as of April 20 at the earliest. There was some confusion about what kinds of libraries were covered by the decision, and it was interpreted differently by different federal states. 13 out of 16 federal states decided that public libraries could reopen according to the decision made. The first libraries opened with strict hygiene measures for the lending and returning of books and media between April 20 – April 27. As of the end of April, it was expected that most libraries would reopen at the beginning of May, as they needed some time to prepare for reopening.

While all libraries opened on June 1 in **Greece**, supported by reopening guidelines from the Association of Greek Librarians and Information Scientists, there was still confusion for librarians all over the country as libraries were the only industry that reopened after the lockdown with no specific measures or guidelines. What each library delivers is based on the decision of each library's administration or local authorities. Generally, public libraries are presently offering e-services and lending but no reading rooms. The Greek Libraries Network, coordinated by the National Library, with most members being public libraries, has adjusted its program "Turn the page" to "Turn the page from the library <--> at home" so that children all over the country can participate from their own place. The opening hours in most cases have been kept to a minimum, mostly morning hours. Some libraries offer their services only by appointment, others have opened their bookshelves to the patrons, encouraging the use of masks and with mandatory use either of gloves or disinfectants.

By May 11, **Ireland's** public libraries had also started to look at reopening, even with the expectation of an extension of lockdown with the Taoiseach's announcement on May 12. Libraries Development at the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) had prepared health and safety guidance for physical lending services, which had been approved by the

Department of Health. By May 11 about 1/3 of Ireland's library authorities were offering some form of physical lending by delivery service.

Following the publication of a five-stage government re-opening roadmap, libraries increased service offerings at the start of the second phase, which began on June 8. In addition to the continuation of housebound and delivery services, 181 branches out of 330 across the country opened their doors to accept returns and provide a contact and collect service. Almost immediately, however, the Government increased the speed of re-opening, and from June 9 the sector began preparing to offer browsing facilities at branches, either by appointment or drop-in. As of the week beginning June 28, 158 branches were offering browsing, with another 40 continuing to offer contact and collect only. The national delivery service, which enables users to borrow books from any library in the country, resumed in the week beginning July 6.

Primary schools in the **Netherlands** reopened on May 11 for a limited number of days or children per day. On June 8 primary schools were reopened without limitations. From the first of July libraries can re-open with no limits to the number of visitors. However, social distancing is still in effect.

In general, most restrictions on limitations in the Netherlands have been eased. Social distancing and hygiene restrictions do still apply. Also, people are urged to stay and work at home as much as possible and to avoid crowds.

All physical libraries in **Northern Ireland** were closed on March 20. On June 25 the Northern Ireland Executive announced that public libraries would be allowed to reopen from July 16. Libraries NI's plan is that all libraries will reopen for a 'Book and Collect' service during the week beginning July 20, alongside a phased programme of reopening libraries to offer limited browsing and IT services and the introduction of a temporary BookBox service which is an extension of the Homecall service for people who are unable to visit a branch library. In advance of this the Homecall service for people who are housebound will be reinstated, a pilot of Book and Collect will take place and customers will be encouraged to return the books that they borrowed prior to lockdown

As of mid-May, a phased reopening of libraries in **Norway** was underway. Libraries in Norway had been closed since March 13, due to local decisions but on general advice from national authorities at the time. It was up to the municipalities to decide the process of reopening, which would also be based on general advice from national authorities. On May 8, the Library Association and the Union of Librarians published guidelines for reopening. The brand-new main library of Oslo could finally open to the public on June 18, with near-normal services but under general measures for infection control. Originally it should have opened on March 28.

Poland's Prime Minister announced at the end of April that Public Libraries could reopen from May 4. In each case reopening was to be decided by the local authorities. The Health Authorities were to check health and safety standards. Directly after reopening, public libraries provided only limited services (returning of books borrowed before the lockdown and collecting materials on reserve, with no access to reading rooms and shelves) which were gradually broadened. In mid-June major public libraries reopened reading rooms (still for a

reduced number of readers who can study in a reading room; most libraries require on-line booking in advance to sit in a reading room and access materials). Instead of a personal visit to a reading room, a digital copy of library material can be requested via the Internet (in compliance with copyright law). By the end of June some local public libraries allowed access for patrons to library rooms and library shelves (however the number of patrons who can enter the library and stay there at the same time is limited, as well as the scope of available materials and services - board games, newspapers and periodicals, playing computer games, children's playing rooms, etc. are still unavailable).

Libraries in **Portugal** began closing from March 10. A state of emergency was declared on March 20, by which time all libraries were closed. Two public libraries continued physical services, however, despite their buildings being closed. At the beginning of April, an increased number of public libraries began physical services. By May 11, 20-30% of public libraries in Portugal offered physical loaning services by takeaway, drive-through or home delivery. At the end of April, it was announced that the state of emergency was to end. A document outlining the timeline and plan for reopening was then drafted and sent to the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Health for approval. This proposal included 4 phases, with no defined timeline:

- Phase 1: Pick up books at the desk or at the door (depending on the type of building and the space available)
- Phase 2: People can be in the library to study as long as all recommendations from the Public Health Authority are followed (i.e. one person per square metre and no access to bookshelves)
- Phase 3: People can access the bookshelves and use computers
- Phase 4: Regular library use following safety and sanitary instructions.

Public library buildings have now been re-opening to the public since May 4. At the beginning of June, only two libraries were still closed to the public by decision of local authorities, as a safety measure. All open libraries have local borrowing services (take-away), but do not allow users to use the reading rooms or access the shelves. Online activities and programs are continuing. Initially libraries have experienced very few local users and most of them use the library only for take away services.

Slovenia was the first EU member state to declare the end of lockdown. At the beginning of May, the plan was to cancel most restrictions by the end of the month, with some preventative measure still in force (i.e. wearing face protection, practicing hand hygiene and social distancing, etc.). On April 28 at 7.45pm, there was a government announcement that libraries could open the following morning. This was not mandatory. Later, it was said that all libraries had to offer at least some services by May 18, and that all libraries were to open by May 28 at the latest. The National Library reopened on April 30, along with some academic libraries. Public libraries reopened on Monday May 4, with 3 planned phases:

- Phase 1: Click and Collect Service, with a restriction on the number of items that can be borrowed by a single user. Items can be returned (preferably contactless), fines can

be paid, and home delivery (which has been in place in most libraries for the previous 5 weeks) is still possible for vulnerable groups. Central branches of public libraries to be open, without access to reading rooms and without events. Libraries are to open for one work shift only, or as long as can be managed by available staff. Returned materials are to be quarantined for 7 days.

- Phase 2: Additional branches to open gradually.
- Phase 3: Visitors can browse the shelves in all branches, and all other services will resume.

In **Spain**, the government published recommendations on the reopening of libraries on May 9. Reopening here was also expected to have 3 phases, with reopening for physical services in Phase 2. A four-phase government plan for exiting lockdown included certain criteria that had to be achieved in each Autonomous Region before moving from one phase to the next. By May 11, some regions had moved from Phase 0 to Phase 1 and some remained in Phase 0. About half the population were thought to be in Phase 1 at that point.

By June 21, after several extensions, the government ended the State of Emergency and all the measures allowed by it and taken by the Government at a national scale were abolished. In future, the different Autonomous Regions will take the measures they consider necessary in their territories. In Catalonia, for example, the quarantine time for books has been reduced to 72 hours (the government recommended 14 days). Others have also reduced it, like Basque Country and the Madrid region.

Reopening was a little different in **Sweden**, where there was no lockdown. Only one municipality here closed their library buildings and had only digital services on offer. 290 municipal web pages (library page, municipal page, and Facebook page) were surveyed weekly. In the first survey, 5 libraries were closed totally. By early May, 4 out of those 5 were open for pick-up and delivery of books (with a phone service in place for delivery by library staff). Outreach services were expanded so that high risk groups and the over 70s could get home delivery. Libraries had moved furniture and shut down some, but not all, computers. Digital services were made more accessible, even while library buildings remained open for the most part.

Libraries in **Switzerland** could reopen on May 11. This was almost one month earlier than the original date on June 8, leaving little time to prepare. Reopening guidelines were published on May 1. Swiss policy allowed a lot of freedom for each institution to work out its own way of reopening, if safety standards (notably social distancing and hygiene) are guaranteed. Events with more than 5 people were not allowed as of May 11. As from June 22 on, social distancing is reduced from 2 to 1.5m and events with maximum 1000 participants are allowed again.

2. Safety Measures

Many safety measures reported to be in place for reopening were common across countries and largely followed national guidelines. Health and safety recommendations were generally adjusted regularly in response to changing situations.

As mentioned in the previous section on the reopening of library buildings, many libraries did not initially allow access to shelves, study spaces, reading rooms, or other spaces where people would gather indoors. Public access computers and OPACs were also handled with care in reopening, either being kept out of bounds or with careful guidelines for disinfection before and after use.

In many countries, adjustments to the library space such as the removal of furniture, the addition of plexiglass barriers and of markers on the floor indicating safe distances were reported. Physical distancing queueing systems were also introduced outside libraries, to facilitate a controlled number of visitors being admitted to library buildings at any one time. Personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks and gloves was provided for employees, and in some countries also recommended or required for patrons, depending on national recommendations. In some cases, facemasks were recommended for indoor areas where social distancing cannot be maintained. The provision of hand disinfectant and reported regular disinfecting of equipment and surfaces was also widespread across countries and regions.

In general, the importance of consistent messaging regarding PPE for staff and library users upon reopening was noted by NAPLE members. Ensuring that library staff and users feel safe to return was also identified as a key shared issue. Regarding the use of Perspex screens, it was noted that many libraries no longer have desks as the staff walk around the library to interact with users.

Official guidelines (often produced for the retail sector) regarding limits on the number of people allowed in a building at a time varied across Europe, from leaving 5 square metres per person to 20 square metres (in **Ireland** and **Slovenia**, for example). Libraries generally followed the guidelines that were in place for shops, although in Slovenia there was specific guidance from the National Institute of Public Health in relation to Cultural Institutions (including libraries, museums, and archives). In **Estonia**, a '2+2' rule from national guidelines on public places specified that up to two people (except for families) may move together, with a distance of at least two metres between them and others.

Over time, these rules have changed. In the **Netherlands** from the first of July there was no limit to the number of people in a building at the same time. As of June 19, the **Estonian** government decided to replace the 2+2 rule with a requirement for people to disperse. This means that a safe distance between people must continue to be maintained, but the state no

longer requires compliance with the 2+2 rule. The order⁴ only concerns the relaxation of the 2+2 rule; all other established requirements regarding the number of participants, maximum occupancy, disinfectants, etc. remain valid.

The dispersal requirement applies to all public spaces, including libraries, public events, public meetings, sports, visits to museums and exhibitions, and so on. The method of ensuring the requirement to disperse people is chosen by the institution according to its size and number of visitors. Indoor and outdoor public library events are subject to restrictions on holding public meetings and organizing public events. For indoor events, the organizer of the event guarantees no more than 50% occupancy and the requirement to disperse people, but not more than 100 people (up to 500 from July 1). Outdoors, the organizer of the event ensures that the number of participants is no more than 100 people (from July 1, up to 1000) and that the requirement to disperse people is met.

In **Flanders (Belgium)**, a number of safety rules remain in force regardless of progress with opening: limiting contacts between people; respecting safe distances; maintaining good hygienic measures - also called 'barrier gestures'. Specifically, from Saturday 11 July onwards, wearing a mouth mask is compulsory in these places:

1. Shops and shopping malls
2. Cinemas, theatres, concert halls and conference halls (to have something to eat or drink the mask may be taken off)
3. Auditoria
4. Places of worship
5. (the public parts of) Courthouses
6. Museums
7. Libraries
8. Public transport (including stations and platforms)
9. Hairdressing salons
10. Beauticians
11. Bank branches
12. Casinos and amusement arcades

"This list may change over time, depending on the epidemiological situation of our country. Wearing a mask always remains highly recommended in other situations", stated the cabinet of Prime Minister Sophie Wilmès in a communication.

Mouth masks are never compulsory for children under the age of twelve and there are special provisions for people who cannot wear a mask for medical reasons. If it does not prove possible to take the necessary safety measures in the case of certain services, it is recommended that, for the time being, such services are not restarted.

⁴ <https://www.kriis.ee/en/news/government-22-rule-changing>

In **Greece**, libraries are requiring 1.5m physical distancing between users in buildings, and allowing one person per 10 square meters. The use of masks is optional, and libraries try to avoid air conditioning usage when possible. In contrast, **Spanish** national legislation makes the use of masks mandatory, alongside physical distancing between users of at least 1.5 meters.

In **Slovenia**, central branches were preparing to allow access to reading rooms, with safety measures in line with official guidelines in place from June 1. This meant at least 1.5m distance between people, a maximum number of people in the building, cleaning all user-accessed surfaces before and after use, and special restrictions for the use of toilets. Access was to be allowed to the shelves in central branches, though with the mandatory use of gloves.

In **Portugal**, all libraries follow safety measure procedures issued by National Health Authorities and guidance from the Public Libraries Authority. Since the end of June, libraries can have activities with a maximum of 20 persons, but a very few libraries are organizing indoor activities. Some libraries are trying to have outdoors activities.

At the end of June, the Portuguese Tourism National Authority extended a procedure applied to monuments and museums to include public libraries. The libraries can apply for a national certification seal called “Safe & Clean” that recognizes the commitment to follow safety and sanitary procedures for the service. This was a measure intended to reinforce the confidence for users to return to libraries.

3. Quarantining of Returned Materials

Guidelines for the quarantining of returned materials were commonly reported, particularly in the early phases of reopening. Many regions recommended a 72-hour quarantine period, but in some cases returned materials were quarantined for 5 days, a week, or in one case 2 weeks. In a handful of countries however, no quarantining procedures were introduced.

Quarantining guidelines were generally relaxed as countries and regions moved through their reopening plans. For example, in **Flanders (Belgium)** materials were initially quarantined for 72 hours, but by early June, after a meeting between the Security Council and representatives of the library sector, the advice was that quarantining was no longer necessary. Libraries could still choose to follow stricter guidelines but in Leuven and elsewhere the quarantine was lifted.

Similarly, in the **Czech Republic**, an initial quarantine period of 3-5 days was relaxed following a recommendation by the Central Library Council. Accordingly, from May 18 onwards a 48-hour quarantine was recommended but not obligatory, leaving the decision to individual libraries. In Estonia, too, libraries were quarantining books for 72 hours up to May 21 but practice in libraries in this area changed following a recommendation from the Health Board specifying that it did not consider quarantining necessary any longer.

In the **Netherlands**, the national guideline for quarantine of library materials has been

removed. Regional security coordinators are in charge and determine with local libraries how to protect their employees and the public. In this sense, this is the same for retail. In **France** on May 21 there was a universal quarantine in place, usually of 10 days for items with a plastic cover and 3 days for items with a paper cover. As of June 16 this was changed to 3 days for items with a plastic cover, and 1 day for paper covers.

In **Germany**, the situation differed from library to library. In general, there were no official guidelines on this issue from the federal governments. In **Norway, Finland** and **Denmark** there was no recommendation to quarantine library materials. The Norwegian Institute for Public Health considered the risk for contamination from books to be low and so this was the message in the guidelines prepared by the Library Association and the Union of Librarians. It was decided that good hand hygiene would be sufficient.

On May 21 in **Poland** a 72-hour quarantine was standard in every open library. The same is presently true in Greece, Scotland, and Switzerland.

The Portuguese Health Authority recommended a 3-day quarantine for library materials in **Portugal** as of May 21. Earlier, in April, a 9-day quarantine had been recommended, reduced to 72 hours on May 4. As of May 21, most public libraries in Portugal were reportedly quarantining returned materials for a period of between 72 hours and 9 days (although the General Directorate for Book, Archives and Libraries (DGLAB) recommends 72 hours). The most recent guidance from the National Health Authority said that paper has a very low probability of contamination, but libraries have not yet removed the quarantine period.

In **Slovenia**, initially (from May 4) there was a quarantine of 7 days for returned materials. Later (from May 18), this was reduced, in accordance with guidance from the National Institute of Public Health of Slovenia, to 72 hours. The Institute recommended that users not use the material at home for at least 3 days after borrowing or, in the case of materials with a plastic cover, to wipe with disinfectant before use. The National Library in Slovenia bought two machines that can sterilize 6 books at a time. As of May 21, it was planned that Slovenian public libraries would no longer quarantine books from the beginning of June. The quarantine procedure had been in place for about 4 weeks. The quarantine of 7 days was recommended by the National Institute for Public Health and resulted in piles of returned books and a lot of books in high demand being placed on hold while in quarantine. In **France**, too, it was noted that quarantining returned items took up space, making it challenging to welcome visitors back to the library and quarantine materials at the same time.

Quarantining items for 72 hours was the approach taken in **Ireland** for the initial phases of the government's re-opening roadmap. At the end of June updated advice was issued from the Department of Health stating that quarantining library books was no longer necessary due to the decreased prevalence of the virus, and that efforts should be focused on informing library users of the correct hygiene and sanitisation procedures to be followed before, during and after using library services. Quarantine is no longer necessary at the time of writing and is being phased out across the country's libraries.

In **Spain**, a 14-day quarantine was recommended by an expert on book restoration from the National Library. This was still the recommended practice on May 21. Although this was not mandatory, most libraries in different regions were compliant.

4. Other Challenges and Considerations

In some cases, where libraries had not yet reopened this was due to a lack of PPE or staffing shortages. Some libraries were also waiting for government guidance regarding procedures such as the quarantining of materials, or national guidelines regarding lockdown. It was noted that, in **Estonia**, for example, the gradual expansion of library services would depend on the analysis of local risks and the decision of the municipality. While decisions around reopening could be made locally, the requirements of the Ministry of Culture's national instructions (coordinated with the Health Board) also had to be followed. This reflected a common situation, where national policy fed into local decisions.

Some concerns in advance of reopening included questions around cleaning and sanitization, social distancing in the workplace, the quarantining of books, PPE, how to manage space, and whether users should book appointments in advance of visiting the library. In **Ireland**, there was a question of how to manage the single Library Management System for all libraries and a national delivery service, considering regional differences in reopening.

Staffing was mentioned in several cases as a challenge. In **England** and **Wales**, for example, the expectation was that libraries would be understaffed with library staff out sick, looking after young children, or having been redeployed to work in Covid19 roles. Library volunteers were not expected to return for some time. In the **Czech Republic**, it was also noted that in some cases librarians were home with children while schools remained closed. The fact that parents of young children had to stay home with them was mentioned by several respondents.

Slovenia's response included the categorisation of employees at increased risk for health complications in the event of new Coronavirus infection. The list was not exhaustive and demonstrated the breadth of situations in which withdrawal from work for medical reasons would be necessary as recommended by an occupational medical specialist. Other respondents also mentioned concern about staff in high risk groups, and what could be done so that they would not have contact with the public.

The German Library Association mentioned that libraries in **Germany** were asking what virtual events could be offered in libraries before the return of in-person events.

In **England**, the pandemic has caused an enormous strain on local authority budgets, and there is concern that library budgets and services will have to contract and that some branches may not reopen.

A resurgence of COVID-19 is a looming challenge. Because of an increase of new COVID-19 cases in the Lisbon Metropolitan area in **Portugal**, more restricted measures are being

implemented, including limiting opening hours for services and placing more restrictions on the size of groups in public. While these measures are not presently affecting libraries, the sector is concerned - two public libraries continue to be closed as a safety measure because an outbreak was identified in a town in the southern part of the country.