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CENL EEDI Network Group: Mission and Strategy 2023–2025

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Thank you very much for your kind invitation to speak to you about the work of our CENL EEDI Network Group. It is a great honour to be able to speak to you and to show our support for the work of your library and all libraries during these very difficult times.

1. CENL is the Conference of European national libraries. The Conference of European National Librarians (shortened to "CENL") is a network of 46 national libraries in 45 European countries. There are 46 rather than 45 because the National Library of Scotland was recently invited to join alongside the British Library, to represent the United Kingdom together.

Since 1987, CENL has worked to advance the cause of Europe's national libraries, reinforcing our special role in preserving the continent's cultural heritage and making it accessible to all. We in CENL believe that we work better together and achieve more than we can do alone.

We also believe that as world-leading memory institutions, Europe's national libraries play an important role in the intellectual, educational, cultural, social and economic development of the continent, countries and communities they serve. And hence why we have created a network group to consider the very important way in which libraries can further EEDI principles for their users and for wider society within our European countries.

2. There are currently three CENL network groups, the other two being AI and Books & Audiences. All three network groups exist to support CENL Strategy 2023–2027 in three main areas:

- Support CENL libraries to develop as memory institutions for the past and for the future.
- Support CENL libraries to increase their impact and be strong and networked institutions.
- Strengthen CENL as a community.

The Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI) Network Group is the youngest, being agreed by the CENL Executive Committee on 23 January 2024. The group held its first founding meeting on 7 March 2023, with at that time a small committee of members. Karin Grönvall (Kungliga Biblioteket / National Library of Sweden) was appointed the EEDI Network Group's Sponsor.

The group held our first in person meeting later that year, in Skopje in North Macedonia.

3. We have a strong and committed membership (built over 12 months) and good representation from all corners of Europe. From December 2024, Rosemarie van der Veen-Oei from the National Library of the Netherlands is our chair, and Lauren Turner from the British Library is our Secretary. Our Treasurer role is in the process of being filled. We also have representation from France, Ireland, Scotland, North Macedonia, Sweden, Bulgaria, Georgia, Croatia, Serbia and the Vatican. We meet quarterly, of which one is an in-person meeting.

Our networking group members typically:

- Actively network with CENL colleagues.
- Engage in constructive discussion and exchange ideas on topics related to equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EEDI).
- Collaborate on initiatives and projects that promote EEDI within our National Libraries and within our societies and communities.
- Actively resource and advocate for a broader understanding of and engagement with EEDI in our libraries and communities.

4. These principles and ideas form part of our network group mission. The mission reflects how the group seeks to:

- Provide a strong and open network within which representatives from libraries across Europe can come together to discuss all aspects of EEDI in a safe and trusted space, to advocate for EEDI generally, and to create opportunities to further our work.
- Support and learn from each other – we know that there are great examples of good practice across our network and across the CENL group of libraries and we want to find ways of actively sharing these with all our colleagues.
- Be involved members of the team who are committed and already demonstrably working in EEDI areas within their libraries.

5. Our first major piece of work, produced in summer 2023 with the support of the BL and the National Library of the Netherlands was to survey all 46 members of CENL about their understanding of the status of EEDI within their organisations. We felt it was important to hear all voices and viewpoints.

These were our top level findings.

- 32 of 46 libraries responded (70%) – a really strong response;
- 16 (out of 20) libraries wish to start an EDI group where none already exist;
- 13 libraries expressed interest in joining the EEDI network (more than a third of all respondents).

We were really encouraged by the scale of response, which suggests there is a lot of interest in this area across the whole network of libraries.

Of the 32 libraries who responded, a reasonably large number did not have an EDI group or committee within their library, but hearteningly, 80% of those libraries (16 out of 20) would like to start such a group. This is very encouraging for the future scope of EEDI within European national libraries.

6. These survey findings were discussed and analysed at our first in person meeting in Skopje North Macedonia. The meeting was held at the National University Library of St Clement of Ohrid in Skopje. It was very important for us to meet in person. At that meeting, we workshopped outcomes and objectives for our group – from which six main themes emerged. These grew out of our survey findings and our own discussions.

The six themes are:

- Improving EEDI visibility.
- Accessibility for all.
- Communication.
- Recruitment and development.
- Learning and sharing best practice.
- Policies and frameworks.

7. We understand the particular importance of in person meetings and sessions. It is an opportunity to get to know our colleagues, to bond and find areas of common purpose and to strengthen our commitment as a group to promoting the cause of EEDI within our own libraries and across the CENL network.

8. The survey questions and ideas were many and varied. They demonstrate how seriously our colleagues in libraries across Europe value the concepts of equity, equality diversity and inclusion, and how central they see these principles to the work of all libraries, and perhaps national libraries in particular. Libraries are well placed to champion equity of access, diversity of user and workforce, and inclusion and representation of all voices within their collections, services and outreach.

One theme in particular is important – that EEDI work should challenge us all to revisit the very concept of a national library and what that might mean across different countries catering for very different audiences and user groups. So it is important to always take on board the context in which different libraries operate, while of course always advocating for equality and diversity as a basic principle for all libraries. And sometimes this is easier said than done.

9. Of our six main strategic themes, we have picked three to prioritise for the next 12 months. They will be the focus of our next in person meeting, in Zagreb at the end of this month. This will be a bigger group, with 12 members meeting to discuss how we can take forward these three themes within the wider CENL network, focussing on improving visibility – through presentations such as this, communication and reporting on our work and achievements to CENL members and more widely; and – probably most important of all – how we can put in place a framework where we can learn best practice from one another and share this across our European libraries network.

The three priority themes are:

- Improving visibility, e. g. CENL newsletters, EDI stories.
- Communication, e. g. reporting.
- Learning from one another, e. g. in-person meetings.

10. An important part of our remit is to increase visibility around the CENL EEDI Network Group.

It has been clear to us that in-person meetings are valuable for discussing, sharing and learning from each other, for sensitive topics like Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI). Our knowledge and expertise in all various forms may be able to empower library staff in general, either in National or public libraries, to develop the necessary knowledge and competences with the demands in this rapid changing society. With our networking group, nowadays enriched by new members, we can create the opportunity to network across borders and learn from how our colleagues in other countries are rising to the challenges related to the topic.

We hope to turn this opportunity into a cooperation partnership project proposal to be submitted under the call Erasmus + cooperation partnership (expected deadline Spring 2025). This cooperation partnership may have the following objectives:

- Provide an opportunity for cross-border exchange and networking between library staff as adult learners to work with target groups from underrepresented communities;
- Develop the awareness and competences of library staff working with underrepresented communities based on exchanges between project partners contributing their experience, knowledge and expertise;
- Empower library staff to deliver more effective support to the underrepresented communities, thereby promoting social inclusion and uptake of educational opportunities and services in libraries.

Generally, the partnership project can be considered as an accelerator for our CENL EEDI activities.

Thank you for listening to this summary of our CENL EEDI work to date.