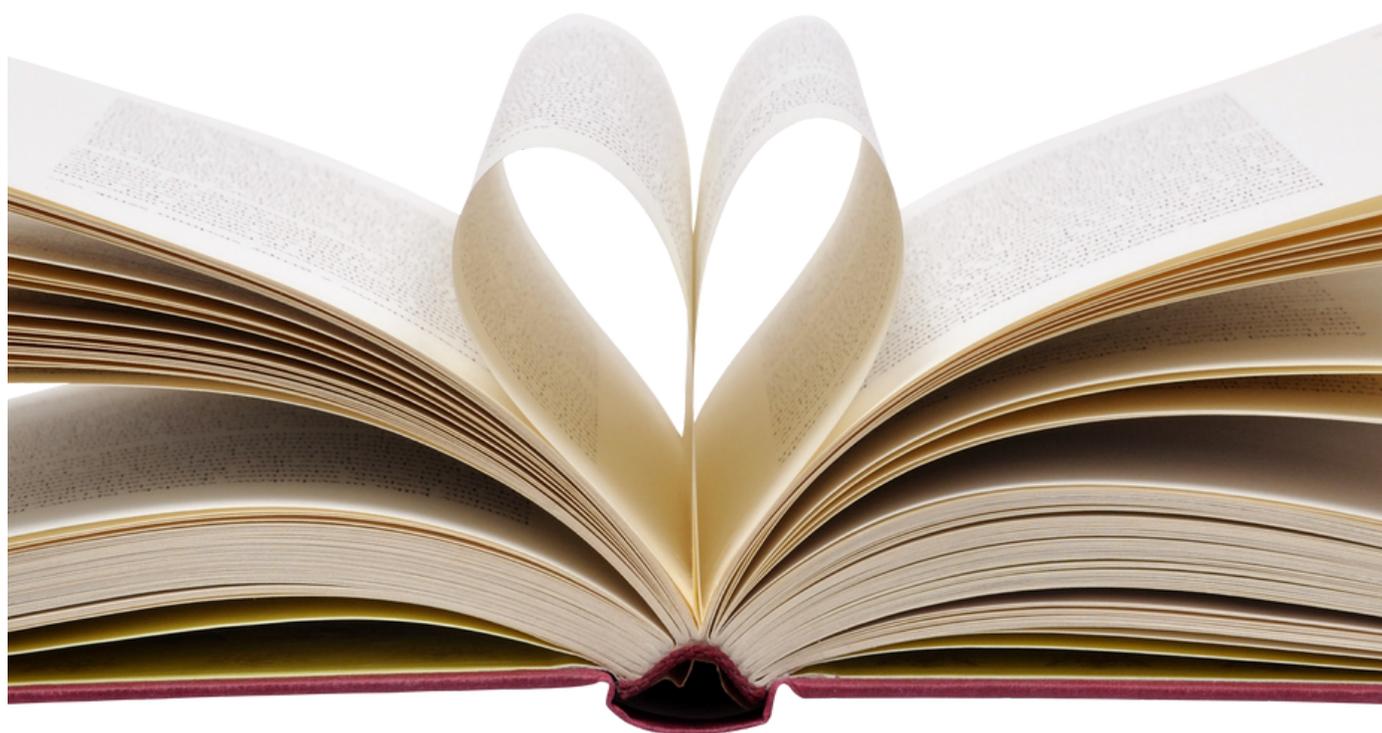


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BOOKS

AS A DRIVER OF EUROPE'S KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The pandemic has demonstrated to all of us the power of digital technologies to help us work, learn and even socialise. Working from home, remote learning and online communities kept our economies moving, delivered knowledge to our children and helped us stay connected with our loved ones despite physical isolation. And perhaps less noticeably, but no less significantly, the pandemic also taught us another valuable lesson: **the enduring value of printed books in transmitting knowledge, entertaining us and supporting equality of access to information.**

A growing body of research, which came to the fore at the same time as Covid-19 was changing the way we work, learn and play, shows us the benefits of print over digital media for certain forms of knowledge acquisition. While further studies will no doubt buttress our knowledge in this area, it is clear already today that **we must include printed books as part of a balanced information diet** – both in our children’s schools and in our own lifelong learning efforts.

No less importantly, **printed books play a powerful role in fighting digital exclusion.** In recent years European societies have come to appreciate how print can level the playing field for those who are less online, for a wide variety of reasons including age and income. **Physical bookshops and libraries are important centres of culture in local communities** around the world, offering intellectual stimulation and opportunities for local residents to come together and engage in the life of the mind.

Finally, **printed books play an important role in the economy**, in particular the circular economy: in Europe they are **produced from sustainable resources and are fully recyclable.** The book value chain provides employment to people of all skill levels across our continent.

Below we present more detailed data on the value that printed books deliver for European societies, in all areas of life. We hope you will join us in celebrating the many benefits that print delivers, and that we will inspire you to cherish, protect and promote this fundamental cultural, educational and economic resource.

BOOKS

BUILD CULTURE

Books offer an invaluable source of culture, creativity, and food for the mind. They are key vehicles of knowledge preservation and dissemination that allow readers to let their imagination run free and escape into different worlds, which has been shown to boost empathy. Books help build literacy, freedom of expression, democratic participation and inclusion: the foundations of a knowledge society.

PRINTED BOOKS ARE A HEALTHY ALTERNATIVE TO SCREEN TIME

Post-pandemic work and education mean we're spending more time in front of screens: from daily teleworking to remote learning to online meetings. Thanks to the rise of streaming, we're also spending more of our leisure time watching screens.

A recent OECD study (1) reported that students are spending more and more time online for school and for entertainment. For instance, in 2018, a Danish 15-year-old spent 47 hours per week online – an increase of 19 hours since 2012. (2) Comparable increases were detected in every country analysed.

This revolution in how we learn and work is delivering enormous benefits. It also requires that we be proactive in seeking opportunities to disconnect and enjoy time offline. The OECD found that when young people read more in print they enjoy reading more, they read more often, and they perform better in reading. (3)

1. 21st century reading – Developing literacy skills in a digital world, OECD, May 2021 ([link](#))
2. 21st century reading – Developing literacy skills in a digital world, OECD, May 2021 ([link](#)), page 21
3. 21st century reading – Developing literacy skills in a digital world, OECD, May 2021 ([link](#)), page 78

PRINTED BOOKS PROMOTE FAIRNESS ACROSS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

While underscoring the importance of digital technologies, the pandemic has also highlighted the gap between those who have digital tools and the skills to use them, and those who do not. The number of people in Europe with insufficient digital skills declined by just 1% in the last four years, from 43% to 42%, Only 35% of those aged 55-74, and 30% of the retired and the inactive, possess basic digital skills (DESI, 2020). [\(4\)](#)

Printed books help bridge this gap. They are fair and inclusive, ensuring opportunities to participate for all members of society, and equal access to these cultural goods.

We applaud the Commission's goal [\(5\)](#) of ensuring that 80% of adults in Europe have basic digital skills by 2030. Still, even once it is reached, tens of millions of people will remain without digital skills (or access to digital tools). Moreover, even when accounting for demographic change, the fast pace of new technologies entering the market will perpetuate a digital gap that will persist far beyond 2030.

The importance of ensuring fairness between online and offline is specifically mentioned in the Council conclusions on the human rights, participation and well-being of older persons in the era of digitalisation [\(6\)](#), and the New Consumer Agenda [\(7\)](#) – as well as more generally in various matters relating to ageing and disability.



4. The Digital Economy and Society Index 2020 (DESI) [\(link\)](#)

5. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0118> [\(link\)](#)

6. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11717-2020-REV-2/en/pdf> [\(link\)](#)

7. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0696> [\(link\)](#)

PRINTED BOOKS ARE THE BEST TOOLS FOR LONG-FORM READING

Printed schoolbooks play a vital role in the future of education in Europe. Between 2014 and 2018, a network of almost 200 academics in Europe carried out four years of empirical research and debates about the effects of digitalisation on reading – particularly on students and young people. (8) Based on a meta-analysis of 54 individual experiments, which involved more than 170,000 participants from 19 countries, the **COST Action E-READ** initiative found that: “Paper remains the preferred reading medium for longer single texts, especially when reading for deeper comprehension and retention, and...paper best supports long-form reading of informational texts.”

The study goes on to add: “Reading long-form texts is invaluable for a number of cognitive achievements, such as concentration, vocabulary building and memory.”

Crucially, this also holds true for the younger generation – those known as ‘digital natives’. Studies find that people today read less well on screens than they did a few years ago, regardless of age group and of prior experience with digital environments.

These findings are supported by the OECD research. (9) According to that study, “reading digital texts more frequently [...] shows a negative association with reading performance” – even after accounting for students’ and schools’ socio-economic profile. (10) Students who read more in print perform better. The type of reading also matters. For example, “reading fiction texts more frequently was positively associated with reading performance in 55 countries and economies”. (11) People also overestimate their comprehension when reading on screens. (12)

To future-proof our education systems, we must ensure a combination of print and digital materials, recognising the strengths and weaknesses of each. For concentration, comprehension, retention and the development of deep reading skills, print is best.

8. COST Action E-READ, Stavanger Declaration ([link](#))

9. 21st century reading – Developing literacy skills in a digital world, OECD, May 2021 ([link](#))

10. 21st century reading – Developing literacy skills in a digital world, OECD, May 2021 ([link](#)), page 120

11. 21st century reading – Developing literacy skills in a digital world, OECD, May 2021 ([link](#)), page 123

12. COST Action E-READ, Stavanger Declaration ([link](#))

PRINTED BOOKS ARE SUSTAINABLE

The book value chain plays a key role in Europe's green transition. Books are made of paper: a recyclable, renewable raw material and a core element of the bioeconomy. European forests are sustainably managed, and paper recycling in Europe has reached a rate of 71.4%. (13) Print is inherently sustainable, and companies and individuals all along the value chain are striving to continually improve these credentials. To take just one current example, at the moment printers are taking steps to reduce the carbon footprint of their products. (14)



PRINTED BOOKS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR EUROPE'S ECONOMY

The book value chain is an important part of Europe's economy, containing many small and medium-sized enterprises in the printing industry and the wider creative sector. The book value chain is composed of companies that provide quality jobs to workers of all skill levels. COVID-19 and the closure of bookshops drastically cut sales numbers, with a knock-on effect on other parts of the chain. This compromised the profitability of the entire book value chain, whose situation was already fragile; sales rebounded in 2021 and particularly 2022, but difficulties remain. The authors, publishers, bookshops, printers and paper manufacturers who work together to put books into our hands all generate added value for the European economy.

13. European Paper Recycling Council, Monitoring Report 2021 ([link](#))

14. Intergraf Roadmap on Carbon Footprint ([link](#))

PRINTED BOOKS ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITIES

Authors, publishers, printers and booksellers make an important contribution to communities and society as a whole, from the educational, cultural and economic points of view. The book value chain is essential for providing access to literature and culture for all, and for improving reading performance and habits across societies.

While digital technologies have proven to be very helpful in navigating the difficulties caused by the pandemic, we cannot overlook the role of printed books. For those who are spending more time online, printed books offer an invaluable opportunity to switch off and decompress. And because they are fair and inclusive, printed books ensure that everyone in society – even those who lack digital skills or means – has access to culture, which is more important now than ever.

WE CALL ON EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL AUTHORITIES TO

- **Celebrate the role of reading and books in the field of culture and education**
- **Recognise the proven advantages of books in the development of critical thinking**
- **Nurture bookshops for the important role they play in their local communities**
- **Recognise the value of printed books as tools of inclusion and their role in protecting people without sufficient digital skills, tools, or access; older people; persons with disabilities; and others who are less online**
- **Strive for the right mix of digital and print in the fields of entertainment and education, recognising the advantages of print for comprehension and for development of critical thinking skills**
- **Support further independent research that measures the effects of digitalisation on reading performance and the development of other skills**



MORE INFORMATION



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