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Administrative data provided by Malta Libraries revealed that, in 2021, total book loans stood at 621,202, an increase of 3,382, or 0.5 per cent, over the preceding year. After the dip in book loans in 2020, which was caused by the outbreak of the pandemic, book loans from public libraries largely kept at the same pace for the second year running.

## Statistics on Libraries: 2021

When compared to the preceding year, public libraries in Gozo and the Southern Harbour district registered the largest increases in book loans, at the rates of 22.6 per cent and 9.6 per cent respectively. In the sister island of Gozo, the public libraries at Victoria and Nadur last year continued with their perennial contest for the top spot, with the Victoria public library reaching 77.4 per cent of the book loans it had in the year before the pandemic (i.e. 2019) and the Nadur public library reaching 68.2 per cent of the same yardstick (Table 3).

The regional library at Ħal Luqa had most of the increase in book loans among the libraries of the Southern Harbour district, such that its counts represented two-thirds of the gains in this district year-on-year. In 2021, this regional library had 80.1 per cent of the book loans it had in the year before the pandemic (i.e. 2019). On the other hand, the public library at nearby Santa Luċija continued to register a steady fall in book loans for the second year running. Last year, its counts amounted to 40.4 per cent of what they were in 2019 (Table 3).

In the same way, the public libraries of the Northern Harbour district continued with their overall decline in book loans in the second year of the pandemic. As can be seen in Table 3, book loans from the public libraries at Ħal Qormi plummeted to the extent of amounting to only 22.1 per cent of what they used to be in 2019. Moreover, book loans from the Birkirkara public library fell by 12.8 per cent year-on-year, to reach 42.4 per cent of the loans made in the year before the pandemic (Table 3).

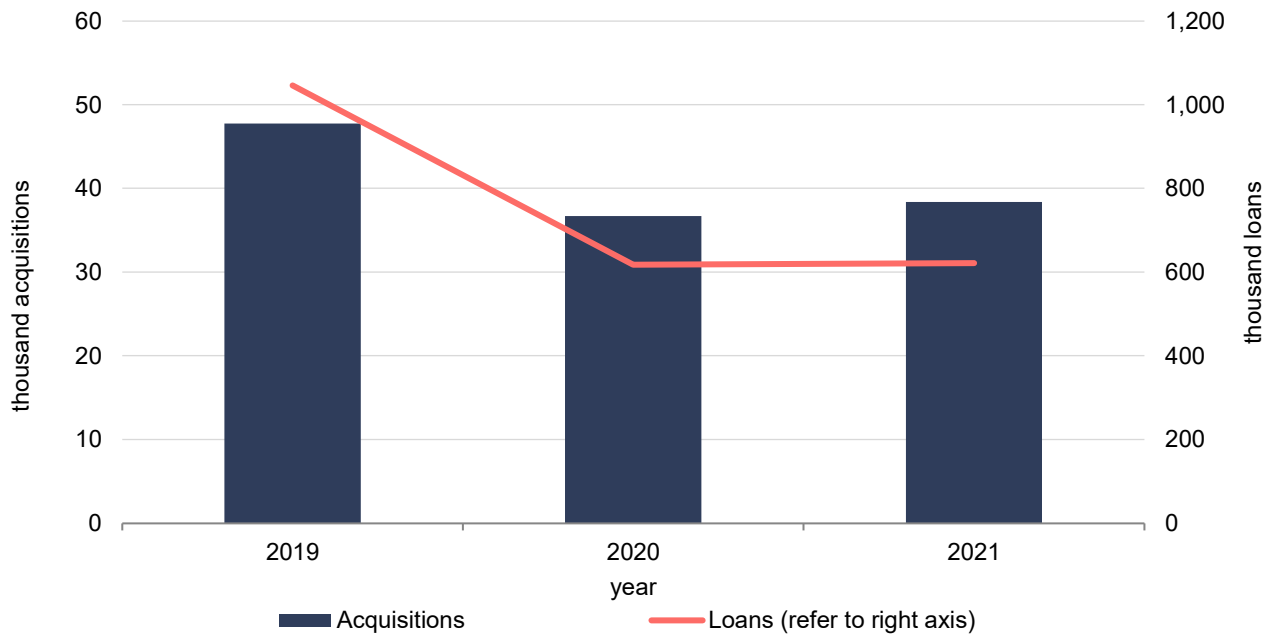
In 2021, book acquisitions went up by 4.6 per cent over the preceding year, to reach 38,379. This recovery in book acquisitions was mainly attributed to the steep growth in eBooks, which increased by 110.6 per cent (Table 1).

New members of public libraries, in 2021, stood at 3,435, down by 39.1 per cent when compared to the preceding year. Likewise, the share of persons under the age of 18 among the new library members fell from 66.9 per cent to 52.1 per cent (Table 2).

The number of books and periodicals received by the National Library of Malta under legal deposit amounted to 990, up by 2.8 per cent when compared to 2020. Last year, the number of books overtook the number of periodicals (Table 4).

Data of the International Trade Statistics indicated that, last year, both the imports and exports of printed book material and periodicals fell. Indeed, such imports dropped by 21.5 per cent, whereas exports dropped by 18.3 per cent (Table 5). At the same time, National Accounts data revealed that the total private final consumption expenditure on books; and newspapers and periodicals grew by 16.2 per cent and 2.3 per cent respectively (Table 6) ■

**Chart 1. Book acquisitions and loans**



**Table 1. Public libraries at a glance by year**

|                             | 2019             | 2020           | 2021           |
|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Book acquisitions</b>    | <b>47,754</b>    | <b>36,706</b>  | <b>38,379</b>  |
| <i>of which:</i>            |                  |                |                |
| Book purchases              | 12,413           | 10,031         | 9,615          |
| Book donations              | 33,702           | 24,325         | 23,816         |
| eBooks                      | 1,639            | 2,350          | 4,948          |
| <b>New library members</b>  | <b>6,071</b>     | <b>5,641</b>   | <b>3,435</b>   |
| <b>Book loans</b>           | <b>1,045,869</b> | <b>617,820</b> | <b>621,202</b> |
| <i>of which:</i>            |                  |                |                |
| Central Public Library      | 115,719          | 68,672         | 76,016         |
| Regional libraries          | 322,517          | 148,171        | 148,051        |
| Branch libraries - Malta    | 465,421          | 282,125        | 267,004        |
| Gozo Central Public Library | 25,469           | 13,071         | 19,718         |
| Branch libraries - Gozo     | 102,742          | 59,739         | 69,513         |
| eBooks                      | 14,001           | 46,042         | 40,900         |

Source: Malta Libraries

**Table 2. New public library memberships by year**

| Type of membership  | 2019                               | 2020         | 2021         |
|---|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
|   | Number of new members              |              |              |
|   | 18 and over                        |              |              |
| Adults <sup>1</sup>   | 1,935                              | 1,488        | 1,415        |
| Adults residing in Malta without Maltese citizenship <sup>1&amp;3</sup>               | 90                                 | 19           | 9            |
| Adult foreign visitors <sup>1&amp;3</sup>   | 4                                  | 1            | -            |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>2,029</b>                       | <b>1,508</b> | <b>1,424</b> |
|   | Junior and Intermediate - under 18 |              |              |
| Junior - 12 years & under   | 2,502                              | 2,070        | 1,614        |
| Intermediate - 13 years to 17 years   | 1,372                              | 1,680        | 161          |
| Intermediate - 13 years to 17 years with additional adult lending rights <sup>2</sup> | 4                                  | 2            | 4            |
| Junior - 12 years & under without Maltese citizenship <sup>3</sup>                    | 86                                 | 19           | 10           |
| Intermediate - 13 years to 17 years without Maltese citizenship <sup>3</sup>          | 8                                  | 1            | 1            |
| Junior foreign visitors <sup>3</sup>  | 1                                  | -            | -            |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>3,973</b>                       | <b>3,772</b> | <b>1,790</b> |
|   | Other                              |              |              |
| Guests <sup>4</sup>   | 1                                  | 135          | 193          |
| Staff members   | -                                  | 1            | -            |
| Teachers <sup>5</sup>   | 68                                 | 225          | 28           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>69</b>                          | <b>361</b>   | <b>221</b>   |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>6,071</b>                       | <b>5,641</b> | <b>3,435</b> |

<sup>1</sup> From 2014 all adults have additional junior lending rights

<sup>2</sup> Require a written permit from a parent or guardian

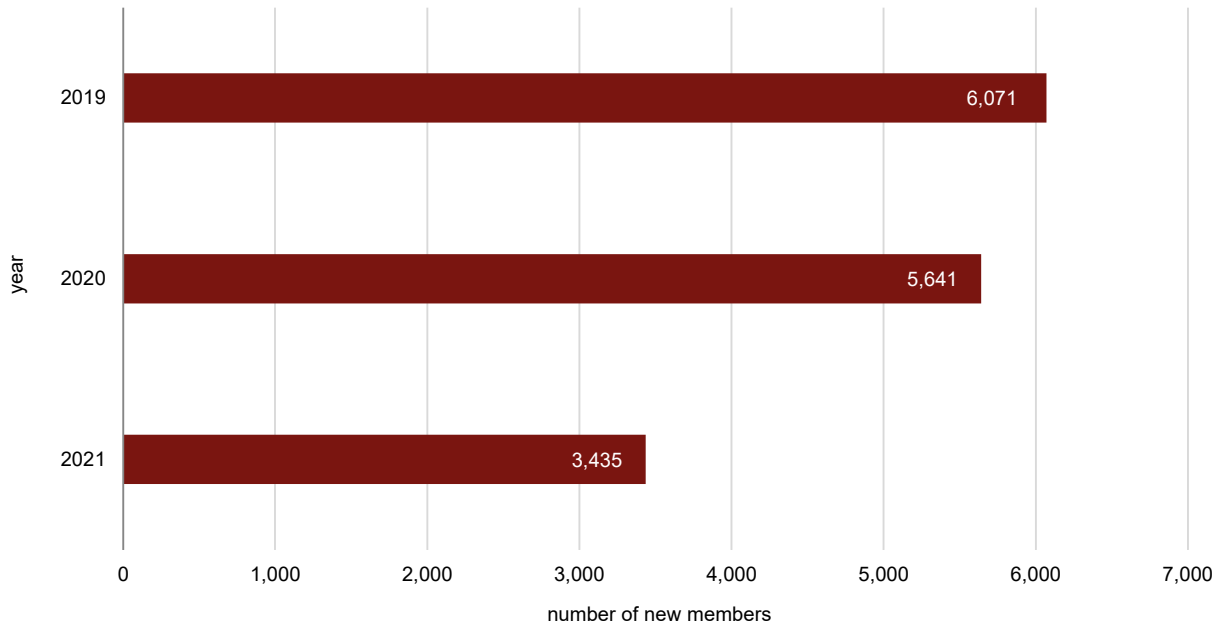
<sup>3</sup> Require a Maltese citizen guarantee

<sup>4</sup> Temporary borrower category for new members who enrol themselves online

<sup>5</sup> This category was added in 2018 following the migration of 8 middle school libraries to Malta Libraries

Source: Malta Libraries

**Chart 2. New library members**



**Chart 3. New public library memberships by category: 2021**

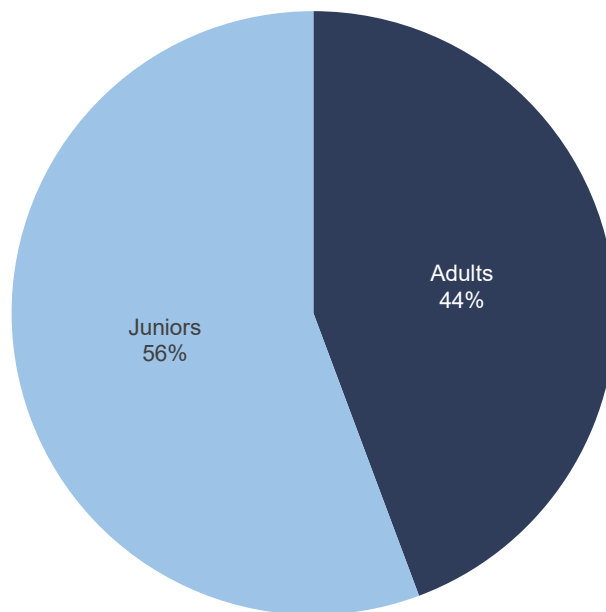


Table 3. Total book loans by year and locality of library ...

| District and locality   | 2019             | 2020           | 2021           |
|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>MALTA</b>            | <b>1,031,868</b> | <b>571,778</b> | <b>580,302</b> |
| <b>Malta</b>            | <b>903,657</b>   | <b>498,968</b> | <b>491,071</b> |
| <b>Gozo and Comino</b>  | <b>128,211</b>   | <b>72,810</b>  | <b>89,231</b>  |
| <b>Southern Harbour</b> | <b>269,437</b>   | <b>151,521</b> | <b>166,088</b> |
| Bormla                  | 1,658            | 768            | 1,286          |
| Fgura                   | 13,367           | 8,736          | 7,483          |
| Floriana                | 115,719          | 68,672         | 76,016         |
| Kalkara                 | 2,403            | 789            | 1,563          |
| Ħal Luqa                | 47,142           | 28,076         | 37,765         |
| Paola                   | 44,430           | 15,547         | 20,367         |
| Santa Luċija            | 17,627           | 11,599         | 7,116          |
| Isla                    | 622              | 149            | 225            |
| Ħal Tarxien             | 3,936            | 1,745          | 235            |
| Valletta                | 1,473            | 264            | -              |
| Birgu                   | 1,927            | 1,137          | 1,986          |
| Xgħajra                 | 580              | 675            | 140            |
| Ħaż-Żabbar              | 18,553           | 13,364         | 11,906         |
| <b>Northern Harbour</b> | <b>254,877</b>   | <b>128,204</b> | <b>100,077</b> |
| Birkirkara              | 109,859          | 53,410         | 46,564         |
| Gżira                   | 9,831            | 6,596          | 4,680          |
| Ħamrun                  | 7,284            | 4,660          | 4,998          |
| Msida                   | 11,194           | 9,910          | 7,987          |
| Pembroke                | 8,174            | 4,293          | 4,677          |
| Ħal Qormi               | 92,439           | 40,502         | 20,420         |
| San Ġwann               | 7,531            | 4,091          | 5,118          |
| Tas-Sliema              | 8,565            | 4,742          | 5,633          |
| <b>South Eastern</b>    | <b>201,882</b>   | <b>119,863</b> | <b>116,120</b> |
| Birżebbuġa              | 5,642            | 3,185          | 4,294          |
| Ħal Għaxaq              | 12,389           | 11,921         | 10,235         |
| Gudja                   | 27,132           | 14,119         | 22,680         |
| Ħal Kirkop              | 6,693            | 3,333          | 2,840          |
| Marsaskala              | 29,326           | 14,148         | 9,401          |
| Marsaxlokk              | 41,073           | 26,636         | 13,069         |
| Mqabba                  | 10,385           | 13,310         | 16,784         |
| Qrendi                  | 23,893           | 11,074         | 7,578          |
| Ħal Safi                | 5,637            | 2,392          | 5,030          |
| Żejtun                  | 25,925           | 12,271         | 14,371         |
| Żurrieq                 | 13,787           | 7,474          | 9,838          |

... Table 3. Total book loans by year and locality of library

| District and Locality  | 2019           | 2020          | 2021          |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Western</b>         | <b>83,879</b>  | <b>49,644</b> | <b>51,379</b> |
| Rabat                  | 9,931          | 5,067         | 6,042         |
| Ħad-Dingli             | 11,173         | 6,257         | 6,552         |
| Mtarfa                 | 13,410         | 6,605         | 3,487         |
| Ħ'Attard               | 20,596         | 14,166        | 13,698        |
| Sigġiewi               | 9,060          | 5,299         | 6,612         |
| Ħaż-Żebbuġ             | 19,709         | 12,250        | 14,988        |
| <b>Northern</b>        | <b>93,582</b>  | <b>49,736</b> | <b>57,407</b> |
| Ħal Għargħur           | 3,117          | 2,502         | 2,934         |
| Mellieħa               | 14,128         | 6,828         | 8,131         |
| Mġarr                  | 7,952          | 5,477         | 6,196         |
| Mosta                  | 42,573         | 21,284        | 27,918        |
| Naxxar                 | 13,389         | 8,046         | 7,888         |
| San Pawl il-Baħar      | 12,423         | 5,599         | 4,340         |
| <b>Gozo and Comino</b> | <b>128,211</b> | <b>72,810</b> | <b>89,231</b> |
| Għajnsielem            | 8,031          | 4,752         | 4,220         |
| Għarb                  | 6,077          | 2,756         | 2,458         |
| Għasri                 | 2,749          | 2,078         | 2,281         |
| Ta' Kerċem             | 999            | 526           | 419           |
| Nadur                  | 46,539         | 26,357        | 31,737        |
| Qala                   | 2,641          | 2,228         | 2,400         |
| Victoria               | 25,469         | 13,071        | 19,718        |
| San Lawrenz            | 3,509          | 2,208         | 3,253         |
| Ta' Sannat             | 2,442          | 1,871         | 2,778         |
| Xagħra                 | 10,348         | 5,271         | 6,039         |
| Xewkija                | 14,651         | 9,211         | 12,379        |
| Żebbuġ                 | 4,756          | 2,481         | 1,549         |

eBooks are excluded from this table.

Source: Malta Libraries

**Table 4. Books and periodicals received at the National Library of Malta under legal deposit by year**

|              | 2019         | 2020       | 2021       |
|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1,579</b> | <b>963</b> | <b>990</b> |
| Books        | 750          | 462        | 521        |
| Periodicals  | 829          | 501        | 469        |

Source: Malta Libraries

**Table 5. Imports and exports of printed book material and periodicals in terms of value by year**

€ 000

|                       | 2019<br>(Revised) | 2020<br>(Revised) | 2021 <sup>P</sup> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Imports</b>        | <b>11,894</b>     | <b>9,892</b>      | <b>7,763</b>      |
| Printed book material | 7,555             | 7,495             | 6,211             |
| Printed periodicals   | 4,339             | 2,397             | 1,552             |
| <b>Exports</b>        | <b>3,904</b>      | <b>4,884</b>      | <b>3,992</b>      |
| Printed book material | 3,904             | 4,884             | 3,991             |
| Printed periodicals   | -                 | -                 | 1                 |

<sup>P</sup> Provisional

Source: International Trade Statistics, NSO

**Table 6. Private final consumption expenditure in the domestic market by year**

€ 000

|  | 2019<br>(Revised) | 2020<br>(Revised) | 2021 <sup>P</sup> |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Total private final consumption expenditure</b> | <b>7,464,494</b>  | <b>5,855,019</b>  | <b>6,522,040</b>  |
| <i>of which:</i>                                   |                   |                   |                   |
| <b>Sub-total</b>                                   | <b>33,135</b>     | <b>32,575</b>     | <b>37,226</b>     |
| Books  | 21,253            | 23,440            | 27,238            |
| Newspapers and periodicals                         | 8,161             | 6,369             | 6,518             |
| Miscellaneous printed matter                       | 3,721             | 2,766             | 3,470             |
| <b>% spent on printed material</b>                 | <b>0.44</b>       | <b>0.56</b>       | <b>0.57</b>       |

<sup>P</sup> ProvisionalNote: 2019-2021 are in line with News Release of 2022 Q1 ESA 2010 no. [095/2022](#).

Source: National Accounts (Production Unit), NSO

## Methodological notes

1. Malta Libraries is the public entity which took over the functions of the Libraries Department in 2011. It is responsible for the Malta and Gozo National Libraries, the Central Public Library, the Regional Libraries, the Branch Libraries and the Gozo Public Libraries.
2. With reference to Table 2, from 2019 the new members in the Intermediate 13-17 age group are calculated by taking into account the enrolment of secondary school students as part of the migration process of school libraries onto the Malta Libraries platform.
3. In Table 5, goods are classified according to the Harmonised System division codes:
  - 4901 - Printed books, brochures, leaflets and similar printed matter, whether or not in single sheets.
  - 4902 - Newspapers, journals and periodicals, whether or not illustrated or containing advertising material.
4. In Table 6, 'Miscellaneous printed matter' includes:
  - catalogues and advertising material;
  - posters, plain or picture postcards, calendars;
  - greeting cards and visiting cards, announcement and message cards;
  - maps and globes.and excludes:
  - pre-franked postcards and aerogrammes;
  - stamp albums.
5. References to this news release are to be cited appropriately.
6. Statistics in this News Release should be interpreted in the context of the COVID-19 situation. Due to the pandemic restrictions, libraries were closed between 30th March and 25th June 2020.  
  
During 2021, both Central Public Libraries as well as the Regional and Branch Libraries across Malta and Gozo operated on restricted schedules during the first and second quarter of the year. None of the libraries were closed.
7. A detailed news release calendar is available on:  
[https://nso.gov.mt/en/News\\_Releases/Release\\_Calendar/Pages/News-Release-Calendar.aspx](https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Release_Calendar/Pages/News-Release-Calendar.aspx)