



NOVATECA PROGRAM

IMPACT ASSESSMENT STUDY

**IREX commissioned this report to Civitta
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1. NOVATECA'S IMPACT IN A NUTSHELL

1.1. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this report is to provide an evidence-based overview of the impact the Novateca program had on Moldova's libraries, as well as to determine to what extent its planned objectives were achieved. Its conclusions are based on the historical quantitative and qualitative data collected between 2011 and 2017, on the administrative data made available by the program, and on the qualitative data collected specifically for this assignment in 2018.

Novateca conducted regular studies, starting in 2011, to track the progress in achieving its core objectives. This wealth of data provided the backdrop of this research. It was possible to monitor midterm trends and determine the overall impact of the program because the questions that were asked stayed relatively stable throughout the year. All conducted surveys were designed following a similar methodological approach and thus the ability to compare the achieved results. The administrative data were self-reported and therefore, rather than being taken at face value, were interpreted and checked against the conclusions of the national surveys and the qualitative study.

TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF SURVEYS CARRIED OUT BY NOVATECA, 2011–2017

Survey	Type	Sample Size	Margin of Error
Use of the internet and visiting public libraries National Representative Survey Republic of Moldova – September 2011	National	1,598	4%
Public Library Visitors Survey – Moldova 2014	National	729	5%
Public Library Visitors Survey – Moldova 2015	National	1,204	4%
Public Library Visitors Survey – Moldova 2016	National	1,230	4%
Public Library Visitors Survey – Moldova 2017	National	1,206	4%
National Citizens' Survey of Moldova 2015	National	400	6%
National Citizens' Survey of Moldova 2016	National	1,200	3%
National Citizens' Survey of Moldova 2017	National	1,200	3%

An extensive qualitative data-gathering effort was undertaken for the specific purpose of informing the conclusions of this report. Three focus groups with librarians from the north, central, and south regions of the country had been carried out, and 56 interviews were conducted with beneficiaries of the program, partners and representatives of the local and national public administration, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector representatives.

The conclusions of the report should be read in the context of the socioeconomic transformation Moldova, which undoubtedly influenced the objectives of the program. Although the official data are inconclusive regarding the exact scale of the demographic crisis, it is beyond a doubt that the country's population was and continues to be shrinking fast due to emigration. Given these

complicated socioeconomic conditions, the achievements of the Novateca program are particularly remarkable, since external factors presented additional risks rather than opportunities for its success.

The report is structured in eight chapters. The first chapter presents its main conclusions; Chapters 2–5 discuss the factors that have contributed to the program’s success; Chapter 6 details its impact; Chapter 7 exemplifies some of the good case practices that emerged over the years; and Chapter 8 analyses what the future holds for the Moldovan library network.

1.2. OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

Launched in 2014, the Novateca program was implemented by IREX in cooperation with USAID and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The aim of the program was to transform the Moldovan public library network into a powerful driver of social and economic change. It set out with the conviction that access to a well-equipped, ICT (information and communications technology)-powered library that provides a diverse range of services and is staffed with well-trained librarians can increase the economic and social opportunities of the community it serves. The objective was to overcome the traditional function of the Moldovan library as a repository of physical knowledge and catapult it into the 21st century by revamping it into a powered community center.

The goal was for the public library to become a place where people use modern technology and engage jointly in community and educational activities that would potentially benefit them individually, as well as the community at large. By doing so, the library would become a central institution in community life, particularly in rural areas; capable of establishing valuable partnerships with other community players; and strong enough to advocate its interests in relation to the local public administration.

The main achievements of the program are the following:

- **More people are using library services than before, and those who are using them are doing so more frequently.** Renovated, comfortable spaces; free access to the internet; and a diversity of services are drawing in more visitors. Because they are now appealing to a broader segment of the population, libraries are better equipped to assess community needs and respond to them adequately. The increase in the number of visitors and their diversity attest to the fact that the libraries have made a great deal of progress in becoming genuine community centers.
- **Libraries have become stronger, better connected, and more influential institutions.** Librarians have been generally able to enhance their standing in the community, particularly with respect to the local public administration. The trainings provided have increased their personal and professional skills, empowering them not only to provide better services, but also to advocate for their interests. Partnerships have been established particularly at the local level, and the library has become a trusted and welcome partner for various local stakeholders.
- **Traditional perceptions and expectations of libraries’ role have shifted.** Libraries are increasingly perceived as more than mere repositories of physical knowledge. The diversification of services and access to ICT have come to be expected and seen as ordinary rather than an unusual, rare, and exceptional occurrence. Increased expectations coupled with community support provide the basis for the further development of the library network.
- **Libraries enjoy greater public recognition and support.** Communities have come to appreciate and value the services provided by the public library. The professional standing of librarians increased as they became a driving force within the community.
- **Libraries’ impact on the qualifications, health, academic performance, earnings, and civic participation of its visitors has increased.** Visitors consistently reported that accessing the services provided by the public libraries had a beneficial impact upon their

lives. Better services meant more educational opportunities and support, more involvement in the community, more access to information for personal or business purposes, more support in finding employment, and less time and money spent on accessing public services.

- **Library modernization provided greater access to information and targeted services to people with special needs, contributing to broader social inclusion.** As a result of the program, more people with special needs benefited from library services, and about half of them mentioned visible improvements in library accessibility for people with special needs.

1.3. PRE-IMPLEMENTATION STATUS QUO

Prior to the beginning of the program, two baseline studies revealed the state of public libraries in 2011. The qualitative data¹ showed that the public saw the library as an unattractive grim, dark, and unfriendly space, especially for young people. It was widely reported that some libraries lacked basic facilities, such as heating during winter time, and were housed in moist, old, and dusty buildings with little or no modern equipment. As late as 2014, only 18% of the population strongly believed that libraries were comfortable and friendly places.

Librarian absenteeism was a common practice, and often there was no librarian at all, particularly in rural areas. About 80% of the library’s visitors reported that they visited the library only once a year.

Those who visited the library were mostly offered and accessed services that fit into libraries’ traditional role: using the reading hall, browsing the library catalog, and borrowing books. Only 12% used computers and 11% used the internet. The predominant view of the library was as of “a place where people go to read books.” It was far less seen “as a place where people come to use computers or the internet.”

FIGURE 1. SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF THE BASELINE SITUATION



Source: Use of the internet and visiting public libraries, National Representative Survey Republic of Moldova, September 2011, IMAS

Moreover, libraries tended to be at the bottom of the local public authorities’ (LPAs’) list of priorities. Libraries were the last to be considered for funding, and their activity was neither significantly valued nor actively supported.































There was, however, a significant appetite for better library services, including ICT enabled, which would be developed bottom up and answer the specific needs of each segment of the community.

¹ Use of the Internet and Visiting Public Libraries National Representative Survey, Republic of Moldova, September 2011.

1.4. OVERVIEW OF KEY PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Five key objectives stemming from the overall vision of the program were pursued. These sought to reify the overall ambition to transform the public library into an institution that would be actively used by citizens, with community-focused services that would be developed and implemented by trained, committed librarians and supported by local and national stakeholders who would see it as a reliable partner.

TABLE 2. OVERVIEW OF NOVATECA'S KEY OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

#1	Libraries have the equipment and technology necessary to provide community access to information						
Key Activities Provided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 1082 free Internet access points ✓ Robotics introduced in 19 libraries ✓ 3 regional FabLabs launched 	Results: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td> 1 061 033</td> <td> 1 281</td> <td> 2 497</td> </tr> <tr> <td>People accessed libraries internet</td> <td>Youth trained in Robotics</td> <td>Fablabs beneficiaries</td> </tr> </table>	 1 061 033	 1 281	 2 497	People accessed libraries internet	Youth trained in Robotics	Fablabs beneficiaries
 1 061 033	 1 281	 2 497					
People accessed libraries internet	Youth trained in Robotics	Fablabs beneficiaries					
#2	Strengthened system of library professional development enables librarians to provide citizen-focused, modern services to their communities						
Key Activities Provided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 38 Regional and National Trainings Centers set up covering each district ✓ 179 librarian trainers in the network ✓ 1372 modern library services meeting citizens needs 	Results: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td> 1590</td> <td> 214 458</td> <td> 572 953</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Librarians trained</td> <td>Library visitors trained</td> <td>Library visitors using new services</td> </tr> </table>	 1590	 214 458	 572 953	Librarians trained	Library visitors trained	Library visitors using new services
 1590	 214 458	 572 953					
Librarians trained	Library visitors trained	Library visitors using new services					
#3	Leading librarians serve as catalysts for library modernization						
Key Activities Provided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 4 Advanced Librarians Leadership program developed ✓ Strengthened Librarians Association of Moldova ✓ Librarians advance in advocacy skills 	Results: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td> \$63 838</td> <td> 497</td> <td> 819</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cost-share in the form of third-party grants</td> <td>Library staff trained in advocacy</td> <td>New services replication</td> </tr> </table>	 \$63 838	 497	 819	Cost-share in the form of third-party grants	Library staff trained in advocacy	New services replication
 \$63 838	 497	 819					
Cost-share in the form of third-party grants	Library staff trained in advocacy	New services replication					
#4	National and local government officials and librarians work together to ensure that public libraries are strategically prioritized and funded to maximize their potential as venues for citizen engagement						
Key Activities Provided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Development partnerships with LPAs and CPAs institutions ✓ Development of the joint initiatives with LPAs ✓ 1198 Librarians trained in e-governance services 	Results: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td> 1326</td> <td> \$191 000</td> <td> 32.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sponsorship Agreements with LPAs</td> <td>Provided by LPAs for 1+1 Initiative</td> <td>Increases in budget allocations for libraries</td> </tr> </table>	 1326	 \$191 000	 32.7%	Sponsorship Agreements with LPAs	Provided by LPAs for 1+1 Initiative	Increases in budget allocations for libraries
 1326	 \$191 000	 32.7%					
Sponsorship Agreements with LPAs	Provided by LPAs for 1+1 Initiative	Increases in budget allocations for libraries					
#5	Public support for libraries and access to information is increased by civil society organizations partnering with libraries						
Key Activities Provided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increase public support for libraries in development local partnerships ✓ Support libraries for development partnerships with private companies and NGOs 	Results: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td> \$542 699</td> <td> 1 198</td> <td> 2978</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total cost-share provided by private partner</td> <td>Librarians trained in e-governance services</td> <td>Total number of the partnerships</td> </tr> </table>	 \$542 699	 1 198	 2978	Total cost-share provided by private partner	Librarians trained in e-governance services	Total number of the partnerships
 \$542 699	 1 198	 2978					
Total cost-share provided by private partner	Librarians trained in e-governance services	Total number of the partnerships					

1.5. OVERVIEW OF KEY RESULTS AND IMPACT

NETWORK COVERAGE | The program set out with the ambition of involving 1,000 libraries in its activities, including libraries in all 32 districts and four municipalities. To date, the Novateca network covers 1,082 institutions, representing 80% of all libraries in the country, and more than 94% of all library visitors are currently visiting a Novateca library. The network has expanded very quickly, and the program has surpassed its initial target number.

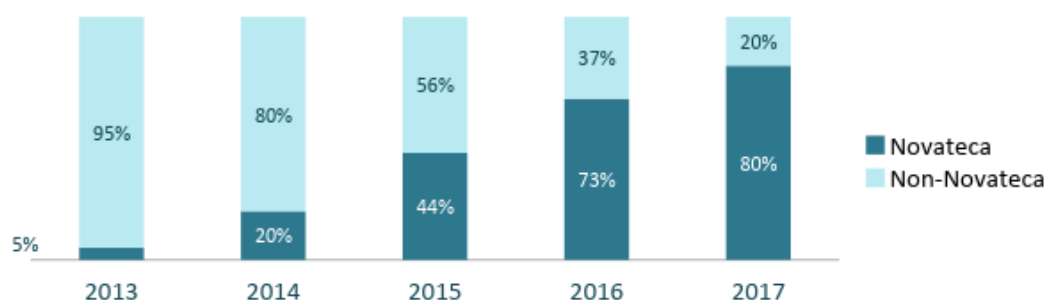
FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF LIBRARIES INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM



Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

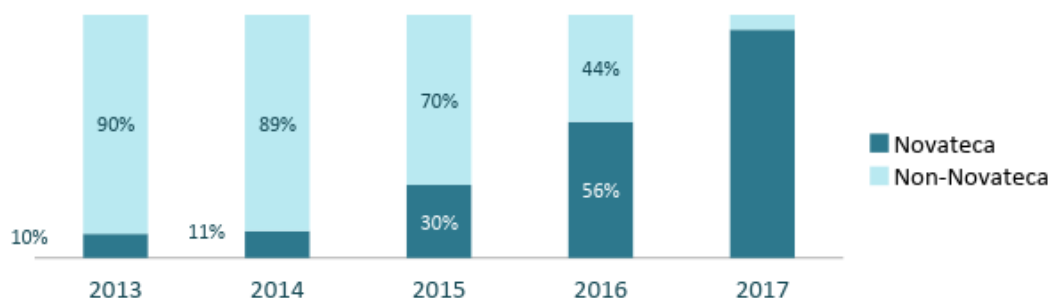
FIGURE 3. EVOLUTION OF THE SHARE OF LIBRARIES PARTICIPATING IN THE NOVATECA PROGRAM 2013–2017

The rates of growth in the number of libraries and the number of visitors was uneven; these rates, however, gradually converged toward the end of the program. The almost complete coverage in terms of visitors suggests that the libraries that are not yet part of the network are generally small.



Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

FIGURE 4. LIBRARY VISITORS FOR NOVATECA AND NON-NOVATECA LIBRARIES, 2013–2017



Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

DELIVERY OF ICT EQUIPMENT | A key goal of the program was equipping the libraries with modern technology; thus 4,096 units of equipment were delivered and installed in Moldovan public libraries. As a result of their advocacy and partnering efforts, the libraries have been able to

identify more external funds than initially planned and were able to purchase 647 modern technology items from other sources, exceeding the target of 195 set initially by the program.

Ensuring access to technology was one of the key driving forces behind the libraries' transformation and a crucial element of the overall vision of the program. For instance, the development of robotics clubs wasn't a specific goal of the program, but due to the libraries' modernization, it became possible. Novateca spearheaded the initiative, and 19 clubs opened throughout the country, introducing thousands of children to robotics and increasing interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects among students.² Importantly, three regional FabLabs were established, in cooperation with Moldova Competitiveness Project, implemented by Chemonics, and supported by USAID and the government of Sweden. These FabLabs will bring innovation to regional level and contribute to the development of the entrepreneurial community.

FIGURE 5. OVERVIEW OF THE ICT EQUIPMENT DELIVERED TO LIBRARIES

		
Number of delivered tablets	N/A	394
Number of delivered workstations	N/A	3702
Number of workstations paid from other sources	195	647

Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

LIBRARIANS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | The transformation would not have been possible, however, without the investments that were made in the capacity building of librarians. It was recognized from the very beginning that without increasing the professional and personal skills of the librarians, no lasting results could be achieved. A total of 1,599 librarians received intense training, provided by the 38 training centers that had been set up, including 35 regional and three national centers.

FIGURE 6. OVERVIEW OF KEY RESULTS CONCERNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARIANS

		
Centers for Training Excellence	6	9
Fully operational ICT Training Centers	30	38
Creation of a National Training Center for Librarians	1	3
Librarians who received formal training in ICT	1500	1599
Trained librarians who deliver new services	850	1213
Librarians trained in e-governance services	1000	1198

² Data provided by Novateca Program, based on comparative sociological study conducted in November 2017 – January 2018

To ensure that the system developed the necessary training skills and to secure the sustainability of the training activities, regional and national training centers had been institutionalized and funds secured from the central and local public authorities. Moreover, the new Law on Libraries, adopted in July 2017, outlined the system of professional development and supported the created network.

Moreover, the impact of the trainings provided, was monitored to guarantee that the lessons taught were applied by the librarians in their daily work.

In partnership with the e-government center, librarians have also benefited from trainings in e-services, and this turned out to be a one of the most impactful skills that they have acquired and have been applying to the benefit of their entire communities. A total of 1,198 librarians from every district received trainings and are now skilled to offer e-gov services.

The program achieved all of its targets with regard to training librarians, and in most cases, it has even achieved more.

MODERN SERVICES | A whole range of modern services was developed as a result of the capacity-building trainings provided and the support offered via the small and network grants initiative run by Novateca. These were bottom-up initiatives stemming from and answering to the actual needs of the community. The provision of modern services was a key contributor for changing the general public's perceptions regarding the public library and increasing the overall number of users. In all, 74% of all librarians involved in the program developed modern services, and a total of 78 community development projects were run over the course of the program. Three PR campaigns were carried out to stimulate the uptake of the newly launched initiatives. As a result, 74% of all new library visitors reported that they had used at least one modern, developed service.

FIGURE 7. OVERVIEW OF KEY RESULTS CONCERNING SERVICES



Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

PARTNERSHIPS | The program sought from the outset to assist libraries in developing partnerships with NGOs, the private sector, and the local and national public administrations. Partnering was an important element both for increasing sustainability and for strengthening the position of the library in relation to various stakeholders. The program targeted both the number of partnerships to be set up and their monetary value in terms of attracted funds. A total of 497 librarians benefited from advocacy trainings, designed to enable them to identify and convince various stakeholders to provide support and enter mutually beneficially relationships.

The results were impressive, in that all targets were overachieved: 306 formal and 2,672 informal partnerships at the local, regional, and national levels with NGOs and private companies were established, and as a result of these partnerships, \$630,000 (USD) was raised³.

³ Novateca Results Framework, 2018


FIGURE 8. RESULTS CONCERNING PARTNERSHIPS WITH NGOs AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

			
Attracted funds (\$)		601 000	630 000
Library staff who receive formal training in advocacy		210	497
Advocacy campaigns implemented		20	26
Overall partnerships with the private sector and NGOs		104	2978

Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

Similarly, efforts to attract funds and support from governmental institutions were successful. An estimated \$200,000 (USD) was raised. This is nearly four times more than was initially planned.




FIGURE 9. RESULTS CONCERNING PARTNERSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

			
Attracted funds (\$)		53 k	200 k

Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

FIGURE 10. RESULTS CONCERNING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

The most striking figures concern the results of the partnering effort with public authorities. The program has made clear from the beginning that a public library's participation was contingent upon the LPA's willingness to invest in the library's facilities and meet some minimum standards for basic infrastructure requirements. These strong initial requirements, coupled with the increased ability of librarians on the ground to advocate for their needs, brought in an estimated \$2.01 million (USD) in public investment. Budget allocations to libraries have increased by an average of 33%, and 80% of village and 89% of district libraries have seen an increase in their budget allocations. This is a great result, given the documented, initial reticence of LPAs to prioritize investment in libraries.

			
Attracted funds (\$)		1 776 k	2 247 k
% change in budget allocations for libraries		15%	32.7%
% libraries that receive an increase in allocations		22%	85%

Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

2. ENABLERS OF CHANGE: ICT AND FACILITIES

Improvements in IT equipment availability and library facilities are the most visible results the Novateca program brought.

FACILITIES | The program transformed libraries' facilities, making them more useful and attractive. As the Novateca network expanded, visitors' perceptions regarding the quality of the library facilities improved. These changes went hand in hand, suggesting a strong causal link.

This positive dynamic revealed by the surveys is corroborated by the qualitative data gathered. All of the focus group discussions showed that the program has served as a powerful impetus for the local public administration to invest in the libraries' facilities. In some cases, this even meant changing the location of the library, and it very often involved undertaking a full-scale refurbishment. There were cases where the facilities were in good condition prior to the library's participation in the Novateca program, but these have been the exception, and even in these instances, some minor upgrades were nevertheless necessary. The strict requirements imposed by the program have often achieved what seemed to some librarians previously impossible – convincing the public administration to allocate additional funds for the community library. It was not unusual for libraries to lack basic conditions such as access to water, sanitation, or heating. The program has managed to achieve a dramatic shift in this respect. The renovation of facilities contributed to ensuring a warm and pleasant space for people to come to. Indeed, some of the libraries did not have heating and were thus being unable to undertake any activities or provide services during winter. Installing heating systems allowed these libraries to continue working even after cold weather set in. Regarding the impact of heating, a 59-year-old librarian from Ungheni District with 32 years of work experience in the library remarked that “the doors of the library are not closed anymore,” because heating enabled permanent, year-round activity of the library.

Moreover, before the Novateca program, the general condition of many libraries was old and unattractive. New, modern furniture contributed to increasing the attractiveness of the space, especially for young people. The librarians understood the importance of this, and they also undertook actions to increase the appeal of the libraries' premises. A 56-year-old librarian from Soroca stated, “We have decorated the walls with the services we are implementing. When our users come, they remember the activities they [participated] in.”

ICT EQUIPMENT | The transformation was further enabled by the provision of new computers, printers, video cameras, tablets, copy machines, and scanning devices. The opinion of a 57-year-old librarian from Crihana Veche captures the importance of this perfectly: “Novateca came at the right moment; it was a breath of fresh air because our 2003 computers were old.” This aspect has been seen by all groups, be it librarians, LPA representatives, NGOs, or the private sector, as equally important in contributing to enhancing libraries' attractiveness.

The equipment also made a difference in terms of promoting ICT education in the targeted areas and enabling the diversification of services. Nearly all of the interviewed librarians reported that they helped people of all ages to learn how to use a computer (notably, to communicate with their families living abroad) after receiving the new ICT equipment. It has been highlighted, however, that the impact of equipping libraries with ICT equipment would not have been as powerful without the trainings provided to librarians. This idea is captured by the opinion of one librarian from the Răzeni library, who stated: “I consider that the success in terms of ICT equipment is due to the fact that we were taught how to use it and that we are using this equipment to teach others.”

There was also a potent connection between ICT equipment provision and the diversification of library services. The equipment permitted libraries to provide modern and attractive services to visitors. The idea that IT equipment contributed to the attractiveness and diversification of services is equally shared by librarians, NGO representatives, and local public administration officials.

Moreover, some NGOs indicated that the new IT equipment facilitated their work with the librarians in terms of communication, making it easier to exchange information with libraries in more remote areas. A representative from the National Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse stated, when speaking about libraries, “This [ICT equipment and proficiency] facilitated the long-distance dialogue, because you do not have always the resources to go physically on the spot.”

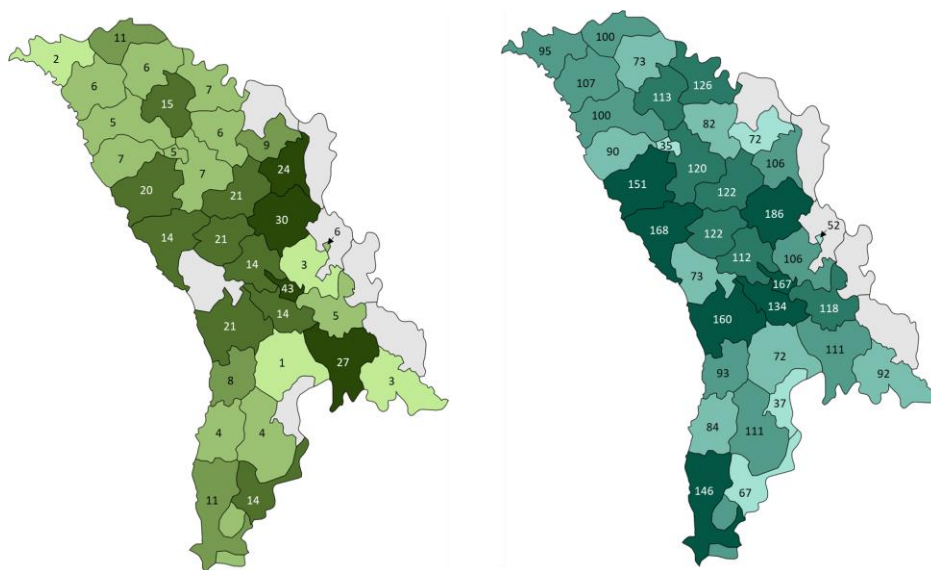
FIGURE 11 RESULTS OF THE 1+1 INITIATIVE



Source: Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

The public administration especially mentioned the 1+1 Initiative as a valuable incentive for procuring ICT equipment. The program’s initiative supported libraries’ efforts to obtain additional funds for procuring ICT equipment by matching any funds raised from the LPA. This initiative covered all 35 districts of the country, involved 478 libraries, and provided 656 units of equipment to libraries: 268 laptops, 142 desktop PCs, 115 tablets, 57 projectors, 49 MFUs, 11 robots, and two mission tables. Overall, the contribution of the LPAs for this initiative was approximately \$191 000 (USD).

FIGURE 12. NUMBER OF TABLETS AND PCS BY DISTRICT



Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

As put by the head of the Zîrnești Public library, the changes in terms of facilities and equipment had a transformative effect: “The library has changed, it has become more alive.”

Regional distribution of ICT equipment has been done such that the entirety of Moldova has been covered. Some districts have benefited more than others, and this was also influenced by the openness of the LPAs to co-invest, but overall, the distribution was rather balanced.

3. ENABLERS OF CHANGE: SKILLED LIBRARIANS

The investment in human capital was an important part of the Novateca program, given that librarians were from the beginning expected to be change catalysts. Considering that modernization of the IT equipment and diversification of the services offered by libraries, including e-gov, a traditional librarian could not tackle all of the new challenges of a modern library. The trainings helped librarians to develop digital competences, learn how to write projects and attract funds, promote the activity of the library through social channels, become real community leaders, and develop other key modern competencies.

The librarians reported high levels of satisfaction regarding the quality of the trainings, which they perceived as useful and worth investing their time and effort. Clearly, the nature of librarians' work has changed, but the librarians indicated that they were motivated to continue to develop in their profession and to offer visitors the best possible services. Most librarians indicated that they have greatly grown professionally and learned new skills, particularly related to the use of modern technology, but also regarding undertaking advocacy activities, identifying community needs, and providing relevant services: "I am very proud of myself, because with the accumulation of the new knowledge I became more confident in myself," librarian, 47 years, Căușeni District.

Some librarians reported that the trainings have also helped them enhance their personal skills, become more confident, come to appreciate their work and profession more, and become more assertive in their relationship with the LPA. Some indicated that they had no prior IT skills before the start of the program, and without the program, it is unlikely that they would have acquired these skills. Most librarians, before the Novateca program, knew only the basic functions of a computer. Nowadays, the skilled librarians are familiar with email, Skype, social networks, and e-gov. They are able today to help people pay their bills online and can teach them how to do this independently. Study visits were particularly appreciated, and they had a great motivational impact, inspiring librarians to aim higher and seek to further develop themselves and their libraries. "Before we just knew how to type, but now we also know how to use email, how to work with Skype, social networks, and e-government services. We help users, and they even pay online bills," said a 65-year-old librarian from Telenești District.

To ensure the success and sustainability of this training effort, training centers were created, and 179 librarians (at least three per district) were trained to be trainers, who could then teach the other librarians. As result, the program ensured that each district now has well-prepared trainers, capable of ensuring further distribution of modern services and good governance skills among new librarians.

Overall, 38 training centers were established, designed to enable the implementation of standardized training curricula covering modern library concepts and services, ICT skills, advocacy and negotiation, and other necessary skills for a modern librarian.

The core training included three mandatory trainings, and a total of 1,599 librarians were trained.

The new digital skills helped librarians attract more visitors to the library. In addition to mastering basic computer skills, they also learned how to create infographics and promotional videos and gained other advanced IT skills that enabled them to improve the visibility of the library online. "The multitude of instruments we learned to use made the library more appealing. I can certainly say that we have a physical space, but also a virtual space, because we are basically followed on Facebook and people are interested in us and are engaging with us online," said a librarian from Crihana Veche, aged 57.

The yearly number of library workers that were trained in IT and new services varied over the years, reaching its peak in 2015. The ensuing decline is explicable, given that, following the interventions in the first three years of the program, most librarians in the country had already passed this basic training, and fewer and fewer were left to train.

The trainings' impact on librarians' level of personal and professional development was also noticed by LPA representatives. They have been very appreciative of the improvement and have remarked on the increase in professionalism as a result of the sharing of good practices among librarians from different regions. LPA representatives observed the development of new abilities such as the provision of adult education courses or the offering of services to visually impaired people. Librarians were seen to become more active in their communities, with many participating in or initiating various volunteer activities. Also, the change in their personality was noticed. The best formulation of the impact of the librarians' professional development was made by representative of the Culture Department of Căușeni District, who stated: "The librarian has changed ... 180 degrees as a personality. They are not anymore silent and modest; indeed, they became more courageous and have the daring to insist and to obtain from the public authorities the resources they need."

The ICT trainings that Novateca has provided empowered Novateca librarians to provide significantly more assistance to visitors with ICT-related tasks than non-Novateca librarians. The discrepancy is clearly visible in Figure 13. Some of it, of course, has to do with the differences in the availability of ICT equipment in Novateca versus non-Novateca librarians; however, it is to a significant extent explicable in terms of the gap in ICT training opportunities.

An even more striking difference is observable when comparing the advanced ICT services provided by Novateca and non-Novateca trained librarians.

FIGURE 13. NEW ICT SERVICES PROVIDED BY LIBRARIANS, 2014–2017

	2014		2015		2016		2017	
	Novateca	Non Novateca	Novateca	Non Novateca	Novateca	Non Novateca	Novateca	Non Novateca
Use software on photo/video/audio editing	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	19%	5%
Use other online services (e-banking, paying bills, etc.)	13%	4%	12%	10%	9%	7%	15%	4%
Use electronic public services (e-Cazier, e-CNAS, Etc)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14%	3%
Use programming languages (Java, PHP, Pascal, etc.)	0%	0%	22%	14%	5%	4%	12%	4%
File for government support (subsidies, benefits, etc.)	6%	2%	7%	4%	5%	4%	8%	2%

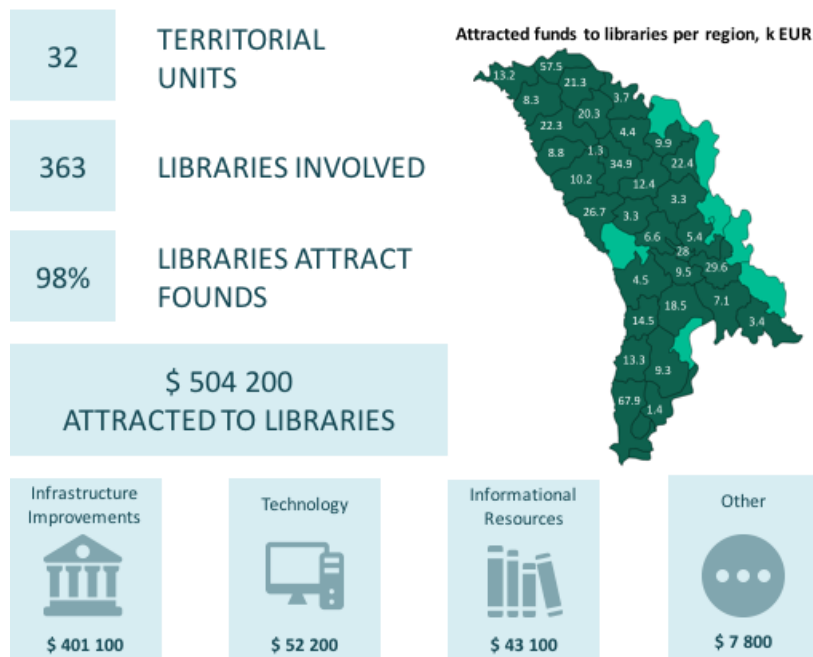
Source: Public Library Visitors Survey – Moldova 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, CIVIS

The quality and effectiveness of these trainings are further validated by the remarkable results achieved by the 497 librarians who have participated in the advocacy trainings. The purpose of these trainings was to enable librarians to engage with their LPA and make their case for increased financial support for the public library. The trainings had a profound impact: 98% of all libraries that have participated in the training, having managed to attract funds. Nearly half a million dollars was raised due to the librarians' sustained efforts. The network covered 32 regional districts and was in that sense truly national.

Before the Novateca program, we had a gloomy reading room. In the advocacy trainings we learned how to cooperate with LPAs, and as result we got new windows, [a] few notebooks, and two computers from it. Last year we negotiated with LPAs and obtained two new tablets: one from the LPA and the second through 1+1 initiative implemented by Novateca. (48-year-old librarian from the Râșcani Public Library)

Overall, the trainings offered by Novateca helped librarians deal with the new requirements generated by evolution of the modern library.

FIGURE 14. ADVOCACY: OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS ACHIEVED BY MOLDOVAN LIBRARIES IN ATTRACTING FUNDS



Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

The main challenge regarding staff training was related to the age of the librarians. Most librarians are over 40 years of age, and many of the involved stakeholders were skeptical of their ability to learn. However, the results were impressive: All of the librarians were open to learning and succeeded in that. For the future, the annual trainings should continue, to maintain the level that was achieved.

4. ENABLERS OF CHANGE: SERVICES

Starting with the implementation of the Novateca program, the spectrum of services offered by the libraries widened. If librarians were previously only concerned with book lending, as a result of the program they became involved in many more services. The provided services cover a large group of beneficiaries: from the youngest to the oldest members of the community. The services differ from one library to another, calibrated to the needs of each community. The novelty and diversification of services resulted mainly from the modernization of the libraries. Another important aspect comprises the different partnerships that started, which offered opportunities for different third parties with specific know-how to become involved in libraries' activities and programming.

One of the most popular services is English teaching, which is available for adults, adolescents, and children. Moreover, English courses as a service help librarians to obtain more funds from LPAs. As mentioned by a 38-year-old librarian from a village from Căușeni District: "Another important service is the 'English Conversation Club' implemented since October 2017.... This service has been a great success, we had about 70 participants, and thanks to this service, the LPA provided us with chairs, tables, and office requisites."

Librarians have also organized different clubs such as the robotics club, TechLab (in which young people and adults learn how to work with computer programs for writing and editing music), the chess hour, the animation club for children, financial education courses for adults, and trainings for making movies and presentations in Canva, Filmora, or PowerPoint.

We have robotics club, which was launched three years ago by [an 11th] grade student. He was very passionate about robotics and came up with the initiative, and we supported him. For two years he developed the robotics club, and at some moment we had about 15 active members. Now he [has gone] to university, and ... he is one of the best students at the Math and Cybernetics Faculty of Babes-Bolyai University, but despite of his leaving, the club is functional and we have about 12 active members. (47-year-old manager of a district library)

Another very successful and very important service implemented was the "Take Care of Your Health" initiative developed in Straseni District. The reasoning behind launching this service was that in recent years, breast and cervical cancers have become two of the most commonly diagnosed cancers in Moldova. Therefore, the service was launched to teach women and girls about health-related issues, so they would develop skills for self-examination and identification of first symptoms, and inform them about medical consultation procedures.

In 2016, with Novateca's support, in nine libraries from Straseni District and in partnership with local healthcare centers, an information campaign on the symptoms and methods of prevention of breast and cervical cancers intended for the libraries' users was launched. The campaign's initial success led to it being replicated in 18 libraries from four districts. At this time, this service continues to be provided, and already more than 5,000 women have received training.

For two years I have ignored the continued breast pain. Without this training, I would not have decided to pass the breast cancer test and I would have ignored the problem. Now, I'm doing a breast cancer treatment course, and I have great hopes for full recovery. (60-year-old woman from Roșcani village)

The librarians are also helping families that have family members who work abroad through the program "You Are Not Alone," facilitating communication through Skype.

Yes, we teach how to use Skype. The old people who have children abroad are our main "clients." I had a case, when a mother and daughter, who lives in Australia, didn't meet for three years. I organized a Skype video call, and for the first time in three years they had a chance to see each other. They both cried. (Librarian from Ordasei Village, Telenești District)

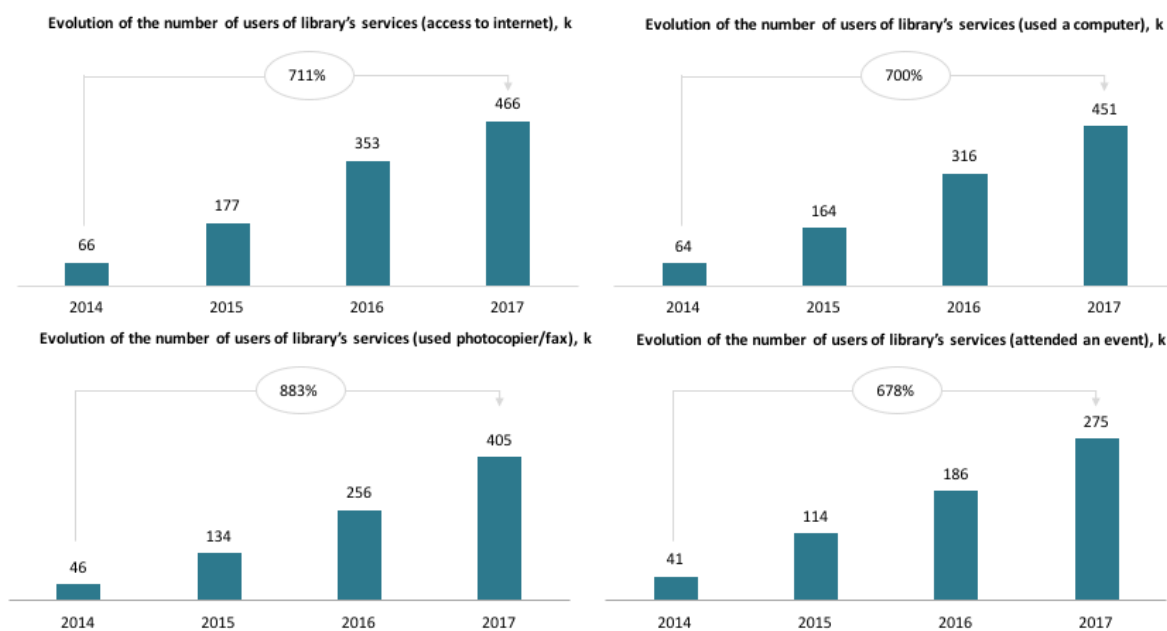
Specific services resulted from the provision of e-governance trainings, because the librarians had become intermediaries between citizens and the e-government platform, helping users to access public services online.

The reaction from the community was positive, as the present services fit better their needs. Whether they want to find specific information on the internet or to create different types of content, or they don't possess the knowledge of some specific technology, they easily go to the librarian for help. Parents are happy to send their children to the activities and programs organized by the library as participants or as volunteers. A member of the LPA said, "The libraries are perceived as a place for education, a place where people can spend their free time, or a place for personal development."

Libraries continue to provide services focused on national heritage and the preservation of local culture (e.g., producing national costumes, investigating local history, collecting sayings and songs). LPA representatives recommend stronger cooperation between libraries and the culture centers, to better meet Moldovans' needs to socialize, rest, and communicate.

The conclusions of the qualitative research are corroborated by the findings of the successive waves of visitor surveys carried out over time. The data gathered clearly indicate that the uptake of ICT-related services significantly increased. The number of users accessing the internet at a library rose sevenfold, from approximately 66,000 in 2014 to 466,000 in 2017. A similar growth was found in the number of visitors reporting that they used a computer at the library. Photocopier and fax services were used by nearly nine times more visitors in 2017 than in 2014. Moreover, libraries also experienced a spike in the number of visitors of non-ICT related services. The increase in the number of people attending events is sevenfold.

FIGURE 15. OVERVIEW OF THE INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR SOME LIBRARY SERVICES, 2014 – 2017



Source: Public Library Visitors Survey – Moldova 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, CIVIS

This backs up the qualitative data indicating that the range of services developed was very broad, being by no means limited only to ICT. ICT-related services played an important role in enticing more people to visit a library, but it was the extraordinary diversity of services on offer that cemented the transformation of the public library into a genuine community center.

Regarding the implementation of modern services, librarians have adapted to their communities' needs, especially the great majority of library visitors, that is, young people.

5. ENABLERS OF CHANGE: PARTNERSHIPS

Establishing long-term fruitful partnerships with diverse stakeholders is essential for libraries. As a result of the Novateca program, the public library's image has improved, which has made it easier for libraries to attract partners. This has further enhanced their standing in the community, which has given rise to a virtuous cycle. The public library's value is no longer overlooked, as it was in the past; indeed, now various stakeholders are interested in partnering and supporting libraries' activities. Some of the established partnerships are officially institutionalized via collaboration agreements, while others are informal and only verbally agreed upon, underpinned by the good relationship between the partners.

One such key partnership is the collaboration with the Association of Librarians of Moldova (ALM). ALM acts as a center for coordinating a network of more than 1,100 libraries and 3,000 librarians across the country. As a result of the collaboration, the association has been able to develop an online curriculum for librarians' professional development and cut trainings costs, making them more accessible to librarians, regardless of the district they live in or their financial situation. Mariana Harjevschi, president of ALM, said,

Novateca helped us a lot. With their support, we've developed the online curricula and significantly updated the offline one. Moreover, thanks to the opportunity to participate in study visits abroad we learned how to implement the online curricula, and now we can train our librarians much [more easily]."

With Novateca's support, cooperation with the LPAs has become closer, with the LPAs often inviting librarians to participate in their working sessions and supporting their activity when necessary. Even if sometimes the LPAs might not have the resources necessary for investing in the public library, it is valuable that there is more contact now between the library and the LPA and that the librarians started to be listened to. As mentioned, a 47-year old library manager from Căușeni District said:

We never had problems in communication with LPA. However, after we joined Novateca program, LPAs become more attentive to our needs. The budget for some library expense lines increased yearly in last three years, [and] we participate at the budget formation and weekly meet [with] the mayor of the city and have the opportunity to discuss our needs or problems.

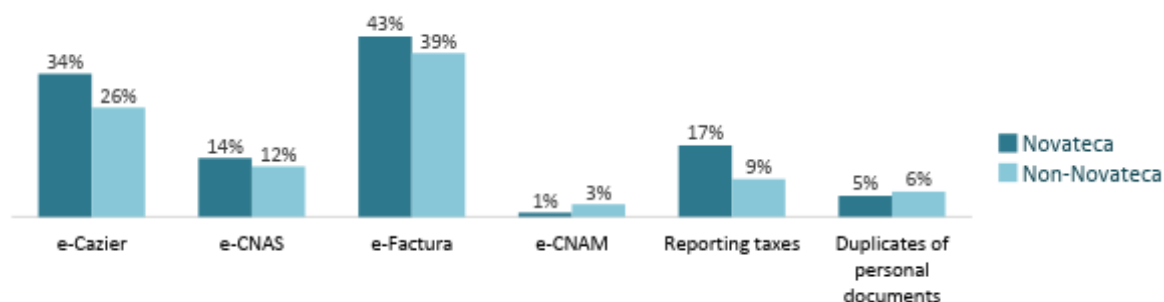
Interviews reveal that the relationship is clearly mutually beneficial. This is particularly the case when the library has a proactive and enthusiastic librarian who can implement attractive services that enhance the standing of the library both at the local and district level. When that happens, the LPA also stand to benefit, not least politically, from partnering with the library and supporting such activities and are eagerly doing so. A 34-year-old village mayor from Căușeni District has eloquently captured this: "Their success is our success, and our success is their success. The fact that we are investing in the library and supporting its projects is motivating for us and it brings us pleasure to share in its achievements and for our village to be talked about."

Libraries also partnered with various local or district-level public institutions such as the district hospital, the police inspectorate, and the National Employment Agency. With their help, the libraries initiated a range of trainings on different topics for children and adults, featuring speakers who are specialists from the specific fields. A real success had been the iCan project, supported by the National Employment Agency, which helped people from rural communities obtain the necessary qualifications to identify and apply for a job.

Before, because of lack of comfortable spaces, our activity in villages was pretty difficult. Thanks to the Novateca program, libraries became a place where we inform the population about the services we provide. Moreover, now we suggest to unemployed people that [the] library is the place where they can find all needed information about how to get a job, ... learn how to write a CV or to find a specific job opportunity. Libraries, [at] some point, became our branches which provide our basic services. (Representative of the Straseni Employment Agency)

A particularly successful example of a national partnership with a public institution is the collaboration between the e-government center and the Novateca program. This started with the implementation of an e-ambassador’s initiative that involved training librarians to use electronic services and assisting them to popularize these services in their communities. The collaboration really demonstrated the potential value of the public library network as a tool for disseminating information, sharing best practices, and teaching new skills. It enabled the center to reach many communities easily and offered it a partner on the ground capable of promoting its message and helping the communities adopt new practices. As a result of this initiative, about 25% of library visitors access online public services. Regarding specific electronic public service types, the percentage of persons using e-Cazier (e-Criminal Record), e-CNAS (e-Social Assistance Form), e-Factura (e-Invoice), and submission of an income tax return online was higher among Novateca respondents.

FIGURE 16. USE OF PARTICULAR ELECTRONIC PUBLIC SERVICES



Source: Public Library Visitors Survey – Moldova 2017

Undoubtedly, this network could be leveraged again by other public and private institutions interested in bringing a positive change to local communities, maximizing their impact, and increasing their efficiency.

The Novateca network was also supported by valuable partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. The partnership with DAAC Systems Integrator, a national IT company, was built around the shared goal of transforming the national library network. DAAC Systems provided free trainings to librarians and technical personnel on hardware and software maintenance topics. The insufficient number of IT specialists, particularly in rural areas, was a risk for the success of the program, and these trainings were therefore particularly valuable. As this partnership demonstrates, there is a lot of potential for mutually beneficial projects between the public library network and the private sector.

To stimulate partnerships with the NGO sector, one of the initiatives the Novateca program carried out was a small grants program that called for projects to be jointly implemented by the library and a local or regional NGO. This served as an impetus for future collaborations and introduced the library as a potential partner to the NGO sector. Most NGOs are very satisfied with their collaboration with the public library. A variety of initiatives were jointly implemented, ranging from educational programs for adults to awareness campaigns regarding violence against women and trainings for farmers and beekeepers. NGOs appreciate the enthusiasm and proactivity of most librarians. Access to upgraded library facilities is another important benefit for the NGOs working particularly in rural areas. “As part of our cooperation, we trained 16 librarians in media literacy, who in turn organized media literacy training sessions in their localities. As result, [there were] more than 4,000 final beneficiaries ... from [the] qualitative media literacy sessions,” said a representative of Internews Moldova.

An important element of program made possible by fruitful partnerships was the organization of study visits abroad. The librarians traveled to a variety of countries, including Romania, Ukraine, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, France, South Africa, and the United States, for experience exchanges, participation in various specialized forums, and the initiation of partnerships with stakeholders from other countries.

The accumulated experience and the trainings provided have made the librarians more confident in initiating collaborations with other entities. The established partnerships were undoubtedly one of the key drivers of the program's success. The program's focus from the beginning on this aspect bore fruit and will be a determining factor for the long-term sustainability and impact of the program.

6. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN DETAIL

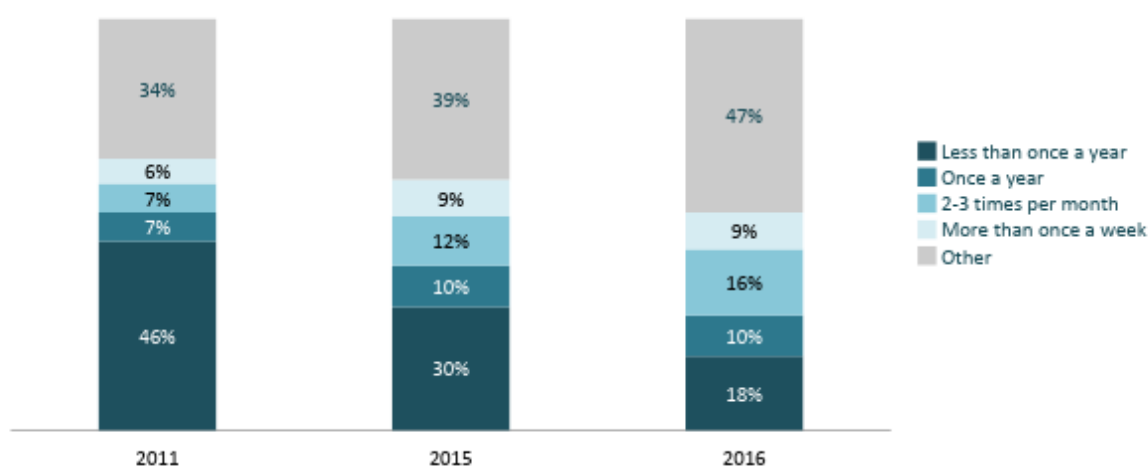
6.1. MORE VISITS AND MORE FREQUENT VISITORS

The number of visitors and the frequency of visits has increased as a result of the program interventions. The survey data suggest that the share of the population identified as library visitors has increased over the course of the program. There is an 8-percentage points⁴ increase between 2011 and 2017 in the share of the general public that is visiting the library at least once a year.

Of course, this is an approximate number based on the official population of the Republic of Moldova. Although it is clear that the number of visitors has significantly increased, it is more difficult to pinpoint in absolute terms by how much due to high levels of emigration.

The increase in the total number of visitors is driven particularly by those who visit libraries two to three times per year and to a lesser extent by the rise in frequent visitors: 13% of the general public said in 2011 that they visited the library at least once per month, and 14% did so in 2017. By contrast, the increase in the share of visitors that go to the library two to three times per month doubled, from 7% eight years ago, to 16% currently.

FIGURE 17. EVOLUTION IN THE FREQUENCY OF LIBRARY VISITS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC, 2011–2017



Source: Use of the internet and visiting public libraries, National Representative Survey Republic of Moldova – September 2011, IMAS and National Citizens' Survey 2016, Service Opinia

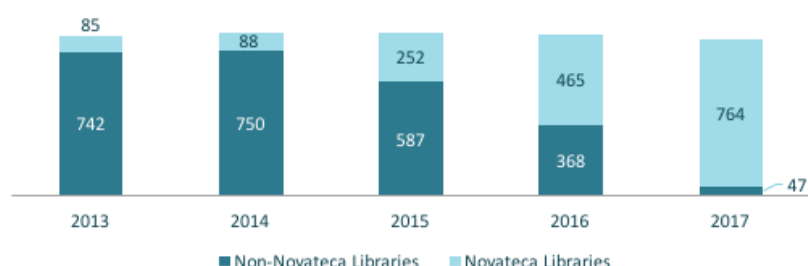
The share of population that visits the library at least once a week increased from 6% to 9%, and the share of monthly visitors has doubled from 7% to 16% from 2011 to 2016.

In addition to the survey data, the program was also gathering the visitor data reported by the libraries themselves. These data indicate a slight decline in the total number of library visitors and a sharp increase in the number of Novateca visitors as the network has expanded.

The number of Novateca visitors has meanwhile continuously increased as the network of Novateca libraries was expanding. Given all the available information, the data show that the share of library visitors among the general public has increased as a result of the program.

⁴ Novateca Results Framework, 2018

FIGURE 18. EVOLUTION IN THE NUMBER OF LIBRARY VISITS TOTAL VERSUS NOVATECA, 2013–2017 (1,000s)



Source: Novateca Results Framework, 2018

CHANGES IN PERCEPTION | One of the goals of the program was to change the perception of the library as a passive repository of knowledge to a modern community center, where people would go to access a large variety of services in addition to borrowing books and using the reading hall. Sociological data suggest that this goal has to a large extent been achieved. Two times more visitors saw the library as a comfortable place in 2017 than in 2015. There is a similar increase in the number of those who said that the library is a place where they can go to find a job, use computers, access the internet for free, or find relevant health information. It is remarkable that such a dramatic shift has been achieved in only three years.

FIGURE 19. EVOLUTION OF GENERAL PUBLIC’S PERCEPTION OF LIBRARIES, 2015–2017

	2015	2017
A welcoming and comfortable place	25%	55%
Place where I go when I need to find a job	17%	38%
A place where I go to use computers	25%	55%
Place where I go to find information about health	22%	51%
A place where I go to use internet for free	22%	47%

Source: National Citizen Survey, Report prepared for Public Association Representation in Moldova “International Research & Exchanges Board” (PA IREX Moldova), NOVATECA Program, 2016

6.2. STRONGER INSTITUTIONS

As a result of the program, libraries have significantly increased their standing in the community. This conclusion stands out clearly from the interviews and focus groups with both librarians and representatives of the local public administration. As already mentioned, librarians indicate that the trainings have increased both their professional and personal skills and have boosted their confidence, willingness, and ability to fruitfully engage with the local public administration. This change was noticed by the LPAs. The opinion of a 55-year-old representative of Laloveni District culture department summarizes very well the predominant view among LPAs:

The librarian’s personality has changed 180 degrees. If previously he/she was a modest, quiet nature, who was afraid to ask, to insist, now, librarians have become more confident. They express their point of view assertively, with arguments, that is, they have the capacity to demonstrate that they are right and defend their opinion.

The increased visibility of the librarians resulted from both the diversification of services offered and the communication efforts that were undertaken. Most libraries set up web pages on the

most popular social networks and have ongoing contact with their users. They started to conduct surveys among both library visitors and nonlibrary visitors to understand their needs, which have been further used for the development of modern services. Libraries have become more active and stronger in cooperating with private and public partners and setting up partnerships with LPAs, NGOs, and in some cases with private companies. All these factors put together have placed the librarian at the center of community life. Of course, some were visible even before the launch of the program, but for most, it was Novateca that enabled them to reinvent themselves and the library. As reported by a 64-year-old librarian from Cahul District, this transformation was profound:

I tell you, they did not even know who the librarian in the village was. Yes, now I am visible, everyone knows that I work at the library and is aware of our activities, what we are involved in – it has become a good relationship, one based on trust. The library became a community center, and I have automatically become a kind of psychologist for the community; I sit and listen to everyone's problems. Now we have a trustful relationship with users.

Before Novateca, librarians didn't see their job as something important and most of the time didn't have any plans for library development. As mentioned by a 65-year-old librarian from a village in Telenești District: "I had no plans. I focused solely on books and [hadn't] even heard about [the] internet. I was afraid of it." But once the Novateca program began, the situation changed, and the same librarian declared,

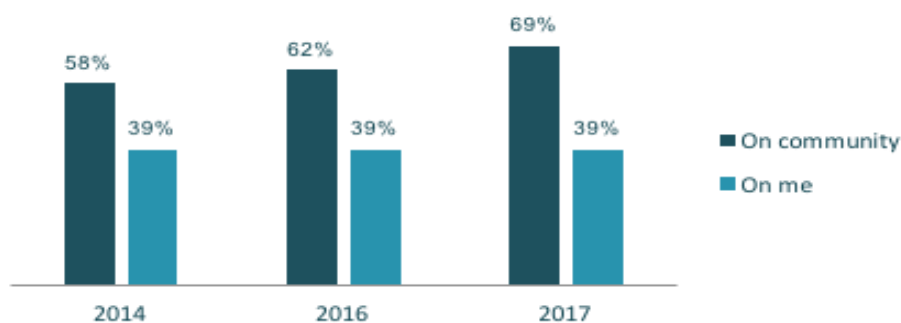
I had exceptional trainers. Besides the fact that they explained how to develop modern community services, I learned how to plan [the] implementation of these services. Now I communicate with users through questionnaires or direct communication in order to find out their needs and develop services based on their needs and expectations. Moreover, due to trainings, now I can estimate the expenditures needed for implementation of specific services and therefore when the LPA develops the annual budget, I come with a request of a specific amount of money that I will need for next year.

6.3. GREATER PUBLIC RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

Community support for the public library clearly increased. This was made evident in both the interviews and the focus groups, and it is corroborated by the survey waves' data. In 2014, only 58% of the population agreed or strongly agreed that the closing of the local library would have a negative impact on their community; three years later, this indicator rose by 11 percentage points. As a result of the program activities and support, public opinion has significantly shifted.

Not only does a higher share of the people say that closing the public library would affect their community, but more also indicate that it would have a negative impact upon them personally. This shift is not as pronounced, but it is nevertheless present. Despite the advancement of technology and the overall modernization of our society, it is remarkable that the public library is still as relevant on a personal level now as it was four years ago. The change in the reported impact that library closure would have on a personal level is of course within the margin of error, yet it is nevertheless positive. What is particularly surprising, though, is that the share of people who say that library closure would affect them personally is much larger than the share of people who visit the library at least once a year.

FIGURE 20. IF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY CLOSED, IT WOULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON MY COMMUNITY/ON ME, AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE, 2014–2017 (%)



Source: National Citizens' Survey 2014, 2016, 2017, Service Opinia

This seems to suggest that the positive impact of the public library extends way beyond its immediate beneficiaries, and that the library plays an important role even in the lives of those who rarely access its services. Overall, these shifts in public support are testament to the extraordinary transformation that the public library has gone through in recent years and form the bedrock for the future development of the Moldovan public library network.

6.4. GREATER IMPACT ON QUALIFICATIONS, HEALTH, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, EARNINGS, AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Visiting a public library has all sorts of reported benefits for users. Some of these were captured by the visitor surveys carried out regularly by the program. Respondents stated that as a result of accessing the library's services, they:

- ✓ Communicated more with friends and family;
- ✓ Saved time and money;
- ✓ Increased their involvement in community activities;
- ✓ Read more;
- ✓ Saw their health improve as a result of a decisions taken based on information accessed at the library;
- ✓ Found a job;
- ✓ Saw their academic performance improve;
- ✓ Experienced an increase in their earnings;
- ✓ Managed to grow their business.

The measured benefits of visiting a public library have been stable throughout the years, and the data show that in most cases these benefits are more pronounced for Novateca visitors compared to visitors of non-Novateca libraries. The key takeaway is that there is a consistent, reported, positive, multidimensional impact of going to the library. Whether the impact has increased over the years for individual visitors is more difficult to ascertain; given the relatively small survey samples, as well as the continuous expansion of the Novateca network. It is clear, however, that the increase in the share of library visitors among the general population increased the overall impact of the network. It is also beyond a doubt that the impact of the Novateca libraries was greater than the impact of non-Novateca libraries, for all years and across all dimensions.

FIGURE 21. AVERAGE IMPACT OF NOVATECA LIBRARIES ON VARIOUS IMPACT DIMENSIONS AS REPORTED BY VISITORS, 2014–2017



Source: Public Library Visitors Survey – Moldova 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, CIVIS

The qualitative research corroborated the results of the visitor surveys, providing additional insights into the way in which the library stood to benefit different groups. The analysis of focus groups and interview data reveal the themes that were most often mentioned in the discussions:

Digital skills increased due to improved access to modern technologies. This holds true across different age groups, as well as among community members vulnerable to social exclusion. School children have been using the libraries’ computers for preparing their homework and searching for relevant information online. Some have also participated in trainings on movie editing, basic design in Canva, or photography. Seniors have learned to use modern communication technologies for talking with their relatives from abroad. The rest of the community has benefited from access to electronic public services, with librarians being very supportive in teaching members of the community to access these services themselves.

The academic performance of children visiting the library has become better. Some of the drivers behind this that have been suggested by librarians are (a) improved access to information, (b) improved support with homework, and (c) the involvement of Peace Corps volunteers. Librarians occasionally took an active role in helping children with their homework or were sometimes able to find volunteers to do so. The mere fact that children had a shared space to learn together and prepare for lessons might have contributed to increased performance as well. It has also been noted that the presence of a Peace Corps volunteer is a great asset that strongly contributed to children’s performance in English language classes.

Children are more engaged and spend their time in a more productive way. All libraries offer a range of afterschool activities for children, providing a possibility for them to learn and spend time together in a qualitative way.

Stronger communities emerged. The libraries have involved the community in various charity activities, celebrations, and community events. It has also been a space for different community groups to interact as well as congregate around shared interests.

Access to technology saved time and money. Many librarians indicated that access to electronic governmental services is one of the key services they provided. It was popular and allowed people to forego a trip to Chişinău or to the district center. One librarian even indicated that she had helped the mayor and all the local council members to submit their income

declarations online. Many librarians reported that they regularly scan documents for visitors and email them abroad, print online tickets, and so forth.

All of the collected data indicate that the Novateca program has had a genuine positive impact upon communities and enhances the academic performance, citizen participation, earnings, health, and job prospects of its visitors.

7. SUCCESSFUL STUDY CASES AND GOOD CASE PRACTICES

This chapter provides an overview of some of the most successful initiatives that were implemented during the program. These were supported by Novateca, but their success was first and foremost determined by the indefatigable dedication of individual librarians. All three initiatives were scaled and had a significant impact on libraries' visitors.

ROBOTICS

Robotics was one of the most popular afterschool activities implemented in the Novateca network. The first clubs opened with the goal of increasing students' interest in science, particularly for IT, mathematics, and physics. The clubs were established in seven districts in March 2016. They were generally run by a qualified, trained librarian or a volunteer who was responsible for organizing the clubs' activities. By the end of 2018, 19 robotics clubs had been created and more than 1,280 students had joined them.

The report entitled, "Impact of Public Libraries Robotic Clubs on Youth," published in March 2018, found that the students' participation in these activities had overwhelmingly positive results. They became more curious, active, and involved in school activities. Club members were more enthusiastic about robotics, artificial intelligence, computers, and programming than students who are nonmembers.⁵ Among the robotics club members, interest in mathematics is about 21% higher than among nonmembers; in physics, it is 31% higher; and in engineering, 21% higher. Most members state that due to attending robotics classes, their school performance has improved in math (58%), physics (51%), and computer science (57%).

Many participants indicated that they would like to pursue an education in IT at university. Moreover, 15% of robotics clubs members preferred IT-related professions, compared to only 4% of nonmembers.

According to teachers, the clubs had a direct impact on students' achievements in STEM disciplines. Students showed greater interest, paid more attention during classes, and became more engaged. Teachers attribute these positive changes to the fact that students had discovered the applicability of the knowledge imparted on them. STEM subjects were very theoretical and disconnected from real life. Robotics provided a venue for applying theoretical concepts to real-life problems, capturing students' imagination.

Students' soft skills also improved. They became better at team work and problem solving. They became more creative and responsible compared to students who did not attend the club. The participants agreed that this activity increased their level of self-confidence and helped them develop better communication skills.

Robotics clubs are a great example of a library-led initiative that can have a profound and lasting impact on the community. It is remarkable the extent to which this straightforward afterschool activity impacted academic performance and has infused much-needed enthusiasm for STEM subjects.

AFTER SCHOOL

Moldovan public libraries have also made a significant contribution to their communities through informal education opportunities. Skilled librarians, local teachers, community, and Peace Corps volunteers use the library as a platform to help primary school children, teenagers, people with special needs, and those from vulnerable families to complete their homework assignments and explore new skills and avenues for creativity.

⁵ Ibid.

Language learners of all levels are using the library space as a platform to learn foreign languages and to converse and debate on various topics in the friendly and open environment offered by public libraries.

Public libraries have been providing IT trainings for children and young people with special needs within their own community development program. Libraries have organized computer-based painting classes for children with hearing impairments, as well as teaching them how to use applications on tablets.

Public libraries provide a great mix of fun and education for children and their parents. Story time sessions open the door to the joy of reading and help people develop a relationship with the library from an early age that can encourage lifelong interest in learning and literature. Children and parents come to the library to spend time reading, playing, using the tablets, singing, participating in puppet shows, theatre plays, and concerts.

There are no quantitative data regarding the impact of the informal education opportunities on students' school results. However, during in-depth interviews, some stakeholders mentioned that in some specific cases students see an increase in their grades. Best results were achieved in STEM disciplines and especially in computer and foreign languages classes, especially English language, due to courses held by Peace Corp volunteers.

As mentioned by a librarian from the north region, "Learning a foreign language is nowadays a priority for many community members. The friendly atmosphere created at the library allows participants to express themselves more openly and boosts their self-confidence and individuality. Parents are also very thankful for this opportunity, as they see progress in their children's school performance."

CAREER ORIENTATION

Over the last few years, many Moldovan public libraries have focused their resources on supporting financial education and creating a nurturing and information-rich environment to help library users achieve career success and develop leadership skills. Partnering with national and local employment agencies and NGOs, librarians train users on topics related to employment and teach participants how to use IT to search for a job or prepare the necessary documents to apply for a job. In 2018, a total of 2,900 unemployed people have benefited from trainings on employment-related resources provided at the public libraries.

Thanks to the sustainable partnerships developed in this area, libraries are now organizing job fairs, meetings with local employers, study visits to factories, and interview simulations.

A participant at the Career Lab library service at the Taxobeni Public Library suggested that "by participating in these trainings, we developed leadership skills that help us choose a profession that is compatible with our personality and aspirations."

8. THE WAY FORWARD

The positive impact of the Novateca program has been mentioned in each of the 56 interviews that were conducted. Whether librarians, representatives of the public authorities, or partners, everybody spoke enthusiastically about the project and about the confidence that the public libraries have gained throughout its implementation. Quite a few librarians mentioned that the project has revitalized their profession as well as given them hope for the future. Most of them feel extremely confident that the progress made throughout the project will continue, and they will strive to further improve their set of skills, further introduce new services, and be of great help to the communities. “Here, in Cahul we have our local Center of Excellence for librarians. I like the trainings and would be interested in more specialized trainings,” said a librarian with 15 years’ work experience from Cahul District.

Remuneration of the staff is another issue that has been identified as one of the main threats for the development of the public library network. Most of current librarians are of advanced age and will soon have to retire. It is extremely difficult to find people who are interested in a career as a librarian, especially when their salaries are low. It has also been mentioned that some of the librarians currently working in the public libraries might need to emigrate unless a change occurs, to be able to provide for their families. “We understand the needs of librarians and understand that the salary is too low, and for next period, this will represent our main challenge. We plan to increase the salary and therefore make the librarian position attractive for young professionals,” stated Andrei Chistol, State Secretary for Culture.

Currently, all the utilities of the public libraries across the country are covered by the LPAs, which is continuing into the future. The public authorities have realized through the Novateca program how important libraries are for the local community, and thus many of them have actually allocated extra budget for the maintenance of the equipment and for training of librarians. “Novateca’s achievements will not disappear with program’s end. We have assumed the responsibility and we will continue our efforts, including cooperation with our international partners, in order to ensure libraries with all needed infrastructure to continue to provide high-quality services and develop new ones,” promised Mr. Chistol.

Because of the new law on libraries, approved by Parliament of the Republic of Moldova in 2017, Novateca’s achievements will not disappear with the end of the program. The law summarizes and continues to support the modernization of libraries over the last six years, recognizing their role as multifunctional public spaces that meet the community’s needs for ICT and other informational resources and provide informal education and socialization services. This guarantees access to all users including those with physical disabilities, offers free access to the internet to all users, promotes the participation of LPAs in library development, and supports the library in providing trainings. As mentioned by the 64-year-old librarian from Cahul District: “The library law basically put in a legal framework all new services and activities which we started to do during the implementation of Novateca program”

Most of the librarians mentioned that the regional continuous training centers have a good yearly schedule of trainings that they look forward to. Specific requests include project proposal writing, further developing IT solutions skills, and further advocacy trainings. Apart from the regional training center, the National Training Centers also have proposed a vast training option list for the librarians that is updated on a monthly and quarterly basis.

The variety of services is one of the main reasons why the visibility of public libraries has increased in recent years. The librarians have committed to continue exploring various new ideas, keeping in mind the needs and wants of their local users. Most of the librarians do a monthly or quarterly questionnaire for their users and nonusers to identify their most common needs and requests. “For us one of the most important challenges is to keep what Novateca build in these four years. The development of modern services, in order to satisfy the needs to as many as possible users is our main focus for next years,” mentioned the 64-year-old librarian from Cahul.

Emigration is a mass phenomenon in Moldova, whether it is to another country or from the rural areas to the urban ones. Librarians feel that this is the main threat to the activity of the public libraries in the coming future. They fear that the number of library users will drop, and some of the public libraries will need to be closed down. “Yes, we can develop modern services, but we may end up not [having anyone] to develop them,” shared a 58-year-old librarian from a village in Telenești District.

Novateca encouraged librarians to become more confident as well as more responsible. Having to go through a lot of paperwork to gain some benefits has made some librarians want to take more responsibility in changes happening in their district. Some of them mentioned that not having to report to anyone might be detrimental for some libraries, as people might lose interest in putting in extra work without having any tangible benefit from it.

No matter what the future holds, the Novateca program did bring a ray of light to a profession that some of the librarians had described as doomed. Now they have acquired a great set of skills that looks certain to help them, first by maintaining the number of users and hopefully increasing it in the near future. The group of current librarians do look certain to be able to handle the current conditions and are up to most of the challenges the future will bring to them.