

Users' perceptions of the benefits of ICT in public libraries in Italy

Final report

March 2013

Susannah Quick, Gillian Prior, Ben Toombs, Luke Taylor and Rosanna Currenti



BILL &
MELINDA
GATES
foundation

Contents

Executive summary	4
1. Background and methodology	6
2. The public library landscape and internet provision	7
3. Library and PAC usage	8
4. Impressions of public libraries	14
5. Informal and non-formal learning	17
6. Use of PACs for employment and business	20
7. E-government and active citizenship	21
8. Impacts	22

Acknowledgements

The authors of this report are grateful for the input and assistance of the following people who helped ensure the success of the project:

Jan Braeckman	Bibnet	Belgium
Kelly Carey	GMMB	
Marcel Chiranov	Biblionet Romania	Romania
Mikkel Christoffersen	Kulturstyrelsen / Danish Agency for Culture	Denmark
Giedrė Čistovienė	National Library of Lithuania	Lithuania
Chris Coward	Technology and Social Change Group (TASCHA), University of Washington	
Annie Dourlent	Bibliothèque publique d'information	France
Elaine Fulton	Scottish Library and Information Council/CILIP in Scotland	United Kingdom
Francoise Gaudet	Bibliothèque publique d'information	France
Robin Knowles	Civic Agenda	
Maciej Kochanowicz	Library Development Program, Information Society Development Foundation	Poland
Alexandre Lemaire	Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles Service de la lecture publique	Belgium
Zdenek Matušík	Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic (SKIP)	Czech Republic
Maria Antonia Carrato Mena	Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte	Spain
Dan Mount	Civic Agenda	
Julia Nagy	GMMB	
Margarida Oleiro	Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas	Portugal
Marjolein Oomes	Netherlands Institute for Public Libraries	Netherlands
Helen Osborn	Libraries NI	United Kingdom
Kristine Paberza	State Agency „Culture Information Systems“	Latvia
Jeremy Paley	Global Libraries, Bill & Melinda Gates foundation	USA
Stefano Parise	Comune di Milano	Italy
Aldo Pirola	Comune di Milano	Italy
Vasilis Polyhronopoulos	Total Quality Unit of Greek Academic Libraries	Greece
Renata Sadunishvili	Independent consultant	Lithuania
Janet Sawaya	Global Libraries, Bill & Melinda Gates foundation	USA
Miriam Schriefers	Deutscher Bibliotheksverband e.V.	Germany
David Streatfield	Consultant	United Kingdom
Ian Watson	Adult & Community Services Directorate, Lancashire County Council	United Kingdom
Barbro Wigell-Ryynänen	Ministry of Education and Culture	Finland
Branimira Vezhdarova	Glob@l Libraries – Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Anna Kåring Wagman	Swedish Library Association	Sweden
Helen Williams	CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales Council of Libraries and Archives at the Ministry of Education	United Kingdom
Dr George Zachos		Greece

Disclaimer

This report is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation.

Executive summary

Objectives and research approach

TNS, an independent research company with a global presence, was commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to conduct research across 17 EU countries to identify perceptions and types of use of public libraries. The purpose of the research was to understand the impact that public libraries in the EU have on users' lives.

The research included:

- a workshop among the study stakeholders to discuss the priorities for the research;
- desk research, to collate key data concerning libraries;
- a survey of a representative sample of the population aged 15 and over in each of the 17 countries;
- a survey among library users and public access computer (PAC) users aged 15 and over, in each of the 17 countries, conducted in libraries; and
- qualitative research among library users and library staff.

This report provides a brief overview of the results for Italy and compares the results to the EU total.

The public library landscape

- The desk research estimates that there are 7,639 public libraries in Italy, which equates to 1.3 libraries per 10,000 population: this is the same as the average across the EU.
- The proportion of public libraries with internet access in Italy is 81-100%.

Library and PAC usage

- An estimated 7.3 million adults in Italy, 14% of adults in the country had used a public library in the last 12 months, significantly below the average of just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 0.8 million adults in Italy, 2% of adults, had used PACs in the last 12 months, significantly lower than the average of 4% of adults across the EU.
- PAC users in Italy were more likely than the EU average to be women, to be aged 25-39, to live in a small or middle-sized town and to have stopped full-time education aged 20 or over.
- It is clear that in Italy, the primary motivation for PAC users is the lack of other options that they have. Across the EU, the primary motivation for PAC users is the free nature of the service. PAC users in Italy were more likely than those in other countries to have said that they had no other option for internet and computer access (27% and 22% in Italy compared with 19% and 19% across the EU).
- Overall, it is estimated that 0.2 million PAC users in Italy had nowhere else to access the internet, or to access the internet free of charge.
- The value placed on the PAC service was lower among users in Italy than the EU average. Around a quarter (23%) of PAC users in Italy said the service was extremely valuable, lower than the EU average (36%).
- Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was reasonably high among users: 82% of users in Italy were satisfied, although this was below the EU average of 91%.

Perceptions and impacts of public libraries

- More than eight out of ten library users in Italy considered 'free access to computers' and 'free access to the internet' important (compared with around seven out of ten library users across Europe).
- Half (50%) of the general public in Italy (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was lower than the average across the EU of 64%.
- Around a fifth (22%) of the public in Italy felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was lower than the EU average (40%).
- Overall 92% of PAC users in Italy said their PAC use had delivered at least one impact for them, higher than the average across the EU (83%) and representing approximately 0.8 million people in Italy.
- Library users in Italy were less likely than the EU average to strongly agree that public libraries 'Have highly skilled librarians' (26% Italy compared with 43% EU), 'Are accessible to everyone' (57% Italy, 70% EU), and 'Are friendly and welcoming' (41% Italy, 58% EU).

Informal and non-formal learning

- In Italy 43% of library users had taken part in an educational activity in a library in the last 12 months, which was higher than the EU average of 25%.

Employment and use of PACs for business

- Around two fifths (42%) of PAC users in Italy had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, above the EU average of 30%. This represents an estimated 0.4 million PAC users in Italy who had used PAC for employment related activity.
- An estimated 69,000 PAC users in Italy had used a PAC to apply for a job in the last 12 months, and an estimated 25,000 adults were successful in securing employment by this means.

E-government and active citizenship

- The library survey found that one third of PAC users in Italy (33%) had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, above the EU average of one in four (24%). The most common ways in which PAC users in Italy interacted with public authorities were to obtain information from public authorities' websites (23%) and to download official forms (22%).
- Overall, 45% of PAC users in Italy had used PAC for civic engagement activities in the past 3 months, considerably higher than the average for users across the EU (26%). The two most common community engagement activities were seeking information on local/national/EU government activity (31% Italy compared with 10% EU) and reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (28% Italy compared with 14% EU).

1. Background and methodology

1.1 Context for the research

Public libraries across the European Union (EU) have long played an important role in communities by providing free access to information, guidance from trained librarians, and public meeting space. As meaningful participation in society increasingly requires access to digital information and resources, many public libraries in the EU have expanded their offerings to include access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) like computers and the Internet.

There is a growing body of evidence about the ways public access to ICTs contributes to economic, health, education, and social development¹. For instance, the Global Impact Study on Public Access to ICTs, which covers five developing countries, found that those using Public Access Computers reported positive impact related to communication (79%), education (78%), access to government information (40%) and health (37%). More than 80% of public services in the EU are now fully available online,² but in 2011, just 41% of the EU population used government services electronically.³ Today, some Europeans have their first experiences with computers or the Internet at a public library, and for some individuals this may remain the only place they can access ICTs (or access them without paying unaffordable fees)⁴.

Under the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the EU has set ambitious objectives in many of the development areas to which access-to-information efforts contribute – specifically employment, innovation, education, and social inclusion. EU Member States are expected to meet targets in these areas by 2020. There is anecdotal evidence that ICT access through public libraries can support the implementation of the specific growth, education, and cohesion policies related to the EU 2020 Strategy, such as digital skills and inclusion milestones described under the Digital Agenda for Europe (one of seven flagship initiatives of the Strategy) or informal and non-formal learning, which is mentioned in three of the seven flagship initiatives. In other policy areas, such as supporting a skilled workforce and connecting people to employment opportunities, public libraries' roles may be less obvious and additional data are needed to demonstrate the contributions of public libraries and help them secure EU support for their work.

This research, which includes EU-wide and country-specific reports, was commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to illuminate the role of public libraries in supporting social and economic policies under the EU 2020 Strategy.

1.2 Research objectives

The main purpose of the research was to understand the impact that public libraries in the EU have on users' lives.

1.3 Research method

The research was conducted in the following seventeen countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom.

¹ See [The Global Impact Study of Public Access to Information & Communication Technology](#) about the scale, character, and impacts of public access to information and communication technologies. Looking at libraries, telecenters, and cybercafes, the study investigates impact in a number of areas, including communication and leisure, culture and language, education, employment and income, governance, and health. Implemented by the University of Washington's [Technology & Social Change Group](#) (TASCHA), the Study is part of a broader research project supported by Canada's [International Development Research Centre](#) (IDRC) and a grant to IDRC from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#).

² [Eurostat](#), 2010

³ [Eurostat](#), 2011

⁴ Sciadas, G., with Lyons, H., Rothschild, C., & Sey, A. (2012). [Public access to ICTs: Sculpting the profile of users](#). Seattle: Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington Information School.

The research involved several phases. First, desk research was carried out to collate existing information showing the public library landscape in the survey countries, using sources such as IFLA, national and local library statistics, local library associations, national statistical offices, Eurostat, Eurobarometer and so on. Survey work was carried out in October/November 2012.

- A representative sample of 1,016 members of the public aged 15+ in Italy (17,816 across the 17 countries) were interviewed regarding their usage of libraries, computers in libraries and their attitudes towards libraries.
- Interviews were carried out in libraries. In Italy, 799 interviews were conducted with people who had not used Public Access Computers (PACs) in libraries (12,537 across the 17 countries) and 682 with those who had (11,716 across the 17 countries). The interviews in Italy were conducted in 22 libraries which were selected and contacted with help from a representative of the Comune di Milano. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face.
- Qualitative fieldwork was conducted, consisting in each country of five 60-minute depth interviews with library managers and four 90-minute group discussions with PAC users. At least 3 libraries were represented in each country, in both urban and semi-rural locations.

Survey results were weighted to ensure that the final results were representative of the population within each country. Weighting was also applied to rebalance the weight of each country within the pan-European totals, in proportion to the population size.

1.4 This report

This report provides a brief overview of the results for Italy and compares the results to the EU total. EU results are based on findings from the 17 countries included in this study. Individual reports for each country surveyed have been produced as well as an overall report⁵.

Throughout this report where we refer to:

- A 'library': This means a public library, which anyone can go to, and does not include school, college, or university libraries'
- PAC user/usage': This refers to usage of a public access computer to access the internet within a public library, and is based on those who responded affirmatively to the following question:

Have you used a public access computer in a public library to access the internet in the last 12 months? Please do not include using your personal computer or smart phone in the library.

Throughout this report comparisons are made between the findings in Italy and the average across the EU. The EU average is calculated based on responses from the 17 countries in the survey. It should be noted that figures for Italy are *included* in the EU average, which has the effect of lessening the statistical power of comparisons between the Italy and EU figures.

While most of the data is presented in terms of percentages, on a number of occasions throughout this report data have been grossed up to represent the population of Italy and are presented in terms of estimated numbers.

2. The public library landscape and internet provision

There are an estimated 7,639 public libraries in Italy (2012), which equates to 1.3 libraries per 10,000 population, which is the same as the average of across the EU.

⁵ Quick, Prior, Toombs, Taylor and Currenti (2013): *Cross-European survey to measure users' perceptions of the benefits of ICT in public libraries* (funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation)

The Italian network of libraries comprises:

- 46 State libraries, including the 2 central national libraries located in Florence and Rome (these 46 are under the authority of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities (MiBAC))
- Municipalities, universities as well as schools and churches.

In 1972, legislative responsibility for libraries of local bodies and of local interest was transferred to the regions. Municipalities have the power to set up and manage public libraries though they have no obligation.

In 2010 the total cost for running the 46 State Public libraries was c.27 million Euro. Funds had been dramatically reduced between 2005 and 2010 and investments in information technology also fell by more than 1 million. In November 2012 the MiBAC announced the allocation of 6 million Euro extra funds for the preservation of the State Public libraries.

The proportion of public libraries with internet access in Italy is 81-100%.

Eurostat data (2011) for Internet access at home shows that Italy has a below average level, with 62% of households having access to the Internet, compared with an EU average of 73%. It may therefore be expected that demand for and usage of PAC services would be higher in Italy than in other countries.

3. Library and PAC usage

3.1 Access to libraries and PACs

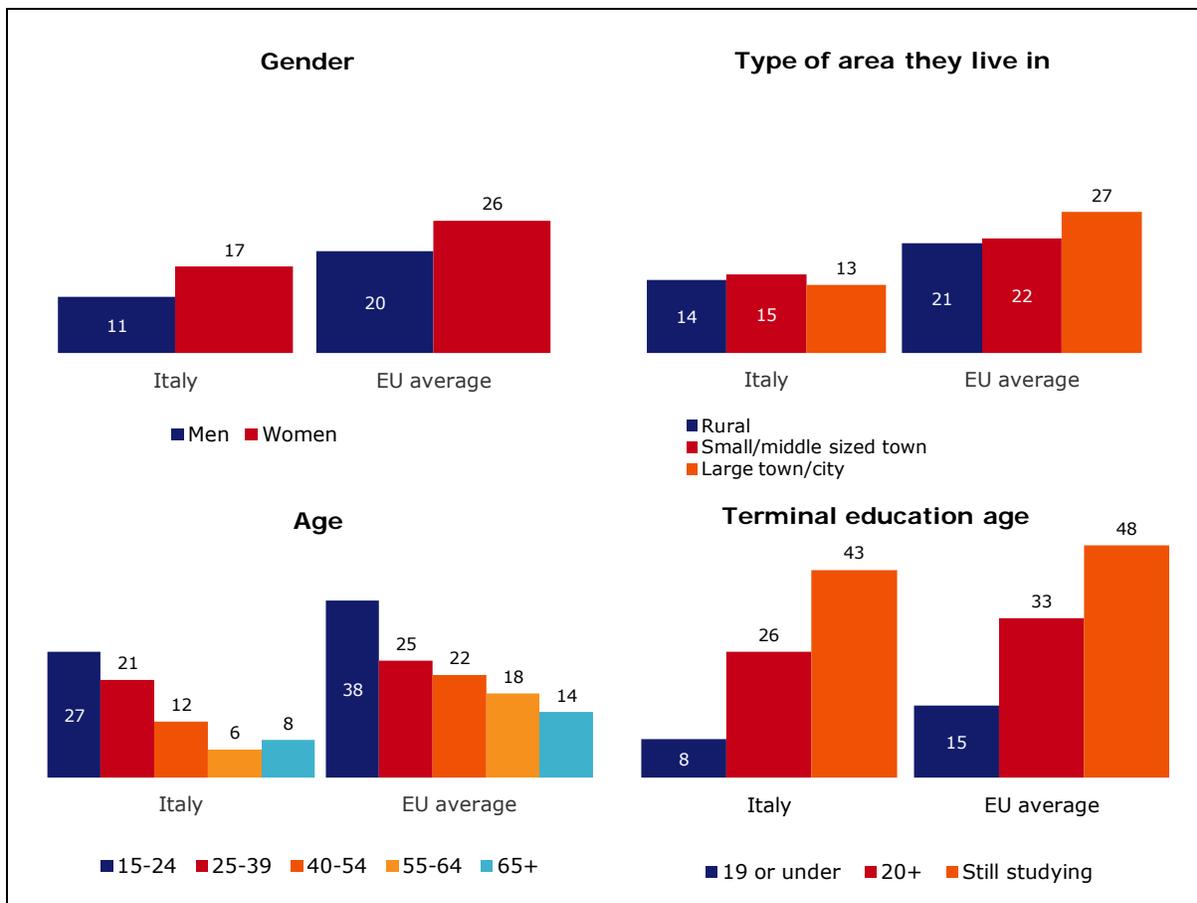
The general public survey found that library usage in Italy was below the EU average.

- An estimated 7.3 million adults in Italy, 14% of adults in Italy had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 4.1 million adults, under a tenth (8%) of adults in Italy, had used a library at least once a month, against an EU average of 14%.

The prevalence of library use in the last 12 months, by different groups in Italy and across the EU, is shown in Figure 1. In Italy:

- Women (17%) were more likely than men (11%) to have visited a library, in line with the findings across the EU.
- Library usage in Italy decreased with age until age 55 (27% of those aged 15-24, 21% of those aged 25-39, 12% of those aged 40-54, 6% of those aged 55-64 and 8% of those aged 65 and over had visited a library in the last 12 months). Library usage in Italy was lower than the EU average in every age group.
- Library use was fairly consistent across large towns and cities (13%), smaller towns (15%) and rural areas (14%).
- Library use was much higher among those who were still studying – 43% of this group had used a public library in the last 12 months, in line with the EU average (48%).

Figure 1: Percentage of each group who had used a library in the last 12 months



Source: Omnibus survey – Q1. Have you visited a public library in the last 12 months?
 Base: Italy – All adults (1016), Men (491), Women (525), 15-24 (125), 25-39 (195), 40-54 (322), 55-64 (146), 65+ (228), Large town/city (182), Small town (558), Rural area (235), Finished education 19 or under (753), 20 or over (164), Still studying (92). EU - All adults (17816), Men (8521), Women (9295), 15-24 (2636), 25-39 (4152), 40-54 (4592), 55-64 (2937), 65+ (3496), Large town/city (5352), Small town (6653), Rural area (5633), Finished education 19 or under (9943), 20 or over (5500), Still studying (1801).

The profile of library users in Italy, compared with across the EU, was:

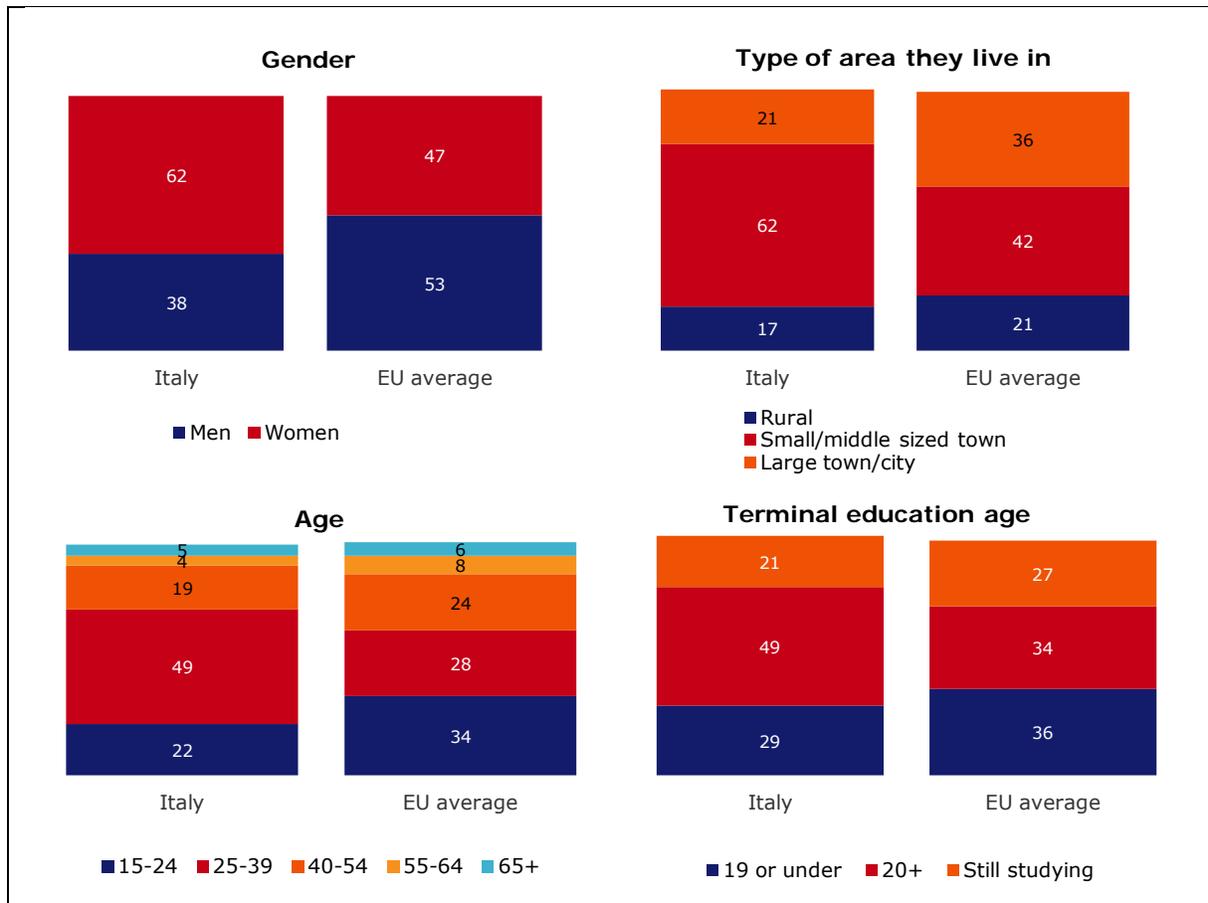
- 37% of library users in Italy were men, 63% women; on a par with the EU average (42% men, 58% women)
- Users in Italy had a similar age profile than the EU average – 23% were aged 15-24, 34% aged 25-39, 23% aged 40-54, 6% aged 55-64 and 14% aged 65+; compared with the EU average of 25% aged 15-24, 26% aged 25-39, 25% aged 40-54, 12% aged 55-64 and 12% aged 65+.

Only just over a tenth (12%) of those who had visited a library in Italy in the last 12 months used a PAC, which is lower than the EU average of 14%. When those who had not used a PAC were asked why this was, 44% said they had no need to because they had a computer/internet at home, and a significant minority of 5% said they did not know how to use computers or the internet, implying that there is potential for libraries to further increase their customer base for PAC.

In total, the survey found that 2% of adults in Italy had used PACs in the last 12 months, lower than the average of 4% of adults across the EU countries. This is estimated to be around 0.8 million adults within Italy.

PAC users in Italy were more likely than the EU average to be women, to be aged 25-39, to live in a small or middle-sized town and to have stopped full-time education aged 20 or over, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Profile of those who had used a PAC in the last 12 months



Source: Library survey – C4. Have you used a public access computer in a public library to access the Internet in the last 12 months?

Base: All PAC users Italy (682), EU (11716).

Around four-fifths of users in Italy (39%) had used PACs once every three months or less often, lower than the EU average (47%). 20% of PAC users in Italy made use of PACs at least once a week, similar to the EU average of 23%, with 39% doing so once to three times a month (compared with 29% across the EU).

The qualitative research found that none of the libraries in the sample carried out any form of encouragement to widen access to the ICT services, largely because they felt they were already at capacity and further users would cause longer waiting lists, but also because they presumed the libraries and their services were already well-known cultural components of their local areas.

“Demand is much higher than our offer. We try not to promote the service as there are already too many users” (Library Manager, urban, Italy).

"Our library is a reference point in the urban fabric: everybody knows it" (Library Manager, Semi Rural, Italy).

The most proactive libraries had organized courses for specific groups of people, such as older users, blind people and immigrants. Some libraries had made attempts to encourage these user groups but been unable to attract them.

"We have even bought some special keyboards for blind people, but they probably prefer to stay at home because they have a better equipment" (Library Manager, urban, Italy).

Users were asked the main reason for using PACs. Students found libraries a useful place to study as they could easily access the internet for research and could meet with their friends to study together. Other motivations included that library ICT services were less expensive than local printing shops or internet cafes, and the library provided a quiet yet sociable environment that allowed them to get out of the house.

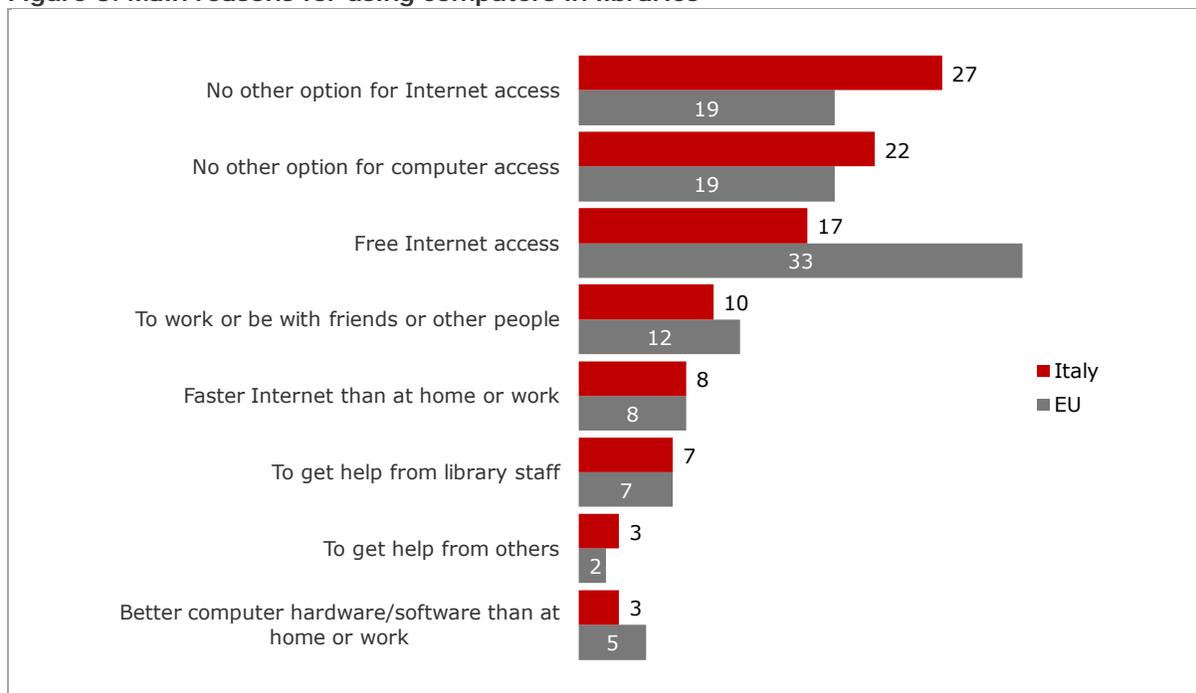
"It is a way to stay with other people, you do not feel closed in your room in front of a desk" (User- M- 25/39).

"I go to the library as it is a good place where to meet with friends to study together" (Recent user – f - 16/24).

3.2 Reasons for using PACs

PAC users interviewed in the in-library survey were asked what their main reasons were for using computers, the internet and software in public libraries within the last 12 months. It is clear that in Italy, the primary motivation for PAC users is the lack of other options that they have. Across the EU, the primary motivation for PAC users is the free nature of the service. PAC users in Italy were more likely than those in other countries to have said that they had no other option for internet and computer access (27% and 22% in Italy compared with 19% and 19% across the EU).

Figure 3: Main reasons for using computers in libraries



Source: Library Survey - C8 What are the main reasons you have chosen to use computers, Internet and software at public libraries in the last 12 months?

Base: All PAC users- Italy (682); EU (11716)

PAC users were also asked two more direct questions as to what other options they had, firstly regarding where else they could access the internet from, and secondly, where else they could access the internet *'for free'*. In Italy, 8% of PAC users said that they had no other options for accessing the internet (compared with 11% across the EU), and a further 17% that there was no other source of free internet for them (compared with 14% across the EU). Overall, it is estimated that 0.2 million PAC users in Italy (25% of PAC users) had nowhere else to access the internet, or to access the internet free of charge.

Those who indicated that they had no other options for accessing the internet tended often tended to come from 'digitally excluded' (and often 'socially excluded') groups, which clearly highlights the role of PACs in the future of the EU's 2020 Growth Strategy. Specifically, the following groups were particularly likely to indicate that they did not have any other options:

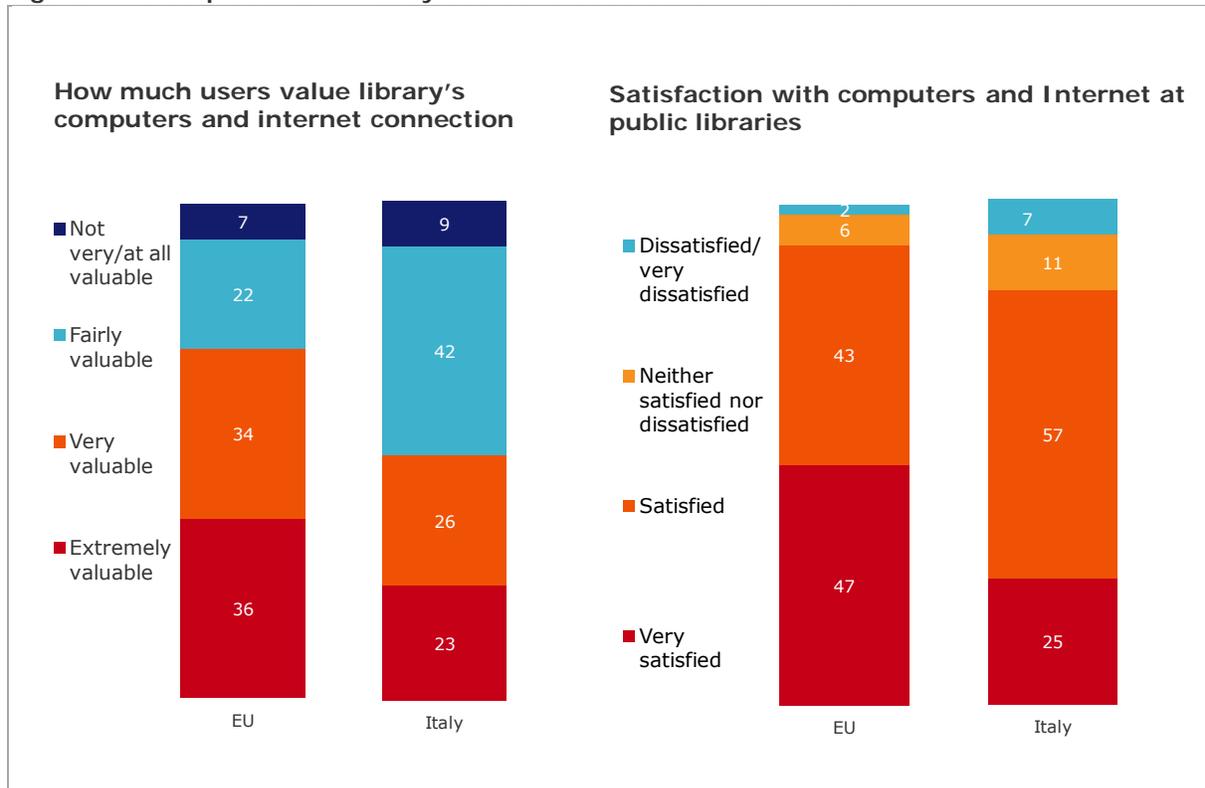
- Older people – 36% of PAC users aged 65+ had no alternative internet access, compared with 5% of those aged 15-24
- Those who were not in employment – 14% had no alternative for internet access, compared with 3% of the employed.

The value placed on the PAC service was lower among users in Italy than the EU average, as shown in Figure 4. Overall, 91% of PAC users in Italy said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Only 23% of PAC users in Italy said the service was extremely valuable, compared with 36% across the EU.

The library's computers and internet connection were more highly valued in Italy by users aged 55+ (45% of this group rated the services as extremely valuable).

Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was reasonably high among users, as shown in Figure 4: 82% of users in Italy were satisfied. However, again users in Italy were less likely to say they were satisfied with computers and internet at the library than EU users as a whole; only a quarter (25%) of users in Italy said they were very satisfied, compared with nearly a half (47%) across the EU.

Figure 4: Value placed on PACs by users and satisfaction with PACs



Source: Library survey - C30 How much do you value the library's computers and Internet connection? & C31 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your access to computers and the Internet at public libraries?

Base: All PAC users. Italy (682); EU (11716)

In Italy, just over a half of PAC users (55%) said that when they go to a library to use a computer, they find a free computer straight away, and a further 24% that they have to wait for no more than 10 minutes. These waiting times are longer than the averages reported across the EU (72% of PAC users find a free computer straight away, and a further 16% wait for no more than 10 minutes).

In the qualitative research, according to the reports of library and senior managers, libraries had between 13 and 22 computers with internet facilities for the public to use; one also had tablets and e-readers. Most operated Windows 7 and Microsoft Office, and all libraries offered Wi-Fi. Broadband was available in all libraries; some used optical fibres.

Although both users and librarians felt the available PACs were quite old and worn, they were seen as sufficient to carry out required tasks: more advanced computers were perceived as nice to have but not really needed. For example, faster connections were not considered necessary by staff because downloading was forbidden and connection to video streaming sites was limited. Similarly, users were aware that the type of operations they were allowed to carry out on PACs were relatively undemanding.

"We have broadband but as it is forbidden to connect to download sites, it is more than sufficient. We preferred to avoid possible illegal activities" (Library Manager, urban, Italy).

"For the tasks they have to carry out they are more than OK" (User - F-16/24).

Users were generally of the opinion that the number of computers was sufficient, although some tried to avoid busier times as there were queues. Microsoft Office satisfied most needs; there was no demand for more specific software. The only perceived limitation was the restricted time slots each user had to use PACs.

"You are there on the internet and you have the person following you in the queue that is breathing on your neck waiting for you to go away!" (User- F - 40/64).

4. Impressions of public libraries

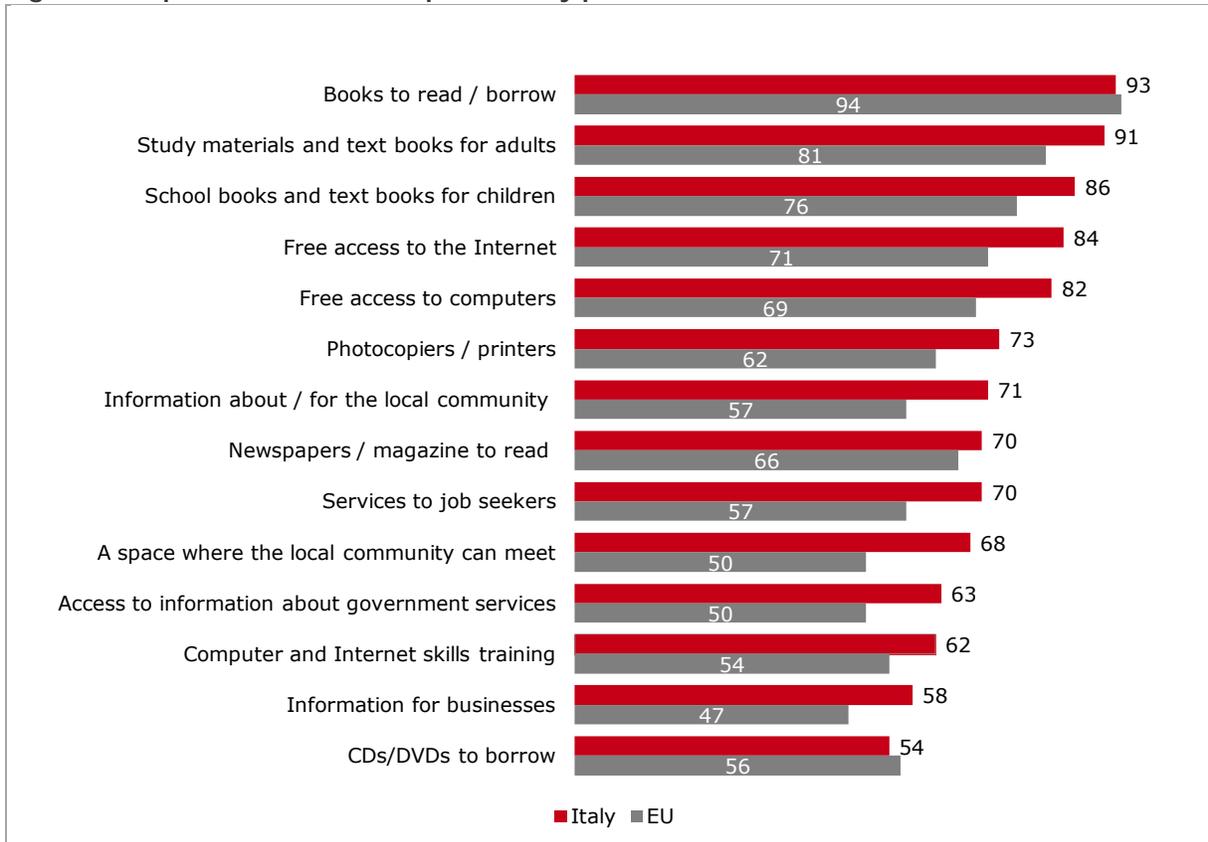
4.1 Importance of library services

Library users (both PAC users and non-PAC users) were asked to rate each of a list of services that could be offered by libraries, on a 5-point scale from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'. Figure 5 shows the percentage in Italy, and across the EU, rating each service as 4 or 5 on the scale.

Not surprisingly, the core service of 'books to read/borrow' was considered the most important, rated as important by 93% of users in Italy (and 94% across the EU), followed by 'study materials and text books for adults' and 'school books'

'Free access to the internet' and 'free access to computers' were both rated as important by around eight out of ten library users in Italy, which was higher than the equivalent figure of around seven out of ten users across Europe.

Figure 5: Importance of services provided by public libraries



Source: Library survey - C15 How important is this service that can be provided by public libraries.

Base: All library users - Italy (1481); EU (24253)

Users in Italy were also more likely than the EU average to rate the provision of computer and Internet skills training as an important service (62% in Italy compared with 54% EU average).

The importance of libraries to community life was emphasised among library users in Italy. Providing a space where the local community can meet was seen as particularly important among library users in Italy (68% compared with 50% EU average), as was providing information about or for the local community (71% compared with 57% EU average).

In the qualitative research, users viewed the library environment positively, appreciating the quiet and efficiency that enabled concentration. There was also a perception of a library as being a real 'cultural heart' for local people to meet and socialise.

"It is like going to a mall, you go there initially for a book but then you meet a friend and you go to the bar." (User- f- 40/65).

"It is in the centre of the city, you can get there in a moment; it is a convivial place, there is people, it is not a dull library." (Recent user- f-40/65).

4.2 Effectiveness and funding of public libraries

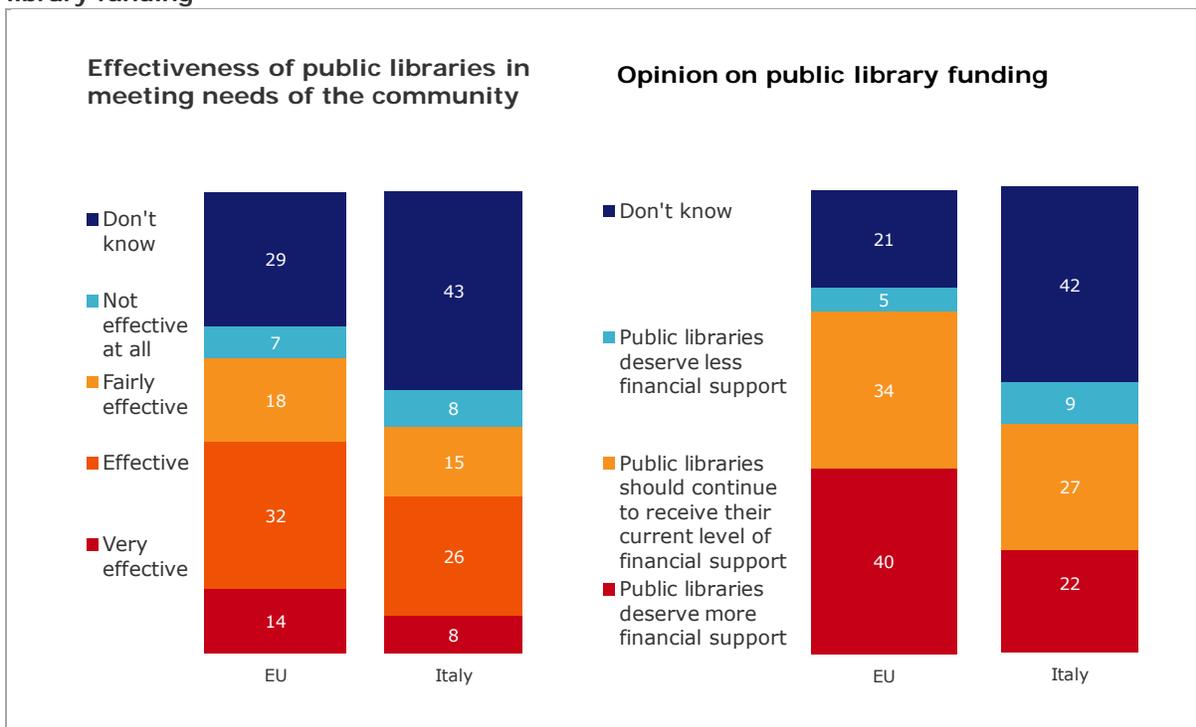
A half (50%) of the general public in Italy (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was lower than the average across the 17 EU survey countries of 64%. The proportion saying libraries were 'very effective' was 8% in Italy, compared with the EU average of 14%.

Library users in Italy and PAC users were almost unanimous in their opinion that libraries were effective in meeting the needs of their local community – 92% of all library users felt they were effective, rising to 100% among PAC users.

Around a fifth (22%) of the public in Italy felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was lower than the average of all 17 EU countries (40%). Almost all the remainder either felt that the funding should continue as at present (27%) or did not express an opinion (42%). Only 9% of the public in Italy felt that public libraries deserve *less* financial support. With such a high proportion of people in Italy not expressing an opinion, it may be that the general public in Italy do not know what the current level of financial support is and perhaps this is reflective of responsibility for public library services being regional rather than central.

Not surprisingly, library users and PAC users were more likely than non-users to say that libraries deserve more financial support – 39% of all library users, and 34% of PAC users, were in favour of more financial support for libraries.

Figure 6: Effectiveness of public libraries in meeting community needs and opinion on public library funding



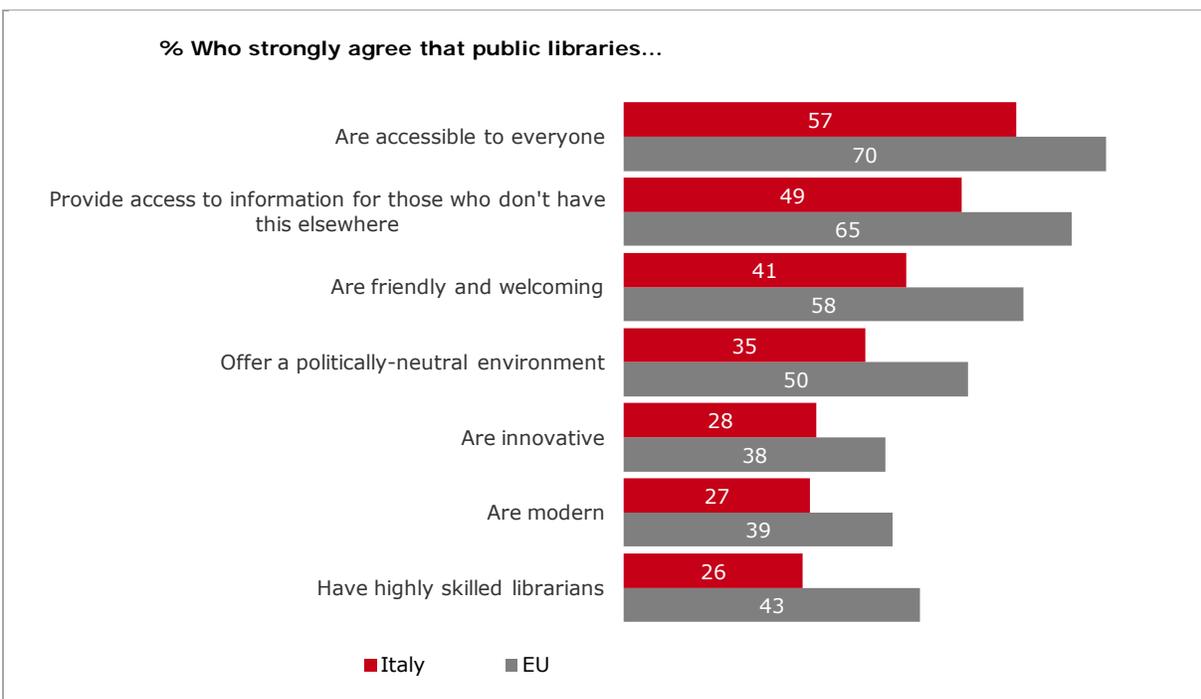
Source: Omnibus survey- Q6 How effective do you think your local public library is at meeting the needs of your community? & Q7 Which of the following statements represents most closely your opinion regarding the current funding for public libraries?

Base: All adults - Italy (1016); EU (17816)

4.3 Perceptions of public libraries

All library users were asked their opinions of public libraries, through a series of agree/disagree statements. Figure 7 shows the proportions in Italy and EU who strongly agreed with each of these statements. Library users in Italy were less likely than the EU average to strongly agree with all of these statements, with the biggest differences from the EU average for 'Have highly skilled librarians' (26% Italy compared with 43% EU). 'Are friendly and welcoming' (41% Italy compared with 58% EU).

Figure 7: Perceptions of public libraries



Source: Library survey- C29 How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements..
Base: All library users. Italy (1481); EU (24253)

5. Informal and non-formal learning

Public libraries are key players in the delivery of the non-formal/informal component of the European Commission's lifelong learning policy, particularly with regard to *inclusive* delivery. The role of libraries in providing education to users was explored through asking all library users whether or not they had taken part in any educational activities in a public library within the last 12 months.

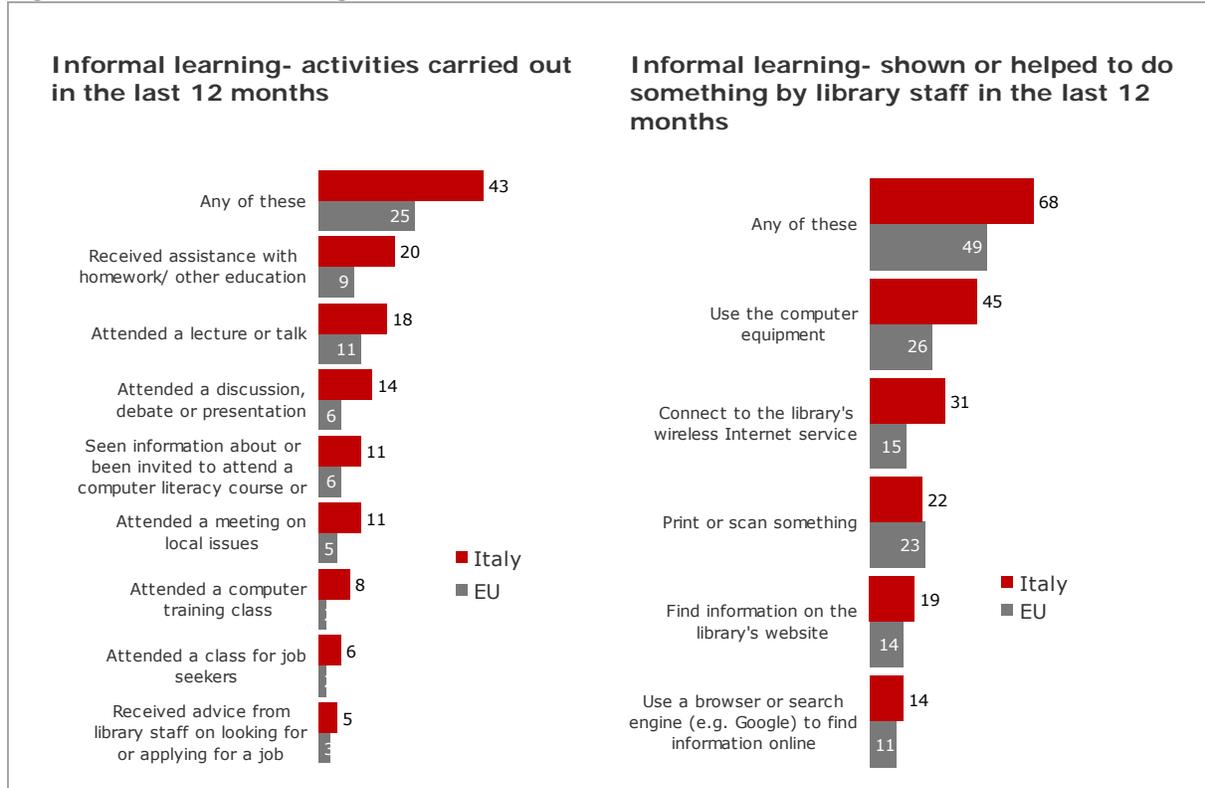
Overall, in Italy 43% had taken part in one of the educational activities in libraries asked about in the last 12 months, which was above the EU average of 25%.

Engagement levels in all educational activities in libraries tended to be higher in Italy than for the EU as a whole (Figure 8), including, among others:

- Receiving assistance with homework or other education (20% vs. EU average of 9%)
- Attending a lecture or talk (18% vs. EU average of 11%)
- Attending a discussion, debate or presentation (14% vs. EU average of 6%)

Eight per cent of library users in Italy reported that they had attended a computer training class in the last 12 months – higher than the EU average. This means that an estimated 0.6 million adults in Italy attended a computer training class in a library in the last 12 months.

Figure 8: Informal learning activities carried out or been shown to users in the last 12 months



Source: Library survey-C16 In the last 12 months, have you done any of the following things in a public library & C17 In the last 12 months, have you been shown how or helped to do any of the following things by staff at a public library...

Base: C16- All library users - Italy (1481); EU (24253). C17- All PAC users – Italy (682); EU (11716).

As Figure 8 shows, public library staff play an important role in assisting library users in informal learning. Overall, over two-thirds (68%) library users in Italy had been shown or helped to do something by a member of library staff within the last 12 months, which was higher than the EU average of 49%.

The most common ways in which library staff assisted library users were helping with connecting to the library's wireless internet service, using the computer and printing or scanning.

The qualitative research found that there were several types of support with ICT services provided by the library staff. These included:

- Technical “first aid” or basic support where a member of staff helped users with technical problems.
- Digital reference, where a user could ask the library personnel to carry out specific research on given topics.
- IT consulting, whereby users were guided towards the best solutions to their IT needs (only one library in the sample provided this level of support).

"We explain which programs and web sites to open in order to carry out the needed tasks (for example a model with the European CV)" (Library Manager, urban, Italy).

More structured learning activities were organized by private associations within the library rooms, and included IT courses for immigrants, unemployed people, users aged over 55, blind people and, in one library, a more advanced IT course on key software. These were mostly traditional courses, but one library had introduced a one-to-one approach to computer training for older people where a knowledgeable retiree taught another older person the computer basics. This produced better results than the usual training as it reduced the discomfort of the pupil.

Users' awareness of the support available varied between libraries. In Bologna, no users had asked for advice, except one who had noticed the presence of an official assistant. Milan users knew that they could ask for support from a librarian, but there was an assumption that library staff were there to monitor the correct use of equipment or provide only basic support, such as giving users log in details. In Cologno, users recognised that the staff on the reference desk were able to guide them to appropriate websites and provide active support when they experienced problems.

"For those that are not so expert they are very important. They are always ready to help you" (Recent user- F - 25/39)

"I had to get information about IMU tax, they were helping me to find the right site" (Recent user- F- 40/65).

In all libraries, the library staff's role was not considered to be ICT specialist, but rather library employees that could give some hints. Overall there was a view that in the event of a very serious IT failure staff would not be able to grant help.

"They are not IT engineers, they are rather library employees that know how to deal with a computer" (Recent User- F -25/39).

None of the users in the qualitative sample were aware of the courses provided by the library, except for the basic assistance, but there was also low interest expressed in such services.

"I am already able to use the computer, these courses are not for me" (User-M-16/24)

Support from library staff was considerably more important to older users than students who could solve problems themselves. It provided reassurance for users who had the least expertise in ICT and knew they could require assistance.

Only one user in the qualitative research had received training in the library, and this had been organized by an external organization. This user had attended the course because it was free of charge and was specifically for older people, and had positive experiences due to the helpful and tolerant approach taken by the trainers.

"There is this course that is carried out by pensioners, you can book at different time of the day: they give you a computer and teach you how to use it. This is organized by the library: they are so nice, helpful, tolerant" (Recent user- F - 40/65)

6. Use of PACs for employment and business

Public libraries have a role to play not only in providing a community gateway to higher level skills – but also to employment, and therefore the role of the public library in helping Europeans access employment opportunities was a key theme within the research.

Two-fifths (42%) of PAC users in Italy had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, higher than the EU average of 30%. This represents an estimated 0.4 million PAC users in Italy who had used PAC for employment related activity.

Overall, 8% of PAC users in Italy had used a PAC to apply for a job (either in Italy or in another EU country) in the last 12 months - this represents approximately 69,000 adults in Italy. Of those respondents who applied for a job through PAC, 36% said that they were successful. This means that in all 3% of PAC users in Italy – or an estimated 25,000 adults– applied for and got a job via a PAC in the last 12 months.

Public library staff have a role to play in supporting employment related PAC activities, as is shown in Figure 9; a quarter (23%) of PAC users in Italy indicated that they had been shown or helped to do some employment-related PAC activity (twice the EU average).

Figure 9: Employment related PAC activities carried out in last 12 months

Employment related activities - Used computers in last 12 months to...			Employment related activities - Been shown/helped to... by library staff in the last 12 months				
	%	Italy	EU		%	Italy	EU
Any listed below		42	30	Any listed below		23	11
Find information about searching and/or applying for jobs	15	15	14	Improve skills needed in your current job	14	14	4
Search for jobs	14	14	13	How to write a CV	10	10	5
Write a CV or covering letter	12	12	12	How to develop skills needed to obtain a job	6	6	2
Improve skills needed in your current job	23	23	11	How to look for a job online (such as finding a recruitment company, searching for information about an employer)	6	6	3
Apply for jobs in this country	8	8	10	How to apply for a job online	5	5	2
Search for information about an employer	8	8	8	How to look for and apply for jobs in other EU countries	4	4	1
Find a recruitment company	6	6	5				
Use spread sheet/data	6	6	3				
Search for jobs in other EU countries	10	10	2				
Apply for jobs in other EU countries	5	5	1				

Source: Library survey-C18 In the last 12 months, have you used the computers available in public libraries to...& C20 In the last 12 months, have you been shown how / helped to do any of the following things by staff at a public library....

Base: All PAC users. Italy (682); EU (11716).

PAC users were asked whether they had used PACs for a range of business-related activities in the last 3 months. Over one in six users in Italy (17%) had used a PAC for finding information related to a business they worked in, which was below the EU average of 20%. The same proportion (17%) of PAC users in Italy had used a PAC for participating in professional networks, higher than the EU average (6%). Fifteen per cent in Italy, compared with 4% EU average, had used a PAC to find ways or places to sell their own products or goods.

In two of the libraries in the qualitative research, support with employment was provided by supplying users with a list of job recruitment sites and assistance with writing a CV.

“An unemployed person had to write a CV for the first time: he came to the library with no idea and the staff showed him which program to open and how to fill it in.” (Library Manager, urban, Italy).

7. E-government and active citizenship

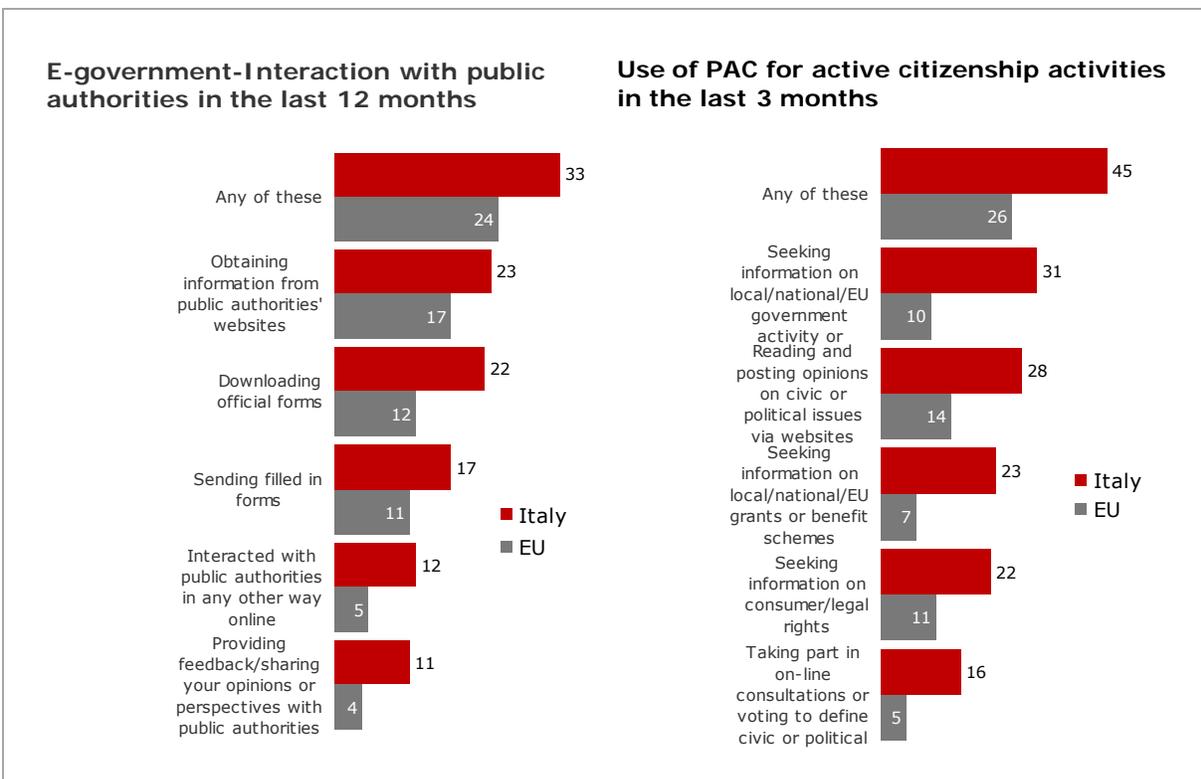
As part of the ‘Connecting Europe’ agenda, public libraries represent a network of public digital access points which can assist in the effective delivery of access to e-government. Computer users were asked about their interaction with public authorities using PACs, including obtaining information from public authorities’ websites, downloading official forms, sending filled in forms, providing feedback/sharing opinions or perspectives with public authorities, and any other way they had interacted with public authorities online.

According to Eurostat data, E-government usage by individuals in Italy is lower than the EU average - 22% of adults in Italy used the internet in the last 12 months to interact with public authorities, compared with 41% across the EU. Citizens in Italy were also less likely than the EU average to use the Internet to obtain information from public authorities’ web sites (21% compared with 35%).

The library survey found that one third (33%) PAC users in Italy had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, higher than the EU average of one in four (24%) PAC users having engaged in E-government interaction, and higher than the Eurostat finding for all adults in Italy. PAC users in Italy were more likely than the EU average to have used PACs to obtain information from public authorities’ websites (23% Italy compared with 17% EU) and more likely to download official forms (22% in Italy compared with 12% EU),

Computer users were also asked about their use of PACs for activities related to civic engagement and active citizenship (Figure 10). This covered areas such as civic participation (reading/posting opinions, taking part in on-line consultations, petitions etc) and seeking information on consumer or legal rights, and on government activity or politics, or grants/benefit schemes. Overall, 45% of PAC users in Italy had used PAC for engagement activities in the past 3 months, considerably higher than the average for users across the EU (26%). The two most common community engagement activities were seeking information on local/national/EU government activity (31% Italy compared with 10% EU) and reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (28% Italy compared with 14% EU).

Figure 10: E-government-Interaction with public authorities in the last 12 months



Source: Library survey-C23 Did you interact with public authorities over the Internet using a computer at a public library for private purposes in the last 12 months for the following activities & C10 For which of the following activities have you used the Internet on computers in public libraries in the last 3 months...
 Base: All PAC users. Italy (682); EU (11716)

In the qualitative research library managers reported staff helping people to use online services to access public subsidies and pension reimbursements.

"Some poor families (including immigrants) could access to public subsidies that were available only online. They came to our library and the reference service helped them." (Library Manager, urban, Italy).

"The old man that could download the forms for having pension reimbursement: the reference service helped him to go to the right site." (Library Manager, urban, Italy).

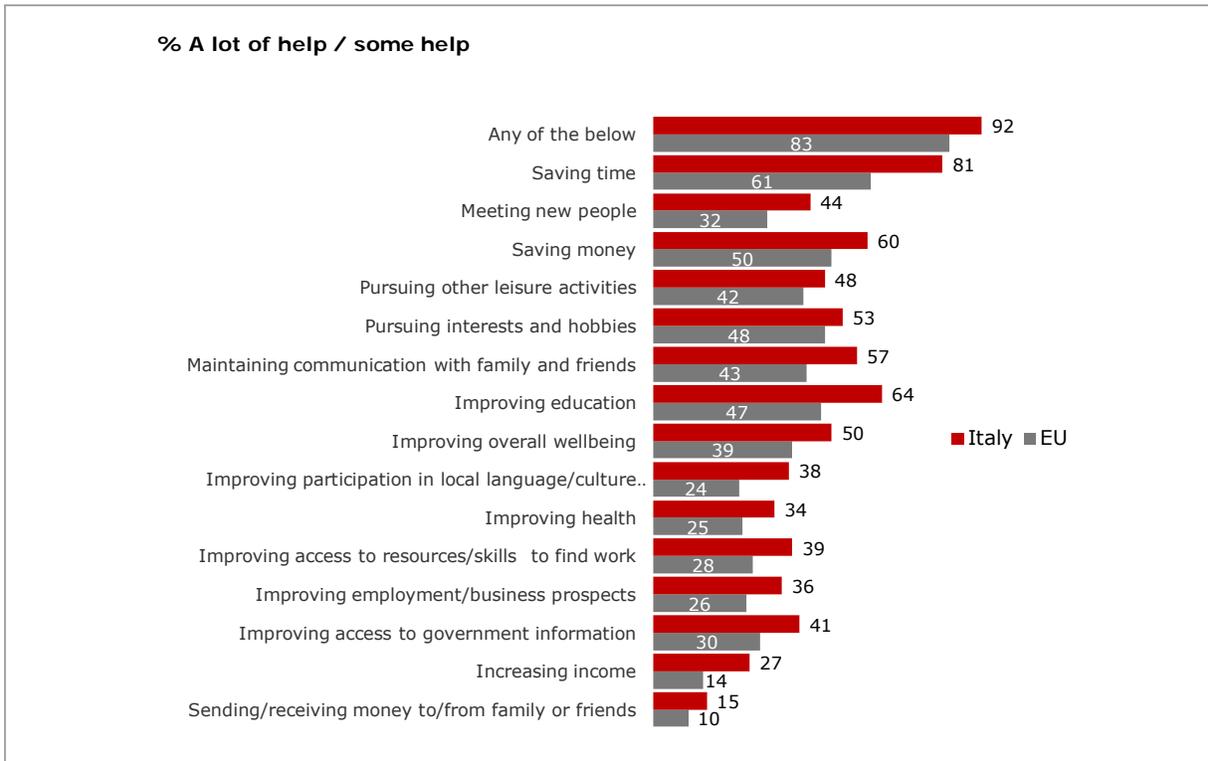
8. Impacts

A key aim of this research was to evaluate the impact of increased digital engagement through PAC use for users. This was assessed by asking PAC users how helpful using computers at public libraries had been for them in the last 12 months, across a wide range of areas including saving time and money, and increasing access to information and resources.

Overall 92% of PAC users in Italy said their PAC use had been helpful to them in at least one of the areas asked about, higher than the average across the EU (83%) and represents approximately 0.8 million people in Italy.

Figure 11 shows the proportions saying PAC use had been helpful in each area, in Italy and across the EU.

Figure 11: Impact of PAC for users



Source: Library survey- C28 In the last 12 months, has using computers at public libraries been helpful to you in the following areas?
 Base: C28- PAC users- Italy (682); EU (11716).

As well as the general area of saving time (81% Italy, 61% EU), PAC use was rated as helpful in improving education (64% Italy, 47% EU) and in saving money (60% Italy, 50% EU).

PAC use was also rated as helpful across a range of leisure and social areas such as maintaining communication with family and friends (57% Italy, 43% EU) and pursuing interests and hobbies (53% Italy, 48% EU).

Overall it is estimated that in Italy, PAC usage in the last 12 months helped:

- 0.6 million people to improve their education
- 0.5 million people to save money
- 0.3 million people to improve their access to resources necessary to find work
- 0.4 million people to improve their access to government information services
- 0.3 million people to improve their employment or business prospects
- 0.2 million people to increase their income.

In the qualitative research, positive impacts of PAC use were not widely reported, partly because users had received most support with ICT outside the library and partly because evaluation and feedback of the impact of ICT on users was minimal. The only user who reported benefits of library ICT was a woman

who had attended a course in the library which had made her more confident and independent when using her PC at home.

"Now I need no more ask my daughter when I am at home." (Recent user- f- 40/65).

In fact, there were some negative associations with the use of PACs in one library, where users reported being scared of carrying out tasks such as reading mail and using online banking due to privacy and security concerns.

"I do not do any money transfer because maybe data are stored somewhere else" (Recent user- F - 40/64)

Library staff felt they were unable to deduce the impact on users of the ICT courses run in the library as they were not run by the library itself but rather by external providers. However, they did report anecdotal evidence of users benefiting from the service, for example by learning about e-books and going on to purchasing one, learning how to write a CV for the first time, and accessing public subsidies and pension reimbursements online.