

# Users' perceptions of the benefits of ICT in public libraries in the Netherlands

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## 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 the Netherlands and compares the results to the EU total.

### The public library landscape

- The desk research estimates that there are 1,063 public libraries in the Netherlands, which equates to 0.6 libraries per 10,000 population, compared with an average of 1.3 libraries per 10,000 population across the EU.
- Computer access is currently available in 100% of public libraries in the Netherlands.

### Library and PAC usage

- An estimated 5.3 million adults in the Netherlands, around a third of adults in the country (38%) had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 0.8 million adults in the Netherlands, 6% of adults, had used PACs in the last 12 months, slightly higher than the average of 4% of adults across the EU.
- Compared to the EU average, PAC users in the Netherlands were more likely to be aged 15-24, to live in a small or middle-sized town, and to have stopped full-time education aged 20 or over.
- The primary motivations of PAC users across the EU are the free nature of the service together with the lack of other options that people have. PAC users in the Netherlands were less likely than those in other countries to have said that they had no other option for computer access (13% in the Netherlands compared with 19% across the EU), but were more likely to mention working or being with friends or other people as a reason (15% vs. EU 12%).
- The value placed on the PAC service was slightly higher among users in the Netherlands than the EU average. Overall, 94% of PAC users in the Netherlands said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Two fifths of PAC users in the Netherlands (40%) said the service was extremely valuable, slightly higher than the EU average (36%).
- Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users: 91% of users in the Netherlands were satisfied.

## Perceptions and impacts of public libraries

- Around six out of ten library users in the Netherlands considered 'free access to computers' and 'free access to the internet' important (compared with around seven out of ten library users across Europe).
- Over two thirds (69%) of the general public in the Netherlands (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 higher than the average across the EU of 64%.
- A quarter (24%) of the public in the Netherlands felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was lower than the EU average (40%).
- Overall 79% of PAC users in the Netherlands said their PAC use had delivered at least one impact for them, lower than the average across the EU (83%) and representing approximately 0.6 million people in the Netherlands.
- Library users in the Netherlands were less likely to strongly agree on all statements about public libraries than the EU average; for example, among others: 'Have highly skilled librarians' (30% Netherlands compared with 43% EU), 'Provide access to information for those who don't have it elsewhere' (48% Netherlands compared with 65% EU), 'Are friendly and welcoming' (47% Netherlands compared with 58% EU).

## Informal and non-formal learning

- In the Netherlands 18% of library users had taken part in an educational activity in a library in the last 12 months, which was lower than the EU average of 25%.

## Employment and use of PACs for business

- A quarter (25%) of PAC users in the Netherlands had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, below the EU average of 30%. This represents an estimated 0.2 million PAC users in the Netherlands who had used PAC for employment related activity.
- An estimated 50,000 PAC users in the Netherlands had used a PAC to apply for a job in the last 12 months, and an estimated 10,000 adults were successful in securing employment by this means.

## E-government and active citizenship

- The library survey found that over a third of PAC users in the Netherlands (37%) 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 the Netherlands interacted with public authorities were to obtain information from public authorities' websites (29%) and to download official forms (21%).
- Overall, a quarter (24%) of PAC users in the Netherlands had used PAC for civic engagement activities in the past 3 months, slightly lower than the average for users across the EU (26%). The two most common community engagement activities were reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (14% Netherlands, the same as the EU) and seeking information on consumer/legal rights (14% Netherlands, compared with 11% 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 development<sup>1</sup>. 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,<sup>2</sup> but in 2011, just 41% of the EU population used government services electronically.<sup>3</sup> 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)<sup>4</sup>.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Eurostat](#), 2010

<sup>3</sup> [Eurostat](#), 2011

<sup>4</sup> 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 1,004 members of the public aged 15+ in the Netherlands (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 the Netherlands, 863 interviews were conducted with people who had not used Public Access Computers (PACs) in libraries (12,537 across the 17 countries) and 523 with those who had (11,716 across the 17 countries). The interviews in the Netherlands were conducted in 25 libraries which were selected and contacted with help from a representative of the Netherlands Institute for Public Libraries. 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 the Netherlands 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 report<sup>5</sup>.

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 the Netherlands 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 the Netherlands are *included* in the EU average, which has the effect of lessening the statistical power of comparisons between the Netherlands 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 the Netherlands and are presented in terms of estimated numbers.

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<sup>5</sup> 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)

## 2. The public library landscape and internet provision

There are 1,063 public libraries in the Netherlands<sup>6</sup>, which equates to 0.6 libraries per 10,000 population, compared with an average across the 17 EU countries of 1.3 libraries per 10,000 population. The number of entities (library organisations) in the Netherlands has decreased from 508 in 2001 to 162 in 2012.

These 1,063 libraries break down as:

- 847 branches
- 216 service points

In The Netherlands the Sectorinstituut Openbare Bibliotheken (SIOB) is responsible for the Dutch library system by order of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Since 1987 as a result of the new welfare law, communities were made responsible for libraries, including financing.

In 2001 the implementation of the 'Koepelconvenant herstructurering openbaar bibliotheekwerk' led to a decrease in library organisations (entities)(from 508 in 2001 to 162 in 2012).The goal of this agreement was to create larger library organisations responsible for more communities to have more impact and to be able to improve the service and modernise.

The Dutch communities are the main financiers of the public libraries. The Dutch central government will continue having a role in realizing the digital infrastructure and the new library law. The provinces through the Provincial Service Organisations (PSO's) are responsible for the provincial library networks and have a role in library innovation and the development of new services and products.

Because of governmental cuts the communities will continue to decrease their library funding. In 2012 30% of libraries were already affected. This will increase to 88% by 2014. In the period 2012-2014 the average decrease in funding will be -9.1%. Consequences are closing of branches, diminishing opening hours, less staff and smaller collections. 70% of libraries are planning to develop new concepts to create an integrated library with both traditional and digital services.

In terms of ICT services, Dutch libraries aim to be a modern digital centre. All libraries have computers for the public and offer internet, mostly free, and facilitate Wi-Fi. Catalogues are accessible through the library websites, media can be reserved and renewed and digital media can be borrowed via email or website.

Computer access is offered by 100% of public libraries in the Netherlands. The proportion of public libraries with internet access in the Netherlands is also 100%.

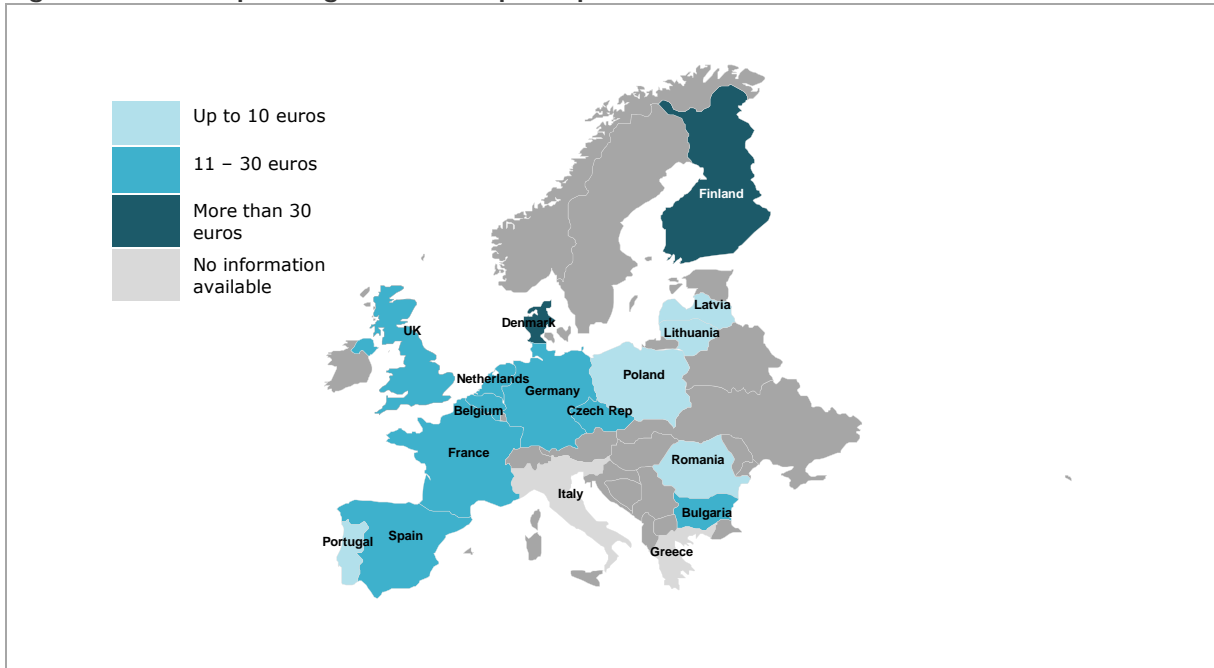
Annual public spending on libraries per capita in the Netherlands at c.28 Euros was above the EU average, as shown below:

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<sup>6</sup> Sources: Netherlands Public Library Association (Vereniging Openbare Bibliotheken); Dutch National Statistics Office (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek)



**Figure 1: Annual spending on libraries per capita**



Source: TNS desk research

Eurostat data (2011) for Internet access at home shows that the Netherlands has one of the highest levels in Europe, with 94% 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 lower in the Netherlands 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 the Netherlands was above the EU average.

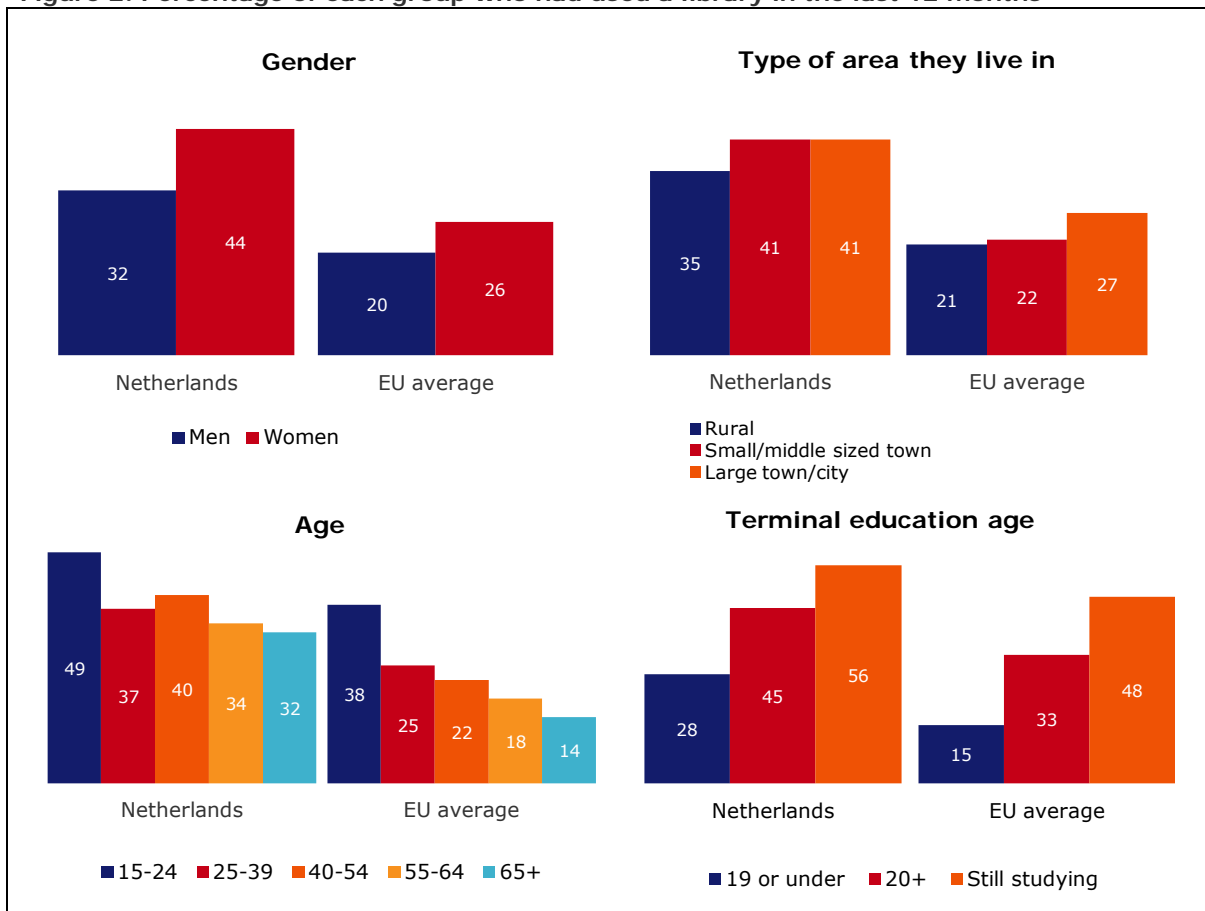
- An estimated 5.3 million adults in the Netherlands, over a third of adults in the Netherlands (38%) had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 3.1 million adults, almost a quarter (22%) of adults in the Netherlands, 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 the Netherlands and across the EU, is shown in Figure 2. In the Netherlands:

- Women (44%) were more likely than men (32%) to have visited a library, in line with the findings across the EU.
- Library usage in the Netherlands in the last 12 months was highest among those aged 15-24 (49%) and lowest among those aged 65 and over (32%). Those aged 25-39 and 40-54 had levels of usage between the latter groups (37% and 40% respectively). Library usage in the Netherlands was higher for all age groups than the EU average.

- Library use was higher in large towns and cities (41%) and smaller towns (41%) than in rural areas (35%).
- Library use was higher among those who were still studying – over half (56%) of this group had used a public library in the last 12 months, higher than the EU average.
- Library use was also slightly higher among those born within the Netherlands – 39% of this group had used a library, compared with 36% of those born outside of the Netherlands. This pattern was different to the EU as a whole, with library usage lower (22%) among those born in the EU, than those born outside the EU (37%).

**Figure 2: 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: NL – All adults (1004), Men (482), Women (522), 15-24 (148), 25-39 (185), 40-54 (330), 55-64 (179), 65+ (162), Large town/city (221), Small town (316), Rural area (466), Finished education 19 or under (439), 20 or over (404), Still studying (131). 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).

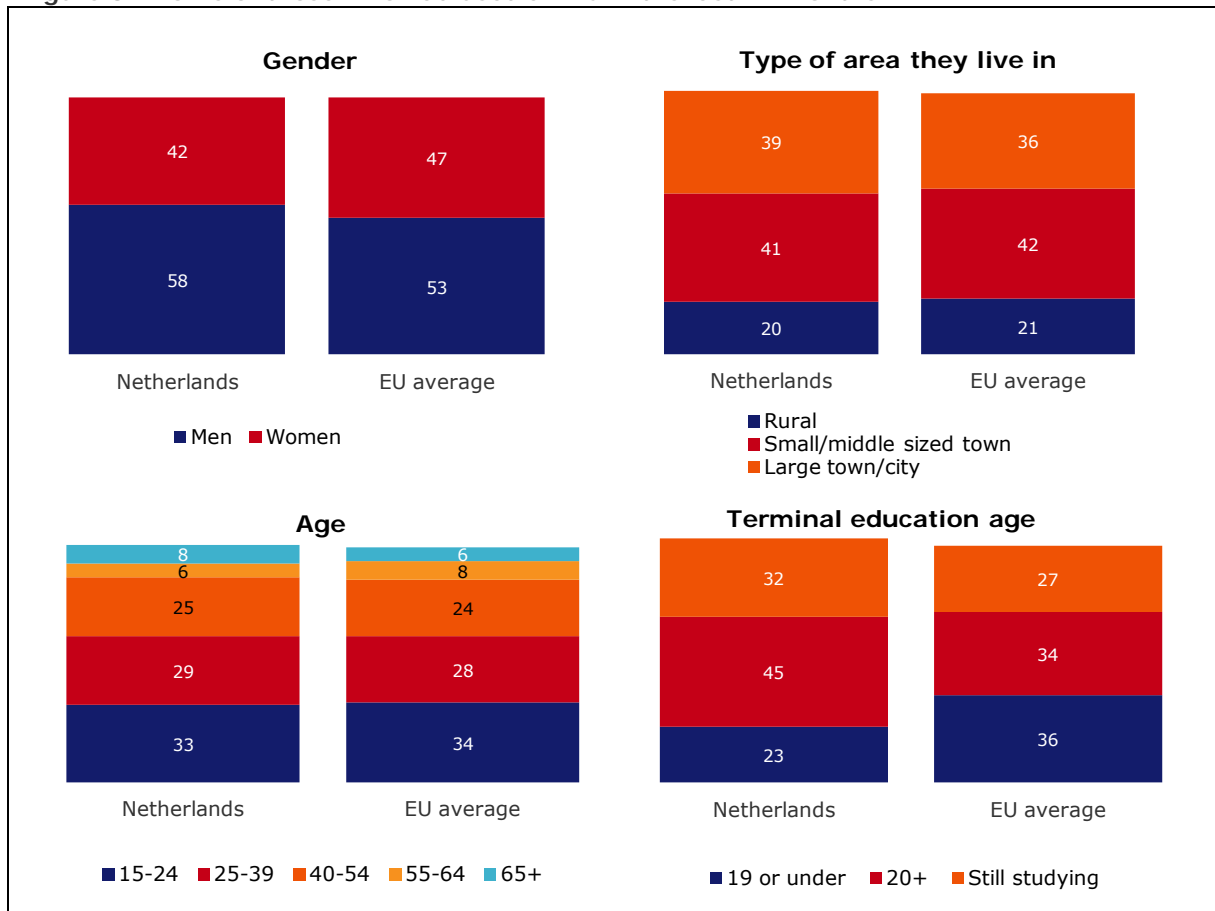
The profile of library users in the Netherlands, compared with across the EU, was:

- 42% of library users in the Netherlands were men, 58% women, the same proportions as the EU average
- Users in the Netherlands had a slightly older age profile than the EU average – 19% were aged 15-24, 20% aged 25-39, 32% aged 40-54, 14% aged 55-64 and 15% 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+.

Under a fifth (14%) of those who had visited a library in the Netherlands in the last 12 months used a PAC, which is exactly the same as the EU average. When those who had not used a PAC were asked why this was, although the majority said they had no need to because they had a computer/internet at home, a small minority of 2% 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 6% of adults in the Netherlands had used PACs in the last 12 months, higher than the average of 4% of adults across the EU countries. This is estimated to be around 0.8 million adults within the Netherlands. PAC users in the Netherlands were more likely than the EU average to be men, to be aged 15-24, to live in a small or middle-sized town, and to have stopped full-time education aged 20 or over, as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: 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 NL (523), EU (11716).

Frequency of PAC use in the Netherlands was very similar to the EU average. 22% of PAC users in the Netherlands made use of PACs at least once a week (EU average 23%), with 29% doing so once to three times a month (EU average 29%). 48% of users in the Netherlands had used PACs once every three months or less often (EU average 47%).

The qualitative research found that libraries communicated information about ICT services via their usual communications channels including their websites, local magazines, newsletters and by the library staff

when entering a public library. However, there was a reluctance to 'push' visitors into using ICT services and staff explained that they were not proactively stimulating visitors to go digital.

*"We use the usual communication channels. We provide students with information during their introduction period and we have newsletters. We also give information on our website and in flyers. But we do not constantly talk about Wi-Fi for example. We have it for a long time already and do not keep on pointing that out to our visitors." (ICT manager)*

*"We make sure all facilities are present and the network runs smoothly, when visitors have questions or need help we are there to help, however it's their own responsibility to ask for help." (ICT Manager)*

Users' motivations to use ICT in libraries were varied and included being able to concentrate better on working in the library than at home or in a busier university library, taking part in courses or training in digital or social media, and socializing.

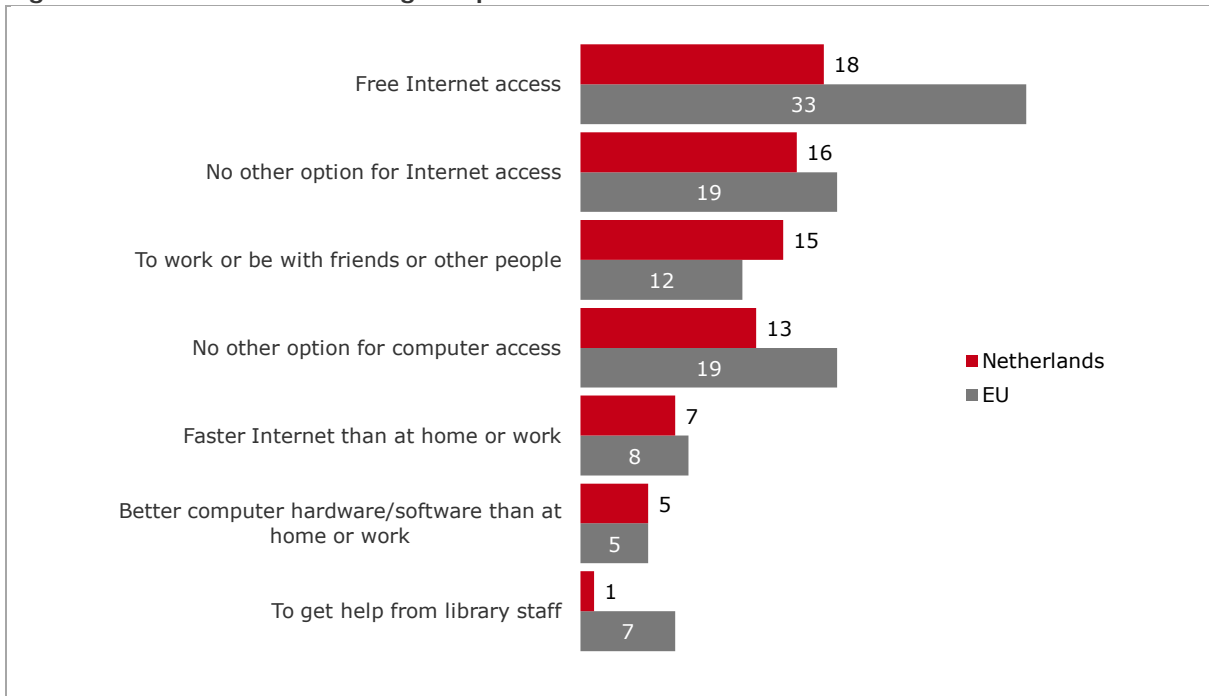
*"I do not come here very often, but when I come I come here to study. In the library of the university it is very busy. Here it is nice and quiet." (User, male, 25)*

*"I just finished a five-week course about social media. My children are using Facebook and I just wanted to know what it was and how it is used." (Recent user, male, 66)*

### **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. PAC users in the Netherlands were less likely than those in other countries to say that it was because of free internet access (18% Netherlands compared with 33% across the EU), or they have no other option for computer access (13% in the Netherlands compared with 19% across the EU). PAC users in the Netherlands were just as likely as the EU average to say that they used PACs for the better computer hardware or software than at home (5%).

**Figure 4: 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- NL (523); 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 the Netherlands, 5% of PAC users said that they had no other options for accessing the internet (compared with 11% across the EU), and a further 5% that there was no other source of free internet for them (compared with 14% across the EU). Overall, it is estimated that 75,000 PAC users in the Netherlands (10% 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 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. Older people were particularly likely to indicate that they did not have any other options - 16% of PAC users aged 55-64 had no alternative internet access, compared with 1% of those aged 15-24.

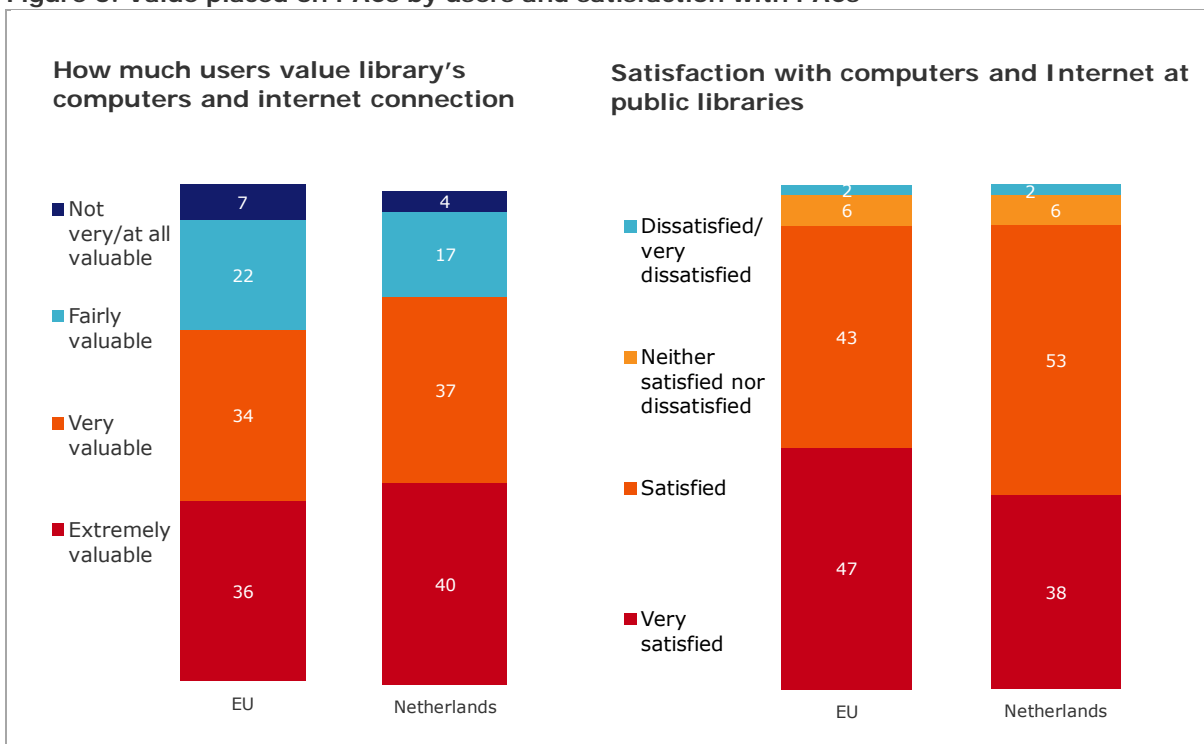
The value placed on the PAC service was slightly higher among users in the Netherlands than the EU average, as shown in Figure 5. Overall, 94% of PAC users in the Netherlands said that the library’s computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Two fifths of PAC users in the Netherlands (40%) said the service was extremely valuable, compared with 36% across the EU.

The library’s computers and internet connection were valued particularly highly in the Netherlands by in rural areas (52% ‘extremely valuable’) and users aged 25-39 (53% ‘extremely valuable’).

Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users, as shown in Figure 5: 91% of users in the Netherlands were satisfied. Users in the Netherlands were less likely to say they

were satisfied with computers and internet at the library than EU users as a whole; 38% of users in the Netherlands said they were very satisfied, compared with just under a half (47%) across the EU.

**Figure 5: 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. NL (523); EU (11716)

In the Netherlands, around three-quarters of PAC users (79%) said that when they go to a library to use a computer, they find a free computer straight away, and a further 16% that they have to wait for no more than 10 minutes. These waiting times are similar to 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).

The qualitative research found that libraries provided computers which ran Windows, as well as a number of library database computers. On the Windows computers Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer and some basic programmes needed to view popular websites (Flash, Adobe and so on) were installed. The library database computers were only used to find materials within the library. In time, these catalogue computers were to be replaced by regular computers which also provided access to the library database using the Internet.

There was variation in the ICT services provided between the central and more regional branches of libraries. All central locations of the libraries offered Wi-Fi networks and special working spots where visitors could work on a laptop. In Amsterdam and Almere (the newly built locations) spaces were created to enable users to work on laptops. There was variation between areas in terms of how up to date software was; in Amsterdam for example they were preparing to switch to Office 2010 but in Zwolle computers were still running Office 2003. The central branches of libraries had an increasing number of

advanced facilities compared to the smaller branches, offering e-readers, e-book and one had recently started offering iPads for use within the library.

The view of library managers was that the number of computers at libraries in central locations was sufficient, but there were not enough PCs at the smaller (older) library locations in the cities. When waiting lines become too long for the ICT facilities managers find creative solutions first before buying new computers, such as creating more spaces for laptops and WiFi, putting a time limit on activities such as playing games, and replacing catalogue computers with PCs that could be used by users for all purposes.

Users were also of the view that the number of available computers at the central library was sufficient, although Saturdays were busier than weekdays and sometimes users had to wait for computers.

*"Weekends are more busy compared to weekdays. When I have to wait for a computer I often get irritated by people who play games the whole day. They should do something about that!" (User, female, 32)*

Overall, users were also happy with the network speed on PCs. The Internet connection was reasonable, with occasional lapses in speed or breaks in the connection. Users noted that the more people who were using the connection at one time, the slower it became.

*"Sometimes when I am mailing the computer shuts down spontaneously. It means I will have to start over again. But I do not want to complain too much because I appreciate it very much that the facilities are available and free to use." (User, female, 39)*

Some users had doubts about the safety and security of the library computers.

*"Sometimes I doubt if the computers are safe. For example with e-banking." (Recent user, male, 66)*

Younger users in particular doubted whether library staff had enough knowledge about computers and safety issues and reported witnessing gaps in security protection on the computers they had used.

*"I also noticed sometimes that you can get access to another system. That should be improved. You are logged in and through a website you can get access to passwords of an email address. That is not very well protected here. Then you can see things of previous users." (User, male, 17)*

## **4. Impressions of public libraries**

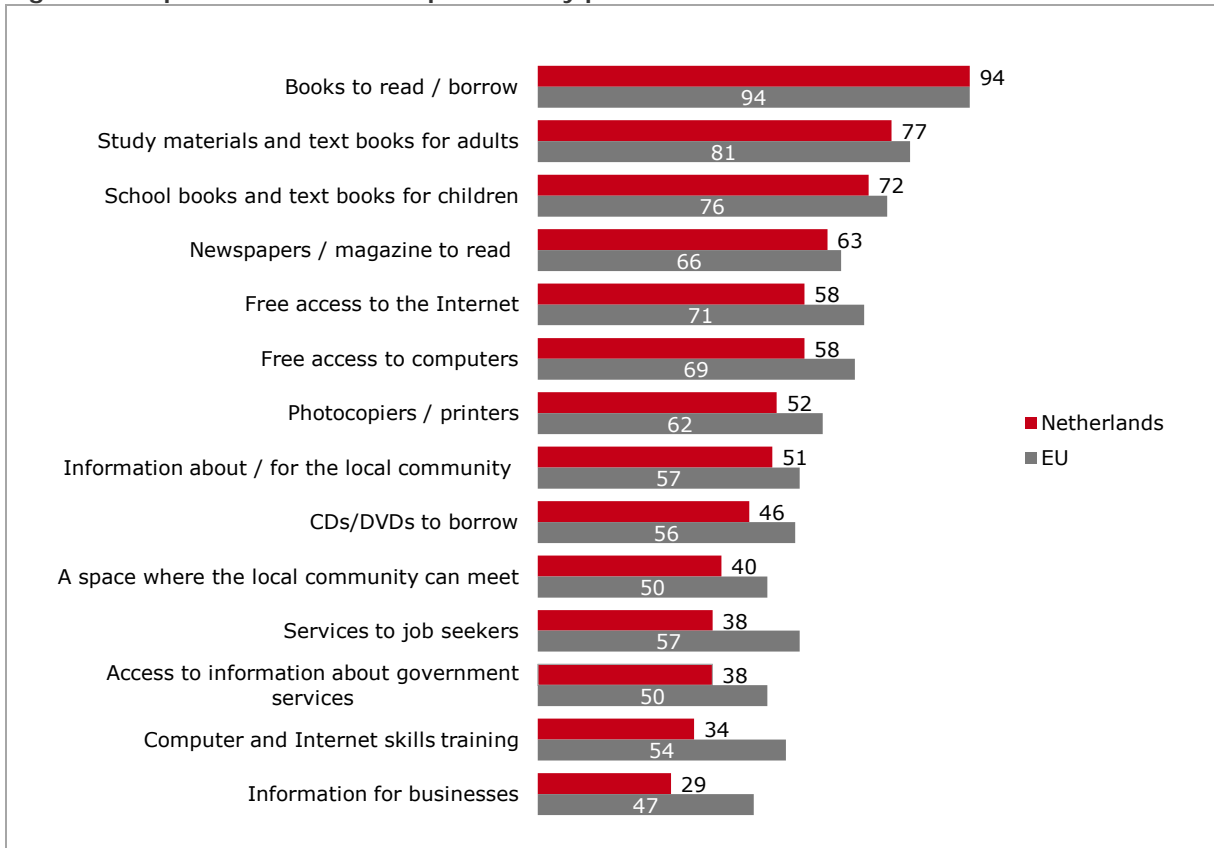
### **4.1 Importance of library services**

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 6 shows the percentage in the Netherlands, 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 94% of users in the Netherlands (the same as across the EU), followed by 'study materials and text books for adults'.

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

**Figure 6: 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 - NL (1386); EU (24253)

Users in the Netherlands were also much less likely than the EU average to rate the provision of computer and Internet skills training as an important service (34% in the Netherlands compared with 54% EU average).

The importance of libraries to children’s education was emphasised among library users in the Netherlands. Providing school books and text books for children was seen as the third most important service among library users in the Netherlands (72% compared with 76% EU average). Apart from having books to read/borrow, library users in the Netherlands rated all services as of less importance compared with the EU average.

In the qualitative research, users were very positive about the library environment in general, describing it as a quiet, well-ordered, colourful and motivating place to work, study or just spend time.

*“The library is a well-ordered library. There is a division for children, a division to study. There is a place for everyone to do what they want without disturbing each other.” (User, female, 39)*



Users explained that being around other people who were working or studying inspired and motivated them to work more than if they studied alone. The social aspect of the library environment was also highlighted, with one user describing her library as fun to spend time in. However occasionally visitors were distracted by people who are talking too loudly or (often homeless) people who are just killing time in the library. Some libraries were also used as a place for young people to spend time and they were reported as making too much noise.

## **4.2 Effectiveness and funding of public libraries**

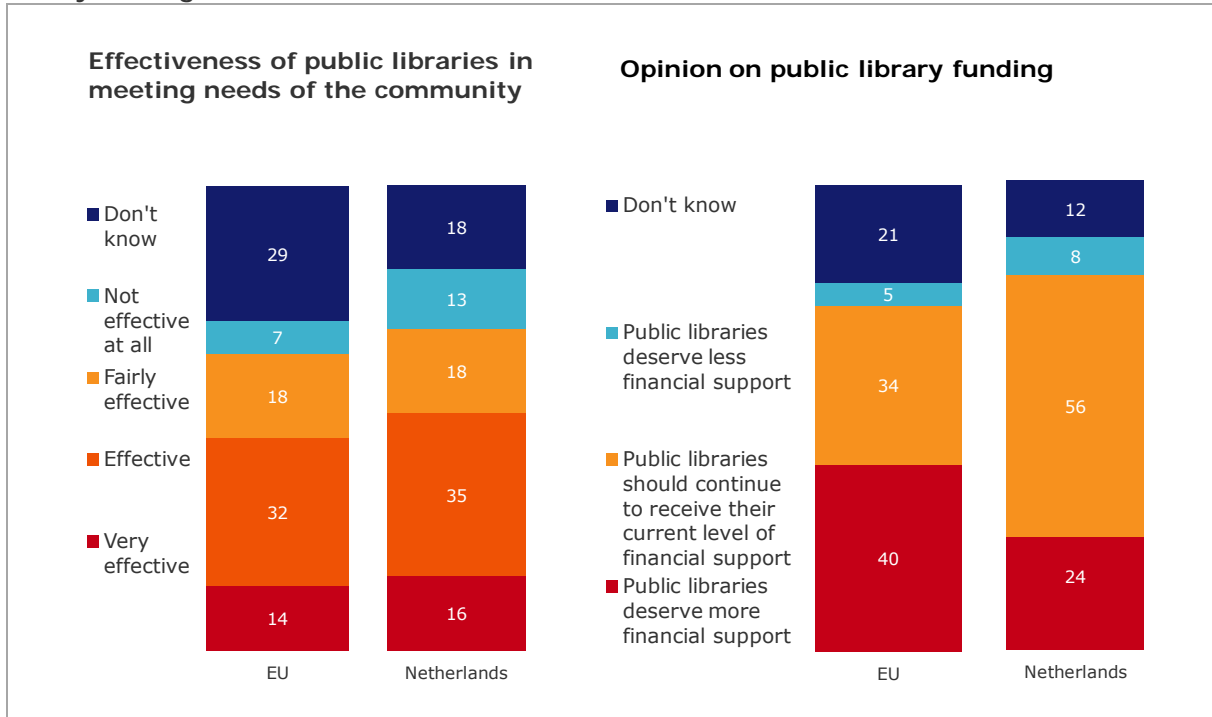
Over two-thirds (69%) of the general public in the Netherlands (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was higher than the average across the 17 EU survey countries of 64%. The proportion saying libraries were 'very effective' was slightly higher in the Netherlands, at 16% against the EU average of 14%.

Library users in the Netherlands were more positive than PAC users when it came to their opinions on the effectiveness of libraries meeting the needs of their local community – 91% of all library users felt they were effective, dropping to 85% among PAC users.

A quarter (24%) of the public in the Netherlands felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was considerably lower than the average of all 17 EU countries (40%). The majority felt that the funding should continue as at present (56%) and one in ten did not express an opinion (12%). Only 8% of the public in the Netherlands felt that public libraries deserve *less* financial support. This is perhaps reflective of the level of cuts to public library services that have already been experienced in the Netherlands; in 2012 30% of libraries were already affected by cuts, consequences of which are the closing of branches, diminishing opening hours, less staff and smaller collections.

Not surprisingly, library users and PAC users were more likely than non-users to say that libraries deserve more financial support – 31% of all library users, and 34% of PAC users, were in favour of more financial support for libraries.

**Figure 7: Effectiveness of public libraries in meeting community needs and opinion on public library funding**



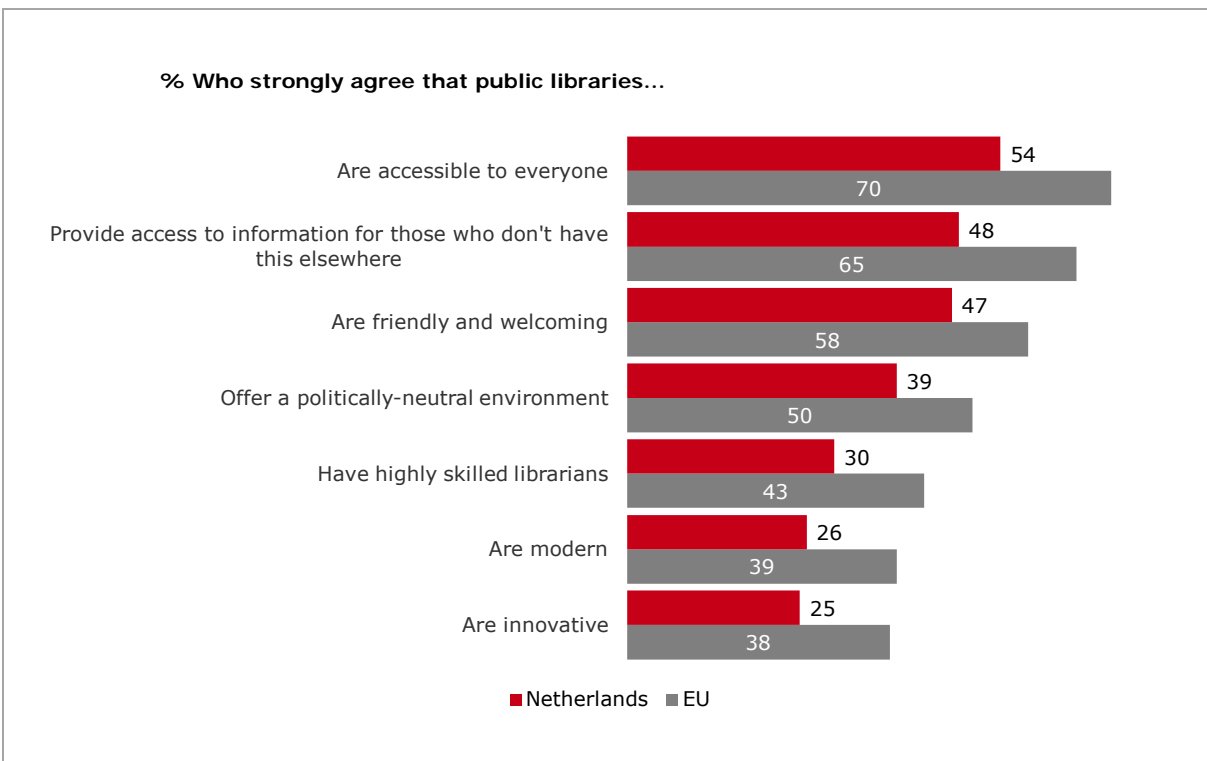
Source: Omnibus survey- Q6 How effective do you think your local public library is at meeting the needs of your community? & Q7 Which of the following statements represents most closely your opinion regarding the current funding for public libraries?.

Base: All adults - NL (1004); 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 8 shows the proportions in the Netherlands and EU who strongly agreed with each of these statements. Library users in the Netherlands were less likely than the EU average to strongly agree with all of these statements, with the biggest differences from the EU average for: 'Are accessible to everyone (54% Netherlands compared with 70% EU) 'Provide access to information for those who don't have this elsewhere' (48% Netherlands compared with 65% EU).

**Figure 8: Perceptions of public libraries**



Source: Library survey- C29 How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements..  
 Base: All library users. NL (1386); 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.

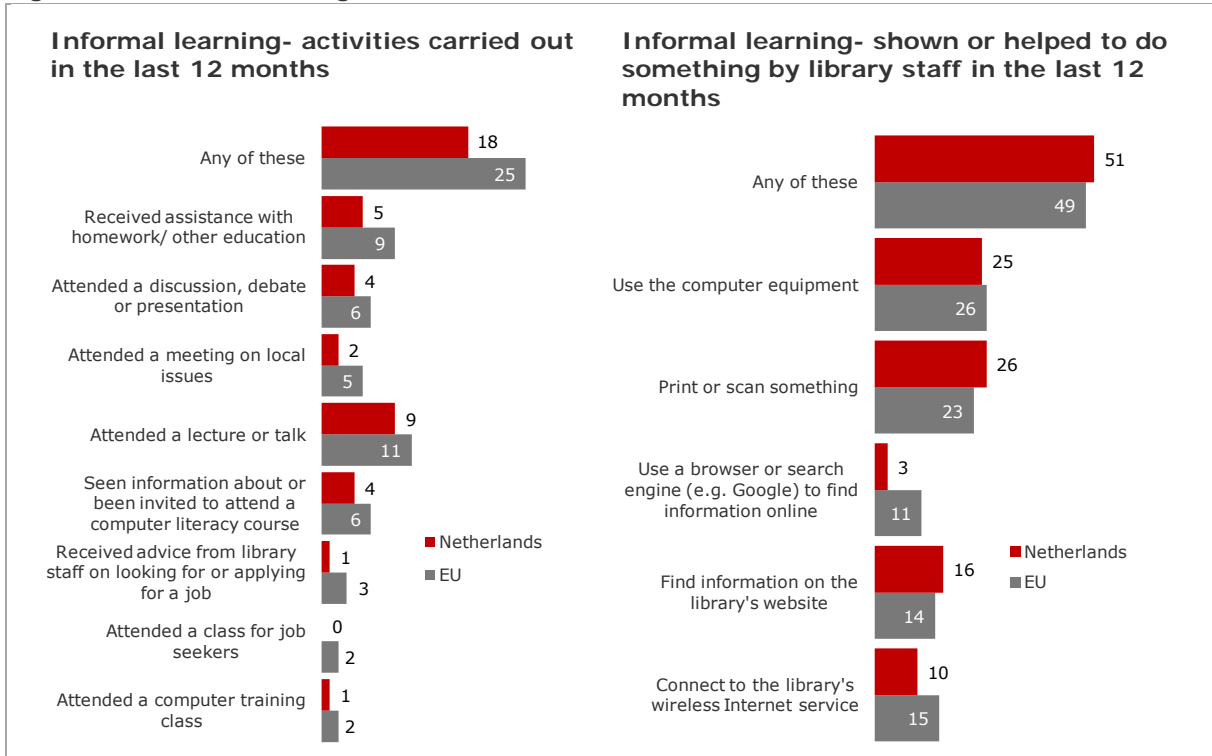
Overall, in the Netherlands, 18% had taken part in one of the educational activities in libraries asked about in the last 12 months, which was below the EU average of 25%.

Engagement levels in all educational activities in libraries tended to be lower in the Netherlands than for the EU as a whole (Figure 9), including, among others:

- Attending a meeting on local issues (2% vs. EU average of 5%)
- Receiving assistance with homework/other education (5% vs. EU average of 9%).

One per cent of library users in the Netherlands reported that they had attended a computer training class in the last 12 months – slightly below the EU average (2%). This means that c.48, 000 adults in the Netherlands attended a computer training class in a library in the last 12 months.

**Figure 9: 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 - NL (1386); EU (24253). C17- All PAC users – NL (523); EU (11716).

As Figure 9 shows, public library staff play an important role in assisting library users in informal learning. Overall, half (51%) of PAC users in the Netherlands 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 printing or scanning, using the computer and finding information on the library's website.

In the qualitative research users were very positive about the support they had received from staff, who were described as visible, friendly and helpful.

*"The staff is very helpful and friendly. They even give you coffee and tea for free. What else do you want? If you want to know something they are there for you. If you come here regularly it also has a social function. You recognize each other and with some of them you chat." (Recent user, male, 66)*

Even in cases where (usually younger) users felt they knew more about ICT than the staff, they found the staff to be helpful.

*"They are very helpful. Maybe they don't have as much knowledge as I have, but they always try to get the best out of it for you and if they do not know they will ask a colleague or the helpdesk." (User, male, 29)*

Users mostly asked for help with technical problems, such as a printer that did not work.

In terms of more specific training, library staff explained that they had shifted from offering training and courses to being more of an information centre where anybody could look up information independently.

*"Initially the library was teaching the public to learn about using PCs and the Internet. But now it developed into an information institute where the public can find information on the Internet and in platforms and e-files created by the library. The aim of the library is to provide neutral and reliable information that helps the public to form a well-balanced opinion on a certain subject. It helps citizens to be more independent." (ICT manager)*

Although library managers state that they had developed courses for special target groups, some users were not aware of this. They felt that libraries did not offer any advanced courses and that the level of computer knowledge was too diverse within participants of courses, as for some participants the course was too easy while for others it was too difficult. There was a suggestion among users the library should define specific target groups and develop special courses that suited each group's needs.

*"In the description of the course they say that you need a certain basic level. You should have worked with computers before. But they don't check it, so the levels of the different students vary so much that for the more advanced users the course is a waste of money. The level becomes too low when you admit people without basic knowledge." (User, female, 73)*

Some frequent ICT workshops and training courses that libraries offered included a beginners course on working with a computer; e-books; an iPad workshop; MS Office; online banking; Photoshop; Dreamweaver and a Flash workshop. Some libraries offered special courses for specific target groups such as those aged 55 and over and children or immigrants.

Most respondents knew that libraries offered access to many forms of information, however they tended not to be aware of the more diverse courses available such as Joomla, Flash, Digital Camera, Photoshop, Prezi and WordPress courses. When told about these courses in interviews users responded enthusiastically and expressed a wish to participate in such courses in the future, suggesting improved communications on these courses would be beneficial. Most respondents were not aware of the opportunity to borrow e-readers and e-books.

## **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.

A quarter (25%) of PAC users in the Netherlands had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, slightly below the EU average of 30%. This represents an estimated 0.2 million PAC users in the Netherlands who had used PAC for employment related activity.

Overall, 7% of PAC users in the Netherlands had used a PAC to apply for a job (either in the Netherlands or in another EU country) in the last 12 months - this represents approximately 50,000 adults in the

Netherlands. Of those respondents who applied for a job through PAC, 30% said that they were successful. This means that in all 2% of PAC users in the Netherlands – or an estimated 15000 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 10; six per cent of PAC users in the Netherlands indicated that they had been shown or helped to do some employment-related PAC activity (compared with an EU average of 11%).

**Figure 10: 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		
%	NL	EU	%	NL	EU
<b>Any listed below</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Any listed below</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>
Find information about searching and/or applying for jobs	14	14	Improve skills needed in your current job	2	4
Search for jobs	12	13	How to write a CV	2	5
Write a CV or covering letter	11	12	How to develop skills needed to obtain a job	1	2
Improve skills needed in your current job	5	11	How to look for a job online (such as finding a recruitment company, searching for information about an employer)	2	3
Apply for jobs in this country	7	10	How to apply for a job online	*	2
Search for information about an employer	6	8	How to look for and apply for jobs in other EU countries	*	1
Find a recruitment company	4	5			
Use spread sheet/data	3	3			
Search for jobs in other EU countries	1	2			
Apply for jobs in other EU countries	1	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. NL (523); EU (11716).

\*= less than 0.5%

PAC users were asked whether they had used PACs for a range of business-related activities in the last 3 months. A fifth (20%) of users in the Netherlands had used a PAC for finding information related to a business they worked in, which was the same proportion as the EU average. Nine per cent of PAC users in the Netherlands had used a PAC for participating in professional networks, slightly above the EU average. Five per cent in the Netherlands, compared with the 4% EU average, had used a PAC to find ways or places to sell their own products or goods.

The qualitative research found that employment support was provided by libraries that worked closely with UWV (Employee Insurance Implementing Agency), which helped clients to write application letters

and referred them to the library to use a PC to write the letter of application. In addition, courses were offered specifically designed to develop users skills in applying for jobs.

*"We offer a course to train your skills to apply for a job. Among these skills are digital skills." (ICT manager)*

The calm environment of a library helped users carry out activities related to business and employment that they would have been too distracted to do at home.

*"Last month I have been here almost every day because I just finished my studies and I am writing a business plan to start my own company. I go here because I get distracted when I am working at home" (User, female, 32)*

## **7. E-government and active citizenship**

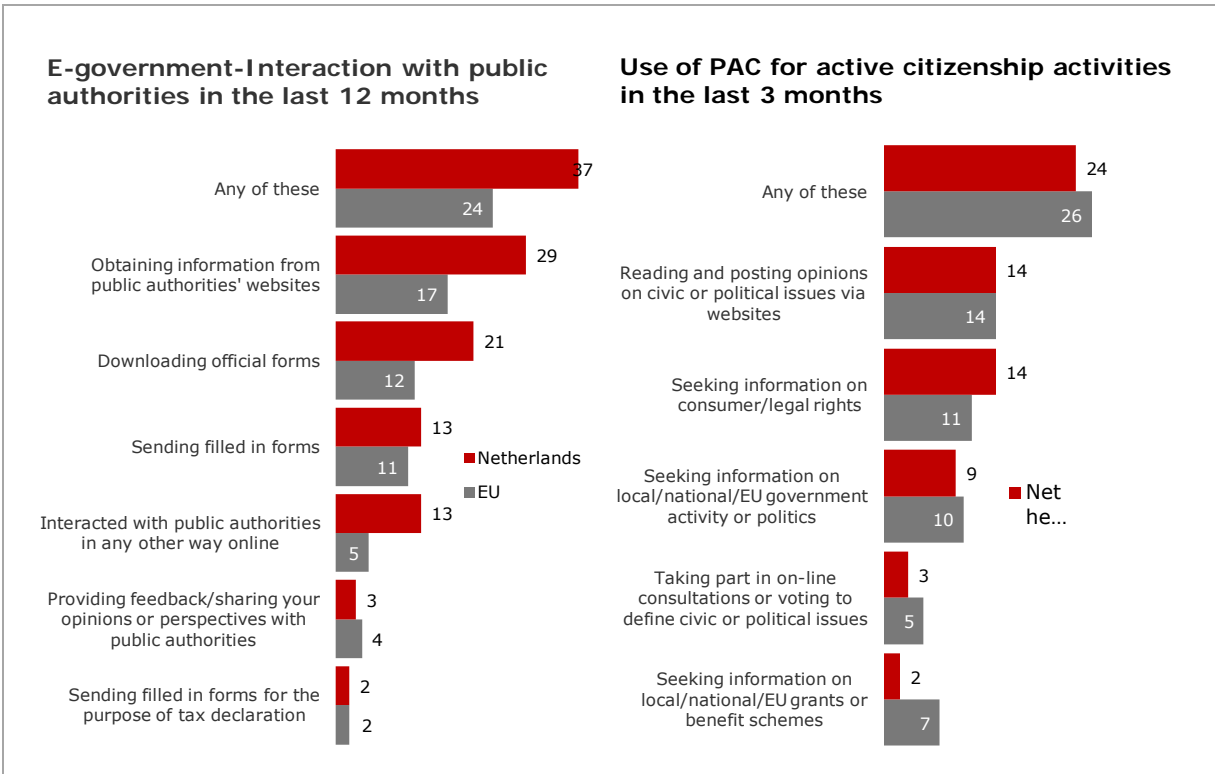
As part of the 'Connecting Europe' agenda, public libraries represent a network of public digital access points which can assist in the effective delivery of access to e-government. Computer users were asked about their interaction with public authorities using PACs, including obtaining information from 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 the Netherlands is much higher than the EU average - 62% of adults in the Netherlands used the internet in the last 12 months to interact with public authorities, compared with 41% across the EU. Citizens in the Netherlands were also much more likely than the EU average to use the Internet to obtain information from public authorities' web sites (58% compared with 35%).

The library survey found that over a third (37%) of PAC users in the Netherlands had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, higher than the EU average of one in four (24%), but considerably below the Eurostat finding for all adults in the Netherlands. PAC users in the Netherlands were more likely than the EU average to have used PACs to download official forms (21% in the Netherlands compared with 12% EU), and more likely to obtain information from public authorities' websites (29% Netherlands compared with 17% EU).

Computer users were also asked about their use of PACs for activities related to civic engagement and active citizenship (Figure 11). 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, a quarter (24%) of PAC users in the Netherlands had used PAC for engagement activities in the past 3 months, lower than the average for users across the EU (26%). The two most common community engagement activities were reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (14% Netherlands compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on consumer/legal rights (14% Netherlands compared with 11% EU).

**Figure 11: 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. NL (523); EU (11716)

In the qualitative research library managers reported specific courses offered to help people with e-government tasks, particularly for groups such as immigrants and older people.

*"All government communication is being digitalized nowadays. For people who do not know how to use a computer this becomes problematic. We organize special courses for example for immigrants and older people. We have an Internet banking course and a course how to use DigiD." (ICT manager)*

## 8. Impacts

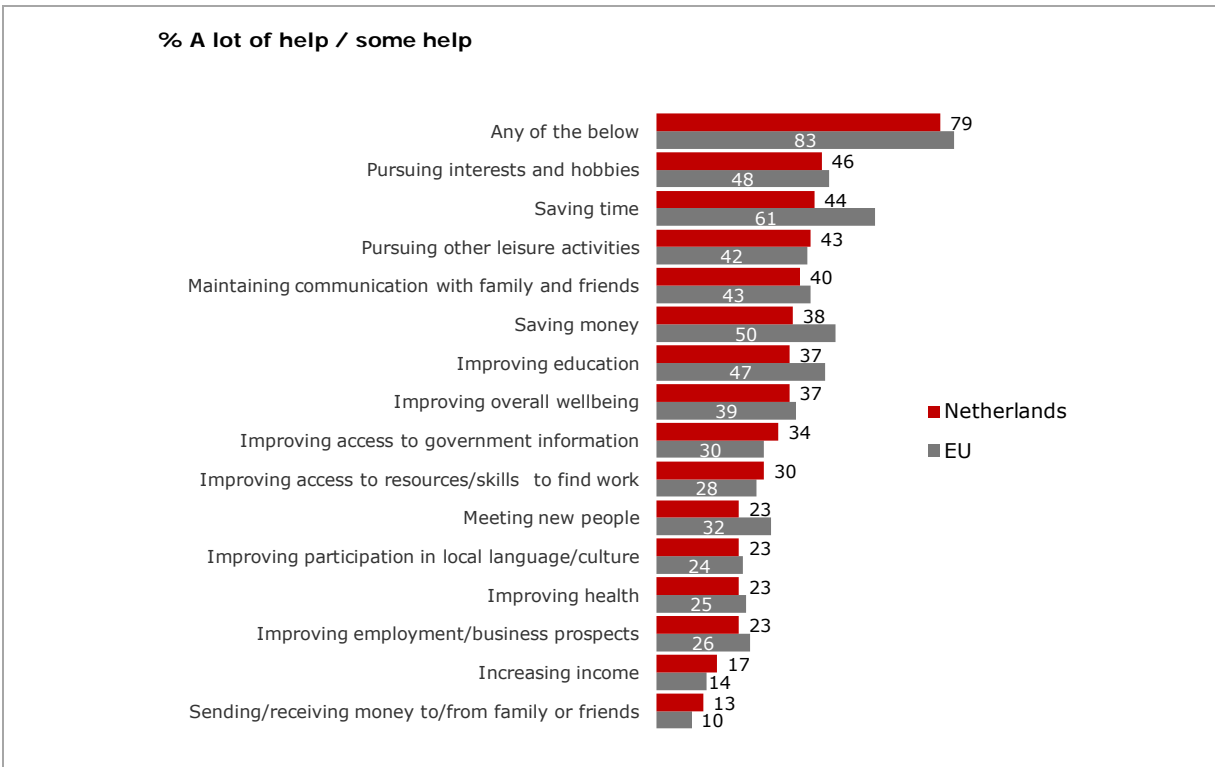
A key aim of this research was to evaluate the impact of increased digital engagement through PAC use for users. This was assessed by asking PAC users how helpful using computers at public libraries had been for them in the last 12 months, across a wide range of areas including saving time and money,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

Overall 79% of PAC users in the Netherlands said their PAC use had been helpful to them in at least one of the areas asked about, which although lower than the average across the EU (83%) represents approximately 0.6 million people in the Netherlands.



Figure 12 shows the proportions saying PAC use had been helpful in each area, in the Netherlands and across the EU.

**Figure 12: 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- NL (523); EU (11716).

As well as the general area of saving time (44% Netherlands, 61% EU), PAC use was rated as helpful across a range of leisure and social areas such as pursuing interests and hobbies (46% Netherlands, 48% EU) and maintaining communication with family and friends (40% Netherlands, 43% EU). Over a third of PAC users (38%) in the Netherlands said PAC was helpful in saving money, compared with half (50%) of PAC users across the EU, which represents an estimated 270,000 PAC users in the Netherlands.

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

- 270,000 people to improve their education
- 220,000 people to improve their access to resources necessary to find work
- 250,000 people to improve their access to government information services
- 170,000 people to improve their employment or business prospects
- 120,000 people to increase their income.

ICT services in public libraries were found to offer numerous benefits to users in the qualitative research. As discussed previously, users felt the library ICT services had helped them with learning, working, educating themselves, concentrating and socializing.

Public libraries not only provide access to all online public information, they also provide access to online information that, outside the library, needs to be paid for (such as scientific databases and consumers' associations) and could be used to self-educate library users in all kinds of topics.

*"In this era people will be ageing. This makes it necessary that good information on health is available. We have been asked by a general practitioner to make e-files on health subjects like diabetes and prevention feeding." (ICT manager)*

Users also reported having developed skills in areas such as digital photography through the more formal training courses provided by libraries.

*"I can do so much with photos nowadays. I had a digital camera for a long time already, but I thought the number of buttons and functions on the camera was excessive. For me only the push button was interesting. Through the course I have discovered the possibilities with very beautiful results." (User, female, 73)*

Respondents held various opinions about the way ICT has changed their lives. Some thought knowledge about ICT is inevitable in life nowadays, but it did not add much to the quality of their lives. Others thought it did add to their quality of life and made new things possible, allowing them to communicate internationally with friends and family and save time by being able to learn without face-to-face interaction.

*"Due to the Internet my world became bigger. I use Skype to call abroad, I chat, I use Facebook. Keeping up contact with family abroad is easier." (User, male, 25)*

*"With my study it's unthinkable to do something without Internet. Everything is available through Internet, for example lectures: I don't even have to go to school. So I can focus on my study instead of having to travel all the way to school." (User, male, 18)*