

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

Final report

March 2013

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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 Chirarov	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
María 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	
Ian Watson	Adult & Community Services Directorate, Lancashire County Council	United Kingdom
Barbro Wigell-Ryynänen	Ministry of Education and Culture	Finland
Branimira Vezhdarova	Glob@I Libraries – Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Anna Kåring Wagman	Swedish Library Association	Sweden
Helen Williams	CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales	United Kingdom
Dr George Zachos	Council of Libraries and Archives at the Ministry of Education	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 Poland and compares the results to the EU total.

The public library landscape

- The desk research estimates that there are 8,261 public libraries in Poland, which equates to 2.2 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 83% of public libraries in Poland.

Library and PAC usage

- An estimated 6.6 million adults in Poland, a fifth of adults in the country (20%) had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 0.5 million adults in Poland, 1% 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 Poland, just like the EU average, were more likely to be men and to be aged 15-24; they were much more likely than the EU average to live in a city or large town, and were more likely than the EU average to be still studying.
- 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 Poland, compared with users across the EU, were much more likely to have mentioned faster internet access than at home or work as a reason for using computers in public libraries.
- It is estimated that overall 85,000 PAC users in Poland had nowhere else to access the internet, or to access the internet free of charge.
- The value placed on the PAC service was higher among users in Poland than the EU average. Overall, 99% of PAC users in Poland said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Over four fifths of PAC users in Poland (85%) said the service was extremely or very valuable, significantly higher than the EU average (70%).
- Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users: 95% of users in Poland were satisfied.

Perceptions and impacts of public libraries

- Around eight out of ten library users in Poland considered “School books’, ‘Free access to the internet’ and ‘free access to computers’ important (compared with around seven out of ten library users across Europe).
- Just over half (55%) of the general public in Poland (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%.
- Over a third (36%) of the public in Poland felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was slightly lower than the EU average (40%).
- Overall 86% of PAC users in Poland said their PAC use had delivered at least one impact for them, slightly higher than the average across the EU (83%) and representing approximately 0.4 million people in Poland.
- Library users in Poland were more likely than the EU average to strongly agree that public libraries are ‘Friendly and welcoming’ (69% Poland compared with 58% EU), ‘Have highly skilled librarians’ (58% Poland compared with 43% EU), ‘Offer a politically-neutral environment’ (57% Poland compared with 50% EU), and ‘Are innovative’ (44% Poland, 38% EU).

Informal and non-formal learning

- In Poland 13% of library users had taken part in an educational activity in a library in the last 12 months, which was below the EU average of 25%.

Employment and use of PACs for business

- Around a fifth (21%) of PAC users in Poland 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 95,000 PAC users in Poland who had used PAC for employment related activity.
- An estimated 28,000 PAC users in Poland 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 around one in seven PAC users in Poland (14%) had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, below the EU average of one in four (24%). PAC users in Poland were less likely than the EU average to have used PACs to obtain information from public authorities’ websites (10% Poland compared with 17% EU) and less likely to download official forms (7% in Poland compared with 12% EU).
- Overall, three in ten PAC users in Poland (31%) had used PAC for civic engagement activities in the past 3 months, slightly higher 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 (20% Poland compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on local/national/EU government activity (14% Poland compared with 10% 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.

The Global Libraries programme of the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation is currently working in five EU countries: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania. In Poland Global Libraries supports the Library Development Program, managed by the Information Society Development Foundation (FRSI) and supported by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation. This project works primarily in rural areas.

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 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.

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.

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 1,000 members of the public aged 15+ in Poland (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 Poland, 700 interviews were conducted with people who had not used Public Access Computers (PACs) in libraries (12,537 across the 17 countries) and 700 with those who had (11,716 across the 17 countries). The interviews in Poland were conducted in 38 libraries which were selected and contacted with help from a representative of the Poland Library Development Program. 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 Poland 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 Poland 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 Poland are *included* in the EU average, which has the effect of lessening the statistical power of comparisons between the Poland 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 Poland and are presented in terms of estimated numbers.

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)

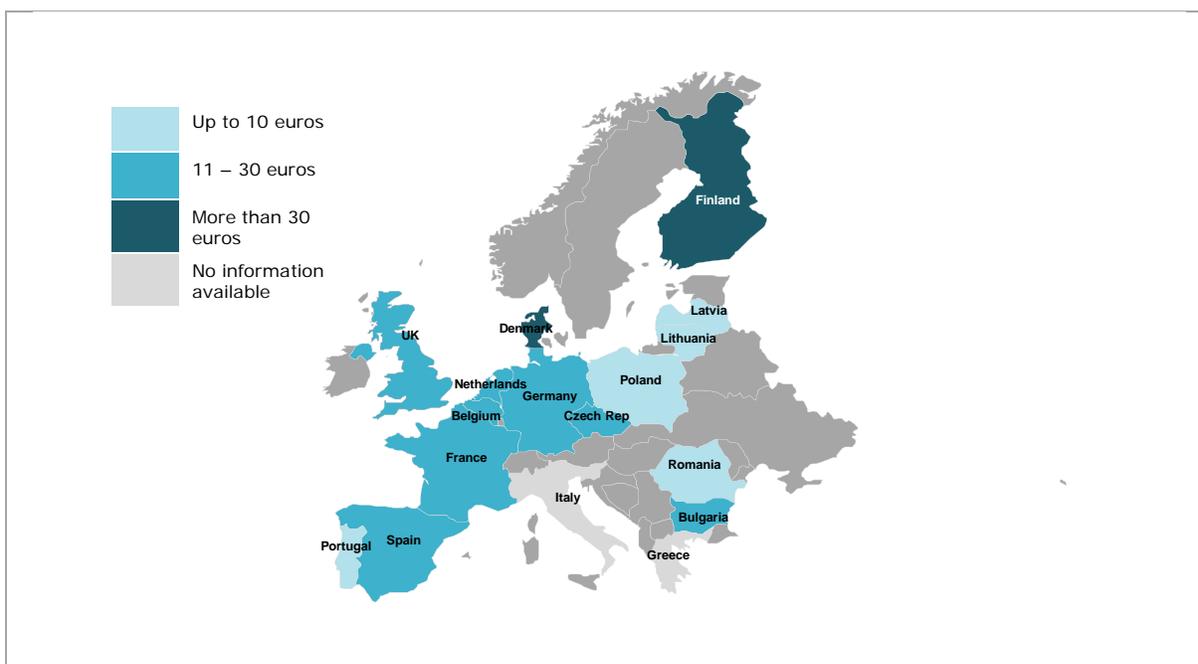
2. The public library landscape and internet provision

There are 8,261 public libraries in Poland (as of 2012)⁶, which equates to 2.2 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 public libraries in Poland is slowly decreasing, caused by a constant reduction of government and local budgets.

Public libraries in Poland are funded both by the government and local authorities with most of the expenditure being financed from local authority budgets (93%) compared with only 8% from government, emphasizing the importance of the regional policy and budgets.

Annual public spending on libraries per capita in Poland at c.8 Euros (32 PLN) was below the average across the EU, as shown in the map below:

Figure 1: Annual spending on libraries per capita



Source: TNS desk research

Computer access is offered by 83% of public libraries in Poland. The proportion of public libraries with internet access in Poland is 78%.

Eurostat data (2011) for Internet access at home shows that the level in Poland is lower than the average level in Europe, with 67% 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 Poland than in other countries.

⁶ Source: Culture in 2010, Central Statistical Office

3. Library and PAC usage

3.1 Access to libraries and PACs

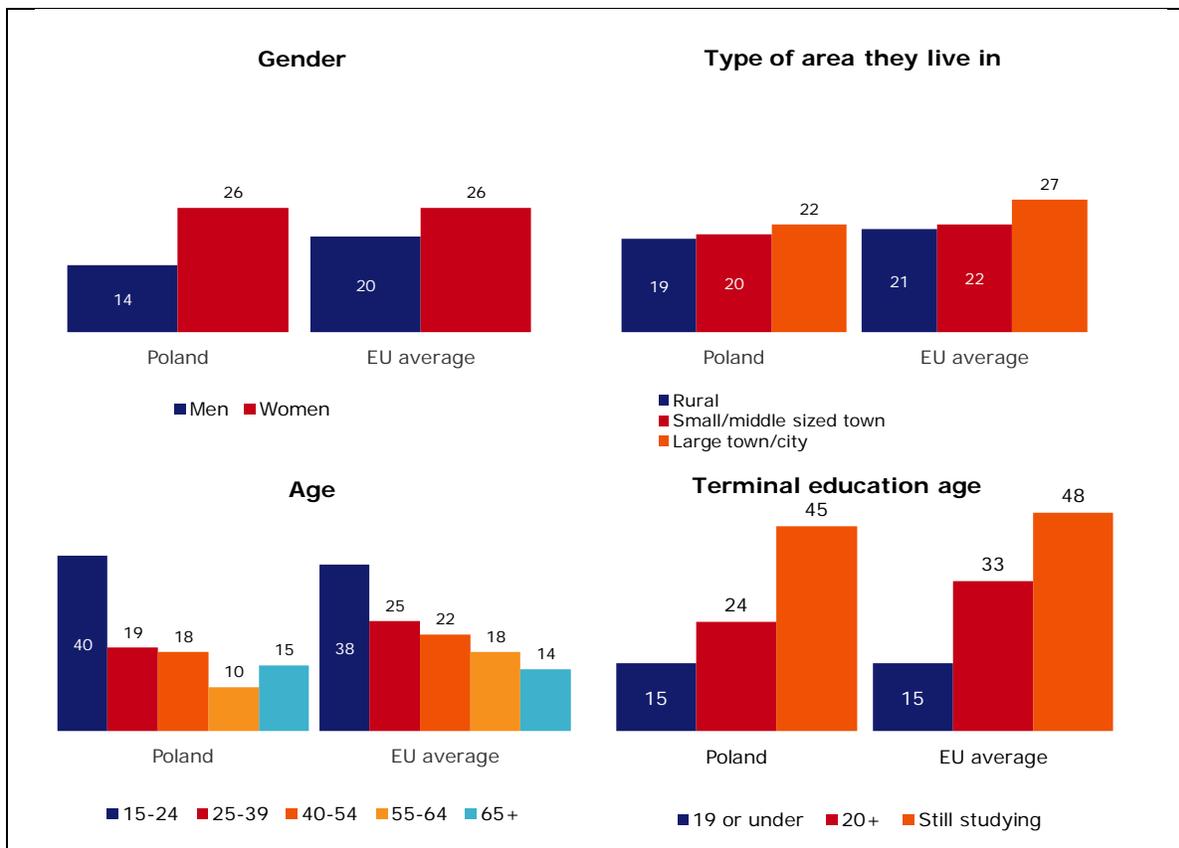
The general public survey found that library usage in Poland was slightly below the EU average.

- An estimated 6.6 million adults in Poland, a fifth of adults in Poland (20%) 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 million adults, just over a tenth (12%) of adults in Poland, had used a library at least once a month, similar to the EU average of 14%.

The prevalence of library use in the last 12 months, by different groups in Poland and across the EU, is shown in Figure 2. In Poland:

- Women (26%) were more likely than men (14%) to have visited a library, in line with the findings across the EU.
- Library usage in Poland was highest among those aged 15-24 (40%) and in line with the EU average for this age group. Usage in Poland among other age groups, however, was lower than the EU average (in Poland 19% of those aged 25-39, 18% of those aged 40-54 and 10% of those aged 55-64 had visited a library in the last 12 months)
- Library use was similar across large towns and cities (22%), smaller towns (20%) and rural areas (19%).
- Library use was higher among those who were still studying – 45% of this group had used a public library in the last 12 months, only slightly lower than the EU average (48%).

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: Poland – All adults (1000), Men (477), Women (523), 15-24 (171), 25-39 (272), 40-54 (220), 55-64 (193), 65+ (144), Large town/city (295), Small town (325), Rural area (380), Finished education 19 or under (569), 20 or over (264), Still studying (111), 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 Poland, compared with across the EU, was:

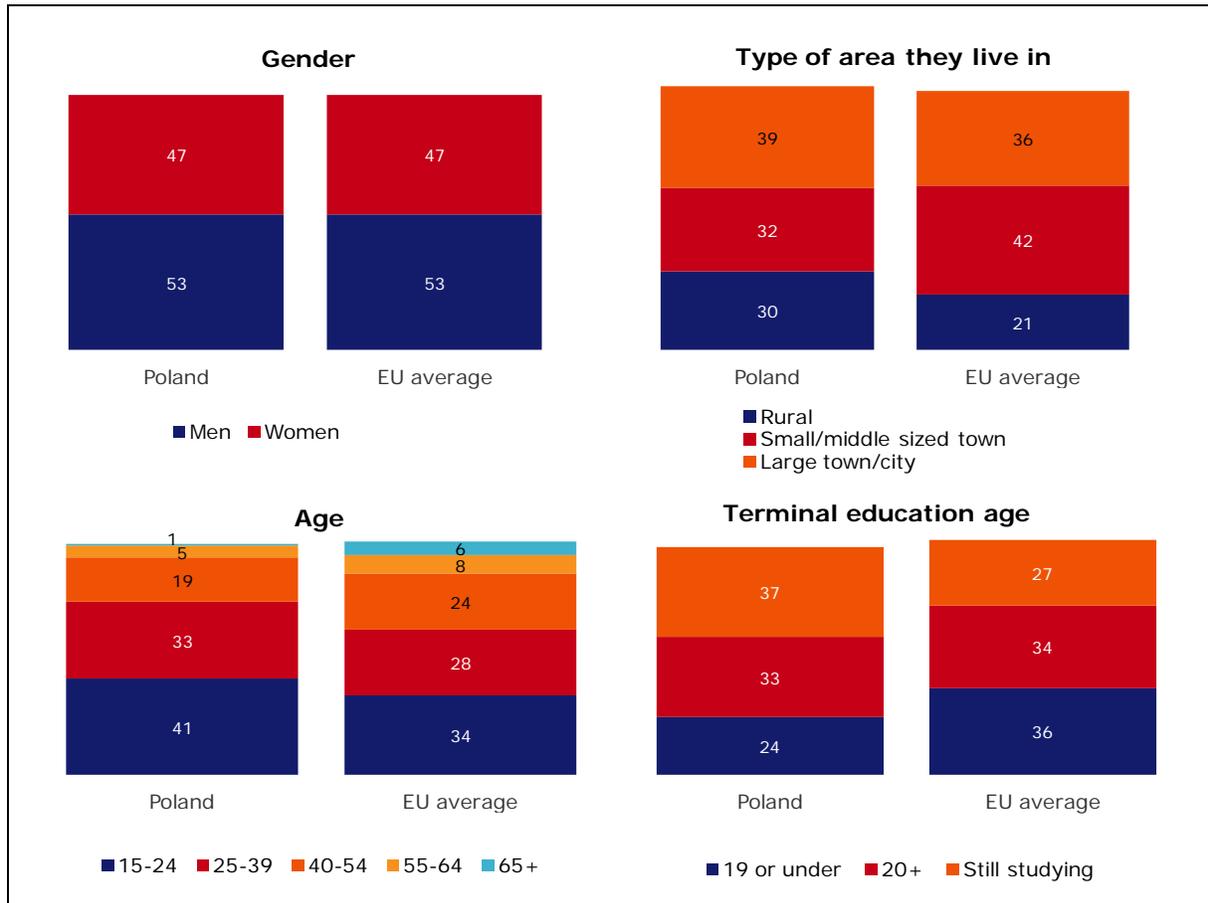
- 33% of library users in Poland were men, 67% women, more skewed to women than the EU average (42% men, 58% women)
- Users in Poland had a younger age profile than the EU average – 34% were aged 15-24, 26% aged 25-39, 20% aged 40-54, 9% aged 55-64 and 11% aged 65+; compared with the EU average of 25% aged 15-24, 26% aged 25-39, 25% aged 40-54, 12% aged 55-64 and 12% aged 65+.

Only 7% of those who had visited a library in Poland in the last 12 months used a PAC, half the EU average of 14%. When those who had not used a PAC were asked why this was, although the majority (77%) said they had no need to because they had a computer/internet at home, a significant minority of 6% 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 1% of adults in Poland 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 0.5 million adults within Poland.

PAC users in Poland, just like the EU average, were more likely to be men, and to be aged 15-24. In Poland, PAC users were also more likely to be still studying, 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 Poland (700), EU (11716).

Just under a half of users in Poland (46%) had used PACs once every three months or less often, which is on a par with the EU average (47%). 15% of PAC users in Poland made use of PACs at least once a week, compared with 23% across the EU, with 37% doing so once to three times a month (compared with 29% across the EU).

In the qualitative research, library managers described a variety of ways in which they had worked to increase ICT usage rates and meet the needs of the people they served. Information and promotional campaigns were among the more formal methods used, whereby library managers placed advertisements in local media (press, radio, and the internet) for upcoming training or workshops. Information posters were put up in library buildings and in smaller towns librarians placed information on poster pillars and in shops. Buzz marketing was also used in smaller towns, whereby employees would encourage inhabitants by phone or through social contacts to make use of ICT services.

“You know we try to get through to our readers via different web pages, many citizens find out from local newspapers, which publish articles about past and future events, we

also invite over the phone, we have phone numbers to our regular senior readers, and we also mail our regular readers about different initiatives that we take up.” (Senior library manager, Urban)

Efforts had been made by libraries to employ volunteers and staff with good computer skills, as well as provide training to existing staff, in order to increase the number of staff available to support users with their ICT needs.

Success in attracting specific user groups differed according to the user group. Older users, for example, were easier to attract than users on low incomes, as most of the training courses were aimed at the former, who were found to be very willing to participate in the courses and enjoyed learning.

“We organize handicraft workshops, so we tried to present the Internet as the medium for the ladies to find more patterns. We showed them how to find and print new patterns, how to find new ideas, where to find blogs, Internet web sites to download things, we showed them how Google graphics worked and how they could use it to choose different patterns. We also taught them how to use YouTube to learn to do new things.” (Senior library manager, Urban)

Unemployed and underprivileged users were more difficult to attract as they feared stigmatization of attending training in CV writing or cover letters. To help overcome this barrier, libraries worked with job centres, although this approach was not as appropriate in rural areas.

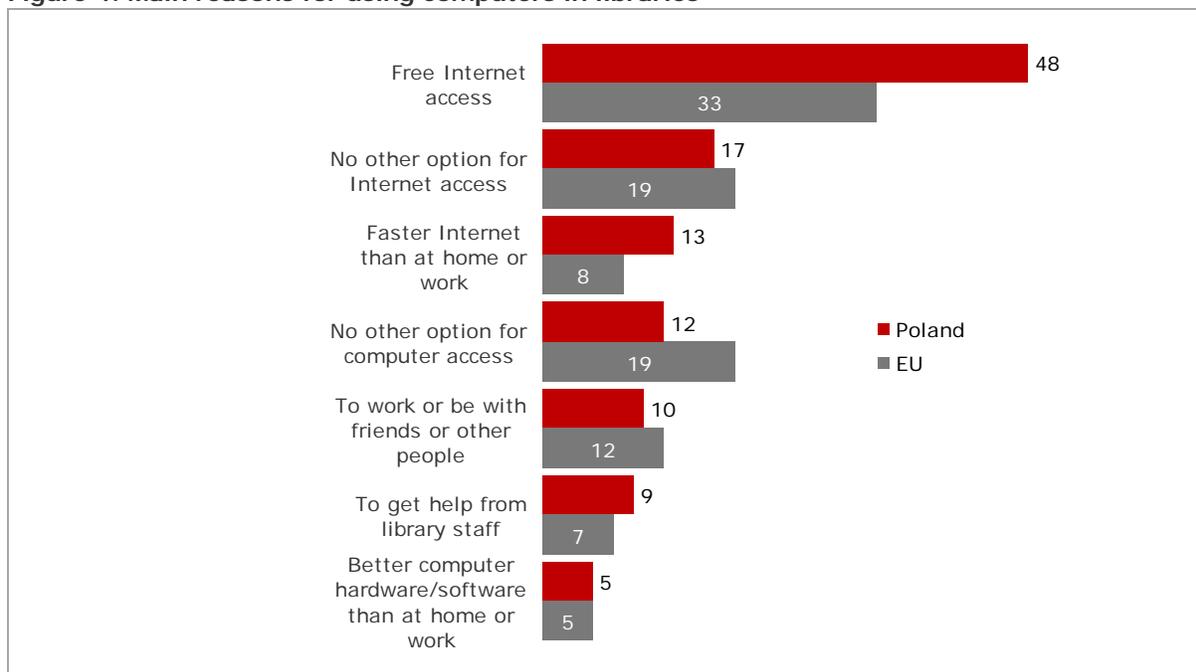
Some libraries were unable to provide access to disabled users, for example due to a lack of a wheelchair ramp. To reach this group therefore, library staff visited disabled users in their home, and worked in partnership with relevant local clubs who worked with disabled people. A library in a larger town provided audiobooks for blind users.

By having English-speaking staff libraries felt they were able to appeal to ethnic minorities.

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 Poland and across the EU, the primary motivations for PAC users are the free nature of the service together with the lack of other options that people have. PAC users in Poland were more likely than those in other countries to have said that the internet in libraries is faster than at home or work (13% in Poland compared with 8% across the EU).

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- Poland (700); 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 Poland, 7% of PAC users said that they had no other options for accessing the internet (compared with 11% across the EU), and a further 12% that there was no other source of free internet for them (compared with 14% across the EU). Overall, it is estimated that c.85,000 PAC users in Poland (18% 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:

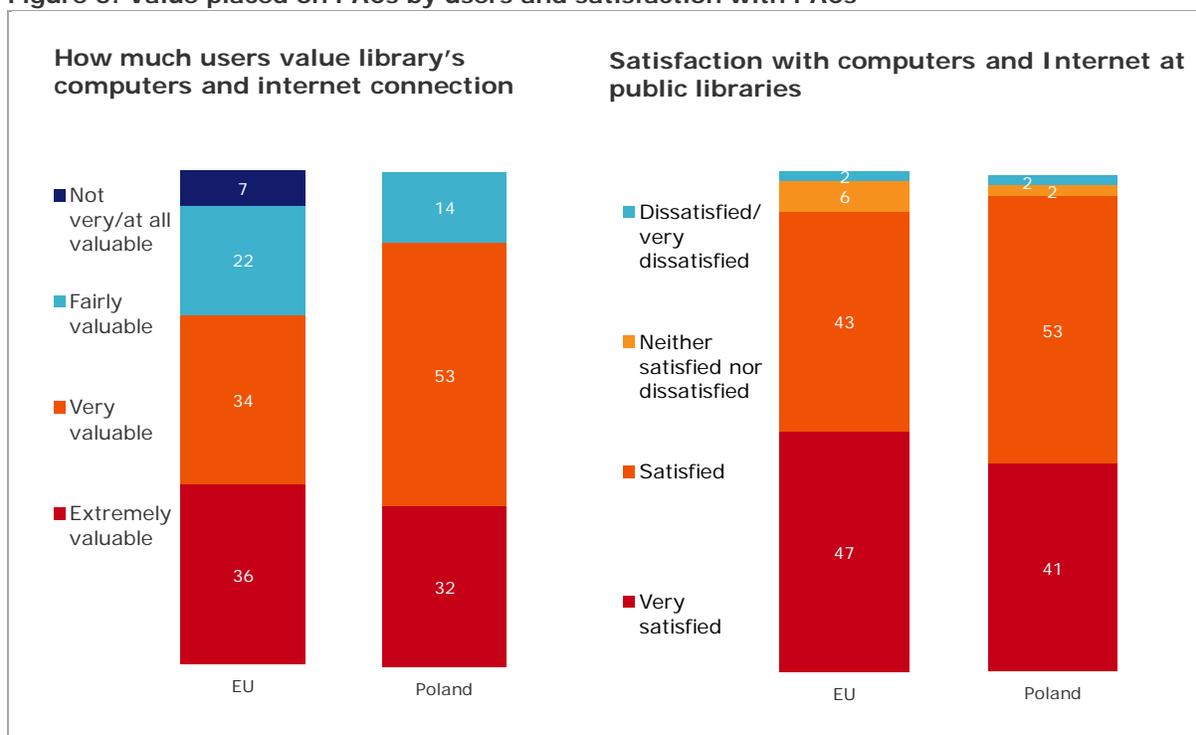
- Older people – 25% of PAC users aged 55+ had no alternative internet access, compared with 4% of those aged 15-24
- Those who were not in employment – 8% had no alternative for internet access, compared with 3% of the employed.

The value placed on the PAC service was higher among users in Poland than the EU average, as shown in Figure 5. Overall, 99% of PAC users in Poland said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Over four fifths of PAC users in Poland (85%) said the service was extremely or very valuable, compared with 70% across the EU.

The library's computers and internet connection were valued particularly highly in Poland by users in rural areas/small towns as opposed to those in large towns/cities (37% and 24% respectively rated the services as extremely valuable).

Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users, as shown in Figure 5. Again, users in Poland were more likely to say they were satisfied with computers and internet at the library than EU users as a whole; 95% of users in Poland said they were satisfied, compared with 91% 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. Poland (700); EU (11716)

In Poland, around three-quarters of PAC users (74%) said that when they go to a library to use a computer, they find a free computer straight away, and a further 17% that they have to wait for no more than 10 minutes. These waiting times are less 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, the number of PACs available to users ranged from 1 to 7 and had typically been acquired through library development programmes. Internet connection and Wifi was available in all libraries, and PCs had MS Office software. Laptops were available for disabled users with limited mobility and were used in workshops for children. Printers, scanner and digital cameras were also provided.

Library managers thought their computer hardware and software were no longer up-to-date, and reported occasions when it was too slow. However hardware was only replaced once it became entirely unusable.

“Computers are available to our members in all libraries. One library has several, another only one – depending on the size of the facility. All computers have Internet access. We basically are waiting for them to stop working and then we replace them.” (Senior library manager, Urban)

"No, no, we have problems with computers which in the beginning operate slowly and people can get irritated, but this is a matter of software not hardware." (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Costs of running equipment such as printers was at times reported to disrupt provision of the service, for example when toners needed replacing there was not always the funds to replace them immediately.

"Printers are very expensive to use. It is problematic, because people are used to having access to copy services, color printouts, and exploitation costs are so high that we cannot always provide a continuous service. Like the toner for instance – it is really expensive." (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Managers thought the speed of the internet was sufficient to meet the needs of the users, although it could be faster.

"[The speed] is average, I don't remember what it is exactly, but it could be a bit faster. Sometimes you have to be patient and wait a while." (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Users tended to view the standard of equipment positively, considering that a limited budget was available. Users' requirements were limited, centering on browsing the internet, using MS Office and photo and graphic editing. Users did report some problems with the number of PCs available and speed of internet connection however, such as a slow loading time of web pages when all PCs were occupied.

"It's not the newest equipment and could be faster. I had to change the computer from one to another, because the previous one was too slow." (User, Male, Urban)

"A lot of people come in and have to wait because there're only these three PC stations here." (User, Male, Urban)

"My own at home is worse, works more slowly." (User, Female, Urban)

An out-dated version of MS Office in one small-town library was said to make it difficult to open documents on users' sticks that they had brought in from outside the library.

4. Impressions of public libraries

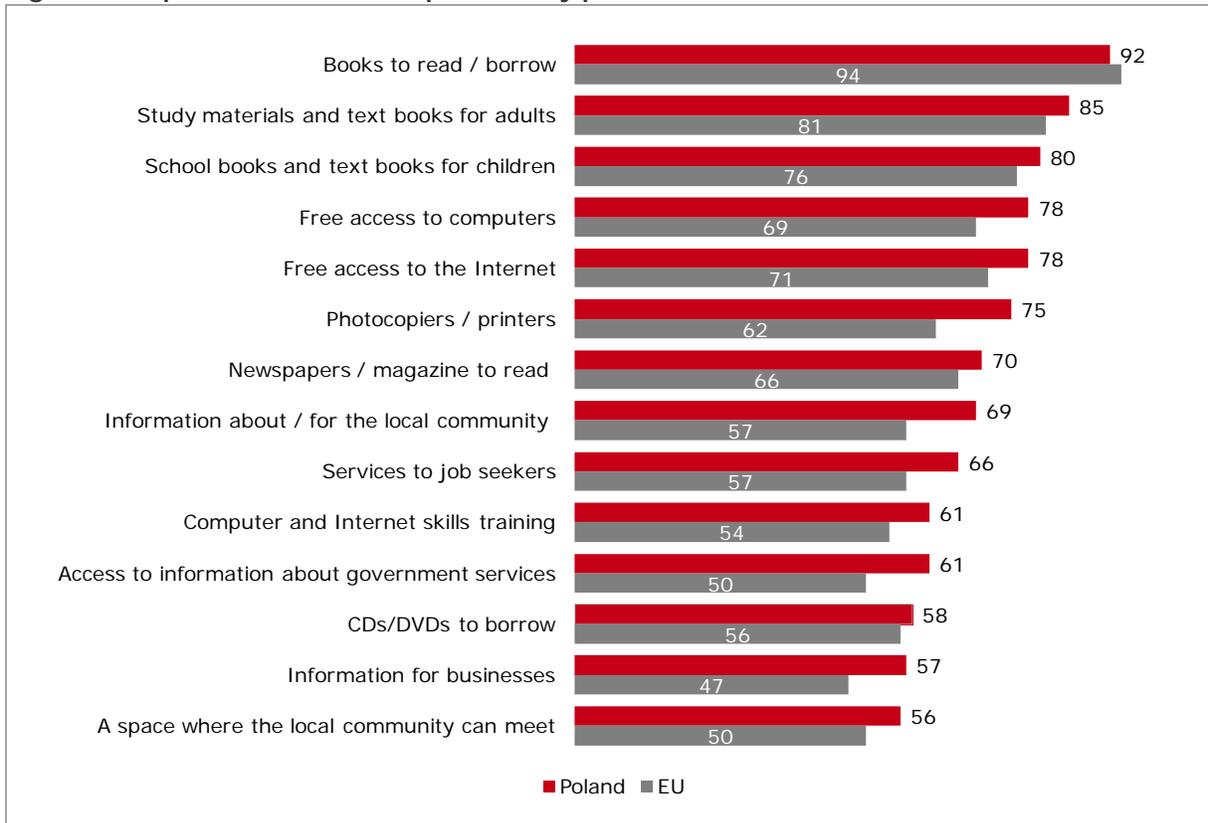
4.1 Importance of library services

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 Poland, 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 92% of users in Poland (and 94% across the EU), followed by 'study materials and text books for adults'.

'School books', 'Free access to the internet' and 'free access to computers' were all rated as important by around eight out of ten library users in Poland, which was higher 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 - Poland (1400); EU (24253)

Users in Poland were also more likely than the EU average to rate the provision of computer and Internet skills training as an important service (61% in Poland compared with 54% EU average).

The importance of libraries to community life was emphasised among library users in Poland. Providing a space where the local community can meet was seen as particularly important among library users in Poland (56% compared with 50% EU average), as was providing information about or for the local community (69% compared with 57% EU average).

All users in the qualitative research evaluated the environment of their library very positively, describing them as very friendly and open places which offer a peaceful and “casual” atmosphere. The library in Warsaw was described as modern, well equipped and creatively furnished.

“Since I have a child, it’s sometimes difficult to have a moment of peace. The library comes in handy then, there’s a reading room which is separated from the main library where people come in with books.” (User, Female, Urban)

“I also think that there’s a very relaxed atmosphere here.” (Recent user, Female, Urban)

4.2 Effectiveness and funding of public libraries

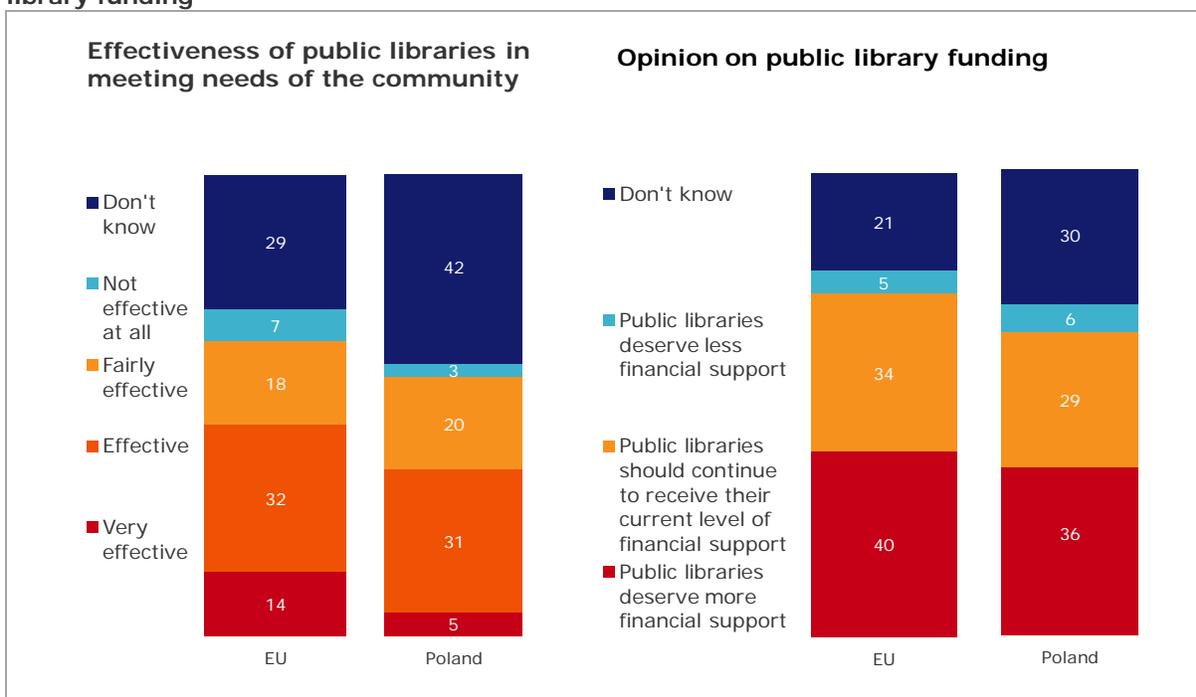
Over a half (55%) of the general public in Poland (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was lower than the average across the 17 EU survey countries of 64%.

Library users in Poland 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, and 87% among PAC users.

Over a third (36%) of the public in Poland felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, just slightly lower than the average of all 17 EU countries (40%). Almost all the remainder either felt that the funding should continue as at present (29%) or did not express an opinion (30%). Only 6% of the public in Poland felt that public libraries deserve *less* financial support. This is perhaps reflective of the level of cuts to government and local budgets for public library services that have been experienced in Poland in recent years.

Not surprisingly, library users and PAC users were even more likely than non-users to say that libraries deserve more financial support – 57% of all library users, and 47% 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?.

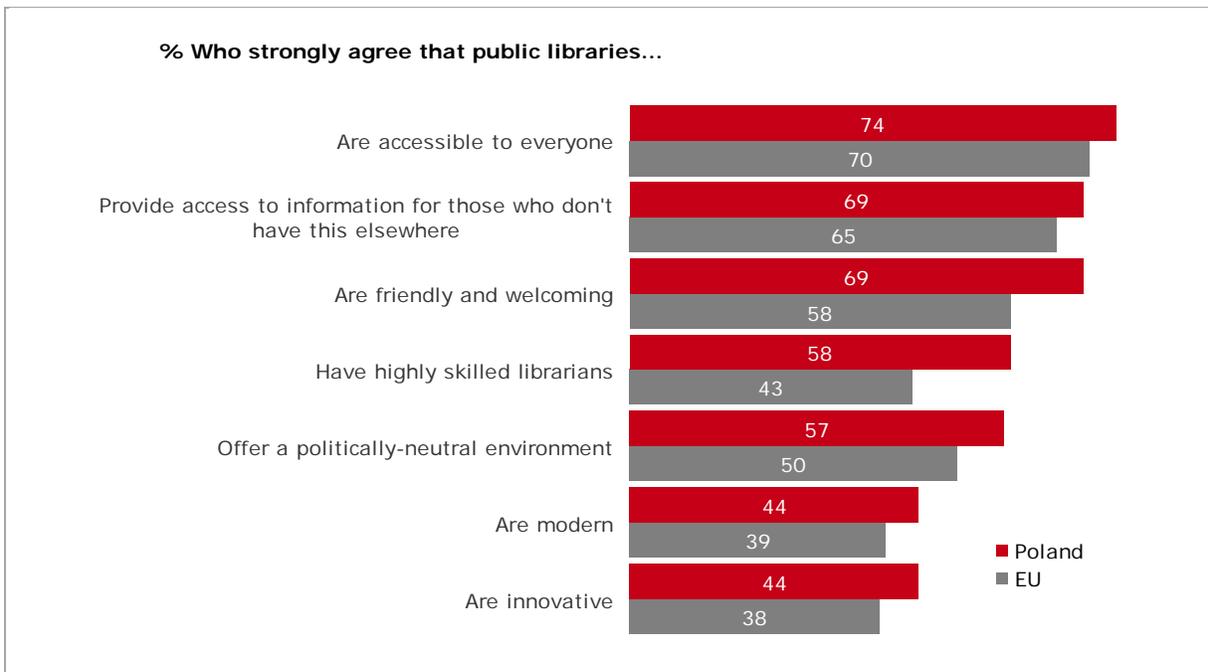
Base: All adults - Poland (1000); EU (17816)

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 Poland and EU who strongly agreed with each of these

statements. Library users in Poland were more likely than the EU average to strongly agree with all of these statements, with the biggest differences from the EU average for 'Friendly and welcoming' (69% Poland compared with 58% EU) 'Have highly skilled librarians' (58% Poland compared with 43% EU) 'Offer politically-neutral environment' (57% Poland compared with 50% EU) and 'Are innovative' (44% Poland, 38% 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. Poland (1400); 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.

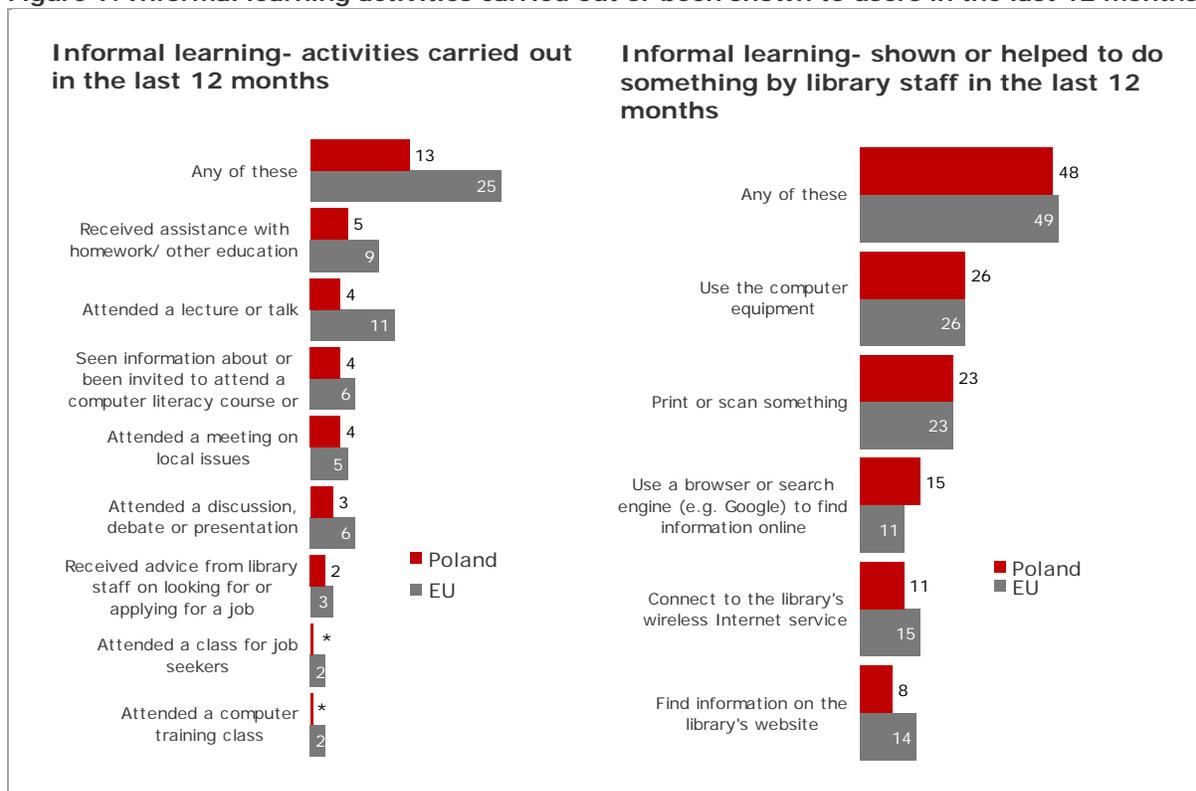
Overall, in Poland 13% had taken part in one of the educational activities in libraries asked about in the last 12 months, which was below the EU average of 25%.

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

- Receiving assistance with homework or other education (5% vs. EU average of 9%).
- Attending a lecture or talk (4% vs. EU average of 11%)
- Attending a computer literacy course (4% vs. EU average of 6%)
- Attending a meeting on local issues (4% vs. EU average of 5%)

Less than 1% of library users in Poland reported that they had attended a computer training class in the last 12 months – lower than the EU average of 2%. This means that c.1,000 adults in Poland 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 - Poland (1400); EU (24253). C17- All PAC users – Poland (700); EU (11716).

As Figure 9 shows, public library staff play an important role in assisting library users in informal learning. Overall, nearly a half (48%) library users in Poland had been shown or helped to do something by a member of library staff within the last 12 months, on a par with the EU average of 49%.

The most common ways in which library staff assisted library users were using the computer, helping with printing or scanning and helping them use a browser or search engine.

In the qualitative research, libraries provided users with ad hoc, informal support as well as regular training and workshops. The former was most popular in rural areas, while the latter was preferred in larger urban areas. Informal support was provided for tasks such as information searches, writing a CV, printing and emailing. Support with basic use of a PC and the internet was provided through both informal, one-to-one help with specific problems and regular training sessions.

“PC consultations are given by one of our IT employees; one can call him, mail him or come to visit during his office hours and he will help with any queries concerning the use of PC.” (Senior library manager, Urban)

“It’s six weeks during which a participant starts with complete beginnings, needs to learn how to operate a mouse, which is very difficult at first – I suppose that you remember that yourself, but then again please note that some users are complete beginners while

others do know something already. But these are the basics, then there is writing in MS Word, then introduction to the Internet, they learn how to create their mailbox, how to receive and send messages, to log onto Facebook, and so on, because these people make progress.” (Senior library manager, Urban)

Users had a good general level of awareness of the training courses offered in their library, and mentioned the following as more formal training courses offered:

- Courses for seniors: the most popular form of group trainings, dedicated to persons aged 50+
- Courses for beginners: similar to senior classes they involve basic computer and Internet skills, but without any specific age profile
- Trainings on digital safety: regarding ways of protecting children from unwanted content as well as general rules of safe use of computers and the Internet, and organized with the help of an outside company
- Online banking training, provided by one library in the qualitative sample
- Language courses and discussion classes with the use of a PC and multi-media equipment
- Handicraft and flower arrangement workshops with the use of the Internet in order to search for inspiration and patterns, as well as how to sell online
- Photography workshops with digital photo editing techniques
- Training courses for the unemployed that included basic computer skills, writing a CV, and searching for jobs and applying online.

Users reported that in most cases training classes were given by the library staff who they were familiar with. It is worthwhile to notice that it was an especially important element for those who were only beginning their journey with ICT and new technologies, because it built their confidence and diminished concerns around their lack of knowledge and the risk of making a fool of themselves. Often close and friendly relations between staff and users helped to overcome the psychological barriers that make it difficult to start using ICT. Users thought it was the staff’s commitment and willingness to help that were the main reasons why they came to use the ICT facilities in the library. The atmosphere created by the staff made users confident enough to ask for individual help in simple matters, as well as regarding more complicated issues, such as searching for legal information. Staff’s PC literacy was highly rated and in one city library the users appreciated that there was an IT employee to help with more complicated issues.

“I can write everything, open my mailbox, send information to newspapers, but photo editing is hell for me. So then I ask ... and they’d come over and help me.” (User, Female, Urban)

“I watched some elderly gentleman ask how to operate a program and a minute later he got all the help he needed, without any problems or without being treated offhand.” (Recent user, Female, Urban)

Users who had participated in courses organized by libraries were unanimous in their opinion that the courses had changed their attitude to technology and improved their self-confidence, thus enabling them to pursue different interests and goals.

“Personally I attended a computer course, and then online banking course. And meanwhile I popped in to ask about something when I had queries.” (User, Male, Urban)

“Computer skills. At the beginning I was even afraid to move the mouse so as not to break something. At first it was a closed book to me, but the presence of others encouraged me and now I’m quite confident.” (User, Female, Urban)

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 fifth (21%) of PAC users in Poland had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, lower than the EU average of 30%. This represents an estimated 95,000 PAC users in Poland who had used PAC for employment related activity.

Overall, 6% of PAC users in Poland had used a PAC to apply for a job (either in Poland or in another EU country) in the last 12 months - this represents approximately 28,000 adults in Poland. Of those respondents who applied for a job through PAC, 34% said that they were successful. This means that in all 2% of PAC users in Poland – or an estimated 10,000 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 10; less than one in ten (7%) of PAC users in Poland indicated that they had been shown or helped to do some employment-related PAC activity (lower than the 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		
%	Poland	EU	%	Poland	EU
Any listed below	21	30	Any listed below	7	11
Find information about searching and/or applying for jobs	9	14	Improve skills needed in your current job	2	4
Search for jobs	8	13	How to write a CV	4	5
Write a CV or covering letter	9	12	How to develop skills needed to obtain a job	1	2
Improve skills needed in your current job	9	11	How to look for a job online (such as finding a recruitment company, searching for information about an employer)	3	3
Apply for jobs in this country	6	10	How to apply for a job online	1	2
Search for information about an employer	5	8	How to look for and apply for jobs in other EU countries	1	1
Find a recruitment company	2	5			
Use spread sheet/data	2	3			
Search for jobs in other EU countries	3	2			
Apply for jobs in other EU countries	2	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. Poland (700); EU (11716).

PAC users were asked whether they had used PACs for a range of business-related activities in the last 3 months. Around a quarter of users in Poland (26%) had used a PAC for finding information related to a business they worked in, which was above the EU average of 20%. Five per cent of PAC users in Poland had used a PAC for participating in professional networks, similar to the EU average of 6%. Five per cent in Poland, compared with 4% EU average, had used a PAC to find ways or places to sell their own products or goods.

The qualitative research found that libraries' activities regarding employment were varied and included assisting users in preparing applications, providing advice on work for young stay-at-home mothers, and helping users search for job listings. Libraries worked in partnership with the Poviats Labour Office to provide occupational information for the unemployed.

"Occupational activation workshops for women aim at training twelve girls who are unemployed at the moment, who are looking for work, or are in a very difficult situation, from small-scale home production all the way to launching their own online store." (Library manager, Semi-rural)

In addition, both employed and unemployed users felt that through the assistance and support from library staff they had acquired ICT skills and confidence that would help them in a job they were already in or to find work.

"We were sitting and learning how to use that special program for work and she was looking through it and decided that it was not that difficult after all...we all know how paralyzing stress and uncertainty can become at work, so I really think that she expanded her opportunities and this makes work so much easier." (Library manager, Semi-rural)

"We were writing a CV and we sent it. I cannot say for sure that it was thanks to this particular effort, or something else that she found work, but she did. Meanwhile her level of self-confidence increased... Here people start believing in themselves, get the sense that after all they have some skills." (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Business support had been provided in the form of assisting a user in submitting documents for a tender procedure, to launch economic activity.

"A councilman is helping to launch economic activity and we are helping to fill in all the relevant forms and applications, plus help writing a business plan so that this person could apply for additional funding." (Senior library manager, Urban)

Other forms of business support included helping users search for information on the rules of operation and how to set up a business, and helping them develop marketing tools such as online blogs. Some users used the library's ICT facilities to carry out their work activities, such as web design.

"I use the Internet every day. I work as a web designer and need access to the Internet. Costs of having Internet connection at home amount to app. PLN 100, which is a lot to me. If you run your own business, you strive for the lowest costs and the highest profits." (User, Male, Urban)

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.

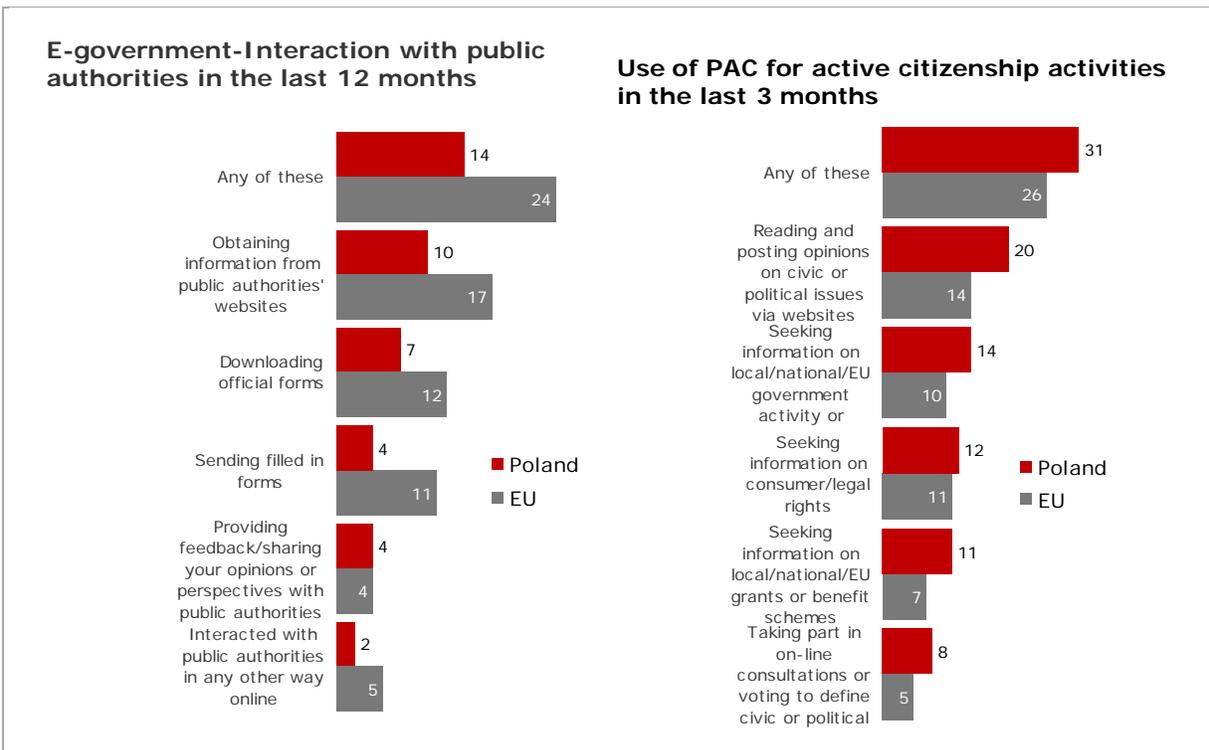
According to Eurostat data, E-government usage by individuals in Poland is lower than the EU average - 28% of adults in Poland used the internet in the last 12 months to interact with public authorities, compared with 41% across the EU. Citizens in Poland were also less likely than the EU average to use the Internet to obtain information from public authorities' web sites (21% compared with 35%).

The library survey found that one in seven (14%) PAC users in Poland had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, lower than the EU average of one in four (24%) PAC users having engaged in E-government interaction, and below the Eurostat finding for all adults in Poland. PAC users in Poland were less likely than the EU average to have used PACs to obtain information from public

authorities' websites (10% Poland compared with 17% EU) and less likely to download official forms (7% in Poland compared with 12% 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, 31% of PAC users in Poland had used PAC for engagement activities in the past 3 months, higher 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 (20% Poland compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on local/national/EU government activity (14% Poland compared with 10% 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. Poland (700); EU (11716)

In the qualitative research, library staff had provided support with e-government activities by helping users find and complete online government forms. The main benefit for the user was believed to be time saved and greater confidence that they were completing the form correctly.

"We also assist in filling in the annual tax forms. Once there was this gentleman who had an accounting office, he was also a councilman. And so he came in and helped to fill in annual tax forms, and my employee then filled them in electronically." (Senior library manager, Urban)

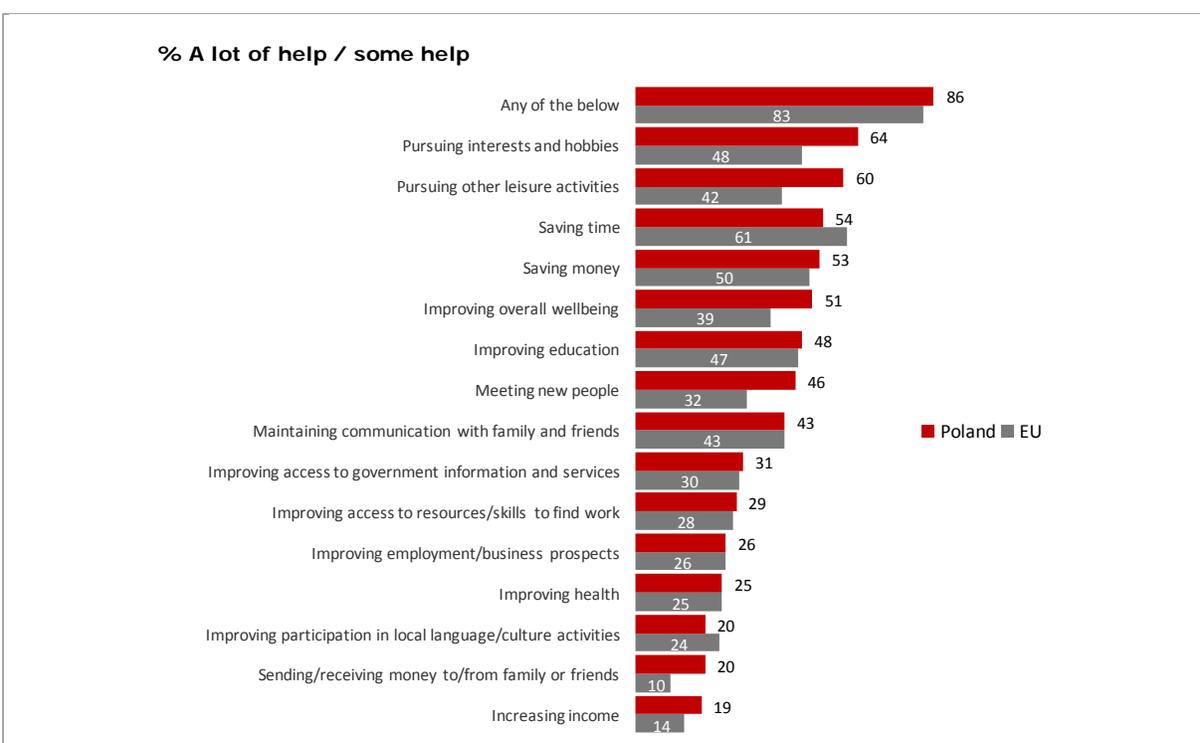
8. Impacts

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 86% of PAC users in Poland 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 this represents approximately 395,000 people in Poland.

Figure 12 shows the proportions saying PAC use had been helpful in each area, in Poland 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- Poland (700); EU (11716).

As well as the general area of saving time (54% Poland, 61% EU), PAC use was rated as helpful across a range of leisure and social areas such as pursuing interests and hobbies (64% Poland, 48% EU) and pursuing other leisure activities (60% Poland, 42% EU). Around a half of PAC users (53%) in Poland and 50% in EU said PAC was helpful in saving money, which represents an estimated 240,000 PAC users in Poland.

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

- 220,000 people to improve their education
- 140,000 people to improve their access to government information services

- 130,000 people to improve their access to resources necessary to find work
- 120,000 people to improve their employment or business prospects
- 85,000 people to increase their income.

In the qualitative research, beneficial impacts of the use of library ICT reported by users were numerous and significant. Benefits were particularly significant for older users and first-time users who felt that they would not have learnt how to use a computer and the internet without the library's support.

The knowledge gained had enabled users to engage in hobbies and interests as well as improving their ability to communicate with friends and relatives living abroad. Positive impacts were also cited in users' career prospects, as they had learnt to use programmes at the library that they could use in employment, or even had found a job by using online services in the library.

More generally, users reported increased self-esteem and self-confidence as a result of having gained the ICT skills learnt in the library, as it helped users feel like they too understood what they had previously felt ignorant about.

"I had to follow the progress. I felt kind of stupid that everybody became used to the things I had no idea about" (User, Male, Urban)