

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

Final report

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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 Bulgaria and compares the results to the EU total.

The public library landscape

- The desk research estimates that there are around 3,000 public libraries in Bulgaria, which equates to just over 4 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 around 40% of public libraries in Bulgaria.

Library and PAC usage

- An estimated 0.8 million adults in Bulgaria, around one in eight adults in the country (12%) had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 0.1 million adults in Bulgaria, 2% of adults, had used PACs in the last 12 months, significantly lower than the average of 4% of adults across the EU.
- PAC users in Bulgaria were more likely than the EU average to be women and to be aged 15-24; they were much more likely than the EU average to live in a city or large town, and more likely to have stopped full-time education aged 19 or under.
- 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 Bulgaria, compared with users across the EU, were much more likely to have mentioned getting help from library staff, working with friends or other people and faster internet access than at home or work as reasons for using computers in public libraries.
- Overall, it is estimated that 35,000 PAC users in Bulgaria 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 Bulgaria than the EU average. Overall, 99% of PAC users in Bulgaria said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Three fifths of PAC users in Bulgaria (61%) said the service was extremely valuable, significantly higher than the EU average (36%).
- Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users: 97% of users in Bulgaria were satisfied.

Perceptions and impacts of public libraries

- More than eight out of ten library users in Bulgaria considered 'free access to computers' and 'free access to the internet' important (compared with around seven out of ten library users across Europe).
- Just over half (53%) of the general public in Bulgaria (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%.
- Just over half (54%) of the public in Bulgaria felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was higher than the EU average (40%).
- Overall 97% of PAC users in Bulgaria said their PAC use had delivered at least one impact for them, higher than the average across the EU (83%) and representing approximately 0.1 million people in Bulgaria.
- Library users in Bulgaria were more likely than the EU average to strongly agree that public libraries 'Have highly skilled librarians' (68% Bulgaria compared with 43% EU), 'Provide access to information for those who don't have it elsewhere' (82% Bulgaria compared with 65% EU), 'Are modern' (56% Bulgaria compared with 39% EU) and 'Are innovative' (55% Bulgaria, 38% EU).

Informal and non-formal learning

- In Bulgaria 37% of library users had taken part in an educational activity in a library in the last 12 months, which was higher than the EU average of 25%.

Employment and use of PACs for business

- Around a fifth (22%) of PAC users in Bulgaria 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 20,000 PAC users in Bulgaria who had used PAC for employment related activity.
- An estimated 3,500 PAC users in Bulgaria had used a PAC to apply for a job in the last 12 months, and an estimated 1,000 adults were successful in securing employment by this means.

E-government and active citizenship

- The library survey found that around one in six PAC users in Bulgaria (16%) had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, below the EU average of one in four (24%). The most common ways in which PAC users in Bulgaria interacted with public authorities were to obtain information from public authorities' websites (10%) and to download official forms (9%).
- Overall, three in ten PAC users in Bulgaria (30%) 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 (22% Bulgaria compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on consumer/legal rights (10% Bulgaria, broadly similar to the EU level of 11%).

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 Bulgaria, Global Libraries supports the Glob@l Libraries - Bulgaria Programme, a joint initiative of the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture, the United Nations Development Programme, the Bulgarian Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications, the National Association of Municipalities in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Library and Information Association.

Glob@l Libraries - Bulgaria Program is designed to facilitate access to information, knowledge, communication, e-contents and community services through Bulgaria's public libraries network. Within

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 Sciadras, 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.

five years (2009-2013), the program aims to have increased library usage throughout the country and helped Bulgarian citizens integrate into the global information society.

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.

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 1,043 members of the public aged 15+ in Bulgaria (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 Bulgaria, 710 interviews were conducted with people who had not used Public Access Computers (PACs) in libraries (12,537 across the 17 countries) and 718 with those who had (11,716 across the 17 countries). The interviews in Bulgaria were conducted in 50 libraries which were selected and contacted with help from a representative of Global Libraries Bulgaria. 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 Bulgaria 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.

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)

Throughout this report comparisons are made between the findings in Bulgaria 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 Bulgaria are included in the EU average, which has the effect of lessening the statistical power of comparisons between the Bulgaria 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 Bulgaria and are presented in terms of estimated numbers.

2. The public library landscape and internet provision

There are about 3,000 public libraries in Bulgaria (as of October 2012)⁶, which equates to just over 4 public libraries per 10,000 population, compared with an average across the 17 EU countries of 1.3 libraries per 10,000 population. Ministry of Culture figures combined with National Statistics Office data from 1998 to 2005 (the latest) shows that the number of libraries in Bulgaria has been steadily decreasing. It is expected that the trend will remain in the near future.

The Bulgarian public library system is organized and regulated by the Law on Public Libraries which regulates all aspects of the system and funding. The libraries operate in a National Network of Public libraries, with each type (national, district, municipal, community center – or chitalishte libraries) funded in a different manner. The National library is funded directly with priority from the budget of the Ministry of Culture. District libraries have independent budgets with funding from the municipality in which they are located and additional funding from the Ministry of Culture. The municipal libraries are funded from municipal budgets. Chitalishte libraries within community centers receive funding from the community center budget. They may receive additional funding from the municipality they are located based on a municipal council decision. All libraries can generate additional revenues from fees, fines, funds from international programs, gifts and bequests, and other sources defined by law or other act.

In terms of funding, many of the libraries faced budget cuts in 2010 (averaging 15% amongst those included in the investigation), with further reductions in 2011, 2012 and more budget cutting anticipated in 2013. The financial position is not expected to improve significantly in the near future.

In around two fifths of libraries in Bulgaria (42%) there is no qualified librarian. These are largely the community centre (chitalishte) libraries where there is only one person employed. The average number of people employed in the district libraries is 39 people, the municipal 4 and the community centres 2 people.

In terms of ICT services, the Glob@l Libraries - Bulgaria Program has had a significant impact on the provision of equipment in libraries, donating 13,492 pieces of equipment, of which 4,935 were computers. However this program is only active in around a third of the total libraries in Bulgaria (960). Besides the efforts of Glob@l Libraries - Bulgaria Program, not much has been invested in the libraries in the country.

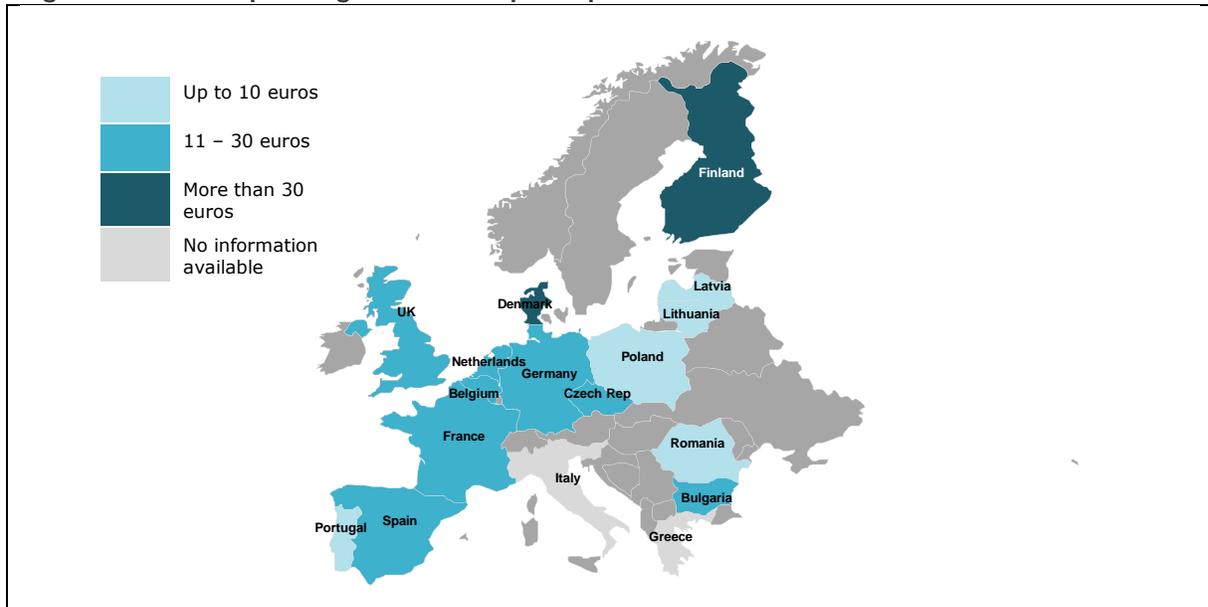
Computer access is currently available in around 40% of public libraries in Bulgaria.

Internet access is available in the vast majority (over 90%) of libraries in the Glob@l Libraries - Bulgaria Program.

⁶ Source: Ministry of Culture, 2012; NSI, Central Statistical Office - 2012

Annual public spending on libraries per capita in Bulgaria is estimated to be about 10.5 Euros (20.6 BGN), as shown in the following map:

Figure 1: Annual spending on libraries per capita



Source: TNS desk research

Eurostat data (2011) for Internet access at home shows that in Bulgaria has one of the lower levels in Europe, with 45% of households having access to the Internet, compared with the EU average of 73%. It may therefore be expected that demand for and usage of PAC services would be higher in Bulgaria 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 Bulgaria was below the EU average:

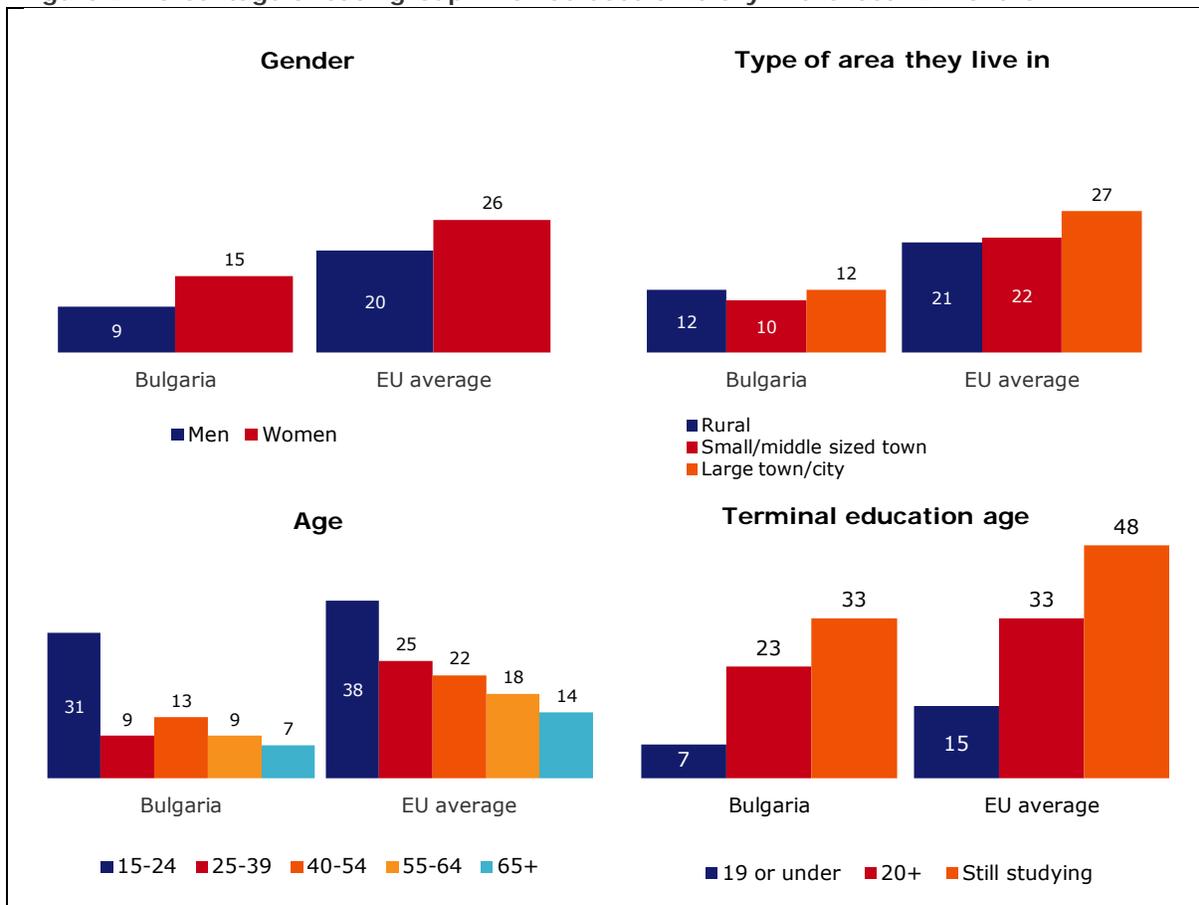
- An estimated 0.8 million adults in Bulgaria, around one in eight adults in the country (12%) had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 0.5 million adults, equating to 7% of all adults in Bulgaria, had used a library at least once a month, much lower than the EU average of 14%.

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

- Women (15%) were more likely than men (9%) to have visited a library, in line with the findings across the EU.
- Library usage in Bulgaria was highest among those aged 15-24 (31%), followed by those aged 40-54 (13%), and those in age bands 25-39 and 55-64 (both 9%). It was lowest among those aged 65+ (7%). Library usage in Bulgaria was lower than the EU average across all age groups.

- Library use was broadly similar in large towns and cities (12%), smaller towns (10%) and rural areas (12%) with figures for Bulgaria all below the EU averages.
- Library use was higher among those who were still studying – 33% of this group had used a public library in the last 12 months, below the EU average.

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: BG – All adults (1043), Men (513), Women (530), 15-24 (117), 25-39 (268), 40-54 (306), 55-64 (195), 65+ (157), Large town/city (575), Small town (191), Rural area (277), Finished education 19 or under (722), 20 or over (268), Still studying (47), 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)

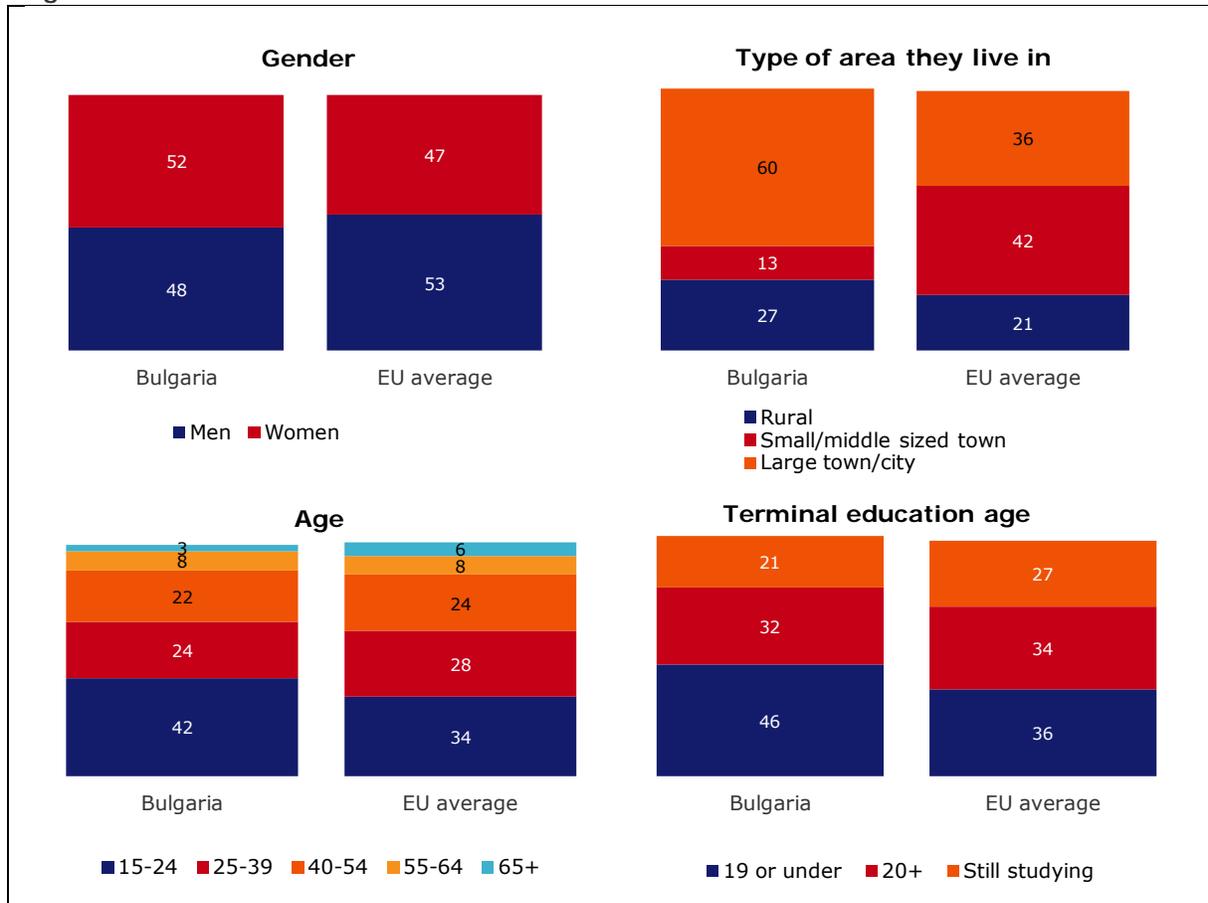
The profile of library users in Bulgaria, compared with across the EU, was:

- 36% of library users in Bulgaria were men and 64% women. Compared with the EU average (42% men, 58% women), library users in Bulgaria were somewhat more likely to be women;
- Users in Bulgaria had a broadly similar age profile to the EU average – 29% were aged 15-24, 19% aged 25-39, 30% aged 40-54, 13% aged 55-64 and 9% 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+.

Around one in eight (13%) of those who had visited a library in Bulgaria in the last 12 months had used a PAC, similar to the EU average of 14%. When those who had not used a PAC were asked why this was, although the majority (66%) said they had no need to because they had a computer/internet at home, a significant minority of 13% 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 only 2% of adults in Bulgaria had used PACs in the last 12 months, significantly lower than the average of 4% of adults across the EU countries. This is estimated to be around 0.1 million adults in Bulgaria. PAC users in Bulgaria were more likely than the EU average to be women and to be aged 15-24; they were much more likely than the EU average to live in a city or large town, and more likely to have stopped full-time education aged 19 or under, 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 BG (718), EU (11716).

Just over a quarter of PAC users in Bulgaria (27%) made use of PACs at least once a week, compared with 23% across the EU, with 35% doing so once to three times a month (compared with the EU average of 29). Just under two fifths of users in Bulgaria (37%) had used PACs once every three months or less often, compared with the EU average of 47%.

In the qualitative research, library staff felt there was no real need to encourage the general public to use ICT in the libraries. They thought that the internet was so attractive that no advertisement was needed, and felt that word of mouth worked well to attract more than enough users in the library, as they normally had more users than available computers. In the past however, libraries had employed various methods to publicise their ICT services, including projections and presentations, formal ICT training courses, websites and Facebook and local TV and radio channels. In smaller, rural locations more traditional methods had also been used such as brochures and posters in the local community.

Current efforts to increase usage were directed towards more specific groups including:

- Older people – one of the most active groups of users, but quite distanced from ICT in general. In order to involve them in using ICT, specialized courses and individual lessons were organized in most libraries in the sample.
- People with disabilities - All library managers except one stated that they had very serious problems regarding the access of the people with physical disabilities to the library facilities, including ICT. Most of the libraries were in old buildings, with steep and narrow stairways without elevators or ramps, which made wheelchair access impossible. The only exception was one of the regional libraries, where a new building had all the equipment needed for disabled people to access the library.
- People on low incomes and unemployed – apart from children, this was the most active group of ICT users, as they usually did not have PC and Internet access at home but had plenty of time, the need to socialize, and were usually actively searching for jobs on the internet
- People from ethnic minorities - in two of the locations there were small Roma communities. The librarians reported that they visited the library the same way as the Bulgarians, and that there was no particular issues for them or particular efforts done to attract them to the libraries.

Users were asked what their main reasons were for using library ICT, and they included the following:

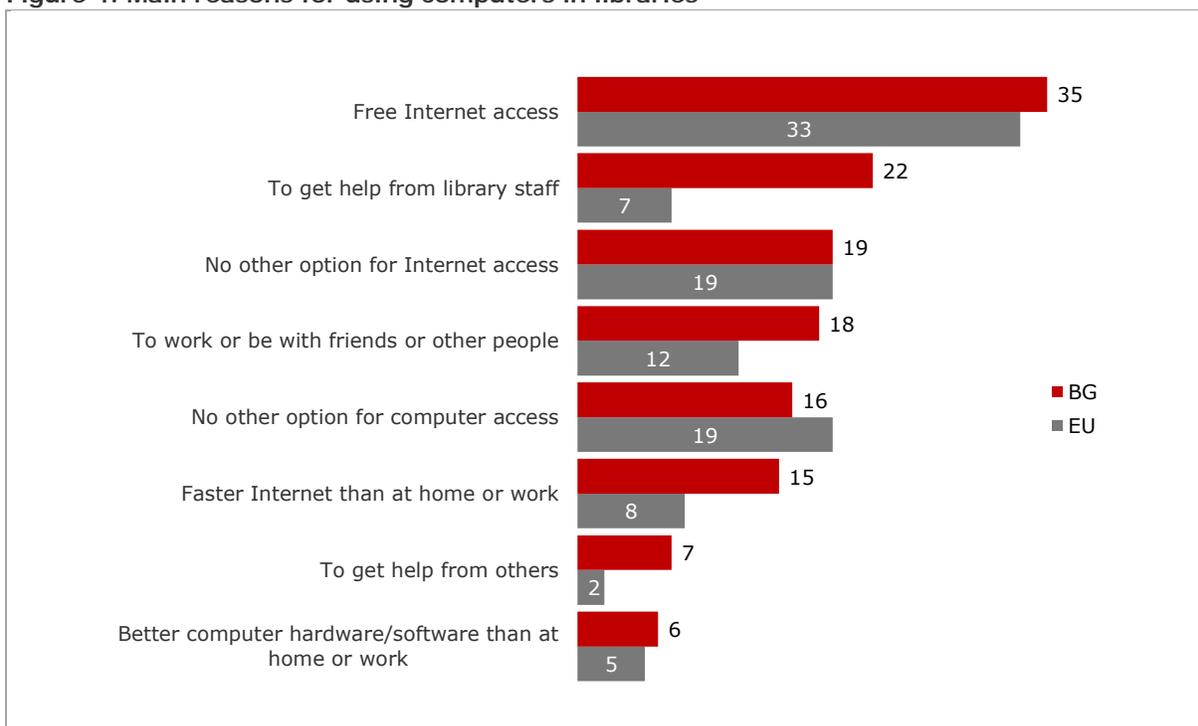
- Opportunity to socialise while using ICT
- Support from the staff (specially relevant to the older users)
- Better PC configuration
- Availability of periphery devices such as printers and scanner
- The possibility to combine information from both the internet and books
- Free access to the internet
- Better software installed
- High number of computers – suitable for group activities
- Access to paid databases
- Calm atmosphere, suitable for concentration.

“Here I can come for one hour only, but it is much more effective than at home. Here there is no “Mum, I am hungry, mum I am thirsty. Here we can hide from the house duties.” (New user, Semi-rural)

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 Bulgaria and across the EU, the primary motivation for PAC users is the free nature of the service. The lack of other options for accessing either computers or the internet were also common reasons given both in Bulgaria and across the EU. PAC users in Bulgaria, compared with users across the 17 EU countries, were much more likely to have mentioned getting help from library staff (22% in Bulgaria compared with 7% across the EU), working with friends or other people (18% in Bulgaria compared with 12% across the EU) and faster internet access than at home or work (15% compared with 8%) as reasons for using computers in public libraries.

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- Bulgaria (718); 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 Bulgaria, 9% of PAC users said that they had no other options for accessing the internet (compared with 11% across the EU), and a further 25% said that there was no other source of free internet for them (compared with 14% across the EU). Overall, it is estimated that 35,000 PAC users in Bulgaria (35% 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 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:

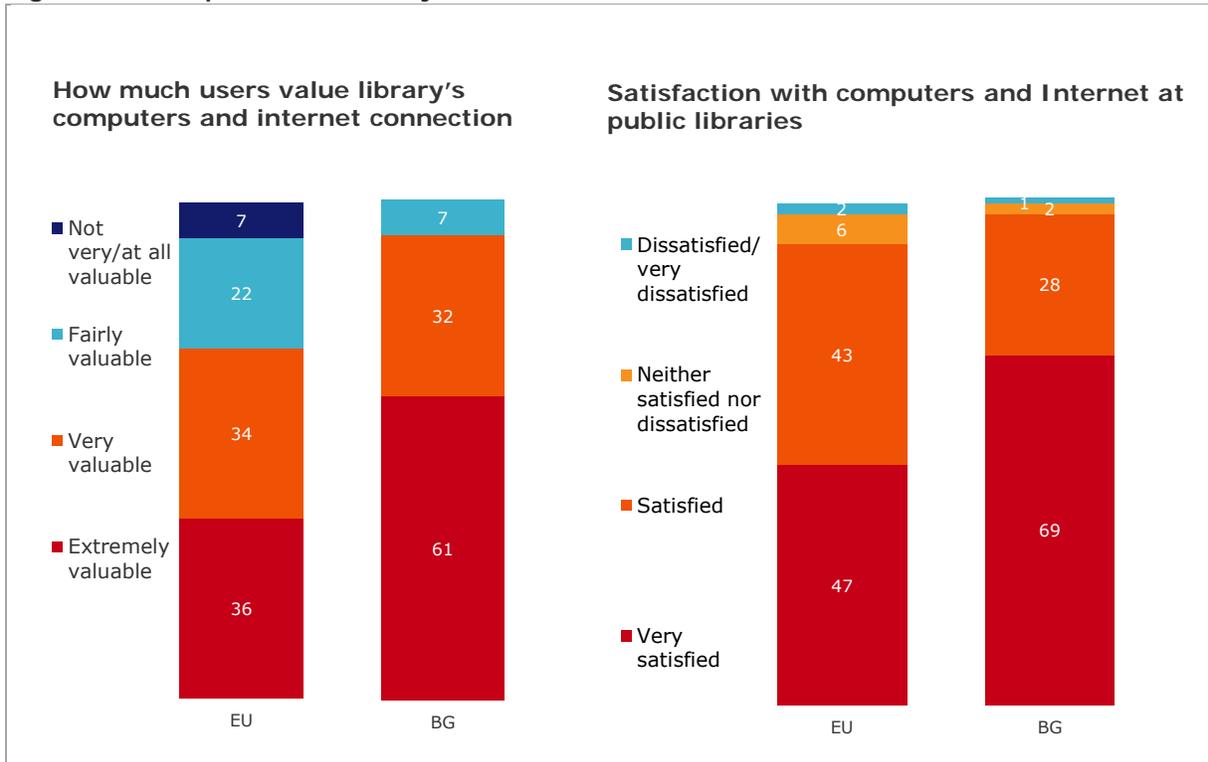
- Older people – 52% of PAC users aged 65+ had no alternative internet access, compared with 6% of those aged 15-24
- Those from minority ethnic groups, 44% of whom had no alternative internet access.

The value placed on the PAC service was higher among users in Bulgaria than the EU average, as shown in Figure 5. Overall, 99% of PAC users in Bulgaria said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Three fifths of PAC users in Bulgaria (61%) said the service was extremely valuable, significantly higher than the EU average (36%).

The library's computers and internet connection were valued particularly highly in Bulgaria by users aged 40-54 and 65+ (71% and 69% respectively rated the services as extremely valuable), and those living in small or mid-sized towns (77% 'extremely valuable').

Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users, as shown in Figure 5: 97% of users in Bulgaria were satisfied. Again, users in Bulgaria were more likely to say they were satisfied with computers and internet at the library than users in the 17 EU countries as a whole; 69% 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. Bulgaria (718); EU (11716)

In Bulgaria, around seven in ten PAC users (71%) said that when they go to a library to use a computer they find a free computer straight away, in line with the EU average (72%). A further quarter (24%) said that they have to wait for no more than 10 minutes. This was better than the EU average (16% wait for no more than 10 minutes).

In the qualitative research, according to the reports of library staff, the number of computers provided for users varied between 5 and 25, depending on the size of the library. For the smaller libraries, the PCs acquired through the Glob@l Libraries – Bulgaria Program were the first computers to enter the library, so there was no benchmark to compare the quality of the hardware with. However the library managers commented that users who had PCs at home still came to the library because library PCs had better configuration and software.

“Many of them have a PC at home, but their computers are really out-of-date, too slow and can not support the new programs like Office 97. So they prefer to come here and work with the latest software available.” (Library manager, Semi-rural)

In contrast, the bigger libraries did have computers before the Glob@l Libraries – Bulgaria Program. Usually they had been donated by another NGO project some years ago. Nowadays many of those computers were not working properly or were too out-of-date to work with the new software, so that they were often not even switched on. Many of the library managers saw this as an example of what to avoid with the Global Libraries PCs.

“Well, they are great (the PCs) but in some years they will be as out-of-date as the old ones. So the municipality should take care of these computers, to keep them in order and updated, otherwise the whole effect of the programme will disappear very soon.” (Library manager, Semi-rural)

All library managers were very satisfied with the performance of the computers, and perceived them as very up-to-date, with great performance and perfectly working software. They were also very satisfied with the speed of internet connection. In general the internet network is well-developed in Bulgaria, the standards are fairly high and the prices are fairly low. Even in the villages there are broadband providers, offering high speed internet. The high speed internet met users’ needs, including allowing them to download and stream movies. Users were also very satisfied with the quality of the computers and the speed with which they allowed them to work.

“The computers here are very good, much better than the one I have at home. There were also some old computers in the library, but nobody used them, because they were too slow” (User, Urban)

WiFi was only available in the regional libraries. The library managers reported that although many users would not use Wifi as they could not afford the devices to use it, already some younger users were asking for this service.

“We do not have wireless internet – here people are relatively poor and do not have laptops or expensive phones that can use Internet. However some of the younger users with new phones are asking if we have a wireless network.” (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Multifunctional copying and printing machines and multimedia projectors were also used often. However some libraries lacked a laptop, which made using a projector more difficult.

“When we organize a projection in the saloon, we take one desk PC and we bring it down the stairs in the saloon – this would be much easier with a laptop”, (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Although all the computers in all libraries should have been equipped with web cams and headphones, in one regional library computers were located in quiet reading rooms so the users were not allowed to make voice calls and the headphones and webcams were removed.

User awareness of the services provided by the library was generally good, particularly in the smaller libraries, where users were aware of all the services offered by the library. The exception was one of the big regional libraries where users were not aware that they could scan and print documents in the library.

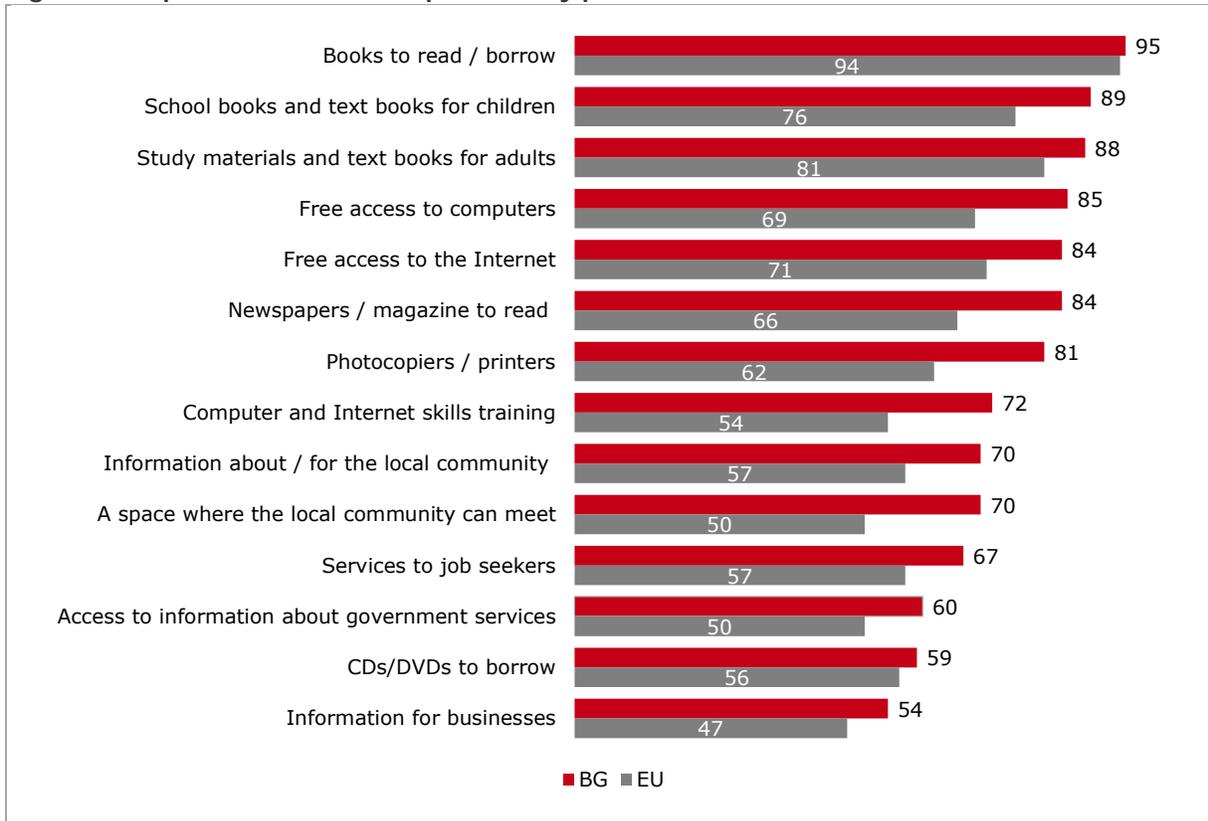
4. Impressions of public libraries

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 Bulgaria, and across the EU, rating each service as 4 or 5 on the scale.

Users in Bulgaria were generally more likely than the EU average to rate the individual services provided by public libraries as important, although the relative importance they attached to the services was broadly similar to that across the 17 EU countries. Not surprisingly, the core service of ‘books to read/borrow’ was considered the most important, rated as important by 95% of users in Bulgaria (and 94% across the EU), followed by ‘school books and text books for children’ and ‘study materials and text books for adults’. More than eight out of ten library users in Bulgaria considered ‘free access to computers’ and ‘free access to the internet’ important (compared with around seven out of ten library users across Europe). Just over seven in ten library users in Bulgaria (72%) rated the provision of ‘computer and Internet skills training’ as an important service, much higher than the EU average of 54%.

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 - Bulgaria (1428); EU (24253)

In the qualitative research, users described the atmosphere in the library as pleasant, calm, quiet and very suitable for concentration.

4.2 Effectiveness and funding of public libraries

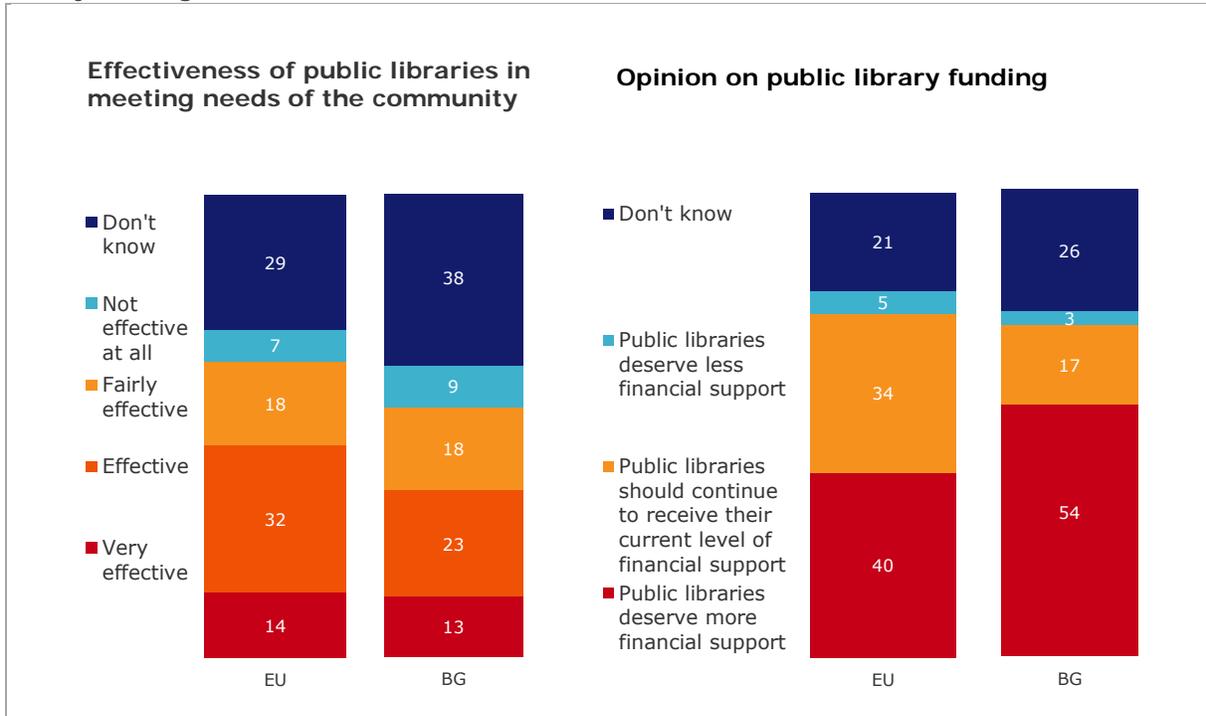
Just over half (53%) of the general public in Bulgaria (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was lower than the average across the 17 EU survey countries of 64%.

Library users in Bulgaria were almost unanimous and PAC users were unanimous in their opinion that libraries were effective in meeting the needs of their local community – 95% of all library users felt they were effective, rising to 100% among PAC users.

Just over half (54%) of the public in Bulgaria felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was higher than the average of all 17 EU countries (40%). Recent cuts in funding may be reflected in the feelings expressed here. A quarter (26%) did not express an opinion. Almost all the remainder felt that the funding should continue as at present (17%). Only 3% of the public in Bulgaria felt that public libraries deserve less financial support.

Not surprisingly, library users and PAC users were much more likely than non-users to say that libraries deserve more financial support – 87% of all library users, and 90% 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



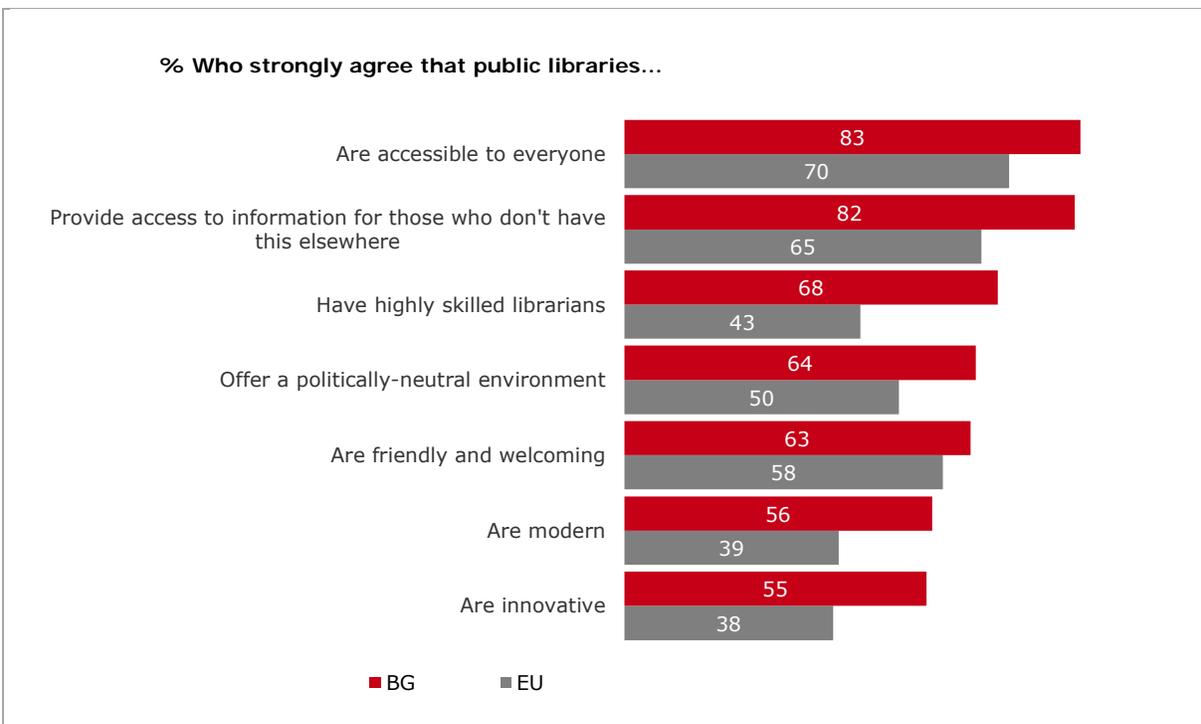
Source: Omnibus survey- Q6 How effective do you think your local public library is at meeting the needs of your community? & Q7 Which of the following statements represents most closely your opinion regarding the current funding for public libraries?

Base: All adults - Bulgaria (1043); 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 Bulgaria and EU who strongly agreed with each of these statements. Library users in Bulgaria were more likely than the EU average to strongly agree with all of these statements, with the biggest differences from the EU average for 'Have highly skilled librarians' (68% Bulgaria compared with 43% EU), 'Provide access to information for those who don't have it elsewhere' (82% Bulgaria compared with 65% EU), 'Are modern' (56% Bulgaria compared with 39% EU) and 'Are innovative' (55% Bulgaria, 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. Bulgaria (1428); 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.

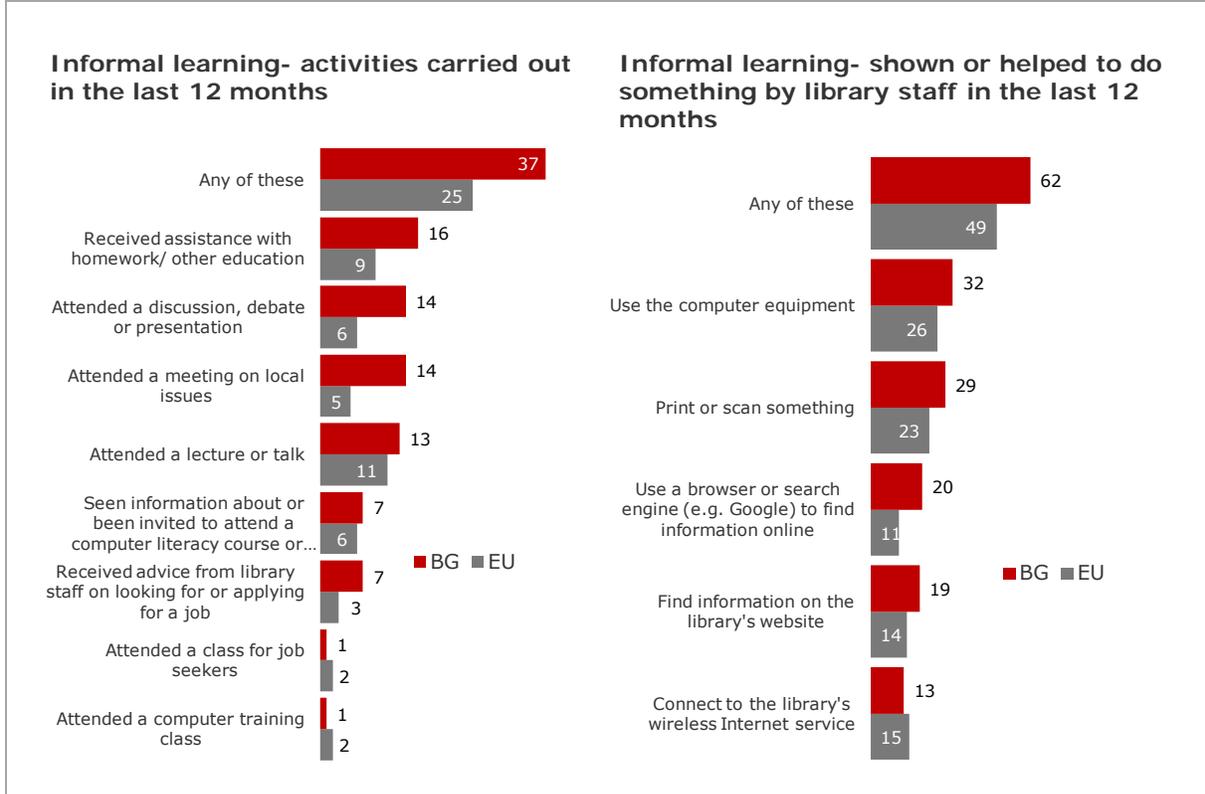
Overall, in Bulgaria 37% had taken part in one of the educational activities in libraries asked about in the last 12 months, which was higher than the EU average of 25%.

Engagement levels in all educational activities in libraries tended to be higher in Bulgaria than the average across the 17 EU countries as a whole (Figure 9), including, among others:

- Receiving assistance with homework or other education (16% vs. EU average of 9%).
- Attending a discussion, debate or presentation (14% vs. EU average of 6%)
- Attending a meeting on local issues (14% vs. EU average of 5%)
- Attending a lecture or talk (13% vs. EU average of 11%)
- Receiving advice from library staff on looking for/applying for a job (7% vs. EU average of 3%)

One per cent of library users in Bulgaria reported that they had attended a computer training class in the last 12 months. This means that c.12,000 adults in Bulgaria 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 - Bulgaria (1428); EU (24253). C17- All PAC users - Bulgaria (718); EU (11716).

As Figure 9 shows, public library staff play an important role in assisting library users in informal learning. Overall, 62% of library users in Bulgaria had been shown or helped to do something by a member of library staff within the last 12 months, which was much higher than the EU average of 49%.

The most common ways in which library staff assisted library users were with the use of the computer equipment, printing or scanning, using a browser or search engine to find information online and finding information on the library’s website.

In the qualitative research, users were very positive about the support with ICT they received from library staff. Among the most often-mentioned help was guidance and support when using Microsoft Office, and staff were found to be very competent in this software, and taught users how to get the best use out of it.

*“In my opinion the librarians are very competent in ICT. Sometimes I have to do some accountancy by Excel. And they always advice me on how to make tables and formulas.”
(User, Urban)*

“Once I had to prepare a presentation to the management of our association. I made it by my own, but then asked the people from the library to check it. So they were really

helpful – not only that they formatted the Powerpoint slides in much better way, but also advised me on how the structure and present the information.” (User, Urban)

Users also reported receiving help with scanning documents, and older users were particularly likely to have received help with creating email accounts and Skype accounts.

Some of the libraries offered more structured training courses, which were so popular that they were sometimes over-subscribed.

“Normally one course is for 5 people – we have 5 computers. But sometimes there are more – they agreed to seat 2 people on one PC only to attend the course.”, (New user, Semi-rural)

Library managers had learnt over time that one-to-one training could better meet the needs and pace of individuals than group training.

“It is quite difficult to gather 5-6 people at the same time. Then they are different ages, they progress with different speed. Finally we realized that the individual lessons are more effective. For instance, the most common problem in the beginning is to learn how to control the mouse pointer. How to show this to 6 people at once? I need to take the hand of each one and show them how to move the mouse.”, (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Some library managers explained the limitations of library staff’s ability to teach ICT skills as they had not teacher training, despite being prepared to help users with queries.

“Well, we can consult and guide the users if they have questions, but we do not feel enough prepared to guide methodical educational courses. And this is not our work – yes we can help and consult, but we are not teachers.” (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Users however, felt very satisfied with training courses they had participated in, and perceived the content to be very up-to-date, covering the last software versions available. Some of the younger users even thought the training courses in the library had been more useful than the formal training they had received in school.

“Many of the things we go through at the course we have learned in school too, but I haven’t remembered anything. The teacher goes through the matter very fast, without explanations... Here the librarian explains everything, give examples, ask us to do it by ourselves.” (User, Semi-Rural)

Many older users, especially in the smaller villages, were very pleased as they had learnt how to use ICT for the first time in the library training courses.

“When we were pupils there were no computers in the schools. So we have to learn this now.” (New user, Semi-rural)

Further, although some users had PCs at home (usually bought and used by their children) they did not know how to use them until they received training at the library

“We have a PC at home, but I was afraid to touch it. It belongs to my daughter. She works till late, then in the weekend she prefers to go out with friends and she never had time to teach me how to operate the computer. Now, after the course in the library I can use it too.” (New user, Semi-rural)

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.

Around a fifth (22%) of PAC users in Bulgaria 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 20,000 PAC users in Bulgaria who had used PAC for employment related activity.

Overall, 3% of PAC users in Bulgaria had used a PAC to apply for a job (either in Bulgaria or in another EU country) in the last 12 months - this represents approximately 3,500 adults in Bulgaria. Of those respondents who applied for a job through PAC, 15% said that they were successful. This means that in all 1% of PAC users in Bulgaria – or an estimated 1,000 adults– applied for and got a job via a PAC in the last 12 months.

Public library staff have an important role to play in supporting employment related PAC activities, as is shown in Figure 10; one in five (20%) of PAC users in Bulgaria indicated that they had been shown or helped to do some employment-related PAC activity (much higher than the EU average of 11%). The most common service library staff provided users with was help in improving the skills needed for their existing job, mentioned by one in seven users (14%).

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			
	%			%		
		BG	EU		BG	EU
Any listed below		22	30	Any listed below	20	11
Find information about searching and/or applying for jobs	6	6	14	Improve skills needed in your current job	14	4
Search for jobs	5	5	13	How to write a CV	6	5
Write a CV or covering letter	5	5	12	How to develop skills needed to obtain a job	4	2
Improve skills needed in your current job	11	11	11	How to look for a job online (such as finding a recruitment company, searching for information about an employer)	4	3
Apply for jobs in this country	3	3	10	How to apply for a job online	4	2
Search for information about an employer	2	2	8	How to look for and apply for jobs in other EU countries	1	1
Find a recruitment company	1	1	5			
Use spread sheet/data	2	2	3			
Search for jobs in other EU countries	1	1	2			
Apply for jobs in other EU countries	*	*	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. BG (718); 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. Around one in five users in Bulgaria (21%) had used a PAC for finding information related to a business they worked in, in line with the EU average of 20%. One in twenty PAC users (5%) had used a PAC for participating in professional networks, compared to the EU average of 6%. Four per cent in Bulgaria, in line with the EU average (4%), had used a PAC to find ways or places to sell their own products or goods.

The qualitative research found that some of the libraries are working in direct cooperation with the national employment agency in order to inform users of vacancies.

"The NEA sends us lists with the available positions, we print them and put them on several places in the village. We also publish this information at the Facebook page of the library.", (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Library staff also helped job-seekers with preparing their CV and other information needed for job applications, which had resulted in users finding employment.

"There was a woman who was here every day, trying to find a job abroad. We helped her to prepare her CV, to scan the diploma and he really did find a job abroad. For us

this was something normal, but during the meetings we realised that this is considered as a great success practice.”, (Library manager, Semi-rural)

Job-seekers felt that the digital skills acquired at the library would be crucial for helping them find employment.

“In many of the job announcements they are looking for computer literacy. Nowadays it is a must if you want to find a job.” (User, Semi-rural)

ICT services in libraries had also helped employed users develop their professional skills to a level that would have been impossible without free access to ICT.

“ICT help me to develop my professional skills at much higher level. Using ICT in the libraries I have access to databases for free. Otherwise I would have to pay 150 euro for downloading a pdf with articles or part of a book. Using ICT permits me to be aware with the latest trends.” (User, Urban)

7. E-government and active citizenship

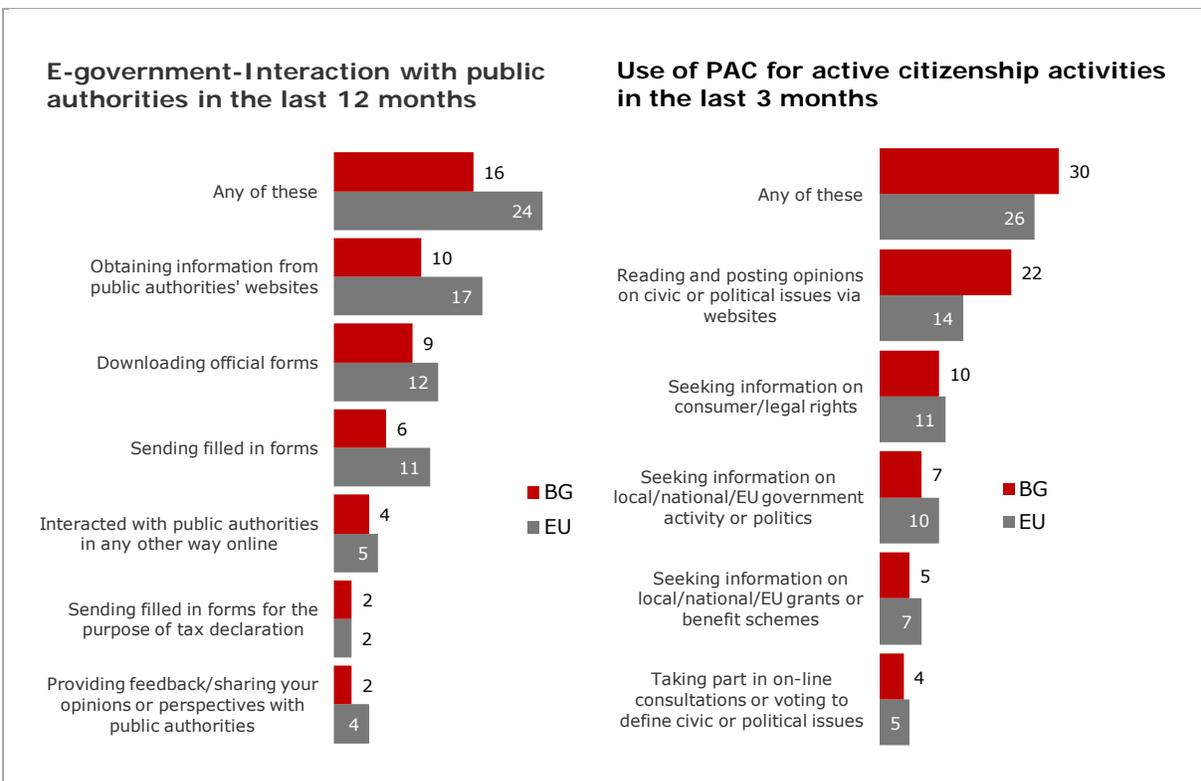
As part of the 'Connecting Europe' agenda, public libraries represent a network of public digital access points which can assist in the effective delivery of access to e-government. Computer users were asked about their interaction with public authorities using PACs, including obtaining information from 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 Bulgaria is significantly below the EU average - 25% of adults in Bulgaria used the internet in the last 12 months to interact with public authorities, compared with 41% across the EU. Adults in Bulgaria were also less likely to use the Internet to obtain information from public authorities' web sites (20% compared with the EU average of 35%).

The library survey found that around one in six PAC users in Bulgaria (16%) had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, below the EU average of one in four (24%), and below the Eurostat finding for all adults in Bulgaria (25%). The most common ways in which PAC users in Bulgaria interacted with public authorities were to obtain information from public authorities' websites (10%) and to download official forms (9%). In each case, these figures were lower than both the average proportions across the 17 EU countries and the Eurostat findings for all adults in Bulgaria.

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, three in ten PAC users in Bulgaria (30%) had used PAC for 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 (22% Bulgaria compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on consumer/legal rights (10% Bulgaria, broadly similar to the EU level of 11%).

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. BG (718); EU (11716)

In the qualitative research, library managers had written an electronic guide of local business and administration, containing useful links and contact details of the local and state administration departments. This was located on desktops on each library PC and on the library’s Facebook page. To encourage civic participation, one library ran a volunteering programme for teenagers to come in to the library and train older users in how to use ICT in the library.

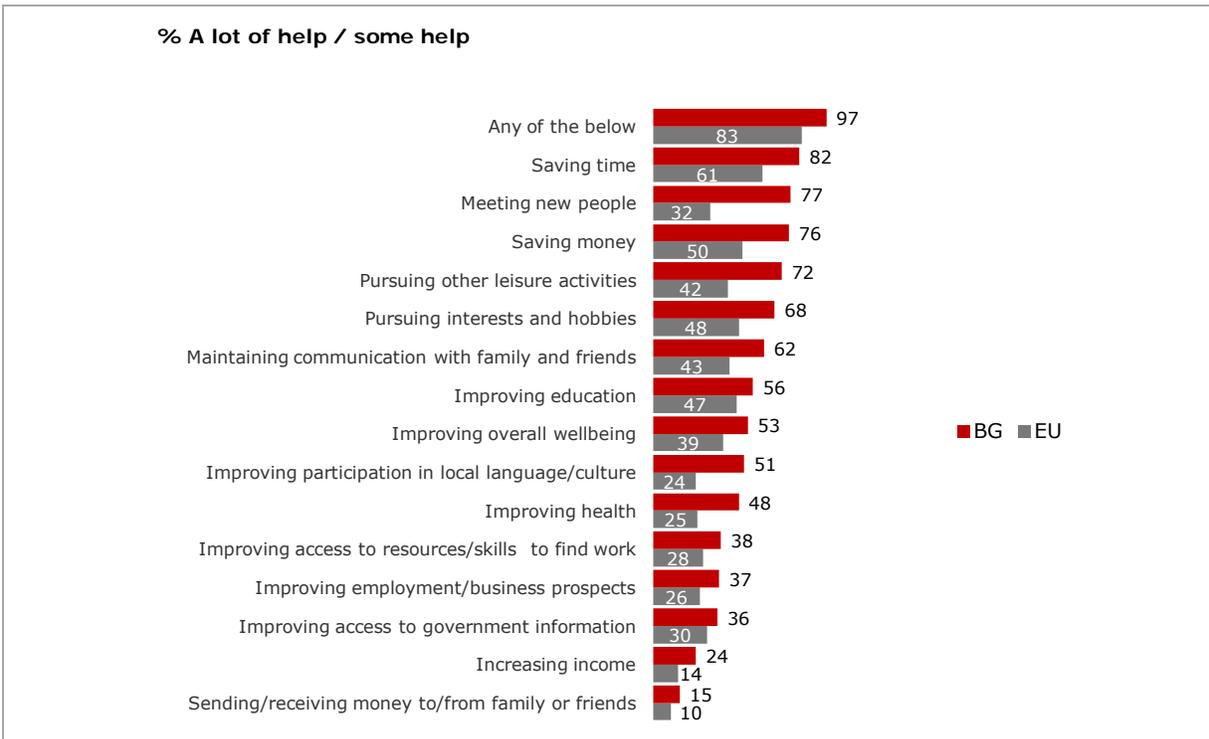
8. Impacts

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 97% of PAC users in Bulgaria 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 representing approximately 0.1 million people in Bulgaria.

Figure 12 shows the proportions saying PAC use had been helpful in each area, in Bulgaria 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- BG (718); EU (11716).

As well as the general area of saving time (82% Bulgaria, 61% EU), PAC use was rated as helpful across a range of leisure and social areas such as meeting new people (77% Bulgaria, 32% EU), pursuing interests and hobbies (68% Bulgaria, 48% EU), pursuing other leisure activities (72% Bulgaria, 42% EU) and maintaining communication with family and friends (62% Bulgaria, 43% EU). Three quarters of PAC users (76%) in Bulgaria, compared to half (50%) across the 17 EU countries, said PAC was helpful in saving money, which represents an estimated 80,000 PAC users in Bulgaria.

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

- 60,000 people to improve their education
- 40,000 people to improve their access to resources necessary to find work
- 40,000 people to improve their access to government information services
- 40,000 people to improve their employment or business prospects
- 25,000 people to increase their income.

In the qualitative research, the majority of users reported that ICT usage in the library had had a very positive impact on their lives, with even small achievements giving them feelings of pride and happiness.

"I registered in Facebook. And in order to register, I had to create an e-mail first. And I did it by my own. So now I have Facebook – well, I still do not have any friends, but this will come too." (New user, Semi-rural)

"I collected traditional songs and legends from the region, typed them on the PC, added some pictures and then print it as a small book. The people from the library liked it so much that they put it in the library, next to the real books." (New user, Semi-rural)

Many users shared the opinion that library ICT had helped them to save money as it provided a free service and allowed them to buy cheaper items online than they would have been able to offline.

"Well I would directly say that ICT saves me money. For 2 months I was unemployed so I stopped paying for Internet. But I come here in the library and I have access to internet. In addition I use Ciela program for free." (User, Urban)

"My children compare the prices in Internet and order on-line. They buy clothes and shoes at much cheaper price than in the shop." (User, Semi-rural)

Some respondents explained that by using ICT they had become much more informed and confident regarding their health.

"I have neighbors who thanks to ICT found a specialist for a very serious health problem they had. They found the right clinic, the right specialist. Without ICT this be very difficult and expensive – to go to Sofia, to stay for several days there etc." (User, Urban)

Users had also found that the easier access to a broader range of information provided by ICT had helped them to be better prepared for their professional or social obligations.

"I am a chairman of a pensioners club. We gather and I am supposed to present them reports on different topics. Now with ICT it is much easier to find interesting and actual articles, to print them and present them to the club", (User, Urban)

Finally, some users reported more frequent use of other library services such as borrowing books as a result of their ICT usage.

"Now I borrow books much more often. I come in the library to check Facebook and when leaving I take a book. This double function of the library is great!" (New user, Semi-rural)