

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

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 Latvia and compares the results to the EU total.

### The public library landscape

- The desk research estimates that there are 819 public libraries in Latvia, which equates to 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 100% of public libraries in Latvia.

### Library and PAC usage

- An estimated 0.5 million adults in Latvia, approaching a third of adults in the country (30%) 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 Latvia, 8% of adults, had used PACs in the last 12 months, significantly higher than the average of 4% of adults across the EU.
- PAC users in Latvia, 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 rural area rather than in a town or city.
- 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 Latvia were more likely than the EU average to have said that they had no other option for internet access (36% in Latvia compared with 19% across the EU).
- Overall, it is estimated that 40,000 PAC users in Latvia 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 Latvia than the EU average. Overall, 95% of PAC users in Latvia said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users.
- Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users: 96% of users in Latvia were satisfied.

## Perceptions and impacts of public libraries

- Around six out of ten library users in Latvia 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 (52%) of the general public in Latvia (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was lower than the average across the EU of 64%.
- Around half (49%) of the public in Latvia felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was higher than the EU average (40%).
- Overall 93% of PAC users in Latvia 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 Latvia.
- Library users in Latvia were more likely than the EU average to strongly agree that public libraries 'Have highly skilled librarians' (63% Latvia compared with 43% EU) and 'Are friendly and welcoming' (79% Latvia, 58% EU).

## Informal and non-formal learning

- In Latvia 30% 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 third (34%) of PAC users in Latvia had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, in line with the EU average of 30%. This represents an estimated 47,000 PAC users in Latvia who had used PAC for employment related activity.
- An estimated 19,000 PAC users in Latvia 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 almost one in five PAC users in Latvia (19%) 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 way in which PAC users in Latvia interacted with public authorities was to obtain information from public authorities' websites (14%).
- Overall, 35% of PAC users in Latvia had used PAC for civic 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 (22% Latvia compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on government activity (12% Latvia 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 development<sup>1</sup>. For instance, the Global Impact Study on Public Access to ICTs, which covers five developing countries, found that those using Public Access Computers reported positive impact related to communication (79%), education (78%), access to government information (40%) and health (37%). More than 80% of public services in the EU are now fully available online,<sup>2</sup> but in 2011, just 41% of the EU population used government services electronically.<sup>3</sup> Today, some Europeans have their first experiences with computers or the Internet at a public library, and for some individuals this may remain the only place they can access ICTs (or access them without paying unaffordable fees)<sup>4</sup>.

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

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

The Global Libraries programme of the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation is currently working in five EU countries: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania. In Latvia, the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation supports 'Father's Third Son', a project of the State Agency 'Culture Information Systems' which has been running since 2006. The goal of the project is to facilitate better and proactive use of resources offered by free access to computers and the Internet in libraries. The project has succeeded in equipping all of Latvia's public libraries with PCs, software and free broadband Internet connectivity and librarians with a comprehensive training program.

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

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

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

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

## 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 1,091 members of the public aged 15+ in Latvia (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 Latvia, 730 interviews were conducted with people who had not used Public Access Computers (PACs) in libraries (12,537 across the 17 countries) and 729 with those who had (11,716 across the 17 countries). The interviews in Latvia were conducted in 30 libraries which were selected and contacted with help from a representative of the 'Culture Information Systems Centre'. 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 Latvia and compares the results to the EU total. EU results are based on findings from the 17 countries included in this study. Individual reports for each country surveyed have been produced as well as an overall report<sup>5</sup>.

Throughout this report where we refer to:

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

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

Throughout this report comparisons are made between the findings in Latvia 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 Latvia are *included* in the EU average, which has the effect of lessening the statistical power of comparisons between the Latvia and EU figures.

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

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 Latvia and are presented in terms of estimated numbers.

## **2. The public library landscape and internet provision**

There are 819 public libraries in Latvia (2011)<sup>6</sup>, which equates to 4 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 Latvia has reduced by 10 since 2010. Closures have been mainly in cities rather than in rural areas where numbers have remained steady. Of the 819 public libraries in 2011, 149 were situated in cities and 667 public libraries were situated in the countryside.

Public libraries in Latvia are established under regional municipalities. Libraries can have a regional or local importance depending on the number of their functions. There are 28 public libraries of regional importance that provide support to local libraries.

Public libraries run by one librarian are very common in Latvia. Almost 71% of all Latvia's public libraries are one person libraries.

In 2011 the total cost of Latvia's library system was 23,696,954 Latvian Lats. Of this, 14,109,189 Latvian Lats were used for the funding of public libraries

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

A public library development project ('Father's Third Son') took place in 2006-13 which aimed to turn basic storage space for books into modern study centres and which provided Latvia's municipal public libraries with:

- Broadband wireless internet
- Guaranteed free use of the internet
- State-of-the-art computers
- Specially trained employees

The project has had a significant impact on the perception of public libraries in Latvia, and has provided users with a higher level of accessibility to information, knowledge and skills. It has also supported digital and social inclusion, and has broadened opportunities to address community priorities. The project objectives included:

- Installing around 4000 computers (an average of 3.4 computers per library) in Latvia's libraries
- Equipping the Latvian Library for the Blind and its seven branches with special computers for blind and sight-impaired users
- Equipping the 28 main regional libraries with special computers for site-impaired users
- Connecting 17 libraries to the internet for the first time
- Increasing the speed of the internet connection at libraries
- Installing equipment enabling wireless access to the internet at libraries
- Establishing 10 regional training centers with an additional 10 mobile training labs

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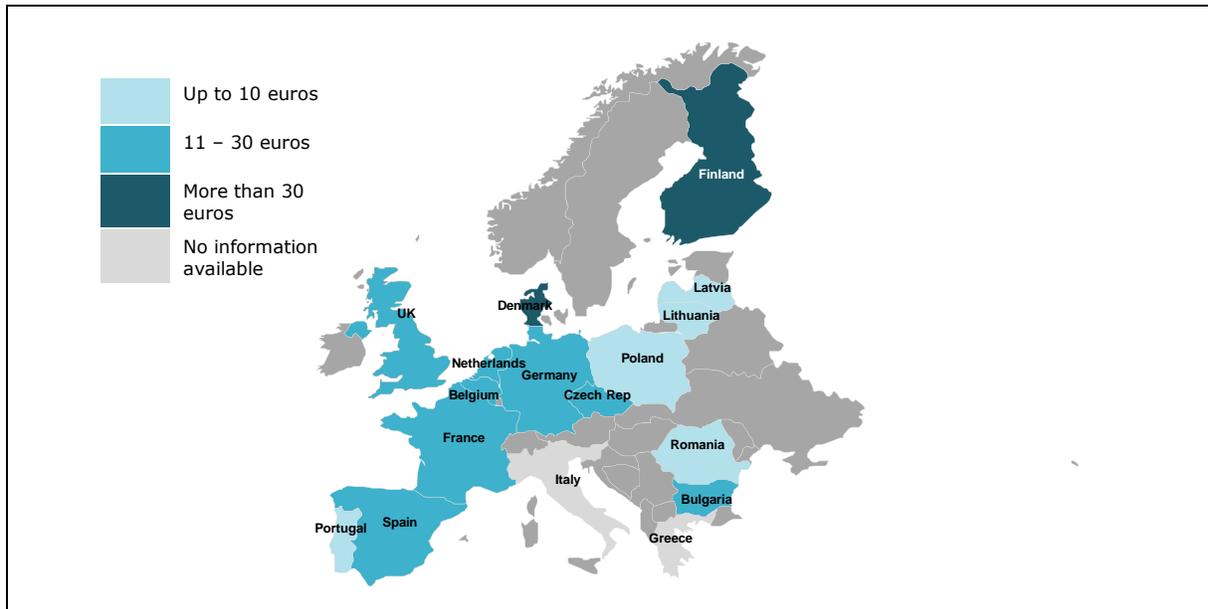
<sup>6</sup> Source: LNB Bibliotēku attīstības institūts (Library development institute of Latvian National Library). *Latvijas bibliotēku darba koprādītāji 2010-2011*

- Giving the opportunity to 1800 librarians to participate in a comprehensive training programme for the provision of ICT related services to library customers

Eurostat data (2011) for Internet access at home shows that the level in Latvia is below the average level in Europe, with 64% 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 Latvia than in other countries.

Annual public spending on libraries per capita in Latvia at 9.7 Euros (6.8LVL) was below the average for other countries in the study, as shown in the map below:

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



Source: TNS desk research

### 3. Library and PAC usage

#### 3.1 Access to libraries and PACs

Library usage in Latvia is above the EU average, as found by the general public survey:

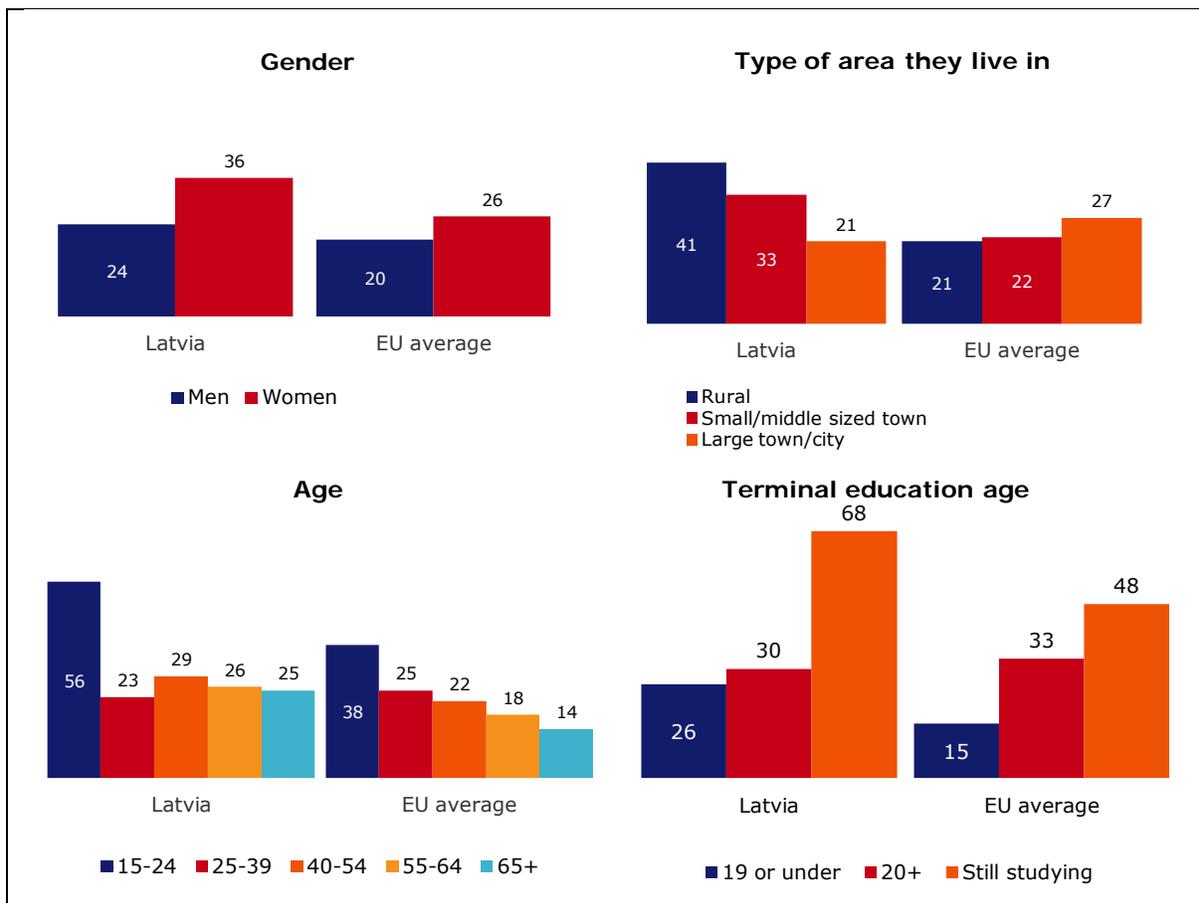
- An estimated 0.5 million adults in Latvia, approaching a third of adults in Latvia (30%) had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 0.3 million adults, almost a fifth (19%) of adults in Latvia, had used a library at least once a month, against an EU average of 14%.

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

- Women (36%) were more likely than men (24%) to have visited a library, in line with the findings across the EU.

- Library usage in Latvia was highest among those aged 15-24 (56%), then fairly consistent across the other age bands (23% of those aged 25-39, 29% of those aged 40-54, 26% of those aged 55-64 and 25% of those aged 65 and over had visited a library in the last 12 months). Among all age groups except the 25-39s, library usage in Latvia was higher than the EU average
- Library use was higher in rural areas (41%) and small towns (33%) than in cities (21%)
- Library use was particularly high among those still studying – 68% of this group had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with the EU average for this group of 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: Latvia – All adults (1091), Men (483), Women (608), 15-24 (178), 25-39 (261), 40-54 (267), 55-64 (139), 65+ (246), Large town/city (384), Small town (381), Rural area (320), Finished education 19 or under (644), 20 or over (348), Still studying (96). 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 Latvia, compared with across the EU, was:

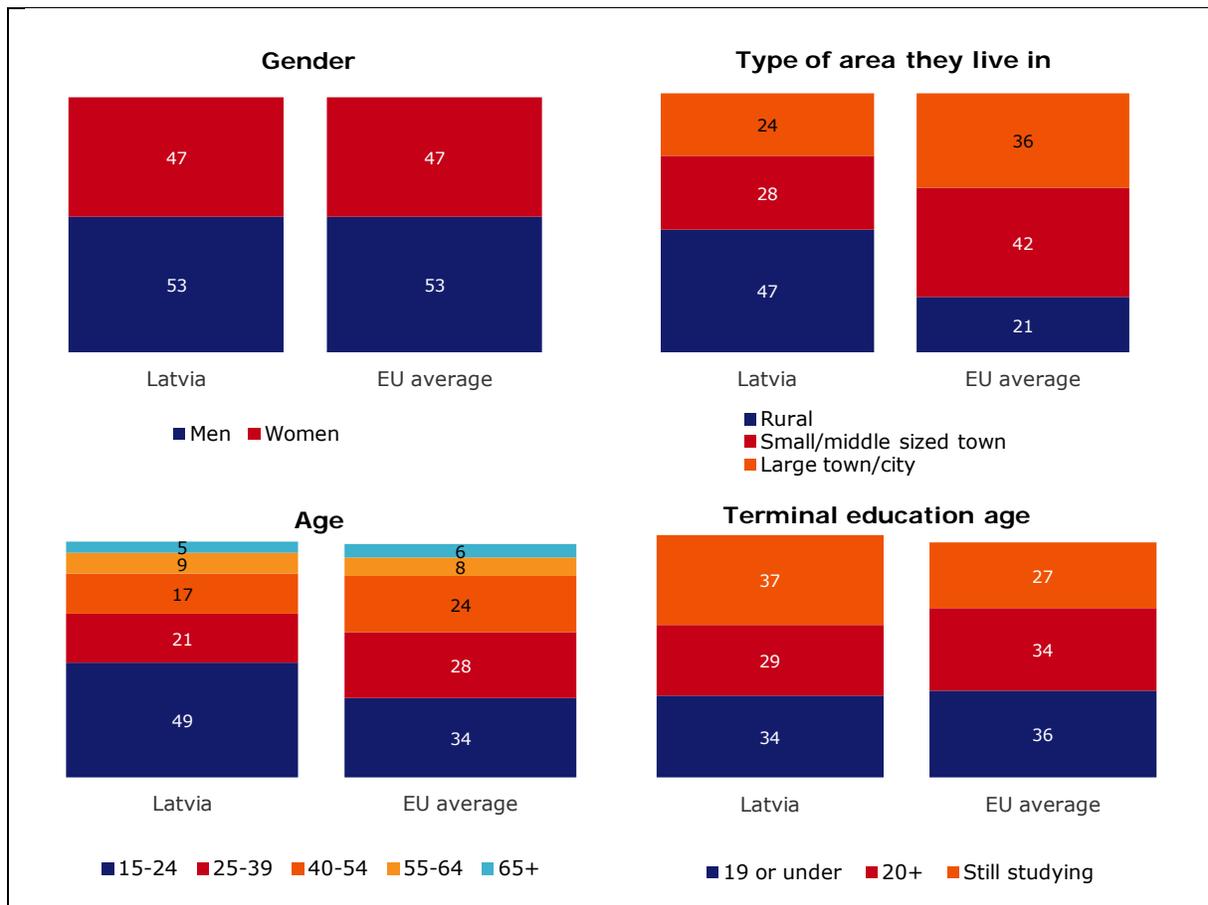
- 36% of library users in Latvia were men, 64% women; compared with the EU average (42% men, 58% women)
- users in Latvia had a similar age profile to the EU average – 28% were aged 15-24, 19% aged 25-39, 24% aged 40-54, 12% aged 55-64 and 17% aged 65+; compared with the EU average of 25% aged 15-24, 26% aged 25-39, 25% aged 40-54, 12% aged 55-64 and 12% aged 65+.

A quarter (26%) of those who had visited a library in Latvia in the last 12 months used a PAC, which is higher than the EU average of 14%. When those who had not used a PAC were asked why this was, although the majority (68%) said they had no need to because they had a computer/internet at home, a significant minority of (15%) 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 8% of adults in Latvia had used PACs in the last 12 months, significantly higher than the average of 4% of adults across the EU countries. This is estimated to be around 0.1 million adults within Latvia.

PAC users in Latvia, just like the EU average, were more likely to be men and to be aged 15-24. However, Latvia stands out as being very different from the EU average in terms of having a high proportion of PAC users coming from rural areas rather than large towns or cities, 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 Latvia (729), EU (11716).

Nearly two fifths of PAC users in Latvia (39%) made use of PACs at least once a week, compared with 23% across the EU, with 24% doing so once to three times a month (compared with 29% across the EU). 37% of users in Latvia had used PACs once every three months or less often, compared with the EU average of 47%.

In the qualitative research, library managers described a variety of methods by which they had tried to attract users to their ICT services. All libraries had information stands, where news was published in the form of announcements, and home pages of the libraries were also used to provide information. Local media, such as local radio, TV and municipal newspapers were used to provide information on ICT services such as 'e-skills' weeks, while other agencies, such as the local employment service, distributed information leaflets on behalf of the library. Library staff also spoke of providing a calm, approachable environment that encouraged hard-to-reach user groups to ask questions and seek support themselves, particularly after having taken part in an introductory course and established a relationship with a particular member of staff.

*"We have computer training for elderly people – it is a special course of lessons for seniors. Groups of 6 persons have 4 lessons, and each [of them] can continue consultations individually with that person, who has instructed them....They come calmly, safely to their librarian on duty." (Senior Library Manager, Urban)*

To encourage users with special needs, one library in the qualitative sample had organized training run by a disabled person's society on how to use a special computer in the library for people with impaired eyesight, which was attended by members of the society.

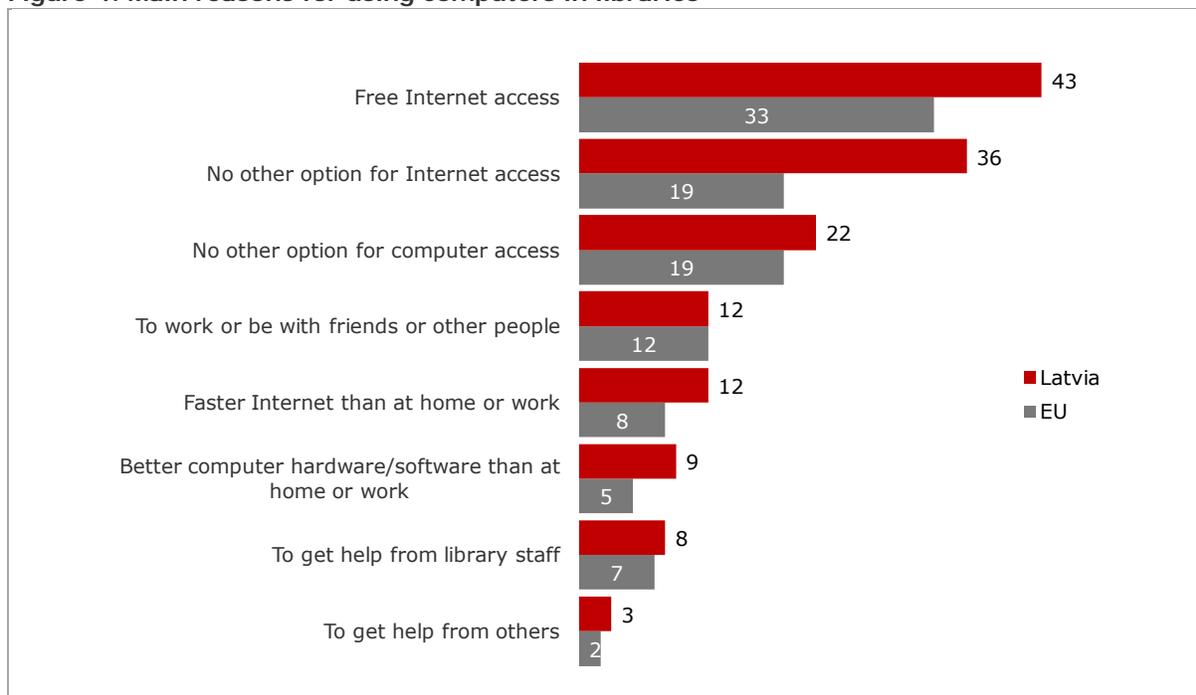
As part of an outreach project for users with disabilities, library staff visited disabled people in their homes to teach them various ICT skills such as writing emails, producing a CV and making a family tree.

Users were asked what their main reasons were for using library ICT services, and one of the key motivations was a lack of a computer, internet connection or other ICT equipment at home, due to it being unaffordable for the user. Other motivations included the accessibility of support from library staff, the quiet and peaceful atmosphere of the library compared to other locations which allowed users to concentrate, and the opportunity to use other library resources such as books in parallel with ICT facilities. Some participants also noted that the speed of the internet and quality of the computers was better than elsewhere. In addition, libraries were often located near users' homes so were in a convenient location. Finally, one participant mentioned the library was a good place to socialize with others.

### **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 Latvia 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 Latvia were more likely than those in other countries to have said that they had no other option for internet access (36% in Latvia compared with 19% 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- Latvia (729); 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 Latvia, 11% of PAC users said that they had no other options for accessing the internet (in line with the EU average (11%), and a further 19% that there was no other source of free internet for them (compared with 14% across the EU). Overall, it is estimated that c.40, 000 PAC users in Latvia (30% of PAC users) had nowhere else to access the internet, or to access the internet free of charge.

Those who indicated that they had no other options for accessing the internet often tended to come from 'digitally excluded' 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:

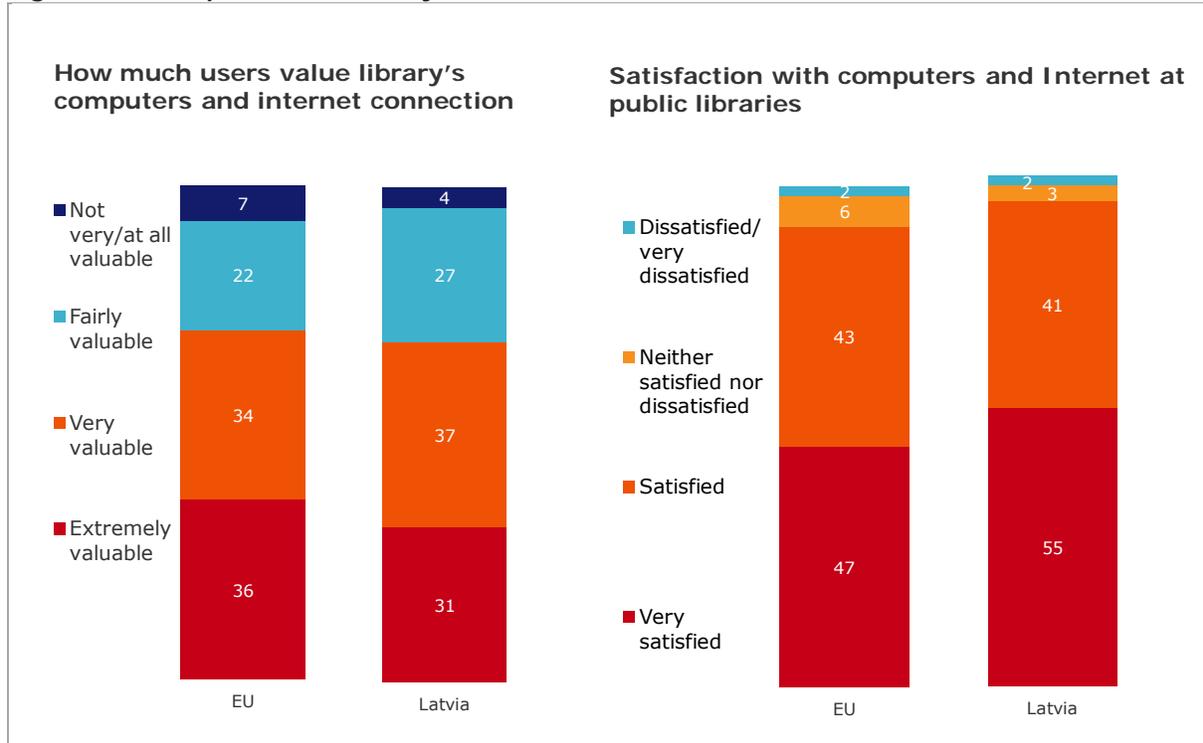
- Older people – 40% of PAC users aged 55+ had no alternative internet access, compared with 3% of those aged 15-24
- Those who were not in employment – 14% had no alternative for internet access, compared with 6% of the employed
- Those living in large towns/cities – 22% had no alternative for internet access, compared with 4% living in rural locations.

The value placed on the PAC service was higher among users in Latvia than the EU average, as shown in Figure 5. Overall, 95% of PAC users in Latvia said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. 31% of PAC users in Latvia said the service was extremely valuable, compared with 36% across the EU.

The library's computers and internet connection were valued particularly highly in Latvia by users aged 65+ (44% rated the services as extremely valuable), and those in large towns/cities (39% 'extremely valuable').

Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users, as shown in Figure 5: 96% of users in Latvia were satisfied. Again, users in Latvia were more likely to say they were satisfied with computers and internet at the library than EU users as a whole; 55% of users in Latvia 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. Latvia (729); EU (11716)

In Latvia, over three-quarters of PAC users (79%) said that when they go to a library to use a computer, they find a free computer straight away, and a further 12% 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 computers available to users in each library ranged from 5 to 14, with the exception of the library with the most visitors in the sample which provided 82 computers. All libraries provided access to photocopiers, printers and scanners as well as multifunctional equipment. Library managers explained that MS Office was used for software, which had been provided by the project 'Fathers third son'.

In the view of library managers, the computers were in good working order and met users' needs. However they were considered to be rather old and technical problems that arose had to be solved with the help of specialists, which had led to certain parts of some PCs being replaced. Further, software was

not the latest version which meant that foreign users passing by could not open documents as the library used older versions of software.

*"Its all normal with us, but, I will say honestly, our computers are terribly old, [working] since the year 2005. And we want younger ones because, they are 7 years [old]... They are generally working well, but, if we have any problems, we call a specialist, who repairs [them]." (Library Manager, Urban)*

*"There are problems here. Electric disturbances, old equipment, because these are basically computers from "Father's third son", and everything needs renewal. Also the software should be renewed, especially because foreigners passing by cannot open their documents very often, as we do not have the latest versions. But, we try to help, when we know, on which computer the document of the relevant year can be opened." (Library Manager, Semi-rural)*

In contrast to the views of library managers, users, particularly those who had recently used library ICT for the first time, thought the condition of hardware and software in their library was satisfactory for their needs. More advanced users were more likely to express a desire for more advanced software than that provided by their library. Both library staff and users agreed however that the number of PCs available was sufficient and there was no need to increase the number of computers in libraries.

Library managers and most users thought the internet connection speed was sufficient, allowing users to download documents and stream videos, although the speed ranged within the sample from 4Mbit/s in the smallest library to 200Mbit/s in the largest.

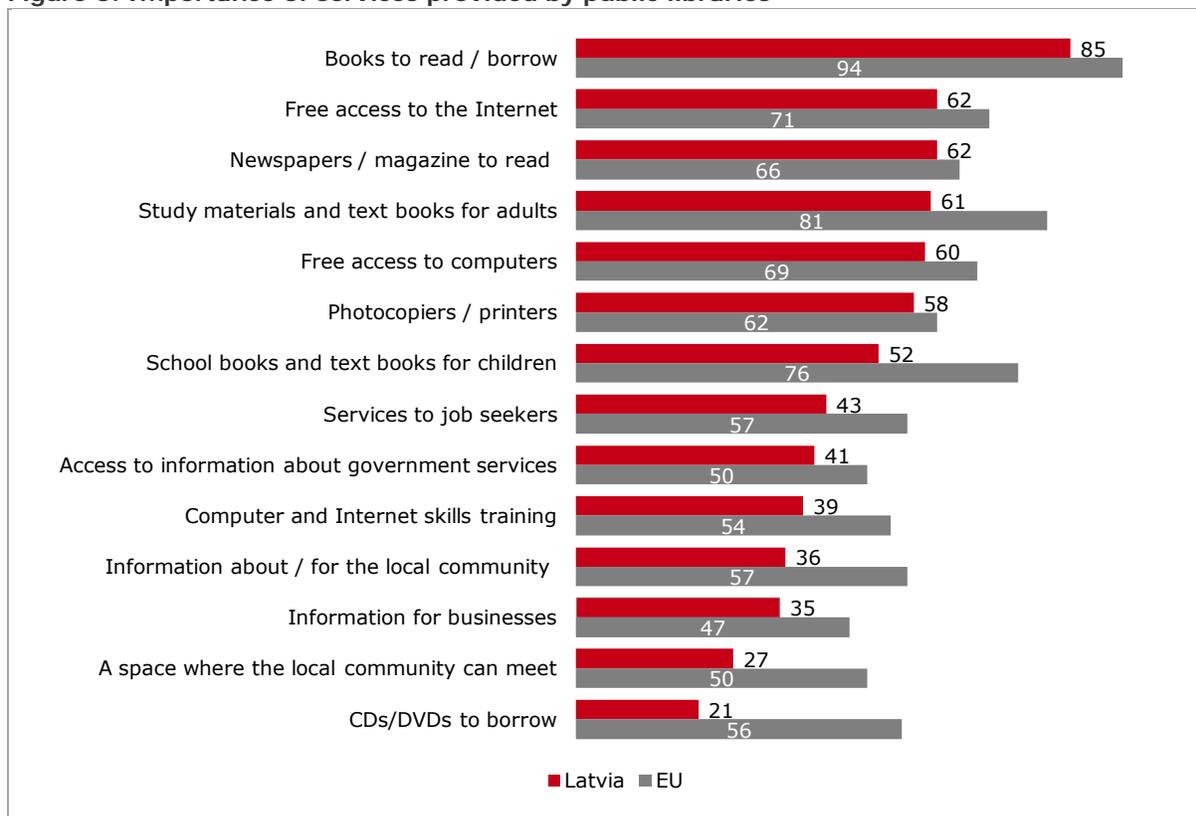
## **4. Impressions of public libraries**

### **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 Latvia, 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 85% of users in Latvia (and 94% across the EU ) followed by 'free access to the internet' 'newspapers' , 'study materials/text books for adults' and 'free access to computers'. Users in Latvia have tended to give lower importance ratings to each of the services compared with the EU average.

**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 - Latvia (1459); EU (24253)

In the qualitative research, users described the library environment positively, using words such as 'peaceful', 'relaxing' and 'quiet'. They also related the environment to the welcoming attitude of the staff, describing it as a 'polite', 'friendly', 'helpful' and 'cozy' place. Other descriptors mentioned included 'intelligent', 'enriching', 'cultural', and 'educational', with the physical environment described as 'clean', 'tidy', 'warm' and 'light'. Users noted that they felt at home in the library. The only negative comment about the library environment was related to poor air quality and ventilation in the computer room.

## 4.2 Effectiveness and funding of public libraries

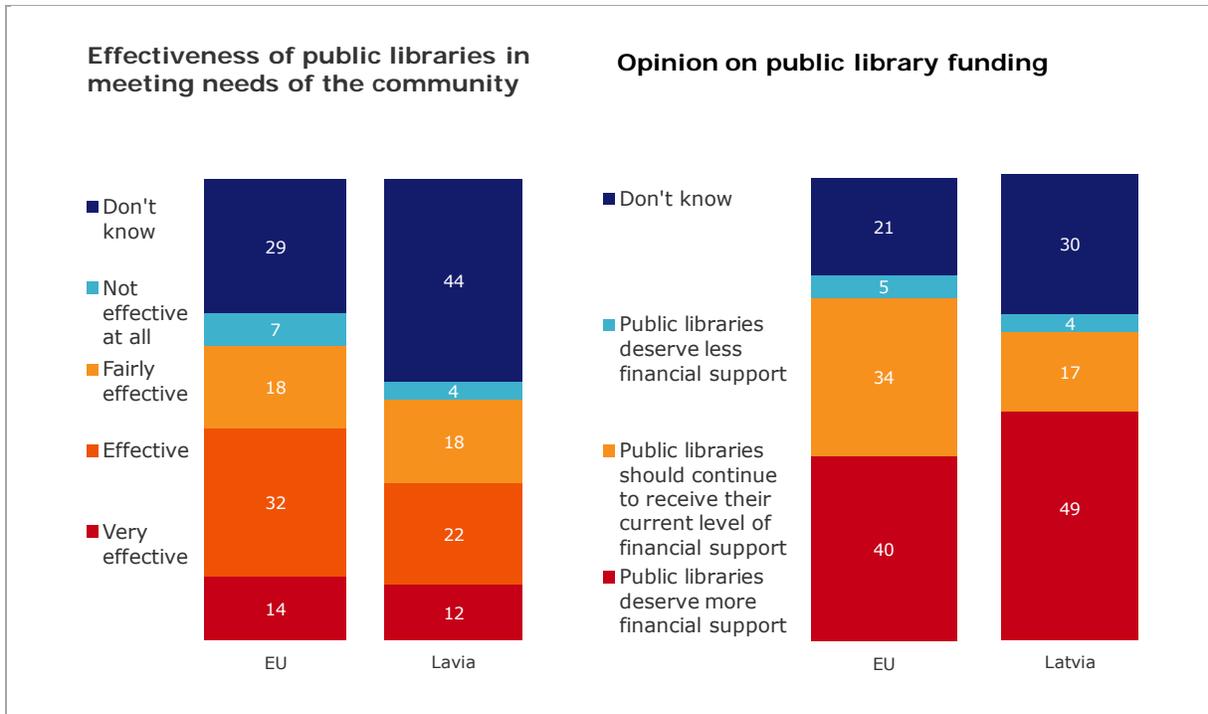
Over a half (52%) of the general public in Latvia (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was lower than the average across the 17 EU survey countries of 64%. The proportion in Latvia saying libraries were 'very effective' was similar to the EU average of 12% v 14%.

Over four fifths of library and PAC users in Latvia (89% and 88% respectively) were of the opinion that libraries were effective in meeting the needs of their local community

Around half (49%) of the public in Latvia felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was higher than the average of all 17 EU countries (40%). Almost all the remainder either felt that the funding should continue as at present (17%) or did not express an opinion (30%). Only 4% of the public in Latvia felt that public libraries deserve less financial support.

Not surprisingly, library users and PAC users were even more likely than non-users to say that libraries deserve more financial support – 72% of all library users, and 77% 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**



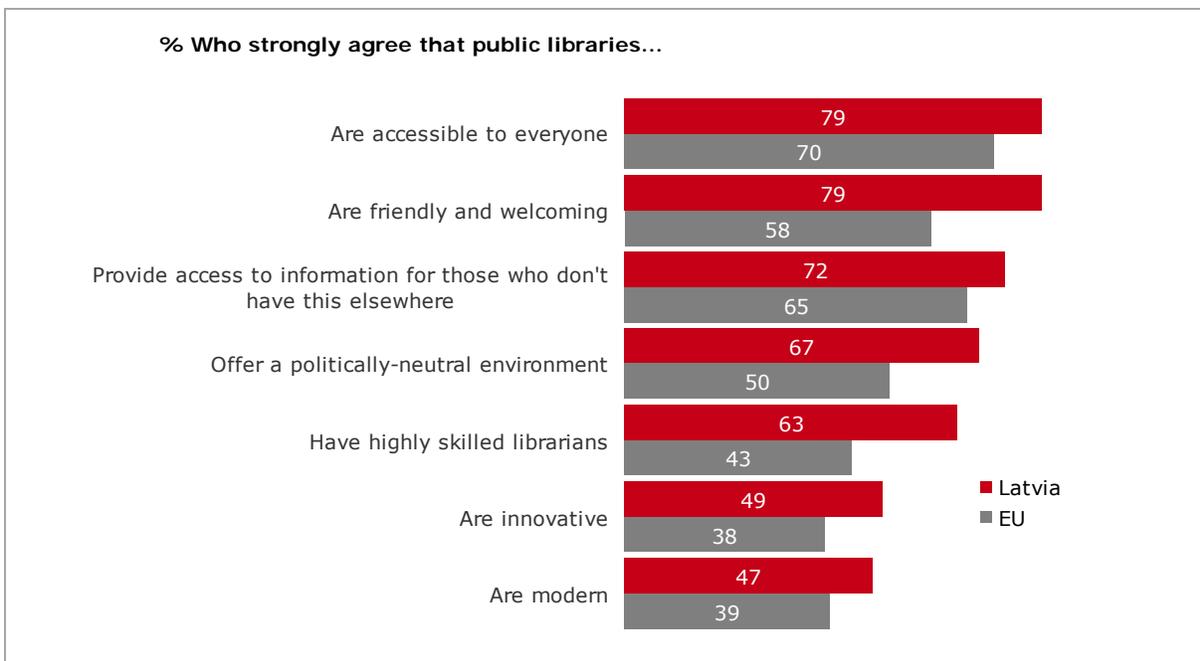
Source: Omnibus survey- Q6 How effective do you think your local public library is at meeting the needs of your community? & Q7 Which of the following statements represents most closely your opinion regarding the current funding for public libraries?.

Base: All adults - Latvia (1091); 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 Latvia and EU who strongly agreed with each of these statements. Library users in Latvia 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' (79% Latvia compared with 58% EU) and 'Have highly skilled librarians' (63% Latvia compared with 43% 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. Latvia (1459); 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.

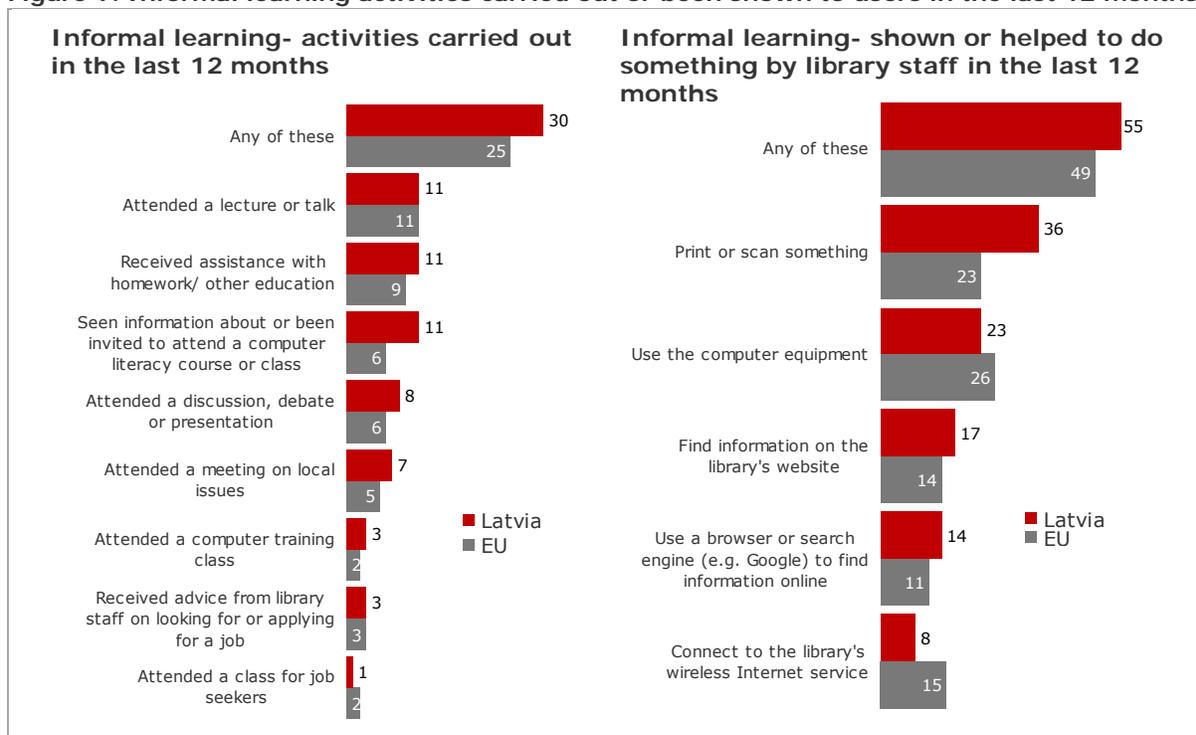
Overall, in Latvia 30% had taken part in any one of the educational activities in libraries asked about in the last 12 months, which was above the EU average of 25%.

Engagement levels in all educational activities in libraries tended to be the same or slightly higher in Latvia than for the EU as a whole (Figure 9), including, among others:

- Attending a lecture or talk (11% vs. EU average of 11%)
- Receiving assistance with homework or other education (11% vs. EU average of 9%)
- Seeing information about or being invited to attend a computer literacy course (11% vs. EU average of 6%)

Three per cent of library users in Latvia reported that they had attended a computer training class in the last 12 months – just above the EU average. This means that c.14, 000 adults in Latvia 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 - Latvia (1459); EU (24253). C17- All PAC users – Latvia (729); EU (11716).

As Figure 9 shows, public library staff play an important role in assisting library users in informal learning. Overall, over a half (55%) library users in Latvia had been shown or helped to do something by a member of library staff within the last 12 months, higher than the EU average of 49%.

The most common ways in which library staff assisted library users were helping with printing or scanning, using the computer and using the library’s website to help find information.

In the qualitative research, users received informal support from staff in a variety of areas, including information searches, emailing, making online payments and purchasing tickets. Some libraries had provided more structured assistance in the form of seminars for particular interest groups. For example, a group of users who were interested in travel were shown useful websites on which they could book travel tickets, and similarly, interest groups were held for people interested in gardening and health. Although this more structured guidance could not be held in smaller libraries due to lack of computers and space, they were held quite regularly in several libraries in the sample. Courses were also given on basic word processing, use of the internet, emails and Skype, in groups of around 8-9 people, and were offered at varied times in the day to suit the routines of different groups, such as retired people, workers and new mothers.

Users were very positive about the support they had received from library staff, and appreciated their benevolent and supportive attitude when providing informal advice and assistance with tasks such as using DVDs, flash, MC Office and Skype. Without this support, users thought they would have taken much longer to work out how to solve the problem themselves, or in the worst case scenario, would not

be capable of solving the problem at all on their own. Those who had participated in the more structured courses had generally found them very valuable and helpful in enabling them to become less dependant on assistance from others as they had acquired the skills they needed. There were some exceptions who thought the course instruction had been too basic, while for others it had been taught at too fast a pace for their liking.

## **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 third (34%) of PAC users in Latvia had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, in line with the EU average of 30%. This represents c.47, 000 PAC users in Latvia who had used PAC for employment related activity.

Overall, 14% of PAC users in Latvia had used a PAC to apply for a job (either in Latvia or in another EU country) in the last 12 months - this represents approximately 19,000 adults in Latvia. Of those respondents who applied for a job through PAC, 50% said that they were successful. This means that in all 7% of PAC users in Latvia – or c.9, 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; one in ten (12%) of PAC users in Latvia indicated that they had been shown or helped to do some employment-related PAC activity (the same proportion as the EU average).

**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                    |           |           |
|--|-----------|-----------|---|-----------|-----------|
| %  | Latvia    | EU        | %   | Latvia    | EU        |
| <b>Any listed below</b>  | <b>34</b> | <b>30</b> | <b>Any listed below</b>   | <b>12</b> | <b>11</b> |
| Find information about searching and/or applying for jobs              | 18        | 14        | Improve skills needed in your current job   | 5         | 4         |
| Search for jobs  | 15        | 13        | How to write a CV   | 7         | 5         |
| Write a CV or covering letter  | 10        | 12        | How to develop skills needed to obtain a job  | 4         | 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) | 5         | 3         |
| Apply for jobs in this country   | 12        | 10        | How to apply for a job online   | 3         | 2         |
| Search for information about an employer                               | 11        | 8         | How to look for and apply for jobs in other EU countries  | 1         | 1         |
| Find a recruitment company   | 6         | 5         |   |           |           |
| Use spread sheet/data  | 2         | 3         |   |           |           |
| Search for jobs in other EU countries                                  | 8         | 2         |   |           |           |
| Apply for jobs in other EU countries                                   | 4         | 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. Latvia (729); 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 fifth of users in Latvia (19%) had used a PAC for finding information related to a business they worked in, on a par with the EU average of 20%. Three per cent of PAC users in Latvia had used a PAC for participating in professional networks, half the EU average of 6%. Five per cent in Latvia, 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 library staff supported users with employment by helping job-seekers to write and submit CVs and search for jobs. Some libraries in the sample also offered a catalogue of internet addresses useful for job searches. Library managers reported this type of assistance as having been successful in helping users to find employment.

*"We are happy, if we do not see somebody for a while and he comes then: oh, I am working already, I have found it. These are unemployed, who come each day like to the [employment] bureau in Riga; they come here and see what happens." (Library manager, Semi-rural)*

In relation to the area of business and e-procurement libraries had a range of experiences: some libraries did not provide any support in this area, while those offering this type of support had both positive and

negative experiences. A benefit to business users was that they could use copiers and faxes by connecting to them remotely online, and could use such facilities free of charge. One library in the sample organized events for new entrepreneurs in cooperation with the Young Entrepreneurs' Centre JCI Latvia. However a library manger from an urban library reported a lack of engagement from local businesses.

*"Putting it simple: do what you want, they will never come. They do not respond to the educational events of other organizations also. Tough, that business environment is a bit different from that [one] we can understand." (Senior Library Manager, Urban)*

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

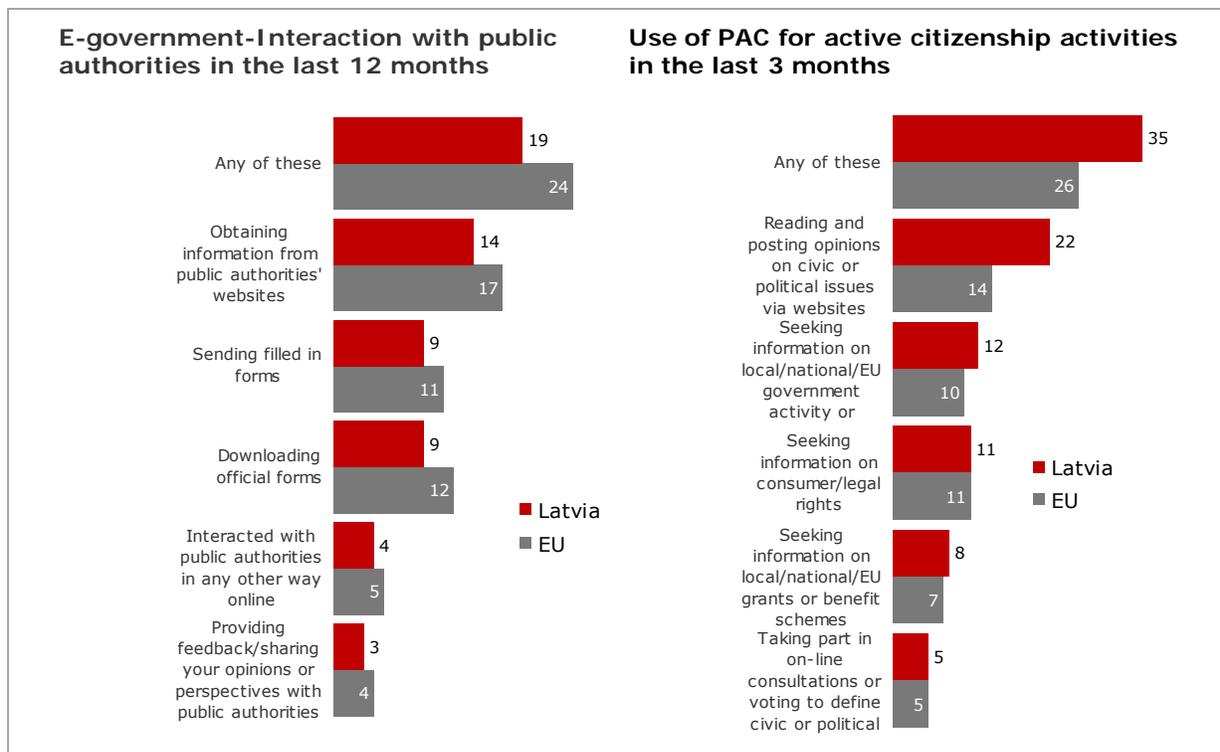
As part of the 'Connecting Europe' agenda, public libraries represent a network of public digital access points which can assist in the effective delivery of access to e-government. Computer users were asked about their interaction with public authorities using PACs, including obtaining information from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

The library survey found that almost one in five (19%) PAC users in Latvia had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, again similar to the EU average of one in four (24%) PAC users having engaged in E-government interaction, but considerably below the Eurostat finding for all adults in Latvia. PAC users in Latvia were less likely than the EU average to have used PACs to send in filled in forms (9% in Latvia compared with 11% EU), and less likely to obtain information from public authorities' websites (14% Latvia compared with 17% EU).

Computer users were also asked about their use of PACs for activities related to civic engagement and active citizenship (Figure 11). This covered areas such as civic participation (reading/posting opinions, taking part in on-line consultations, petitions etc) and seeking information on consumer or legal rights, and on government activity or politics, or grants/benefit schemes. Overall, 35% of PAC users in Latvia 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 (22% Latvia compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on government activity (12% Latvia 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. Latvia (729); EU (11716)

In the qualitative research, library managers reported that support for civil involvement was provided informally according to users' demand. One library had helped a user to use ICT to express an opinion about changes planned for the city.

*"A possibility to express one's evaluation in portals is there too. For example, they plan to build a swimming pool in our town, then also, people used (library) to use mass media and portals. ... We help them to find those addresses in the portal, where they can write what they think about the topic." (Senior Library Manager, Semi-rural)*

The portal [www.latvija.lv](http://www.latvija.lv) was mentioned when speaking about support in the area of e-government; the libraries introduced the users to the portal because it allowed users to access services from the state administration and municipalities. The 'e-skills week' covered assistance with these types of tasks, including internet banking and making payments. Libraries worked with partners to provide support with e-government, for example by working with Lursoft specialists who gave lectures to users about the use of Letonika databases.

*"Swedbank provides its services at us once a week, a kind of visiting Swedbank, and people come that one time a week and know that the representatives of the bank will be here; they can make their payments. Swedbank offered also courses for its users here.... It is the most elementary beginning: a computer, a mouse, a monitor, etc.." (Library manager, Semi-rural)*

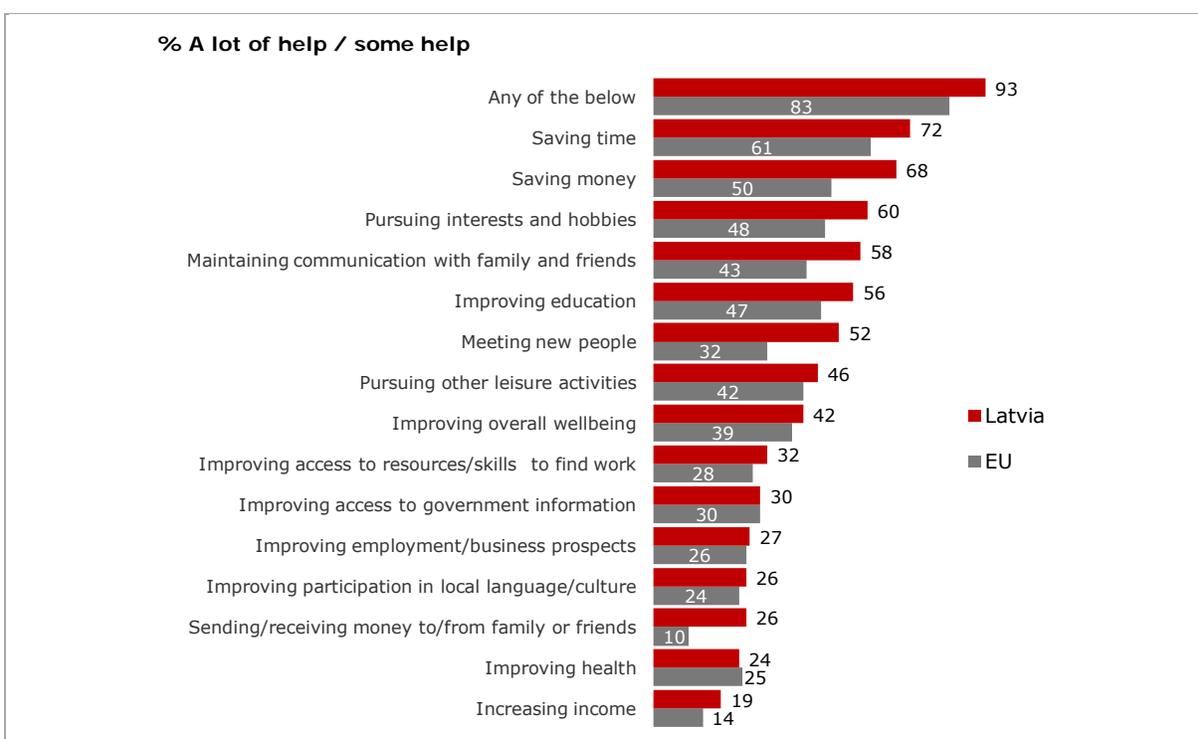
## 8. Impacts

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 93% of PAC users in Latvia 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 0.1 million people in Latvia.

Figure 12 shows the proportions saying PAC use had been helpful in each area, in Latvia 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- Latvia (729); EU (11716).

As well as the general areas of saving time (72% Latvia, 61% EU) and money (68% Latvia, 50% EU), PAC use was rated as helpful across a range of leisure and social areas such as pursuing interests and hobbies (60% Latvia, 48% EU) and maintaining communication with family and friends (58% Latvia, 43% EU). The two thirds of PAC users (68%) in Latvia who said PAC was helpful in saving money represents an estimated 95,000 PAC users in Latvia.

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

- 80,000 people to improve their education
- 45,000 people to improve their access to resources necessary to find work

- 40,000 people to improve their access to government information services
- 35,000 people to improve their employment or business prospects
- 25,000 people to increase their income.

In the qualitative research, users reported having improved their ICT skills by using library services, and recent first-time users were particularly enthusiastic about their new-found skills and further opportunities for learning that lay ahead for them.

*"But, I realized today also how little I know." (Recent first time user, female, 40-64)*

Recent first-time users felt much more confident in their use of ICT as a result of support received by the library and planned to use their new-found skills in the future.

*"We are not people back in times any more. We think about the future. We have learnt now, acquired at least as much as to be able to read a new advertisement at any time, or this, or that, if internet is accessible here (in the library) or at somebody's home." (Recent first time user, female, 40-64)*

While learning about ICT, several users had noted the evident need to improve their English language skills in order to work with ICT more efficiently, and so planned to improve their English language skills in the future.

ICT skills acquired through the library had made it easier for users to communicate with relatives living abroad, both by email and Skype, which was appreciated as a cheaper method of communication than the telephone.

*"I communicate with my family, my children by e-mail on the regular basis. It is much more expedient than by telephone. The bills are smaller." (User, male, 40-64)*

Other benefits of ICT included allowing users to look for jobs, often in locations that would otherwise have been out of their reach, search for a place to live, find information on how to improve their health, develop foreign language skills, find ideas for decorating their homes and establish new contacts with local social groups.

*"He (an acquaintance) did not find job in Latvia.... At last, he found job in England and went away with the whole family. Only by the means of internet. He would never go without it [internet]. I did know him, I was sitting with him side by side in the library talking about life and so on." (User, male, 40-64)*

*"As it is called the year of seniors in EU, I found on internet the number of seniors' groups in Riga ... and I [decided] would cooperate with them. I went there, got acquainted. They have a wide (range): excursions, lessons, needlework – in other words, everything for our age, our generation to do – it is really an achievement. I found it only by internet .... Yes, it will be the cooperation for the future." (User, female, 40-64)*

*"I printed out very much for my niece. She has diabetes, I got to know about very many medicals for the treatment of this disease, what is allowed for use, what not, what diet must be observed – it is also very useful." (User, female, 65+)*