

# The need for information literacy skills among users of European Union information

*Ana Lúcia Terra*

PhD student of Information Science at the University of Coimbra, Portugal

Lecturer, Superior School of Industrial Studies and Management, Oporto Polytechnic Institute, Portugal

anatterra@eu.ipp.pt or analuciaterra@yahoo.com

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is the assessment of information literacy skills related to European topics, among a group of 234 users of 55 European Documentation Centres (EDCs), from 21 European Union Member-States.

We will present the results of a survey on access to European information. So we will analyse the answers given by the users of the EDCs relating to aspects like the best sources to access trustworthy and impartial European information. The factors determining access to information on the EU and the frequency of this access will equally be analysed. The reasons the users gave for the ease or difficulty in accessing European information are also included and pondered on. Parallel to this, we will evaluate the aspects most valued by the users of this kind of information. Our findings on the use of European information available on the Internet, especially the knowledge and making use of databases will be presented.

Based on this analysis the paper will demonstrate the need to develop information literacy competencies to identify, use and access European information. Doing so, some potential components of information literacy skills adapted to European information will be introduced.

**KEYWORDS:** Information behaviour, information literacy, European Union

## 1. STARTING POINT: INFORMATION SCIENCE AND EUROPEAN INFORMATION

The European Union (EU) makes available an increasing amount of information on its activities through multiple channels of information. Simultaneously, the decisions made by European institutions have a profound effect on the daily life of European citizens.

Thus, those who study European matters have to deal with the increasing complexity of their field of study and also with the growing diversity of the information sources and the new accessing opportunities. For these researchers possessing information literacy skills

becomes essential because an information literate person recognizes when information is needed and can locate, access, evaluate and apply that information. Apart from that, information literacy encompasses the effective use of multiple information technologies and formats (Bundy, 2004).

The aim of this paper is the assessment of information literacy skills related to European topics among European information users.

We place our approach within the scientific field of Information Science as an applied social science that investigates the problems, topics and cases related to the info-communication phenomenon (origin, collection, organization, storage, retrieval, interpretation, transmission, processing and use of information) (Silva, 2006).

Academic research on EU information access is scarce. Some authors dedicated themselves, above all, to the identification, description and classification of the information produced in and by European institutions (Thomson, 1991; Macia, 1998; Martín González, 2002).

European institutions already have information networks specialized on European matters since the 1960s. However, only at the beginning of the 1990s, after the difficulties in ratifying the Maastricht Treaty, was a complex structure of information units dedicated to distinct areas of activity and public developed with clearly defined communicational objectives. Although these networks do exist and are multiplying, studies on the information behaviour of the users and the assessment of their information literacy skills are, however, non-existent.

We focused our study in the European Documentation Centres (EDC). These special libraries exist since the 1960s in the universities where European Studies are developed. The main reason for the creation of EDCs was to support academic research on European topics. Until today, this service is looked upon as the primary reason for the existence of the EDCs, even though it isn't possible to quantify its actual support, since there is a lack of integration between the EDCs and the research structures, such as the investigation centres that study

European issues at the host institution.

In most cases, EDCs' collection is largely composed of printed documentation that the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities sends for free. However, the amount of printed documentation as decreased since the 1990s, as the digital information available in the EUROPA website expanded.

Only recently some EDCs were analyzed, in the United Kingdom, in a PhD research (Parker, 2004). In that study, the information behaviour of the United Kingdom EDC users underwent partial examination. Rita Marcella (1997, 2001) also undertook studies about the information needs in European issues among the users of public libraries, women and among the British Members of European Parliament. In none of these cases, however, was the need to develop information literacy skills specifically approached, nor its components identified. In this sense, the present study is greatly exploratory.

In the Portuguese case, no scientific research on European information access can be found.

## 2. METODOLOGY

We applied the quadripolar method of investigation, which articulates four spheres: the epistemological, the theoretical, the morphological and the technical (De Bruyne, De Schoutheete, 1974).

The epistemological aspects constitute the background of our research. Here we place ourselves within a post-custodial, informational and scientific paradigm.

The theoretical sphere concerns the reference frameworks that inspire and guide the direction of the investigation, allowing the formulation of rules to the interpretation of the facts and the definition of temporary solutions to the problems. The systems theory was applied as an approach and global analysis model (Mella, 1997).

The technical sphere includes the information gathering procedures and its transformation into relevant data to the investigation problems. Here occurs the contact between the researcher and the real world through the technical operations performed to gather the data and simultaneously select it.

Thus, the sample of our case study is defined by selecting the EDCs that would hand out the questionnaires among their users. We decided to send 5 questionnaires to all the EDCs in Finland, Ireland, Hungary and Portugal. The remaining countries were sent 5 questionnaires to be handed to the users of two randomly picked EDCs. The questionnaires were sent by post following previous telephone contact with the people in charge of the EDCs, over November and December 2007.

Some EDCs' managers accepted immediately, whereas others considered it would be difficult to get all of the five answers from the users. Others, still, considered this task to be utterly impossible. These facts account for the participation rate (53%) and also for the distribution of the number of questionnaires answered in each country. They also explain the lack of response in some countries. In fact, there was no feedback whatsoever from any EDC

in Denmark, Slovakia, France, Malta or Romania. There also wasn't a response from Luxembourg, since there is no EDC in that country. Consequently, the results of the survey from EDCs' users represent only twenty-one Member-States. Thus, we obtained answers out of 234 users from 55 EDCs [Table 1].

**Table 1: Distribution of EDCs' users' questionnaires by country**

Country	Total number by country
Germany	8
Austria	10
Belgium	7
Bulgaria	9
Cyprus	5
Slovenia	10
Spain	6
Estonia	3
Finland	16
Greece	6
Hungary	28
Ireland	15
Italy	9
Latvia	4
Lithuania	9
Netherlands	1
Poland	10
Portugal	64
United Kingdom	4
Czech Republic	6
Sweden	4
<b>Total number of users</b>	<b>234</b>

It turned out to be impossible to have an online questionnaire, because that would imply to give out users' e-mails to an external source, which wouldn't be compatible with the policy on data protection in some EDCs. On the other hand, some of the EDCs also didn't have an address list of their users' e-mails.

This way, the users which answered the inquiry where the ones who where present in the EDC during the period when the questionnaires were held (November of 2007 to March 2008). Also, the users who answered the inquiry were selected by EDCs' managers. This selection may have been random or pre-determined, but we had no participation in it.

The morphological sphere deals with the objectification of the problem and with the organization and presentation of the findings. The gathered information was analyzed and the observed results and findings compared with those expected as possibilities through the drawing up of hypothetical theories based on the statistical analysis of the questionnaire data.

The findings will be analyzed taking into consideration

the European average and the average of countries whose EDCs were all studied (Finland, Ireland, Hungary and Portugal) and in this way we could develop a multi-level analyses.

Some of the survey's questions also underwent content analyses.

### 3. THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE TO EDCS USERS'

We prepared a questionnaire in order to collect data about the EDCs' users' access to European information. There was an English version and a Portuguese one. Both versions had 34 questions, all of them closed-ended questions.

We will now present the questionnaire's structure, although in this paper we will only analyse some of the given answers.

The questionnaire is a research tool which has been used in a PhD project about information policy of the European Union (EU), the role of EDCs in that policy and the access to European information by EDCs' users.

The aim of the questionnaire's first five questions was to classify the individuals regarding their gender, age, occupation, academic degree or other qualifications, and also their status regarding the EDC where they answered the questions.

Questions 6 through 9 concerned the users' opinion on the access to European information. As for questions 10 through 13, they looked into the more specific relation between the subjects and European information, particularly their opinion towards the preferred ways and sources to access this sort of data. These questions also glanced upon the frequency of contact between the users and European information and the intentionality of that contact.

On the other hand, questions 14 to 19 minded the users' relation with the particular EDC they attended, namely the way they had been introduced to it, their reasons for attending it and the frequency of their attendance. We also tried to establish if users attend other libraries or other European information centre, as well as their level of information.

Question 20 had the purpose of identifying the sort of documents people looked up.

The following five questions (21 to 25) related to the users' information behaviour. Hence, they were asked to identify the theme areas their information search more frequently focused on. They were also asked to point out the reasons that facilitate or make it difficult to access European information, and to identify the most valued aspects for accessing EU information. Finally, they were requested to explain what situations could motivate their access.

Questions 26 to 28 are related with the use of European information databases.

Question 29 was about the most visited websites to get

information on the EU. This question interrelates to the question 30, which enquires if the subjects look for information on the Internet and, if so, on what websites. The question 33 also relates to the same topic, as it tries to define what sort of information is relevant on the EDC's website.

As for questions 31 and 32, they enquire in what way users search and access documents in the EDC.

The questionnaire's last question was an open question, allowing the persons to comment as they saw fit. In addition, the users were offered the possibility of providing their e-mail address, so they would later receive the enquiry's analysis report.

### 4. USERS' BACKGROUND

We will now identify the background of the EDCs' users who answered the questionnaire [Table 2].

**Table 2: Users' background**

	<i>FI</i>	<i>HU</i>	<i>IR</i>	<i>PT</i>	<i>EU</i>
EDC host institution's lecturers	13%	18%	20%	9%	12%
Lecturers from other higher education institution	6%	4%	7%	2%	3%
EDC host institution's undergraduate students	6%	7%	0%	19%	13%
Undergraduate students from other higher education institution	6%	25%	0%	17%	13%
EDC host institution's masters students	13%	7%	47%	9%	13%
Masters students from other higher education institution	6%	7%	0%	2%	7%
Researchers	31%	14%	7%	11%	12%
Public services	13%	7%	7%	22%	12%
Private bodies	0%	4%	0%	5%	3%
Other	6%	0%	0%	3%	2%
No answer	0%	7%	13%	2%	8%

We can verify that in Finland, the majority of users who answered the questionnaire are researchers (31%). In that country both lecturers and masters degree students of the EDC institution come in second, each accounting for 13% of the results. Another 13% corresponded to feedback from public services, while there was no response whatsoever from private entities.

As far as Hungary is concerned, curiously, undergraduate students from other higher education institution account

for the great majority of answers, representing 25% of the total, followed by the EDC host institution's lecturers (18%) and researchers (14%).

In Ireland, the larger percentage of answers comes from the EDC host institution's masters students (47%). This can be explained by the fact that one EDC's manager handed out the questionnaires during a class of the masters degree. In fact, when you take into account that this EDC is integrated in a main library, which allows free access to all material, you can see why it would be a difficult task to hand out questionnaires to all of the EDC's users. We should also mention that 20% of the answers from Ireland come from the EDC host institution's lecturers and that 13% of the users chose not to answer.

In Portugal, the fact that the public services account for the majority of answers (22%) is noteworthy. This number is followed by the EDC host institution's undergraduate students, who represent 19% of the total.

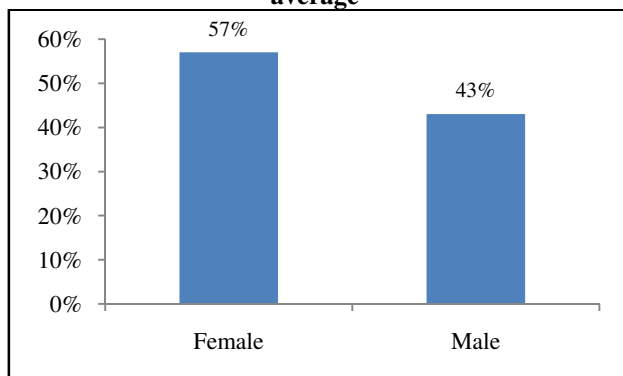
In the EU's average, the users' answers percentages are distributed almost evenly in six categories, varying between 12% and 13%. These categories are: lecturers, EDC host institution's undergraduate and masters degree students, undergraduate students of other higher education institutions, researchers and public services.

Thus, we can consider that most of the users to EDCs' trying to fulfil the needs that come up in academic context.

## 5. GENDER AND AGE

As we can observe [Chart 1], female users represent the majority of the EDC's users (14% more than the male users). This demonstrates the progressive increase of women in higher education, which is the EDCs' main background of recruitment.

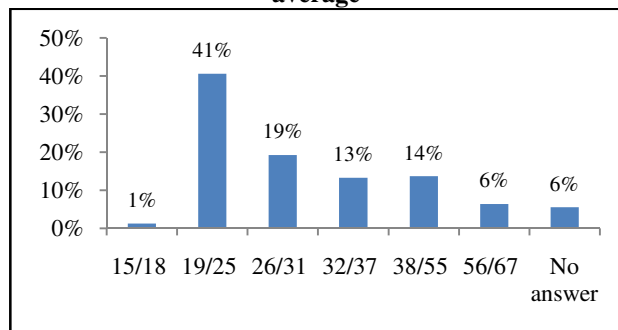
**Chart 1: Gender of the EDCs' users in the EU's average**



Regarding the users' age [Chart 2], we can see that in the European average the largest percentage of EDC users who answered the questionnaire is between 19 and 25 years old, which is coincident with the fact of the undergraduate and masters degree students being the

most important contingents of the EDCs' users. However, the sum of other age groups such as 32-37 year old persons (13%), and 38-55 year old persons (14%) also represent a quarter of the users, probably including lecturers and researchers. Masters degree students and PhD students should be included in the 26-31 age group.

**Chart 2: Age of the EDC users in the European average**



## 6. ACCESS TO EUROPEAN INFORMATION: INTENTION OR CHANCE?

The individual information behaviour is motivated by factors which originate from the subjects' context and from cognitive factors inherent to them, but also from the influences of their surrounding environment which, in time, they influence themselves (Ingwersen; Jarvelin, 2005, 30).

In this sense, we tried to find out which factor prevailed in the access to European information: the will of the individual or the environment in which that contact took place.

In this manner, regarding the EDCs' users, we tried to establish whether the access to European information was predetermined or if it was the result of chance [Chart 3].

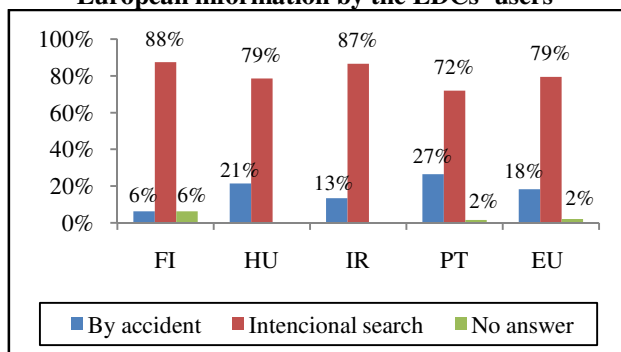
A vast majority of the users declared intentionally accessing this kind of information, with numbers that vary between 72% in Portugal and 88% in Finland, being all of the other intermediate results very close to these (Hungary: 79%; Ireland: 87%), as was the European average (79%).

Random access is always below 30%, being that in Portugal the results amount to 27%, in Hungary to 21%, in the European average to 18%, in Ireland to 13% and in Finland to 6%.

Also, the percentages of persons who chose not to answer are very low (Finland: 6%, Portugal and European average: 2%) or non-existent (Hungary and Ireland).

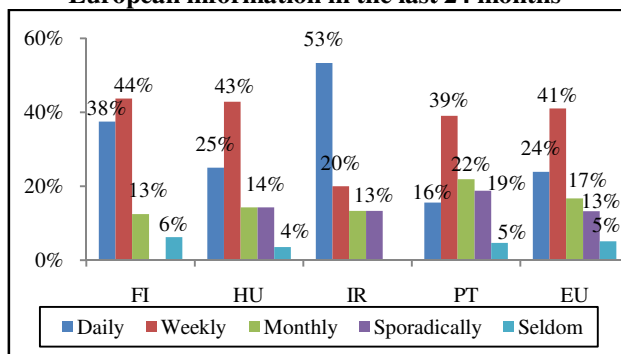


**Chart 3: The underlying intentionality in the access to European information by the EDCs' users**



Since the access to the European information is mostly intentionally motivated, it is now important to determine how frequently it occurs.

**Chart 4: Frequency of the EDCs' users' access to European information in the last 24 months**



As we can see [Chart 4], the option “weekly” is the one which holds the higher percentages in the European average (41%), Finland (44%), Hungary (43%) and Portugal (39%). Ireland is the only country where the option “daily” prevails, with a percentage of 53%, followed by the option “weekly”.

In the remaining countries, the second more frequent choice is the daily access to information about EU, although the results are varied (Finland: 38%; Hungary: 25%; Portugal: 16% and the European average: 24%). The options “monthly” and “sporadically” (more than 10 times a year) come together in third place (Hungary: 24%; Ireland: 13%) or else in third and forth place, in that order (Portugal: 22% and 19%, and the European average: 17% and 13%). This situation only differs in Finland, where the third place is occupied by the option “monthly” (13%) and the fourth by the option “rarely” (less than 10 times a year) (6%). In fact, the latter always gets minimal percentages (Hungary: 4%; Portugal and the European average: 5%) or even zero (Ireland).

## 7. MOTIVATION TO ACCESS EUROPEAN INFORMATION

In this questionnaire, the EDCs' users were asked to indicate situations that made them search information about the EU. They were given eight different options to choose from and, theoretically, these could all be simultaneously chosen. Therefore, the total sum of the results always surpasses 100% [Table 3]. We will now see what makes the EDCs' users search for European information.

**Table 3: The most common situations stated by EDCs' users to look for EU information**

	FI	HU	IR	PT	EU
School work	6%	36%	13%	36%	28%
Academic work	69%	57%	80%	70%	65%
Research about EU	75%	64%	80%	33%	55%
General information about EU	50%	39%	73%	42%	44%
For professional purposes	69%	46%	20%	36%	46%
To know EU citizens rights	6%	14%	7%	31%	24%
Cultural or leisure purposes	13%	36%	13%	19%	22%

If we consider the EDCs' academic context in the European average, the elaboration of academic work (65%), and the research about the EU are, in that order, the main reasons for the information search. In Finland (75% and 69%) and Hungary (64% and 57%), the situation is reversed, because the research motives surpass the academic work motives. As for Ireland, both options account for an equal percentage (80%).

In third place for the European average (44%), Finland (50%), Ireland (73%) and Portugal (42%), there is the need to obtain general information about the EU.

However, it should be referred that in the Portuguese case the principal choice (academic work) has a very high percentage, while the remaining have approximated values, being four of those percentages around 30%. A similar example is the one of Hungary. In Ireland's case, however these three options register values that are quite elevated (between 80% and 73%), and the remaining elevated are around 20% or (and mostly) less. Therefore, in this particular country, there is a very distinct preference for the first three choices. By opposition, in the European average the percentages are distributed in a less disparate way in all the different options, being that there was a 43 points difference between the lowest and highest values whereas in Ireland that disparity reaches 73 points.

## 8. REASONS WHICH MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO ACCESS EUROPEAN INFORMATION

As far as the users' opinion about the obstacles on accessing adequate information to their needs is concerned [Table 4], the option which reaches the higher percentages regards the problems in dealing with the large quantity of EU information available (EU average: 19%; Finland: 27%; Ireland: 20%; and Portugal: 21%). This difficulty has been referred by the English members of the European Parliament, in a study conducted by a team led by Rita Marcella in 1999. (Marcella; Carcary; Baxter, 1999, 175).

Hungary sets itself apart from the other countries because its highest percentage of users (26%) chose not to answer when questioned on the motives that explained the difficulties on accessing European information. The percentage of this choice is also relevant in the Portuguese results (18%), and in the European average (17%), where it holds the second position, except in Finland's case (6%) and Ireland, where it holds the third position (11%) after the option "don't know how to express information needs" (16%). In fact, this option also holds the second place in Finland (14%).

The third higher percentage varies quite a bit between the four countries that were monographically studied, because in Finland it corresponds to the option "difficulties in understanding EU information" (12%), whereas in Hungary and the EU average it is the option that relates to difficulties understanding EU information terminology (Hungary: 12%; EU average: 11%). In Portugal this place is held by the problems of finding information (15%).

We should also be aware of the fact that the number of persons who consider that no reason makes the access to EU information difficult corresponds to a percentage of 4% in Finland, Hungary, Ireland and Portugal, being only 1% higher in the European average.

Within the given range of choices, we can make a distinction between the reasons that come from difficulties or lack of knowledge of the users and the motives that are exterior to them.

Therefore, we consider the first five options (don't know how to express information needs; don't know how to find EU information; difficulties in understanding EU information; difficulties in understanding EU terminology; problems in dealing with the large quantity of EU information) belong to the first group. Thus, these are problems which may be solved by the development of information literacy skills by the EDCs' users.

In the second group we include three options (lack of objective and up to date EU information; lack of EU information attractively presented; inadequate tools for accessing EU information). These motives seem to be exclusively derived from deficiencies in the EU information itself and, therefore, exterior to the users.

We cannot establish a definite division between the two groups, however, because the users' perception may be erroneous when they consider the information to be

outdated or the access tools inadequate due to their unawareness of updated sources or because they don't know how to use the full potential of information access tools. In order to determine more precisely the importance of this factor, it would be useful, for instance, to study the ergonomics of the data bases for the access to information or to make a similar analysis to the EUROPA website.

**Table 4: Opinions' users about the reasons which make it difficult to find EU information that fit their needs**

	FI	HU	IR	PT	EU
Don't know how to express information needs	14%	7%	16%	6%	9%
Don't know how to find EU information	0%	6%	7%	15%	10%
Difficulties in understanding EU information	12%	6%	7%	5%	8%
Difficulties in understanding EU terminology	8%	12%	9%	9%	11%
Problems in dealing with the large quantity of EU information	27%	17%	20%	21%	19%
Lack of objective and up to date EU information	4%	6%	11%	5%	5%
Lack of EU information attractively presented	8%	7%	0%	10%	6%
Inadequate tools for accessing EU information	6%	4%	4%	3%	5%
There is no reason to difficult access to EU information	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%
No	8%	5%	9%	3%	5%
Other	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%
No answer	6%	26%	11%	18%	17%

In any case, all exceptions considered, it would be safe to assume that the EDCs' users believe that the difficulties in accessing European information that suits their needs derives, most of the time, from reasons inherent to them. In fact, when we add up the first five categories' percentages, both in each country (Finland: 61%; Hungary: 48%; Ireland: 59%; Portugal: 56%) and in the European average (57%) we always get values above 50%. Whereas if we add up the percentages of the three categories we mention above we always come up with values below 20% (Finland: 18%; Hungary: 17%; Ireland: 15%; Portugal: 18%, and the European average 16%). We should also mention that the percentages in the "no" category correspond to the users who decided that no reasons complicated the access to European

information and consequently didn't choose any other options.

## 9. REASONS WHICH MAKE POSSIBLE FOR THE USERS TO ACCESS EUROPEAN INFORMATION

In the questionnaire the EDCs' users were asked to choose three options that would make their access to European information easier [Table 5].

**Table 5: Three reasons which make it possible to access information that meets EDCs users' needs about EU information**

	FI	HU	IR	PT	EU
User knows how to to express EU information needs	13%	12%	7%	13%	13%
User is familiar with EU information accessing tools	25%	13%	27%	8%	16%
EU information accessing tools are adequate	10%	11%	11%	10%	10%
The EDC assistant(s) give(s) the information to the user	10%	13%	18%	21%	16%
The EDC assistant(s) help(s) user in the information searching and retrieval process	8%	18%	13%	20%	17%
EU information is objective and up to date	19%	15%	9%	12%	11%
EU information is attractively presented	4%	5%	4%	5%	5%
EU institutions make available all information requested by users	8%	7%	9%	4%	5%
Other	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
No answer	2%	5%	2%	7%	7%

The percentages here aren't as strong, and the highest doesn't reach 30%. In fact, the percentage in question represents the Irish users' choices, 27% of which considered that the most important factor to facilitate their access to information comes from the fact of knowing the information access tools so well, including catalogues and databases, among others. This category also reached the highest value in Finland (25%), taking the second place in the European average (16%), along with the option that indicates that the EDCs' assistants oriented their information search. As for Hungary, this option comes in third place, along with others, with the percentage of 13%. In Portugal it amounts to 8%.

We should, in fact, notice that two of Portugal's higher percentages correspond to the options which indicate that the EDCs' assistants facilitate the needed information

(21%) and that the EDCs' technicians oriented the information search (20%). Still, in the cases where the assistants deliver the needed information to the user, we may criticize the latter's passive approach. In this situation, the individuals get the wanted information, but they won't be able to do it again which is to say they don't develop the informational skills because of the assistant's help.

In any case, the assistants' intervention seems to be quite valued by the users, because the European average accounts for 16% of the total when the assistants give the proper information, and 17% when they guide the information search. In Ireland those same options register 18% and 13%, in that order, while in Hungary they register 13% and 18%. Finland is the only example with lower percentages (10% and 8%).

In Finland, we should point out that the second choice reflects the option which states that the information about the EU was objective and updated. That same choice is 15% in Hungary, 9% in Ireland, 12% in Portugal and 11% in the EU average.

Next, we will explain the difference between the factors that are internal or external to the individuals, in order to determine which their influence in the access to the information is. In this manner, we conclude that the external factors are predominant when it comes to making the access to the information more easily, because the factors that depend on the individuals, present in the first two options ("are able to express accurately their needs" and "have good knowledge of the information access tools") always have less than half of the total sum of all of the available items. In fact, the percentages are of 38% in Finland, 25% in Hungary, 34% in Ireland, 21% in Portugal and 29% in the EU average. This is to say that the EDCs' users attribute their information search's success to factors external to themselves.

## 10. VALUED ASPECTS IN THE ACCESS TO EUROPEAN INFORMATION

In the survey, we included a question about the aspects that people found more important when they have to access European information.

The users were asked to pick three out of six items: ease of access to the information; information in mother tongue; information in digital format; up to date information; impartial information; easily understandable information.

As far as this set of options is concerned, we can separate the ones which are more closely related to the physical access to information from the ones which have to do with the information's inherent characteristics as a specific content. In the first group we can include "ease of access to the information" and "information in digital format". The remaining options belong in a second group, namely the up to date, impartial and understandable

information. The option of the mother tongue is related to the translation aspects and can also be included in the second group.

In the questionnaire to the EDCs' users [Table 6], we can see that the fact of the information being on digital support and being up to date are the most important aspects for the users. These two options registered the highest percentage in the European average (23% each). In Finland, the up to date information comes in first place (27%), followed by the digital support option (25%). The Portuguese percentages are similar (22% and 21%, in that order). However, the first place corresponds to the ease of access to the information option (23%). And this option also takes the lead in the Irish case, along with the up to date information option, both with 27%, while the digital information option only gathers 17%.

**Table 6: Most valued aspects for accessing EU information**

	FI	HU	IR	PT	EU
Ease of access to the information	15%	21%	27%	23%	21%
Information in mother tongue	13%	7%	11%	20%	16%
Information in digital format	25%	24%	18%	21%	23%
Up to date information	27%	29%	27%	22%	23%
Impartial information	8%	4%	7%	5%	6%
Easily understood information	10%	11%	11%	7%	9%
No answer	2%	5%	0%	2%	3%

In fact, the ease of access to the information comes in second or third place, when it comes to the aspects which facilitate the access to European information, according to the EDCs' users (Finland: 15%; Hungary and EU average: 21%)

We should also point out the fact that the information in the mother tongue is an important factor for the EDCs' users, reaching 20% in Portugal and 16% in the European average. Opposed to these values are Hungary (7%), Ireland (11%) and Finland (13%). These variations show the contrasts between the countries, when it comes to mastering other languages. However, in the Irish case the difficulties in finding information in the mother tongue (English) are minimal.

Based on the data analysis we can also conclude that the users give more importance to the information's inherent characteristics than they do to the physical access related aspects. In fact, if we add the values of the "ease of access" option and "digital format" option, we always end up with percentages that are inferior to the ones that result from adding the other options. This way, the first group has the following percentages: Finland: 40%; Hungary and Ireland: 45%; Portugal and the European average: 44%.

The second group has superior values: Finland: 58%; Hungary: 51%; Ireland: 56%; Portugal: 53%; European average: 54%.

Simultaneously, we may verify that the users don't seem to give much relevance to the fact that the information is impartial or understandable. Actually, the first of these categories always registers percentages below 10% (Finland: 8%; Hungary: 4%; Ireland: 7%; Portugal: 5%; European average: 6%).

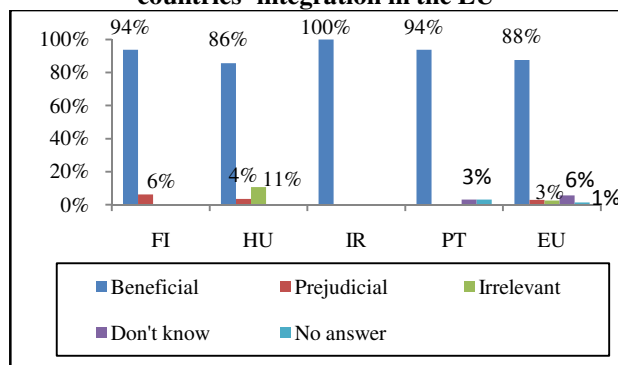
The option "understandable information" has values that are slightly above these: Finland: 10%; Hungary and Ireland: 11%; Portugal: 7%; European average: 9%. Therefore, the EDCs' users consider understandable information to be more important than impartial information.

Finally, the percentages of the users who didn't answer are very low, varying between 5% and 2%.

## 11. OPINION ABOUT EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND INFORMATION

We tried to determine what the subjects' opinion was, regarding integration in the European project. We also took into consideration their opinion on the importance of accessing European information and in which areas of their lives it could be important.

**Chart 5: Opinion of the EDCs' users on their countries' integration in the EU**



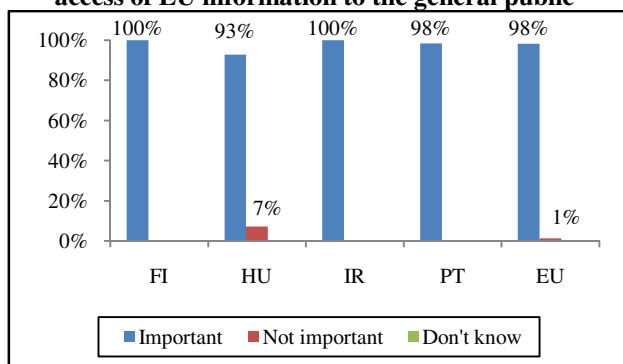
Both in the EU average and in the four countries that were monographically studied [Chart 5], the majority of the persons who answered the questionnaires considered that the integration in the EU was beneficial, with values that vary between 88% (EU average) and 86% (Hungary). We must also point out the very high percentage in Ireland (100%), as in Finland and in Portugal (94%). However, even though it is low, the percentage of 6% of answers that consider integration to be prejudicial in Finland stands out. As for Hungary, 11% of the persons think it was irrelevant. In Portugal, 3% of the persons have no formed opinion, and another 3% didn't answer. Our results seem to confirm the elitist support to the European project. In fact, some authors, based on empirical studies or on the *Eurobarometer* survey pools,



have demonstrated that the favourable opinions towards the European Union are predominant in individuals who have a higher education or are studying in a higher education institution. This elitist orientation is present in all of the countries, independently of the country's degree of support towards the European Union (Cautres, Grundberg, 2007).

Since our subjects all had access to European information, we also tried to establish their position on the importance of the general public having the possibility to access the information [Chart 6].

**Chart 6: Opinion of the EDCs' users regarding the access of EU information to the general public**

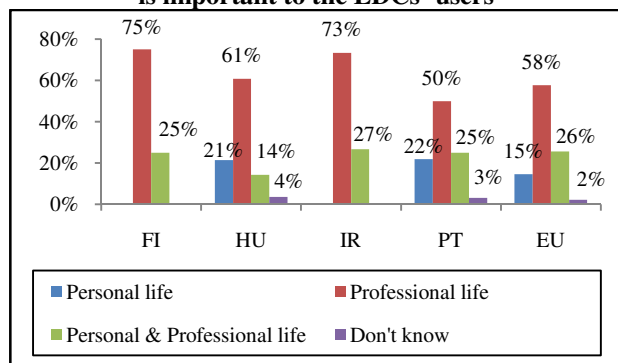


The overwhelming majority, with percentages of 100% in Finland and Ireland, 98% in the EU average and Portugal, considers this to be an important subject. This value is only a bit lower in Hungary (93%), which, as we saw, is also the country with the less significant percentage of people who consider their country's integration in the EU beneficial. Hungary is also the country with the higher percentage (7%) of users who think that the access from the general public is not important.

Therefore, the theory according to which the European project can be led only by elites setting aside the European citizens is refuted here, for the smashing majority of the persons consider that the access to European information from the general public is important. This is also the present position of the European Commission, namely since the Prodi and Barroso Commission, promoting the establishment of a more intense dialogue with the citizens. Even if later on, when it comes to actually establishing the direct participation for instance, regarding the Lisbon treaty's ratification through a referendum, the Member-States, supported by Brussels, have chosen the Parliament's ratification.

As far as the areas in which the access to EU information is important are concerned [Chart 7], the EDCs' users mainly refer professional reasons. However, the percentages vary. Thus, in the European average this option is represented by a percentage of 58%, while Finland reaches 75%, Hungary goes up to 61%, Ireland gets to 73% and Portugal sums up 50%.

**Chart 7: Areas in which the access to EU information is important to the EDCs' users**



Based on these results, we can state that most of the subjects aren't able to understand the full impact that the global influence of European information has in their lives. In fact, those who chose simultaneously the options "personal life" and "professional life" account for a little over one fourth in the EU average, Finland, Ireland and Portugal, while in Hungary that percentage drops to 14%. Besides these two choices, some of the subjects chose the option which indicates that the access to EU information was important in their personal lives, accounting for 15% in the EU average, 21% in Hungary and 22% in Portugal. Both in Finland and Ireland these percentages were null.

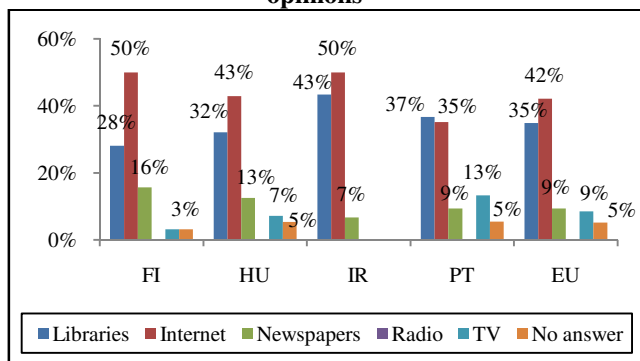
## 12. CHOICES ABOUT INFORMATION PROVIDERS AND INFORMATION SOURCES

In two of the questionnaire's answers, we tried to determine which providers and sources were the best to access European information. We will now analyse those answers.

In the best information providers' question, the available options were: libraries/documentation centres; Internet; newspapers/magazines; radio and television.

The results show that the first two options clearly have the higher percentages of answers [Chart 8]. Thus, the results (European average: 42%; Finland: 50%; Hungary: 43%; Ireland: 50%) show that the Internet represents the first place in the users' preferences. The Portuguese case is the exception, with the libraries/documentation centres taking the lead with 37%, and the Internet coming in second, with 35%. In the other countries, libraries/documentation centres take the second place, with the following percentages: Finland: 28%; Hungary: 32%; Ireland: 43%. In the EU average, the libraries/documentation centres also come in second, with 35%, in some cases with a very close percentage to the Internet, in other cases with a bigger difference. These values were expected because the persons who answered the questionnaire did so because they were EDCs' users.

**Chart 8: The best information providers about European information according to EDCs' users opinions**



The other options got results that are very far from these. Newspapers and magazines (that may be printed or digital) take the third place in Finland (16%), Hungary (13%), Ireland (7%) and the European average (9%), in this case being equal to the television. In fact, Portugal is the only country where this medium comes in third with 13%, because in the remaining countries the percentages are minimal (Finland: 3%; Hungary: 7%). We should also point out that the radio option got null percentages in all countries.

In the questionnaire to the EDCs' users, we asked them to identify the two most reliable and objective EU information sources of access to EU information. There were five available options: documents that are published by European institutions; documents that are published by non-European institutions; Information from mass media; EU official information on the Internet; EU information on the Internet provided by national governments.

**Table 7: Most trustworthy and impartial information sources to solve a European information gap**

	FI	HU	IR	PT	EU
Documents published by EU	38%	32%	23%	35%	37%
Documents published by non EU institutions	6%	4%	10%	5%	6%
Information from mass media	3%	9%	7%	10%	7%
EU official information on Internet	41%	36%	27%	37%	36%
EU information on Internet provided by national governments	13%	11%	20%	5%	7%
No answer	0%	9%	13%	7%	6%

In this set, the two preferred options, with a significant majority, are "documents that were published by European institutions" (Finland: 38%; Hungary: 32%; Ireland: 23%; Portugal: 35%, and the EU average: 37%), and "EU official information on the Internet" (Finland: 41%; Hungary: 36%; Ireland: 27%; Portugal: 37%, and the EU average: 36%) [Table 7].

It is clear that the EDCs' users consider that the most objective and trustworthy information comes essentially from the European institutions. This means that the users don't take into consideration the criticism according to which the information from Brussels' institutions is often a product of marketing, if not by propaganda. Being in the academic context, they should be looking for more rigorous factual information.

On the other hand, the above shown percentages demonstrate that the users don't have a preference when it comes to choosing digital or printed information, because the differences in the percentages are minimal. What most appeals to them is the fact that the information comes from European institutions.

In this manner, we can conclude that people don't seem to trust documents that are published by non-European institutions, because this option has percentages between 10% and 4%. But this also doesn't seem to make much sense, because this is a population that is likely to produce information about EU itself. The same lack of confidence also shows through when the mass media are concerned. This option also registers values between 3% and 10%. The only case that stands out is the one of Ireland, when it comes to EU information on the Internet provided by national governments, this option registers 20% of the choices. That preference also seems odd, because the national governments are frequently accused of exaggerating the negative consequences of the Brussels' decisions, giving themselves credit for the positive ones.

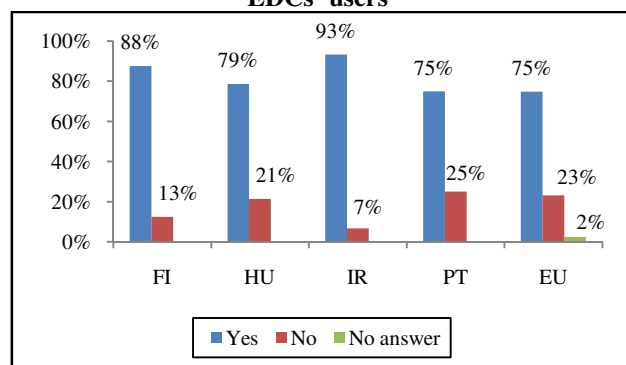
### 13. USE OF DATABASES

The European institutions have been progressively sending less and less printed information to the EDCs, because digital information available on the Internet is growing, has more quality and is more up to date.

On the other hand, considering the huge amount of online European information as well as its exponential daily increase, the use of specialized databases is essential. In fact, the generalist search engines, and even the basic or advanced search in the EUROPA website are, in most cases, insufficient to get the needed information.

We will now see in what way those resources are known and used by the EDCs' users.

**Chart 9: Access to European information databases by EDCs' users**



As we can see [Chart 9], the great majority of the EDCs' users say that they have already used databases to access information about the EU. The highest percentage is the one of Ireland (93%), and the lowest is the one of Portugal and the European average (75%). This also means that almost a fourth of the users (Hungary: 21%; Portugal: 25%; EU average: 23%) have never used this tool, which is a bit concerning.

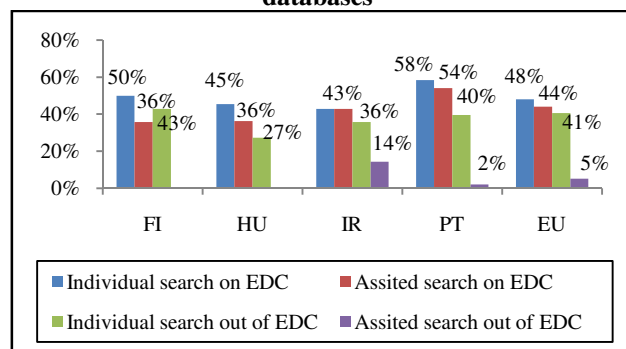
We should also point out the residual percentage of persons who didn't answer (only 2% in the EU).

After asking if they had used databases, we wanted to know how the users did it [Chart 10].

When it comes to the access modalities, we only took into account the total number of users who said they had used this information access tool in the past. On the other hand, there was the possibility of choosing more than one option and therefore the totals surpass 100%.

The individual search on the EDC option always gets the higher percentages (Finland: 50%; Hungary: 45%; Portugal: 58%; EU: 48%). The only exception is Ireland, where this option has an equal percentage to the assisted search by an EDC assistant option (43%). This means that in this set of options, the Portuguese seem to be the most independent. In fact, this trend is even more accentuated if we add both of the individual search options

**Chart 10: Types of access to the European information databases**



The individual search on the EDC option always gets the

higher percentages (Finland: 50%; Hungary: 45%; Portugal: 58%; EU: 48%). The only exception is Ireland, where this option has an equal percentage to the assisted search by an EDC assistant option (43%). This means that in this set of options, the Portuguese seem to be the most independent. In fact, this trend is even more accentuated if we add both of the individual research options.

We can also see that the second more popular choice is the one that indicates the assisted search by an EDC assistant (Hungary: 36%; Portugal: 54%; EU: 44%). The only exception is Finland, where the second choice is the option about individual search outside the EDC (43%), because in this country the other choice has a percentage of 36%.

Finally, we must point out that the assisted search out of the EDC has residual percentages (Portugal: 2%; EU: 5%; Ireland: 14% and both Hungary and Finland: 0%).

The questionnaire also asked the users to choose, from a group of databases about EU information the ones they were familiar with and the ones they had used before.

The percentages were calculated according to the total number of persons who answered the questionnaire [Table 8]. Actually, the subjects had the possibility to say they had never used a data base before, but that they were aware of its existence.

**Table 8: Databases known by the users**

	FI	HU	IR	PT	EU
ARCHIplus	0%	14%	7%	5%	14%
CURIA	38%	39%	53%	28%	38%
ECLAS	19%	32%	20%	25%	32%
EUR-Lex	100%	68%	87%	61%	71%
EU Whoiswho	31%	43%	13%	14%	26%
PRELEX	56%	29%	20%	30%	35%
RAPID	31%	32%	7%	28%	30%
REGISTER	13%	11%	7%	8%	12%
Other	19%	7%	0%	5%	4%

The Eur-Lex database is the one that more persons know, because it was chosen by all of the users in Finland, 68% in Hungary, 87% in Ireland, 61% in Portugal and 71% in the EU average.

Secondly, we have CURIA, both in EU average (38%) and Ireland (53%). In the other countries, this database comes in third, with percentages of 38% in Finland, 39% in Hungary and 28% in Portugal. In Hungary, the second most known database is EU Whoiswho (43%), but in Portugal (30%) and Finland (56%) it is PRELEX.

PRELEX is the third most known by the EDCs' users (EU average: 35%; Ireland: 20%, same percentage of ECLAS). The third place in Portugal is held by RAPID (28%).

Based on these results, we can see that the users know the

databases that can help them to accessing European law and to be aware of the EU's institutions' daily activities. The remaining databases have much lower percentages. From the sum of those values, we may conclude that ECLAS and RAPID are the databases that come in forth for most of the users, whereas EU Whoiswho is in the fifth position, ARCHIplus in the sixth and Register in the seventh. We also included the option "others", allowing the subjects to mention other databases. These percentages were minimal, except in Finland (19%). Some examples are: Eurostat, TED and CORDIS. Besides knowing what the knowledge level was, we also wanted to know how they used the databases [Table 9]. Naturally, the percentages were calculated from the total number of users that stated to have used databases before.

**Table 9: Databases that the users said to have used before**

	FI	HU	IR	PT	EU
ARCHIplus	0%	5%	0%	2%	9%
CURIA	36%	23%	29%	19%	33%
ECLAS	14%	23%	14%	29%	29%
EUR-Lex	86%	73%	79%	71%	81%
EU Whoiswho	29%	27%	0%	17%	22%
PRELEX	50%	18%	14%	25%	31%
RAPID	36%	23%	0%	19%	19%
REGISTER	14%	9%	7%	4%	9%
Other	21%	9%	0%	4%	5%

According to the trend that we found about the level of EU databases knowledge, the ones that are more used are EUR-Lex, PRELEX and CURIA, in descending order. EUR-Lex has higher values than other databases (EU average: 81%; Finland: 86%; Hungary: 73%; Ireland: 79%; Portugal: 71%).

The CURIA database has the second higher percentage (EU average: 33%; Ireland: 29%). However, in Portugal, the second place is held by ECLAS (29%), in Hungary by EU whoiswho (27%), and in Finland PRELEX holds this position with 50%.

In fact, in the EU average, PRELEX is third with 31%, and also in Portugal, with 25%, and Ireland, with 14%, the same as ECLAS. The latter is also the third one in Hungary (23%), along with RAPID which, in turn, occupies third place, along with CURIA in Finland (36%).

We should point out the low or null percentages obtained by ARCHIplus. Besides, in the option "others", the databases were the same as the ones users said they know about.

#### 14. SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT EUROPEAN INFORMATION LITERACY

Based on our findings, we can see that the EDCs' users,

which are familiar with European issues, need to develop specific skills in terms of information literacy. In fact, when the nature and extent of their European information needs are concerned they must realize that these can't be confined to the professional aspect of their lives; it also contaminates their personal lives, when we consider the influential areas of the Brussels' institutions on the Member-States policies.

At the same time, they must also be aware of the meaning and importance of using diversified information sources, in order to have several points of view and, therefore, a more wide perspective of the problems. Hence, they must not exaggerate the value of the information that is produced and distributed by the European institutions, using external sources to have a plural vision as a fundament to formulate their own ideas and decisions.

When it comes to the ability to access the needed information effectively and efficiently, the EDCs' users must be independent in their searches, identifying the best information search tools for each particular situation. A fundamental element relates to the access to European databases which allow access to the primary information about the activities and decisions of the EU.

Therefore, based on the results we obtained, the users of European information seem to need to develop information literacy skills, which are essential to the development of capacities that allow a free access and a more effective and efficient use of the growing informational resources of this area.

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