



Internet and e-Government Among Low Socio-Economic Status Groups: The Role of Socio-Economic Background and Incentives for Use



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Structure of Presentation

- Introduction: The ELOST Survey
- Results and cross-cultural analysis
- Focus group recommendations



ELOST Survey

Objective:

- Provide groundwork to map reasons for non-/low use of internet by LSGs, and
- better understand their needs and concerns by examining:
 - Patterns of internet use by LSGs
 - Attitude toward e-Government

Existing surveys on ICT use:

- Marginalized groups usually under-represented
 - fall short of providing insight into processes of e-exclusion that characterize LSGs



Reference Population

Persons with one or more of the following characteristics:

- low income
- low-skill occupation
- long-term unemployed
- low educational level

Target sample: 250 completed questionnaires per country

- gender balanced, reflecting age distribution and ethnic composition of reference population



Additional Information

Fieldwork

- Mostly outsourced (except in Germany)
- Telephone or face-to-face interviews
- From November 2006 – February 2007

Questionnaire

- 2 parts, 48 questions
- a) Respondents familiar with the internet
 - questions on skills, internet use, knowledge and assessment of e-Government services
- b) Respondents not/hardly familiar with the internet
 - questions on reasons for non-use, awareness of & attitude toward internet/e-Government.



RESULTS:

1. LSGs are less likely to use the internet and e-Government services

	EU-27 (2006)	ELOST-4
Using the internet	45%	24%
Access to the internet at home	49%	37%
e-Government: information from the authorities	21%	12%

The results are also confirmed by other studies:

- Roe & Broos 2005, *Communications* 30, pp. 91-96
- Riga Dashboard
- Inkinen & Kuru 2004, Pirkanmaan tietoyhteiskuntatutkimus
- SIBIS 2002, www.sibis-eu.org

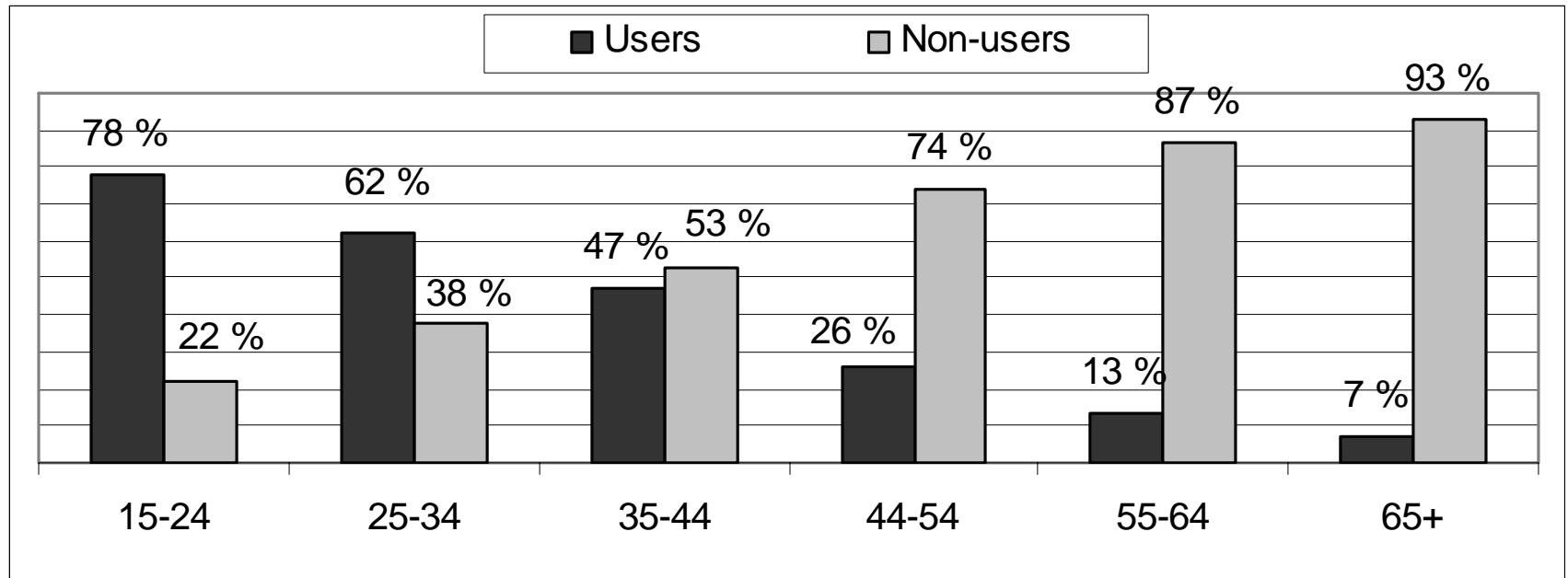


1.1. ELOST Survey: The impact of socio-economic factors

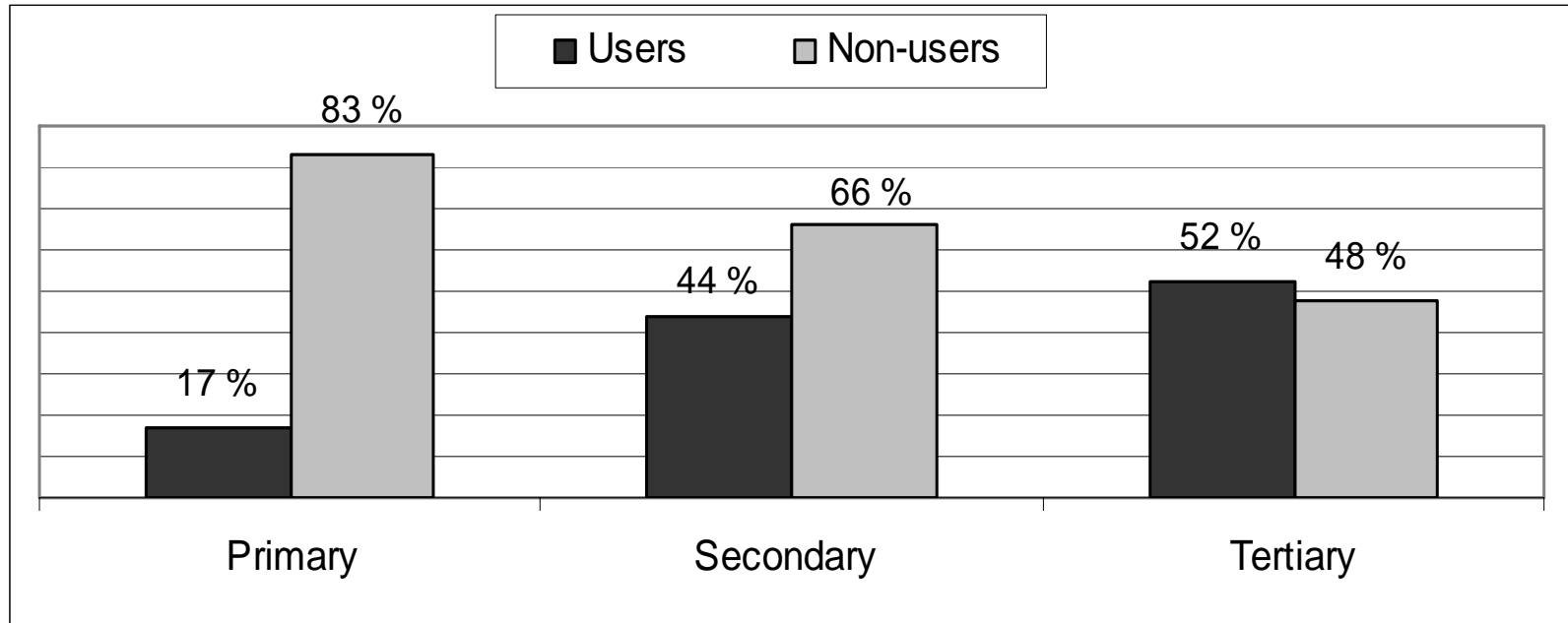
- Age, education and main activity status affect the likelihood of LSGs using the internet:
 - Older respondents used the internet less often than younger ones.
 - Respondents with lower level of education used it less than LSGs with higher education levels.
 - The unemployed and retired respondents used the internet less than those who worked or studied.



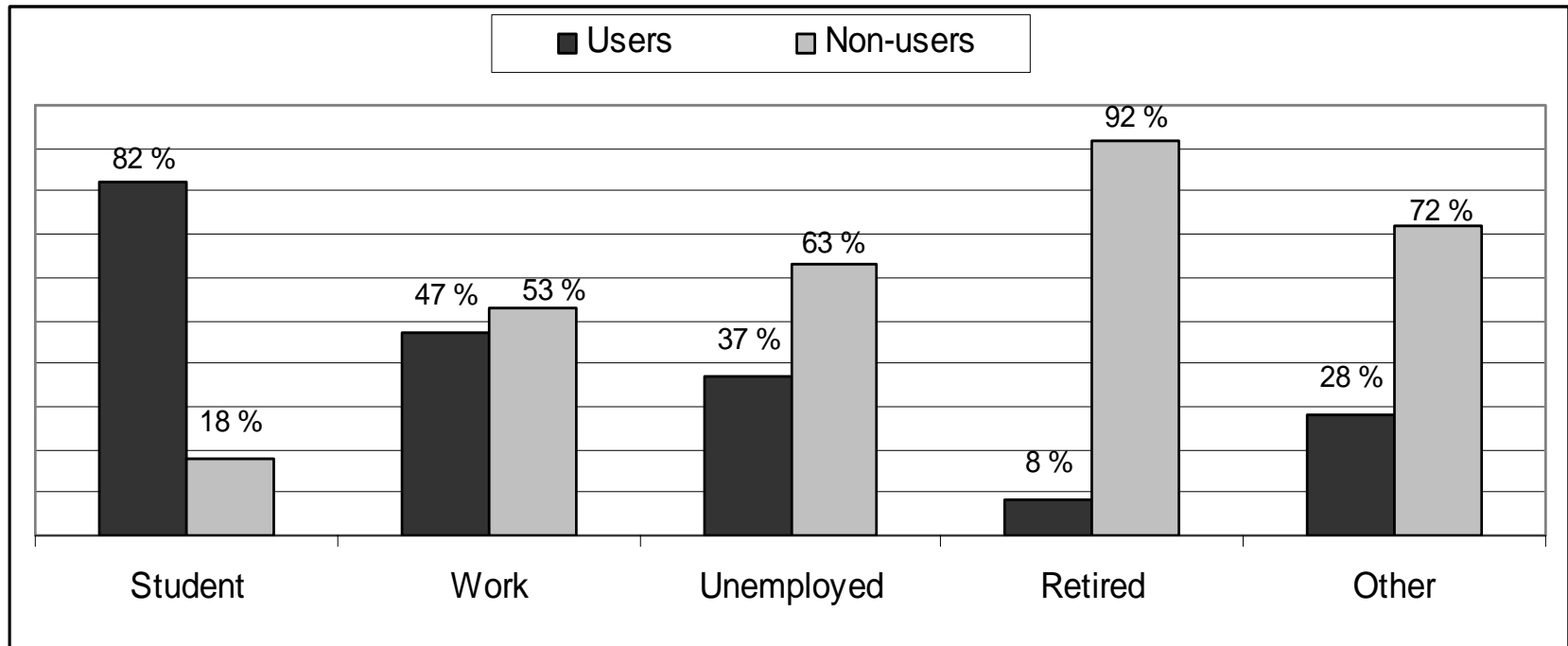
1.1.2. Internet usage by LSG age groups



1.1.3. Internet usage by education

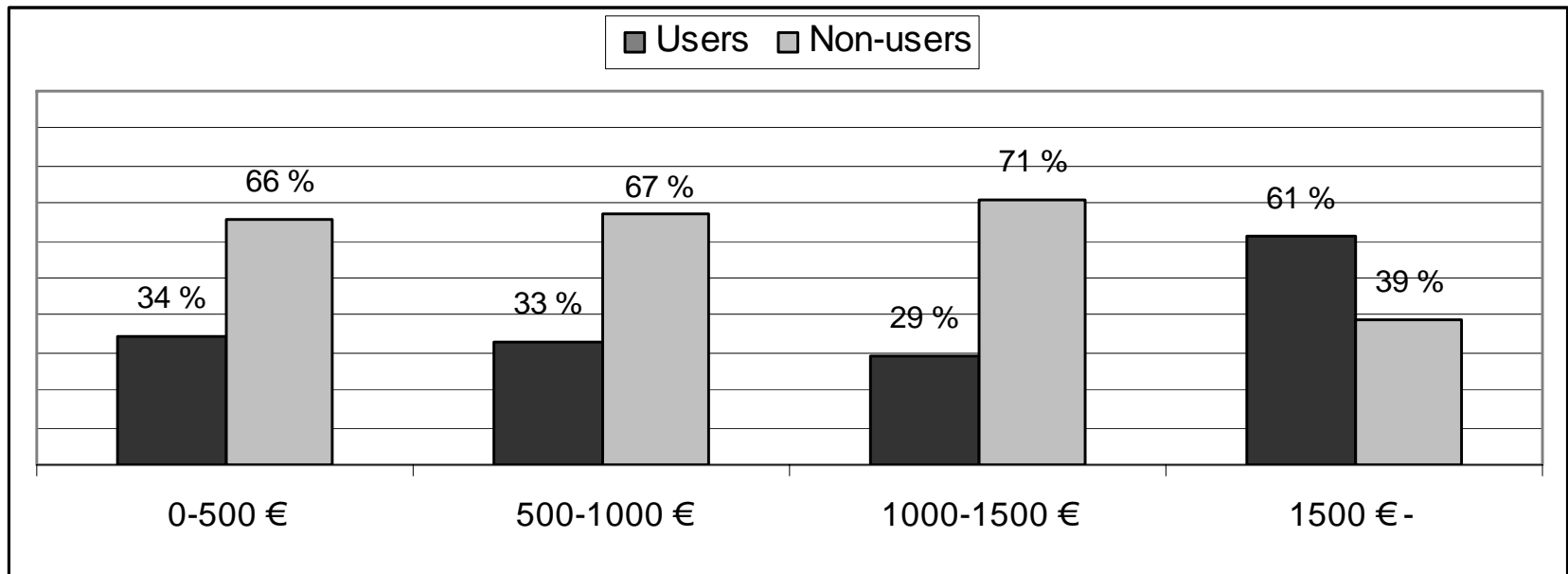


1.1.4. Internet usage by main activity status



1.2. Internet usage by household's monthly net incomes

Incomes had effect only to a certain degree



2. Non-users:

Reasons for not using the internet

- "I do not need the internet" 65%
- Difficulties with using a computer 53%
- Cannot afford a computer at home 39%
- Nobody ever showed me how to use the internet 37%
- The internet is not useful 33%
- Someone else uses the internet for me 28 %
- The internet is harmful 20%
- Difficulties with reading and writing 18%



2.1. Cross-cultural analysis

- **"Do not need the internet"** Finland (97%), France (83%), Austria (74%), Germany (65%).
- **Difficulties with using a computer** France (64%), Bulgaria (85%).
- **Cannot afford a computer at home** Israel (26%).
- Altogether financial barriers were most common in Bulgaria and least common in Israel.



2.2. Interest in learning how to use the internet

- The German and Bulgarian LSGs were most often interested in learning to use the internet (>60 %), followed by the Israeli LSGs (>40 %).
- The Finnish, French and Austrian respondents were least often interested (~25 %).
- A majority of those who were interested in learning would take courses only if they were free of charge.



3. LSGs and e-Government

- Use/awareness of e-Government services (internet users):
 - downloading forms 35% / 45%
 - searching information from the authorities 35% / 43%
 - job services 30% / 45%
 - library services 25% / 43%

20-30% of internet users do not know the most common services!

- Awareness of e-Government services (non-users):
 - job services 58%
 - searching information from the authorities 56%
 - downloading forms 49% and submitting forms 47%

Awareness is poor: Half of the non-users do not know the most common services.



3.1. Barriers for using e-Government services (internet users)

- Not aware of the services (France, Israel, Bulgaria)
- Not aware of relevant www-addresses (Austria)
- No personal support available (Germany)
- Do not know how to use the services
- Afraid of viruses
- Navigation difficulties (Finland)



3.2. Perceptions of e-Government (internet users)

- Enables dealing with authorities in more convenient times and places.
- Faster than using traditional services
(agreement of about 90% among the users).

BUT

- Difficult to use without online support
- Not as safe as using traditional services
- Requires special equipment
(agreement of 50-60% among the users)



3.3. Incentives for using e-Government services

- Finland: Subsidized internet usage at home, increased security and confidentiality.
- France: Online support and free courses.
- Israel: Online support and personal support.
- Austria, Germany and Bulgaria: More and better services, subsidized internet usage at home.



4. Access

- 78 % of the internet users had access at home.
 - The most common reasons for not having access at home were access elsewhere (at work or at school) or financial barriers.
- 76 % of the non-users did not have access at home
 - The most common reasons were financial barriers.
- Interestingly, one fourth of the non-users had access at home but still did not use it.
 - Most common reasons: 'Do not need the internet' and someone else uses the internet for me.
 - Voluntary e-exclusion?



4.1. Only Finnish respondents used public internet access points commonly

- Only among the Finnish respondents a majority knew about a public access point close to their home.
- The Finns used public internet access points much more than respondents in other countries (more than 50 % used one at least occasionally).
- The Bulgarians used PIAPs second most often.
- In Israel and France almost 80 % had never used a PIAP, in Germany and Austria almost 75 %.
 - Reasons: there are too few PIAPs around, not possible to print



Conclusions

- Age, education and main activity status affect the likelihood of using the internet.
- Barriers related to internet usage can be divided into 4 categories:
 - **Lacking motivation:** no interest in learning / no need / someone else takes care of it
 - **Lacking education:** lacking skills / lacking training (difficulties with using a computer and the internet)
 - **Financial problems:** lacking resources for buying a computer and internet connection
 - **Lacking awareness:** not aware of possibilities offered by the internet as well as services provided online.



Focus Groups

- 8 – 10 citizens with a low socio-economic background
- Recruited with the help of community centers, agencies involved in social work
- 2 meetings
 - a) before the launch of the survey
 - b) after the survey results were available



QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Discussions largely confirmed survey findings:

- No access due to lack of technical skills and problem of affordability
- Problem of affordability aggravated by
 - Lack of transparency regarding costs
 - Continuous upgrades of PCs
- Negative Attitudes = often the result rather than the cause of not having access



Recommendations

- Increase the number of PAPs (not on the street, but in community/neighborhood centers, public spaces frequented by LSGs);
- Establish “e-Government houses” in every district with free access and personal help;
- Provide printing facilities at PAPs;
- Awareness campaigns should be user- not product-oriented, emphasis on advantages of e-Government;
- More transparency of actual costs of access;
- Better search functions, facilitate navigation (user-friendlier);
- Improve interfaces;
- Simplify language;



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- Avoid overloading of pages with information;
 - Availability of personal support (hotline) on e-Government sites;
 - Distribution of e-Government booklets, compilation of sites;
 - Elaboration of learning modules as online games;
 - Confirmation of receipt;
 - Reduction of costs if filing an application online (reward);
 - Additional funds for organizations supporting LSGs to offer IT training and increase classes being offered;
 - Organize PC fleamarkets.



A detailed report on both the ELOST survey results as well as on the cross-cultural analysis is available on the project's website:

www.elost.org/results

Thank you for your attention!

