



Survey on Refugees' and Immigrants' Literature and ICT Skills

The main result from Output 1 of the Big Step project concerns the findings of the preliminary survey on the educational background and IT skills of refugees and immigrants in five European countries: Belgium, Greece, Slovenia, Czech Republic and Cyprus. This information was gathered between July and September 2016. The sample was recruited mainly from refugee camps in the participating countries, but also included some immigrants. In Cyprus, some of these refugees and immigrants were also recruited from free consultation service offices for refugees and immigrants.

This survey was designed to assess the needs and skills of the target population for the serious game which will be developed for refugees and immigrants, to help them learn the language of their host country, but also cultural particularities which will help their assimilation in the local community. For this survey, a questionnaire with 24 questions was created. These questions consisted of 15 demographic questions (such as gender, age, nationality, country of origin, family status, destination country etc), three questions about their education and literacy skills and six questions for ICT (Information Communications Technology) skills. The questionnaire was available in three languages: English, French and Arabic, but most of the participants completed the English version of the questionnaire. They completed the questionnaires on their own, or with the help of the researchers who visited the refugee centers.

Sample demographics

The sample consisted of 119 participants (35 female, 80 male, 4 missing), aged between 11 and 57 years ($M = 64$, $SD = 25$). Specifically, 12 participants were recruited in Czech Republic, 7 in Belgium, 48 in Greece, 18 in Slovenia and 32 in Cyprus (2 filled in the online version of the questionnaire).

The majority of the participants were Syrian (49 out of 119), followed by Afghans (14), Iraqis (13) and a number of other nationalities (Table 1).

Table 1: Nationalities of participants

Nationality	N	Nationality	N
Afghan	14	Kazakhstan	2
Albanian	1	Kurdish	1
Armenian	1	Nigerian	1
Bulgarian	1	Pakistani	1
Cameroon	3	Palestinian	2
Central Africa	1	Palestinian Syrian	5
Congolese	1	Polish	1
Cypriot	1	Russian	1
Czech	1	Somalian	4
Egyptian	1	Syrian	49
Eritrean	4	Turkish	1
FYROM	1	Ukrainian	3
Indian	3	Vietnamese	1
Iraqi	13	(Missing)	1

The majority of participants were married (49) or single (44). A smaller number (5) claimed that their spouse was deceased or missing, four (4) were underage, three (3) engaged and two (2) separated or divorced. 12 participants did not fill in their marital status information. Most of the participants (19) were alone in the host country, many were accompanied by one to five relatives, and fewer participants were accompanied by six or more relatives (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of relatives accompanying the participant

Number of Accompanying Relatives	N
0	19
1	17
2	8
3	10
4	10
5	9
6	5
7	3
8	1
9	1
Missing	36



The important factors for their choice of the destination country, were, in order of popularity (based on the number of participants who chose each answer): security (58), job opportunities (28), quality of life (26), family or relatives already living in the country (22), the educational system (19), the health support system (17), the state of the economy of the country (11), the language spoken (11), the weather (7), people of the same ethnic group already living there (6), friends who live there (5), the social support system and the available benefits (5) and its access to Europe (3). It is worth pointing out that in this question, participants could choose multiple answers. Still, 31 out of the 58 people who included security in their answers chose that as the only important factor. This shows the importance of finding a secure shelter away from war zones being the major (or only) concern for a big percentage of our participants. The second finding worth pointing out is that job opportunities were the second most popular factor in their choice, whereas a small number of people took into account the benefits available in the host countries. This is a clear disproof of the racist narrative in many European countries, where refugees or immigrants are seen as “freeloaders” on social support benefits.

In order of preference, the destination countries where the participants would like to settle down were: Germany (21), Sweden (11), Cyprus (10), Belgium (9), Czech Republic (8), Slovenia (7), UK (6) and Canada (6), Norway (5), Switzerland (3) and Netherlands (3), Austria (2) and a number of countries, chosen by one participant each (Australia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, USA, Syria). 3 participants stated no preference.

Literacy

Participants spoke between 1 and 5 languages (Figure 1). The most common languages among the participants were Arabic (N = 74) and English (N = 67), followed by a number of other languages such as Greek, Turkish and Slovenian, which were probably learned during the accommodation of our sample on transit to their destinations (Table 3).



Figure 1: Number of languages spoken. Data labels show the number of participants in each category.

Table 3: Languages spoken and number of speakers for each language

Language	N	Language	N	Language	N
Albanian	1	Finnish	2	Punjab	3
Amharic	1	French	7	Russian	1
Arabic	74	German	5	Slovenian	10
Bulgarian	1	Greek	23	Somali	4
Dari	8	Hindi	3	Swedish	2
Dutch	9	Igbo	1	Tigrinya	4
English	67	Kurdish	8	Turkish	12
Ewodi	1	Pashto	5	Urdu	2
Farsi	7	Polish	1		

Participants of all education levels (Table 4) and various professional backgrounds (Table 5) were included in the sample. 32 participants came from urban areas and 75 from rural areas (12 participants did not give an answer).

Table 4: Number of participants for each education level

Educational level	N
No education	3
Primary school	26
Junior high school	8
High school	36
Technical school	4
College	19
Bachelor's degree	21
Masters degree	2



Table 5: Job categories of participants

ProfessionType	N
Athlete	1
Education	9
Freelance / Business	12
Housewife	4
Public/private employee	11
Student	16
Unemployed	10
Unskilled worker	26
(Missing)	20

A large number of participants reported reading books sometimes or on a more regular basis, while fewer participants regularly read magazines or newspapers (Table 6).

Table 6: Reading habits of participants. Answers on the question how often they read books, magazines and newspapers

How often do you read:	Books	Magazines	Newspapers
Never	18	25	33
Rarely	12	20	18
Sometimes	48	40	34
Often	21	14	14
Very often	16	13	17
(Missing)	4	7	3

ICT skills

Most of the participants in the study owned one or more electronic devices (such as smartphone, tablet and laptop). Only 3 of the 119 participants reported owning no electronic devices, and 2 did not respond to the question. The remaining participants owned one (48), two (34), three (27), four (4) or five (1) electronic devices. Most of the participants reported using their phone often or very often, and laptops/PCs and tablets a bit less often (Table 7).

Table 7: Reported frequency of use for different electronic devices in the last two years

Frequency of using electronic devices in the last two years	Mobile Phone	Laptop / PC	Tablet
Never	5	44	34
Rarely	4	9	10
Sometimes	17	24	25
Often	24	24	22
Very often	67	15	25
(Missing)	2	3	3

This is a promising finding for interventions designed to help refugees and immigrants in capacity building and learning based on modern learning techniques, such as the gamification approach of the Big Step serious game.

Most of the participants assessed their ICT skills as good (42), average (28) or very good (16), fewer assessed their skills as excellent (11) or bad (10) and less people claimed they are very bad (2) or have no ICT skills (9). One participant did not answer this question. It seems that the vast majority thinks their ICT skills range between average and very good. Their ratings for specific ICT skills are presented in Table 8 below:

Table 8: Assessment of ICT skills for different uses

Assessment of internet and computer skills	Web browsing	E-mail	Social Media	Communication Software/Apps (Skype, Viber, WhatsApp etc)	Video Games	MsOffice
No skills	7	8	5	2	18	21
Very bad	3	2	1	1	4	16
Bad	11	12	11	10	13	15
Average	22	18	13	20	16	28
Good	33	37	31	28	28	20
Very good	23	21	27	26	16	13
Excellent	17	18	29	29	19	21
(Missing)	3	3	2	3	5	6

It seems that a small proportion of participants have an average or above knowledge for specialized software such as MS Office or video games. On the contrary, most participants claim an average or above knowledge of using internet for basic functions such as internet browsing or using e-mails, and an even more greater ability for using internet for communications, such as social media and specialized communication software or applications such as Skype, Viber and WhatsApp. It is possible that such communication options become the cheapest and most easy to use ways for refugees and immigrants to talk to family and friends in other countries, so most people learn to use them quite well, as our data suggests. This hypothesis is supported by the reported frequency of use for ICT skills (Table 9). It seems that participants use communication software/apps and social media most often, followed by general web browsing / internet surfing. Email use, programs such as MS Office and video games are used less often, with a larger proportion of participants claiming to never use the last two (44 and 47 out of 119 respectively).

Table 9: Reported frequency of use for different ICT skills in the last 2 years

Frequency of use in the last two years	Web browsing	E-mail	Social Media	Communication Software/Apps (Skype, Viber, WhatsApp etc)	Video Games	MS Office
Never	28	28	26	17	47	44
Rarely	9	14	6	3	19	18
Sometimes	23	26	17	27	17	14
Often	10	20	16	21	13	20
Very often	48	29	52	49	22	21
(Missing)	1	2	2	2	1	2

When asked to assess the frequency for which participants use ICT skills (Table 10), again the most frequent use was related to communication and socializing, followed by entertainment, reading the news or reading in general, and then for other reasons such as studying, working and shopping. Still, a considerable number of participants reported that they rarely or never use their electronic devices for shopping, working and reading in general or for reading the news.

Table 10: Reported frequencies for ICT use for different reasons

Frequency of use in the last two years	Work	Study	Entertainment	Socializing	Communication	Shopping	Reading	News
Never	37	21	17	20	16	51	29	23
Rarely	21	9	18	5	8	12	15	14
Sometimes	14	29	21	15	11	13	21	24
Often	22	25	20	21	29	14	22	25
Very often	24	34	42	56	52	25	28	29
(Missing)	1	1	1	2	3	4	4	4

Finally, in the question whether they had any professional training in ICT skills, a large number of participants (44) did not respond. The majority of the participants who responded said that they never had any training ($n = 54$). A small number claimed to have learned some basic things in school or while working ($n = 9$) and a similar number claimed to have had short or long term training, such as seminars or university courses ($n = 10$). Even though it was not part of the question, some participants commented that they would like to have the opportunity to have such training.

As a conclusion, the availability of electronic devices such as smartphones, the eagerness of the participants to use modern technology and the familiarity of people of most ages with at least basic functions such as internet browsing, using emails, social media and communication apps give added value to gamification approaches for learning and skill development in refugees and immigrants.

External validity limitations

Given that sampling was based on self-selection and that most of the participants responded in the English version of the questionnaire, it is possible that participants with higher educational level were included in our sample at greater proportion compared to the population of interest. We should therefore be careful in generalizing our findings from this sample to the general population of refugees and immigrants that interests us.



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