

Selected findings on age and digitalisation from FRA’s Fundamental Rights Survey

This background paper was prepared by FRA, at the request of the 2020 German Presidency of the Council of the EU, to support the international online conference “Strengthening Older People’s Rights in Times of Digitalisation – Lessons learned from COVID-19” on 28 - 29 September 2020. The dataset from FRA’s Fundamental Rights Survey – on which the information contained in this paper is based – will be made available by FRA in 2021 to allow for further analysis and exploration of the survey results.

About the Fundamental Rights Survey

The Fundamental Rights Survey – conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) – provides for the first time a comprehensive set of comparable data on people’s experiences and opinions concerning their fundamental rights. The survey focuses on everyday situations in areas including data protection, equal treatment, access to justice, consumer rights, crime victimisation, good administration and the importance of protecting rights.

The survey interviewed just under 35,000 people aged 16 years and older in all EU Member States, North Macedonia and the United Kingdom. The survey design involves a combination of face-to-face and online data collection, as appropriate in each country, to reach a representative sample of the total population. Fieldwork took place from January 2019 to October 2019.

Data collection was carried out by Ipsos MORI on behalf of FRA, and in cooperation with Statistics Netherlands (CBS) in the Netherlands, Statistics Austria in Austria and Centre des technologies de l’information de l’État (CTIE) in Luxembourg.

This background paper provides a breakdown of the survey’s results with respect to respondents’ age in relation to questions on digitalisation.

Key Findings:

- The digital divide between generations is significant and it increases with age. The 2019 Fundamental Rights Survey¹ shows that one in five people (20 %) aged 75 years and older in the survey uses the internet at least occasionally, in comparison with 98 % of 16-29-year-olds.
- In terms of their age, internet users and non-internet users are diametrically opposed: older people are over represented among those not using the internet, while younger people are over represented among internet users, when looking at the population as a whole.
- Among internet users, frequency of use of the internet decreases with age.

¹ For more information concerning the survey and how it was carried out, see ‘Annex II: Methodology’ in European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020), *What do Fundamental Rights Mean for People in the EU*, Luxembourg: Publications Office (https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-fundamental-rights-survey-human-rights_en.pdf).

- There are no strong and systematic differences in the gender distribution for internet users and non-internet users, when people’s age is also taken into account.
- Among non-internet users, at all ages, there are slightly more people who experience limitations in daily activities (severe as well as less severe limitations, due to a health problem or disability) than among internet users.
- The results show that education plays an important role for the use of the internet among people of all ages, but in particular for older age groups; with higher levels of education corresponding to greater internet use.
- With the exception of the youngest age group, the financial situation of internet users is more advantageous compared to the non-internet users.
- Starting at age 45, a clear pattern of the use of the internet can be observed: among older age groups the internet is used most often for social contacts and when looking for information about public services, and less often for online banking and shopping, which differs from the patterns of internet use among younger people.
- Non-internet users perceive as their main obstacles for using the internet their lack of necessary skills, followed by a lack of interest (when the same things can be done without using the internet), and having no access to the internet.

A note on how to read the survey data with respect to ‘internet users’ and ‘non-internet users’

The Fundamental Rights survey used two different methods to collect information from respondents in the EU-27: in nine countries² respondents filled in the questionnaire online, in the remaining 18 countries, the interviews were done face-to-face³. This should be kept in mind with regard to questions asked in the survey about internet use and non-internet use.

As a consequence, in the online countries, nearly all respondents indicated that they use the internet, while in the face-to-face countries the sample includes people who never use the internet as well as those who use it.

When differentiating in the graphs in this paper between ‘**non-internet users**’ and ‘**internet users**’, the first group is representative only for the face-to-face countries, the second for all Member States of the EU-27.

- **Non-internet users** are respondents from those countries where face-to-face interviews were conducted – who indicate that they never use the internet.
- **Internet users** are all respondents across the EU-27 – who indicate that they use the internet at least occasionally.

Internet use was measured with the survey question ‘*How often do you use the internet? This can be for a range of things to do with work or leisure, and can include social media.*’

Non-internet users were identified with respect to those respondents who indicated that they never use the internet, while internet users were those respondents who indicated that they use the internet at least sometimes.

² Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden

³ Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain

Internet users and non-internet users by socio-demographic characteristics

Figure 1a: Age profile of internet users (%)^{a,b}

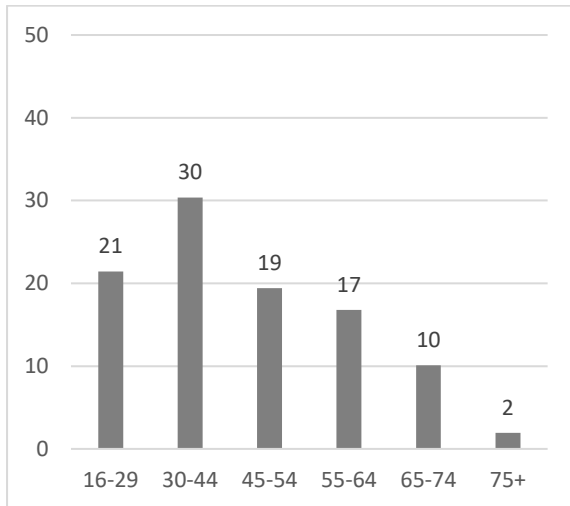
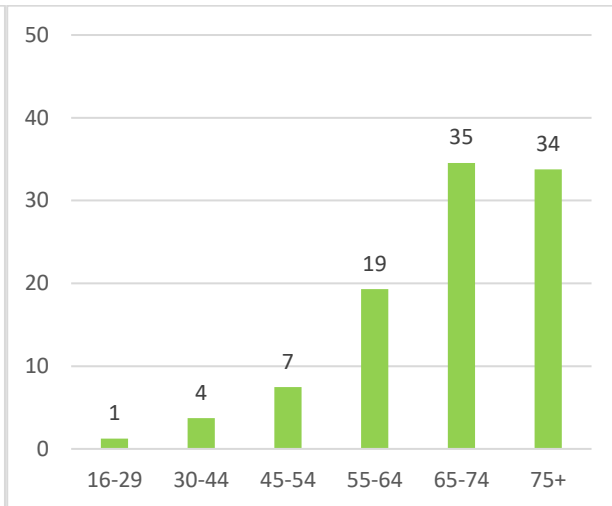


Figure 1b: Age profile of non-internet users (%)^{a,b}

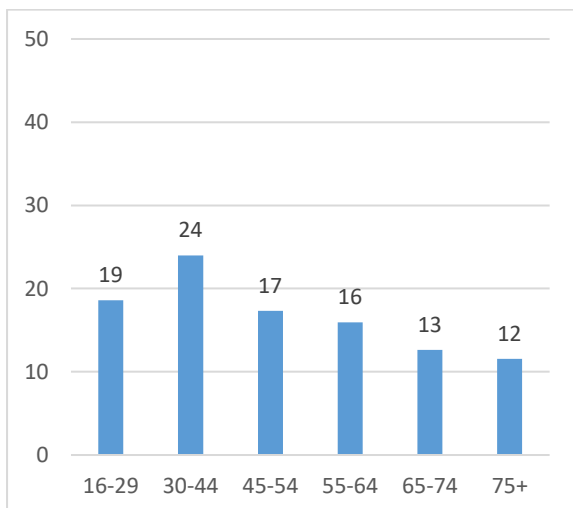


Notes: ^a Out of all respondents in EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Technology’ of the survey, excluding non-internet users in the countries where the questionnaire was completed online (n = 24,256); weighted results.

^b Non-internet users are respondents from those countries where face-to-face interviews were conducted – who indicate that they never use the internet. Internet users are all respondents across the EU-27 who indicate that they use the internet at least occasionally. Note: Only 64 respondents aged 16-29 indicated they were non-internet users.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019. Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT). In AT, the survey did not cover persons aged 75 or more.

Figure 1c: Age profile of the population (16 years of age and older) in the EU in 2019 (%)^a



Notes: ^a Population in EU-27 on 1 January 2019, people aged 16 years and older, based on the same age categories as shown in Figures 1a and 1b above. Eurostat online data code [[demo_pjan](#)], based on data downloaded on 23 September 2020.

Source: Eurostat 2020.

- **In terms of their age structure, internet users (Figure 1a) and non-internet users (Figure 1b) are diametrically opposed: older people are over represented among the non-internet users, younger people among the internet users.**
- In particular, the age profile of the non-internet users (Figure 1b) differs markedly from the age profile of the total population in EU-27 (Figure 1c).
- 70 % of internet users are younger than 55 years, while 88 % of the non-internet users are 55 years or older.
- Only 10 % of the internet users are 65 to 74 years old and 2 % are 75 years or older.
- This clearly reflects a generational effect – older persons who have not grown up with computers and the internet are less often using them compared to younger generations, the so-called ‘digital natives’.

- **In addition to the results presented in Figures 1a and 1b, the survey findings show that among non-internet users, of all ages, there are slightly more people with severe limitations in their usual everyday activities (due to a health problem or disability), or limitations that are less severe, in comparison with internet users.** This points to issues in relation to accessibility to the internet with respect to health and disability.
- However, it should be noted there is a strong relationship between aging and limitations in everyday usual activities, that is – among older age groups the percentage of those experiencing limitations in their usual activities is higher than among younger people.

Figure 2a: Internet users by age and gender (%)^{a,b}

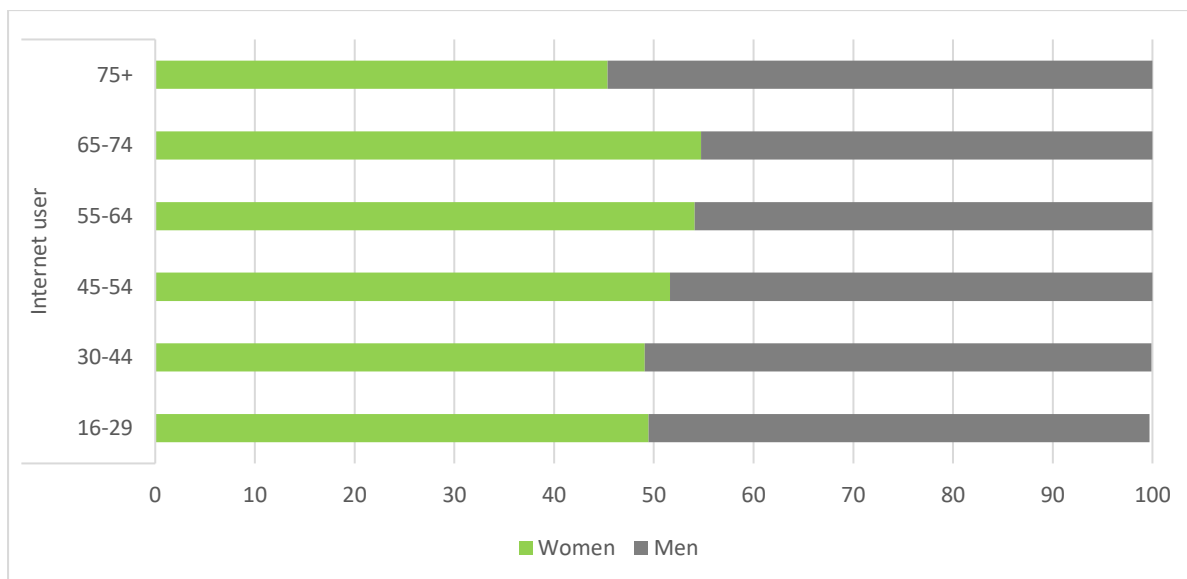
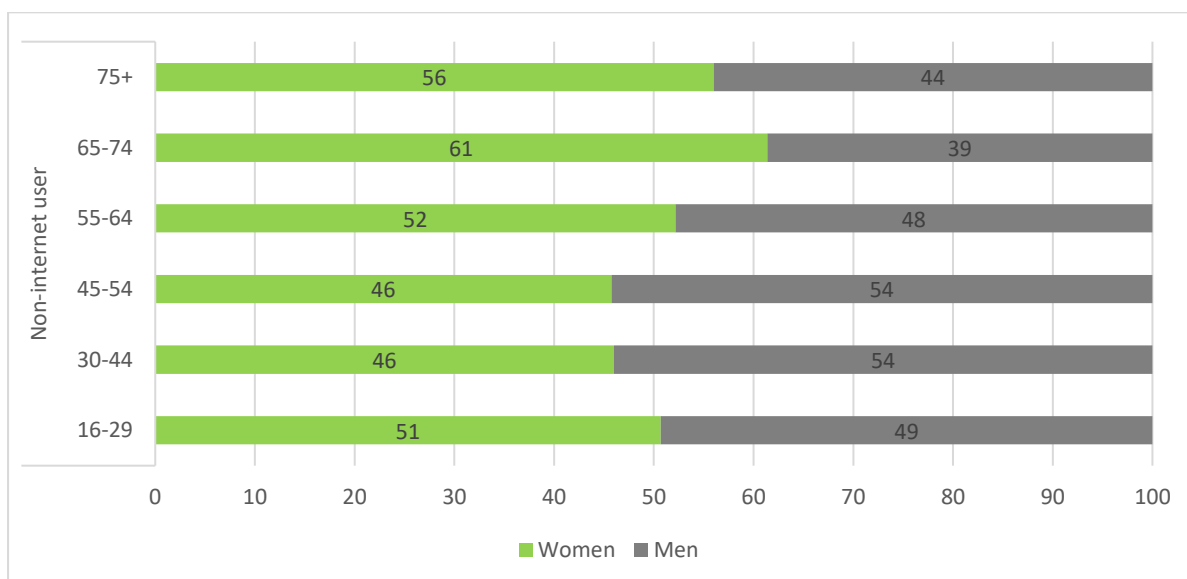


Figure 2b: Non-internet users by age and gender (%)^{a,b}



Notes: ^a Out of all respondents in EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Technology’ of the survey, excluding non-internet users in the countries where the questionnaire was completed online (n = 24,256); weighted results.

^b Non-internet users are respondents from those countries where face-to-face interviews were conducted – who indicate that they never use the internet. Internet users are all respondents across the EU-27 who indicate that they use the internet at least occasionally.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019. Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT). In AT, the survey did not cover persons aged 75 or more.

- **There are no strong and systematic differences in the gender distribution of internet users (Figure 2a) and non-internet users (Figure 2b), when these are examined separately for the different age groups.**
- While from the age of 45 to 74 slightly more than half of the internet users are women, this changes at the age of 75 or more, where more than half of the internet users are men (Figure 2a).
- For non-internet users, no clear pattern can be distinguished in terms of gender distribution across age groups (Figure 2b).

Figure 3a: Internet users by age and highest education level attained (%)^{a,b}

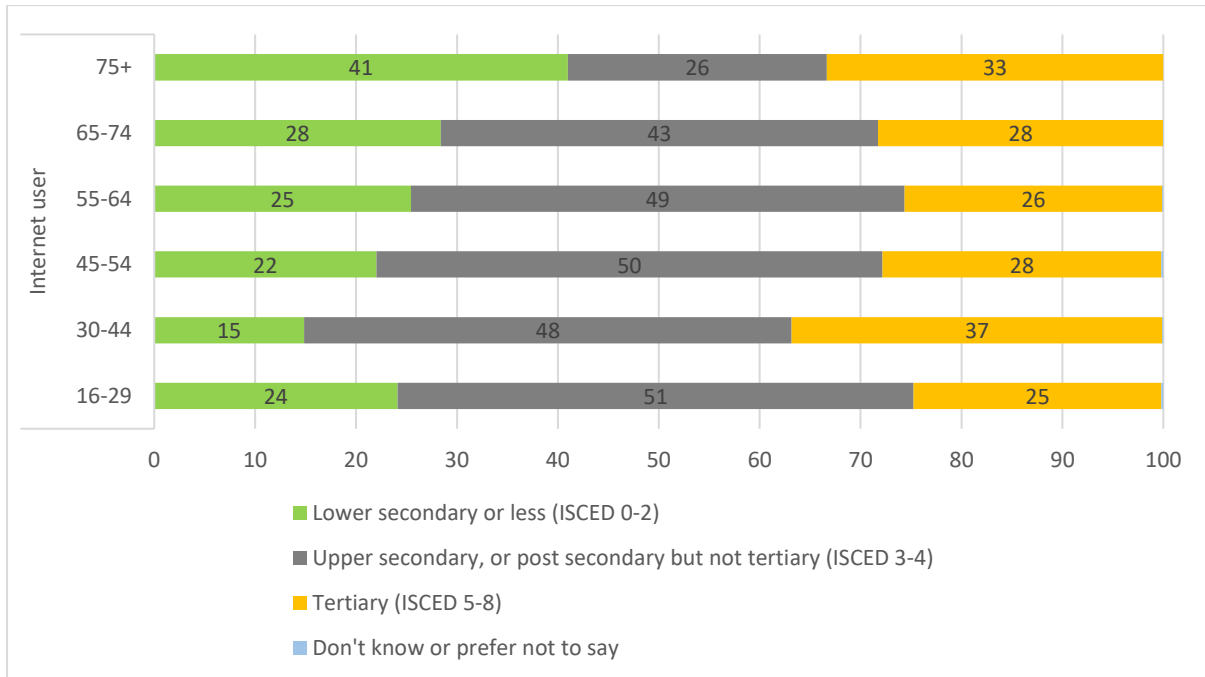
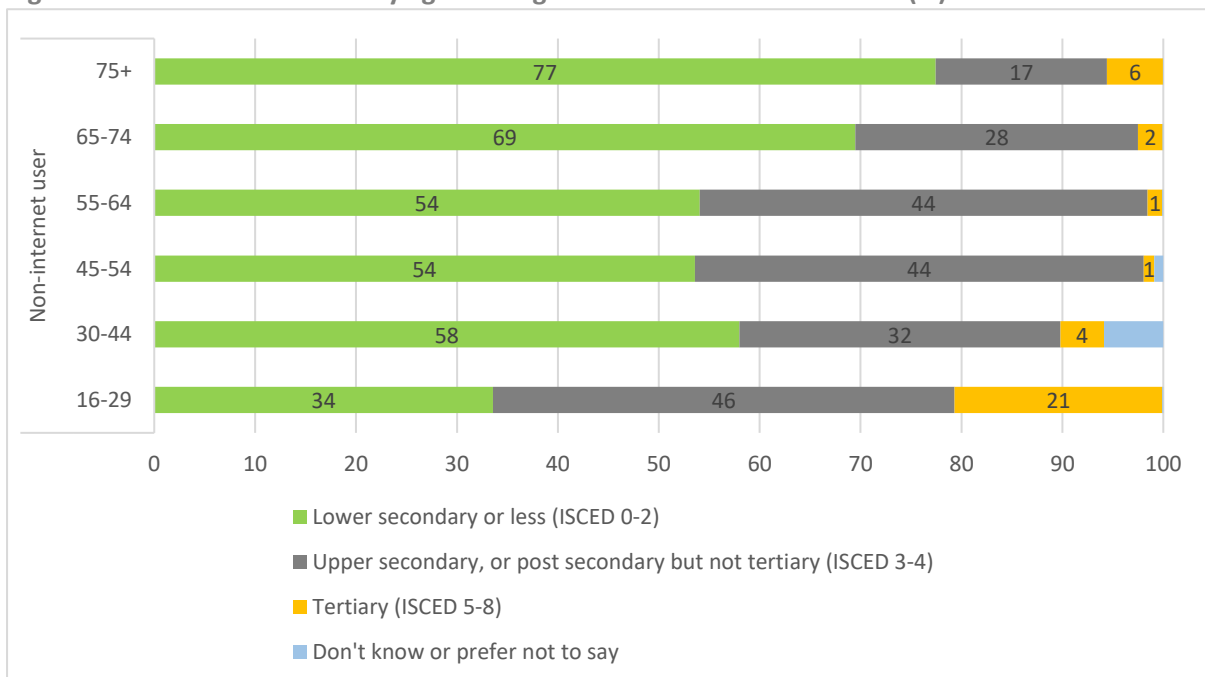


Figure 3b: Non-internet users by age and highest education level attained (%)^{a,b}



Notes: ^a Out of all respondents in EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Technology’ of the survey, excluding non-internet users in the countries where the questionnaire was completed online (n = 24,256); weighted results.

^b Non-internet users are respondents from those countries where face-to-face interviews were conducted – who indicate that they never use the internet. Internet users are all respondents across the EU-27 who indicate that they use the internet at least occasionally.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019. Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT). In AT, the survey did not cover persons aged 75 or more.

The education profiles of internet users (Figure 3a) and non-internet users (Figure 3b) are very different. The differences are less pronounced among the youngest age group, given that they – in part – have not yet finished their education.

- **The results show that education plays an important role for use of the internet across all age groups, but in particular at older ages; namely - higher education levels tend to indicate higher internet use.**
- At all ages, a large majority of internet users (Figure 3a) has completed at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3-4)⁴. In contrast, at all ages a majority of non-internet users (Figure 3b) has completed at most a lower secondary education (ISCED 0-2).
- With increasing age, the percentage of internet users with a lower level of education increases from 15 % for the 30 to 44 year old to 41% for those aged 75 years or more. This increase clearly reflects a generational effect and the fact that the percentage of the population continuing to higher education is higher now than in the past.
- The generation effect is less clear for the non-internet users, in part because of the high proportion of people who have completed at most lower secondary education, across all age groups. More than half of the non-internet users aged 30 to 44 years, 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 (58 %, 54% and 54%, respectively) have stopped their education at lower secondary level or before. This percentage increases strongly for the oldest age groups: two out of three (69 %) non-internet users aged of 65 to 74 and three out of four (77%) at the age of 75 or more (Figure 3b).
- A relatively stable proportion of internet users across all age groups has completed tertiary education. This percentage varies between 26 % and 37 % (Figure 3a). In comparison, for non-internet users, with the exception of the youngest age group where many have not yet finished their education, 6 % or fewer – depending on the age group – has completed tertiary education (Figure 3b). These differences in terms of people’s education can be relevant for measures designed to help people, of different ages, to use online services.

⁴ ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education

Figure 4a: Internet users by age and household's ability to make ends meet (%)^{a,b}

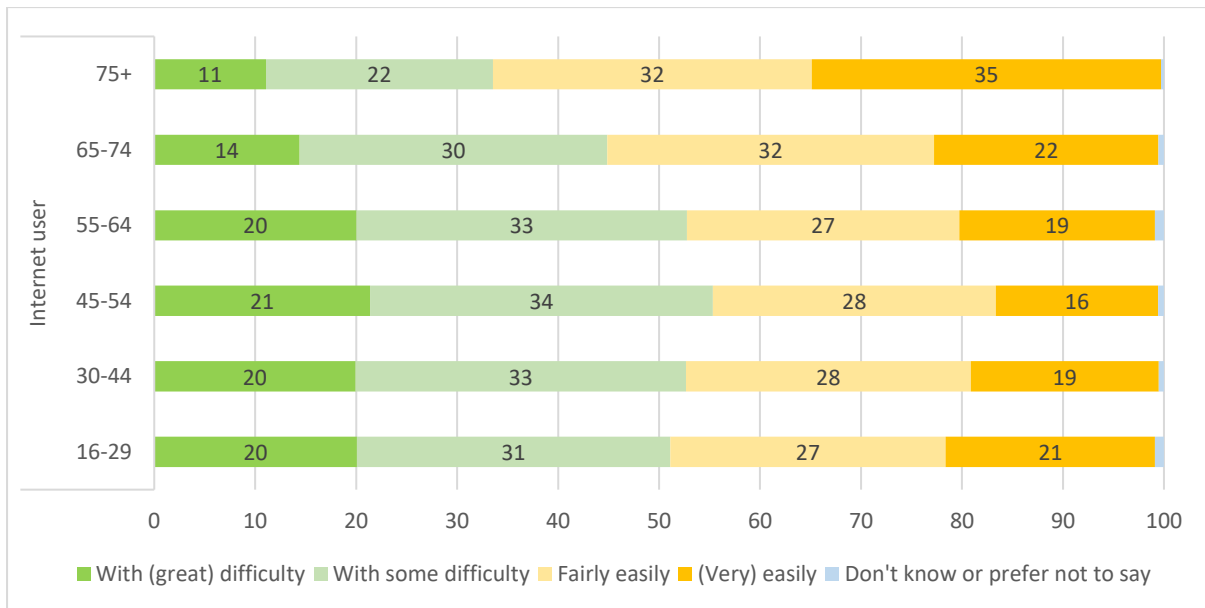
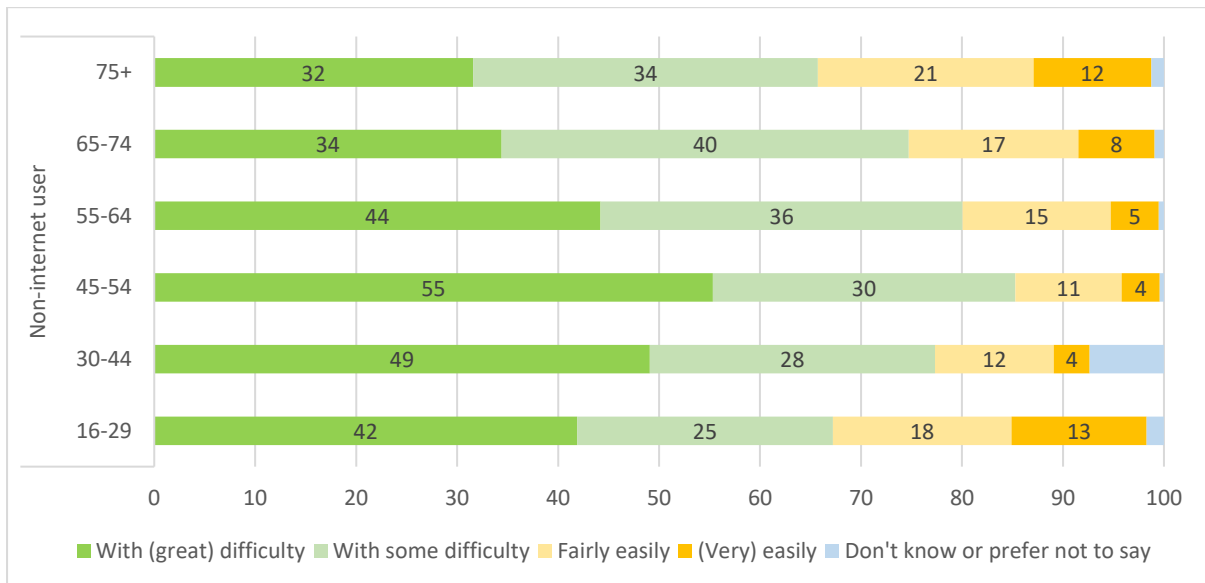


Figure 4b: Non-internet users by age and household's ability to make ends meet (%)^{a,b}



Notes: ^a Out of all respondents in EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Technology’ of the survey, excluding non-internet users in the countries where the questionnaire was completed online (n = 24,256); weighted results.

^b Non-internet users are respondents from those countries where face-to-face interviews were conducted – who indicate that they never use the internet. Internet users are all respondents across the EU-27 who indicate that they use the internet at least occasionally.

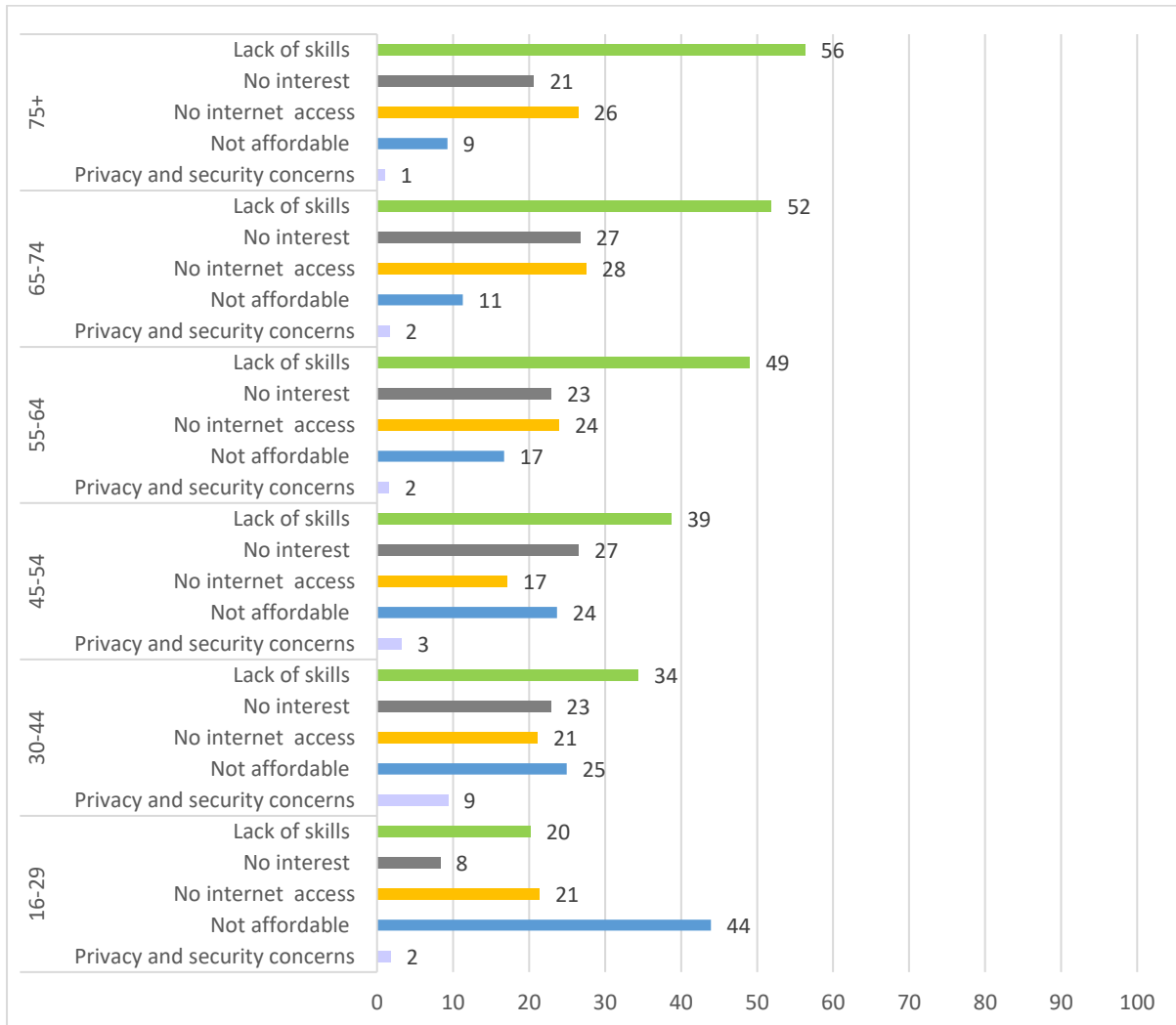
Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019. Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT). In AT, the survey did not cover persons aged 75 or more.

With the exception of the youngest age group, the financial situation of internet users is more advantageous compared to the non-internet users. This finding can be read alongside educational levels.

- Overall, 14 % of the internet users aged 65 to 74 years and 11 % of those aged 75 years and above declared to have (great) difficulties to make ends meet (Figure 4a). In the group of non-internet users, 34 % of those aged 65 to 74 years and 32 % of people 75 years and older experienced (great) difficulties to make ends meet (Figure 4b).
- Beyond the results shown above, internet users and non-internet users differ slightly with respect to the areas where they live in terms of categories differentiating in the survey between urban and rural areas. Internet users are living more often in big cities, towns or small cities, while non-internet users reside more often in a country village or have a home somewhere in the countryside. This finding may reflect lack of internet availability in some rural locations.
- Non-internet users, apart from the youngest age group, live less often in big cities from the age of 55 onwards. About one out of four non-internet users indicates a big city as their area of residence.

Non-internet users - Obstacles for use of the internet

Figure 5: Non-internet users – Perceived obstacles for the use of the internet by age (%)^{a,b,c}



Notes: ^a Out of respondents who were asked to complete the section ‘Technology’ of the survey, excluding non-internet users in the countries where the questionnaire was completed online (n = 4,635); weighted results.

^b The results for non-internet users are representative for all countries where the interviews were done face-to-face.

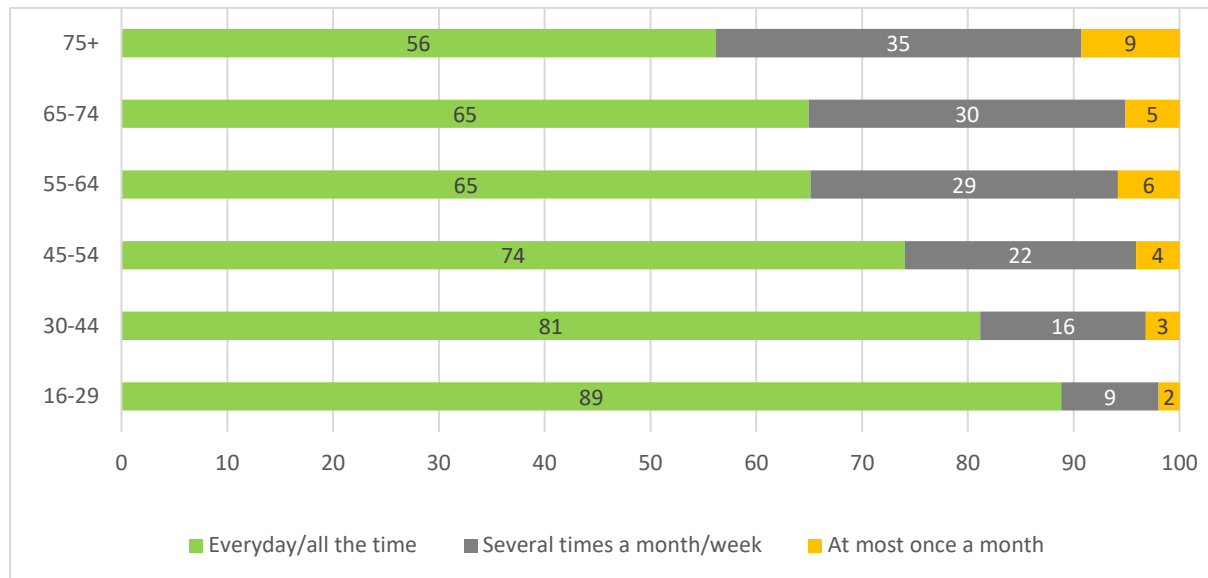
^c Question asked: ‘In the past 12 months, have any of the following prevented you from using the internet to do things such as shopping, banking or using the public services?’ Respondents were asked to choose the appropriate answer among the following categories: ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘Prefer not to say’ or ‘Don’t know’ for the following obstacles: ‘1 – Can’t afford a computer / smartphone / the internet’, ‘2 – Lack of computer skills’, ‘3 – Worried about data privacy and security’, ‘4 – No internet access’, ‘5 – Prefer to do things not using the internet’, ‘6 – Other reasons’, ‘7 – None of these’.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019. Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT). In AT, the survey did not cover persons aged 75 or more.

- A lack of computer skills is perceived as the main obstacle for doing things online by non-internet users. While 20 % of the 16-29-year-old non-internet users mention this as an obstacle, this proportion raises to 49 % at the age of 55 to 64, 52 % in age group 65-74 and 56 % for those aged 75 years or more (Figure 5).
- The lack of access to the internet is perceived as an obstacle by 17 % to 28 % of non-internet users, depending on the age group. The percentage is highest for the 65 to 74-year-olds (28 %) and those 75 years or older (26 %).
- With the exception of the youngest age group, a stable proportion of the non-internet users (21 % – 27 %) indicates that they prefer to do things not using the internet (lack of interest to use the internet).
- With age, the costs related to the use of the internet are perceived as less of an obstacle. In particular, 44 % of those aged 16-29 who do not use the internet state that this is because they cannot afford it. In comparison, the cost of internet use was mentioned as an obstacle by only 9 % of non-internet users aged 75 or more.
- Privacy and security concerns were for most non-internet users not a significant obstacle stopping them from using the internet. This reason for not using the internet was mentioned by 9 % in the age group of the 30 to 44-year-olds – the highest percentage among the examined age groups.

Internet users: Frequency of use of the internet in general and for selected online activities

Figure 6: Internet users – Frequency of general internet use by age (EU-27, %)^{a,b,c}



Notes: ^a Out of all respondents in EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Technology’ of the survey, excluding non-internet users in the countries where the questionnaire was completed online (n = 19,621); weighted results.

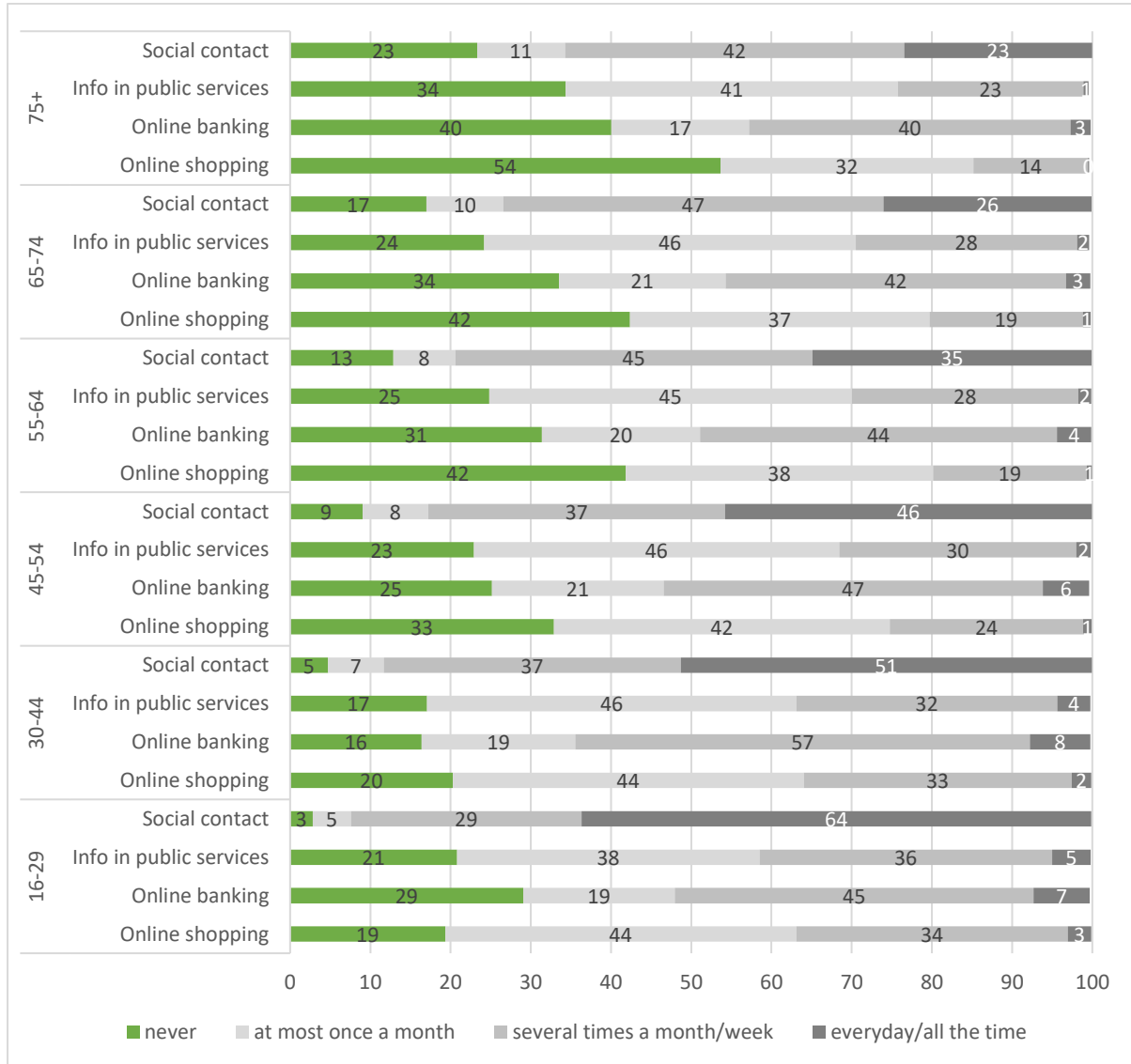
^b The results for internet users are representative for EU-27.

^c Question asked: ‘How often do you use the internet? This can be for a range of things to do with work or leisure, and can include social media.’ Respondents could choose from the following answer options: ‘1 – Never’, ‘2 – Less than once a month’, ‘3 – Once a month’, ‘4 – Several times a month’, ‘5 – Once a week’, ‘6 – Several times a week’, ‘7 – Every day / all the time. Respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were provided an option to answer ‘Prefer not to say’ or ‘Don’t know’. All respondents who choose category 2 to 7 are considered as internet users.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019. Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT). In AT, the survey did not cover persons aged 75 or more.

- Among internet users, the frequency of the use of the internet decreases with age. However, 65 % of both 55 to 64 and 65 to 74-year-olds, and 56 % of those 75 years or older use the internet every day or all the time (Figure 6).

Figure 7: Internet users – Frequency of internet use for selected online activities by age (EU-27, %)^{a,b,c}



Notes: ^a Out of all respondents in EU-27 who were asked to complete the section ‘Technology’ of the survey, excluding non-internet users in the countries where the questionnaire was completed online (n = 19,621); weighted results.

^b The results for internet users are representative for the EU-27.

^c Question asked: ‘In the past 12 months, how often have you used the internet for the following things?’. Respondents could choose for each of the following activities (Keeping in touch with family or friends (by email, Skype, WhatsApp, social media, etc.), Banking, Shopping, Looking for work / applying for a job, Finding information about public services—such as checking office opening times, or making an appointment) from the following answer options: ‘1 – Never’, ‘2 – Once a month’, ‘3 – Several times a month/ week’, ‘5 – Every day / all the time’. Respondents who did not select one of these answer categories were provided an option to answer ‘Prefer not to say’ or ‘Don’t know’. All respondents who choose category 2 to 7 were considered as internet users.

Source: FRA, Fundamental Rights Survey 2019. Data collection in cooperation with CBS (NL), CTIE (LU) and Statistics Austria (AT). In AT, the survey did not cover persons aged 75 or more.

- **Starting with the age of 45, a clear pattern of the use of the internet can be observed: Among people 45 years and older, the internet is least often used for online shopping, followed by online banking, and it is used most often for social contacts and when looking for information about public services.**
- The internet is never used for online shopping by 42 % of internet users who are 45-54 or 55-64 years old, and by 54 % of those aged 75 years or older – compared with 19 % of 16-29-year-olds never using the internet for online shopping.
- The proportion of internet users never using the internet for online banking also increases with age. One out of four (25 %) of the 45 to 54-year-old internet users never use online banking, and this raises to 40 % of internet users who are aged 75 years or older.
- Starting with the age of 45, about one out of four internet users is never using the internet to look for information on public services, and this raises to one out of three (33%) among the age group 75 years or older.
- Across all age groups, people use the internet most often for social contacts. However, the proportion of those never using the internet for social contacts increases with age, from 9 % at the age 45 to 54, and up to 23 % of those aged 75 years or more.