

# Statistics in focus

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# How skilled are Europeans in using computers and the Internet ?

One of the most remarkable developments over the past ten years has probably been the way in which the Internet – previously known only to a small circle of scientists and university students – has infiltrated, and become an important part of, our everyday lives. The Internet is not only changing our way of communicating with friends, relatives and colleagues, but also our way of working and shopping. Many traditional services are slowly being replaced by their electronic or online counterparts: banking, ticket sales, travel and holiday information, contacts with public administration, etc.

This rapid growth faces a barrier, however; namely the capability of citizens or the labour force to understand and use the applications or, more generally, their ability to use Information and Communication Technologies.

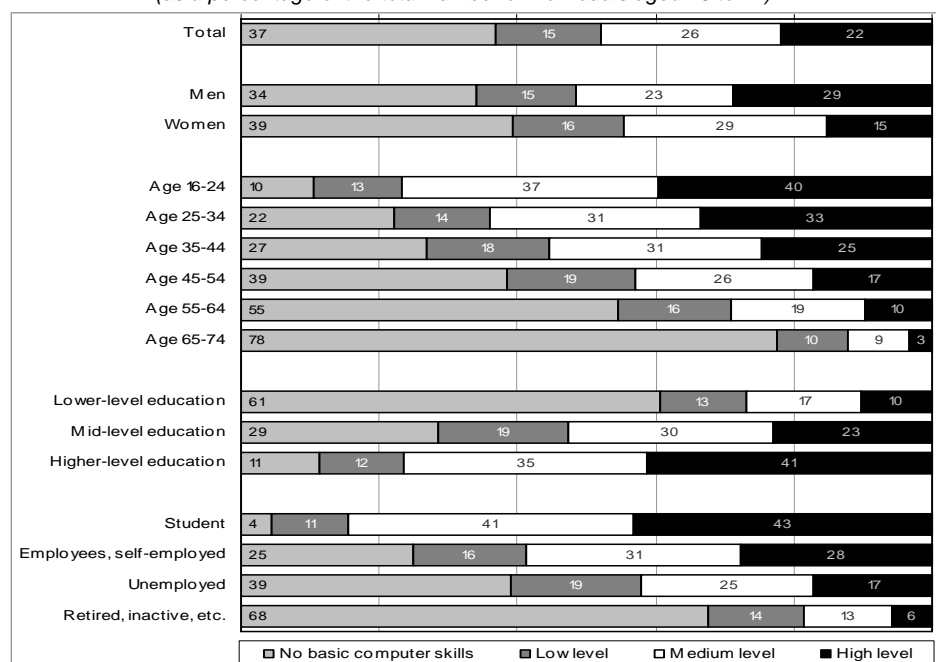
This edition of *Statistics in Focus* explores the results of the *2005 Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals* to gain insight into the current state of Europeans' e-skills.

## E-skills at a glance

By way of introduction, Graph 1 shows the skill levels of different subgroups of the population (for more information on the skill levels, see *Methodological Notes*):

- a first observation is that 37% have no computer skills whatsoever, while only 22% seem to be acquainted with a wide range of computer activities.
- as expected, educational level is an important factor: while only 11% of people with a higher education have no basic e-skills, this applies to more than 60% of people not educated beyond lower secondary level.
- as regards age, more than 3 out of 4 people over 65 years of age have no computer skills at all, but even among young people aged 16 to 24, about 10% appear to have no basic e-skills.

**Graph 1 – Individuals' level of basic computer skills (2005), EU-25**  
(as a percentage of the total number of individuals aged 16 to 74)



Source: Eurostat, *Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals*

## Digital literacy is a problem for a large part of the population

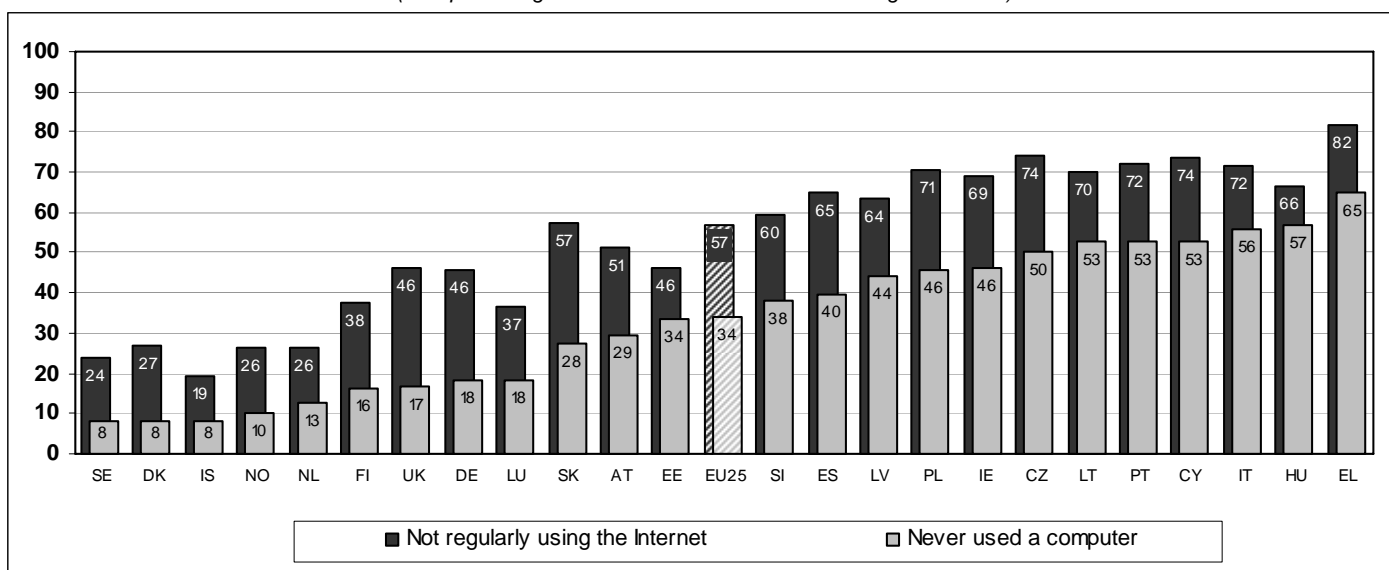
Digital literacy involves the confident and critical use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic ICT skills: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate via the Internet. The focus of the 2005 survey is on basic skills in computer and Internet use. These e-skills can cover a wide range of activities from simply opening or moving files, to creating and managing complex computing services.

As seen in Graph 1, a considerable proportion of European citizens have no computer skills at all. The fact

that 37% of the population lack basic computer skills is not so surprising when considering Graph 2, which shows that more than one in three (34%) of EU residents have *never* used a computer, ranging from 8% in the Nordic countries Sweden, Denmark and Iceland to 65% in Greece. It is clear that a lack of e-skills will prevent these people from participating fully in the information society.

In the same graph, we see that a majority of 57% do *not regularly* use the Internet. About 43% have never used it (not in the graph). In Greece, only 18% of people aged 16 to 74 are regularly online (i.e. on average at least once a week).

**Graph 2 – Individuals not using computers or the Internet (2005)**  
(as a percentage of the total number of individuals aged 16 to 74)



Source: Eurostat, Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals.

Notes: Data on computer use not available for Belgium (percentage not regularly using the Internet: 47%); no data available for France and Malta.

Taking a closer look at the groups of society at risk of exclusion (Graph 3), we observe – as expected – that digital literacy is a particular problem for the older generation (61% of people over 55 years of age have never used a computer), people who don't have an upper secondary education (57% have never used a computer, compared to 'only' 25% and 8% for mid- and higher levels of education respectively) and the unemployed (36%). On the other hand, the gender gap (not shown in the graph) is relatively small, with 37% of women having no computer experience, compared to 31% of men.

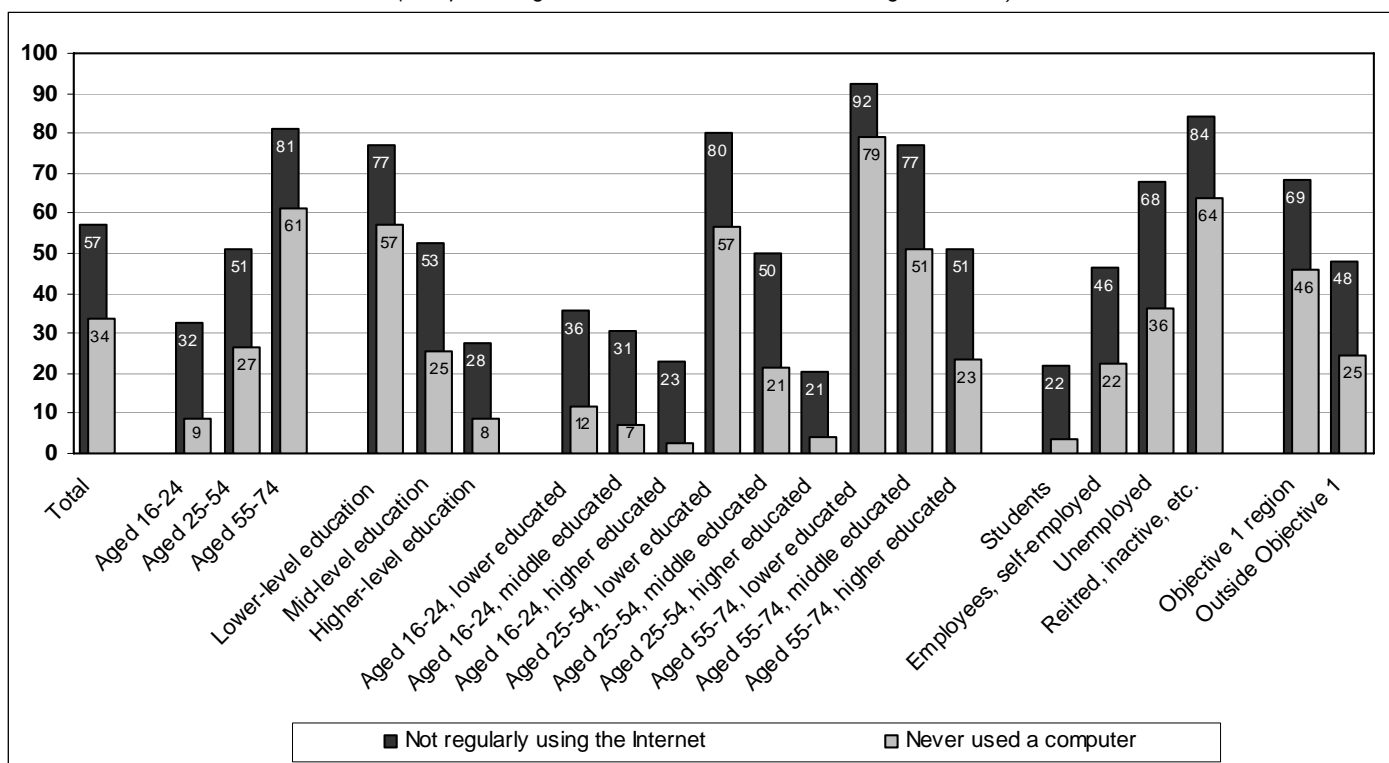
Combining age groups with level of education, the differences are even clearer, as almost 80% of people over the age of 55 with a lower-level education have never used a computer.

When comparing economically prosperous regions with relatively poorer regions (i.e. regions where *per capita* GDP is below 75% of the EU average), we see that in the

latter the proportion of the population which has never used a computer is almost double that in the more prosperous regions not covered by Objective 1.

Conclusions similar to those for computer use can be drawn for Internet use. As mentioned above, more than half the citizens of Europe do not regularly use the Internet. Again, older people or those with a lower-level education are far less likely to use the Internet. But even in the middle age-group of persons aged 25 to 54, more than half belongs to the 'offline population'. 77% of people with a lower-level education do not regularly use the Internet, meaning that specific programmes for e-learning or jobsites aimed at those with a lower-level education may reach only a quarter of their potential target users. Similarly, we see that most unemployed persons (68%) are not regularly online.

**Graph 3 – Individuals not using computers or the Internet (2005), EU-25**  
(as a percentage of the total number of individuals aged 16 to 74)



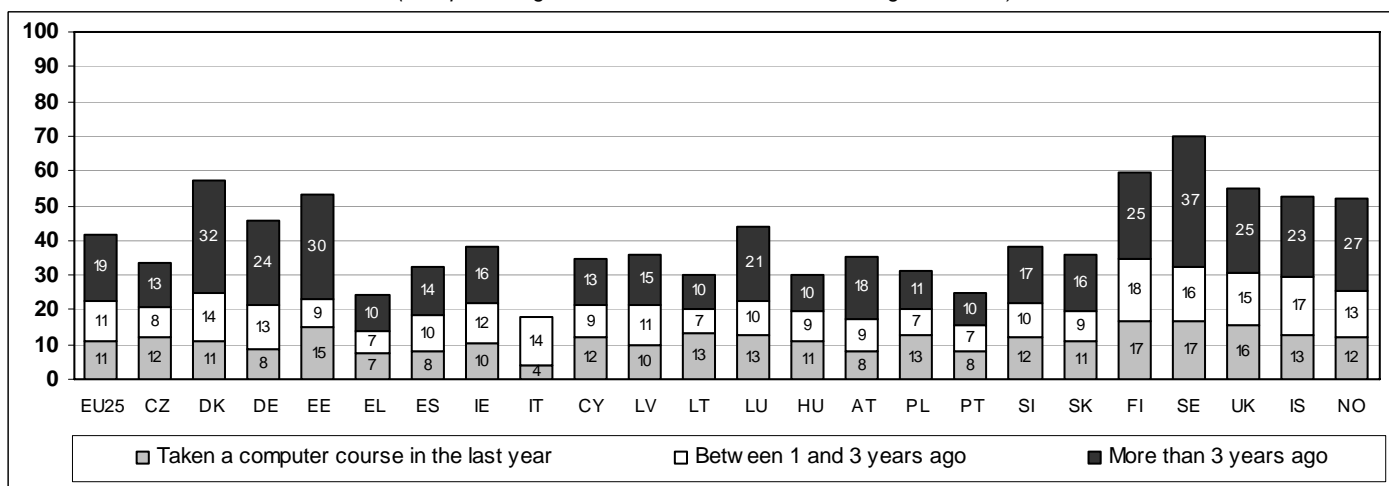
Source: Eurostat, Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals.

### Only a few people attend computer training courses

Graph 4 below shows that more than half the population (aged 16 to 74) have never taken a course (of at least three hours) on any aspect of computer use. Only a minority (of about 11%) have taken a course in the last year, and the course taken by about half the 42% who have taken a course at all was more than 3 years ago. Although the level of participation in computer training differs across countries – which can be explained by the level of participation in computer use (see Graph 2) - the pattern is not very different when comparing the countries.

Taking a closer look at the data (not shown), participation appears to be highest amongst those with a higher-level education – these people may have easier access to computer training because of the nature of their jobs – and amongst young people aged 16 to 24 – probably in the framework of a formal education programme. However, computer training is only one way to improve digital literacy. Informal methods such as assistance from colleagues or self-study will be added to the discussion in the last section of this *Statistics in Focus*.

**Graph 4 – Most recent training course (of at least 3 hours) on computer use (2005)**  
(as a percentage of the total number of individuals aged 16 to 74)



Source: Eurostat, Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals.

Notes: (i) EU-25 excluding BE, FR, IT, MT and NL. (ii) Italy (IT): 'Between 1 and 3 years ago' includes 'More than 3 years ago' (not available separately)

## The level of e-skills is particularly low in societal groups at risk for employment

Table 1 lists, for a selected set of computer and Internet activities, the percentage of computer users and Internet users respectively who have already carried out these activities. Although the selected activities cannot cover all basic skills, the set gives an insight into people's abilities. From the table, we see that slightly more than half of those who have ever used a computer have had some experience with spreadsheets, while 13% have already done some computer programming. Unemployed people do not score better than employed people for any skills, but in most cases the differences are minor.

Looking at Internet skills, Internet users are relatively unlikely to have carried out a wide range of basic Internet

activities. Indeed, while most people know how to use search engines or how to send attachments with an email message, only a few are familiar with using services for making phone calls over the Internet, using peer-to-peer networks or creating webpages. The type of connection available at home seems to play a role, as the skills level for Internet activities necessitating a higher bandwidth – such as telephoning over the Internet or file sharing via peer-to-peer networks - is much lower among those without a broadband connection at home. It is equally likely, however, that the skills level determines whether a household signs up for broadband.

**Table 1 – Computer and Internet users' skills for carrying out selected activities (2005), EU-25**  
(as a percentage of individuals aged 16 to 74 who have already used a computer (top part) or the Internet (bottom part))

	All individuals (age 16-74)	Broadband at home	No broadband at home	Student	Employee, self-employed	Unemployed	Retired, inactive
<b>Computer skills</b>							
Use a mouse to launch programs such as an Internet browser or word processor	94	97	96	98	95	95	87
Copy or move a file or folder	78	85	80	91	81	71	58
Use copy and paste tools to duplicate or move information on screen	72	81	75	87	75	66	52
Use basic arithmetic formulae (add, subtract, multiply, divide) in a spreadsheet	52	61	53	65	55	46	33
Compress files	38	51	37	50	41	31	20
Write a computer program using a specialised programming language	13	19	12	22	14	12	7
<b>Internet skills</b>							
Use a search engine to find information	88	93	89	94	90	84	77
Send an email with attached files	74	83	74	79	77	61	59
Post messages to chatrooms, newsgroups or an online discussion forum	33	41	28	61	30	33	18
Use the Internet to make phone calls	12	17	8	17	11	9	7
Use peer-to-peer file sharing for exchanging movies, music, etc.	16	25	11	31	15	16	6
Create a web page	15	20	12	24	14	13	8

Source: Eurostat, Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals.

Note: Data for EU-25, excluding BE, CZ, ES, FR, IE, MT and NL.

The information concerning the six computer skills listed in Table 1 has been used to regroup individuals into four categories (for more information, see the *Methodological Notes* on page 7). In Table 2 on the next page, important differences across countries can be noted. As already observed in Graph 1, 37% of all individuals aged 16 to 74 have no computer skills, but across Europe this ranges from only one in ten people in Denmark, Sweden and Norway to almost two out of three (65%) in Greece. In Luxembourg and Iceland, people appear to be fairly well able to use computers with 42% in the group with high basic computer skills. Among the new Member States, Estonia and Slovenia are doing better than the EU average.

In most countries, the gender aspect of e-skills is not very relevant, but as one would expect, the generational aspect plays an important role. In about half the countries, e-skills appear to be particularly rare among those aged 55 to 74 but even in the age-group 25 to 54 – people who are typically in the labour force – basic computer skills are a problem for many. In this age band, on average 29% of Europeans lack basic skills, but in Greece, Italy, Cyprus,

Lithuania and Hungary, this applies to 50% or more of middle-aged people. On the other hand, we see that this group of people is well skilled in using computers in Denmark, Luxembourg, Iceland and Norway where more than 4 out of 10 persons can be classified in the group 'high level of basic computer skills'. The highest skill levels can of course be found among younger people, although in Greece and Hungary about one in three young people has no basic computer skills. Not surprisingly, skill levels are also relatively good for those with a higher education and for students.

As seen in Table 1 above, skills level does not vary much between employed and unemployed computer users. However, unemployed persons score much worse when considering the total group of unemployed persons (Table 2), mainly because an important part is hardly using computers (see also Graph 3). More than two in three unemployed persons are unskilled in computer use in Latvia, Lithuania and Hungary, but in Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Norway, this applies to very few jobless people.

**Table 2 – Individuals' level of basic computer skills (2005)**  
(as a percentage of the total number of individuals aged 16 to 74)

	EU-25	DK	DE	EE	EL	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	AT	PL	PT	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	IS	NO
<b>All individuals aged 16-74</b>																					
No basic computer skills	37	10	21	37	65	59	54	44	53	20	57	31	46	54	39	29	33	11	25	14	10
Low level	15	13	23	16	12	5	9	20	10	13	7	12	19	9	12	17	17	20	16	11	23
Medium level	26	37	34	18	14	18	22	24	19	25	16	26	22	16	22	35	37	37	29	33	32
High level	22	39	22	29	9	19	15	11	18	42	20	31	13	21	27	19	13	32	31	42	35
<b>Men</b>																					
No basic computer skills	34	9	18	35	63	53	54	43	52	10	58	26	46	50	38	28	32	11	23	13	9
Low level	15	13	22	14	12	5	10	22	11	12	6	12	18	10	12	17	14	18	14	11	19
Medium level	23	27	29	19	15	17	19	22	17	22	13	24	20	16	21	30	36	28	22	24	25
High level	29	50	31	32	10	25	17	13	20	55	23	38	15	24	29	25	19	44	40	52	47
<b>Women</b>																					
No basic computer skills	39	11	24	40	67	64	55	45	53	29	57	35	47	57	41	30	34	12	26	15	11
Low level	16	14	25	17	12	5	9	19	9	14	8	13	19	8	11	17	20	22	17	11	27
Medium level	29	47	38	18	14	18	24	26	21	28	19	28	24	16	23	39	38	46	35	42	39
High level	15	28	13	25	8	13	12	10	17	30	17	24	10	19	26	14	7	20	22	31	23
<b>Aged 16 to 24</b>																					
No basic computer skills	10	0	1	13	32	28	18	2	11	2	34	5	6	13	:	3	3	1	7	9	0
Low level	13	3	15	18	22	5	14	23	9	4	7	9	20	10	:	14	20	10	10	3	10
Medium level	37	39	45	24	26	32	37	47	37	30	24	33	44	29	28	48	56	43	29	32	43
High level	40	59	38	45	20	35	32	28	44	64	35	54	29	48	67	34	21	46	54	56	47
<b>Aged 25 to 54</b>																					
No basic computer skills	29	3	10	29	59	50	51	38	50	14	50	21	45	49	:	21	23	5	17	7	4
Low level	17	12	25	18	14	6	11	26	13	13	9	14	22	11	:	20	19	19	17	10	24
Medium level	29	39	38	21	17	21	24	25	20	27	19	30	22	17	26	39	42	38	33	36	31
High level	25	45	27	32	10	23	14	11	17	45	22	35	11	23	:	20	16	37	34	47	41
<b>Aged 55 to 74</b>																					
No basic computer skills	65	27	:	:	93	87	88	83	90	45	84	67	81	:	:	73	68	27	:	36	30
Low level	14	21	23	9	3	3	3	8	4	17	3	10	10	4	:	12	12	26	17	20	30
Medium level	15	33	22	:	3	6	6	7	4	17	6	15	6	6	:	13	17	32	20	27	26
High level	7	18	:	:	1	4	2	2	3	21	6	9	2	:	:	3	4	15	:	17	14
<b>Lower educational level</b>																					
No basic computer skills	61	18	30	49	89	80	83	63	66	33	83	56	61	69	:	59	47	24	54	21	36
Low level	13	18	24	16	5	4	4	15	5	17	5	10	10	10	:	13	17	23	20	16	26
Medium level	17	31	30	15	5	9	8	16	14	21	7	17	19	12	:	20	28	32	15	34	21
High level	10	33	16	19	1	7	5	6	15	29	5	17	10	9	:	8	8	21	11	29	17
<b>Middle educational level</b>																					
No basic computer skills	29	8	19	40	51	37	46	46	59	11	40	25	48	8	33	20	35	11	19	13	9
Low level	19	14	25	19	18	6	14	23	13	11	9	14	22	8	16	20	19	23	17	11	28
Medium level	30	40	36	17	21	27	27	22	16	32	23	29	20	27	25	40	34	37	32	34	32
High level	23	38	20	23	11	30	13	9	11	45	27	32	9	57	26	20	12	29	33	42	31
<b>Higher educational level</b>																					
No basic computer skills	11	3	12	24	23	20	20	16	18	4	17	11	11	5	:	7	13	2	7	4	1
Low level	12	7	16	8	19	6	12	18	8	6	7	9	17	6	:	10	14	12	10	3	13
Medium level	35	40	35	23	30	28	36	40	31	27	29	31	41	27	30	41	52	41	36	32	36
High level	41	50	37	45	28	46	32	27	42	63	46	48	31	63	61	42	21	45	47	62	49
<b>Students</b>																					
No basic computer skills	4	0	0	:	19	14	5	1	1	0	19	2	2	1	:	1	2	1	:	6	0
Low level	11	3	13	:	22	5	13	17	5	3	9	4	17	5	:	10	21	9	:	2	10
Medium level	41	38	44	29	33	37	41	49	42	30	29	28	47	29	:	51	58	43	:	31	49
High level	43	59	42	44	26	44	41	32	52	67	43	67	34	65	73	38	19	47	62	61	41
<b>Unemployed</b>																					
No basic computer skills	39	12	16	:	56	62	42	66	71	36	67	32	53	57	:	38	43	10	:	34	13
Low level	19	14	27	:	11	4	9	19	11	18	7	19	24	11	:	26	21	21	:	11	30
Medium level	25	36	38	:	20	17	32	13	13	26	10	26	17	19	:	24	26	33	:	21	25
High level	17	37	18	:	13	17	16	3	5	21	16	22	6	13	:	12	10	36	:	34	32
<b>Employees, self-employed persons</b>																					
No basic computer skills	25	5	10	:	55	44	50	32	43	12	44	17	37	46	:	19	24	7	16	9	5
Low level	16	13	24	:	16	7	11	25	13	12	9	12	23	11	:	19	18	20	14	12	23
Medium level	31	40	38	22	18	23	24	29	22	27	22	31	26	18	:	41	42	39	33	36	32
High level	28	42	28	35	11	26	16	14	21	50	26	39	14	24	:	22	16	34	37	44	40
<b>Non-manual workers</b>																					
No basic computer skills	:	:	:	14	36	:	29	16	21	:	26	:	28	23	:	10	:	:	10	5	:
Low level	:	:	:	13	19	:	13	23	11	:	11	:	21	10	:	18	:	:	11	8	:
Medium level	:	:	:	26	27	:	34	40	31	:	28	:	32	25	34	46	:	:	37	38	:
High level	:	:	:	47	18	:	24	21	36	:	35	:	19	42	44	26	:	:	42	49	:
<b>Manual workers</b>																					
No basic computer skills	:	:	:	44	81	:	85	53	67	:	73	:	55	72	:	40	:	:	28	18	:
Low level	:	:	:	22	10	:	7	27	15	:	6	:	26	12	:	20	:	:	19	21	:
Medium level	:	:	:	15	6	:	6	15	12	:	11	:	15	11	:	28	:	:	25	30	:
High level	:	:	:	19	3	:	2	4	5	:	9	:	4	6	:	12	:	:	28	32	:

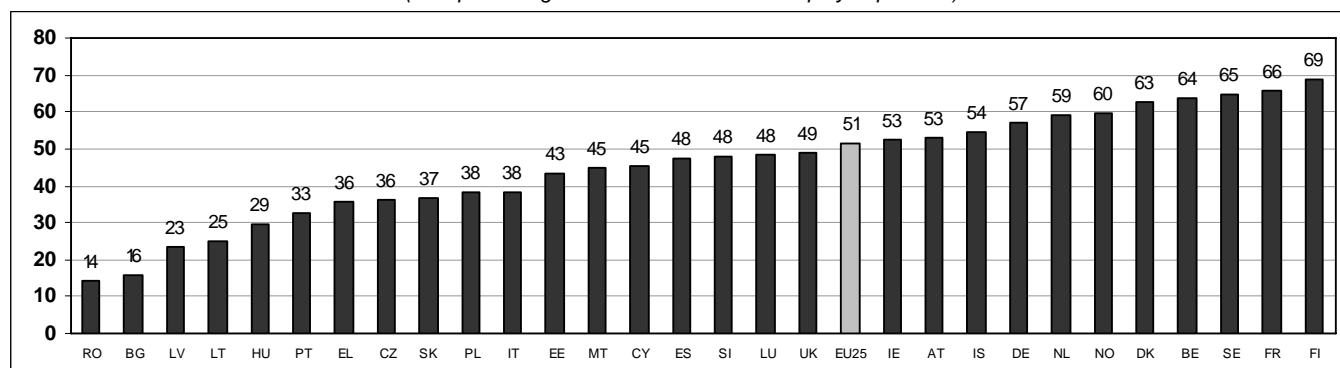
Source: Eurostat, Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals.

Note: (i) Data not available for BE, CZ, ES, FR, IE, MT, NL and FI. (ii) 'No basic computer skills' includes individuals who have never used a computer.

Still in Table 2, we see that in most countries, within the group of employed persons, manual workers are about three times more likely to have no computer skills than non-manual workers. This phenomenon can partly be explained by the fact that non-manual workers are more likely to need computers at work. In 2005 the share of

employed persons in the European Union using computers in their normal work routine exceeded 50% for the first time (see Graph 5), and the figure has been growing at an annual rate of 3 to 4 percentage points in recent years.

**Graph 5 – Employed persons' use of computers in their normal work routine (2005)**  
(as a percentage of the total number of employed persons)



Source: Eurostat, Community survey on ICT usage and e-commerce in enterprises.  
Note: EU-25 includes estimates for FR and MT for 2005; data for FR, MT and IS: 2003; data for BG and RO: 2004.

## Digital literacy mainly acquired and maintained via informal channels

When asked how they obtained their basic computer or Internet skills (see Table 3), two methods – also the most informal or ad-hoc – appear to be by far the most common: informal assistance from colleagues, relatives and friends (relevant for 59% of those who have already

used a computer) and self-study via learning-by-doing (relevant for 58%).

The same conclusion can be drawn for each of the societal groups shown in the table.

**Table 3 – Way of obtaining e-skills (2005)**

(as a percentage of individuals aged 16 to 74 who have already used a computer; the breakdown by level of basic computer skills is expressed as a percentage of individuals in the various skills levels)

	All computer users	Gender		Educational level			Degree of urbanisation			Level of basic computer skills		
		Men	Women	Lower	Middle	Higher	Urban	Middle	Rural	Low	Medium	High
Formalised educational institution (school, college, university, etc.)	31	29	33	34	28	35	30	31	35	16	30	47
Training courses in adult education centres, on own initiative	15	13	18	11	15	19	15	15	16	10	17	20
Training courses in adult education centres, on demand of employer	23	21	25	12	23	32	24	23	20	14	25	29
Self-study using books, cd-roms, etc.	28	35	21	22	27	37	29	29	27	10	26	48
Self-study (learning by doing)	58	64	52	52	57	65	60	59	54	38	61	76
Informal assistance from colleagues, relatives or friends	59	58	59	58	59	59	60	62	55	61	61	60
Some other way	4	4	3	5	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	4

Source: Eurostat, Community survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals.  
Notes: Data based on 16 countries for which comparable information is available, namely DE, EL, IT, CY, LV, LT, LU, HU, PL, PT, SI, SK, SE, UK, IS and NO.

For women, training in a more formal setting (e.g. a school or adult education centre) seems to be slightly more common than for men, while for the latter, self-study is more common. When considering educational levels, we see that training courses in adult education centres (whether or not at the request of the employer) are far less popular among people with a lower level of education than among those with a higher education. This could be explained by personal thresholds to enroll in courses, or more limited access via employers. Access to more formal computer or Internet training does not appear to be an issue for those living in rural areas. Indeed, Table 3 shows no significant differences between this group and those living in more densely populated areas.

Finally, Table 3 shows significant differences in the relation between the level of basic computer skills and the way the e-skills were obtained. Those with relatively high skills seem to have obtained them mainly in an independent way, via self-study – especially in the sense of learning-by-doing – but also via books or cd-roms. With the exception of informal assistance, all channels appear to be picked up by relatively few persons with lower computer skills. The limited popularity of courses or books within this group could be an explanation for their low level of basic computer skills, but the reason may well lie in the fact that low skills levels lead to fears or confidence problems with signing up for a computer course.

## ➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

### Abbreviations

EU or EU-25 (European Union);  
 BE (Belgium), CZ (Czech Republic), DK (Denmark),  
 DE (Germany), EE (Estonia), EL (Greece), ES (Spain),  
 FR (France), IE (Ireland), IT (Italy), CY (Cyprus), LV (Latvia),  
 LT (Lithuania), LU (Luxembourg), HU (Hungary), MT (Malta),  
 NL (Netherlands), AT (Austria), PL (Poland), PT (Portugal),  
 SI (Slovenia), SK (Slovakia), FI (Finland), SE (Sweden),  
 UK (United Kingdom);  
 BG (Bulgaria), RO (Romania);  
 IS (Iceland), NO (Norway).

### Symbols

“.” confidential, or unavailable

### Aggregation of results

An EU-25 aggregate is only calculated if the available countries represent at least 55% of the number of Member States and at least 60% of the EU population.

### Community Survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals (2005)

*Survey period:* in general, the second quarter of 2005.

*Sample size:* 123 941 households and 181 703 individuals.

*Scope (individuals):* individuals aged 16 to 74 years;

*Scope (households):* households with at least one member in the age group 16 to 74.

### Level of basic computer skills:

The respondent's ICT competences are measured using a self-assessment approach, i.e. the respondent simply indicates whether he/she is able to carry out specific tasks related to computer use, without these skills being assessed, tested or actually observed. Studies have indicated that people's perception of their computer skills is a very good indicator of their actual abilities as measured through observations or survey items that measure users' actual knowledge of computer related terms and functions. This means that self-reported ratings of digital literacy can be used as a proxy for actual skill ratings (see for instance Hargittai, E. (2005). Survey Measures of Web-Oriented Digital Literacy. *Social Science Computer Review*, Vol. 23 No. 3, Fall 2005, p371-379).

The six computer-related items listed in Table 1 were used to recode the respondents into levels of skills: persons who ticked 1 or 2 of the computer-related items were coded as 'low level of basic computer skills', persons who ticked 3 or 4 items were coded as 'medium level' while those who ticked 5 or all activities were labelled as 'high level of basic computer skills'.

### Highest completed level of education:

- Lower: ISCED 0, 1 or 2 (no formal education, primary education or lower secondary education);

- Mid: ISCED 3 or 4 (upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education);

- Higher: ISCED 5 or 6 (tertiary programmes which normally require successful completion of ISCED 3 or 4, or second stage tertiary education leading to an advanced research qualification).

### Community Survey on ICT usage and E-commerce in enterprises (2005)

*Survey period:* in general, the first quarter of 2005.

*Sample size:* 117 000 enterprises.

*Scope:* enterprises with 10 or more persons employed in selected activities (see below).

*Activity coverage:* enterprises classified in the following sections and groups of the NACE Rev. 1.1 classification: section D (manufacturing); section F (construction); section G (distributive trades); groups 55.1 and 55.2 of section H (hotels and accommodation); section I (transport, storage and communication); section K (real estate, renting and business activities) and groups 92.1 and 92.2 of section O (motion picture, video, radio and television activities).

For a full overview of NACE, see RAMON, Eurostat's classification server: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/ramon>.

### References

This *Statistics In Focus* is partly based on the paper "ICT skills measurement in Eurostat's Information Society Statistics", submitted for the conference *Knowledge Economy – Challenges for Measurement*, held in Luxembourg on 8-9 December 2005.

For further information on the methodology of the Community surveys, see Eurostat's *Methodological Manual for statistics on the Information Society* (available from the Eurostat website).

# Further information:

Data: [EUROSTAT Website/Home page/Industry, trade and services/Population and social conditions/Science and technology/Data](#)

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  - 📁 Industry, trade and services - horizontal view
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    - 📁 Policy indicators
    - 📁 Structural Indicators
    - 📁 Telecommunication services
  - 📁 **Computers and the Internet in households and enterprises**
  
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