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Internet Access and Usage among Ireland's Older Population

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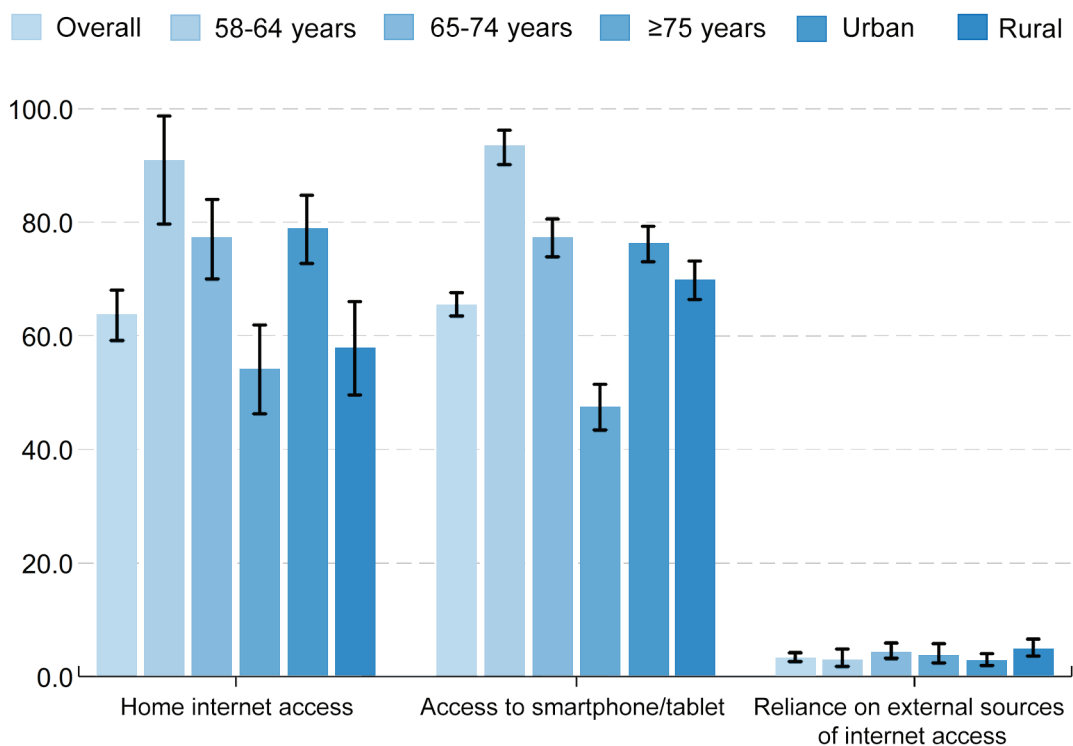
Internet Access and Usage among Ireland's Older Population

Key Findings

- 80% of adults aged 58 years and older have access to the internet in their homes.
- Internet access decreases with age. Only 58% of those aged 75 years and older have home internet access, compared to 94% aged 58-64 years, and 83% aged 65-74 years.
- 83% aged 58 years and older in urban areas have home internet access; 75% in rural.
- 66% of adults aged 58 years and older have access to a smartphone/tablet (and therefore to apps).
- Access to smartphones/tablets similarly decreases with age. Only 42% aged 75 years and older have access to a smartphone/tablet, compared to 84% aged 58-64 years, and 69% aged 65-74 years.
- Common internet uses among those aged 58 years and older include:
 - Searching for information: 81%
 - Sending and receiving emails: 73%
 - Financial transactions: 59%
 - News: 58%
 - Audio/video calls: 44%
 - Social media: 40%
 - Gaming/apps: 17%
- Internet use for any purpose declines with increased age, with social media use experiencing the largest of these age-associated declines, from 49% in those aged 58-64 years, 40% aged 65-74 years, to only 26% aged 75 years and older.

- Women use social media more than men, with 47% of women aged 58 years and older using the internet for this purpose, compared to 33% of men.
- 70% of adults aged 58 years and older use the internet daily; 87% weekly.
- 3% of adults aged 58 years and older use the internet but are solely reliant on internet access external to their homes e.g. friends'/relatives' home, library, community centre and public Wi-Fi networks.
- Of adults aged 58 years and older living alone, 36% do not have internet access in their homes.

Executive Summary Figure 7. Home internet, smartphone and tablet access, and reliance on external sources of internet access, stratified by age group and residence, among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland



7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline internet access and use among adults aged 58 years and older in Ireland, using data collected during Wave 5 of The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) in 2018. Specifically, information will be provided regarding home access to the internet; access to smartphones/tablets (ergo access to apps); and the frequency and purpose of internet use. This chapter will also provide information regarding those who are solely reliant on internet access external to their own homes, as well as the lack of internet access among those living alone. All prevalence estimates provided within this chapter are weighted to account for age, sex, educational attainment, and urban/rural residence in the 2016 Census, as well as the probability that participants returned a completed self-completion questionnaire during Wave 5 of TILDA.

7.2 Internet access and usage

7.2.1 Home access to the internet

Among adults aged 58 years and older in Ireland, 80% have access to the internet in their homes. The prevalence of home internet access decreases with age, from 94% of those aged 58-64 years, to 83% aged 65-74 years, and 58% aged 75 years and older.

The overall prevalence of home internet access is relatively evenly distributed when stratified by sex, with approximately 80% of both men and women having access to the internet in their homes. The relative prevalence of home internet access when stratified by sex changes with age however; approximately 4% more women aged 65-74 years, have home access to the internet relative to men, while among those aged 75 years and older this sex difference is reversed, with approximately 10% more men having home access to the internet compared to women (Table 7.1). Additionally, there is a minor urban/rural divide, with 83% aged 58 years and older living in urban areas having home access to the internet, compared to 75% in rural areas.

Table 7.1. Home access to the internet, stratified by age group and sex, among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland, 2018

Age group / Sex	Total participants (n)	Home access to the internet (n)	Home Access to the internet	
			%	95% CI
Total (58+ years)	2729	2183	80	[78-82]
Male	1172	949	81	[78-83]
Female	1544	1220	79	[76-81]
58-64 years	1037	975	94	[91-95]
Male	418	389	93	[89-96]
Female	620	583	94	[91-96]
65-74 years	1192	989	83	[80-85]
Male	483	391	81	[77-84]
Female	720	612	85	[81-87]
≥75 years	493	286	58	[54-63]
Male	250	160	64	[58-69]
Female	247	133	54	[48-59]

7.2.2 Access to apps via smartphone/tablet

Among adults aged 58 years and older in Ireland, 66% have access to a smartphone/tablet, and therefore access to apps. The prevalence of access to these devices decreases with age, from 84% of those aged 58-64 years, to 69% aged 65-74, and falling to 42% aged 75 years and older.

The overall prevalence of smartphone/tablet access is relatively evenly distributed when stratified by sex, with slightly under 66% of men and women aged 58 years and older having access to these devices (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2. Access to digital applications via smartphone / tablet, stratified by age group and sex, among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland, 2018

Age group / Sex	Total participants (n)	Access to digital applications (n)	Access to apps via smartphone / tablet	
			%	95% CI
Total (58+ years)	4135	2729	66	[64-68]
Male	1831	1172	64	[61-67]
Female	2304	1544	67	[65-70]
58-64 years	1235	1037	84	[81-86]
Male	522	418	80	[76-84]
Female	713	620	87	[83-90]
65-74 years	1727	1192	69	[66-72]
Male	754	483	64	[60-68]
Female	720	720	74	[70-77]
≥75 years	1173	493	42	[39-46]
Male	555	250	45	[40-50]
Female	618	247	40	[35-45]

7.2.3 Purposes of internet usage

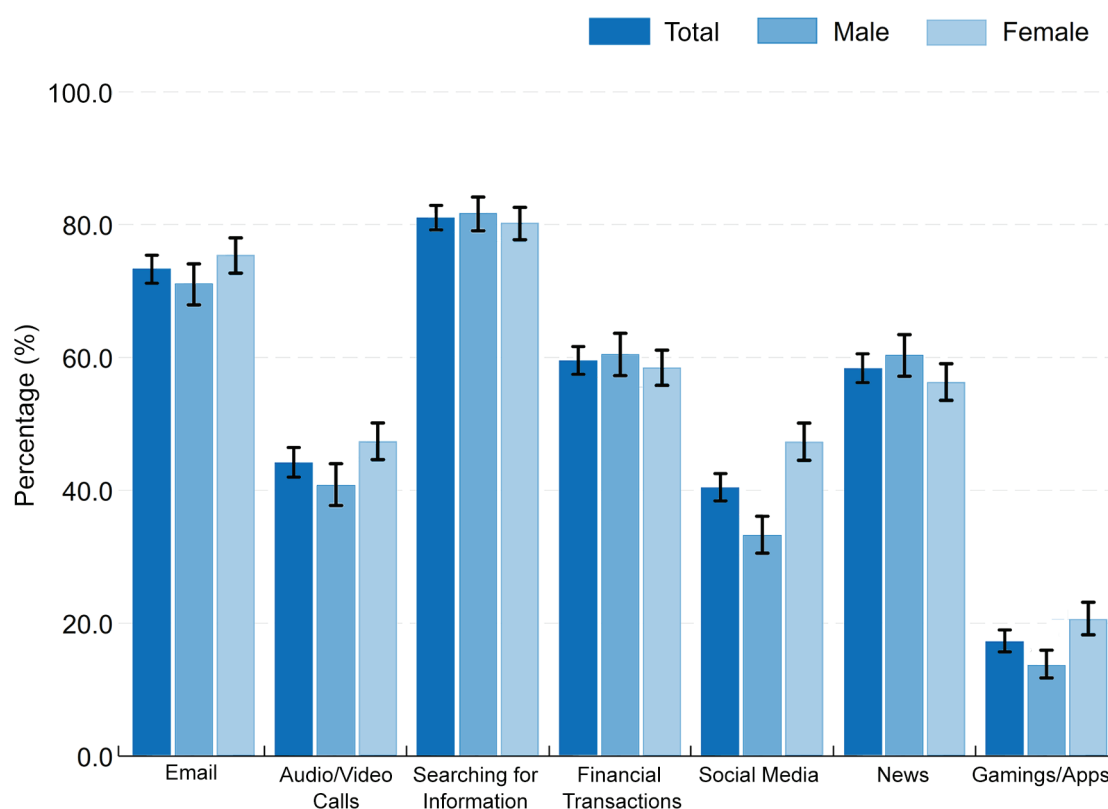
Participants were asked to report the types of activities they use the internet for (Figure 7.1, Supplementary Table 7.1). The list of activities shows among adults aged 58 years and older who have access to the internet in their homes, searching for information (81%) and sending/receiving e-mails (73%) are the most common activities, while just 17% use the internet for gaming/apps. Common internet uses among those aged 58 years and older with home internet access include:

- Searching for information: 81%
- Sending and receiving emails: 73%
- Financial transactions: 59%
- News: 58%
- Audio/video calls: 44%
- Social media: 40%
- Gaming/apps: 17%

Women report higher internet use for sending/receiving emails, participating in audio/video calls, accessing social media, and gaming/apps than men. Men report higher internet use for information searching, conducting financial transactions and accessing news sites. While there are relatively minor differences between sexes in most of these categories, women report much higher use of social media, with 47% of women aged 58 years and older accessing social media compared to 33% of men.

Internet use for all purposes declines with increased age, with the largest of these age-associated declines observed in the use of social media and online financial transactions, both of which decline by almost half in those aged 58-64 years, compared to those aged 75 years and older, from 49% to 26%, and 66% to 40% respectively.

Figure 7.1. The purpose of internet use, stratified by sex, among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland with home internet access, 2018

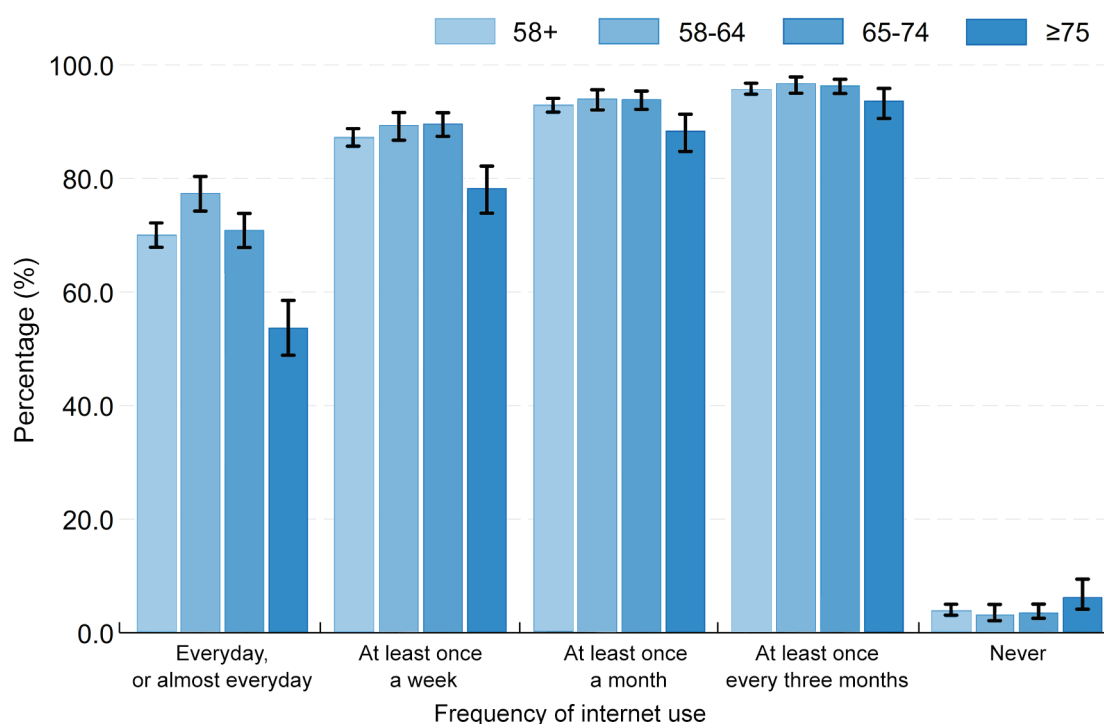


7.2.4 Frequency of internet use

Among adults aged 58 years and older who have home internet access, 70% use the internet every day or almost every day, while 87% use the internet at least once per week. The frequency of internet use declines with age, with over 77% aged 58-64 years using

the internet daily, compared to 71% aged 64-75 years, and 54% aged 75 years and older. This difference is reduced in figures for weekly use, with 89% aged 58-64 years, 90% aged 65-74 years, and 78% aged 75 years and older, using the internet at least once a week (Figure 7.2, Supplementary table 7.2A).

Figure 7.2. The frequency of internet use, stratified by age group, among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland with home internet access, 2018



7.2.5 Reliance on internet access external to home

Over 3% of adults aged 58 years and older in Ireland use the internet but have no access within their own homes. These individuals have indicated a sole reliance on external sources of internet access, e.g. friends'/relatives' home, library, community centre and public Wi-Fi networks (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3. Reliance on external sources of internet access, stratified by age group and sex, among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland, 2018

Age group / Sex	Total participants (n)	Reliant on external internet access (n)	Reliance on external sources of internet access	
			%	95% CI
Total (58+ years)	3843	115	3	[3-4]
Male	1699	68	4	[3-5]
Female	2144	64	3	[2-4]
58-64 years	1199	36	3	[2-4]
Male	502	15	3	[2-6]
Female	697	14	2	[1-4]
65-74 years	1620	65	4	[3-5]
Male	701	28	4	[2-6]
Female	919	37	4	[2-5]
≥75 years	1024	31	3	[2-5]
Male	496	15	3	[2-6]
Female	528	16	3	[2-6]

7.2.6 Lack of internet access in those living alone

Among adults aged 58 years and older living alone in Ireland, over 36% are without home access to the internet. Lack of home internet access among those living alone increases with age, from 19% of those aged 58-64 years, to 31% aged 65-74 years, and 52% of those aged 75 years and older. Among all ages, men living alone are more likely to be without home internet access compared to women, though this decreases with age (Table 7.4).

Table 7.4. Lack of internet access, stratified by age group and sex, among adults aged 58 years and over and living alone in Ireland, 2018

Age group / Sex	Total participants (n)	Reliant on external internet access (n)	Reliance on external sources of internet access	
			%	95% CI
Total (58+ years)	878	316	36	[32-41]
Male	303	121	40	[33-47]
Female	575	196	34	[29-39]
58-64 years	169	32	19	[12-29]
Male	66	18	28	[16-43]
Female	103	11	11	[5-23]
65-74 years	364	113	31	[25-38]
Male	116	51	44	[33-55]
Female	248	52	21	[16-28]
≥75 years	345	179	52	[45-59]
Male	121	54	45	[34-57]
Female	224	123	55	[46-63]

7.3 Conclusions

Internet access has become more important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. As restrictions are placed on travel, older people advised to 'cocoon' and employees to work from home, the use of the internet for work, shopping, communication and social contact has become an increased focus of public attention. This chapter shows that among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland, access to the internet is common, with frequent and varied use. There is also however a relatively large section of the population aged 58 years and older who do not have home internet access. This is particularly the case for older adults. This cohort of adults may be particularly at risk of loneliness as a result of social isolation, and have a reduced capacity to access information, support services and commerce. For these individuals, and in particular those living alone and older age groups, more traditional forms of communication and information distribution, e.g. telephone, radio, television, and the national postal service, in combination with ongoing family and community support, are likely essential.

Appendix 7A. Tables on Internet Access and Usage among Ireland's Older Population

Table 7.A1. The purpose of internet use, stratified by age group and sex, among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland with home internet access, 2018

	Email		Audio / video calls		Searching for information		Financial transaction		Social media		News		Gaming / Apps	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Total (58+ years)	73	[71-75]	44	[42-46]	81	[79-83]	59	[57-62]	40	[38-42]	58	[56-60]	17	[16-19]
Male	71	[68-74]	41	[38-44]	82	[79-84]	60	[57-64]	33	[31-36]	60	[57-63]	14	[12-16]
Female	75	[73-78]	47	[45-50]	80	[78-83]	58	[56-61]	47	[45-50]	56	[54-59]	21	[18-23]
58-64 years	78	[74-81]	48	[45-52]	85	[82-88]	66	[63-69]	49	[45-52]	65	[61-68]	20	[17-23]
Male	74	[69-78]	42	[37-47]	85	[80-89]	65	[59-70]	40	[35-45]	65	[59-70]	16	[12-20]
Female	81	[77-85]	55	[50-59]	86	[82-89]	67	[63-72]	57	[52-62]	65	[60-70]	24	[19-28]
65-74 years	74	[71-77]	45	[41-48]	81	[78-84]	62	[59-65]	40	[37-43]	59	[55-62]	16	[14-19]
Male	72	[67-76]	43	[39-48]	82	[78-86]	62	[58-67]	32	[28-36]	63	[58-67]	14	[11-17]
Female	77	[73-80]	46	[42-50]	81	[77-84]	62	[58-66]	47	[43-51]	55	[51-59]	19	[15-22]
≥75 years	63	[58-67]	35	[30-40]	72	[67-76]	40	[36-45]	26	[22-30]	45	[40-49]	15	[12-19]
Male	65	[58-71]	33	[28-40]	75	[69-80]	49	[42-55]	23	[18-29]	47	[41-54]	10	[7-15]
Female	61	[53-67]	36	[30-43]	68	[61-74]	32	[27-38]	28	[22-35]	42	[36-49]	19	[14-26]

Table 7.A2. The frequency of internet use, stratified by age group and sex, among adults aged 58 years and over in Ireland with home internet access, 2018

	Every day, or almost every day		At least once a week (cumulative)		At least once a month (cumulative)		At least once every three months (cumulative)		Never	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Total (58+ years)	70	[68-72]	87	[86-89]	93	[92-94]	96	[95-97]	4	[3-5]
Male	69	[66-72]	86	[84-88]	92	[90-94]	96	[94-97]	4	[3-6]
Female	71	[68-74]	88	[86-90]	94	[92-95]	96	[95-97]	4	[3-5]
58-64 years	77	[74-80]	89	[87-92]	94	[92-96]	97	[95-98]	3	[2-5]
Male	74	[69-79]	87	[82-91]	93	[90-96]	97	[94-98]	3	[2-6]
Female	72	[68-76]	91	[87-93]	95	[93-97]	97	[95-99]	3	[1-5]
65-74 years	71	[68-74]	90	[87-92]	94	[92-95]	96	[95-97]	4	[3-5]
Male	70	[65-74]	89	[85-92]	93	[90-95]	95	[93-97]	5	[3-7]
Female	72	[68-76]	91	[87-93]	95	[93-97]	97	[95-99]	3	[1-5]
≥75 years	54	[49-59]	78	[74-82]	88	[85-91]	94	[91-96]	6	[4-9]
Male	56	[50-63]	79	[73-85]	89	[84-93]	94	[90-97]	6	[3-10]
Female	51	[44-58]	77	[70-83]	88	[82-92]	93	[88-96]	7	[4-12]