E-commerce statistics for individuals

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in January 2020.
Planned article update: January 2021.

This article takes a closer look at the electronic commerce (e-commerce) of individuals in the European Union . It is based on the results of the 2019 Survey on ICT (information and communication technology) usage in households and by individuals.

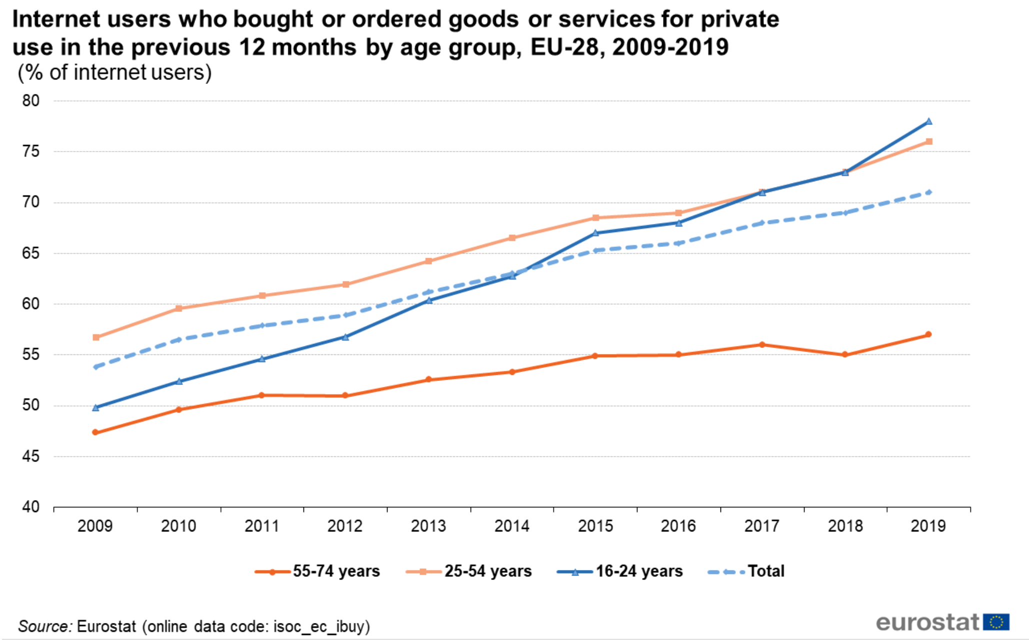

Figure 1: Internet users who bought or ordered goods or services for private use in the previous 12 months by age group, EU-28, 2009-2019 (% of internet users) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_ibuy)

General overview

More than 7 out of 10 internet users from the 12 months prior to the survey (hereafter referred to as "internet users") made online purchases in the same period. Overall, the share of e-shoppers among internet users is growing, with the highest proportions found in the age groups 16-24 (78 %) and 25-54(76 %).

The proportion of e-shoppers varied considerably across the EU, ranging from 29 % of internet users in Romania to 91 % in the United Kingdom.

Internet use and online purchases, 2019
(% of individuals)

	Proportion of individuals who:	
	Used internet within the last 12 months	Purchased online within the last 12 months
EU-28	88	63
Belgium	91	66
Bulgaria	71	22
Czechia	88	64
Denmark	97	84
Germany	94	79
Estonia	91	68
Ireland	91	67
Greece	76	39
Spain	91	58
France	91	70
Croatia	80	45
Italy	78	38
Cyprus	86	39
Latvia	87	47
Lithuania	82	48
Luxembourg	97	72
Hungary	83	49
Malta	86	58
Netherlands	96	81
Austria	88	62
Poland	82	54
Portugal	76	39
Romania	80	23
Slovenia	84	56
Slovakia	85	60
Finland	95	73
Sweden	98	82
United Kingdom	96	87
Iceland	99	80
Norway	99	82
Switzerland	97	80
Montenegro	76	16
North Macedonia	82	29
Serbia	79	34
Turkey	75	30

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: isoc_ci_ifp_iu and isoc_ec_ibuy)

Table 1: Internet use and online purchases, 2019 (% of individuals) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ci_ifp_iu) and (isoc_ec_ibuy)

The most popular type of goods and services purchased online in the EU were clothes and sports goods (65 % of e-buyers), followed by travel and holiday accommodation (54 %). E-shoppers aged 16-24 were the top age group when it came to clothes and sports goods purchases (73 %), those aged 25-54 in online purchases of travel and holiday (57 %) and the older age group (55-74) in buying books, magazines and newspapers, together with those aged 25-54 (35 % both).

In terms of frequency, the highest proportion of e-shoppers made purchases in the three months prior to the survey three to five times (34 %), while 32 % did so once or twice. In terms of amount spent, the highest proportion of e-buyers (42 %) bought goods or services for a total of between EUR 100 to EUR 499. Furthermore, 35 % of e-buyers made purchases from sellers in other EU countries, compared with 29 % in 2014.

E-shopping: biggest increase among young internet users

E-shopping growing steadily, with the biggest increase among young internet users .

Online shopping is very popular in the EU. The proportion of individuals aged 16-74 having shopped online in the 12 months prior to the 2019 survey stood at 63 % (Table 1). Consumers appreciate the convenience of being able to shop anytime anywhere, having access to a broader range of products, comparing prices and sharing their opinion on goods with other consumers.

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 88 % of individuals aged 16 to 74 in the EU had used the internet, 71 % of whom had bought or ordered goods or services for private use. Online purchases by internet users increased by 17 percentage points compared with 2009 (Figure 1).

Those aged 25-54 had the highest share of online shoppers among internet users up to 2016. In 2015, the youngest age group (16-24) overtook the EU average level, surpassing the level of the 25-54 year age group in 2019. E-commerce picked up over the 2009-2019 period among all age groups, with individuals aged 16-24 showing the biggest increase (28 percentage points). Over eight in ten internet users in the United Kingdom (91 %), Denmark (86 %), Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden (84 % each) had bought or ordered goods or services over the internet in the 12 months prior to the survey (Figure 2). On the other hand, fewer than 40 % had shopped online in Romania (29 %) and Bulgaria (31 %). The largest increases (15 percentage points or more) between 2014 and 2019 were recorded in Lithuania, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Croatia, Poland, Spain, and Slovenia.

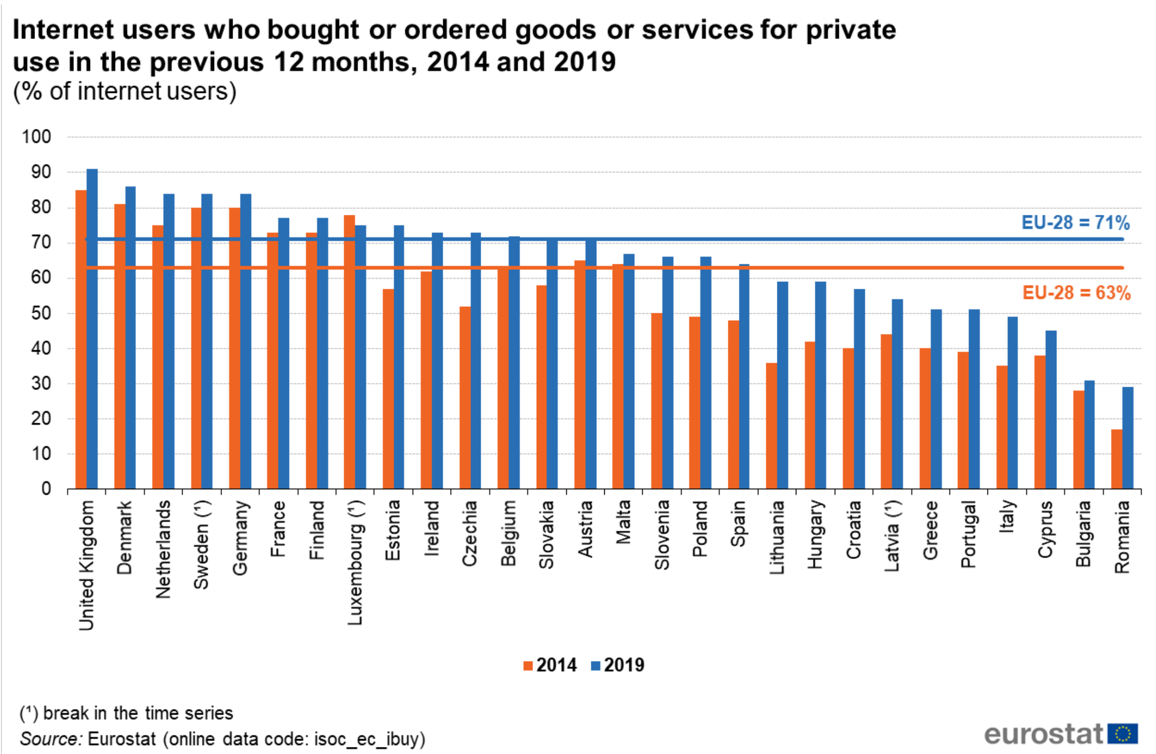

Figure 2: Internet users who bought or ordered goods or services for private use in the previous 12 months, 2014 and 2019 (% of internet users) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_ibuy)

Gender, age, level of education and employment situation all affect e-commerce activity (Figure 3). For men, the share of online shoppers among internet users was slightly higher than for women (72 % and 71 %, respectively), while people aged 25-34 are more active e-shoppers (83 % of internet users) than other age groups. The proportion of internet users with a higher level of education shopping online (more than eight in 10) is 35 percentage points greater than that of internet users with lower education. Employees and the self-employed (77 % of internet users) as well as students (75 %) shop online far more than unemployed (58 %) or retired/inactive people (55 %).

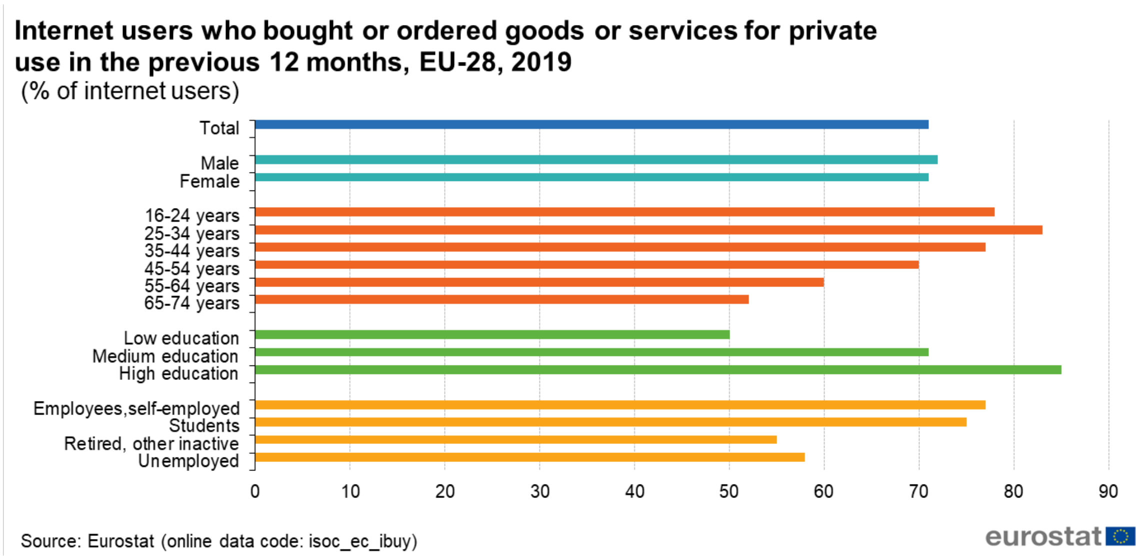

Figure 3: Internet users who bought or ordered goods or services for private use in the previous 12 months, EU-28, 2019 (% of internet users) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_ibuy)

Most popular online purchases

Figure 4 shows that most purchases, by a third or more of e-shoppers, involved clothes and sports goods (65 %), travel and holiday accommodation (54 %), household goods (46 %), tickets for events (41 %) and books, magazines and newspapers (33 %). Fewer than one in five e-shoppers bought computer hardware (17 %), medicines (16 %) and e-learning material (8 %).

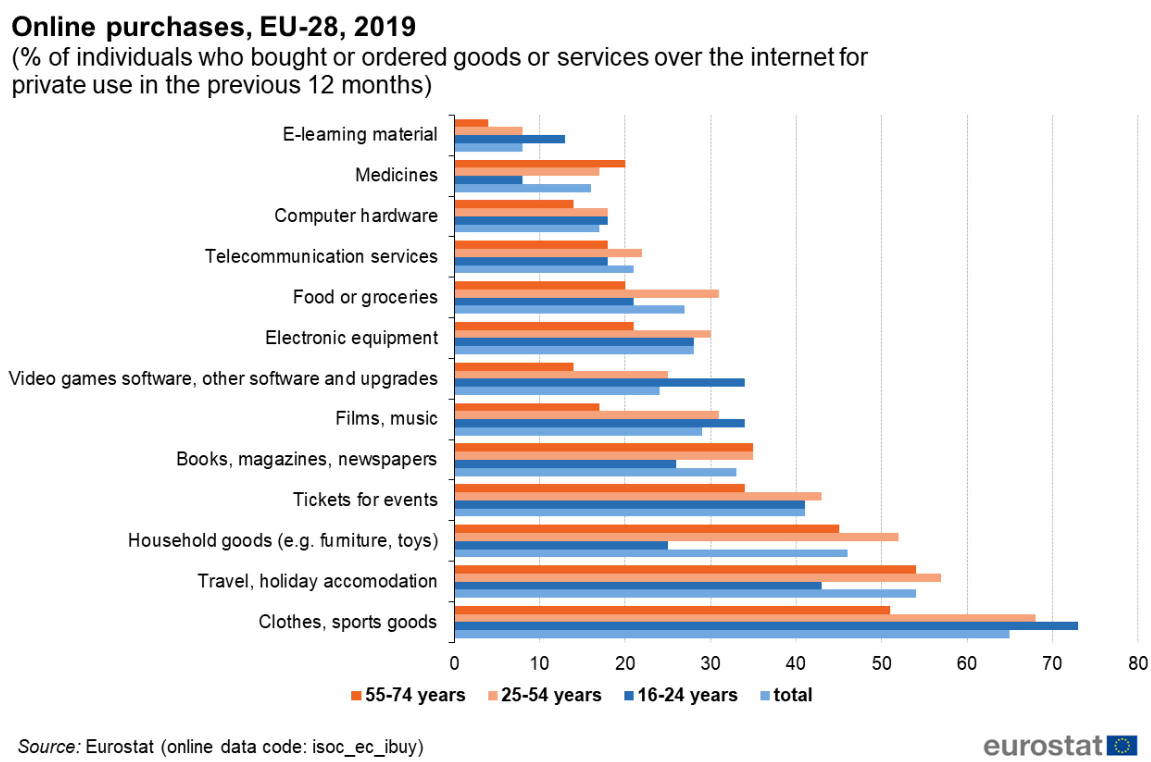

Figure 4: Online purchases, EU-28, 2019 (% of individuals who bought or ordered goods or services over the internet for private use in the previous 12 months) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_ibuy)

The 16-24 age-group had the highest proportions of e-shoppers purchasing clothes and sport goods (73 %), video games software and other software and upgrades (34 %), films and music (34 %) and e-learning material (13 %). People aged 25-54 made up the highest proportion of e-shoppers buying travel and holiday accommodation (57 %), household goods (52 %), tickets for events (43 %), food or groceries (31 %), electronic equipment (30 %) and telecommunication services (22 %). The older (55-74) age group took the lead in buying medicines (20 %) and shared the lead in buying books, magazines and newspapers with those aged 25-54 (35 %).

About 34 % of e-shoppers had in the three months prior to the survey bought goods or services for private use three to five times and 32 % of e-shoppers had done so once or twice. The proportion of e-shoppers who had made online purchases over 10 times was the lowest, at 16 % (Figure 5).

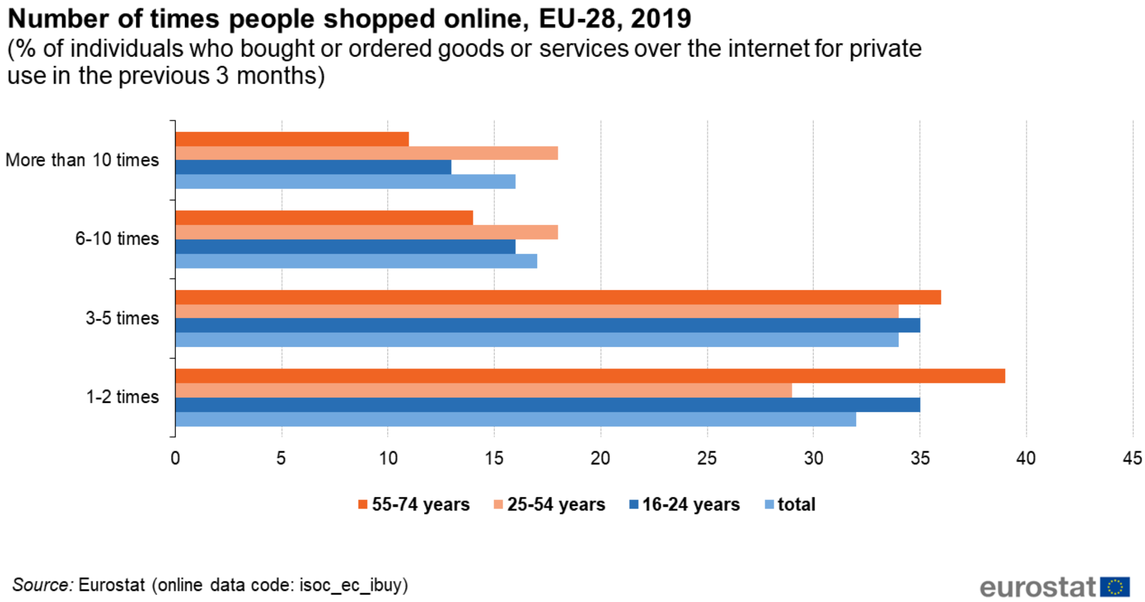

Figure 5: Number of times people shopped online, EU-28, 2019 (% of individuals who bought or ordered goods or services over the internet for private use in the previous 3 months) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_ibuy)

The largest proportion of people buying online once or twice is found among those aged 55-74 (39 %). People aged 25-54 stand out as making more frequent purchases: 18 % of e-shoppers in this age group bought online 6-10 times in the three months prior to the survey and another 18 % did so even more often.

Over four in ten e-shoppers said they had spent between EUR 100 and EUR 499 for their online purchases in the three months prior to the survey. Individuals aged 16-24 led in online purchases worth less than EUR 100 and those aged 25-54 and 55-74 for purchases of EUR 100-499. Purchases worth EUR 500 or more were less popular with all age groups (Figure 6).

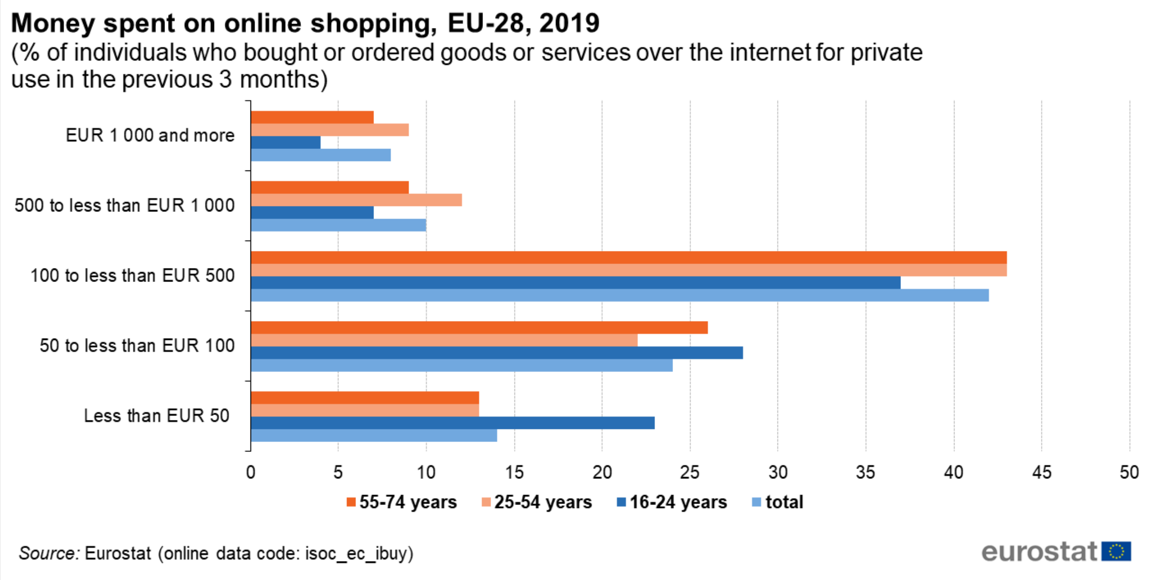

Figure 6: Money spent on online shopping, EU-28, 2019 (% of individuals who bought or ordered goods or services over the internet for private use in the previous 3 months) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_ibuy)

Purchasing online and problems encountered

65 % of e-buyers reported having no problem when purchasing online

More than six e-buyers out of ten reported that they did not encounter any problem when buying or ordering goods or services in the 12 months prior to the survey. The problems encountered most often by EU online shoppers were related to slower delivery than had been indicated at the time of making the purchase (19 %). Some 12 % had problems in the form of technical failure of a website while ordering or paying, 11 % had received wrong or damaged goods or services, 6 % found it difficult to make complaints and seek redress after a complain, 5 % had difficulties in finding information on guarantees and other legal rights and again 5 % were confronted with foreign retailers not selling to customers in their country. About 4 % of online shoppers in each case were confronted with final costs higher than indicated and with problems with fraud (e.g. no goods or services received at all, misuse of credit card details) (Figure 7).

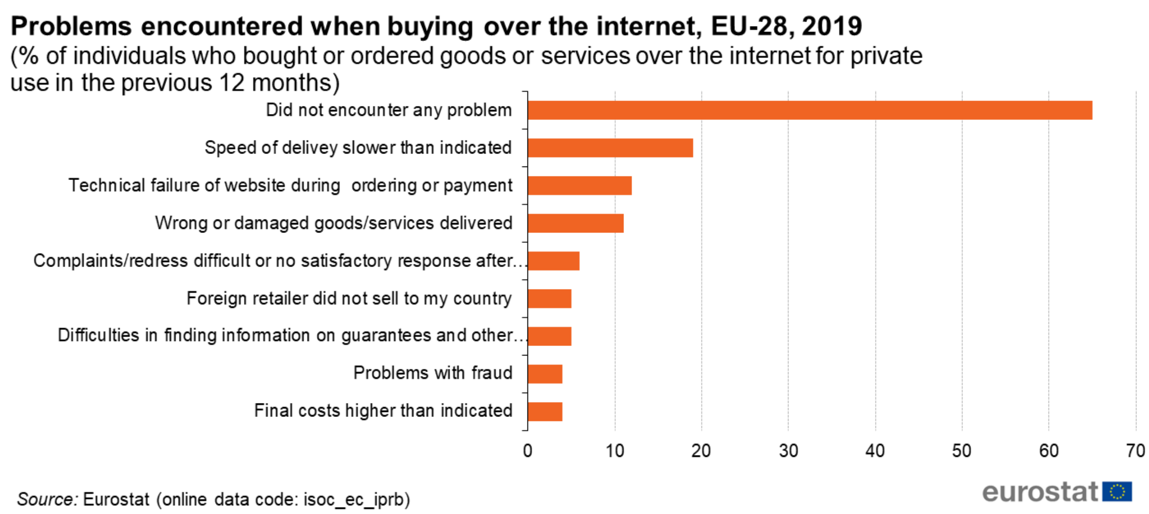

Figure 7: Problems encountered when buying over the internet, EU-28, 2019 (% of individuals who bought or ordered goods or services over the internet for private use in the previous 12 months) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_iprb)

Main reason for not buying online

The main reason for not buying online is that people prefer to shop in person

Figure 8 shows that the main reason given for not making purchases online in the 12 months prior to the survey was a preference for shopping in person in order to be able to see the products before purchasing them, out of loyalty to shops or by force of habit (73 %). Other, much less reported factors were worries as to privacy or the security when paying online (24 %), people believing that they lacked the necessary skills or knowledge to make online purchases (21 %), concerns about receiving or returning goods (17 %), and not having a suitable payment card (12 %). Very few of those who had not made online purchases considered that the delivery of goods would be a problem (7 %).

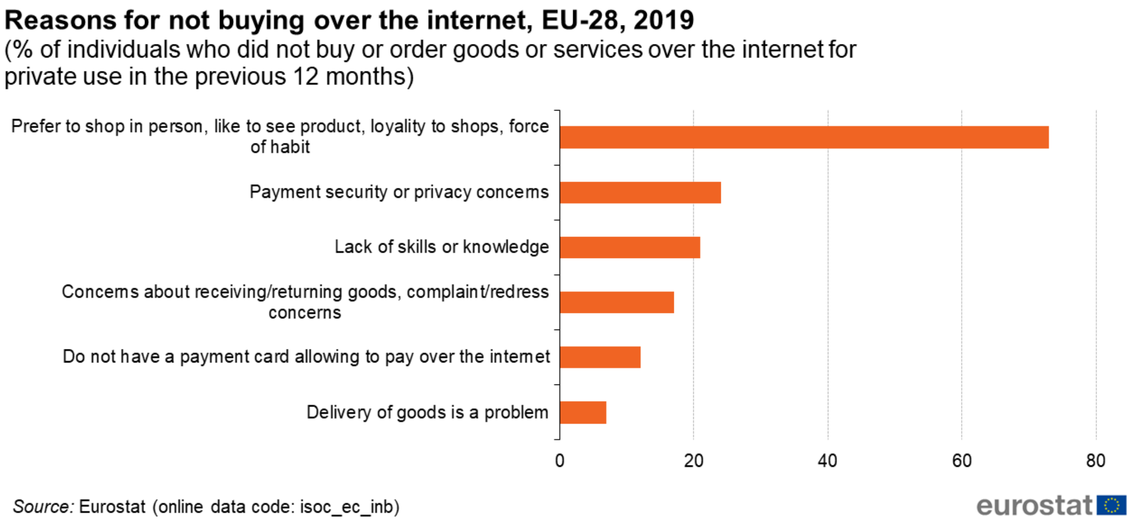

Figure 8: Reasons for not buying over the internet, EU-28, 2019 (% of individuals who did not buy or order goods or services over the internet for private use in the previous 12 months) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_inb)

E-shopping from other EU countries

35 % of online shoppers bought or ordered goods or services from sellers in other EU countries

Cross-border online purchases can be an indicator of the smooth functioning of the single market for e-commerce and the extent to which consumers make use of wider choices and lower prices. A large majority of e-shoppers in the 12 months prior to the survey made online purchases from sellers in their own country: 87 %, i.e. down by 1 percentage point from 2014 (Figure 9). An increase could be observed for purchases from sellers in other EU countries (from 29 % in 2014 to 35 % in 2019) and from sellers outside the EU (from 17 % in 2014 to 27 % in 2019).

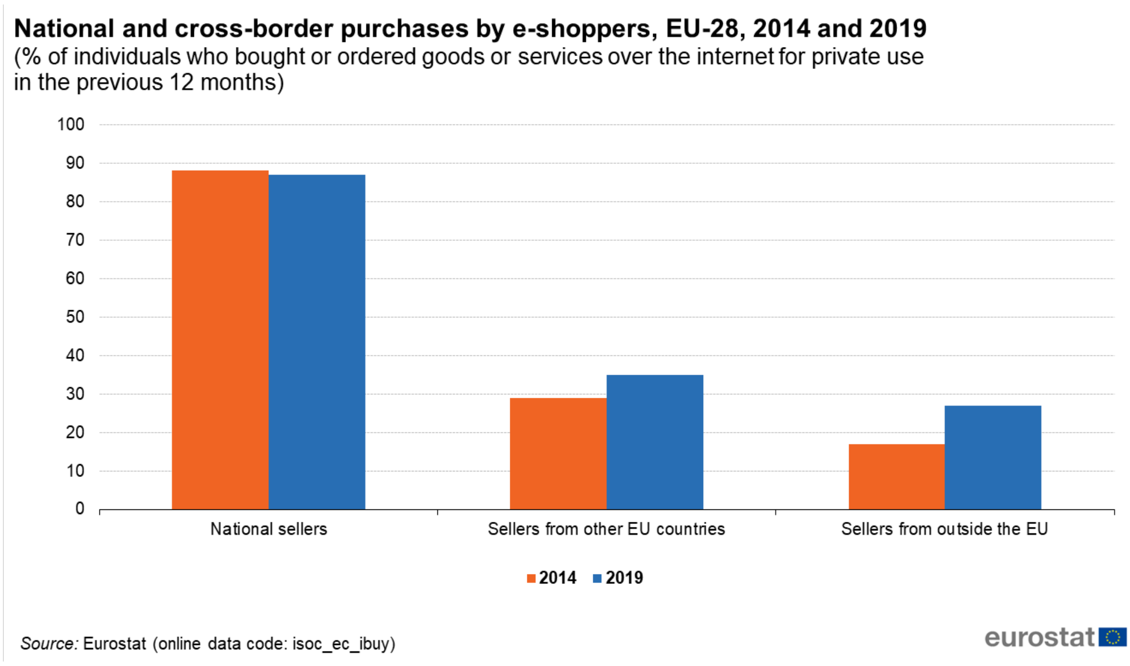

Figure 9: National and cross-border purchases by e-shoppers, EU-28, 2014 and 2019 (% of individuals who bought or ordered goods or services over the internet for private use in the previous 12 months) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_ibuy)

Physical goods have the biggest part in e-buying (2017 survey)

Eight out of 10 people who bought from abroad purchased physical goods

As shown in Figure 10, of the e-shoppers who in the 12 months prior to the survey made purchases from sellers outside their own country, 80 % bought or ordered physical goods such as electronics, clothes, toys, food, groceries, books, CDs/DVDs. Lower proportions of e-shoppers made online purchases from abroad of travel, accommodation or holiday arrangements (34 %) and products downloaded or accessed from websites or apps (25 %).

Only 16 % of the e-shoppers bought or ordered from abroad other services, such as e-tickets for events (sport events, concerts or other entertainment events) or telecommunication services (subscription of telephone services, SIM cards).

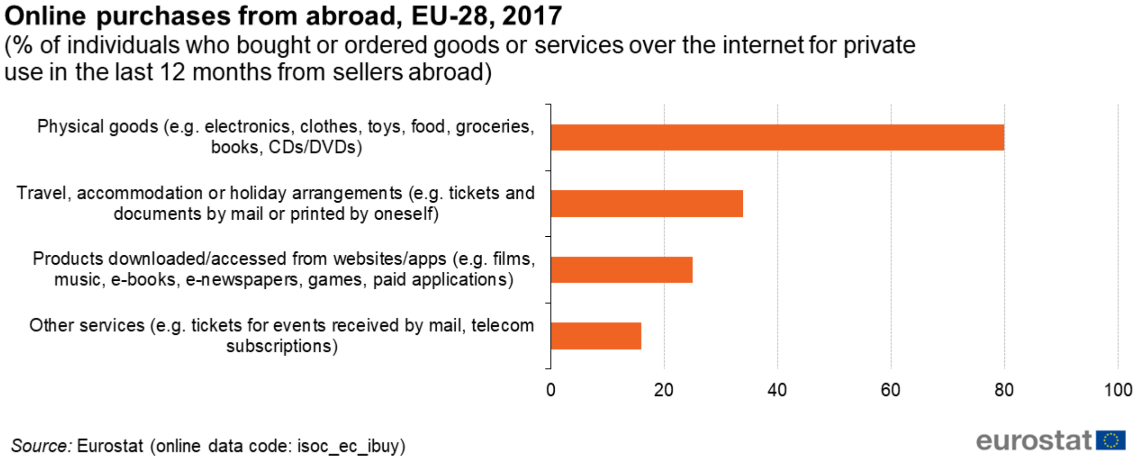

Figure 10: Online purchases from abroad, EU-28, 2017 (% of individuals who bought or ordered goods or services over the internet for private use in the last 12 months from sellers abroad) - Source: Eurostat (isoc_ec_ibuy)

Data sources

The data in this article are based on the results of annual surveys on ICT usage in households and by individuals. Data for 2019 were aggregated from micro data transmitted by all Member States and some non-EU countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Kosovo[1]and Bosnia and Herzegovina). They are available on the Eurostat website (see link below). Researchers can apply for access to the micro data.

The 2019 survey results are based on responses from a total of 147 531 households in the EU-28 having at least one person aged 16-74, and 193 958 individuals in the EU-28 aged 16-74. Individuals were asked about the last time they used the internet, how often they used it, use by device type away from home or usual place of work, internet activities, certain aspects of the collaborative economy, activities related to e-government, e-commerce and e-skills.

Most countries collected data in the second quarter of 2019. The reference period for the questions on frequency of online shopping and amounts spent was the three months prior to the survey. For the other data relating to the e-commerce activities, the reference period was the 12 months prior to the survey, as such activities tend to be irregular and seasonal.

Levels of education are defined according to ISCED -2011 as follows: high (tertiary, ISCED 5, 6, 7 or 8); medium (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary, ISCED 3 or 4); low (at most lower secondary, ISCED 0, 1 or 2).

Source data for tables and graphs

- E-commerce statistics for individuals - graphs and tables

Context

The findings of this survey are used for monitoring several EU policies, in particular the Digital Agenda , which is one of the pillars of the Europe 2020 strategy (which sets objectives for the growth of the European Union by

[1]This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

2020). The Digital Agenda proposes to better exploit the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in order to foster innovation, economic growth and progress. One of its main objectives is the completion of the Digital Single Market , in which the free movement of persons, services and capital is ensured and where the individuals and businesses can seamlessly access and exercise online activities under conditions of fair competition, and a high level of consumer and personal data protection, irrespective of their nationality or place of residence. The completion of the Digital Single Market is currently one of the political priorities of the European Commission. It covers three areas: promoting better online access to goods and services across Europe; designing an optimal environment for digital networks and services to develop; ensuring that the European economy and industry takes full advantage of the digital economy as a potential driver for growth.

At the end of 2015 the European Commission published a framework called Monitoring the Digital Economy and Society 2016–2021. This document describes the main policy developments and outlines the main data requirements to monitor European digital policies, information and communication technologies as well as their impact on the economy and society in the period 2016-2021. It reviews existing data sources and lists new areas and data sources to be made use of in the future.

See also

- All articles on Digital economy and society

Publications

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- Other publications on digital economy and society

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- Regional Statistics Illustrated

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- Access to micro data for researchers

Legislation

- Digital economy and society legislation

External links

- Digital Agenda
- Digital Agenda Scoreboard reports
- Digital Single Market