

INDIVIDUALS USING THE INTERNET TO ACCESS HEALTH SERVICES AND HEALTH INFORMATION

Access to the internet among Europeans is rising (85% of EU households had internet access in 2016) and people are increasingly going on line to access information and interact with the provider of different services. Health is no exception. The amount of information regarding health and illness available on line is growing, as are the opportunities of interacting with health care providers electronically, for example to make medical appointments. Digital technologies can improve patient experience and outcomes, and the efficiency of services, but some may generate minimal benefit (at a considerable expense), and protecting individuals' privacy is a frequent problem and a policy priority (OECD, 2017). While online medical information can be a useful way to help people manage their health, regulation is difficult and many people are not in a position to check the veracity of this type of information.

One in eight EU residents (13%) made an appointment with a health care practitioner on line in 2016, up from one in twelve (8%) in 2012 (Figure 8.3). Almost half (49%) of Danish residents made a medical appointment on line in 2016 (up from 29% in 2012). Finland and Spain had the second and third highest proportion of residents making a medical appointment this way in 2016, with 35% and 30% respectively. Virtually no Cypriots reported making a medical appointment on line in either year. The figure was also low in Greece and Bulgaria (2% and 3% respectively in 2016). In all countries except Cyprus, the proportion of residents making appointments on line increased between 2012 and 2016, on average by 63%. The greatest increases were observed in Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Hungary.

Making medical appointments on line had a weak correlation with internet access ($r_2 = 0.34$), suggesting that internet access is not a sufficient condition to making medical appointments on line. A moderate correlation ($r_2 = 0.51$) was observed with internet banking, which was performed by 49% of EU residents in 2016, suggesting that individuals who conduct their banking on line also tend to book medical appointments this way. The correlation with the percentage of individuals booking travel and accommodation on line (41% across the EU) was weak ($r_2 = 0.32$). These figures suggest that internet use for making medical appointments is lagging behind use for other personal services.

Half of all EU residents sought health information on line in 2017, a figure that has almost doubled since 2008 (Figure 8.4). The highest proportions of people seeking health information on line were in the Netherlands and Finland (about 70%). Almost 60% of Cypriots sought health information on line in 2017, a large increase from only about 10% in 2008. Less than 40% of Romanian, Italian, Bulgarian and Irish residents reported that they sought health information on line in 2017.

Disparities by age and socioeconomic groups exist in using the internet for health-related purposes. In 2017, only about 30% of people in EU countries aged 65-74 accessed health information on line, compared to 55% of those aged 25-64. This "age gap" in using the internet for health-related information was particularly large in Croatia, Greece and Malta. In terms of socioeconomic status, about 40% of people in EU countries living in households in the lowest income quartile accessed health information on line, compared to over 60% in the highest income quartile. This "income gap" in accessing health information on the internet was particularly large in Hungary, Lithuania and Portugal.

Definition and comparability

The figures presented here come from an annual European Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) survey of households and individuals. Data are collected by National Statistical Institutes based on Eurostat's model questionnaire on ICT usage. The model questionnaire changes every year.

Around 150 000 households and 200 000 individuals aged 16-74 in the EU were surveyed in 2016 (Eurostat, 2016).

In the 2016 survey, the question related to the activities described here was:

- For which of the following activities did you use the Internet in the last 3 months for private purpose? (tick all that apply)
 - ❖ Seeking health-related information (e.g. injury, disease, nutrition, improving health, etc.)
 - ❖ Making an appointment with a practitioner via the website (e.g. of a hospital or a health care centre)

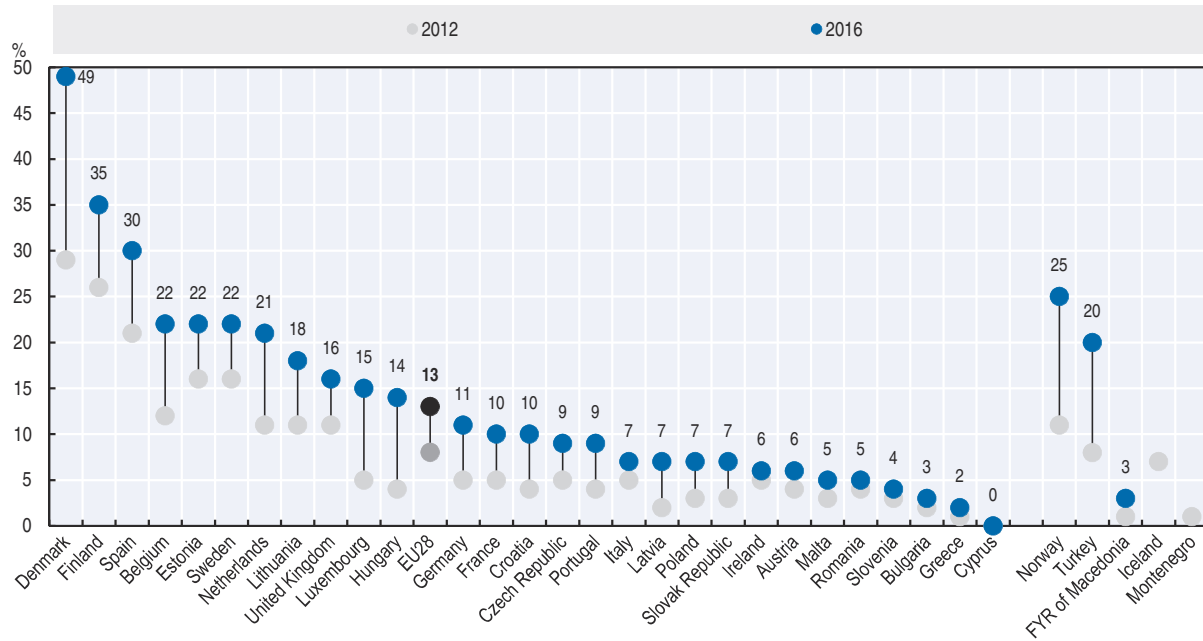
The 2017 survey did not include the question on making an appointment via the website.

Data on internet access and use for personal banking and booking travel and accommodation come from the same surveys.

References

- OECD (2017), *New Health Technologies: Managing Access, Value and Sustainability*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264266438-en>.
- Eurostat (2016), *Methodological manual for statistics on the Information Society*, <https://circabc.europa.eu/faces/jsp/extension/wai/navigation/container.jsp>.

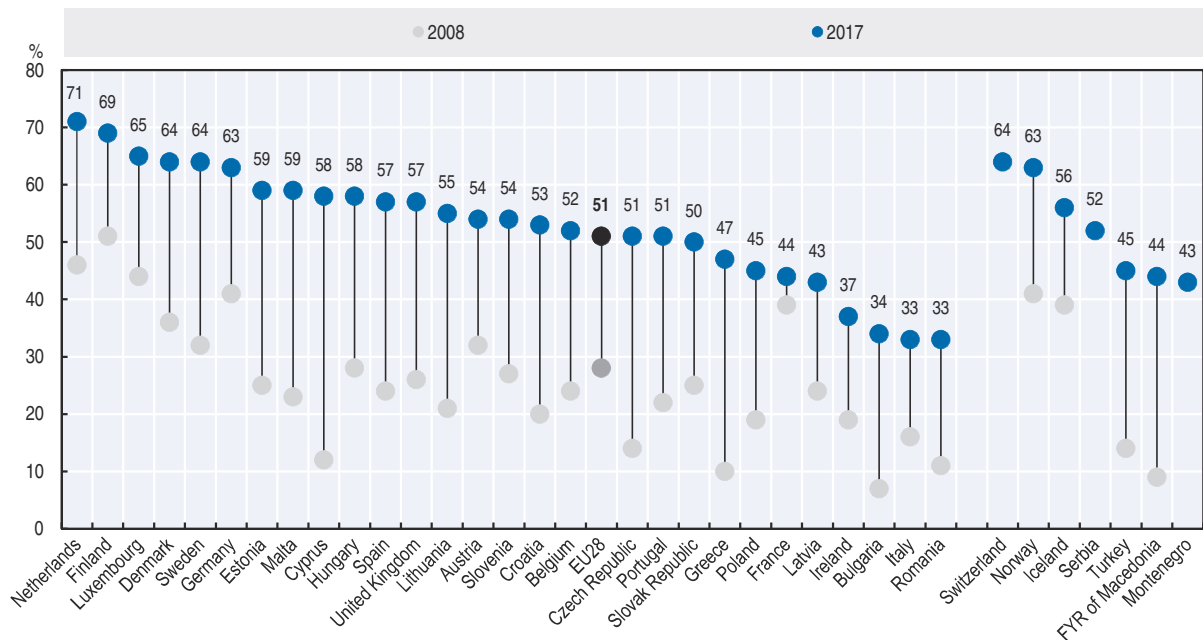
8.3. Percentage of people who made an appointment with a health practitioner on line, 2012 and 2016



Source: Eurostat Database, based on the European ICT survey of individuals aged 16-74.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933836770>

8.4. Percentage of people who sought health-related information on line, 2008 and 2017



Source: Eurostat Database, based on the European ICT survey of individuals aged 16-74.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933836789>



From:
Health at a Glance: Europe 2018
State of Health in the EU Cycle

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/health_glance_eur-2018-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/European Union (2018), "Individuals using the internet to access health services and health information", in *Health at a Glance: Europe 2018: State of Health in the EU Cycle*, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/health_glance_eur-2018-57-en

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