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THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN ITALY: A GENDER AND TERRITORIAL PROBLEM

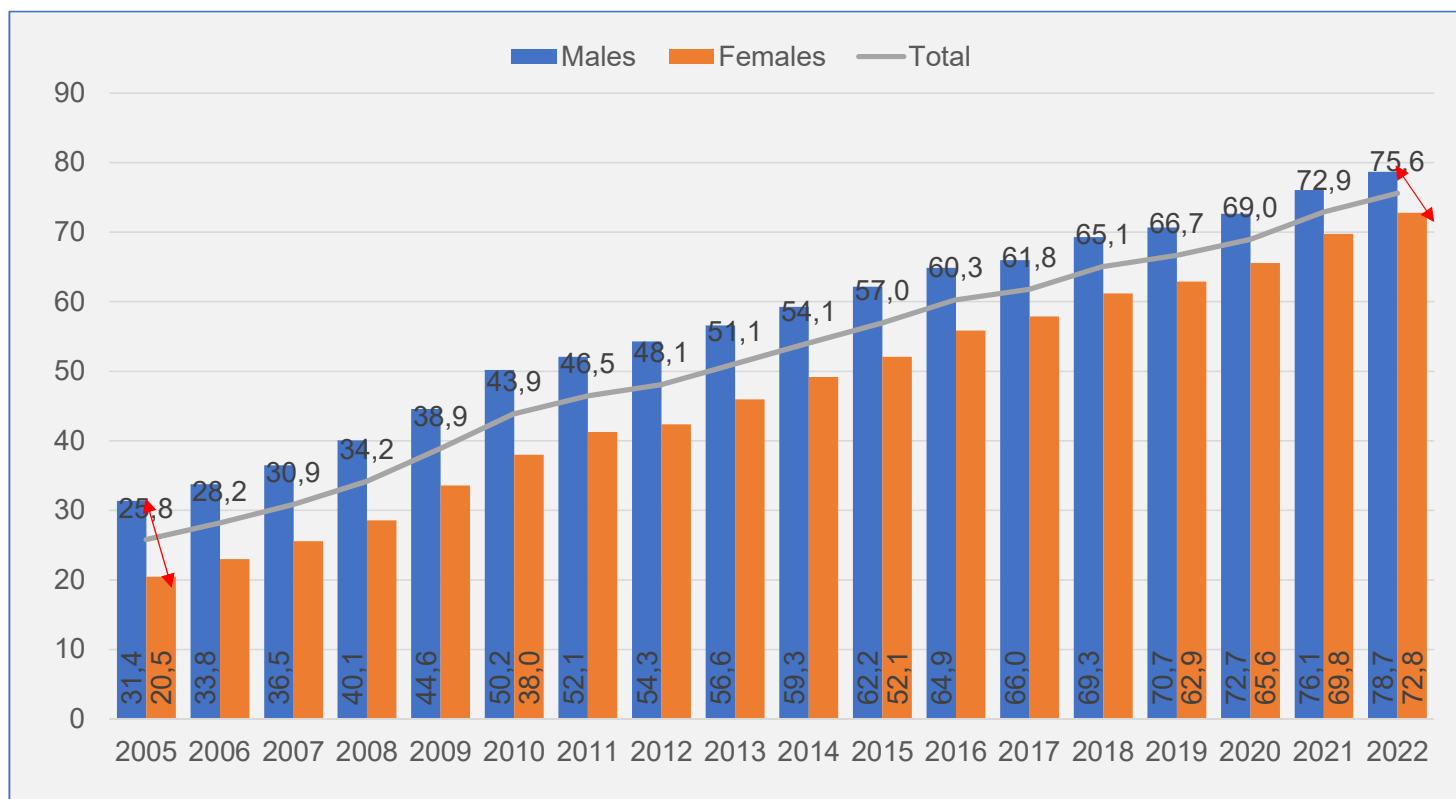
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Introduction

- In Italy, over the last thirty years, the spread of the Internet has brought about a real revolution in people's lives, entailing changes in terms of customs and lifestyles, offering new modes of communication and new possibilities for experiencing the various spheres of one's life, from work and study to leisure and social and cultural participation.
- There has been no lack of disparities in the spread of access and even today the North-South territorial divide, together with gender differences in favour of men combined with generational differences or those linked to educational credentials, characterise the spread of the Internet in Italy.
- Analysis of the temporal trend shows how, especially in correspondence with the entry into the new millennium, the diffusion of the Net has been increasingly disruptive, with constant annual growth rates and population groups that have gradually been reached more and more, until reaching saturation in some cases.

Internet use over time in Italy

Persons aged 11 and over who used the Internet at least once a week in the last three months before the interview by gender. Years 2005-2022 (percentage values)



Starting from 25.8% in 2005 we arrive at 75.6% in 2022. Over a period of nearly 20 years, therefore, the share of regular users increased by about 50 percentage points.

The increase over time has been very high for both men and women, but higher among women (from 20.5 to 72.8%), reducing the gap with men from ten to five percentage points.

Source: Istat, Aspects of daily life survey

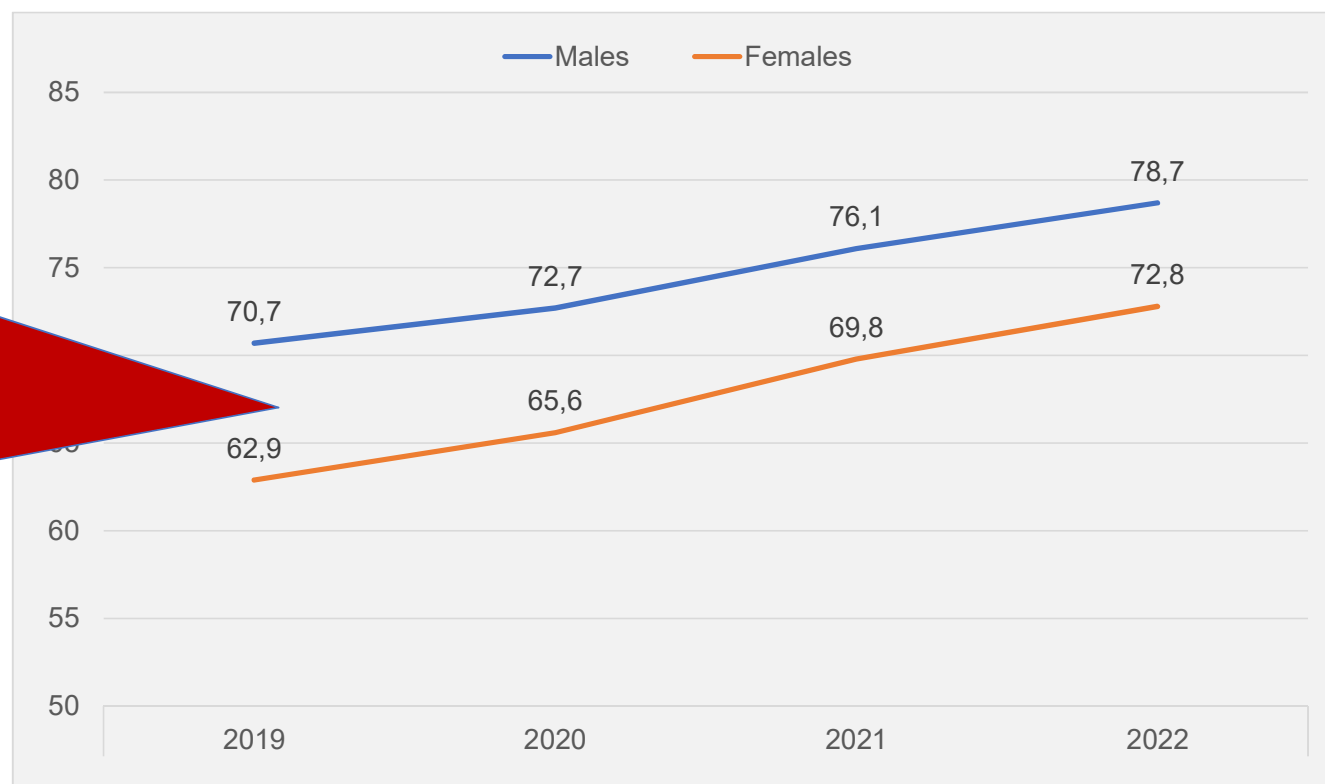
Internet use over time in Italy: The effect of the Covid Pandemic

From 2020 onwards, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic also had an impact by imposing a strong acceleration on the spread of the Internet.

The total increase in just three years (from 2020 to 2022) was 13.3%, an average of about 3 percentage points per year.

The increase was higher among women: About 16% compared to an increase of 11% among men.

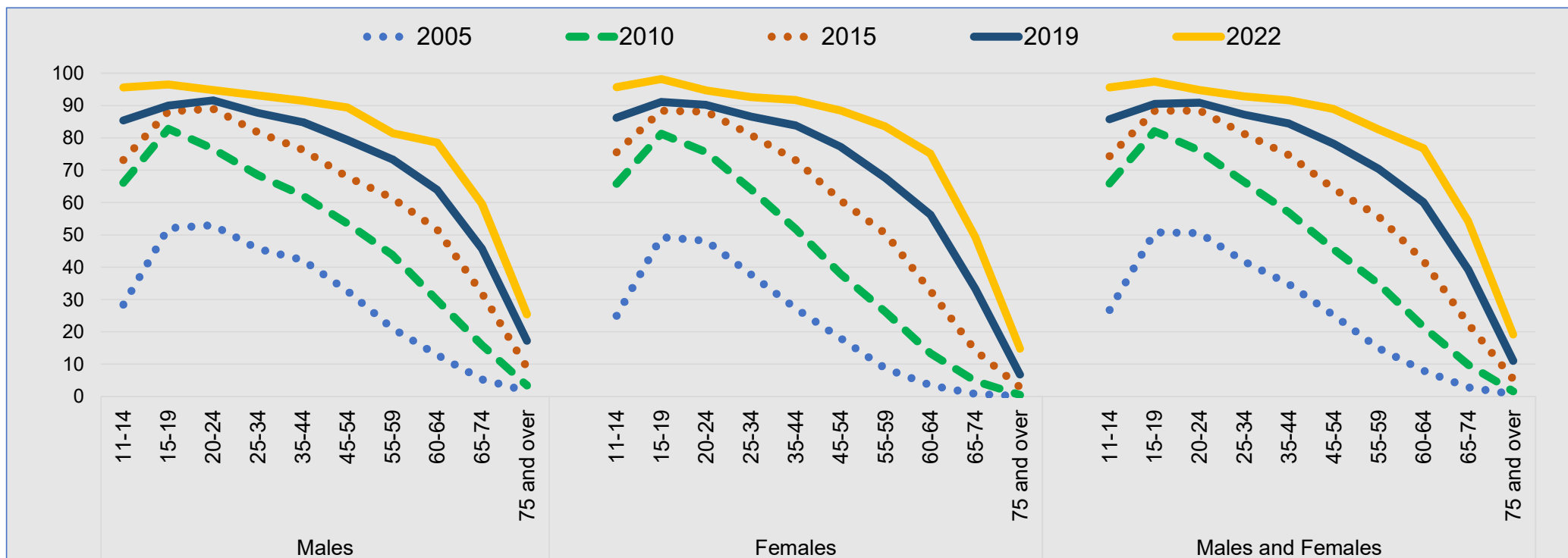
Men and Women aged 11 and over by use of the Internet. Years 2019-2022 (percentage values)



Source: Istat, Aspects of daily life survey

Analysis by gender and generations

Persons aged 11 and over who used the Internet at least once a week in the last three months before the interview by gender and age class. Years 2005, 2010, 2015, 2019, 2022 (percentage values)

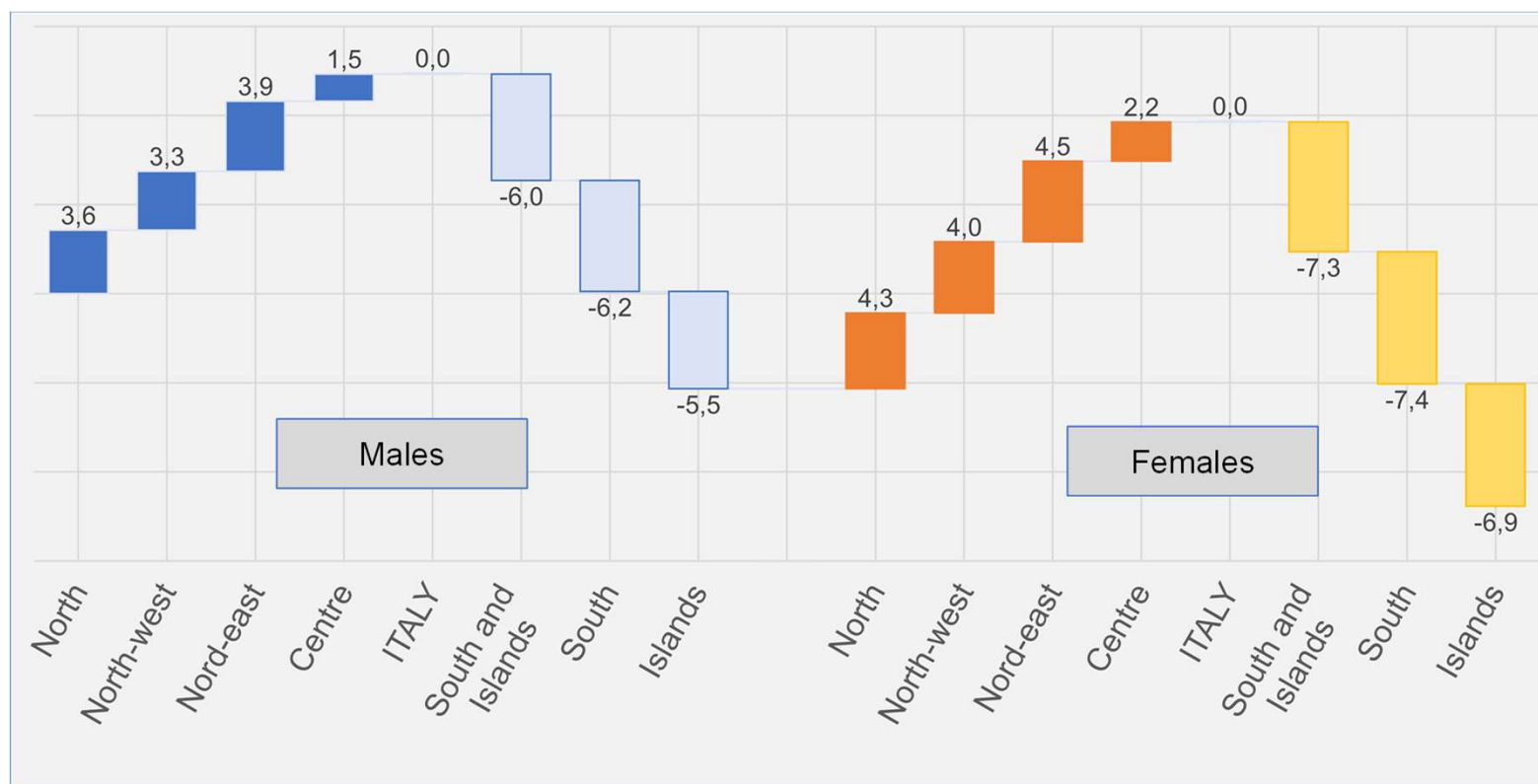


Source: Istat, Aspects of daily life survey

The analysis by age highlights how the increases over time have been high for both men and women

Analysis by gender and territory

Persons aged 11 and over who used the Internet at least once a week in the last three months before the interview by gender and geographical areas. Year 2022 (percentage variations with respect to the Italian average)



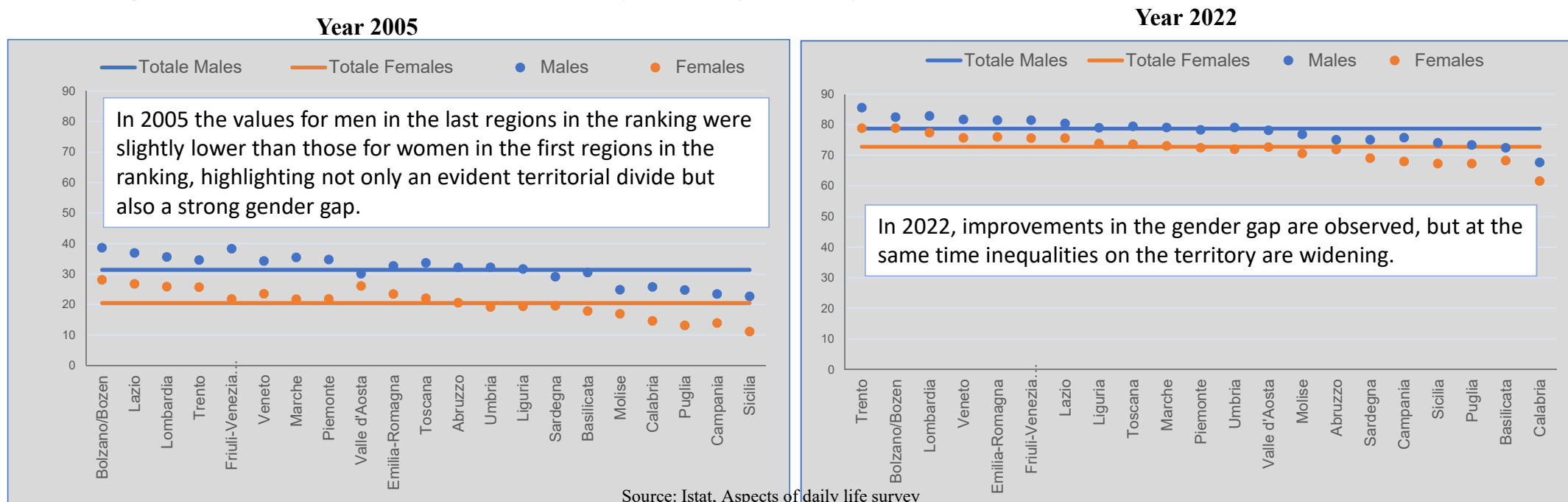
The analysis by gender and territory highlights similar differences for men and women, with higher values of use in the Centre-North and lower values in the South.

However, the territorial distances registered separately among men and among women are greater among women than men, and this happens in both positive and negative directions.

Source: Istat, Aspects of daily life survey

Gender and regions over time

Ranking of regions with respect to Internet use at least once a week in the last three months before the interview of people aged 11 and over. Years 2005 and 2022 (percentage values)



Similar regional rankings for both sexes in the two years compared (2005 and 2022), although with levels for women in both years always lower than those for men in the same region of residence. There is an upward shift in the observed values for all regions from the 2005 to 2022 analysis.

Gender, generations and educational status

- Internet access is strongly associated with people's level of education and this is combined with trends by gender and generation. The distributions by educational level show that the higher the educational qualification possessed the higher the access to the Internet and this evidence has remained fairly constant over time. Moreover, it tends to be men with high educational qualifications more than women with the same qualifications who use the net.

- However, these differences have shifted over time. In fact, if we compare the distributions of men and women by educational qualification, we can see that:

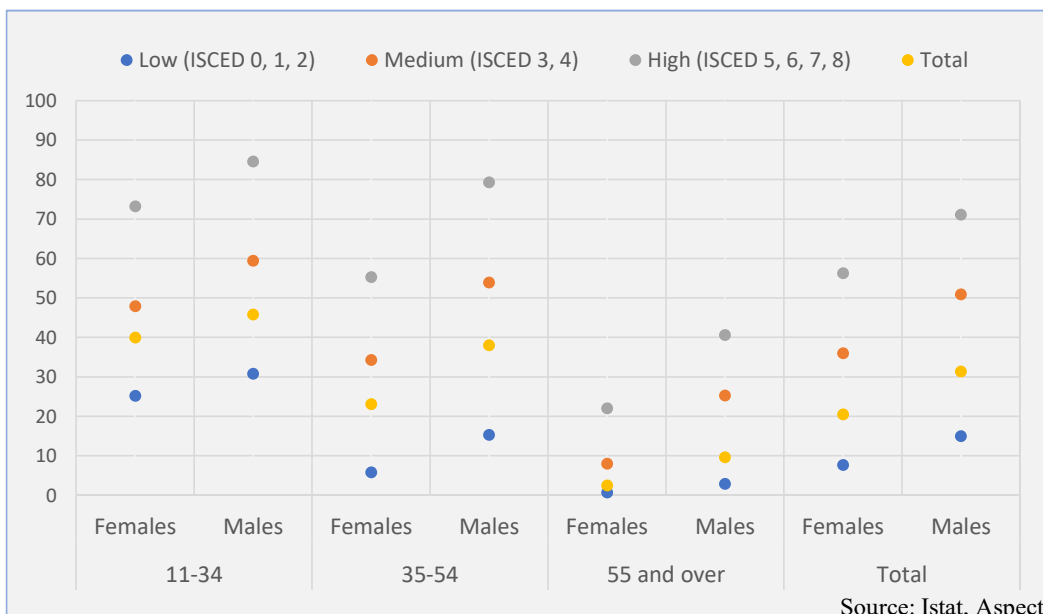
In **2005**, for all age groups, men with higher educational qualifications had significantly higher rates of Internet use than women with the same educational qualification (71.1% vs. 56.3%).

In **2022**, among the youngest, there are no differences and the levels of Internet use are similar among university graduates, high school graduates and those who have only completed compulsory education, regardless of gender and age.

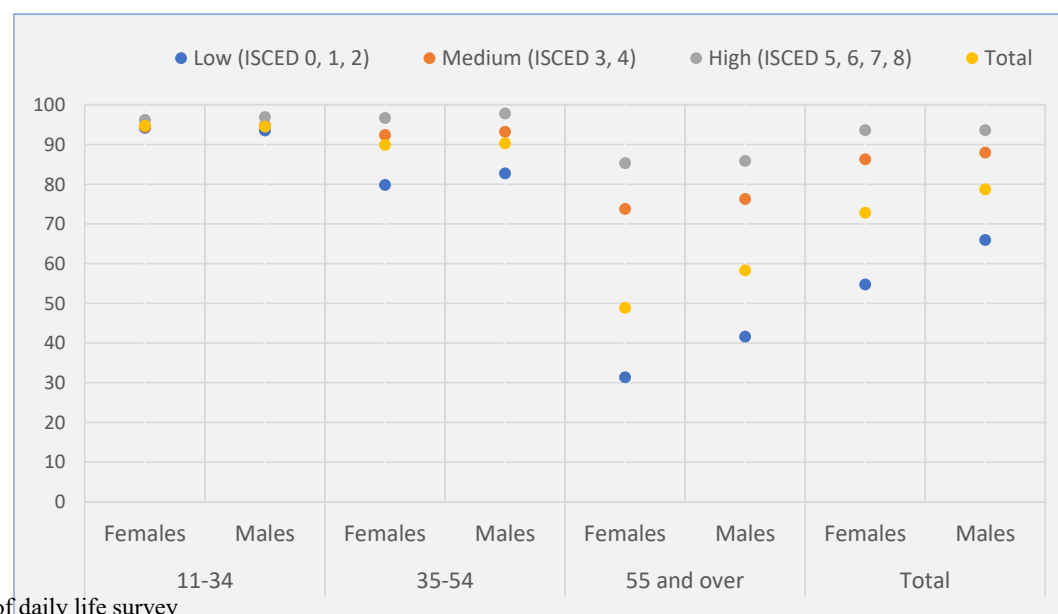
Gender, generations and educational status

Persons aged 11 and over who used the Internet at least once a week in the last three months before the interview by gender, educational status and age class. Years 2005 and 2022 (percentage values)

Year 2005



Year 2022



Source: Istat, Aspects of daily life survey

As the age increases, we find in 2022 a similar situation to that observed in 2005, and when the educational qualification possessed is higher, the levels of use tend to be higher. However, the comparison between men and women shows that the gap in favour of the former is narrowing compared to 2005: especially in the case of university graduates there are almost no differences and the levels of use of men and women almost overlap.

... To sum up

- Over the past thirty years, there has been a continuous increase in Internet use in Italy.
- Not all the population is accustomed to using the Internet on a regular basis (about one in four people used it less than once a week in the three months before the interview or never used it at all) and the use of the internet is so far very associated to social and demographic factors.
- Among the younger generations, a generalised spread has been observed over time that has cancelled out gender differences, but there is still a gender gap that connotes a disadvantage especially for elderly women and the residents in the South.
- Digital capital has shown its indispensability in times of pandemic, when it was fundamental for everyday life and the challenges of school and work activities and social and cultural participation.
- However, the impact of the digital divide has been equally evident, highlighting the difficulties of those segments of the population and territories that, as a result of the very lack of access to information and communication technologies, have found themselves excluded, either totally or partially.

Thanks!

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