

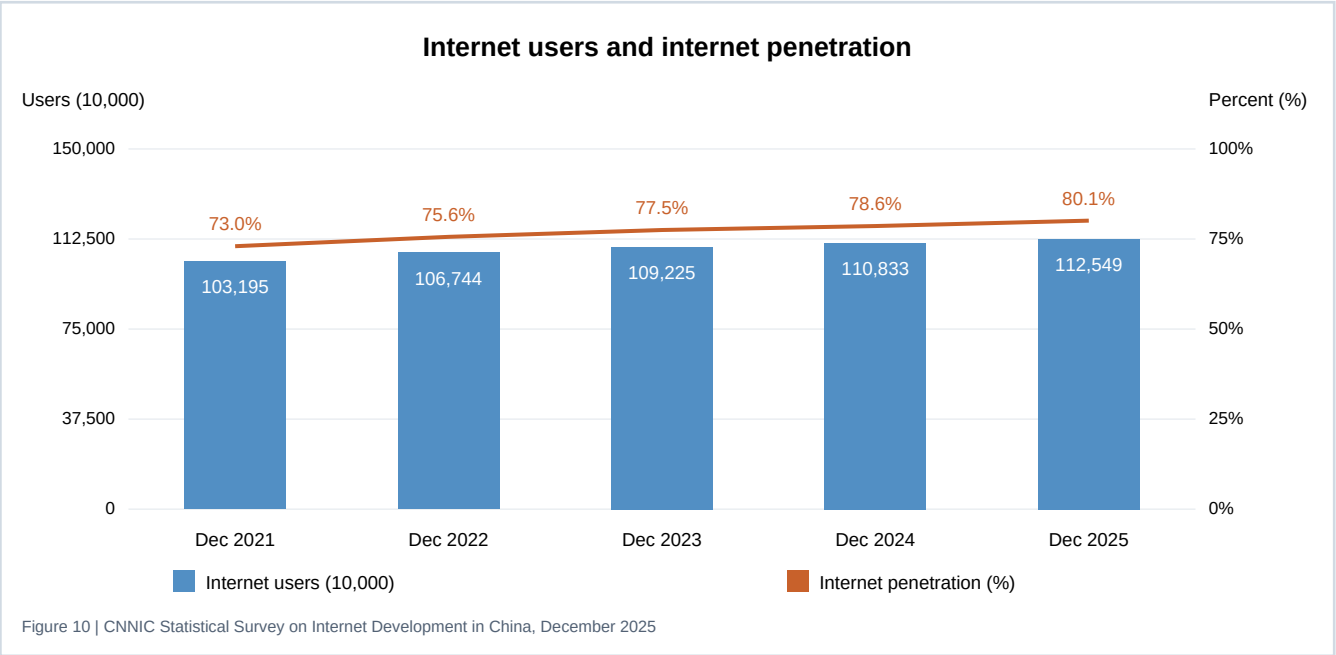
Chapter 2: Internet Users - Size and Structure

In 2025, China continued to develop its network infrastructure and steadily expanded the number of connected users. The real and digital economies became more deeply integrated, new digital-consumption scenarios continued to emerge, and priority AI Plus actions to improve public wellbeing were accelerated. These developments supported a better quality of life and more inclusive and meaningful internet connectivity.

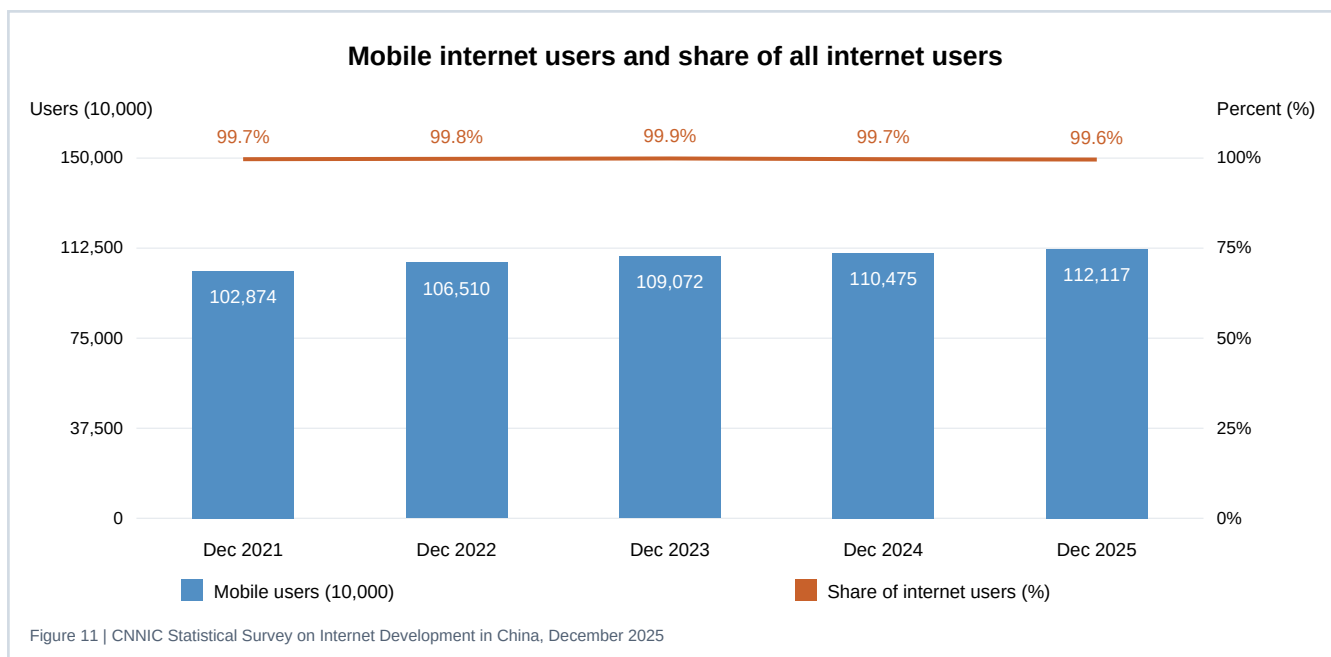
1 Number of internet users

1.1 Overall internet-user population

By December 2025, China had 1.125 billion internet users, an increase of 17.17 million over December 2024 [9]. Internet penetration reached 80.1%, up 1.5 percentage points.



China had 1.121 billion mobile internet users by December 2025, up 16.42 million over December 2024. Mobile phones were used to access the internet by 99.6% of internet users.



During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, China made significant advances in both internet adoption and the depth of its applications. Continued construction of new infrastructure, closer integration of the real and digital economies, and the launch of the AI Plus era strengthened the foundations of internet access. Consumption became more digital and intelligent, and AI applications expanded rapidly, greatly extending the reach and value of connectivity.

Network development moves from basic access to better-quality access

China has built the world's largest information and communications network, with globally leading technology, providing the information backbone for economic and social development and completing the 14th Five-Year Plan to a high standard. Fixed-network infrastructure included 31.62 million 10G PON ports capable of supporting gigabit optical networks. Two-thirds of prefecture-level cities met gigabit-city standards, and some cities began trials of 10-gigabit optical networks [10]. China Telecom, China Mobile and China Unicom together served 691 million fixed-broadband subscriptions, of which 659 million, or 95.3%, had access speeds of at least 100 Mbps [11].

In mobile networks, 4.838 million 5G base stations had been built, and evolved 5G networks covered more than 330 cities [12], supporting the spread of network services. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology's Signal Upgrade initiative extended comprehensive mobile coverage to more than 240,000 key locations [13], improving connection stability, reliability and users' experience.

Digital and real-economy integration makes consumption more intelligent

By 2024, the added value of core digital-economy industries accounted for 10.5% of GDP [14], achieving the 14th Five-Year Plan target of 10% ahead of schedule and becoming an important driver of high-quality development. The digital economy improved livelihoods and stimulated consumption by combining online and offline activity, integrating consumption formats, and connecting supply and demand. This created new digitally enabled offerings and consumption scenarios that better met the needs of a wider range of people.

During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, China maintained the world's largest digital-consumption market. Digital consumption totalled RMB 9.37 trillion in the first half of 2025, and its user base exceeded 958 million [15], making it an important driver of consumption growth. Offline service consumption became much more connected and intelligent. Digital ordering, smart visitor guidance and other digitally assisted services provided convenient interactions that also reached and influenced people who did not themselves use the internet, deepening the value of connectivity.

From Internet Plus to AI Plus: improving everyday life

During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, faster adoption of digital and intelligent technologies made public services more inclusive and convenient and digital life smarter. Many localities promoted digitally enabled neighbourhood services, integrating transport, healthcare and social security through unified city apps. Large AI models helped personalise and target services and support urban governance.

Multimodal AI interactions in smart devices can reduce barriers to internet access and use for older people, people with disabilities and people with limited educational attainment, helping to build a more inclusive and convenient digital society. By December 2025, 30.90 million internet users aged 60 or over had used AI; among internet users with secondary education or below, the number was 370 million. These figures rose by 9.44 million and 48.11 million respectively over six months, while usage rates increased by 4.5 and 7.1 percentage points. AI products gradually improved the precision and efficiency of healthcare, elderly care and education, as well as the experience of online and offline products and services, extending the benefits of connectivity.

1.2 Urban and rural internet users

By December 2025, China had 812 million urban internet users, accounting for 72.1% of the total, and 314 million rural internet users, accounting for 27.9%.

Urban and rural composition of internet users

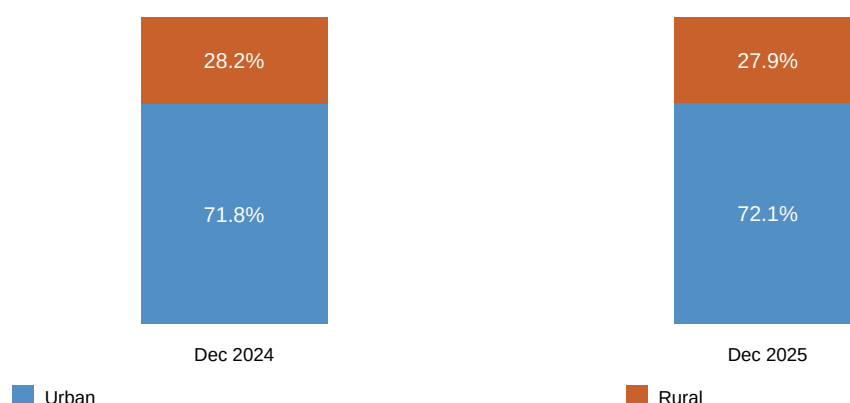


Figure 12 | CNNIC Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, December 2025

By December 2025, internet penetration was 85.1% in urban areas and 69.5% in rural areas. Rural penetration rose by 2.2 percentage points compared with December 2024.

Internet penetration in urban and rural areas

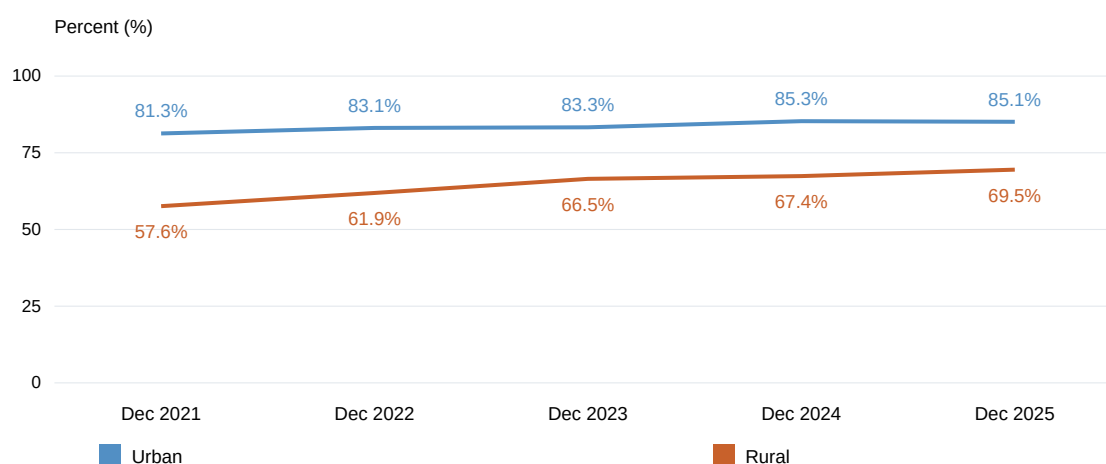


Figure 13 | CNNIC Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, December 2025

The year 2025 marked the tenth anniversary of China's universal telecommunications service policy. Approval of the Universal Telecommunications Service Compensation Mechanism in October 2015 formally launched the pilot programme. Over the following decade, broadband networks in rural and remote areas advanced rapidly, opening access to the digital era. Long-standing communications difficulties, particularly in formerly impoverished areas, were addressed. Internet connectivity reached rural households and provided a strong foundation for rural revitalisation and agricultural and rural modernisation.

Targeted speed upgrades and lower fees raise rural internet penetration

Over ten years, network-speed improvements and fee reductions progressed from broad-based measures to continuing targeted discounts for rural households lifted out of poverty. More than 28 million such households benefited, with cumulative savings exceeding RMB 8.8 billion [16]. Calculations using the International Telecommunication Union's ICT price-basket data [17], without adjusting for urban-rural tariff differences, show that fixed- and mobile-broadband service charges as a share of rural per-capita disposable income fell from 17.9% to 2.6%. Over the period, rural internet users increased at a compound annual rate of 4.8%, rural penetration rose by 37.1 percentage points, and the urban-rural penetration gap narrowed by 15.9 percentage points.

Closing the access gap across counties, townships and villages

China implemented eleven rounds of universal telecommunications service pilots, supporting fibre-network construction in more than 130,000 administrative villages and 100,000 rural 4G and 5G base stations [18]. All townships and 95% of administrative villages had 5G coverage [19]. The country achieved gigabit connectivity in every county, 5G in every township and broadband in every village, narrowing the urban-rural digital divide and enabling rural communities to share digital opportunities and prosperity.

In 2023, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and twelve other departments jointly issued the Notice on Accelerating Broadband Development in Border Areas. It called for deeper mobile- and fixed-broadband coverage, faster upgrades to 5G and gigabit optical networks, and better coverage in key locations such as larger rural settlements in border areas, supporting prosperity and stability along the borders.

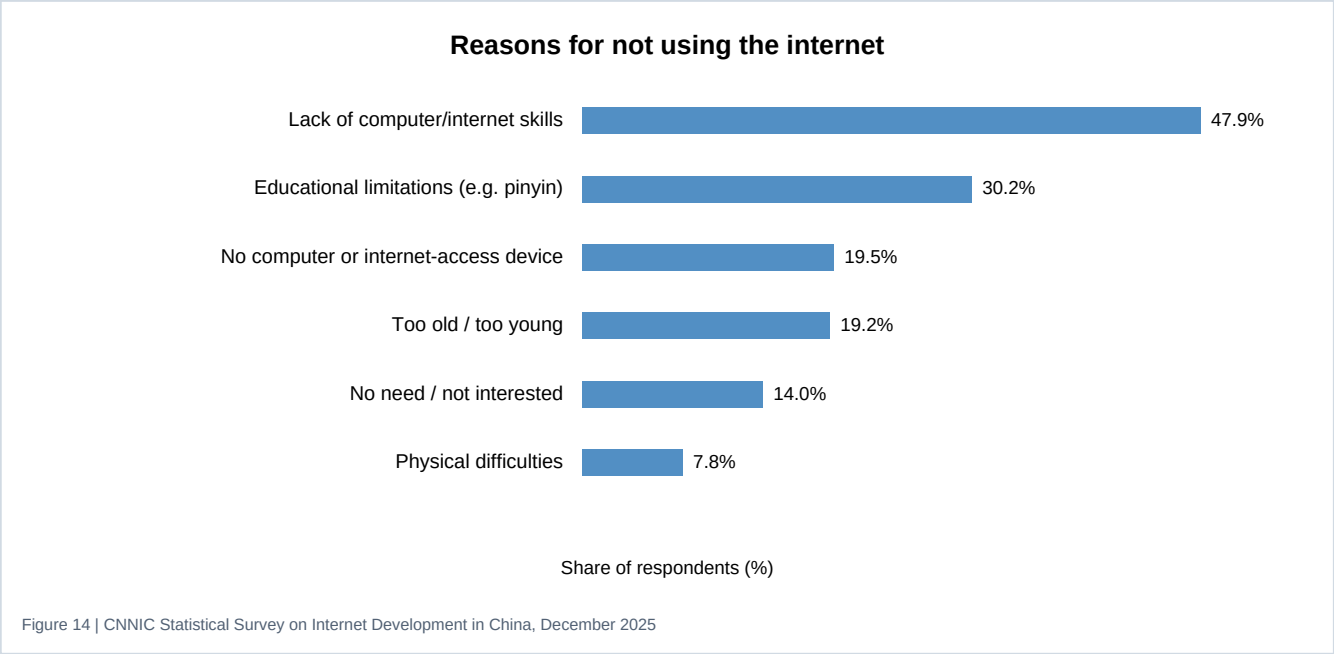
Digital development supports rural revitalisation

Accelerated rural network coverage enabled people in rural and remote areas to benefit from digital development. Systematic digital initiatives supported higher-quality agricultural production, public services and local industries. 5G, the Internet of Things and satellite networks enabled smart agriculture, significantly improving productivity and resilience. China's telemedicine network covered every city and county, and internet access reached 100% of rural primary and secondary schools, including teaching sites [20]. Rural online retail sales grew from RMB 353 billion in 2015 [21] to RMB 2.56 trillion in 2024 [22]. Livestream commerce and virtual rural tourism became new business formats driving the digital development of distinctive local industries.

1.3 People who do not use the internet

By December 2025, China had 279 million non-internet users, down 21.95 million from December 2024. Of these, 216 million were aged six or over; people aged 60 or over accounted for 53.6% of this group.

Lack of skills, limited education, lack of equipment and age were the main reasons for not using the internet among non-users aged six or over. Some 47.9% did not understand computers or the internet; 30.2% cited educational limitations such as not knowing pinyin; 19.5% lacked a computer or other internet-access device; and 19.2% considered themselves too old or too young.



The two leading factors that could encourage non-users aged six or over to go online were easier contact with family or relatives (23.3%) and easier access to specialist information (20.9%). Provision of accessible internet devices ranked third (19.3%), followed by help to increase income (18.9%).

Factors that could encourage internet use

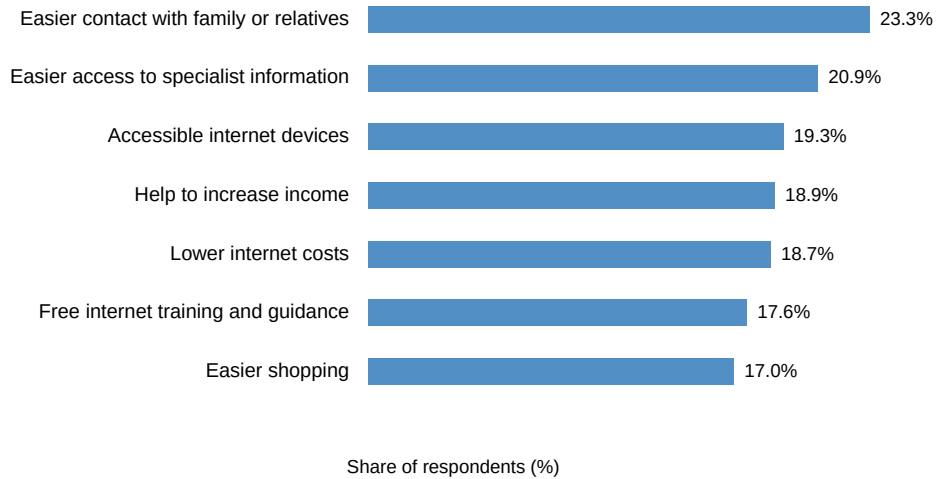


Figure 15 | CNNIC Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, December 2025

2 User demographics and internet-access devices

2.1 Gender

By December 2025, the male-to-female ratio among China's internet users was 51.2:48.8.

Gender composition of internet users

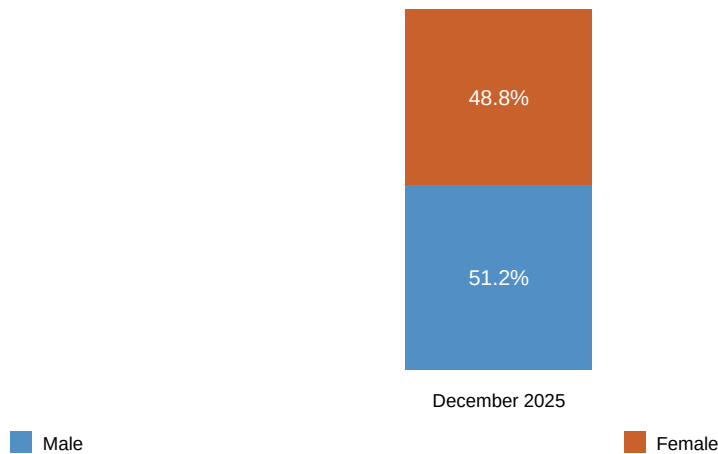
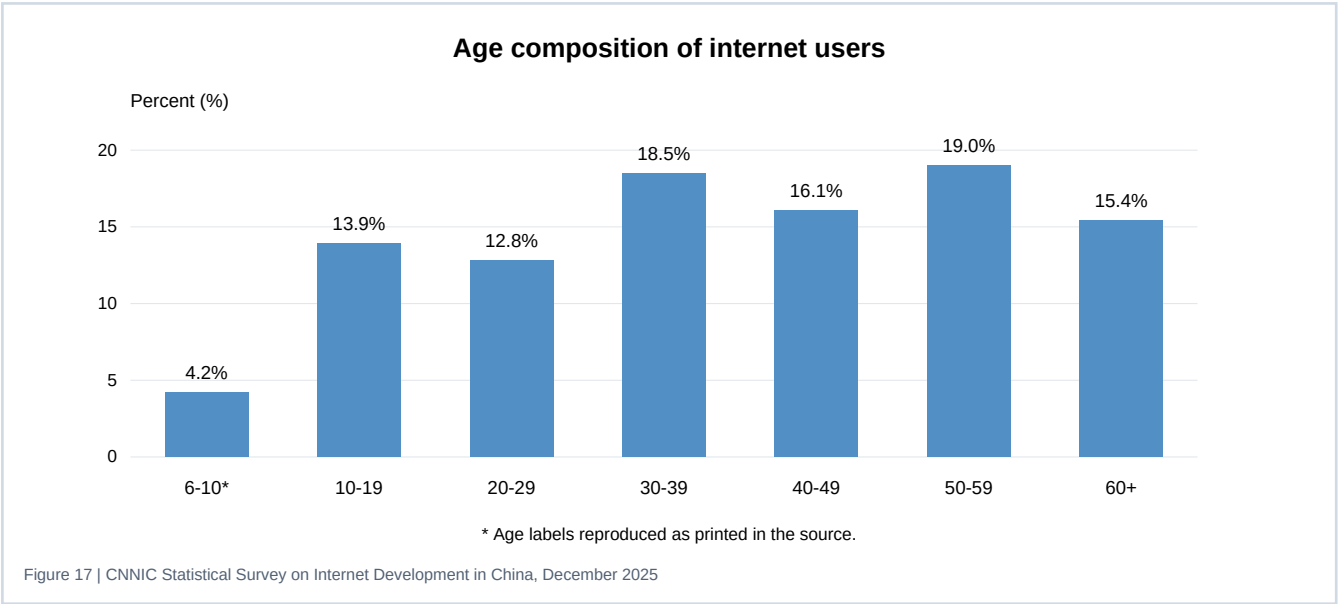


Figure 16 | CNNIC Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, December 2025

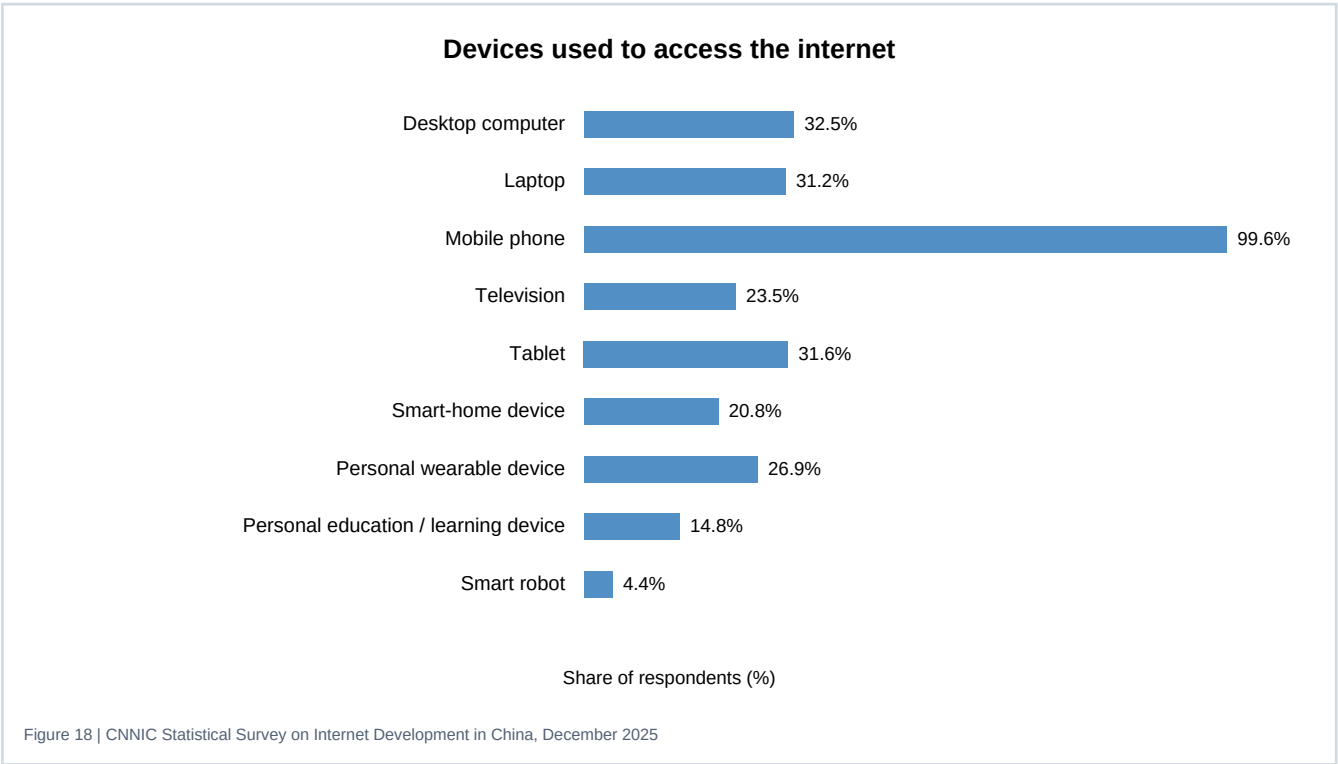
2.2 Age

By December 2025, internet users were concentrated among younger and middle-aged people. Those aged 10-49 accounted for 61.4% of users, while those aged 50 or over accounted for 34.4%.



2.3 Internet-access devices

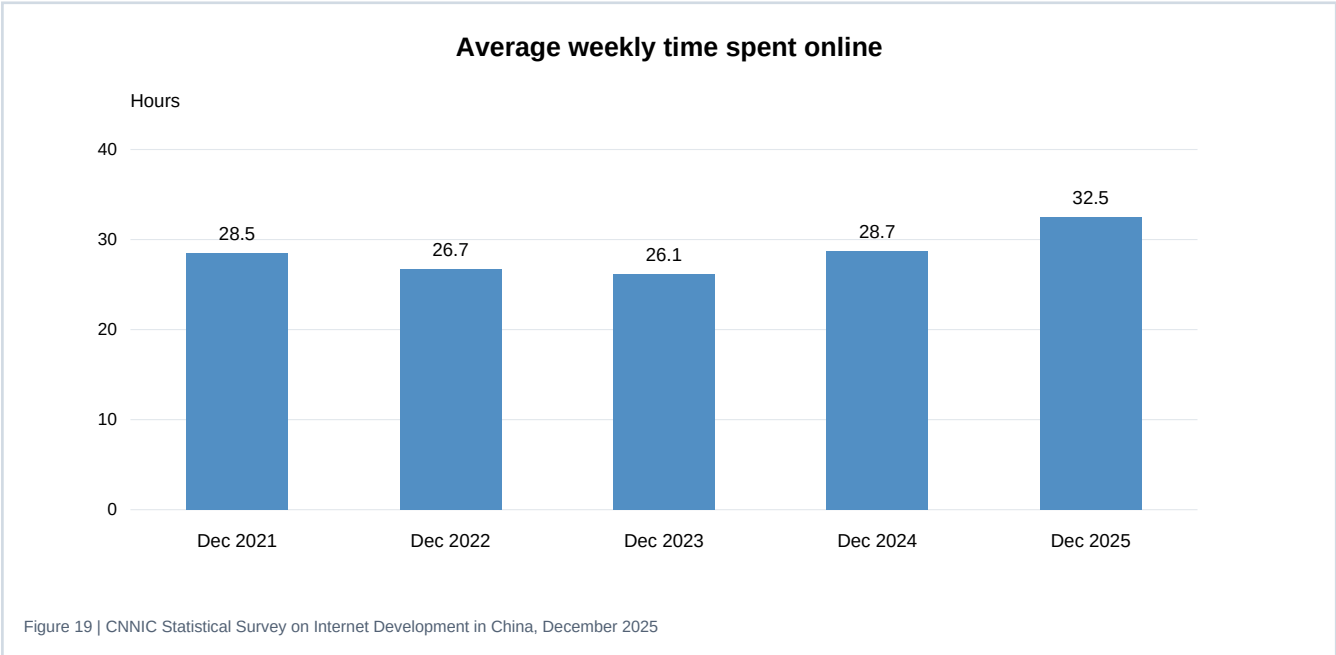
By December 2025, 99.6% of internet users accessed the internet using mobile phones. Desktop computers, laptops, televisions and tablets were used by 32.5%, 31.2%, 23.5% and 31.6% respectively. Smart-home devices, personal wearable devices and personal educational or learning devices were used by 20.8%, 26.9% and 14.8% respectively.



2.4 Time spent online

Average weekly time online

By December 2025, internet users spent an average of 32.5 hours online per week [23], an increase of 3.8 hours over December 2024.



Distribution of app use across the day

In December 2025, among five commonly used categories of mobile apps, instant-messaging use was relatively evenly distributed from 09:00 to 20:00, with each hourly period accounting for more than 5% of total use time. Online-video use peaked from 12:00 to 13:00 and from 18:00 to 20:00, when hourly shares exceeded 6%.

Online shopping and online payments followed similar daily patterns, with hourly shares above 5% from 08:00 to 19:00. Food-delivery apps had pronounced peaks corresponding to mealtimes: a first peak from 11:00 to 13:00, with hourly shares exceeding 8%, and a second from 17:00 to 19:00, with hourly shares exceeding 7%.

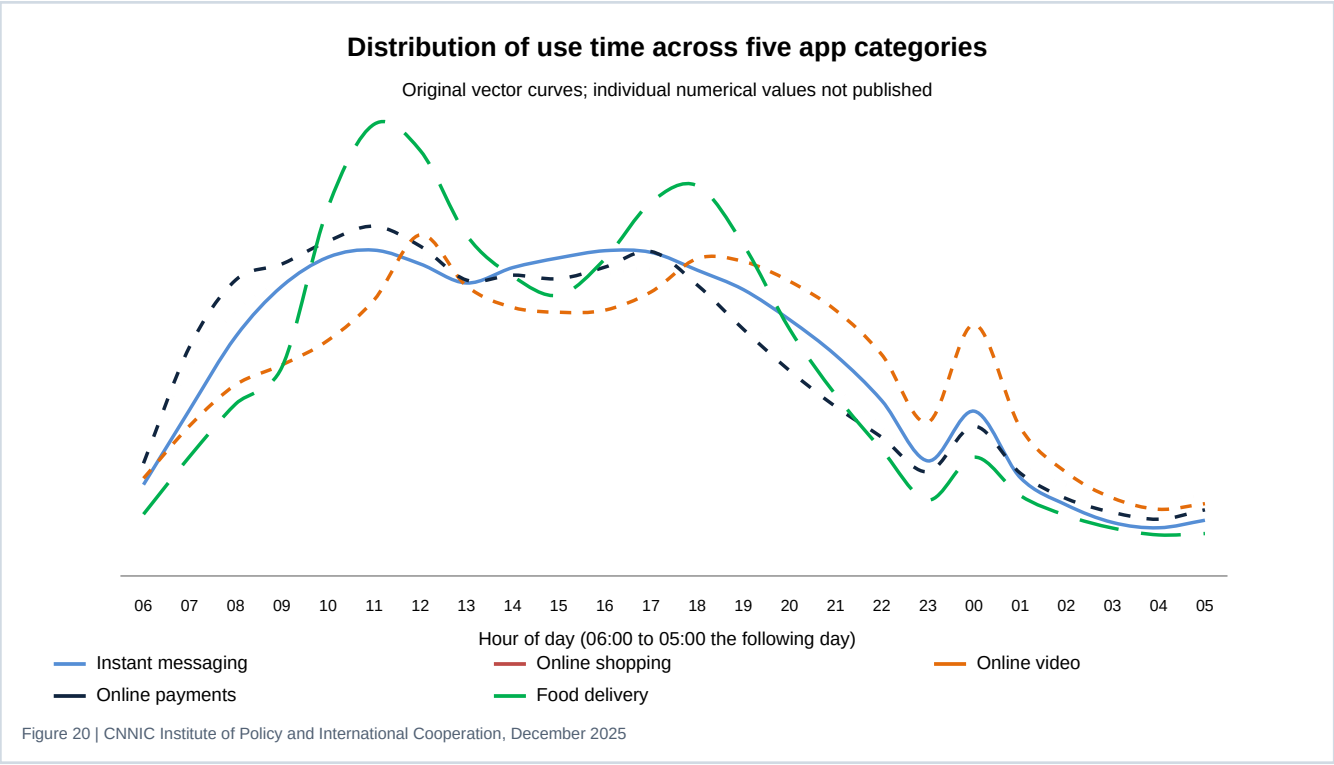
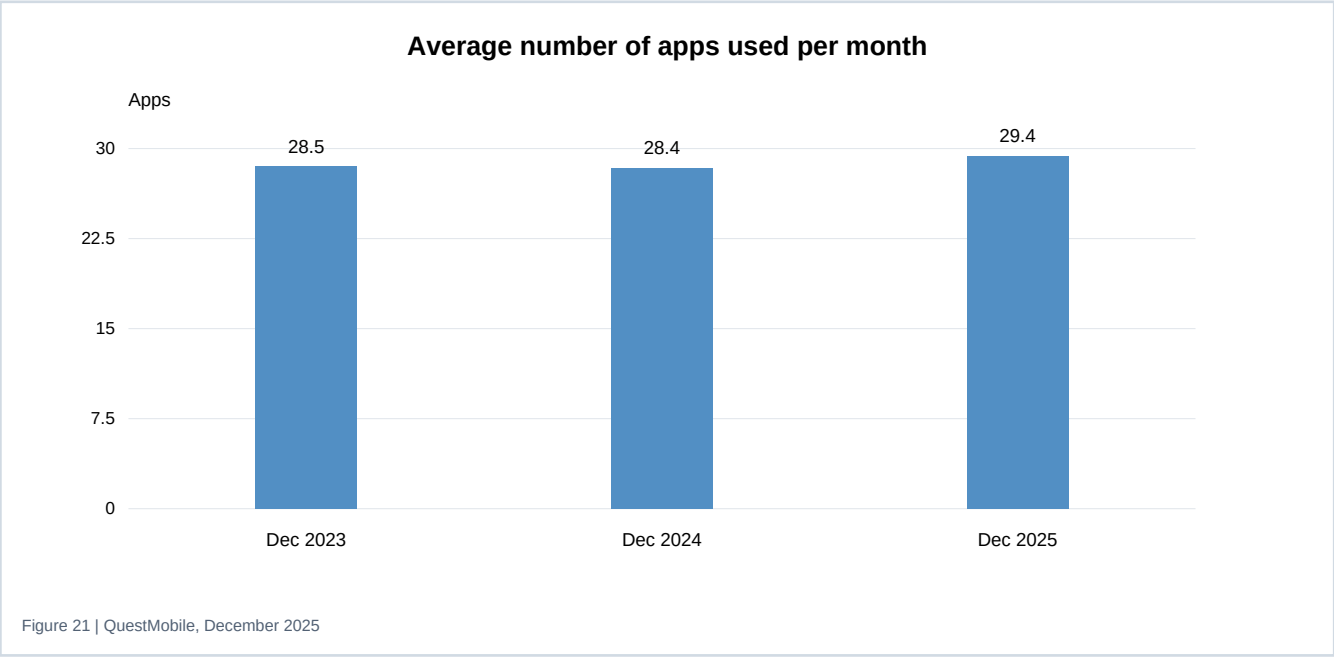


Figure 20 shows the distribution of use time by hourly period [24]. Its original vector curves are retained; the source does not publish numerical values for individual points.

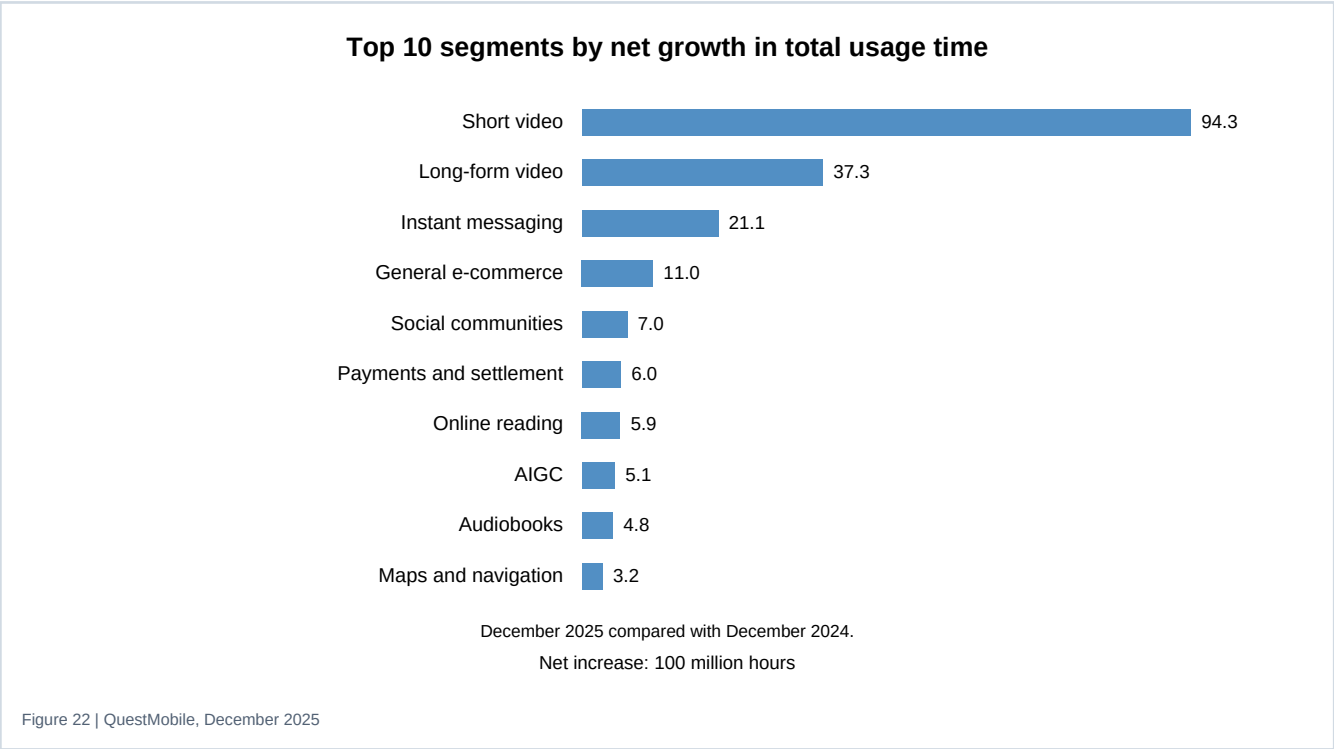
Average number of apps used per month

In December 2025, users across the internet used an average of 29.4 apps per month, up 1.0 app from December 2024.



Growth in usage time by industry segment

In December 2025, short video recorded the largest net increase in usage time among internet industry segments: 9.43 billion hours more than in December 2024, up 14.1% year on year. AIGC [25] recorded the highest year-on-year growth rate, increasing by 510 million hours, or 176.7%.



3 Development of digital literacy and skills

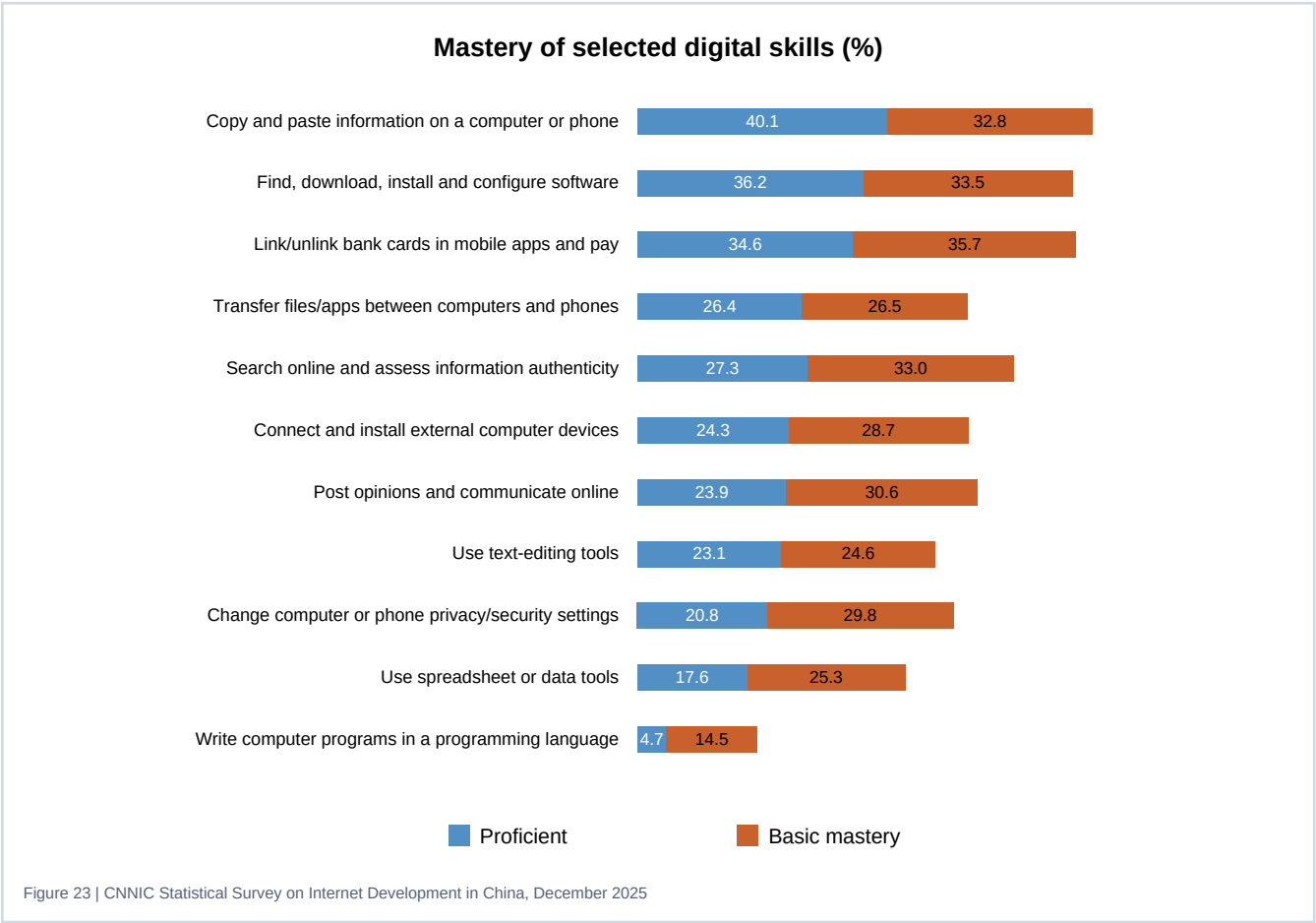
In April 2025, four departments jointly issued the Key Tasks for Improving Digital Literacy and Skills for All in 2025. They set out six priorities: strengthening digital-talent development; expanding opportunities for digital-economic growth; building an inclusive digital society; enabling smart and convenient digital life; fostering a safe and orderly digital environment; and improving coordinated working arrangements [26]. As demand from the digital economy continued to grow and digital infrastructure improved, internet users' digital literacy and skills [27] developed steadily and the national training framework became more complete. By December 2025, 50.9% of internet users were proficient in at least one of the digital skills surveyed [28].

Marked differences in proficiency by age and location

Internet users aged 20-29 had the highest proportion proficient in at least one surveyed digital skill, at 80.3%, followed by those aged 10-19, at 67.7%. The proportion among users aged 60 or over was lower, at 20.3%. In urban areas, 57.8% of users were proficient in at least one surveyed skill, compared with 33.2% in rural areas, a gap of 24.6 percentage points. The imbalance between urban and rural digital literacy remained pronounced, indicating the need for stronger rural training.

Younger users improve their advanced digital skills

Rapid AI development created new digital jobs and raised the digital-skill requirements placed on workers. Among internet users aged 20-29, a major part of the workforce, 10.7% were proficient in writing computer programs using a programming language, up 2.3 percentage points from December 2024. The Opinions on Accelerating Digitalisation in Education, issued by the Ministry of Education and eight other departments, called for an integrated digital-literacy framework spanning primary, secondary and higher education and encouraged distinctive AI courses [29]. Among internet users aged 10-19, 7.1% were proficient in programming, up 0.7 percentage points from December 2024.



Sources and notes

[9] All figures in this report derived from the Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China are rounded.

[10] State Council Information Office, 21 January 2026. [Source](#)

[11] Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, 28 January 2026. [Source](#)

[12] State Council Information Office, 21 January 2026. [Source](#)

[13] Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, 9 September 2025. [Source](#)

[14] National Bureau of Statistics, 30 December 2025. [Source](#)

[15] China Internet Network Information Center, Digital Consumption Development Report (2025).

[16] Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, 30 December 2021. [Source](#)

[17] International Telecommunication Union, Measuring the Information Society Report; ICT price-basket dashboard. [Source 1](#) [Source 2](#)

[18] Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, 17 April 2025. [Source](#)

[19] State Council Information Office, 21 January 2026. [Source](#)

[20] Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, 9 December 2024. [Source](#)

[21] Ministry of Commerce, China E-commerce Report (2015). [Source](#)

[22] Chinese Government website, 23 March 2025. [Source](#)

[23] Average weekly time online: the average number of hours spent online per day across a seven-day week during the preceding six months, multiplied by seven.

[24] Distribution of usage time means the share of an app category's total usage time occurring in each hourly period. For example, 15 minutes (0.25 hours) spent on instant messaging between 06:00 and 07:00 out of four hours over the whole day gives a share calculated as $0.25 / 4$.

[25] AIGC: Artificial Intelligence Generated Content. Here it refers to applications that use AI to generate content.

[26] Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, 27 April 2025. [Source](#)

[27] Under the Action Outline for Improving Digital Literacy and Skills for All, digital literacy and skills are the capabilities needed for learning, work and daily life in a digital society, including acquiring, producing, using, evaluating, interacting with and sharing digital information, innovation, security, ethics and morality.

[28] In this report, having mastered a skill includes both proficient and basic mastery.

[29] Ministry of Education, 15 April 2025. [Source](#)

Unofficial English translation of CNNIC's 57th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development, Chapter 2, PDF pages 19-30 (printed pages 11-22). Claims, dates and sources are translated as published, not independently verified. Rounded figures are retained. Figure 17 reproduces the source's overlapping age labels; Figure 20 preserves the published vector curves without inventing point values.