

Health literacy: how Switzerland compares with other countries

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General health literacy

Health literacy (HL) is the degree to which individuals have the motivation, knowledge and ability to find, understand and judge health information and to use it to make decisions that have a positive impact on their health.

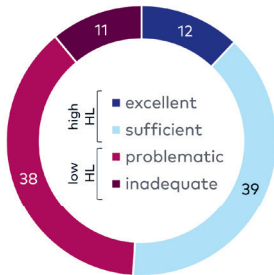


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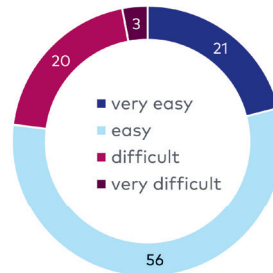
If we consider all 17 countries (including Switzerland), then **46 %** of respondents report frequent difficulties. The share of people in Switzerland with low health literacy is therefore slightly higher.

To describe the population's health literacy differently, so-called «average percentage response patterns» (APRP) were calculated. The APRP measure how often on average a response category was cited across all relevant questions. They therefore reflect the share of individual response options.

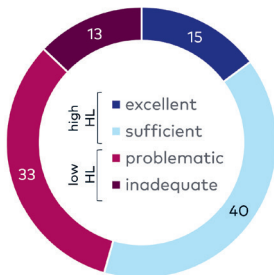
Switzerland (HLS_{19-21-CH})



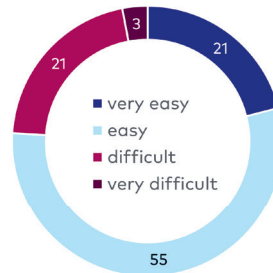
Switzerland (HLS_{19-21-CH})



International (HLS₁₉)



International (HLS₁₉)



49 % of the Swiss population reports frequent difficulties in dealing with health information and therefore has low health literacy.

The figures for Switzerland are very similar to the international average.





Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA
Federal Office of Public Health FOPH

How big are the difficulties in comparison?

Respondents in Switzerland and on average in Europe find it (very) difficult...

		
46%	...to judge the advantages and disadvantages of different treatment options.	43%
45%	...to decide how they can protect themselves from illness using information from the mass media.	40%
41%	...to find information on how to handle mental health problems.	36%
26%	...to make decisions that improve their health and well-being.	26%
23%	...to judge how their housing conditions may affect their health and well-being.	22%
22%	...to understand information about recommended health screenings or examinations.	17%
18%	...to understand advice concerning health from family or friends.	17%
18%	...to understand information about what to do in a medical emergency.	23%
12%	...to judge whether information on unhealthy habits is reliable.	18%
10%	...to find information on healthy lifestyles, such as getting enough exercise and eating a balanced diet.	10%
7%	...to find where to get professional help when ill.	16%
6%	...to act on advice from their doctor or a pharmacist.	8%

Which population groups are more likely to have difficulty in European countries on average?

The results in all 17 countries show that the health literacy of the population follows a social gradient, although this may be more or less marked depending on the country.

Low health literacy particularly affects people...



...living in financial deprivation.



...with a lower social status.

The data also confirm that people with a higher level of health literacy tend to have healthier behaviours and report a better self-perceived health.

The Health Literacy Survey Switzerland 2019–21 (HLS19-21-CH) was part of the international Health Literacy Survey (HLS19), a project of the WHO Action Network on Measuring Population and Organizational Health Literacy (M-POHL). Sixteen countries besides Switzerland participated in the HLS19.

Additional packages were developed in the HLS19 to measure specific aspects. Besides general health literacy, Switzerland also surveyed digital and navigational health literacy.

Navigational health literacy

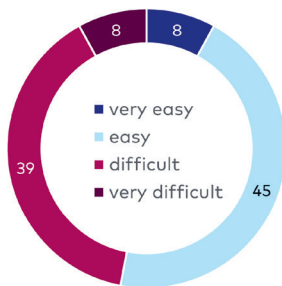
Navigational health literacy refers to the ability of using the available information to navigate the healthcare system.



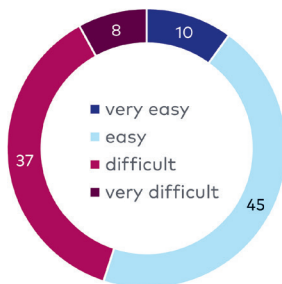
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In terms of navigational health literacy, Switzerland performs slightly less well than the European average.

Switzerland (HLS₁₉₋₂₁-CH)



International (HLS₁₉)



Respondents in Switzerland rate **47%** of the tasks concerning navigational health literacy as (very) difficult. The international average is **45%**.

How do the difficulties compare between Switzerland and the European average?

Respondents find it (very) difficult...

Switzerland	Task	European average
64%	...to find out about their rights as a patient.	52%
60%	...to understand information on healthcare reforms.	57%
59%	...to judge whether a particular health service meets their own expectations.	52%
58%	...to find information on the quality of a particular health service.	49%
54%	...to stand up for themselves if healthcare does not meet their needs.	47%
53%	...to judge to what extent health insurance covers a particular health service.	49%
51%	...to find out about support options that may help them to orientate in the health system.	48%
48%	...to decide for a particular health service.	38%
44%	...to identify the right contact person in a healthcare institution.	42%
36%	...to understand information about how the health system works.	39%
22%	...to judge what type of health service is required.	28%
16%	...to understand how to get an appointment with a particular health service.	20%

The Swiss population only has less difficulty than the European average in three areas. For people in Switzerland, the greatest difficulty lies in finding out about their rights as a patient. This figure is above the international average.

Digital health literacy

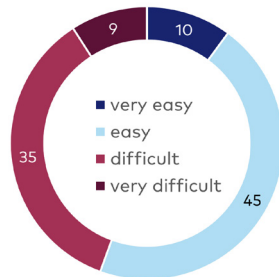
Digital health literacy is the degree to which individuals are able to obtain, understand and judge health information from digital sources and use it to make decisions about their health.



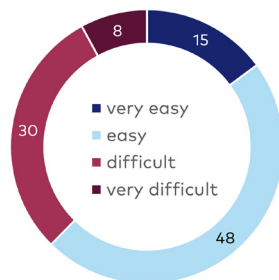
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People in Switzerland perform worse in digital health literacy than the European average.

Switzerland (HLS₁₉₋₂₁-CH)



International (HLS₁₉)



44 % of the items concerning digital health literacy were answered with (very) difficult by respondents in Switzerland, compared with the European average of **38 %**.

How do the difficulties compare between Switzerland and the European average?

Respondents find it (very) difficult...



66%	...to judge whether the information is reliable.	54%
63%	...to judge whether the information is offered with commercial interests.	54%
53%	...to use the information to solve a health problem.	42%
51%	...to judge whether the information is applicable to them.	38%
41%	...to find the exact information they are looking for.	35%
29%	...to understand the information found.	27%
29%	...to visit different websites to check whether they provide similar information about a topic.	25%
24%	...to use the right words or search terms to find the required information.	22%

The Swiss population has basically the same difficulties as the rest of Europe when it comes to dealing with digital health information, although they are more marked in Switzerland.

Sources:

De Gani, S. M., Jaks, R., Bieri, U., Kocher, J. Ph. (2021). Health Literacy Survey Schweiz 2019-21. Schlussbericht im Auftrag des Bundesamtes für Gesundheit BAG. Zürich, Careum Stiftung. *(Final report commissioned by the Federal Office of Public Health FOPH. In German with an English summary).*

The HLS₁₉ Consortium of the WHO Action Network M-POHL (2021): International Report on the Methodology, Results, and Recommendations of the European Health Literacy Population Survey 2019-2021 (HLS₁₉) of M-POHL. Austrian National Public Health Institute, Vienna.

Download HLS₁₉-Study: www.m-pohl.net/Result

More information (in German):

www.careum.ch/studie-gesundheitskompetenz



Careum

Pestalozzistrasse 3, CH-8032 Zürich

T +41 43 222 50 00

info@careum.ch, careum.ch