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## Exploring Health Literacy in the international context – Why does it matter?

3. ZVFK-Forum Versorgungsforschung, Köln, Germany, 26. November 2013

**Dr. Kristine Sørensen; project coordinator (HLS-EU)**

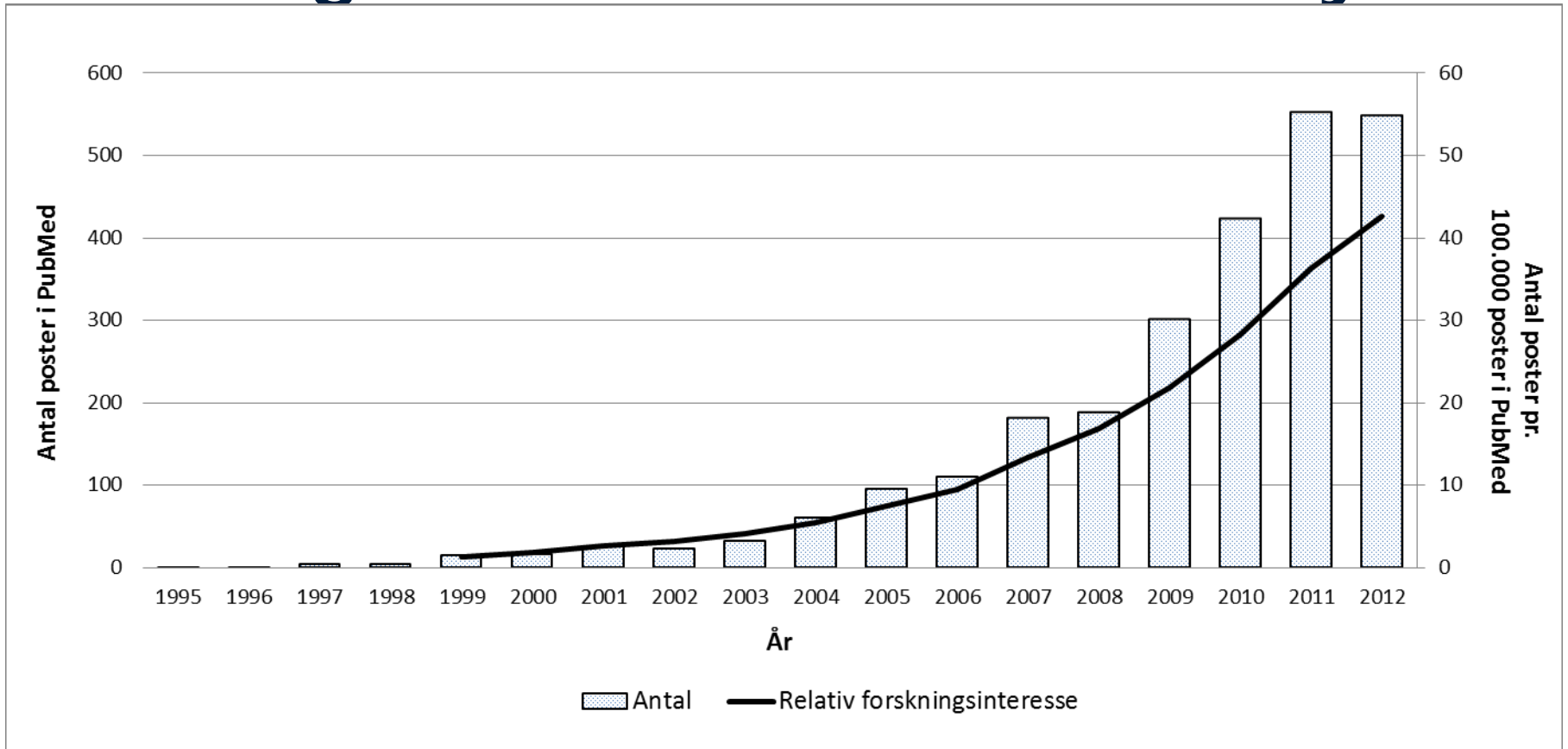
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# Why does health literacy matter?

- "**Most clinicians assume** patients understand everything but this is frequently not the case. **Patients may not realize** they don't quite understand, or even when they know they don't understand, they are **afraid or ashamed** to tell the clinician,"
- Health literacy - the ability to understand and use health information - **depends on individual skills and also on the complexity of the health information being presented.**
- People with lower health literacy, for example, **might not know how to take their medications** or why they have to follow specific doctor's instructions.
- In 2003, a U.S. government study found that **89 million** Americans had limited health literacy skills and they came from all segments of society.
- "Patients with low or limited health literacy have poor outcomes from a number of disease processes which results in **increased costs** to society".

# Growing interest in health literacy



# The European Health Literacy Survey

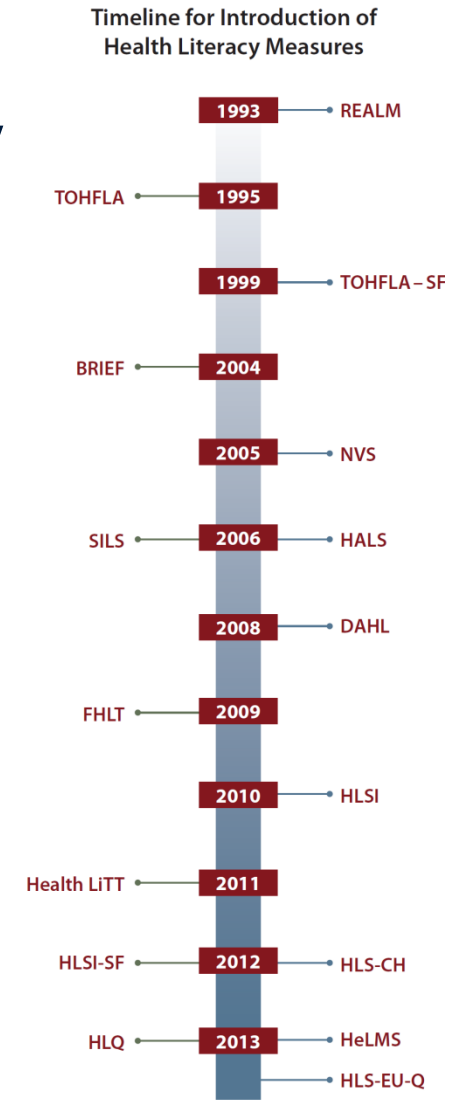
**HILS • EU**

Supported by the European Commission 2009-2012

# Measuring health literacy

# Measuring different dimensions of health literacy

- Health
- Literacy
- Interaction
- Comprehension
- Numeracy
- Information seeking
- Application/function
- Decision-making, critical thinking
- Evaluation
- Responsibility
- Confidence (self-efficacy)
- Navigation



# Key differences between health literacy measures

- Health literacy focus
- Self-administered, performance-based, long distance administration
- Number of items
- Training required
- Scoring
- Target audience
- Correlation with other tests



# Implications for Practice

- Transparency about definitions, frameworks and language
- Use of multiple measures
- Differentiate between health literacy measures - screening tools and research tools; specific or generic; objective or self-reported etc.
- Choose the most suitable and feasible measurement for the right purpose





# Defining health literacy



Ursus Wehrli

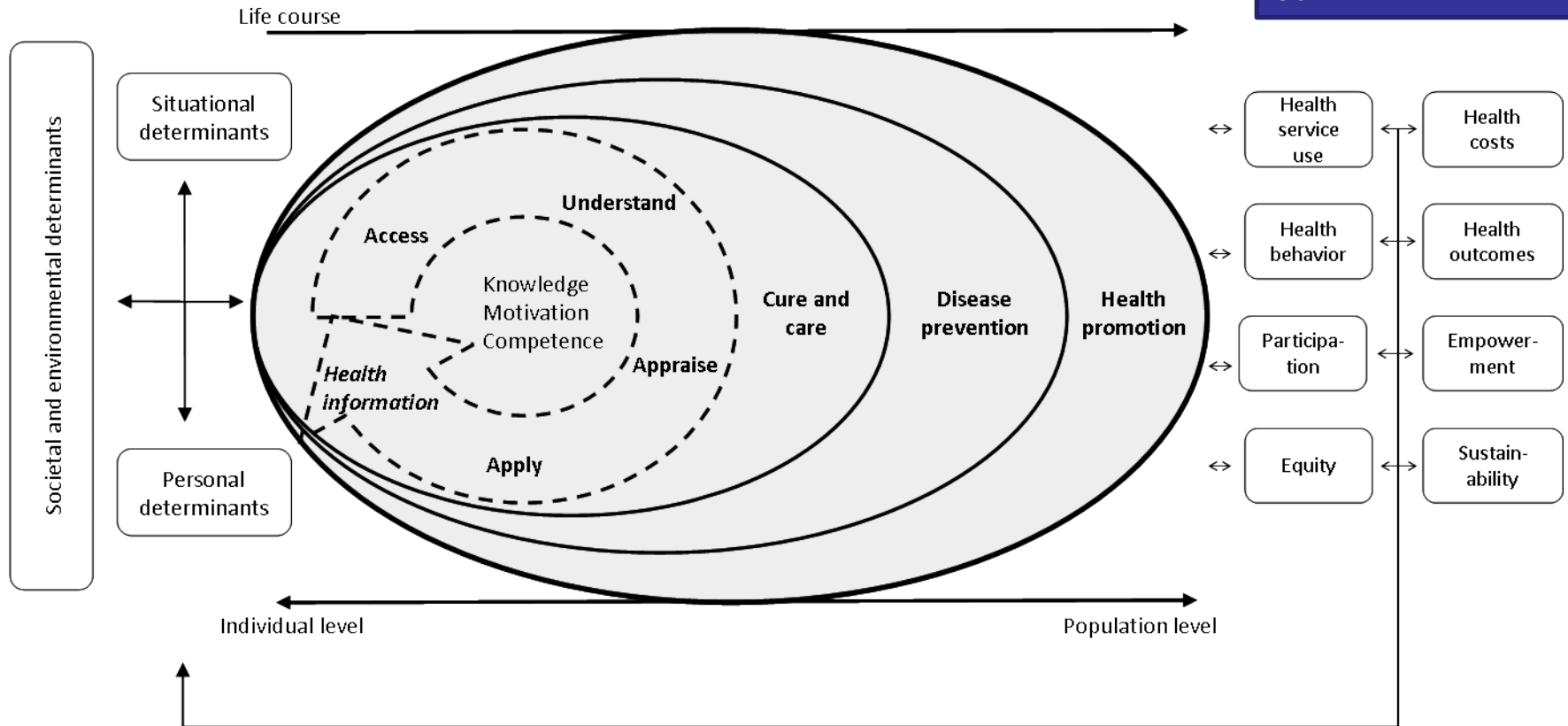


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# Definition of health literacy

Health literacy is linked to literacy and it entails people's **knowledge, motivation and competences** to access, understand, appraise and apply information to take decisions in everyday life in terms of healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion to maintain and improve quality of life during the life course.

# HLS-EU model



## Milestones in the HLS-EU survey

- Literature review
- Conceptual model
- Questionnaire development (HLS-EU-Q)
- Pilot
  - Focus groups (Ireland, Greece and the Netherlands)
  - Face to face interviews (Ireland and the Netherlands)
- Survey in eight countries (Summer 2011)
- Results and report (Primo 2012)



<b>Health literacy matrix</b>	Access/ obtain	Understand	Appraise	Apply
Cure & Care	Are you able to find information about symptoms that concern you?	Are you able to understand your doctor's or pharmacist's on how to take prescribed medicine?	Are you able to judge how information from your doctor applies to you?	Are you able to follow the instructions on medication?
Disease prevention	Are you able to find information on vaccinations and health screenings, that you should have?	Are you able to understand why you should need health screenings?	Are you able to judge when you should go to a doctor for a health check-up?	Are you able to decide if you should have a flu vaccination?
Health promotion	Are you able find information on healthy activities such as exercise, healthy food and nutrition?	Are you able to understand information on food packaging?	Are you able to judge how where you live affects your health and well-being?	Are you able to make decisions to improve your own health?

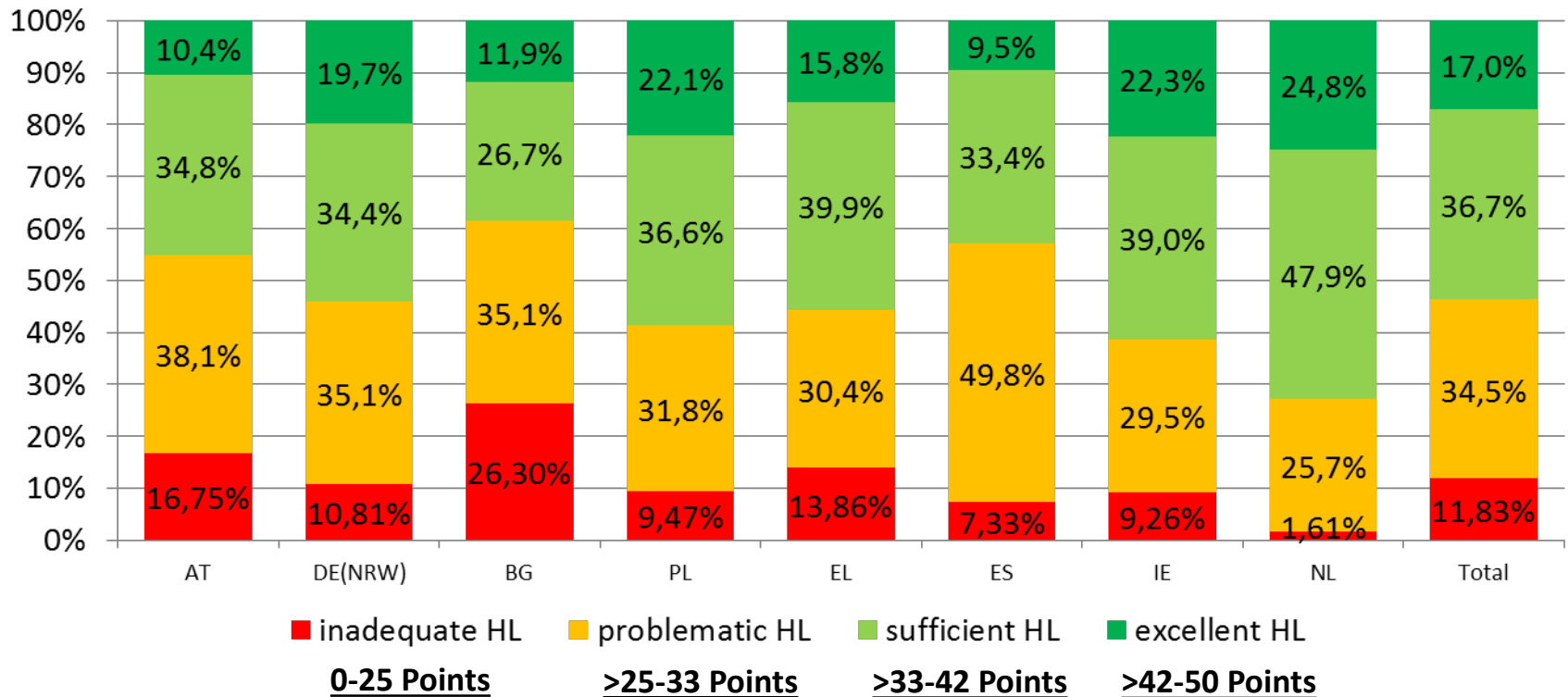
## HLS-EU-Q

- Questionnaire in three versions
- More than ten languages
- Population health literacy measure
- Research tool rather than screening tool
- Self-reported



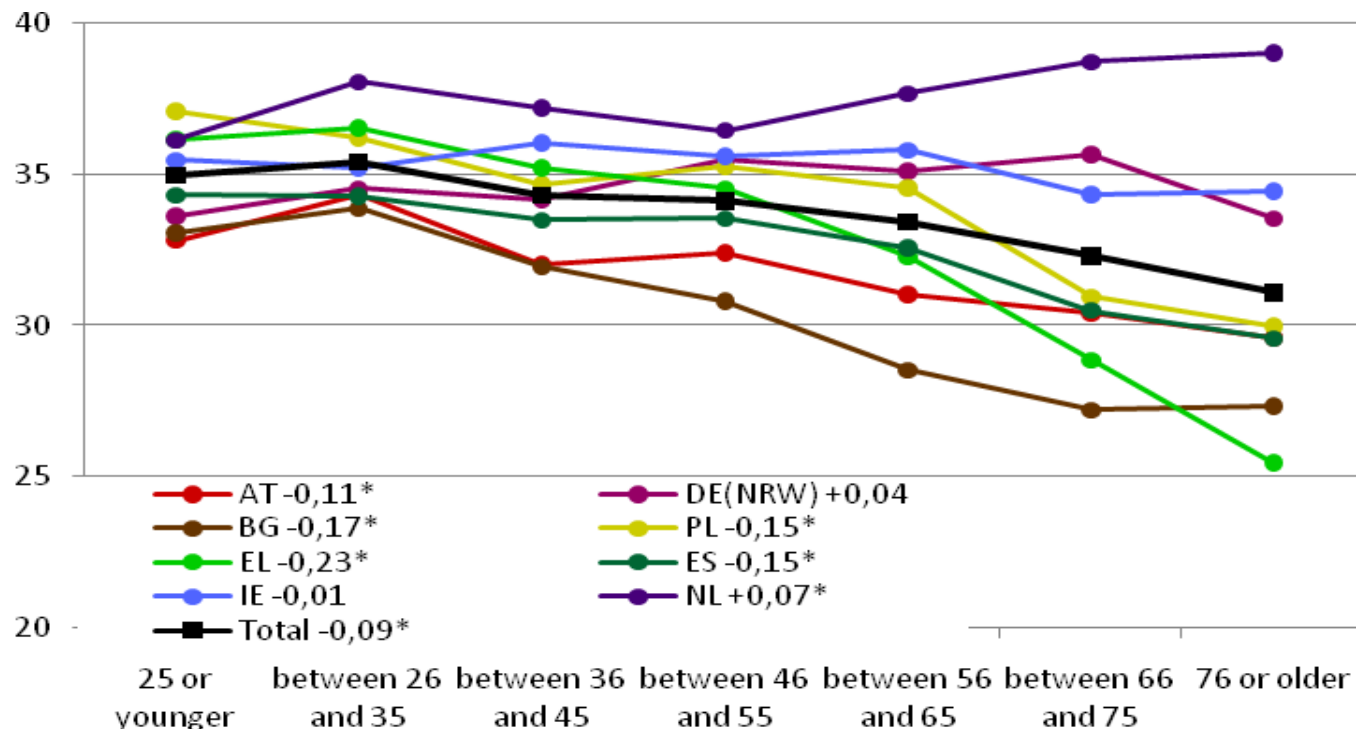
# Cross-national analysis

## Percentages of different levels of the general HL-Index in the 8 participating countries and the total sample of HLS-EU

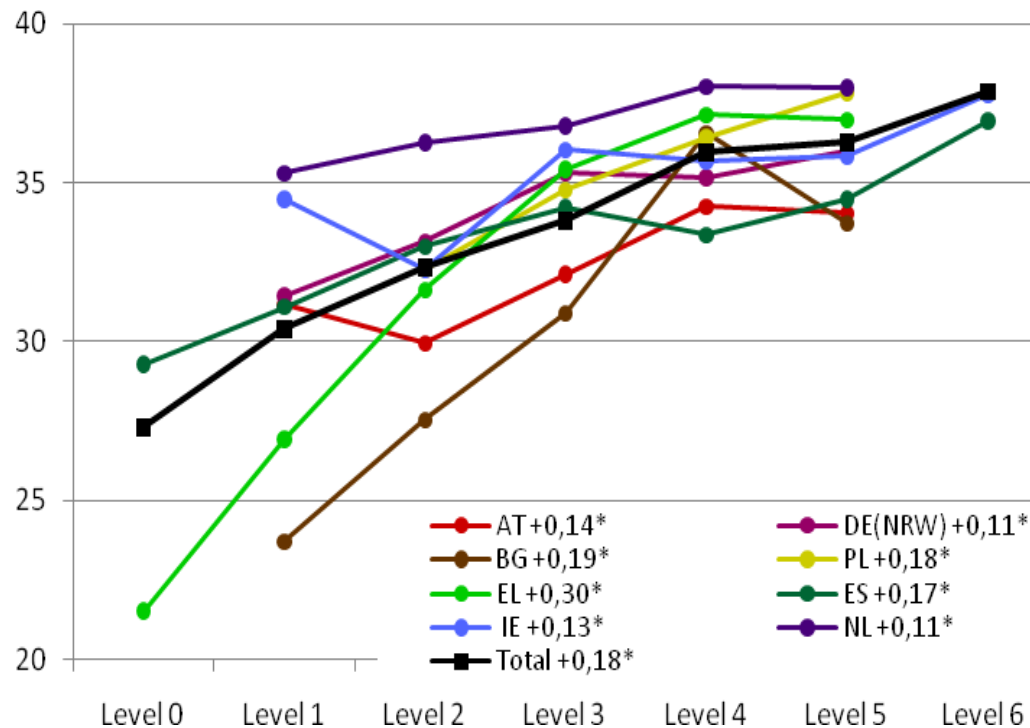


The general HL Index is based on means of all 47 items of the HLS-EU Instrument. It is standardized between 0 and 50, where 0 is the minimal possible health literacy and 50 is the maximal possible health literacy.

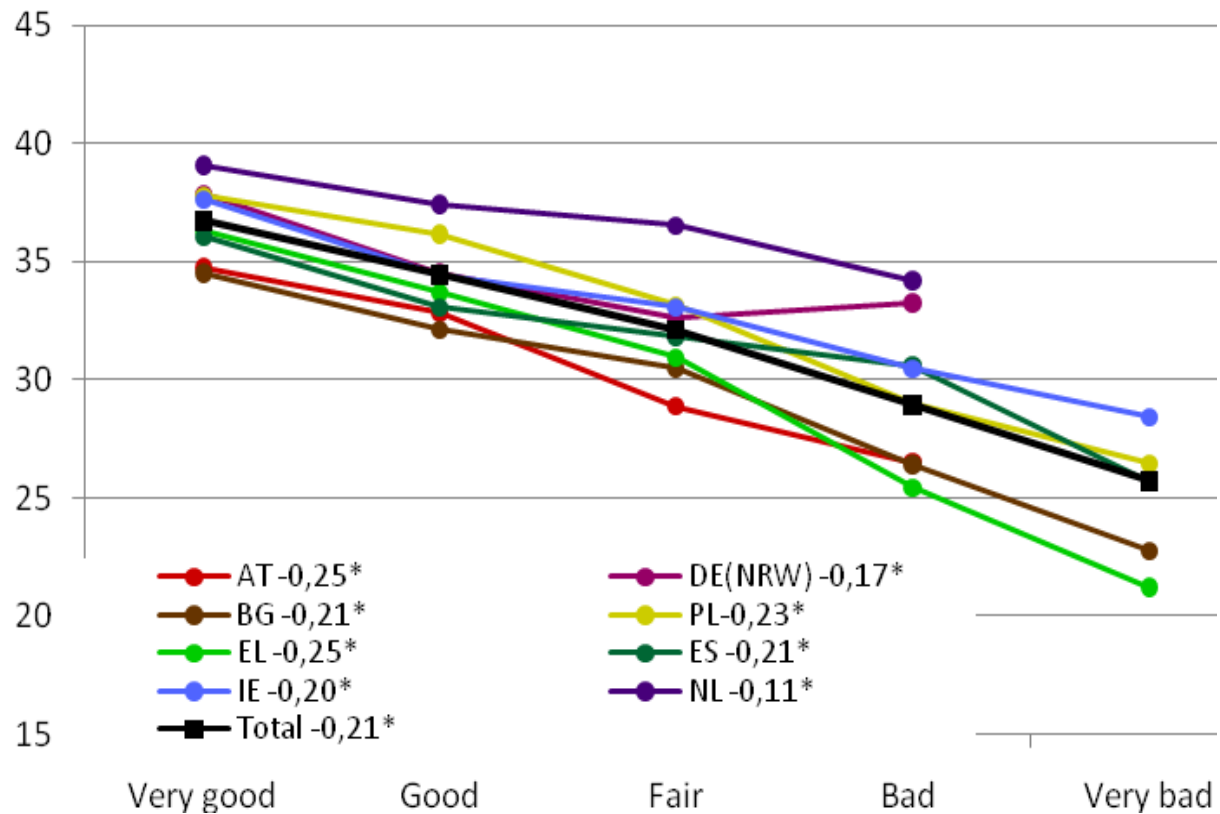
# Health Literacy by Age and Country : General Health Literacy



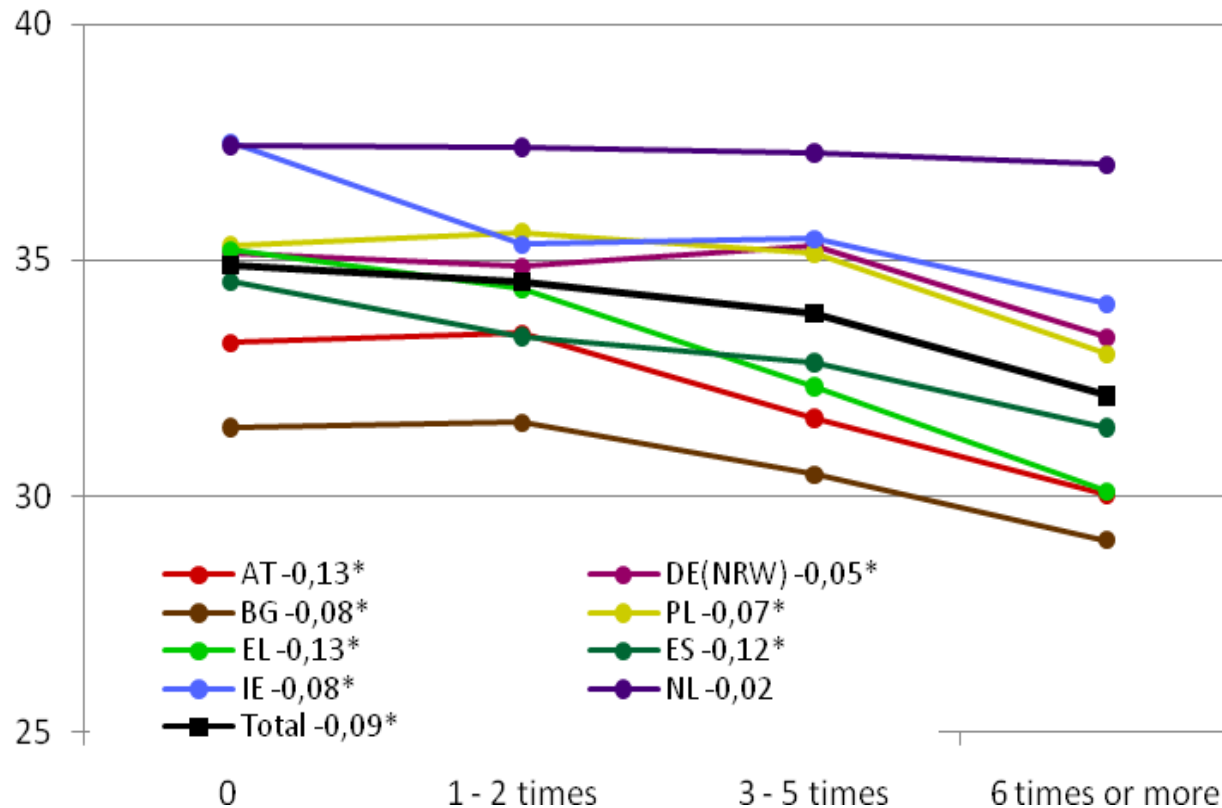
# Health Literacy by Education and Country: General Health Literacy



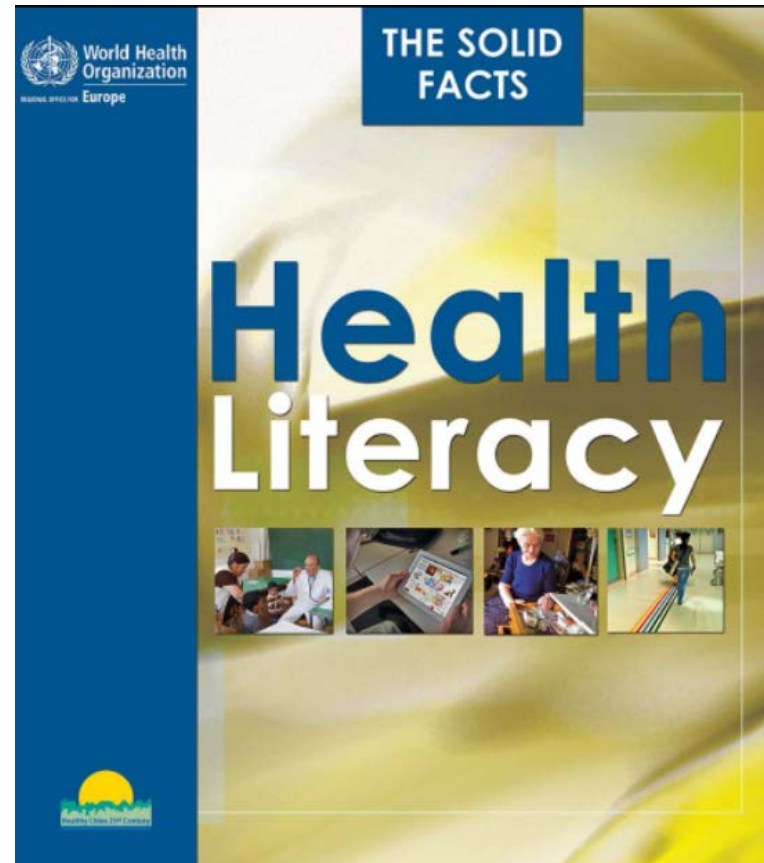
# Health Literacy by Self Perceived Health and Country



# Health Literacy by Doctor Visits and Country



# Why is Health Literacy important?



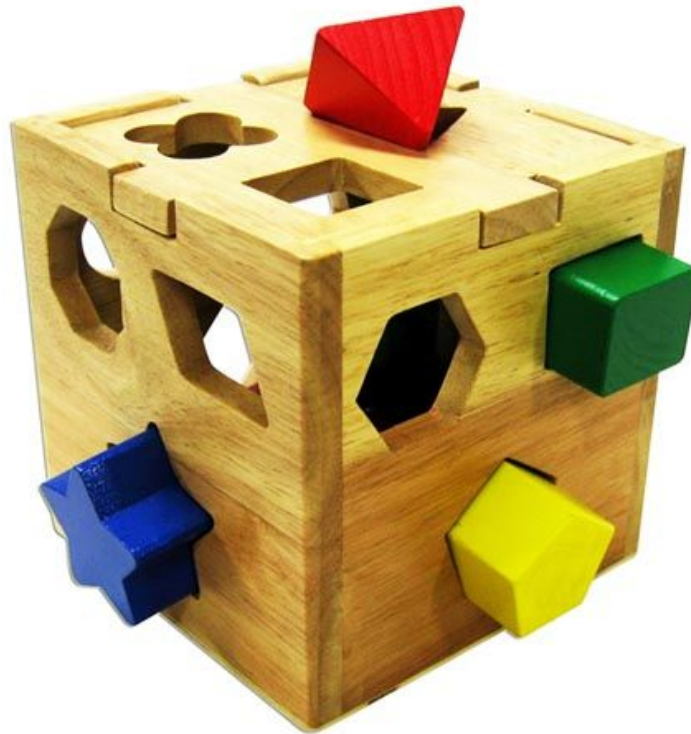


*If one is truly to succeed in leading a person to a specific place, one must first and foremost take care to find him where he is and begin there.*

(Søren Kierkegaard)

# In health literacy

- there is no size that fits all



# Health literacy – the dual responsibility

- You can educate people to be more resourceful and by that advance their health literacy

and

- You can make the task/role/situation/context they have to cope with less demanding

# Changing the role of clinicians: knowledge brokers





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# HEALTH LITERACY EUROPE

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**SAVE THE DATE!**



[www.healthliteracyeurope.net](http://www.healthliteracyeurope.net)

Abstracts: 8. December 2013

# Readings

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**Questions or more information?**

[www.health-literacy.eu](http://www.health-literacy.eu)

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**THANK YOU!**