

SILC variables on health status

(EXTRACT FROM THE EU-SILC DESCRIPTION OF TARGET VARIABLES)

PH010: General health

HEALTH (Health, including health status and chronic illness or condition)

Cross-sectional and longitudinal

Reference period: current

Unit: Selected respondent (where applies) or all current household members aged 16 and over

Mode of collection: Personal interview (proxy as an exception) or registers

Values

1	very good
2	good
3	fair
4	bad
5	very bad

Flags

1	filled
-1	missing
-3	not selected respondent

The measurement of self-perceived health (SPH) is, by its very nature, subjective. The notion is restricted to an assessment coming from the individual and not from anyone outside that individual, whether an interviewer, health care worker or relative. SPH is influenced by impressions or opinions from others, but is the result after these impressions have been processed by the individual relative to their own beliefs and attitudes.

The reference is to health in general rather than the present state of health, as the question is not intended to measure temporary health problems. It is expected to include the different dimensions of health, i.e. physical, social and emotional function and biomedical signs and symptoms. It omits any reference to an age. It is not time limited.

Five answers categories are proposed. Two (very good and good) are at the upper end of the scale and two (bad and very bad) are at the lower. It is also important to note that the intermediate category 'fair' should be translated into an appropriately neutral term, as far as possible keeping in mind cultural interpretations, in the various languages.

For this question a proxy should be limited as much as possible.

PH020: Suffer from any a chronic (long-standing) illness or condition

HEALTH (Health, including health status and chronic illness or condition)

Cross-sectional and longitudinal

Reference period: current

Unit: Selected respondent (where applies) or all current household members aged 16 and over

Mode of collection: Personal interview (proxy as an exception) or registers

Values

1	yes
2	no

Flags

1	filled
-1	missing
-3	not selected respondent

It is necessary to keep in mind that the recommended wording contains ‘alternatives’. For instance:

- ‘chronic’ or ‘longstanding’ should be chosen according to what is ‘best understood’ in a country/language.
- it is intended to ask if people ‘have’ a chronic condition, not if they really suffer from it. But it seems that in some countries/languages it would be strange to use the word ‘have’ and that they ‘suffer’ means the same as ‘have’.
- ‘health problem’ seems not to be understood in some countries/languages and therefore ‘illness or condition’ is the alternative.

The main characteristics of a chronic condition are that it is permanent and may be expected to require a long period of supervision, observation or care.

Rather than adding further details to the question wording, interviewers should be instructed to be as inclusive as possible in answering to PH020. This means that the following would all be included:

- problems that are seasonal or intermittent, even where they ‘flare up’ for less than six months at a time;
- problems not seen by the respondent as very serious (hay fever again): the item on severity or limitation would ‘screen out’ less serious problems at the second stage;
- problems that have not been diagnosed by a doctor (to exclude these would mean permitting those with better access to medical services to declare more problems);
- problems that the respondent treats him self or herself (e.g. with over-the-counter drugs);
- problems that have lasted (or recurred), or are expected to last (recur) over a six month period or longer.

For this question a proxy should be limited as much as possible.

PH030: Limitation in activities because of health problems

[Limitation in activities people usually do because of health problems for at least the last 6 months]

HEALTH (Health, including health status and chronic illness or condition)

Cross-sectional and longitudinal

Reference period: current

Unit: Selected respondent (where applies) or all current household members aged 16 and over

Mode of collection: Personal interview (proxy as an exception) or registers

Values

1	yes, strongly limited
2	yes, limited
3	no, not limited

Flags

1	filled
-1	missing
-3	not selected respondent

The person's self-assessment of whether they are hampered in their daily activity by any ongoing physical or mental health problem, illness or disability.

An activity is defined as: 'the performance of a task or action by an individual' and thus activity limitations are defined as 'the difficulties the individual experience in performing an activity'. Limitations should be due to a health condition.

The activity limitations are assessed against a generally accepted population standard, relative to cultural and social expectations by referring only to activities people usually do. This is a self-perceived health question and gives no restrictions by culture, age, gender or the subjects own ambition.

Specification of health concepts (e.g. physical and mental health) should be avoided.

The purpose of the instrument is to measure the presence of long-standing limitations, as the consequences of these limitations (e.g. care, dependency) are more serious. A 6 months period is often used to define chronic or long-standing diseases in surveys.

The period of at least the last 6 months is relating to the limitation. The answer to this question is yes (1 or 2) if the person is currently limited and has been limited in activities for at least the last 6 months.

In the response categories, a distinction is made in three levels of severity (yes strongly limited, yes limited, no not limited).

If the problem is seasonal or recurring the interviewee has to think in general over the at least the last six months (or coming six months if condition has just developed), would you say it has limited you strongly, somewhat or not at all.