HEALTH EXPECTANCY IN THE NETHERLANDS

What is health expectancy?

Health expectancies were first developed to address whether or not longer life is being accompanied by an increase in the time lived in good health (the compression of morbidity scenario) or in bad health (expansion of morbidity). So health expectancies divide life expectancy into life spent in different states of health, from say good to bad health. In this way they add a dimension of quality to the quantity of life lived.

How is the effect of longer life measured?

The general model of health transitions (WHO, 1984) shows the differences between life spent in different states: total survival, disability-free survival and survival without chronic disease. This leads naturally to life expectancy (the area under the ‘mortality’ curve), disability-free life expectancy (the area under the ‘disability’ curve) and life expectancy without chronic disease (the area under the ‘morbidity’ curve).


There are in fact as many health expectancies as concepts of health. The commonest health expectancies are those based on self-perceived health, activities of daily living and on chronic morbidity.

How do we compare health expectancies?

Health expectancies are independent of the size of populations and of their age structure and so they allow direct comparison of different population sub-groups: e.g. sexes, socio-professional categories, as well as countries within Europe (Robine et al., 2003).

Health expectancies are most often calculated by the Sullivan method (Sullivan, 1971). However to make valid comparisons, the underlying health measure should be truly comparable.

To address this, the European Union has decided to include a small set of health expectancies among its European Community Health Indicators (ECHI) to provide synthetic measures of disability, chronic morbidity and perceived health. Therefore the Minimum European Health Module (MEHM), composed of 3 general questions covering these dimensions, has been introduced into the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) to improve the comparability of health expectancies between countries.* In addition life expectancy without long term activity limitation, based on the disability question, was selected in 2004 to be one of the structural indicators for assessing the EU strategic goals (Lisbon strategy) under the name of “Healthy Life Years” (HLY).

What is in this report?

This report is produced by the European Health Expectancy Monitoring Unit (EHEMU) as part of a country series. In each report we present:

- Life expectancies** and health expectancies at age 65 based on activity limitation (HLY) for the country of interest and for the overall 25 European Union member states (EU25), using the SILC question on long term activity limitation for 2005, 2006 and 2007. As the SILC has been only recently initiated, to document trends we provide previous HLY series based on the disability question of the 1995-2001 European Community Household Panel (ECHP)

- health expectancies based on the two additional dimensions of health (chronic morbidity and self-perceived health) for the country of interest, based on SILC 2007

- a global analysis of health expectancies of European countries, based on the SILC 2007

References


*Nevertheless, before 2008, the translations of the module used in some countries were not optimum (See Eurostat-EU Task Force on Health Expectancies common statement about the SILC data quality); ** Computed with the Eurostat method.
Life expectancy (LE) and Healthy Life Years (HLY) at age 65 for the Netherlands and the European Union (EU15 and EU25) based on ECHP (1995-2001) and SILC (2005-2007)

---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---
Women : LE | 19.2 | 19.2 | 19.3 | 19.4 | 19.2 | 19.3 | 19.4 | | | | | | | |
Women : HLY | 10.6 | 10.6 | 10.7 | 10.3 | 10.7 | 9.6 | 9.7 | | | | 10.9 | 11.2 | 12.1 | | |
% HLY/LE | 55% | 55% | 55% | 53% | 56% | 50% | 50% | | | | 54% | 55% | | |

EU15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
EU25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Key points:
- Dutch life expectancy (LE) at age 65 has increased by 1.4 years for women and 2.0 years for men over the 1997-2007 period: LE for both sexes between 1995-2001 were slightly below the EU15 average and by 2007 LE for both sexes was at the EU25 average.
- Over the 1995-2001 period, health expectancy based on activity limitation (HLY) at age 65 from the ECHP data decreased for women but remained almost stable for men. The proportion of HLY (or years without self-reported limitations due to health condition or disability), within the total expected years, decreased for both sexes, being close to 50% for women and 60% for men in 2001. Between 1995 and 1999 HLY in the Netherlands was above the EU15 average but dropped to the EU15 average in 2001.
- The new HLY series, initiated in 2005 with the SILC data, show values for the Netherlands being in 2007 3.4 and 2.6 years above the EU25 average for women and men respectively. In 2007 women and men at age 65 can expect to spend 58% and 65% of their life without self-reported long-term activity limitations respectively. Between 2006 and 2007 HLY increased strongly for men and women in the Netherlands.
Life and health expectancies at age 65 based on activity limitation (Healthy Life Years), chronic morbidity and perceived health for the Netherlands (Health data from SILC 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Expectancy at age 65 and expected years</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Without activity limitation</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With moderate activity limitation</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With severe activity limitation</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Expectancy at age 65 and expected years</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Without chronic morbidity</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With chronic morbidity</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Life Expectancy at age 65 and expected years</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In very good or good perceived health</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In fair perceived health</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In bad or very bad perceived health</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* = provisional values

Key points:
- In 2007 LE at age 65 in the Netherlands was 20.7 years for women and 17.1 years for men.
- Based on the SILC 2007 at age 65, women spent 12.1 years (58% of their remaining life) without activity limitation (corresponding to Healthy Life Years (HLY)), 5.4 years (26%) with moderate activity limitation and 3.3 years (16%) with severe activity limitation. *
- Men of the same age spent 11.2 years (65% of remaining life) without activity limitation compared to 3.1 years (18%) with moderate activity limitation and 2.8 years (17%) with severe activity limitation. *
- Although for all the health expectancies the years of life spent in positive health were greater for women than men, women spent a larger proportion of their life in ill health.

These results should be interpreted cautiously given the lack of the institutional population and in some countries the small sample size. The sample size for Netherlands comprised 985 women and 667 men aged 65+ years in 2007.

* These may not sum to Life Expectancy due to rounding.

Published results and other reports of health expectancies for the Netherlands


The prevalence of activity limitation in Europe in 2007 and change over time

Since 2005, SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) has allowed activity limitation to be monitored at the EU25 level thanks to the Global Activity Limitation Indicator (GALI), a key component of the Healthy Life Years (HLY).

After three years of monitoring, three main points can be made which confirm and generalize previous studies made in specific EU countries (Figure and Table below).


1. Limitation in usual activities strongly increases with age, from a few percent of the population below age 20 to more that 50% after age 75.
2. Women systematically report more activity limitation than men. It is noteworthy that this difference declines with age from about 25% for the youngest (0.07 vs 0.05) to about 10% for the most elderly (0.71 vs 0.65)
3. The prevalence of activity limitation in the EU25 appears to have remained stable over time as demonstrated by the standardized prevalence rate at age 65 and over (see Table).

Standardized prevalence of activity limitation at age 65 years and over, SILC EU25, 2005-2007\textsuperscript{n}

From a methodological point of view, this picture clearly suggests that the irregularities observed for some countries, by age or over time, might be fluctuations due to smaller sample size. At the EU level, SILC provides sound information on disability and more specifically on limitation in usual activities.

From a public health point of view, these results suggest that the current increase in life expectancy in Europe is not accompanied by an increase in the prevalence of activity limitation.

About EHEMU

The European Health Expectancy Monitoring Unit (EHEMU) and its current project European Health and Life Expectancy Information System (EHLEIS) are funded by the European Public Health Programme (2004-2008) and is a collaboration between: the French national institute on health and medical research (INSERM) and CRLC (Montpellier, France), the University of Leicester (UK), the Scientific Institute of Public Health (ISP Belgium), the French National Institute of Demography (INED), University Charles (Czech Republic), Erasmus University Medical centre (The Netherlands) and University of Rostock (Germany). EHEMU aims to provide a central facility for the co-ordinated analysis, interpretation and dissemination of life and health expectancies to add the quality dimension to the quantity of life lived by the European populations. Further details about EHEMU can be found on the websites: [www.ehemu.eu](http://www.ehemu.eu) and [www.healthy-life-years.eu](http://www.healthy-life-years.eu)