



HEALTH LITERACY – A TOOL FOR HEALTH PROMOTION

Costa A¹; Saboga-Nunes L²; Costa L¹

¹Departamento de Promoção da Saúde e Prevenção de Doenças Não Transmissíveis, Instituto Nacional de Saúde Doutor Ricardo Jorge, Lisboa;

²Rede Lusófona para a Promoção da Literacia para a Saúde www.literacia-saude.info, Centro de Investigação em Saúde Pública, Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal.

BACKGROUND

Health Promotion (HP) is the process that enables citizens to create conditions to increase their ability to control the determinants of health, with the aim of improving it [1].

Health Literacy (HL) is a relevant tool in the field of HP as it relates to the ability to deal with health information, in various situations and throughout the life cycle [2-3].

Low HL may lead to a:

- higher number of hospitalizations and a more frequent use of emergency services,
- lower prevalence of preventive attitudes in the health field,
- lower quality of life.

OBJECTIVES

Assess the HL level of a Portuguese sample using the HLS-EU methodology [3], and compare it with the results published by the HLS-EU Consortium.

METHODS

Between 2011 and 2013 were collected in Portugal 1180 surveys, being retained 983 responses (valid surveys). The Portuguese version HLS-EU-PT was validated in 2013 [5].

The data analysis method adopted was based on the HLS-EU Consortium conceptual model [4] as an instrument for the measurement of HL in samples from eight European Member States from the application of the *European Health Literacy Survey* [3]. Eurobarometer methodology served as a standard for the assessment of HL.

RESULTS

- The Portuguese sample referred presents **59.9%** of a limited HL level (figure 1).
- The more difficult auto-perceived tasks for Portuguese sample were related to:
 - 1) health policies (53%)
 - 2) reliability of media (50%),
 - 3) evaluation of different treatment options (43%).

- Compared to the results of the HLS-EU report [3], only Bulgaria, other than Portugal, has the worst HL scenario accounting for 62% of respondents (graph 1).
- On the other hand, initially was reported a total of 12.4% of respondents from the 8 countries showed an inadequate overall HL level [3]. When adding the Portuguese results, this value increased to 13.8% (graph 1).

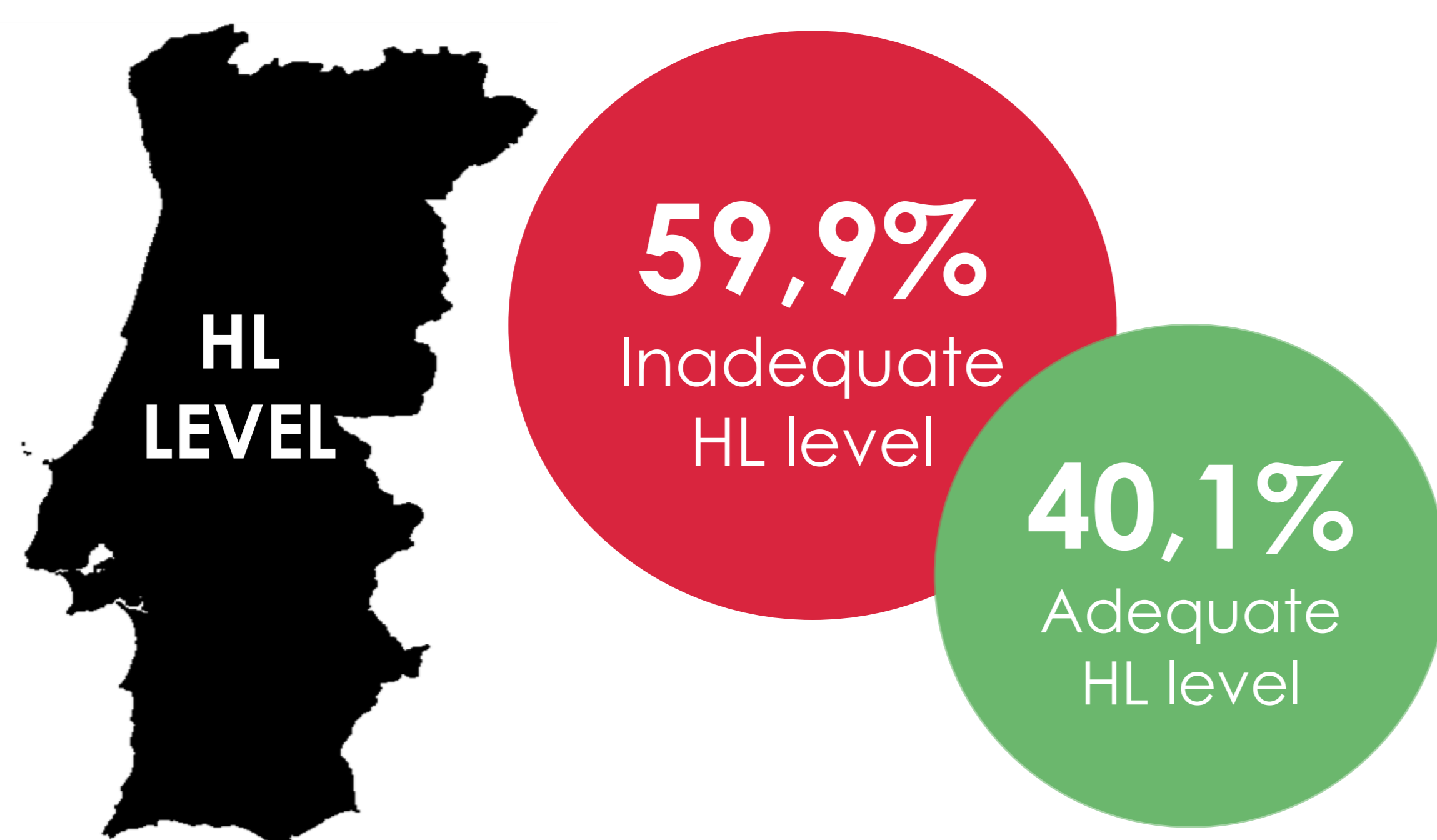
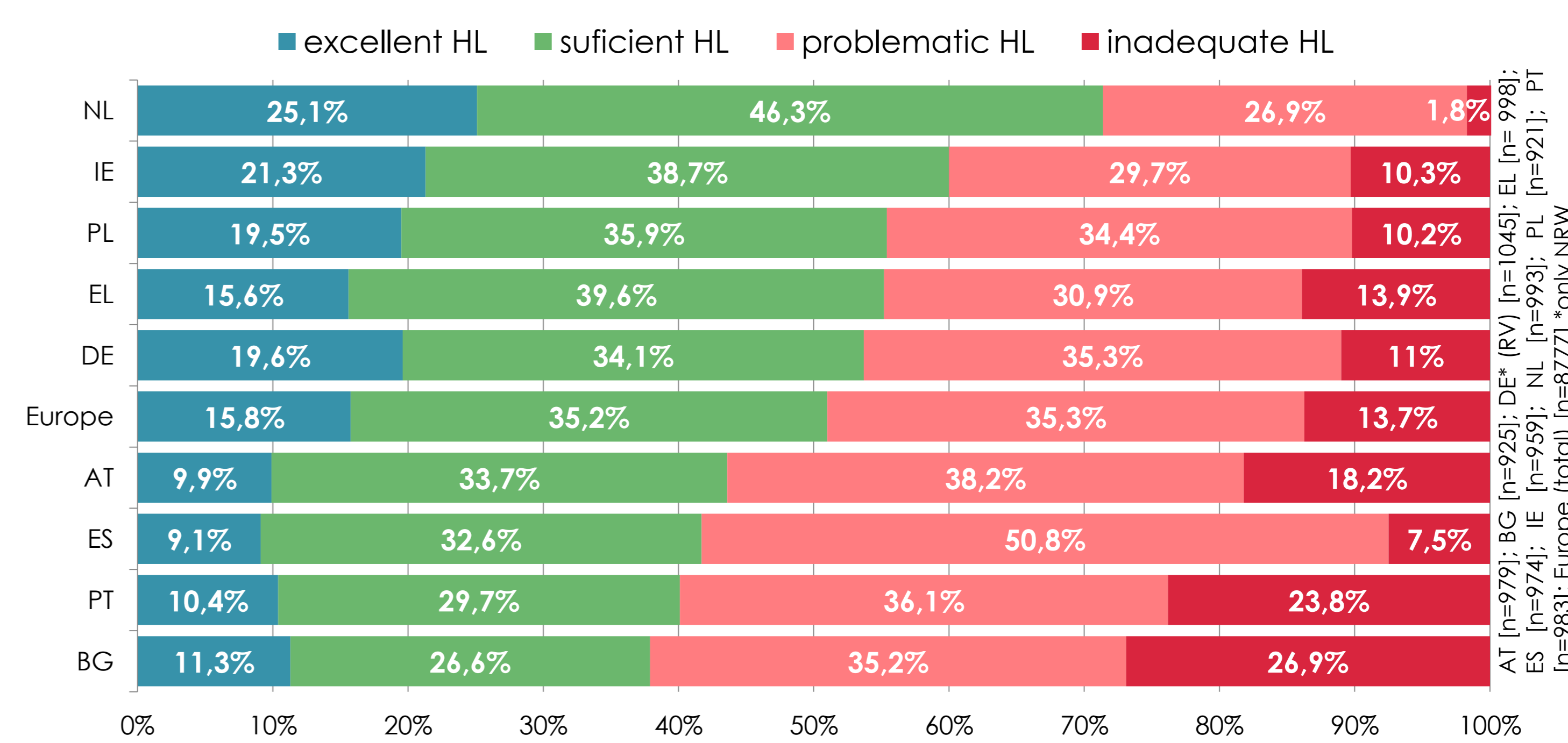


Figure 1. Health Literacy Levels in Portuguese sample.



Graph 1. Percentages of General Health Literacy Levels Thresholds for Member States and Europe (total)

DISCUSSION

The data presented here allow us to make some inferences about the **low HL status of our country within the EU**. Thus, the need to put Health Promotion in political agenda is highlighted.

Cases of inadequate level of HL, as indicated by the Portuguese sample could mean a compromised quality of life and well-being, especially of those who are at risk and socially vulnerable.

A broad discussion of HL's determinants is needed, to allow design a more strategic interventions that enables the establishment of healthy communities, only conquerable with the adoption of 'Health in all Policies' (HiAP).

CONCLUSIONS

Portuguese respondents present significant difficulties regarding the different ways of dealing with relevant health information in various situations and throughout its life cycle.

It is noted that in the EU a limited HL is not a minority problem and isn't confined to a single Member State. In addition, the percentages for the four HL-general levels show considerable variation across countries.

Several factors and their associations may influence the observed results and therefore should be taken into account in the casuistic construction of public policies to promote HL.

REFERENCES:

- [1] World Health Organization. The Ottawa charter for health promotion. [Em linha]. (consult. 14/09/2016). www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/
- [2] Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization. Health literacy: the solid facts. Copenhagen: WHO, 2013. www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/190655/e96854.pdf
- [3] HLS-EU Consortium. Comparative report on health literacy in eight EU Member States. The European Health Literacy Survey HLS-EU, 2012. http://ec.europa.eu/chafea/documents/news/Comparative_report_on_health_literacy_in_eight_EU_member_states.pdf
- [4] Sørensen K, Van den Broucke S, Fullam J, et al.; (HLS-EU) Consortium Health Literacy Project European. Health literacy and public health: a systematic review and integration of definitions and models. BMC Public Health. 2012;12:80. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC/22276600/
- [5] Saboga-Nunes L, Sørensen K, Pelican J, Hermêutica da literacia em saúde e sua avaliação em Portugal (HLS-EU-PT). In: 40 anos de democracia(s): Progressos, contradições e perspectivas. Atas do VIII Congresso Português de Sociologia. Lisboa: Associação Portuguesa de Sociologia, 2014.