

# Health indicators as indicators of the progress of civilization

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## Abstract

The health status of a population defined by deliberately chosen indicators can be treated as one of principal elements of the civilization progress constituted by the development of the public health area, i.e. improvement of particular indicators relating directly to the health of the population. Within different societies this process runs at different rates and has different priorities. The activities aiming at increasing its dynamics and rationalizing its targets may contribute to the civilization progress in its health dimension.

The paper is an attempt to apply a taxonomic method of international comparisons in order to set the population health development goals. The method is illustrated by the example of 28 EU countries. The health status of the populations of these countries has been operationalized in the set of six indicators. On the basis of applying the method some procedures of setting out the development perspective within the population health area is illustrated using the example of Poland.

**Key words:** population health, taxonomic method, development goals

**Słowa kluczowe:** zdrowie populacji, metoda taksonomiczna, cele rozwojowe



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## Civilization and health

It is generally accepted that the different properties of particular areas of social life to a large extent determine the phenomena and processes forming the health condition of the population. Therefore, it can be assumed that health indicators in a specific way show the general situation of society, which can be defined as the level of civilization development, civilization advancement or civilization progress.

The concept of civilization can be used attributively (to indicate a characteristic or set of characteristics of an individual or society), processually (as a path of, or the process of acquiring characteristics or properties that form subsequent stages of civilization) or as a certain entity (to indicate a macro-social group).

Clear traces of these semantic distinctions can be found in social sciences and in historical literature, where the term ‘civilization’ is used in a variety of ways. In one of the meanings, used and developed above all in Germany from the late nineteenth century to World War II, and perhaps best represented in the works of Alfred Weber, and in the English-speaking world by Robert M. MacIver, the term ‘civilization’ – in contrast to ‘society’ and especially ‘culture’ – covers primarily material, technological and to some extent organizational aspects of social life, excluding the deeper, more ‘spiritual’, cultural or aesthetic dimensions.

Another meaning of the term, adopted by Norbert Elias in *On the Process of Civilization*, focused on the ‘socializing’ process in the course of which the image of a civilized person construed at the European courts