



Disability in Sweden

The Importance of Disability

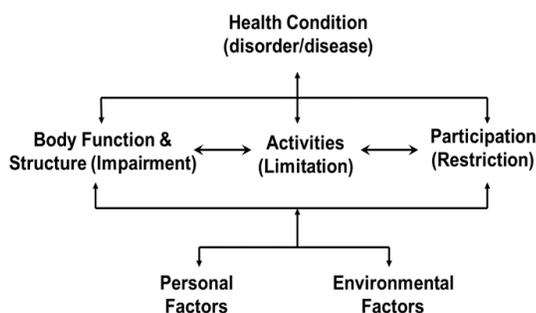
Disability is both a multidimensional concept and experience. Disability can affect anyone at any time – from birth through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

Worldwide, many people with disabilities do not have equal access to education, employment, and health care. In addition, those with disability may experience barriers to participating in civic and social life activities.

Defining Disability

No single definition of disability exists. Definitions vary depending on the purpose for measurement. Moreover, the nature and severity of disabilities can vary greatly depending on cultural contexts¹. Yet, data on the size and characteristics of the population with disability, which also allow for cross-cultural comparisons, require standardization in both the conceptualization and the measurement of disability.

The ICF Model of Disability



The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), developed by the World Health Organization², provides the necessary and consistent definition of disability. According to the ICF model, disability arises from the interaction between an individual and

that individual's contextual (personal and environmental) circumstances. Thus, the degree to which participation in life activities is restricted depends on the interaction between the individual's functioning (ability to perform basic functional activities) and the environment.

The Washington Group

The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG), a city group established under the United Nations Statistical Commission, was formed to address the need for population-based measures of disability by promoting and coordinating international co-operation in the area of health statistics, focusing on disability data collection tools suitable for censuses and national surveys.

The WG has developed, tested and adopted the Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS) to collect such data. The questions use the ICF as a conceptual framework. The WG-SS is comprised of 6 questions measuring difficulty functioning in basic actions, with response categories that capture the full spectrum of difficulty functioning, from mild to severe. Disability is defined as having “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one WG-SS question.

The WG Short Set on Functioning

1. Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?
2. Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?
3. Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?
4. Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?
5. Do you have difficulty with self-care, such as washing all over or dressing?
6. Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?

Response categories: No difficulty / Some difficulty / A lot of difficulty / Cannot do at all

Swedish Data on Disability and Methods

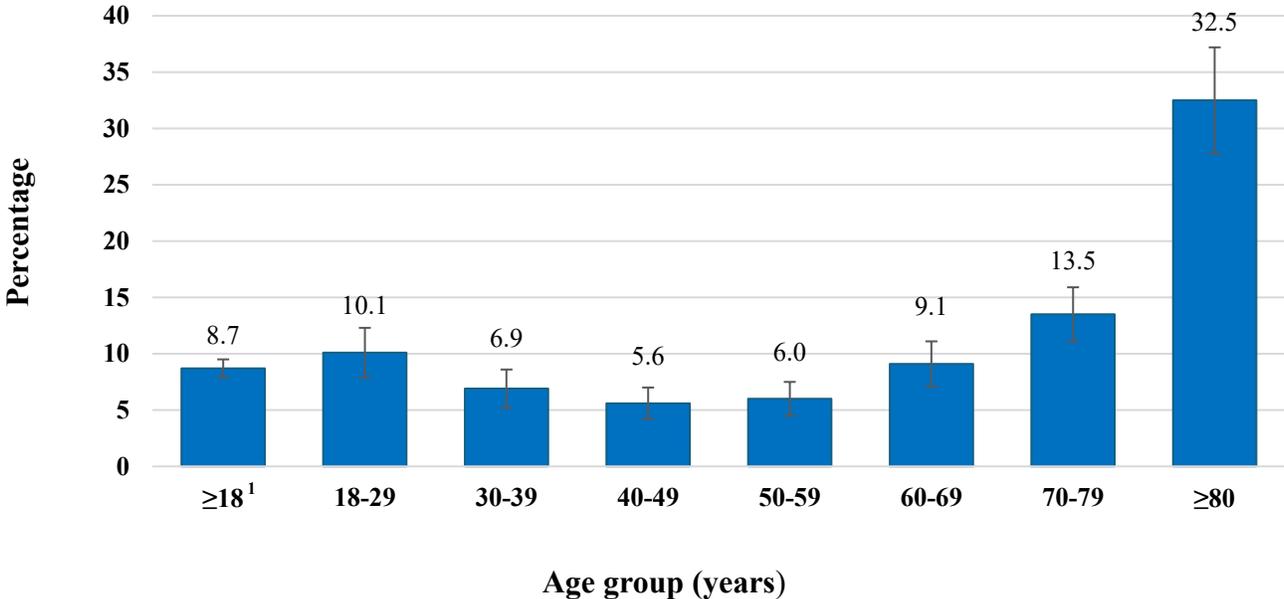
The European survey Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) covers different aspects of living conditions for the Swedish population aged 16 and older. The Swedish EU-SILC is based on a national representative sample. From 2022, the Swedish EU-SILC uses a mixed mode design, which means that the selected respondents choose to answer the questionnaire either via a telephone interview or via a web survey. Data collection is carried out annually. In 2022, when the WG-SS questions were part of the obligatory questions in EU-SILC, the Swedish EU-SILC included 8 403 respondents aged 18 or older. For more information about EU-SILC, visit [Statistics Sweden](#) and [Eurostat](#).

Apart from the indicators regarding education level and at risk of poverty, all estimates in the report are based on self-report. Some of the estimates reported here are age-adjusted using the 2020 world population to facilitate cross-country comparisons³.

Prevalence of Disability

- The age-adjusted percentage of persons aged 18 and over with disabilities is 8.7%.
- The prevalence of disability increases with age, from 10.1% among those 18-29 years to 32.5% among those aged 80 and over.

Figure 1. Prevalence of disability: age-adjusted and age-specific percentage of the population 18 years and over and by age group, Sweden, 2022



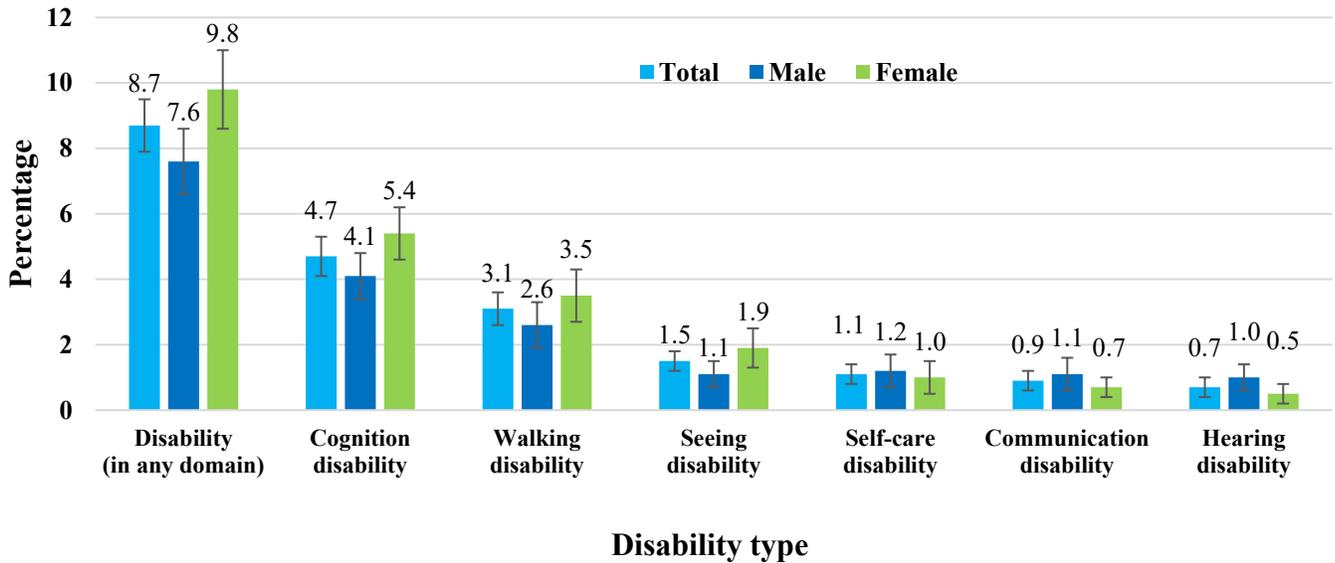
¹Total for ≥18 is age-adjusted using the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and ≥80 years. The presented margin of errors are 95 percent confidence intervals, i.e. an interval that is 95 percent likely to contain the true percentage.

Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities.

Estimates are based on telephone interviews and web survey answers from a national representative sample of the Swedish population. Data source: the Swedish Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

- There are no statistically significant differences between men and women regarding the percentage reporting disability in any domain or disability in specific types of functional domains.
- The most common type of disability reported is cognition.

Figure 2. Prevalence of disability in any domain and disability in each domain: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, by sex, Sweden, 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥80 years. The presented margin of errors are 95 percent confidence intervals, i.e. an interval that is 95 percent likely to contain the true percentage.

Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as having disability (in any domain). Disability in each domain is defined by a response of “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” in that domain.

Estimates are based on telephone interviews and web survey answers from a national representative sample of the Swedish population. Data source: the Swedish Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

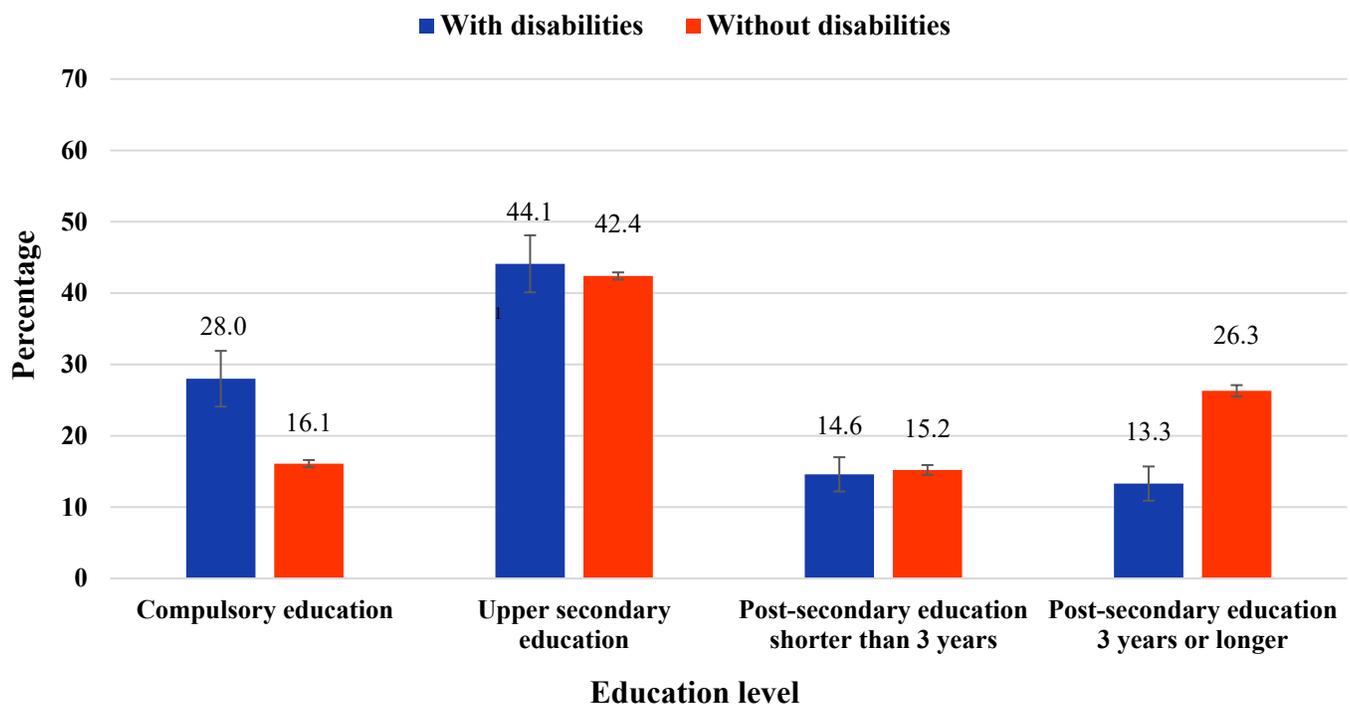
Outcomes Disaggregated by Disability

Disaggregating data by disability status allows for the comparison of outcomes for people with and without disabilities and is a necessary first step towards addressing disparities. Outcome indicators, such as educational attainment and employment, any of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals⁴, or specific programmatic objectives, can be monitored over time to determine if gaps exist between those with and without disabilities and whether those gaps are increasing or decreasing across time. In this section, data on educational attainment, economic situation, self-defined main activity status, self-perceived general health, regular participation in leisure activity, and social situation are disaggregated by disability status.

Educational Attainment

- Adults aged 18 and over with disabilities (28.0%) were more likely to have compulsory school as their highest level of education compared with those aged 18 and over without disabilities (16.1%).
- Adults with disabilities (13.3%) are less likely to have a post-secondary education 3 years or longer as their highest level of education compared with those without disabilities (26.3%).
- There are no statistically significant differences between adults with and without disabilities regarding the percentage who has upper secondary education or post-secondary education shorter than 3 years as their highest level of education.

Figure 3. Education level by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Sweden, 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥80 years. The presented margin of errors is 95 percent confidence interval, i.e. an interval that is 95 percent likely to contain the true percentage.

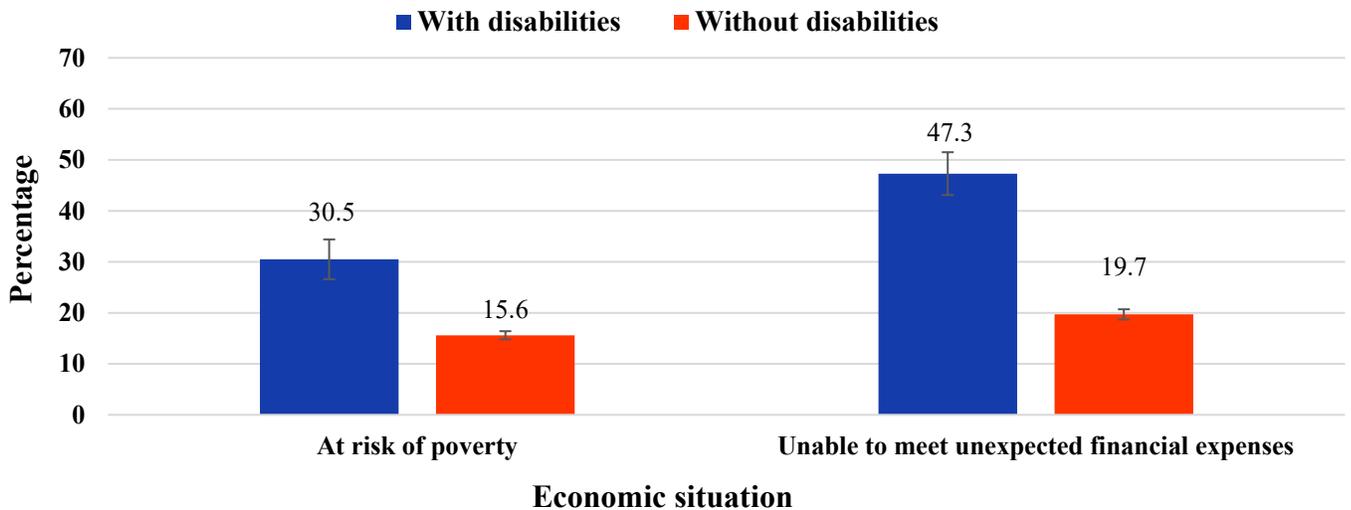
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities. Education is defined by highest education level attained according to register data matched to EU-SILC.

Estimates are based on telephone interviews and web survey answers from a national representative sample of the Swedish population. Data source: the Swedish Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

Economic Situation

- Adults aged 18 and over with disabilities (30.5%) are more likely to be at risk of poverty compared with adults aged 18 and over without disabilities (15.6%). The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income.
- Adults with disabilities (47.3%) are more likely to be unable to meet an unexpected financial expense corresponding to 13 000 SEK compared to adults without disabilities (19.7%). Being unable to meet an unexpected financial expense means that a household would be unable to cover an unexpected expense from its own resources within one month.

Figure 4. Economic situation by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Sweden, 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥80 years. The presented margin of errors is 95 percent confidence interval, i.e. an interval that is 95 percent likely to contain the true percentage.

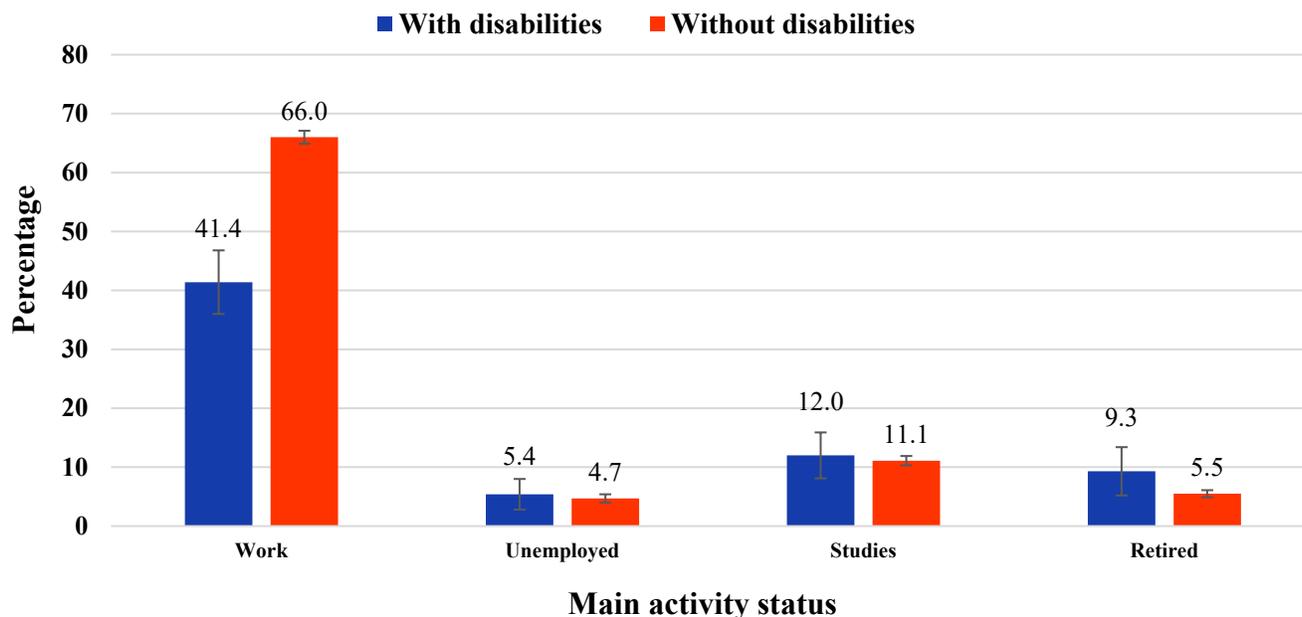
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities. At risk of poverty means that the person has an equivalised disposable income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income. Being unable to meet unexpected financial expenses means that the household would be unable to cover an unexpected expense of 13 000 SEK from its own resources within one month, without asking for help or borrowing money. The amount corresponds to one twelfth of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income.

Estimates are based on telephone interviews and web survey answers from a national representative sample of the Swedish population.
Data source: the Swedish Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

Self-defined Main Activity Status

- Adults aged 18–69 with disabilities (41.4%) are less likely to have work as their main activity compared with adults aged 18–69 without disabilities (66.0%). Note that if the respondent, for example, works 50% and studies 50%, only one of these activities can be given as an answer to the question about main activity. This means that the percentage who has work as their main activity does not include all who works, only those who, according to self-definition, has work as their main activity.
- There are no statistically significant differences between adults aged 18–69 with and without disabilities regarding the percentage who has unemployment, studies, or retirement as their self-defined main activity

Figure 5. Self-defined main activity status by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18-69 years, Sweden, 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69. The presented margin of errors is 95 percent confidence interval, i.e. an interval that is 95 percent likely to contain the true percentage.

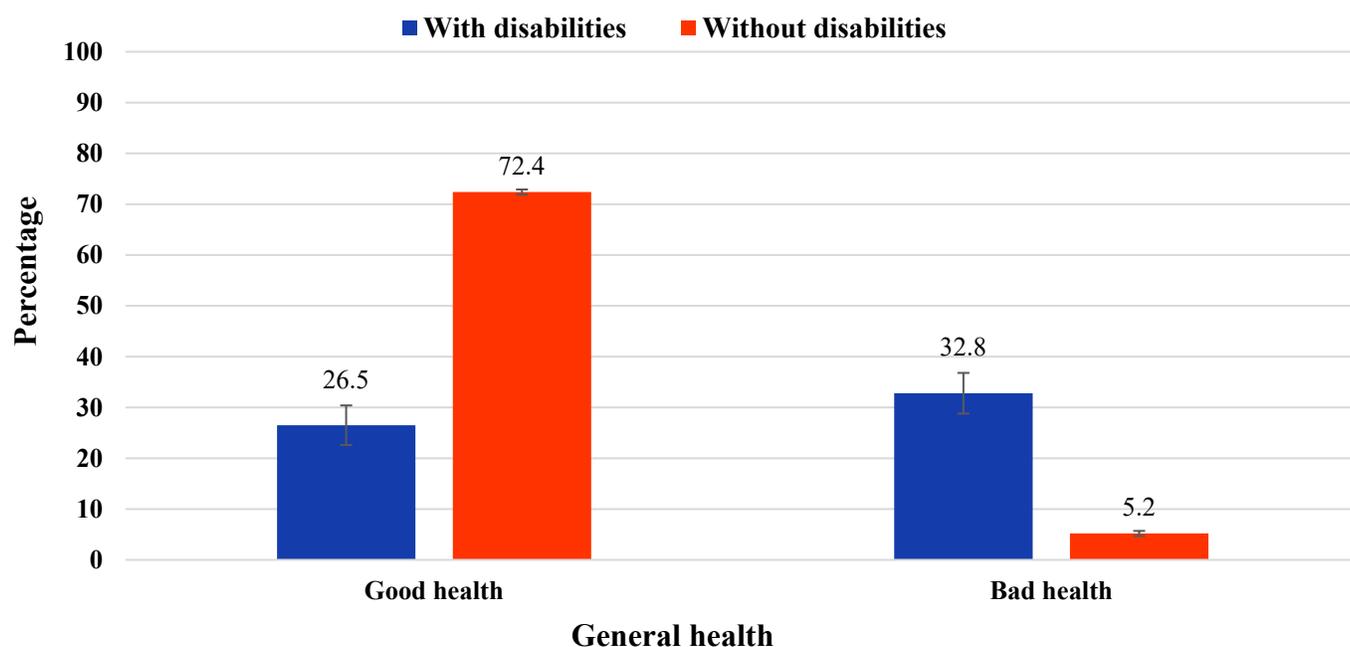
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities. Self-defined main activity status refers to the response to the question *What is your main activity?* If the respondent, for example, works 50% and studies 50%, only one of these activities can be chosen as the answer. This means that the percentage who has work as their main activity does not include all who works, only those who have work as their self-defined main activity.

Estimates are based on telephone interviews and web survey answers from a national representative sample of the Swedish population. Data source: the Swedish Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

Self-perceived General Health

- Adults aged 18 and over with disabilities (26.5%) are less likely to perceive their general health as very good or good compared with adults aged 18 and over without disabilities (72.4%).
- Adults with disabilities (32.8%) are more likely to perceive their general health as bad or very bad compared with adults without disabilities (5.2%).

Figure 6. Self-perceived general health by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Sweden, 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥80 years. The presented margin of errors is 95 percent confidence interval, i.e. an interval that is 95 percent likely to contain the true percentage.

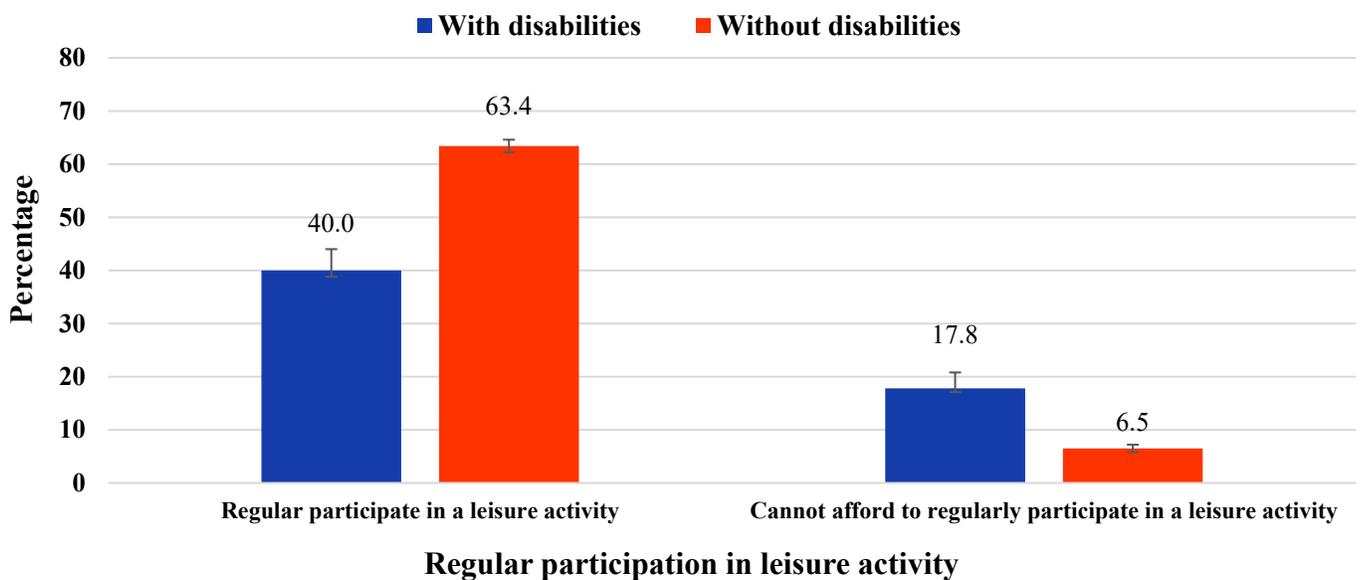
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities. Good health refers to persons who have answered “very good” or “good” to the question *How do you find your health in general? Is it very good, good, fair, bad, or very bad?* Bad health refers to persons who have answered “bad” or “very bad” to the question *How do you find your health in general? Is it very good, good, fair, bad, or very bad?*

Estimates are based on telephone interviews and web survey answers from a national representative sample of the Swedish population. Data source: the Swedish Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

Regular Participant in Leisure Activity

- Adults aged 18 and over with disabilities (40.0%) are less likely to regularly participate in a leisure or entertainment activity outside of the home, and which costs money, compared with adults aged 18 and over without disabilities (63.4%).
- Adults with disabilities (17.8%) are more likely to not be able to afford to regularly participate in a leisure or entertainment activity outside of the home, and which costs money, compared with adults without disabilities (6.5%).

Figure 7. Regular participation in leisure activity by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Sweden, 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥80 years. The presented margin of errors is 95 percent confidence interval, i.e. an interval that is 95 percent likely to contain the true percentage.

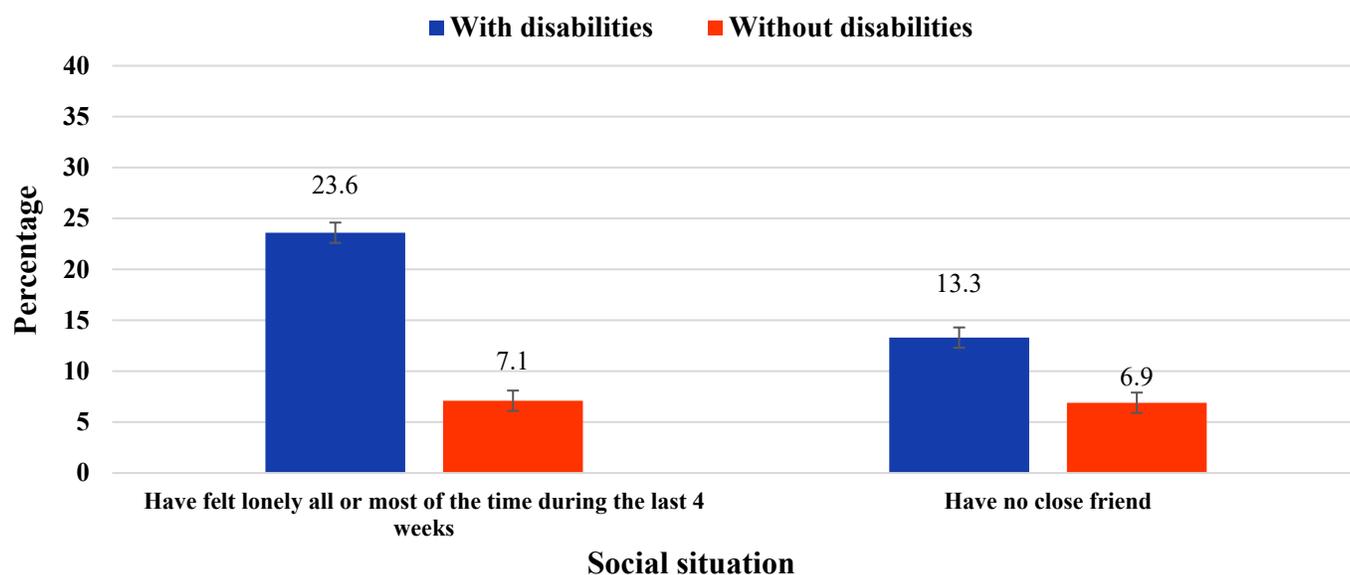
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities. Regularly participate in a leisure activity refers to persons who have answered yes to the question *Do you participate regularly in some leisure or entertainment activity outside of the home, and which costs money?* Cannot afford to regularly participate in a leisure activity refers to persons who have answered “no, cannot afford to” when asked *Do you participate regularly in some leisure or entertainment activity outside of the home, and which costs money?*

Estimates are based on telephone interviews and web survey answers from a national representative sample of the Swedish population. Data source: the Swedish Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

Social Situation

- Adults aged 18 and over with disabilities (23.6%) are more likely to feel lonely all or most of the time during the last four weeks compared with adults aged 18 and over without disabilities (7.1%).
- Adults with disabilities (13.3%) are more likely not to have a close friend with whom they can discuss personal matters, if they want to, compared with adults without disabilities (6.9%).

Figure 8. Social situation by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Sweden, 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥80 years. The presented margin of errors is 95 percent confidence interval, i.e. an interval that is 95 percent likely to contain the true percentage.

Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities. Have felt lonely all or most of the time during the last 4 weeks refers to persons who have answered “all of the time” or “most of the time” to the question *How much of the time over the last four weeks have you been feeling lonely?* Have no close friend refers to persons who have answered no to the question *Do you have a close friend with whom you could discuss personal matters if you wanted to?*

Estimates are based on telephone interviews and web survey answers from a national representative sample of the Swedish population. Data source: the Swedish Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2022.

References

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