



Disability in the Maldives

The Importance of Disability

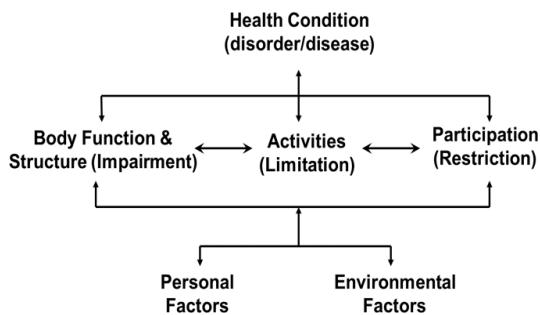
Disability is both a multidimensional concept and experience. Disability can affect anyone at any time – from birth through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

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

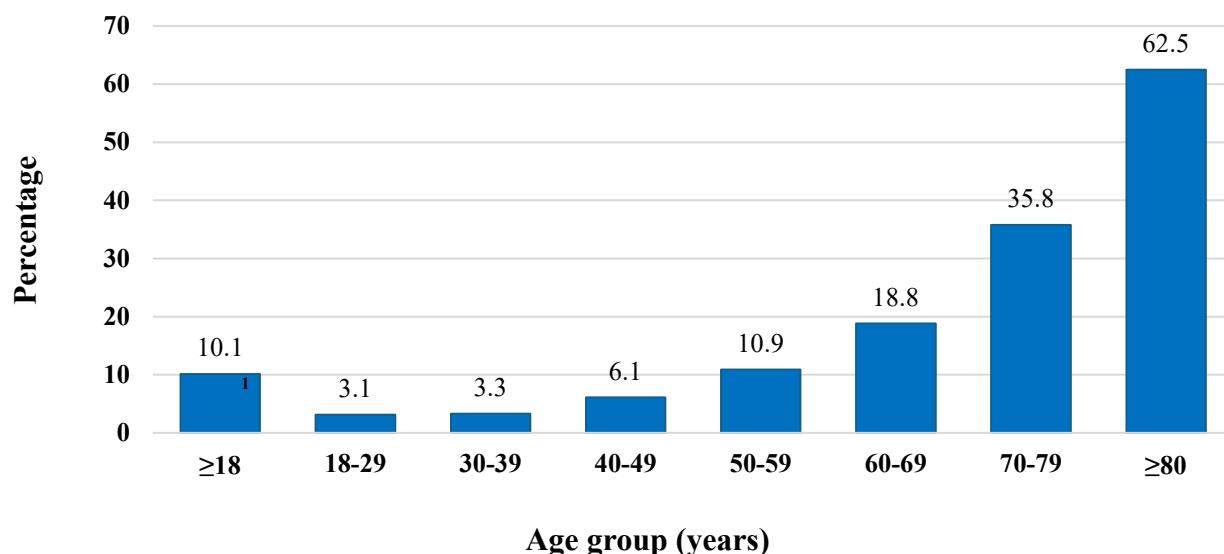
Maldives Data on Disability and Methods

This report uses data from the Maldives Population and Housing Census 2022. The Maldives census does a complete enumeration of the population residing in the country. This is the first time the WG-SS questions have been included in the census. This report presents the disability findings for the resident Maldivian population^a. The WG-SS questions were administered to all resident Maldivians 5 years and above. For the preparation of the Washington Group standardized country disability report, age adjustments have been applied (see figure notes). Estimates in this report have been age adjusted using the 2020 world population³ and are not directly comparable with non-adjusted estimates in other publications. This report presents the disability information for the resident Maldivian population 18 years and above. For more information about disability in the Maldives, visit: <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/disability-in-the-maldives/>.

Prevalence of Disability

- The age-adjusted percentage of persons aged 18 and over with disabilities is 10.1%.
- The prevalence of disability increases with age, from 3.1% among those 18-29 years to 62.5% 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, Maldives, Census 2022



^aTotal for ≥18 is age-adjusted using the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](https://www.un.org/development/desa/population/prospects/)) using the following age groups: 18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and ≥80 years.

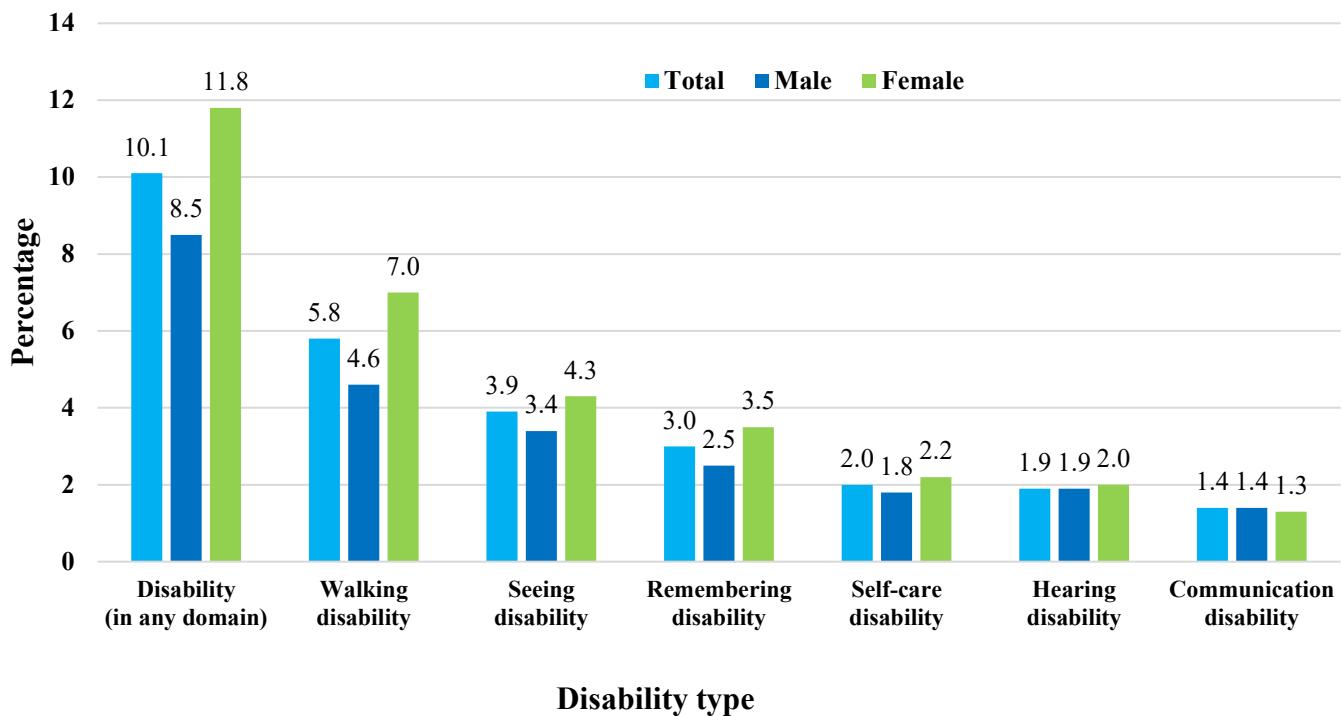
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all”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

Data source: Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2022.

^a Resident Maldivian is defined as Maldivians who have lived in the Maldives for more than one year or intend to live in the Maldives for 1 year or more. Maldivians who are permanently living abroad are excluded from here.

- Females (11.8%) are more likely than males (8.5%) to report having disability (in any domain).
- Males are more likely to have communication disability, while females are more likely to have walking, seeing, remembering, self-care and hearing disabilities.
- The most common type of disability reported is walking for both males and females.

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, Maldives, Census 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](https://www.un.org/en/development-group/population/prospects/)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥ 80 years.

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.

Data source: Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2022.

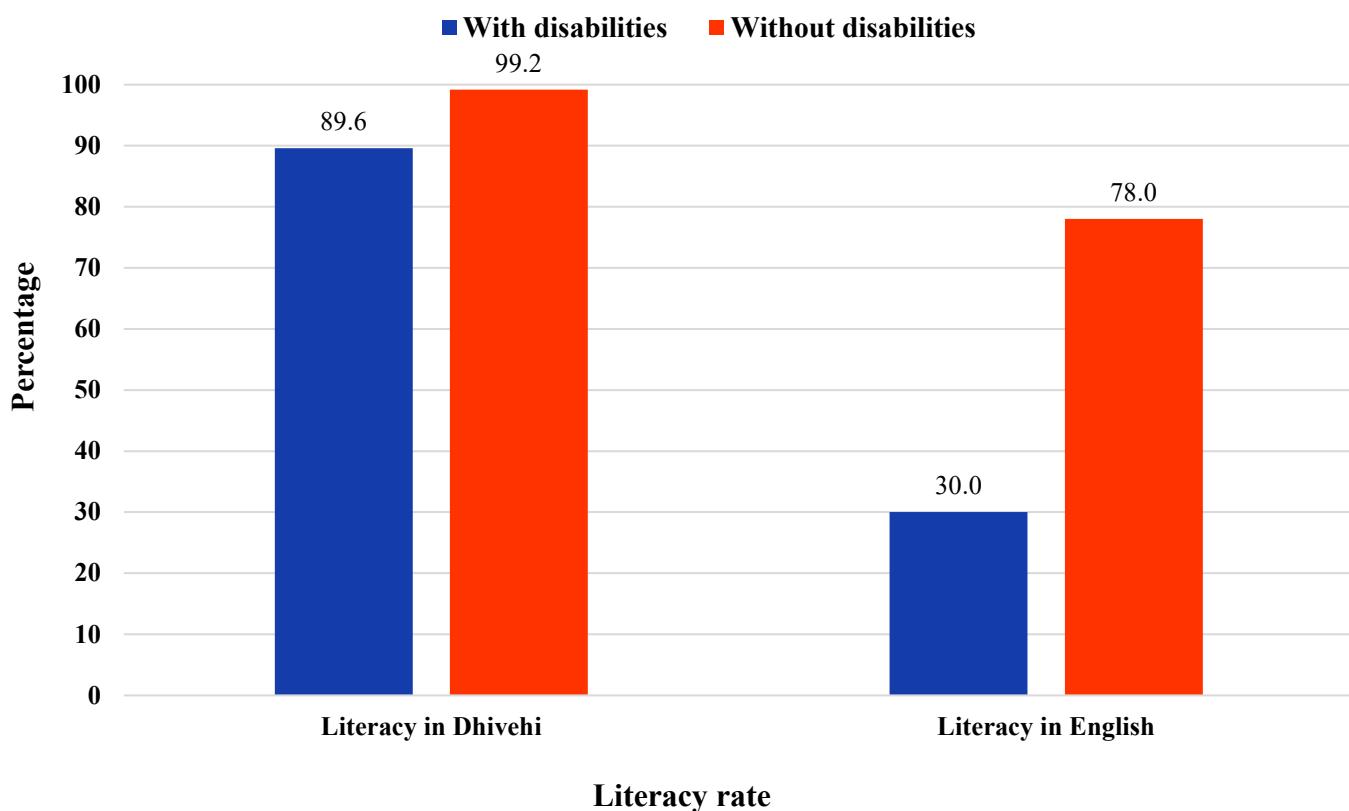
Outcomes Disaggregated by Disability

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 education and employment are disaggregated by disability status.

Literacy Rate in Mother Tongue (Dhivehi) and English

- Adults aged 18 and over with disabilities (89.6%) had a lower literacy rate in Dhivehi (mother tongue) than those without disabilities (99.2%).
- Adults with disabilities (30.0%) tend to have a much lower literacy rate in English than those without disabilities (78.0%).
- Adults with disabilities (30.0%) had a much lower literacy rate in English compared to their literacy rate in Dhivehi (89.6%).

Figure 3. Literacy rate in Dhivehi and English by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Maldives, Census 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](https://www.un.org/development/desa/population/prospects/)) using the following age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥ 80 years.

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.

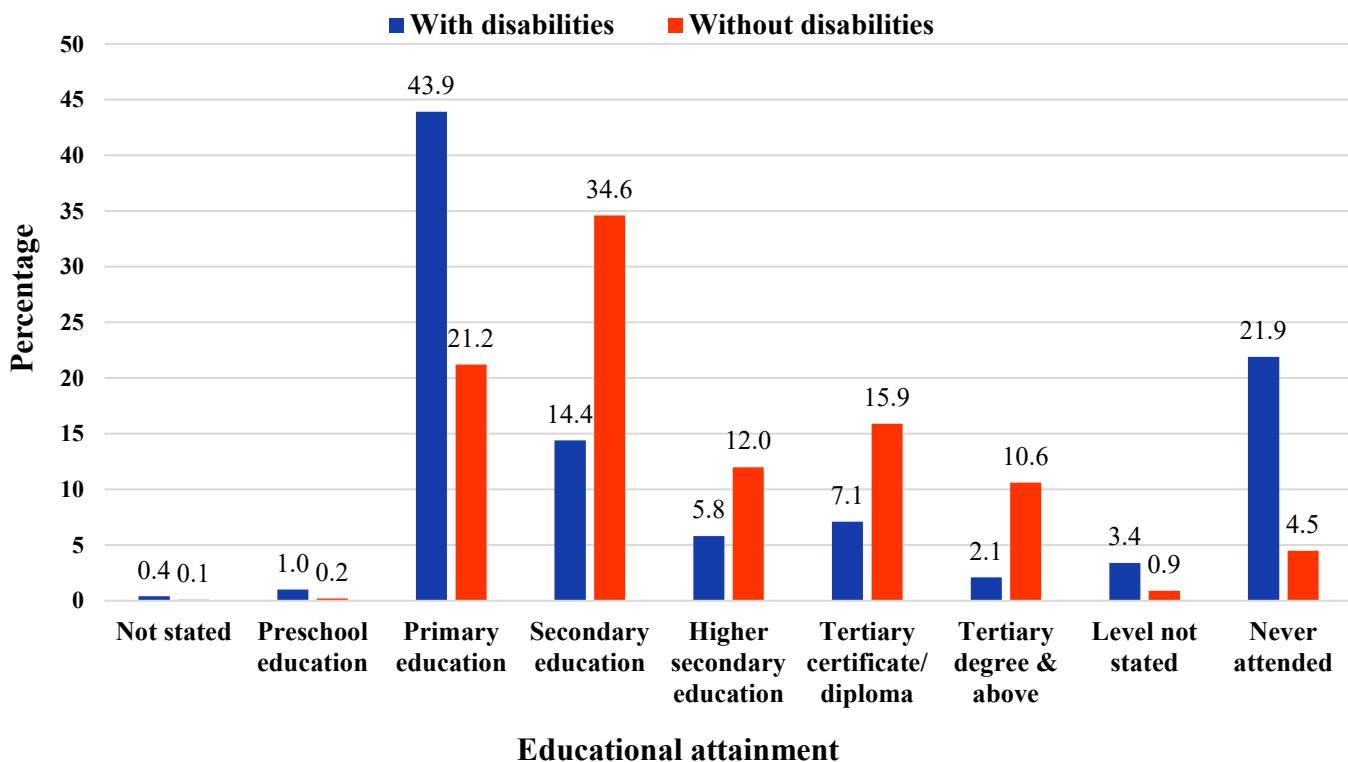
Data source: Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2022.

Educational Attainment

- Adults aged 18 years and over with disabilities (21.9%) were more likely to never attend school compared with those without disabilities (4.5%).

- Adults with disabilities (43.9%) were most likely to have a primary education, whereas those without disabilities (34.6%) were most likely to have completed secondary education^b.
- Adults with disabilities were less likely to complete higher tertiary education compared to those without disabilities. While only 2.1% of adults with disabilities have completed degree & above qualification, it was more than 10.6% for adults without disabilities^c.

Figure 4. Educational attainment by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Maldives, Census 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.

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. Educational attainment categories include preschool education, primary education (grades 1–7), secondary education (grades 8–10), higher secondary education (grades 11–12), and tertiary education, with degrees granted at higher tertiary education levels.

Data source: Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2022.

Labour Force Indicators

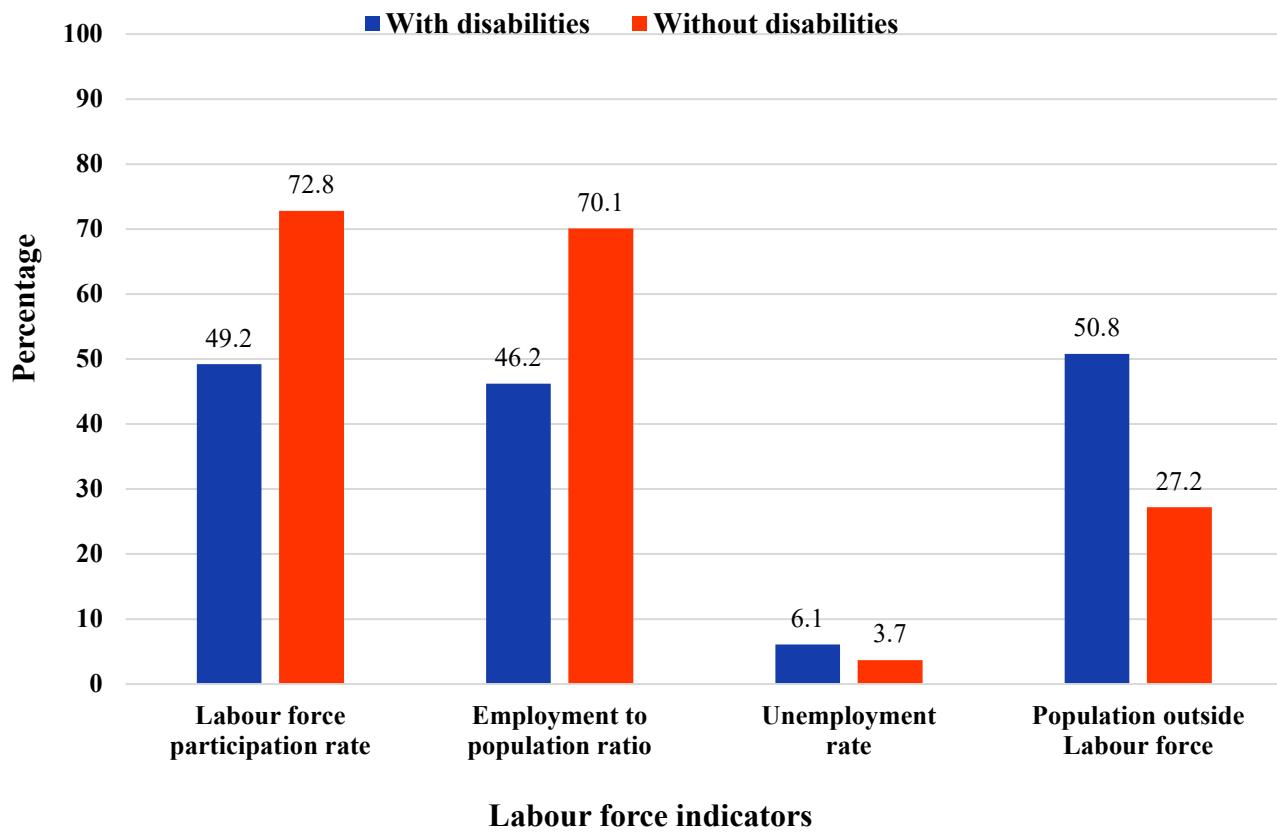
- The labour force participation rate of persons with disabilities 18–64 years was 49.2%, while the labour force participation rate of persons without disabilities was 72.8%.
- The unemployment rate was higher among persons with disabilities at 6.1%, while it was lower for persons without disabilities and was at 3.7%.

^b The Government of the Maldives offers universal education up to secondary education.

^c Since 2019, the Government of the Maldives has been offering a free degree program.

- Close to 50.8% of persons with disabilities were outside the labour force, while less than 27.2% of persons without disabilities were outside the labour force.

Figure 5. Labour force indicators by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18-64 years, Maldives, Census 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, 60-64 years.

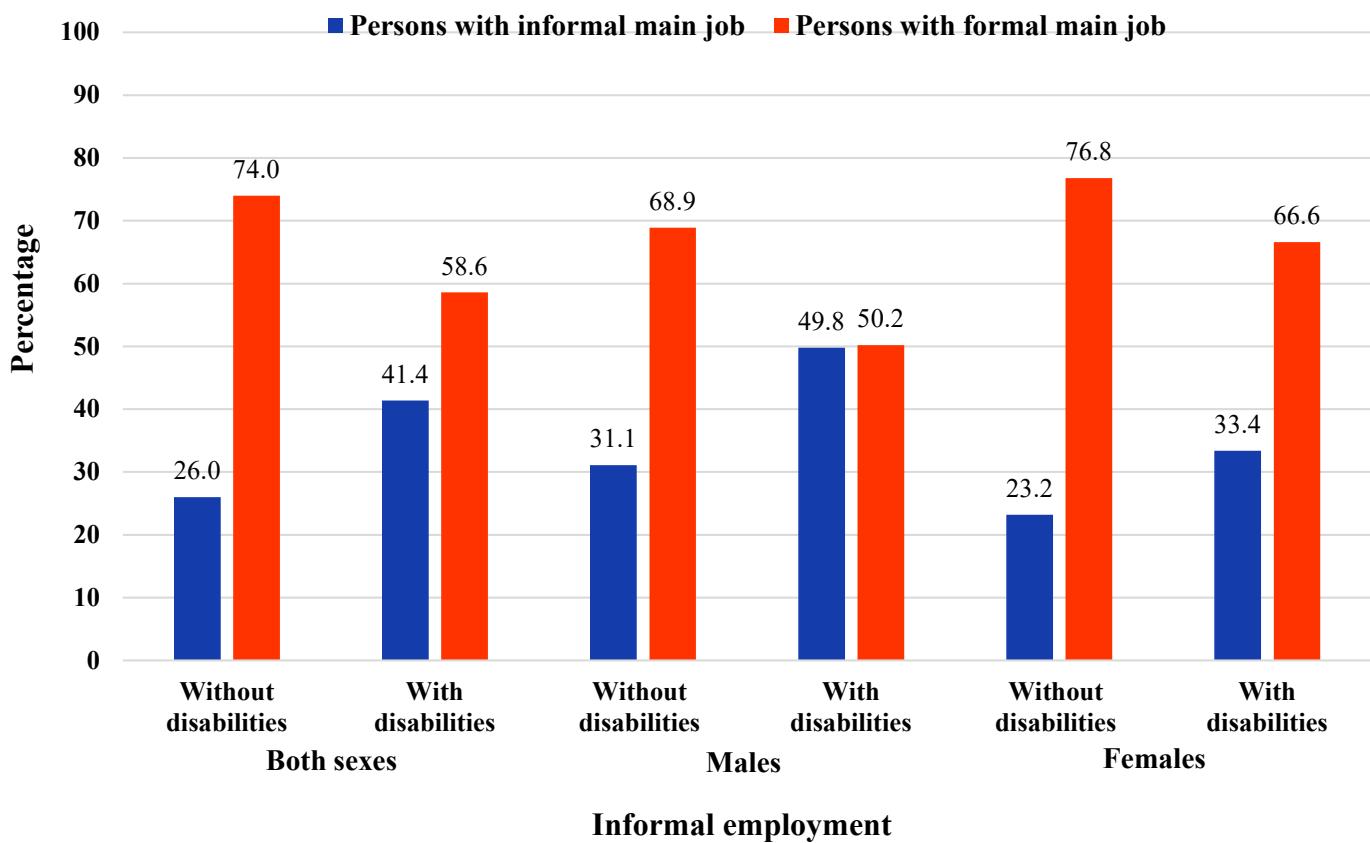
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all”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

Data source: Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2022.

Informal Employment

- Many employed persons with disabilities aged 18-64 years worked in the informal sector (41.4%), while 26.0% of employed persons without disabilities were engaged in informal jobs.
- Males with disabilities worked almost equally in formal (50.2%) and informal jobs (49.8%).
- Females with disabilities were more likely to work in informal employment than females without disabilities - 1 in 3 employed females with disabilities worked in informal jobs, while about 1 in 4 employed females without disabilities worked in informal jobs.

Figure 6. Informal employment by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18-64 years, by sex, Maldives, Census 2022



Age-adjusted percentages are based on the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](https://population.un.org/wpp/)) using the following age groups: 18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-64 years.

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.

Data source: Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2022.

References

1. Altman, B. (2001). “Definitions of Disability and their Operationalization, and Measurement in Survey Data: An Update.” In Barnartt, S. and Altman, B. (Eds.) *Exploring Theories and Expanding Methodologies: Where We Are and Where We Need To Go* (Research in Social Science and Disability, Vol. 2, pp. 77-100). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
2. World Health Organization. (2001). *The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*. WHO.
3. United Nations. 2019 Revision of World Population Prospects. Available at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.
4. United Nations General Assembly. (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html>.

Technical Notes

- **Resident Maldivian:**

Resident Maldivian is defined as Maldivians who have lived in the Maldives for more than one year or intend to live in the Maldives for 1 year or more. Maldivians who are permanently living abroad are excluded from here.

Source: Maldives Population and Housing Census 2022,

<https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/population-movement-migration-dynamics/>

- **Labour force participation rate:**

Labour force participation rate expresses the labour force as a percentage of the working-age population.

Labour force participation rate = Labour force / Working-age population x 100 = (Persons employed + Persons unemployed) / Working-age population x 100

Source: Maldives Population and Housing Census 2022, <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/census-2022-island-and-atoll-level-indicator-sheets/>

- **Employment-to-population ratio:**

Employment-to-population ratio is defined as the proportion of a country's working-age population that is employed.

Employment-to-population ratio = Persons employed / Working-age population x 100

Source: Maldives Population and Housing Census 2022, <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/census-2022-island-and-atoll-level-indicator-sheets/>

- **Unemployment rate:**

Unemployment rate is calculated by expressing the number of unemployed persons as a percentage of the total number of persons in the labour force.

Unemployment rate = Persons unemployed / Labour force = Persons unemployed / (Persons employed + Persons unemployed) x 100

Source: Maldives Population and Housing Census 2022, <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/in-depth-analysis-of-informality-and-informal-employment-in-the-maldives/>

- **Persons outside labour force:**

Persons outside labour force = Persons outside labour force / Working-age population x 100

Source: Maldives Population and Housing Census 2022, <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/in-depth-analysis-of-informality-and-informal-employment-in-the-maldives/>

- **Formal employment:**

Encompasses employers, self-employed individuals and members of producer cooperatives operating within registered enterprises and government institutions, along with all employees contributing to social security benefits, especially pensions.

Source: Maldives Population and Housing Census 2022, <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/census-2022-island-and-atoll-level-indicator-sheets/>

- **Informal employment:**

Encompasses employers, self-employed individuals and producer cooperatives members who are not part of the formal sector, as well as employees lacking pension benefits from employers.

Source: Maldives Population and Housing Census 2022, <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/census-2022-island-and-atoll-level-indicator-sheets/>

- **Additional data & analysis on employment in the Maldives:**

<https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/mapping-the-employment-landscape-a-comprehensive-analysis-of-the-situation-in-the-maldives/>