



Disability in Portugal

The Importance of Disability

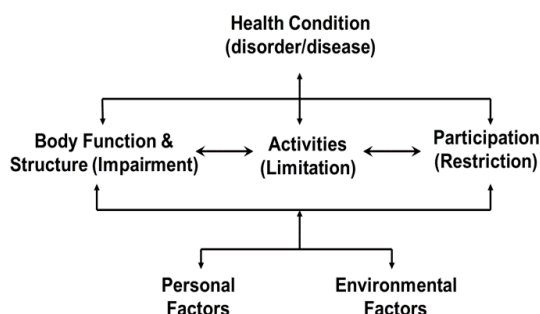
Disability is both a multidimensional concept and experience. Disability can affect anyone at any time – from birth through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

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

Portuguese Data on Disability and Methods

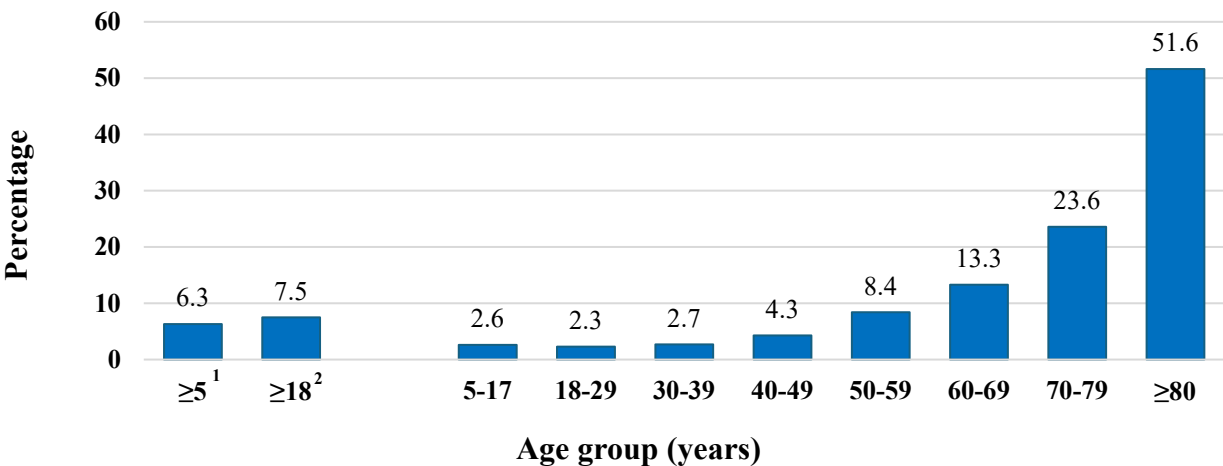
This publication presents an analysis of the data collected by the XVI General Population Census and the VI General Housing Census (2021 Census)³ on the six activities or functions included in the WG-SS. As mentioned above, the questions allow an approximation to the concept of disability based on functionality and not the result of an assessment based on medical diagnoses of disability. The six questions, the WG-SS, were collected on an optional basis in the individual questionnaire of the 2021 Census, for the population aged 5 and over. Response rates varied from 96.3% to 96.7%, depending on the specific question: the overall response rate was 96.6%. For more information about the Portuguese Census 2021, visit www.ine.pt.

In the analysis of the results of the 2021 Census, the concept of disability is applied in accordance with the WG-SS model, considering that there is a disability when the respondent indicates a lot of difficulty or unable to perform any one of the six specific activities or functions. Some of the data reported here are age-adjusted using the 2020 world population⁴ to facilitate cross-country comparisons.

Prevalence of Disability

- The age-adjusted percentage of persons aged 18 and over with disabilities is 7.5%.
- Considering the population aged 5 and over, the prevalence rate was 6.3%.
- The prevalence of disability increases with age, from less than 3% among those aged 5-39 years to around 24% among those aged 70-79 years, and to more than 50% among those aged 80 and over.

Figure 1. Prevalence of disability: age-adjusted and age-specific percentage of the population 5 years and over and by age group, Portugal, 2021



¹Total for 5 years and over is age-adjusted using the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/)) using the following age groups: 5-17, 18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and ≥80 years.

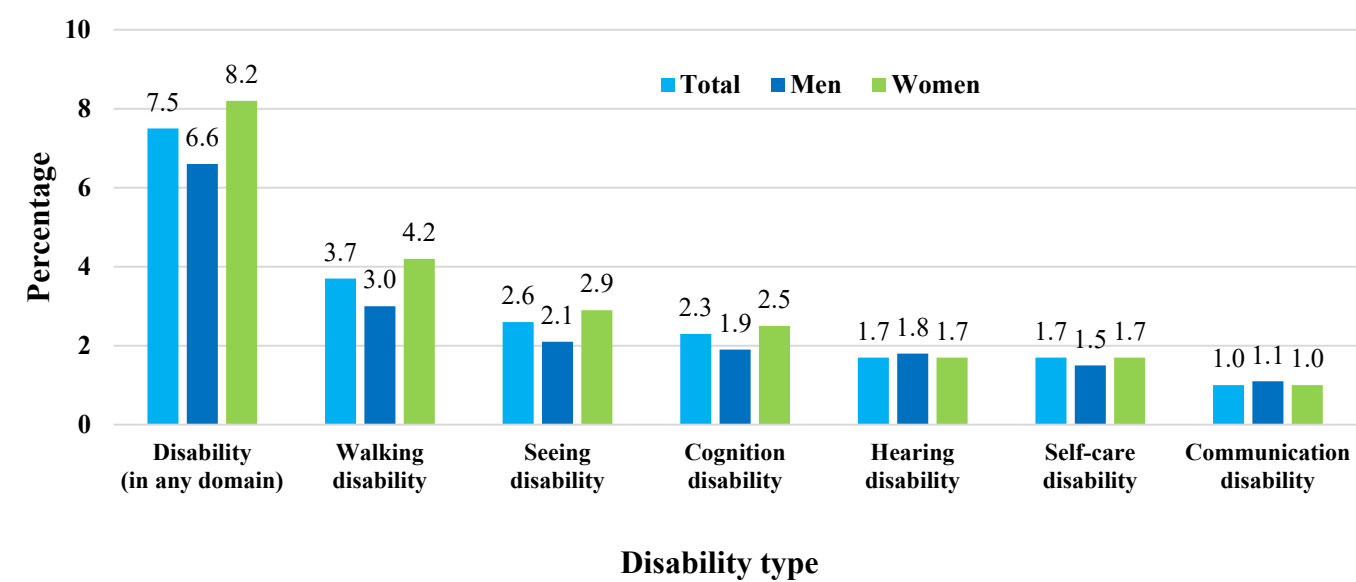
²Total for 18 years and over is age-adjusted using the 2020 world population (available at: [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/)) using the following age groups: 18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and ≥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: Statistics Portugal, Population and Housing Census, 2021.

- The most common type of disability reported is walking, both for males and females.
- Females (8.2%) are more likely than males (6.6%) to report having a disability (in any domain).
- Males are more likely than females to have hearing and communication disabilities, while females are more likely to have walking, seeing, cognition, and self-care disabilities.

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, Portugal, 2021



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 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: Statistics Portugal, Population and Housing Census, 2021.

Outcomes Disaggregated by Disability

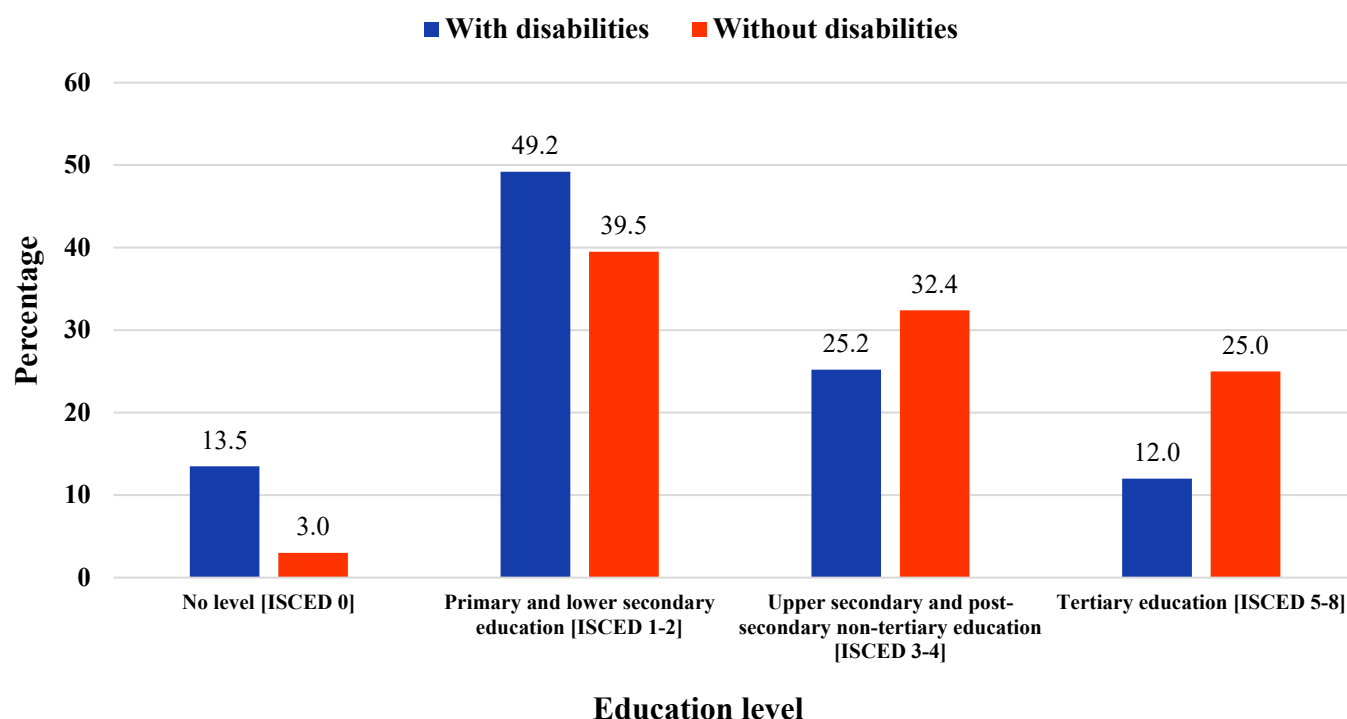
Disaggregating data by disability status allows for the comparison of outcomes for people with and without disabilities and is a necessary first step towards addressing disparities. Outcome indicators, such as educational attainment and employment, any of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals⁵, 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, main source of income, activity status and household type are disaggregated by disability status.

Educational Attainment

- The percentage of people aged 18 and over with disabilities who have not completed any level of formal education (13.5%) was 4.5 times higher than that of adults without disabilities (3.0%).

- Higher education levels are more prevalent among individuals without disabilities compared to those with disabilities.
- People aged 18 and older with disabilities were less likely to complete upper secondary education (25.2%) compared to their counterparts without disabilities (32.4%).
- Similarly, adults with disabilities were less likely to conclude tertiary education (12.0%) compared to those without disabilities (25.0%).

Figure 3. Education level by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Portugal, 2021



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, 60–69, 70–79, and ≥80 years.

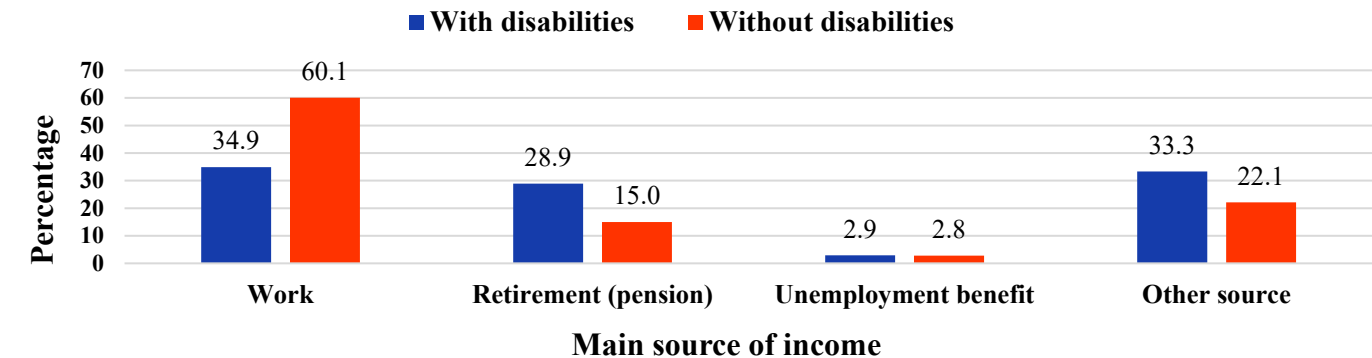
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all” to at least one of the six functioning domains were classified as with disabilities. The educational level was organized by International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011.

Data source: Statistics Portugal, Population and Housing Census, 2021.

Main Source of Income

- According to the 2021 Census data results, the most frequently reported main source of income was work, for people aged 18 and over either with disabilities (34.9%) or without disabilities (60.1%).
- The percentage of people aged 18 and over with disabilities who rely mainly on retirement pensions (28.9%) was almost twice as high as that of adults without disabilities (15.0%).

Figure 4. Main source of income by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Portugal, 2021



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.

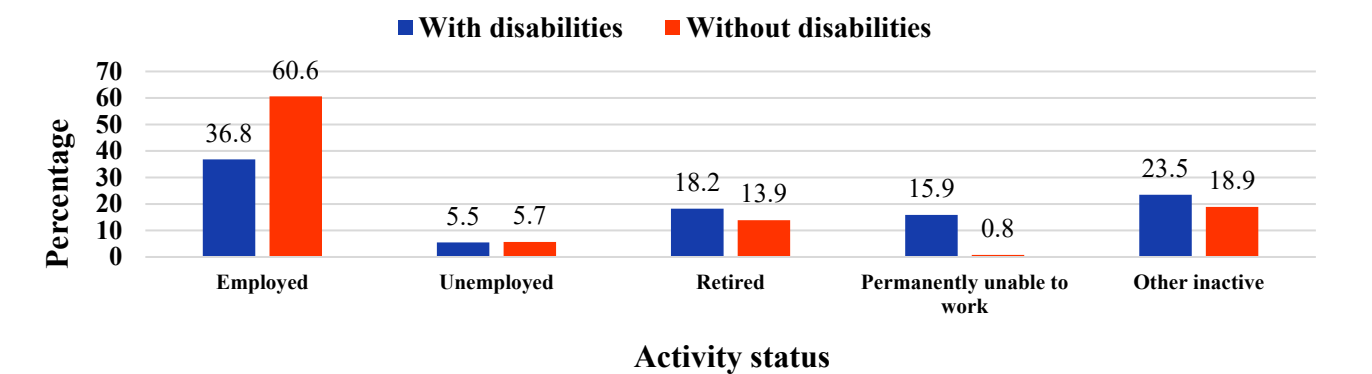
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all”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

Data source: Statistics Portugal, Population and Housing Census, 2021.

Activity Status

- In 2021, 36.8% of people aged 18 and over with disabilities were employed compared with 60.6% of adults without disabilities.
- In contrast, retired people are more frequent among the population with disabilities (18.2%) than in the population without disabilities (13.9%).
- Differences become even more evident in terms of who is permanently unable to work: 15.9% of the population with disabilities compared to 0.8% of adults without disabilities.

Figure 5. Activity status by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Portugal, 2021



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.

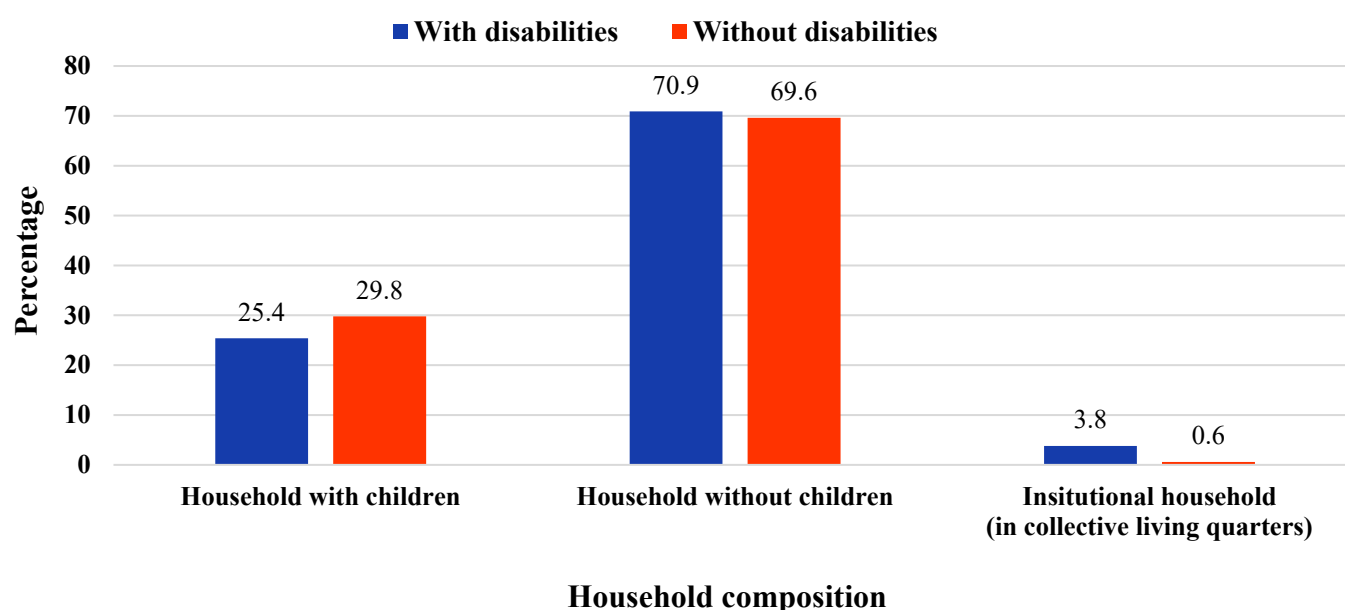
Disability is defined using the WG Short Set on Functioning, which asks about difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, communicating, remembering or concentrating, and self-care, such as washing all over or dressing. Respondents who indicated “a lot of difficulty” or “cannot do at all”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

Data source: Statistics Portugal, Population and Housing Census, 2021.

Household Type

- In 2021, the percentage of people aged 18 and over with disabilities who lived in households with children (25.4%) was lower than that of people without disabilities (29.8%).
- 70.9% of adults with disabilities lived in households without children (2.9% were elderly people living alone), a percentage that is close to the one observed for adults without disabilities.
- 3.8% of adults with disabilities lived in institutional households, a percentage that is higher than the one observed for adults without disabilities (0.6%).

Figure 6. Household type by disability status: age-adjusted percentage of the population 18 years and over, Portugal, 2021



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. Children are defined as individuals under the age of 18 as well as individuals aged between 18 and 24 years who are economically inactive.

Data source: Statistics Portugal, Population and Housing Census, 2021.

References

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