



## 8.2 Participation in society by people with disability

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* sets out rights for people with disability, one of which protects the right of people with disability to participate fully in all aspects of life (United Nations 2006). However, people with disability often face challenges in doing so, and their rates of participation in education, employment and social activities are generally lower than for people without disability.

Any disability may limit the activities a person undertakes in their daily life (such as tasks relating to self-care, mobility and communication), or restrict their participation in other ways. How people with disability participate in society can also be affected by the opportunities and assistance available to them, and by the severity of their disability.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) uses a broad construct of disability, defining it as any limitation, restriction or impairment that restricts a person's everyday activities, and has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months (see Chapter 8.1 'People with disability' for more detail). Almost 1 in 5 (18%) Australians—4.3 million people—had a disability in 2015. This represented an increase of 8.7% from 2003, at the same time as the general population increased by almost 19%. Around 1 in 3 people with disability (1.4 million) had severe or profound limitation.

The following article presents key findings from AIHW analyses of the 2003 and 2015 ABS SDAC. More detail is available in the related fact sheets (see 'Where do I go for more information?').

### Trends in education and work

#### School attendance

In 2015, there were 336,000 children and younger people with disability aged 5–20 living in households in the community and attending school or an educational institution. This represents 1 in 14 (7.1%) people in this age group. The number of students with disability increased by 4.0% between 2003 and 2015, growing at a slower rate than the number of people in the same age group in the general population (up by 9.2%). At the same time, the number of students with severe or profound limitation increased by 11%.





For students with disability, common schooling options are special schools (those that enrol only students with special needs), special classes within a mainstream school (those that specifically support students with special needs), or ordinary classes within a mainstream school (where students with disability may receive extra, tailored supports). Between 2003 and 2015, there was a shift towards students with disability attending special schools. The number of students who attended a special school increased by 35% for people with disability, and by 31% for people with severe or profound limitation. In 2015, 15% of children and young people with disability, and 26% of students with severe or profound limitation, attended a special school. At the same time, fewer students attended special classes within a mainstream school environment—decreasing from 2003 by 22% for people with disability, and by 8.0% for people with severe or profound limitation. In 2015, 19% of students with disability, and 22% of people with severe or profound limitation, attended special classes in a regular school.

An increasing number of students with disability also needed assistance in other ways with their schooling. This included help provided by a person, by using special equipment, or through other arrangements such as for access, transport or assessment. The need for part-time attendance at school increased considerably. Between 2003 and 2015, the number of students requiring 1 or more days off school each week increased by 47% for people with disability, and by 79% for people with severe or profound limitation. In 2015, 10% of students with disability and 14% of people with severe or profound limitation attended school part-time.

## Employment

### Labour force participation

Around 1.1 million working-age people (aged 15–64) with disability living in households participated in the labour force, either by working or looking for work in 2015. Almost as many people with disability did not participate in the labour force (1.0 million), with more than half (57%) of them reporting having an employment restriction that meant they were permanently unable to work.

The number of people with disability in the labour force has fallen by 3.0% between 2003 and 2015. This is similar to the 3.3% fall in the overall number of working age people with disability living in households over that period. At the same time, the number of working age people without disability participating in the labour force increased by 23%.

There has been little change in the overall labour force participation rate for people with disability. Around half of working age people with disability were participating in the labour force (53% in 2003 and 2015), compared with 81% and 83%, respectively, for the overall population. The rate of labour force participation varied by the severity of people's disability. Two-thirds (68%) of people with disability and schooling or employment restrictions only, and one-quarter (25%) of people with severe or profound limitation (down from 30% in 2003), were either employed or looking for work in 2015.





## Employment

In 2015, around 580,000 working age people with disability were employed full time, and 453,000 part time. The number of people with disability who were working fell (down by 4.6% from 2003), and considerably fewer people with severe or profound limitation were working (down by 17%). In 2015, half (48%) of working age people with disability, and 22% of people with severe or profound limitation, were employed, compared with 79% of people without disability.

The patterns of work changed between 2003 and 2015, with a trend towards part-time work. Between 2003 and 2015, the number of people with disability working full time dropped by 16%, and the number of people with severe or profound limitation by 41%. At the same time, the numbers of those working part time increased by 14% and 7.4%, respectively. By comparison, the number of people without disability in full-time and part-time employment increased over this period (by 12% and 33%, respectively). In 2015, employed people with disability were more likely to work part-time, compared with employed people without disability—44% of employed people with disability, and 63% of those with severe or profound limitation, were working part-time hours, compared with 32% of employed people without disability (see Supplementary Table S8.2.1 for additional information on employment).

## Unemployment

Unemployment rates are calculated as the proportion of people participating in the labour force who were unemployed and looking for work. These rates are thus affected by not only the number of unemployed people but also the size of the labour force. Unemployment rates also showed variation by disability severity. Overall, for all people with disability, the unemployment rate was 10% in 2015 (9% in 2003), 13% for people with a schooling or employment restriction (15% in 2003) and 14% for people with severe or profound limitation (11% in 2003).

For more information, see Chapter 9.2 'Indicators of *Australia's welfare*'.

## Social activities

There were 2.1 million people aged 15–64 with disability living in households in 2015. The likelihood of participating in some aspects of community life varied, depending on the severity of a person's disability (Table 8.2.1). The differences in general measures of participation were small. For example, in 2015, most people with disability and people with severe or profound limitation had participated in at least one social activity at home (96% and 93%, respectively) and away from home (94% and 89%) in the previous 3 months. On some specific measures, such as internet use, the difference was greater. Overall, four-fifths (81%) of people with disability had used the internet in the previous 3 months; among people with severe or profound disability, the proportion was lower (68%) (Table 8.2.1).





Table 8.2.1: Participation rates in selected social activities for people aged 15–64 with disability or with disability and severe/profound limitation living in households, 2015

Participation type	Disability (%)	Severe/profound limitation (%)	
 Had a driver's licence <sup>(a)</sup>	84.2	64.0	
 Destination of last trip was shopping <sup>(b)</sup>	30.0	32.6	
	Participated in social activities at home <sup>(c)</sup>	96.0	93.4
	<i>Visits from friends/relatives</i>	89.8	88.5
	<i>Telephone calls from friends/relatives</i>	92.8	86.6
	Used the internet <sup>(c)</sup>	80.9	68.0
	<i>For online banking</i>	64.7	47.2
	<i>For social networking</i>	72.7	70.2
 Left home as often as would like	70.0	48.0	
	Participated in social activities away from home <sup>(c)</sup>	94.0	89.0
	<i>Visited friends/relatives</i>	92.8	90.2
	<i>Went out with friends/relatives</i>	74.1	65.3
	Attended a cultural venue <sup>(d)</sup>	69.0	57.4
	<i>Movies</i>	55.2	42.1
	<i>Library</i>	30.4	24.0
 Felt safe/very safe at home after dark	81.1	69.5	
 Able to find support from others in times of crisis outside of members of own household	90.9	86.3	
 Difficulty with access <sup>(e)</sup>	26.7	31.6	
 Avoided community situations due to disability <sup>(d)</sup>	41.3	61.9	
 Experienced discrimination due to disability	13.8	21.8	

(a) Excludes people aged under 17.

(b) People who took a trip in the previous 2-week period.

(c) At least once in the previous 3-month period.

(d) At least once in the previous 12-month period.

(e) Had difficulty with mobility/communication and difficulty accessing community facilities/buildings in the previous 12-month period.

Source: AIHW analysis of ABS 2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (TableBuilder).





## What is missing from the picture?

With currently available data, it is not possible to provide a full picture of the experiences of people with disability in Australia. The SDAC is a valuable source of information for estimating the number of people with disability and the nature of their disability, but information from other data sources is needed to provide a consolidated picture of the experiences and outcomes of people with disability as they engage in various aspects of life in Australia. For more information, see Chapter 1.7 'Understanding health and welfare data' and Chapter 8.1 'People with disability'.

The SDAC has been conducted regularly since 1981, with changes over the years. Many items, particularly for social and community activities, are either recently introduced, or not comparable across the years, and some items are only applicable to specific subgroups. For example, questions on participation in social and community activities are only asked of people with disability living in households, rather than of all people with disability or people without disability (although these questions are asked of carers and people aged 65 and over). Some populations are also outside of the survey's scope: while data are collected for Indigenous people with disability, the SDAC excludes people who live in *Very remote* areas and discrete Indigenous communities, and the resulting data may not be representative of the prevalence or experience of disability for all Indigenous people.

## Where do I go for more information?

More information about people with disability is available at [www.aihw.gov.au/disability/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/disability/). The factsheets for *Disability in Australia: changes over time in inclusion and participation in community living, employment and education* are available for free download, as well as other recent publications such as *Disability support services: services provided under the National Disability Agreement 2015–16* and *Life expectancy and disability in Australia*.

The ABS also provides information on people with disability through a [Summary of findings](#) and supporting data from each Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

## References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2016. Disability, ageing and carers, Australia: summary of findings, 2015. ABS cat. no. 4430.0. Canberra: ABS.

United Nations 2006. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York: United Nations. Viewed 12 April 2017, <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>>.

