



Disability in Papua New Guinea: Key Findings from the 2022 SDES and Policy Priorities

Why this matters

The 2022 Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey (SDES) is the first nationally representative dataset in Papua New Guinea (PNG) to measure disability using the Washington Group short set of questions on difficulty with seeing, hearing, walking, remembering, self-care, and communicating. The results show that disability in PNG is not only a health issue: it is closely tied to weaker schooling, harder access to work, and poorer living conditions at home.

Key Findings

1. Disability reaches into many households.

- 4% of Papua New Guineans aged 5 and above are persons with disability.
- 15% of households include at least one person with disability.
- Prevalence rises sharply with age, reaching 22% among persons aged 60 and above.

2. Children with disabilities are being left behind.

- **Adult literacy:** persons with disabilities sit 17 percentage points behind everyone else (70% versus 87%).
- **Primary school attendance gap:** 30 percentage points (41% versus 71%).
- **Secondary school attendance gap:** 16 percentage points (22% versus 38%).
- Children with disabilities aged 6 to 18 years old are more than twice as likely to be out of school as other children.

3. Disability is associated with poorer employment outcomes.

- **Employment-to-population rate:** persons with disabilities 46% versus others 51%. The disability gap remains statistically significant once we control for age, sex, education, and location.
- When accounting for various factors, employment gap is about 14 percentage points, meaning persons with disabilities who are part of the labour force are 14 points less likely to be employed than otherwise-similar peers once age, sex, education, location, and province are accounted for. This gap is three times larger than the descriptive figure, because subsistence work flatters the simple comparison.
- Persons with disabilities are concentrated in subsistence agriculture and underrepresented in industry and services.
- Among employed persons with disabilities, 43.0 per cent are wage and salary workers, against 55.1 per cent for other employed persons.

4. Disability and poverty push against each other from both sides.

- Households with a person with disability show worse basic living conditions: more crowded dwellings, greater reliance on polluting cooking fuels, poorer access to safe drinking water, and lower housing quality.
- 70% of persons with disabilities face multiple, overlapping disadvantages across education, work, and household conditions, compared with 29% for other persons.
- Disability is strongly linked with lower education, lower employment, and poorer housing and living conditions at home.

What should be prioritized?

Immediate (2026-2027)

- ✓ Operationalize the Disability Services Act 2025 by mainstreaming disability equity across health, education, justice, employment, and social protection services, with DfCDR as the lead coordinator.
- ✓ Anchor disability-disaggregated monitoring in the Disability Knowledge Hub and the Disability Data System concept under the National Statistical Information Framework (NSIF), so a single coordinated system, not scattered dashboards, carries the data forward.
- ✓ Use the SDES findings to underwrite PNG's next CRPD reporting cycle.

Medium Term (2027-2030)

- ✓ Expand inclusive education through teacher training, accessible schools, and assistive devices.
- ✓ Improve pathways from school to work for persons with disabilities.
- ✓ Promote reasonable accommodation in employment.

Long Term

- ✓ Build a sustainable national disability data system, connecting survey evidence to the Disability Knowledge Hub.
- ✓ Strengthen administrative data with a disability marker in health, education, labour, and social-protection records.
- ✓ Integrate disability inclusion into sector plans, budgets, and SDG monitoring.
- ✓ Regularly collect Washington Group disability data in national surveys and censuses.

Key Message

The biggest disability gaps in PNG are in education. Children with disabilities are significantly less likely to attend school, which contributes to lower literacy, weaker employment outcomes, and higher vulnerability later in life. Closing these education gaps offers the greatest opportunity for improving inclusion and for realising the objectives of the Disability Services Act 2025.

Three headline numbers to remember

4% of the population have disabilities | 15% of households include a person with disability | 70% of persons with disabilities face multiple, overlapping disadvantages