



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare

Disability in Australia: changes over time in inclusion and participation in employment

While people with disability participate actively in all aspects of Australian life, they can face additional challenges doing so.

This fact sheet uses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) to look at selected changes between 2003 and 2015 for people with disability in one life area—inclusion and participation of working-age people in employment (see Box 1 and ‘Where can I find out more?’). In this fact sheet, working-age people are defined as those aged 15–64 living in the community (that is, in households).

Fast facts

- People with disability continue to have lower rates of labour force participation and employment, and higher rates of unemployment, than people without disability.
- Between 2003 and 2015, there was a shift away from full-time work and towards part-time work for working-age people with disability.
- In 2015, more than 1 in 4 working-age people with disability who had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months reported their employer as the source (27%), and around 1 in 6 reported work colleagues as the source (18%).

Box 1: The ABS SDAC

In the SDAC, a person is considered to have disability if they have at least one of a list of limitations, restrictions or impairments, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months and restricts everyday activities. The severity of disability is further defined according to the degree of assistance or supervision required in core activities—self-care, mobility, and communication—and grouped for mild, moderate, severe, and profound limitation. People with disability can also be identified as having a schooling or employment restriction. More information on the survey is available on the ABS website at: www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0.

Labour force participation

In 2015, an estimated 1.1 million working-age people with disability, including around 131,000 with severe or profound limitation, participated in the labour force through work or looking for work (ABS 2004, 2016a, 2016b). This was a decrease from that reported in 2003—by 3% for those with disability, and by 13% for those with severe or profound limitation.

People with disability had a lower labour force participation rate than people without disability

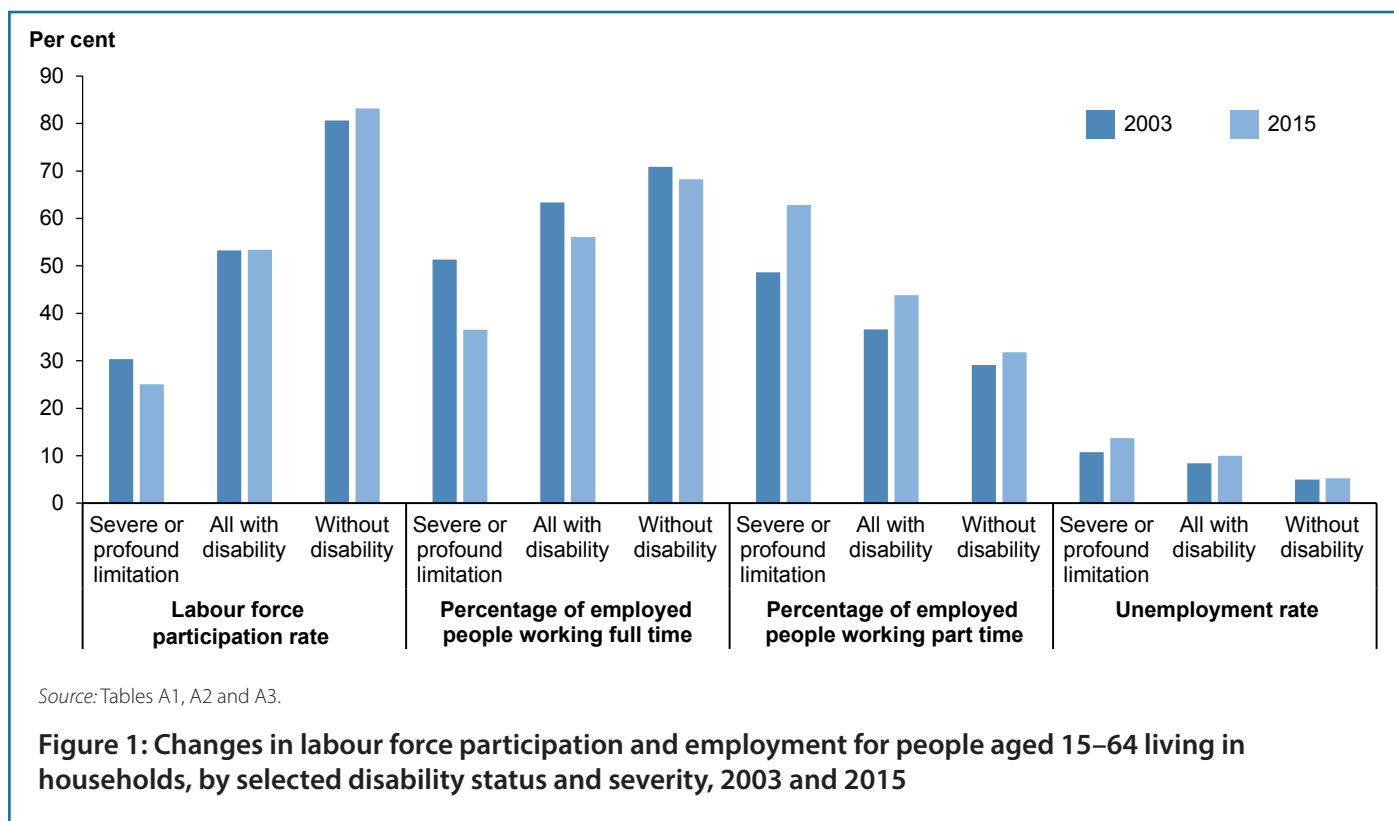
The labour force participation rate is the sum of people who are employed or unemployed and looking for work as a percentage of the working-age population.

Generally, people with disability had lower labour force participation rates than people without disability. In 2015, 53% of working-age people with disability, and 25% of those with severe or profound limitation, were participating in the labour force, compared with 83% of those without disability (Table A1; ABS 2016a).

Many working-age people with disability who were not in the labour force were unable to work. In 2015, more than half (57%) of those who were not in the labour force reported an employment restriction that meant they were permanently unable to work (ABS 2016a).

Labour force participation for people with severe or profound limitation has decreased

The labour force participation rate for working-age people with disability remained steady between 2003 and 2015, at around 53% in both years (Figure 1; Table A1). But among those with severe or profound limitation, the labour force participation rate dropped from 30% to 25%.



Employment

People with disability had a lower employment rate than people without disability

The employment rate (employment to population ratio) is calculated as the proportion of the working-age population who were employed. In 2015, 48% of working-age people with disability, and 22% of those with severe or profound limitation, were employed (ABS 2016b). This compares with around 79% of those without disability.

The employment rate for people with severe or profound limitation has decreased

While the overall employment rate for working-age people with disability remained relatively steady between 2003 and 2015 (at around 48–49%), it decreased for those with severe or profound limitation (from around 27% to 22%) (ABS 2004, 2016b).

The number of people with disability who were employed fell

The number of working-age people with disability who were employed has decreased—by 5% for those with disability and by 17% for those with severe or profound limitation (Table A2). Much of this change was the result of a decrease in the number of working-age people with disability working full-time hours—107,000 fewer were employed full time by 2015, but there were only an extra 56,400 part time workers (ABS 2016b).

There has been a shift away from full-time work and towards part-time work

While most working-age people with disability who were employed were working full time, between 2003 and 2015, there was a shift away from full-time work and towards part-time work (Figure 1; Table A2). Over that period, for working-age people with disability who were employed:

- the number and proportion working full time decreased:
 - the number working full time decreased by 16%, and by 41% for those with severe or profound limitation
 - the proportion working full time decreased from 63% to 56%, and from 49% to 37% for those with severe or profound limitation
- the number and proportion working part time increased:
 - the number working part time increased by 14%, and by 7% for those with severe or profound limitation
 - the proportion working part time increased from 37% to 44%, and from 49% to 63% for those with severe or profound limitation.

In comparison, between 2003 and 2015, the number of people without disability in both full-time and part-time employment increased (by 18% and 34%, respectively), with 68% of those employed working full time and 32% working part time in 2015 (similar to 2003).

People with disability were more likely to be underemployed than those without disability

Some people with disability would like to work more hours than they do. In the SDAC, a person is considered underemployed if they are employed, usually work 34 hours or less per week, would like a job with more hours, and are available to start work with more hours if offered a job in the next four weeks. In 2015, 11% of working-age people with disability who were employed, and 15% of those with severe or profound limitation, reported they were underemployed, compared with 8% of people without disability (ABS 2016a).

Unemployment

The unemployment rate is calculated as the proportion of working-age people participating in the labour force who were unemployed and looking for work.

People with disability had a higher rate of unemployment than people without disability

In 2015, the unemployment rate for people with disability was 10%, and 14% for people with severe or profound limitation, compared with 5% for people without disability (Figure 1; Table A3).

The unemployment rate for people with disability has increased

Between 2003 and 2015, the unemployment rate remained relatively steady for people without disability (at around 5% in both years) and increased slightly for people with disability (from 8% to 10%), especially for those with severe or profound limitation (from 11% to 14%) (Figure 1; Table A3).

In 2015, around 1 in 3 unemployed people with disability who were looking for work reported that the main reason they had difficulty finding work was their own ill health or disability (29%), rising to 48% for those with severe or profound limitation (ABS 2016b).

Discrimination

People's participation and inclusion in employment is influenced by discrimination. The 2015 SDAC introduced a new module to estimate the prevalence of discrimination experienced by people with disability, and to contextualise these experiences.

In 2015, of working-age people with disability who had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months:

- 27% reported their employer was the source of the discrimination
- 18% reported work colleagues were the source (ABS 2016b).

For those who were in the labour force at the time of the survey, an employer was the source of discrimination for:

- 47% of those who were unemployed
- 46% of those who were employed full time
- 35% of those who were employed part time (ABS 2016a).

Where can I find out more?

This fact sheet is accompanied by separately published tables, and is part of a series of releases on disability. These are available at: <www.aihw.gov.au/disability-publications>.

The SDAC is considered the best source for estimating the prevalence of disability in Australia, and is the source of the information included in this fact sheet. For more information on, and publications from, the survey, see: <www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0>.

Monitoring disability prevalence provides information on various issues relevant to social and economic policies and service planning, but it is only part of the picture. Information from other sources is needed to complement such data, and to present a more complete picture of the experiences of, and outcomes for, people with disability as they take part in various aspects of life in Australia. Sources of additional information include, but are not limited to, administrative data on government services and payments, including those from mainstream services (that is, those that are not disability specific). For example, other sources of data on people with disability include the Disability Services National Minimum Data Set at: <www.aihw.gov.au/disability-publications>, and the National Disability Insurance Agency at: <www.ndis.gov.au>.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2004. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2003, TableBuilder. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2016a. Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: summary of findings, 2015. ABS cat. no. 4430.0. Canberra: ABS.

ABS 2016b. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015, TableBuilder. Canberra: ABS.

Acknowledgments

This fact sheet was prepared by Jenni Joenpera and Felicity Murdoch of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The contributions of Melinda Petrie and Louise York are gratefully acknowledged.

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Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. Disability in Australia: changes over time in inclusion and participation in employment. Cat. no. DIS 68. Canberra: AIHW.

ISBN 978-1-76054-128-6 (PDF)

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