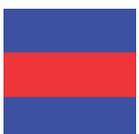




**The Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census

# Policy Brief on Disability



Department of Population  
Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population  
With technical assistance from UNFPA





## Key points

- (1) The nation's disability rate (comprised of those with mild, moderate and severe disabilities) is 4.6%; this figure represents 2,311,250 individuals. The rate is slightly higher for females at 4.8%, when compared to males (4.4%).
- (2) For all four functional domains (seeing, hearing, walking and remembering/concentrating), the disability prevalence rate rises steadily after age 39. As the percentage of older adults increases over time, so does the number of persons with disabilities, which is expected to increase by 36% by 2035. This fact needs to be considered when Government and stakeholders plan policies and programs to improve the living conditions of persons with disabilities.
- (3) Across the four functional domains, the disability prevalence rates are higher in rural areas. A more challenging physical environment and a lack of services (e.g., rehabilitation centres) may be two explanatory factors.
- (4) According to the 2014 Census, when compared to the population without disabilities, fewer persons with disabilities are married and, while still relatively rare, more report a divorce, separation or renouncement. For the population aged 35-39, 4.4% of all females with disabilities were divorced, separated or renounced; the proportion is 2.8% for females without disabilities. Among men in this age group, the proportions are 5.5% and 3.2% respectively. These facts may point to issues with isolation, stress, and social and economic hardship.
- (5) Many persons with disabilities (48.3%) are living in an extended household. However, some are living alone, and it is these individuals who are particularly vulnerable and in need of prioritized services.
- (6) Both boys and girls with disabilities are less likely to attend or to have attended school than are children without disabilities. Among children aged 5 to 13 years who do not have a disability, 12.7% have never attended school. This rate is more than three times higher at 38.7% among children of the same age who report a disability. Addressing teacher training and the physical accessibility of schools may help to address this educational disparity going forward.
- (7) Just over two-thirds of males aged 15 and older with a disability (68.2%) report either no education or grades 1 to 5; this figure is 81.1% for females aged 15 and older with a disability. By contrast, almost half (49.4%) of males aged 15 and older without a disability report either no education or grades 1 to 5; the figure is 58.2% for females aged 15 and older without a disability. Education is essential if persons with disabilities are to fulfill their potential and to play an active role in the social and economic development of the country.
- (8) Labour force participation is lower for males and females with disabilities when compared to the populations without disabilities. For example, the labour force participation rate is 22.9% for males and females with a moderate/severe walking disability; this rate is 67.6% for males and females without a disability. This could be addressed through more workplace-specific disability employment policies, school-to-work transition programs and employer education.
- (9) With less formal education and lower employment rates, it is not surprising that the 2014 Census data show a higher disability prevalence rate amongst those in the lowest wealth index quintile.<sup>1</sup>
- (10) Persons with disabilities face barriers and obstacles that can impede their access to services. The creation of a disability-friendly infrastructure and inclusive services could help to remove these barriers.

## Prevalence

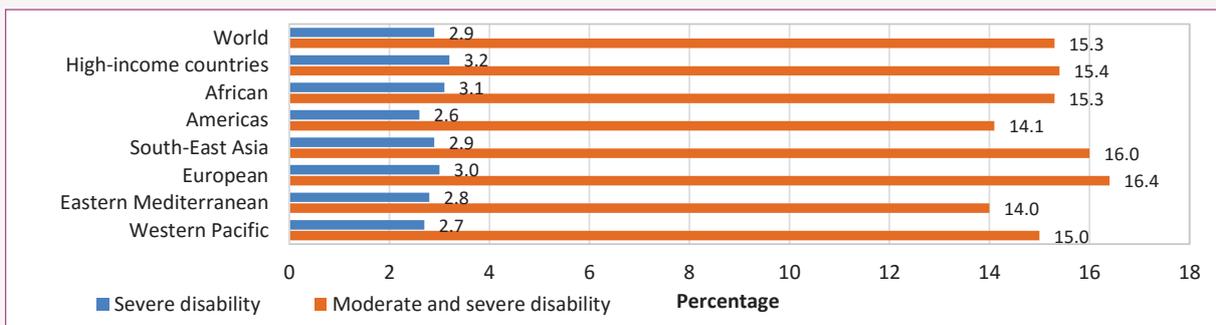
According to the 2014 Census, there were 2,311,250 individuals (4.6%) who report a mild or higher degree of disability based on their responses to questions in four functional domains: seeing, hearing, walking and remembering/concentrating. Among people with a disability, 75.8% report a mild disability (some difficulty), 14.9% report a moderate disability (a lot of difficulty) and 9.3% report a severe disability (cannot do at all).

More people report that they have some difficulty seeing (2.15%) than report some difficulty walking (1.36%), remembering/concentrating (1.21%) or hearing (1.08%).

A total of 841,612 persons (1.7% of the total population and 36.4% of the population with disabilities) report multiple disabilities. The largest group among those who had multiple disabilities report a disability related

<sup>1</sup> A wealth index is a composite measure of a household's cumulative living standard that is calculated using data such as access to selected assets (e.g., bicycles), construction materials used, and types of water access and sanitation facilities. The population is then divided into five equally sized groups of people, each representing 20% of the population (i.e., quintiles).

**Figure 1: Estimated prevalence of 'moderate' and 'severe' disability, by sex by region**



Source: Global Burden of Disease estimates for 2004, World Report on Disability, 2011

to both walking and remembering/concentrating.

The *World Report on Disability* (2011) places the global rate of disability (moderate or higher) at 15.3% and 16% for South-East Asia. According to this report, South-East Asia has the second highest prevalence rate after Europe, which has a much larger population of older adults. At 4.6%, Myanmar's rate is much lower than those reported both globally and in the South-East Asia region.<sup>2</sup>

### Age and Gender

The percentage of persons who report a disability remains stable until the age of 30 and then increases rapidly as age increases. There is only a small gender difference in the age-specific disability prevalence rates until age 75. After 75, the prevalence rate increases at a faster pace for females, largely due to their higher average life expectancy.

The same pattern is present for all four functional domains.

The aging population will mean a significant increase in the number of persons with disabilities in the next 35 years. These older persons with disabilities will have specific needs that will have to be considered as policies and programs are being developed.

### Regional and Rural/Urban Differences

Across all domains, persons living in rural areas have higher levels of disability when compared to their urban counterparts: 1.8 million (5%) live in rural areas

and 532,064 (3.6%) live in urban areas.

Despite this fact, services for persons with disabilities are concentrated in the major cities. It will be important to ensure that all persons with disabilities have access to the necessary services. Outreach activities and coordination with authorities and stakeholders in all areas of the country may help improve this situation.

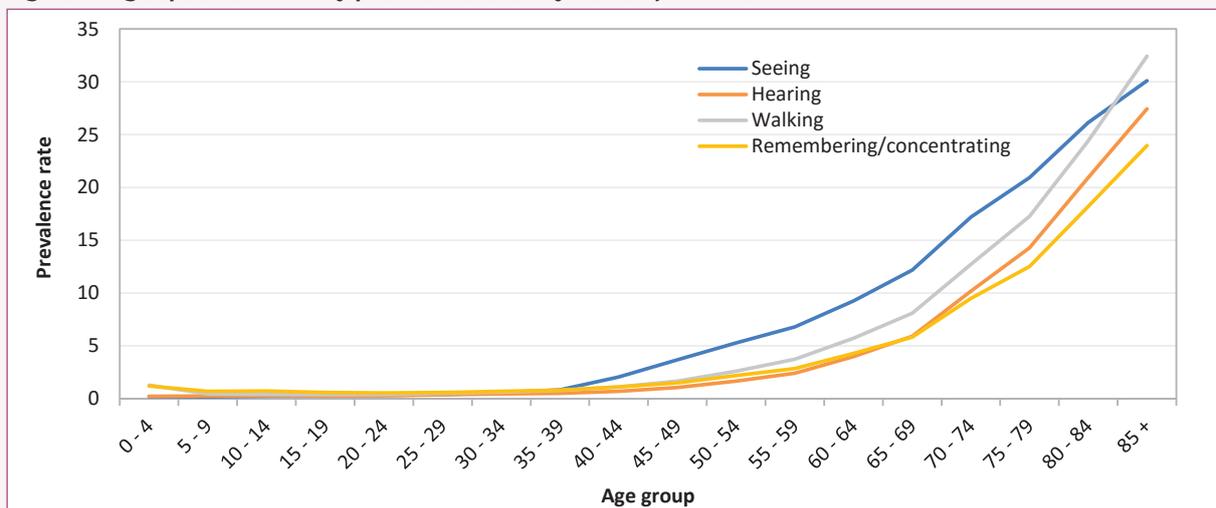
The prevalence of disability is higher in the middle-western and southern parts of the country. There is a concentration of Districts with high prevalence rates in the Ayeyawady Region and also in several southern States/Regions. Labutta (11.2%), Hinthada (8.3%), Myaungmya (7.6%) and Phayapon (7.4%) (all in the Ayeyawady Region) are amongst the Districts with the highest prevalence rates. Myeik (Tanintharyi Region) and Pharpon (Kayin State) also reported high prevalence rate (both at 8%).

### Household Living Conditions

At the time of the 2014 Census, an estimated 47.9 million persons were living in 10.9 million households. Within these households, 11.3% had at least one person living with a mild disability only, 2.7% of households had at least one person with a moderate disability only, and 1.8% of households had at least one person with a severe disability.

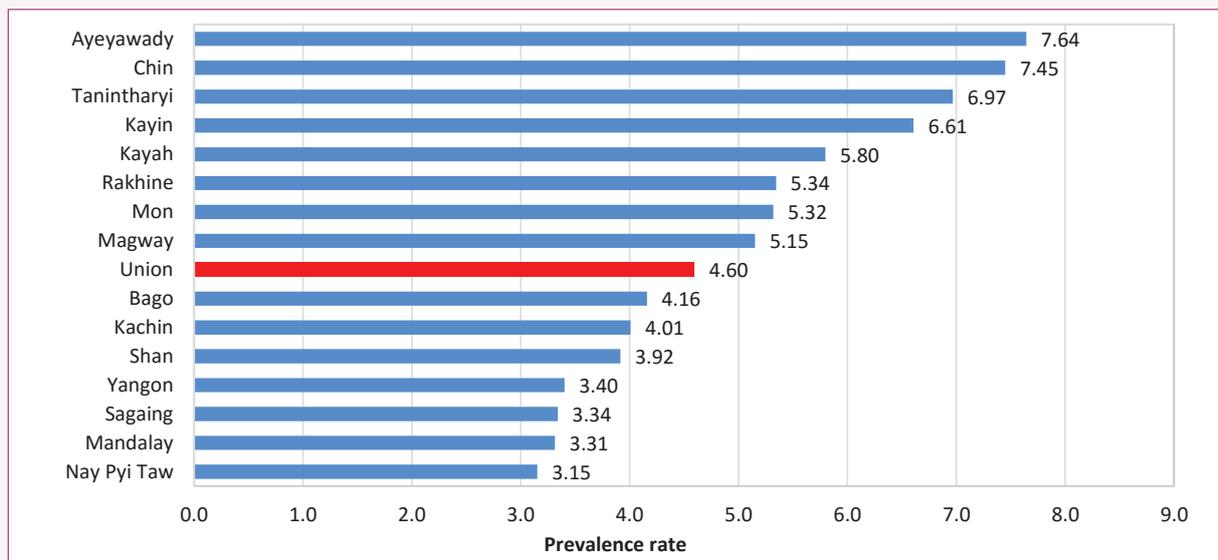
Families are taking care of their relatives with a disability; this demonstrates that the traditional system in which the family takes care of an ailing or

**Figure 2: Age specific disability prevalence rates by domain, 2014 Census**



<sup>2</sup> Disability prevalence rate collected in a census is generally low which is common in several countries.

**Figure 3: Disability prevalence rates, State/Region, 2014 Census**



relative with a disability is still largely in place. The proportion of people living in extended households is considerably higher for those with a disability than for those without a disability: 48.3 versus 39.4 per cent.

More than three times as many persons with a disability live on their own. Amongst those individuals with a disability who live on their own, more than two thirds (67%) are women.

**Marital Status**

The Census also found that where a person lives, his/her wealth status and his/her disability domain all have an impact on marriage rates. Both males and females with a disability have a much lower chance of being in a marital union at all ages than their peers without a disability. According to the 2014 Census, 81.8% of males without a disability were married; this figure was 63.4% for males with a disability. Among females, the rates were 77.9% and 66.8%, respectively.

While divorce in Myanmar is quite rare amongst all populations, disability status does seem to be a factor. Amongst females aged 15 to 74, the percentage of those reporting a divorce, separation or renouncement is higher for those with a disability than for those without a disability. Amongst males, the pattern is slightly different, with the rate lower for males with disability until age 25 but became higher

until the age of 69, and then lower again for those aged 70 and over.

In terms of disability domains, those individuals who experience difficulties remembering/concentrating have a much higher likelihood of experiencing a divorce/separation/renouncement than individuals with difficulties in the other functional domains.

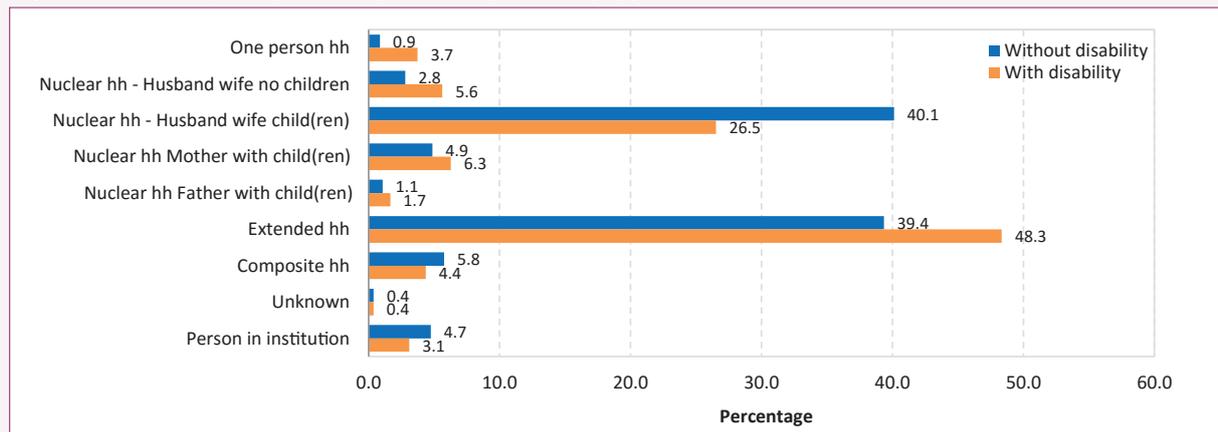
There are steps that the Government and other stakeholders could take to address the potential isolation, stress, and social and economic hardship that may be experienced by those persons with a disability who have never married or who have reported a divorce, separation or renouncement.

**Disability and School Attendance**

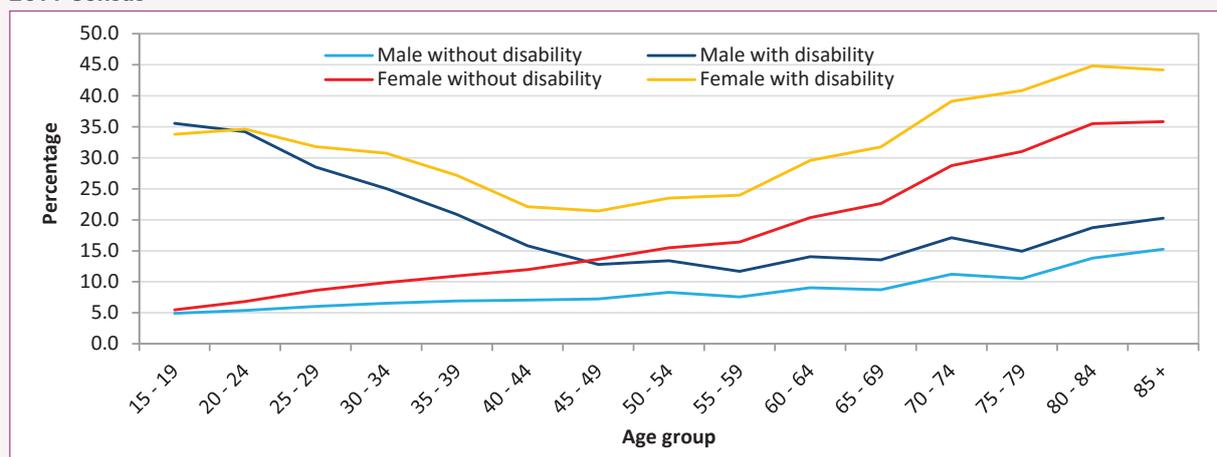
Both boys and girls with disabilities are less likely to attend or to have attended school than are children without disabilities. Among children aged 5 to 13 years who do not have a disability, 12.7% have never attended school. This rate is more than three times higher (38.7%) among children of the same age who report a disability. This rises to 50% among children with a moderate disability and 72% among children with a severe disability.

Location and wealth are some of the factors that influence whether or not a child with a disability

**Figure 4: Percentage of persons by disability status by type of household, 2014 Census**



**Figure 5: Percentage of population aged 15 and over, who are illiterate by disability status by age by sex, 2014 Census**



will attend school. However, the factor that has the greatest influence on whether or not a child with a disability will attend school is the severity of his/her disability. For each of the four functional domains, the chances of a child attending school gradually decrease as the degree of his/her disability increases. In fact, children with severe problems remembering/concentrating are more than 10 times less likely to be in school.

Addressing teacher training and the physical accessibility of schools may help to address this educational disparity going forward.

### Disability and Literacy

Literacy increases the chances that persons with a disability will participate in the labour market, and it empowers them, and allows them, to fully participate in all aspects of social life. Among males without a disability, 6.8% are illiterate compared to 16.9% among males with a disability. Among females, the corresponding rates are 11.9% and 31.7% respectively. The differences are most pronounced among young adults under the age of 30.

### Disability and Educational Attainment

Education is important if persons with a disability are to advance themselves and it is also essential if persons with a disability are to play an active role in the social and economic development of the country. Just over two thirds of males aged 15 and older with a disability (68.2%) report either no education or had attended only grades 1 to 5; this figure is 81.1% for females aged 15 and older with a disability. By contrast, almost half (49.4%) of males aged 15 and older without a disability report either no education or had completed grades 1 to 5; the figure is 58.2% for females aged 15 and older without a disability. These data show that females, both with and without a disability, experience inequality and lack of opportunity because of their gender.

As was the case for school attendance, wealth, location and functional domain all have an impact on educational attainment.

### Disability and Employment

The right to work is one of the key human rights of persons with disabilities. Participation in the labour market is a crucial factor in creating an individual's

sense of worthiness by contributing to society. The 2014 Census shows that, amongst the population aged 15 to 64 (the working-age population), labour force participation is lower for both males and females with a disability when compared to their counterparts without disabilities.

Across the four functional domains, males and females with a mild disability are more likely to participate in the labour force than those with a moderate/severe disability.

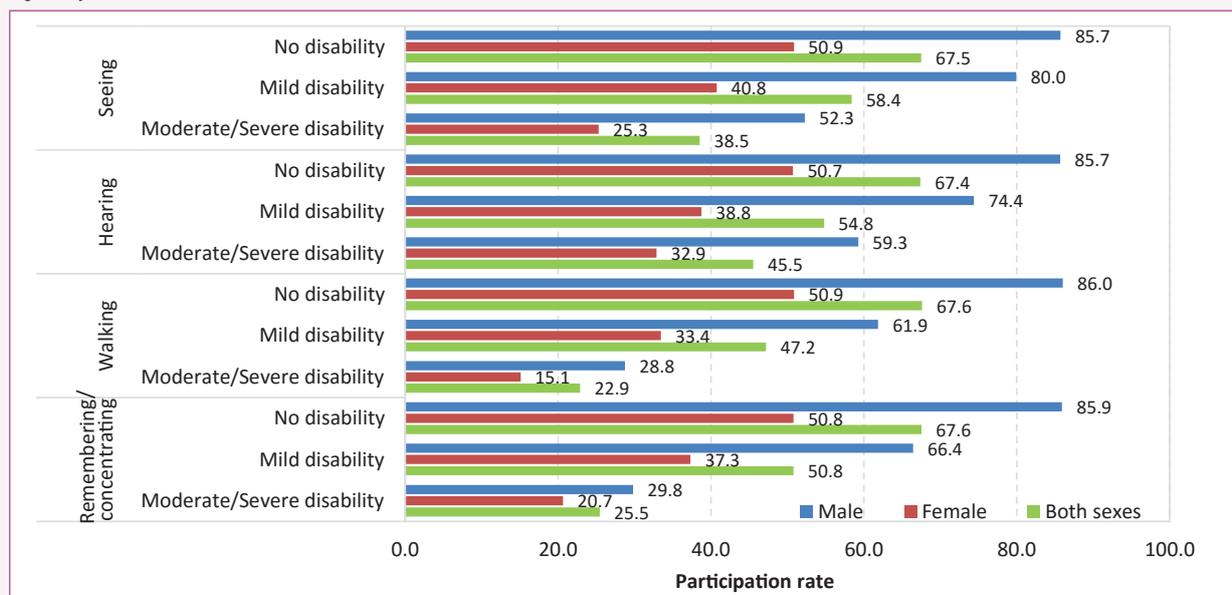
While there are differences in labour force participation between States/Regions, the overall pattern remains consistent, with the lowest participation rate amongst those with a moderate/severe disability, slightly higher participation amongst those with a mild disability and the highest participation amongst those with no disability.

For all populations (both with and without a disability and for all domains and severity levels), the labour force participation rate is lower for females than it is for males. To illustrate, the labour force participation rate amongst individuals (aged 15 to 64) with a moderate/severe seeing disability, the rate is 25.3% for females and 52.3% for males.

Amongst the working-age population, disability is a contributing factor to whether or not the individual is engaged in vulnerable employment (often with no formal work arrangements, which perhaps leads to worsening work conditions and a lack of adequate social security). Among adults aged 15 to 64 years with no disability, 56.1% are working in vulnerable employment. By contrast, among individuals with moderate/severe seeing disability - 61.2% are working in vulnerable employment. This increases to 61.7% of individuals with a moderate/severe walking disability, 66.9% of individuals with a moderate/severe hearing disability, and to 69.4% for those with a moderate/severe remembering/concentrating disability.

These lower labour force participation rates can be addressed through law that prohibits discrimination based on disability, employment quotas, school-to-work transition programs, job search assistance and employer education.

**Figure 6: Labour force participation rates for persons aged 15 - 64 in households by domain by degree of disability by sex, 2014 Census**



### Disability and Poverty

Persons with disabilities are more likely to have less formal education and are also less likely to be economically active. As such, it is not surprising that the data show a higher disability prevalence rate amongst those in the lowest wealth index quintile than in the highest. This statement is true across the four functional domains for both males and females. Overall, across domains, more females than males with a disability are in the lowest quintile. For example, amongst females with a seeing disability, 3.35% are in the lowest quintile; this rate is 2.74% for males.

Poverty and disability are intertwined in a vicious circle. One way to break this cycle is to ensure that persons with disabilities who can and want to work are supported and properly protected by the Government. This requires changes in a number of areas, including accommodations in the education

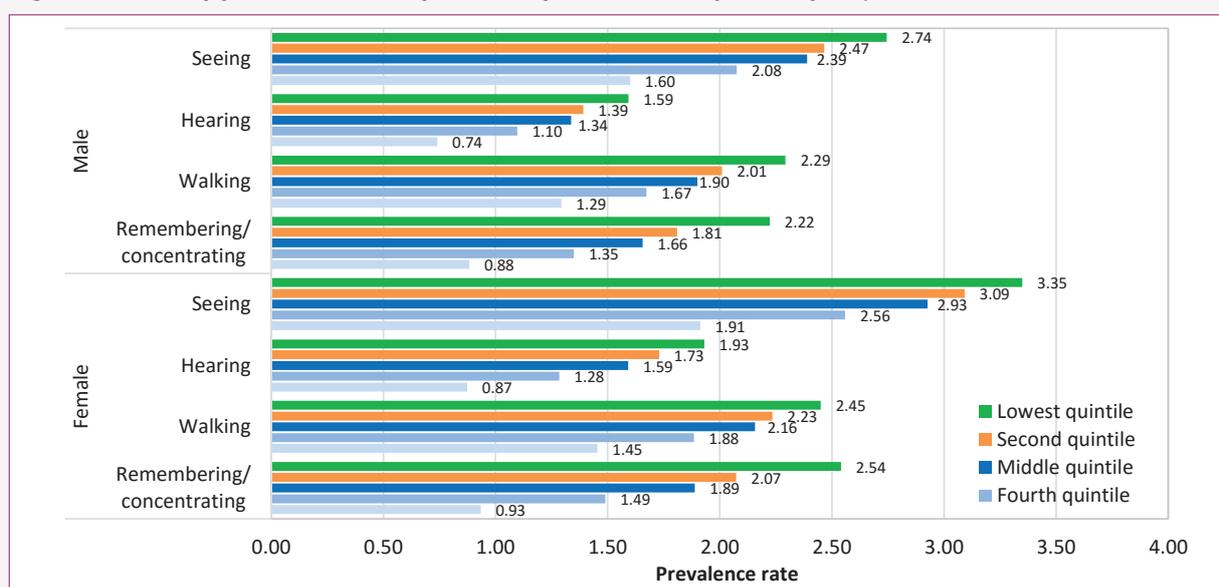
system and the creation of a disability-friendly infrastructure.

### Access to Services

According to the 2014 Census, almost one quarter (23%) of persons with a disability did not have any form of identity card. This figure increases to 40.9% amongst those with a severe disability. The lack of proper identification may make it difficult for these individuals to register for benefits and access the necessary assistance.

The Census Thematic Report on Disability has highlighted important disparities that need to be taken into account when developing plans and programmes in Myanmar. Deliberate efforts should be made by policy makers to concretely address these disparities and to ensure the overall welfare of people with disabilities.

**Figure 7: Disability prevalence rates by domain by wealth index quintile by sex, 2014 Census**



**Note:** The analysis in this policy brief does not cover the non-enumerated populations. Some populations in three areas of the country were not enumerated. This included an estimate of 1,090,000 persons residing in Rakhine State, 69,800 persons living in Kayah State and 46,600 persons living in Kachin State (see Department of Population, 2015, for the reasons that these populations were not enumerated). In total, therefore, it is estimated that 1,206,400 persons were not enumerated in the Census.