

Disabilities around the world

What is “disabilities”?

Disability cannot be easily defined and conceptualized. The current international standard is the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO): “disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.”

(Source: World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>, last access: 28/04/2010)

An estimated 10 % of the population worldwide experience some form of disability

Due to differing definitions of disabilities, measurement methodologies, and variance in the quality of the data, we have to rely on an estimate. **Approximately 650 million people – of which 200 million are children – live with a disability.** About 80 % of disabled persons live in low-income countries. According to WHO disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. The most common disabilities are associated with chronic conditions such as chronic respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, injuries (such as those due to road traffic crashes, landmines, or violence), mental illness, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS (see graph), and other infectious diseases.

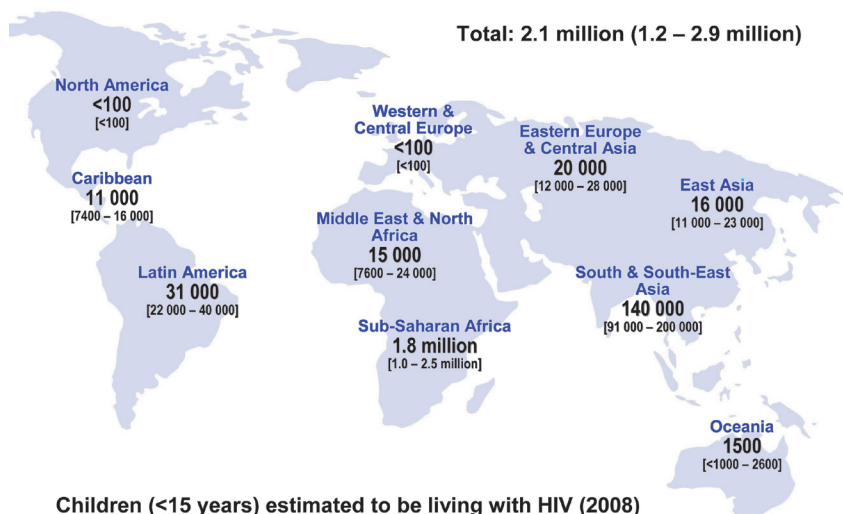
According to the World Bank, reported disability rates vary widely in developed and developing countries. In developed countries like the United States and Canada, the prevalence rates are quite high (around 20 %). Conversely, countries like Kenya and Bangladesh often report very low rates (under 1 %). This is because of the differing definitions of disability. End of 2010, WHO will publish their **World report on disability** to provide comprehensive and reliable statistic data.

(Sources: World report on disability: http://www.who.int/disabilities/publications/concept_note_2010.pdf, United Nations: Factsheet on persons with disabilities: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=18>, last access: 28/04/2010)

A new social model of disability

Recently, there is a paradigm shift from a **medical model to a social model** of disability. For many years, the “problem” of disability was seen in the body of the affected person, rather than in society or in the way the deviant body is perceived. Following the “UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (CRPD), human beings with disabilities are considered as subjects with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free consent as well as being active members of the society they live.

(Source: United Nations enable: Rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. CRPD. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/>, last access: 28/04/2010)



Children (<15 years) estimated to be living with HIV (2008)

Source: UNAIDS/WHO: AIDS epidemic update. 2009.

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