

# A brief explainer on The Washington Group Questions on Disability

It's estimated there are **1 billion** persons with disabilities in the world.

There is a critical evidence gap regarding the incidence, distribution and experience of persons with disabilities. Although many countries currently collect data on persons with disabilities, the methods used can vary greatly. The result is inconsistent, often poor-quality information which can under-estimate disability prevalence, lacks a nuanced understanding of different types of disabilities, and is not locally, regionally or globally comparable. This may lead decision makers to overlook disability in policies and programming and makes it impossible to benchmark and monitor progress for persons with disabilities.

To address this, The Washington Group on Disability Statistics developed a standard set of universal questions on disability to use in censuses and surveys. These questions identify and measure disability across multiple domains of functioning and enable the comparison of data.

**The short set can provide key information for evidence-based advocacy and policies.**

## THE SHORT SET



Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?

Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?

Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?

Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?

Do you have difficulty (with self-care such as) washing all over or dressing?

Using your usual (customary) language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?

a. No – no difficulty b. Yes – some difficulty c. Yes – a lot of difficulty d. Cannot do at all

## Washington Group Questions on Disability

✓ The Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS) are the simplest and shortest set of questions. They are relatively efficient, low cost, and easy to incorporate into ongoing data collection of national statistical systems. Other tools are appropriate when a more detailed understanding of sectors or barriers and enablers to inclusion is required.

✓ The WG-SS have been rigorously tested across the world in many languages to ensure they deliver internationally comparable data.

✓ Many countries and stakeholders strongly support the Washington Group short set of questions to be used as the tool to determine prevalence and disaggregate data by disability, particularly in household surveys and national censuses. (e.g., by United Nations Statistics Division for the 2020 round of census, and the Conference of European Statisticians, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe)

✓ The WG-SS is suitable for disaggregating by disability status and monitoring progress in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. It is widely endorsed for this by the disability sector.



## Disaggregated Data

- Data disaggregation is the process of dividing data for the total population into subgroups of interest.
- Data disaggregated by disability allows for comparisons of persons with and without disabilities, which is the first step in identifying and exploring inequalities associated with disability.
- The subcategories across which data are disaggregated can be defined by more than one characteristic, such as disability and gender, and the disability disaggregation can take into account different aspects of disability such as severity and type.
- In disability data collection, disaggregation, and analysis, the categories of disability should follow guidelines identified by representative organizations of persons with disabilities.

**The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development require that statistics and data be disaggregated by disability whenever applicable.**

# Supplementary Information

Where possible, expanding data collection beyond the short set of questions will get more complete information on disability.

## What about other disabilities and children?

The Washington Group Short Set is not perfect.

To adequately capture information on psychosocial disabilities more complex questions are needed than what are included in the short set. Refer to the [Washington Group website](#) for more information on data collection for psychosocial disabilities.

- However, an [Enhanced Short Set](#) and [Extended Set](#) of questions on functioning that includes questions on psychosocial disabilities has been developed for use in surveys.

The WG-SS is designed for use with adults

- The Washington Group / UNICEF Module on Child Functioning includes domain of importance to the functional status of children and adolescents.

## What do these additional questions cover?

- [The Enhanced Short Set](#) (12 questions), that includes additional questions on upper body functioning and anxiety and depression. The questions on anxiety and depression follow a different response format and cut off points to other questions in the Short Set.

- [The Extended Set](#) (24 items) adds supplementary questions to the Short Set questions and also includes additional questions on upper body functioning, anxiety and depression, pain and fatigue and the use of assistive devices. The questions on pain and fatigue follow similar response formats to the questions on anxiety and depression.

## Can they be used outside of official government censuses and surveys?

While their design was to address the shortcomings in quality internationally comparable data, these questions are being used increasingly by others including development and humanitarian organisations to identify persons with disabilities in their programmes and disaggregate programme data.

**For more information:**

**On the Washington Group and related questions and guidance**



Click the icons to learn more



**On disability data advocacy**

