

## Disabled Population in Saudi Arabia

By

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### Abstract

#### *Background*

The Saudi population with disabilities represents an important segment of the population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as their percentage has evolved from 0.8% of the Saudi population in the 2004 census to 7.1% in the 2017 survey, and it is expected that their percentage will reach 8.4% in 2022.

#### *Aims*

The study aims to know the development in the number of disabled Saudis, their geographical distribution, the change in some of their characteristics, and the factors leading to the growth of their numbers.

#### *Methods*

The study is a quantitative study based on the spatial analysis method for the distribution of Saudi disabled persons and the study of some of their specialties using the historical and analytical method.

#### *Results*

From analysis of the spatial data distribution of Saudi disabled persons varied among the thirteen Provinces of the Kingdom, as it was noted that the highest urban and populated areas (Al-Riyadh - with Makkah Al- Mokarramah -Eastern Province) are the highest in the percentage of disabled persons.

#### *Conclusions*

Some social customs and traditions in Saudi society, such as Encouraging consanguineous marriages, in addition to the high rates of illiteracy. The study of some demographic characteristics of disabled Saudis, such as the sex ratio, showed a higher percentage of disabled males compared to females, while female illiteracy rates were higher compared to disabled males, considering the family's interest in educating males at the expense of females.

**Keywords:**Saudis with disabilities, geographical distribution, sex ratio of the disabled educational status of the disabled, Saudi Arabia.

### Introduction

The Saudi population with disabilities represents an important segment of the population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as their percentage has evolved from 0.8% of the Saudi population in the 2004 census to 7.1% in the 2017 survey, and it is expected that their

percentage will reach 8.4% in 2022. Therefore, it is important to study their development and distribution in the thirteen administrative regions of the Kingdom, and to study the factors that lead to the increase in their numbers despite the health care and pre-marital examinations imposed by the Saudi government.

### ***The Evolution of the numbers of the Saudi disabilities' population:***

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia acceded to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol in 2008 (Maat for Peace.2019. P.1), thus increasing its interest in its statistical data. Attention was also paid to the health, social and economic services provided to them under the auspices of the government and its various institutions, In addition, the system of care for persons with disabilities promulgated by Royal Decree No. (M/ 37) of 2000, ensured the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, In addition, 38 responses and support were established from the Kingdom's Provinces (Maat for Peace.2019, p.2).

Data of the disability's population in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia suffers from several problems, whether in terms of its unavailability, renewal, or lack of detailed information. The oldest census carried out in the Kingdom was in 1974, when the total population reached 7 million, and it was inaccurate and did not include data on people with disabilities. Then, came the 1992 census, with a Saudi population about 16.9 million, without data on the disabled population as well. Then, came the 2004 census, with a population about 27.1 million people (60.9% of all is Saudis), and for the first time, fairly detailed data on people with disabilities was reported. Then, the last census was in 2010 with a population of 31.7 million (60% of all is Saudis), and it included data on people with disabilities, and the survey of people with disabilities in 2017 is the last data available on people with disabilities from official Saudi authorities.

The number of the Saudi population with disabilities reached 124596 people (65% males - 35% females) in the 2004 census, at a rate of 0.8 of the total Saudi population (population census, 2004, p. 95). The number of the Saudi population with disabilities increased by 170,217 people (56.6% males - 40.4% females), by 0.9% of the total Saudi population in the 2010 census (population census, 2010, p. 145), and at a growth rate of 5.3% annually during the period (2004-2010). The number of the Saudi population with disabilities continued to increase with the latest published government data about them, reaching 1.44 million (52.2% males - 47.8% females), representing 7.1% of the total Saudi population in the 2017 survey sample (Disability Survey, 2017, P.37).

### ***Spatial analysis of the Saudi disabilities' population:***

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is divided administratively into 13 Provinces, and the distribution of the population in general varies among its Provinces, with Makkah Al-Mokarramah coming in first place with 26% of the total population in 2017 and 2021, while Al-Riyadh (the capital of the Kingdom) came in second place with 25%. The eastern Province came in third place with a rate of 23%, and the percentages differed in the rest of the Provinces. The distribution of the Kingdom's population over its Provinces affected the geographical distribution of the Saudi population with disabilities, as the degree of Pearson's correlation coefficient between them 0.989 in 2004, 0.987 in 2010, and finally 0.979 in 2017, which is a very strong direct correlation which indicates the correlation between them. Geographical distribution of the disabled Saudi population in the administrative Provinces:

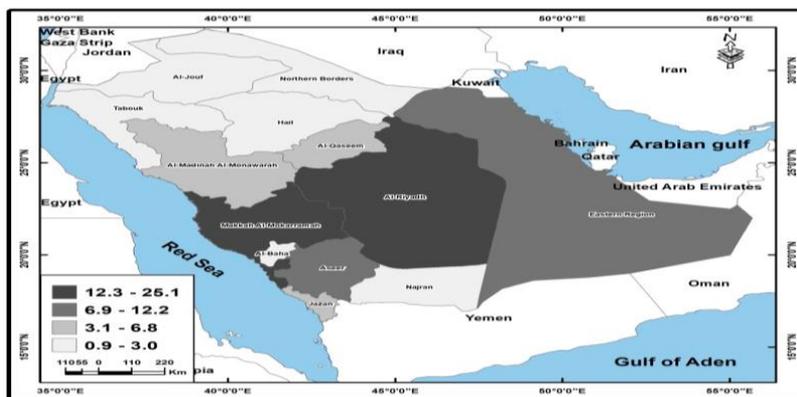
Al-Riyadh Province came in the first place, as it included 23% of the total number of people with disabilities in 2004, followed by Makkah Al Mukarramah Al-Mokarramah Province with 18.7%, The Eastern Province with 16%. The three Provinces are the largest population centers in the Kingdom, as they together included 60% of the total Saudi population of 9.9 million people in the 2004 census, while they included 57.7% of the total Saudi population with disabilities.

The order of the rest of the Kingdom's Provinces varied in terms of the proportion of the Saudi population with disabilities in the 2004 census, as shown in Table No. (1) and Figure No. (1), where the centers occupied from the fourth to the thirteen Provinces (Aseer, Jazan, Madinah, Al-Al-Qaseem, Tabouk, Hail, Al Baha-Najran-Al-Jouf-Northern Borders) and these areas together included 42.3% of the total Saudi population with disabilities in the 2004 census.

**Table 1.** The relative geographical distribution of Saudi disabled persons during the period (2004-2017).

Areas	2004	2010	2017
Al-Riyadh	23.0	22.6	25.1
Makkah Al-Mokarramah	18.7	20.8	23.3
Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah	6.1	6.9	6.8
Al-Qaseem	4.3	5.1	4.5
Eastern Region	16.0	15.0	12.2
Aseer	8.0	9.5	11.4
Tabouk	3.7	3.0	3.0
Hail	3.4	2.8	3.0
Northern Borders	1.6	1.3	0.9
Jazan	7.9	7.1	6.0
Najran	2.5	2.0	0.9
Al-Baha	2.6	2.0	1.8
Al-Jouf	2.2	1.8	1.0

\* Population Census – 2004 & 2010.  
-Disability Survey 2017



**Figure 1.** The geographical distribution of Saudi disabled persons.

The order of the provinces (Al-Riyadh-Makkah Al Mukarramah-the Eastern Province) has not changed in terms of the percentage of the disabled Saudi population in the 2010 census compared to the previous census in 2004. Al-Riyadh came first with a rate of 22.6%, Makkah Al Mukarramah 20.8%, and the Eastern Province 16%, Together, they included 59.4% of the total Saudi population with disabilities in 2010, decreasing by about 0.6% compared to the percentage of the 2004 census, while the three Provinces included 60.4% of the total Saudi population in the Kingdom in 2010. The order of the rest of the other ten Provinces, which together included 40.6%, did not change. Of the total Saudi population with disabilities in 2010, except for Najran Province, which advanced to come in tenth place, while Al-Baha Province declined to come in eleventh place compared to the 2004 census.

The three major Provinces in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Riyadh, Makkah Al Mukarramah, Eastern Province) accounted for the largest number of the disabled Saudi population in the Kingdom by 25.1%, 23.3% and 12.2%, respectively, with a total of 60.6% according to the data of the last survey of the disabled in the Kingdom in 2017, In parallel, the three Provinces accounted for 65% of the total Saudi population in 2017.

The ranking of some administrative Provinces in Saudi Arabia has changed according to the last survey of the disabled in 2017, where Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah Province advanced to come in the fifth place, and Jazan fell to the sixth place compared to their positions in 2010. While Najran fell from the eleventh place to the thirteenth and last place to be equal with the Northern Border Province. The ten Provinces together contained 39.4% of the Saudi population with disabilities in 2017.

## **Demographic characteristics of the disabled Saudi population:**

The demographic characteristics of the disabled population vary between social, economic, educational and more characteristics, and the following is a study of some of those characteristics.

### ***Sex Ratio***

The sex ratio of the total Saudi population with disabilities in the Kingdom reached 183 males/100 females in the 2004 census and decreased to 148 males/100 females in 2010, and the sex ratio continued to decline to reach 109 males/100 females in the 2017 handicapped survey.

The sex ratio of the disabled Saudi population varied in the administrative Provinces (Table NO. 2), as it rose from its counterpart in the Kingdom in six Provinces in 2004 in Tabouk, Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah, Eastern Province, Hail, Al-Qaseem and Makkah Al Mukarramah. While it was equal with it in Jizan, and decreased from it in the Northern Border Provinces, Al-Riyadh, Najran, Al Baha, Al-Jouf, and Aseer.

The sex ratio in four Provinces (Al-Qaseem , Northern Borders, Riyadh, Jizan) increased from its counterpart in the Kingdom in 2010, while it was equal with it in Al-

Madinah Al-Monawarah and Makkah Al-Mukarramah, and decreased from it in the rest of the Provinces.

**Table 2.** The sex ratio of Saudi disabled persons during the period (2004-2017).

Areas	2004	2010	2017
Al-Riyadh	172	132	118
Makkah Al-Mokarramah	178	153	117
Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah	201	139	116
Al-Qaseem	195	148	114
Eastern Region	183	149	113
Aseer	163	128	111
Tabouk	187	148	109
Hail	188	161	108
Northern Borders	168	136	107
Jazan	163	144	102
Najran	194	147	100
Al-Baha	190	138	96
Al-Jouf	179	154	94
	172	148	109

\* Population Census – 2004 & 2010.  
-Disability Survey 2017

The sex ratio in six Provinces (Najran, Riyadh, Tabouk, Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah, Jizan, Al-Jouf) increased from its counterpart in the Kingdom according to the Disabled Survey in 2017, while it was equal with it in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, and decreased in the rest of the Provinces to record the lowest value in the Hail Province (96 males/100 males/100 female), and the Northern Border Province (94 males/100 females), and this is the first time that the percentage of females with disabilities exceeds males.

### **Educational composition:**

Education is one of the most important rights guaranteed by international conventions and treaties to human beings in general, and to people with disabilities. Therefore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has provided many schools and institutions that provide educational services to people with special needs, whether Saudi or non-Saudi residents, which is reflected in the educational level of the Saudi population with disabilities and monitoring in the 2017 Disability Survey (no older or more recent data on the educational status of people with disabilities is available). A study of Table No. (3) and Figure No. (2) revealed the following:

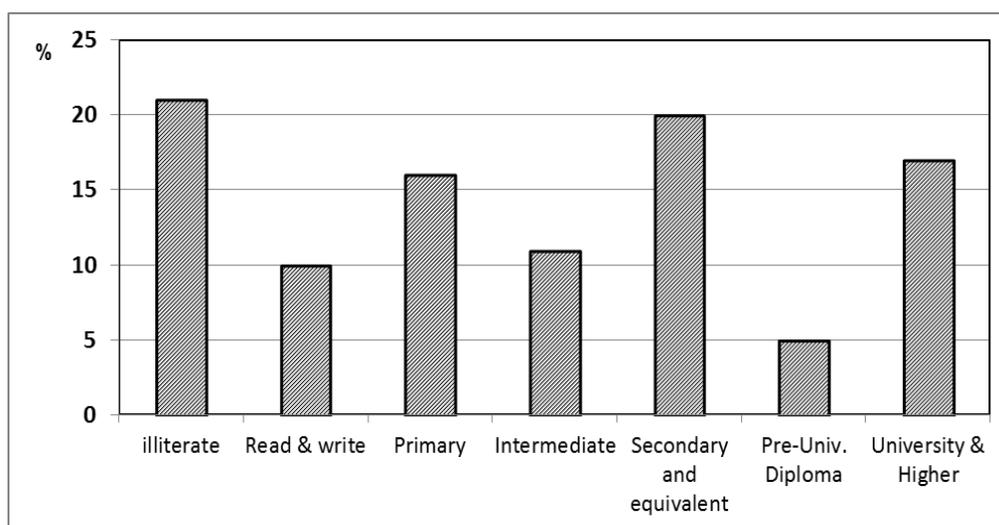
The number of disabled Saudis (10 years and over) reached 770,167 (54% males, 46% females) in 2017, and they represent 53.3% of the total Saudi population with disabilities of all ages, amounting to 1.45 million people according to the 2017 survey.

**Table 3.** Relative distribution of Saudi disabled people by educational status in 2017.

<b>Educational Status</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
illiterate	22	78	21
Read & write	44	56	10
Primary	63	37	16
Intermediate	57	43	11
Secondary and equivalent	66	34	20
Pre-Univ. Diploma	83	17	5
University & Higher	66	34	17

\* Disability Survey 2017. PP 94-95.

The illiteracy rate is high among the Saudi population with disabilities (10 years and over), as their category came first with a rate of 21%. The most illiterate disabled were females, at 78%, compared to 22% for males. This is explained in the light of some social customs and traditions of some families, which give preference to educating disabled males.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Saudi disabled people by educational status in 2017.

- The category of the Saudi population with disabilities (10 years and over) with a secondary qualification and its equivalent came in second place with a rate of 20% (66% males, 34% females). Those with a university degree or more came third with 17%, and the majority of them were males with 66%. The government has been interested in providing educational opportunities abroad to complete higher studies, as the royal approval was issued for the scholarship system for Saudis with disabilities in 2007 (A.P.D, 2020, p. 21). The category of Saudis with disabilities who obtained primary education came in fourth place with a rate of 16% (63% males, 37% females), then those with intermediate education ranked fifth with 11% (57% males, 43% females).

Saudis with disabilities who can read and write ranked sixth with a rate of 10% (44% males, 56% females), and in the seventh and last place came the category of holders of a diploma less than a university degree by 5% (83% males, 17% females). In general, it is noted that the percentage of males at the higher educational levels increase compared to females, while the percentage of females increases at the lower educational levels.

## **Conclusion**

The percentage of Saudi disabled persons increased from 0.8% in 2004 to 7.1% in 2017, and it is expected that their percentage will reach about 8.4% in 2022. The largest proportion of the disabled Saudis were geographically distributed among the densely populated and higher urban areas such as Al-Riyadh, Makkah Al Mukarramah and the Eastern Province, while the regions of Najran and the Northern Border Province were the least in the proportion of the disabled because they are border provinces and less urban. The percentage of disabled males is also higher compared to females in Saudi Arabia, which is reflected in the sex ratio, which was in eleven provinces, and in favor of females in only two provinces (Hail the Northern Border). The illiteracy rates of disabled Saudi females have also increased compared to disabled males due to the social customs and traditions of some families that are more interested in educating disabled males compared to females in some provinces.

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