

Disabled people in Västra Götaland

Inventory of target groups in 2000



Introduction

This publication presents information on the number of disabled people in Västra Götaland. It is a short version of a comprehensive publication with the same title that can be ordered from the Disabilities committee's secretariat.

Stating the numbers of disabled people is a means to create a basis for planning and decisions on disability policies in Västra Götaland. The aims might be to find a better basis for decisions on how to improve accessibility for various disabled groups, to dimension activities or equalise the county's health care. Statistical data on people with different disabilities is also useful in contacts and co-operation with competent authorities, administrations and organisations in the county.

It is difficult to arrive at exact numbers since different definitions and criteria are applied. Two main sources have been used: one is the number of people with a certain disability receiving support or treatment from Region Västra Götaland, the second is a general assessment of the number of people with a certain disability.

Almost all registrations are made focusing on one disability, as a kind of major diagnosis, but it is not unusual for individuals to have several disabilities. The number of unrecorded cases is considerable for certain groups.

Please note that numbers and statistics in this publication are very uncertain. Many disabled individuals appear in several combinations and the material should be used with caution.

Different sources have been used for the present statistics. Data have been collected from Region Västra Götaland's own activities, from certain epidemiological research activities, Statistics Sweden, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Handicap Institute, disability organisations, municipalities, the social insurance office, the county labour board, and the National Institute for Disability issues at school (SIH).

Results

There is an assessed figure of approx. 200 000 disabled people in Västra Götaland. Government states in its bill “From patient to citizen – a national plan for disability policies”, 1999/2000:79, that approximately every fifth individual in professionally active age groups has some kind of disability, e g 180 000 people in Västra Götaland. In general terms 10 percent of the population are immigrants. This implies that 20 000 disabled people in the county have an immigrant background.

It is very important to point out that these people form a very mixed group. Very different disabilities are involved, of various severity and often in combinations. One example would be an individual with mobility impairments, epilepsy, hearing disorders and diabetes. Combinations of different disabilities could be very extensive.

It is an open question if the disability leads to a handicap, not least due to the physical environment and existing attitudes and values. The 200 000 individuals have different needs and life situations. They have certain needs in common only because of specific disabilities but in addition needs and wishes as varied as everyone else's.

We have chosen to use seven major headings for the various diagnosis/disability groups.

People with:

- neurological diseases and/or mobility impairments
- hearing disorders/deafness
- visual impairments
- cognitive disabilities
- medical disabilities
- mental disabilities
- environmentally related disabilities

This categorisation is quite common in Sweden today. The “primary disability” in each diagnosis has been decisive: people with cerebral palsy are found in the category mobility disorders, people with learning difficulties/mentally retarded in the category cognitive disorders etc. As an example people with gastrointestinal disorders are traditionally referred to the group medical disabilities, mainly based on the care they receive from traditional health care.

There are different trends and patterns behind changes in the statistics. Development in medicine technology has led to reduction of certain disabilities or their scope. On the other hand more lives are saved today sometimes resulting in life-long and severe disabilities. Social demands change constantly and the handicapping consequences alternately increase or diminish.

In the following all statistics are valid for Västra Götaland only.

People with neurological diseases and/or mobility impairments

This is a comprehensive concept containing several subgroups and diagnoses. The term neurological diseases covers diagnoses like ataxia, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, spinal injuries and stroke. These people often suffer from very complex problems concerning both motor and cognitive functions. This is why many in this group can also be labelled people with cognitive disorders. In this presentation the term mobility disorders characterises mainly the traditional groups and diagnoses under the care and support of units in habilitation /rehabilitation care for children and the young.

Table 1
Numbers of individuals with various diagnoses in the group mobility disorders and/or neurological diseases.

Diagnosis	Number
Cerebral palsy	3 000
Multiple sclerosis	1 500
Cerebrospinal injury	700
Neuromuscular diseases	700
Stroke	17 000
Epilepsy	7 000

People hit by stroke form a very large group, many of them elderly. It has been assessed that some 3 000 people are in need of very extensive measures of support and supervision round the clock.

People with hearing disorders/deafness

In this comprehensive group are included people who are deaf or have hearing disorders since childhood, people gone deaf as grown-ups, with severe hearing disorders, having acquired hearing disorders as grown-ups, or as elderly, deaf and blind and people suffering from tinnitus. Some of these groups are found in the table below.

Table 2

Numbers of individuals with various diagnoses in the group hearing disorders/deaf

Diagnosis	Number
Hearing disorders	155 000
Tinnitus	180 000
Severe tinnitus	13 000
Deaf since childhood	1 000
Deaf and blind	150
Turned deaf as grown-ups	800

The statistics are based on contacts that the Region Västra Götaland's audiology department has with people with hearing disorders/deafness. In general 70 percent of all old-age pensioners are thought to have some kind of hearing disorder – equalling 180 000 people in the county!

People with visual impairments

The group covers people with different visual disorders and severe visual disorders. 15 000 people with visual disorders are estimated in Västra Götaland. This number corresponds well with statistics from visual impairment centres and the estimates of the WHO.

Table 3

Numbers of individuals with various diagnoses in the group visual disorders

Diagnosis	Number
Visual disorders	13 500
Severe visual disorders	1 500

The visual impairment centres have reported 15 000 visitors, 42 percent men and 58 percent women. In Västra Götaland an estimated 1 500 visually impaired people are of foreign extraction.

People with cognitive disabilities

The concept covers several subgroups and diagnoses. These people often have very complex problems touching on both cognitive and motor functions. Many of them could also be included in the group neurological and/or mobility disorders. People with learning disabilities often have an additional functional disorder. The most common forms are different mobility disorders, visual impairments and epilepsy.

Table 4
Numbers of individuals with various diagnoses in the group cognitive disabilities.

Diagnosis	Number
Mentally retarded	6 500
Autism	22 out of 10 000
Asperger’s syndrome	40 out of 10 000
DAMP	5% of 5-6 year-olds
Cerebral disorder	
Dyslexia	very varied figures

The number of people with learning disabilities has been fairly stable in the past few years. However, the numbers of people with Asperger’s syndrome and DAMP/ADHD in particular have increased significantly. As for DAMP it would imply that at least one out of twenty children starting school has DAMP. Approximately three times as many boys as girls develop DAMP.

There are frequent debates on definitions and causes of DAMP. Asperger’s syndrome is sometimes called high-level functioning autism – people with good or very good intellectual ability but with difficulties in social interplay with others.

People with cerebral disorders form a large group with several different subgroups. Consequently no conclusive sum is reported in the table.

Dyslexia is another area with varying statistics due to different definitions and theories. Approx. 80% of the dyslexia cases are reported to be boys/men.

People with medical disabilities

The group people with medical disabilities has several subgroups and diagnoses. The handicapping consequences of the disability are however great and similar to those that several more “traditional” disability groups display. Here also there are complex problems touching on other disability areas such as vision and mobility impairments. The disease diabetes can have consequences in a number of areas. Amputation of a leg causes impairments to motor functions with orthopaedic measures as a result. Visual impairments may also occur.

Table 5

Numbers of individuals with varying diagnoses in the group medical disabilities.

Diagnosis	Number
Gastrointestinal	
Colostomy	3 000
Rheumatism	170 000
Chronic rheumatism	40 000
Diabetes	35 000
Speech/language difficulties	4 000

Gastrointestinal diseases is a label covering different subgroups. One of these refers to colostomy patients. Rheumatism is one of the big national diseases. Approx. 40 000 of them have severe and chronic rheumatism. Of the diabetics slightly over 9 000 receive care from Region Västra Götaland’s hospitals. As for speech and language difficulties slightly over 6 000 people have severe speech disabilities and slightly over 13 000 suffer from a stammer.

People with mental disabilities

Mental disabilities is a concept that has become used increasingly in the past years.

People with mental problems can be divided into three main groups. One group requiring qualified hospital care is going down in numbers. A second and bigger group are people with symptoms strong enough to be characterised as sick but who manage a social life with the right kind of support. The third group is the biggest with remaining mental disorders as the result of mental illness. They need social support of different kinds and scope and more seldom treatment by physicians. The two last groups include those most commonly referred to when speaking of people with mental disabilities. Under Swedish special legislation on support and service to the disabled, mentally disabled people also qualify if they fill certain specified requirements.

Table 6

Numbers of individuals with various diagnoses in the group mental disabilities

Diagnosis	Number
Enduring psychotic states of health	1 300
Schizophrenia without need of care round-the-clock	5 000

People with environmentally related disabilities

This concept is comparatively new in Swedish vocabulary but gives environmental aspects a clear emphasis.

Table 7

Environmentally impaired individuals, various diagnoses

Diagnosis	Number
Allergies	75 000
Dental care injuries	20 000
Electromagnetic hypersensitivity	15 000

Allergy has turned into a widespread national disease, often with handicapping consequences. 6 000 people suffering from asthma receive care at the county's hospitals. There are varying figures for dental care injuries. The number given in the table has been calculated on figures from Stockholm county. This is also the case with electromagnetic hypersensitivity. There is probably a great number of unrecorded statistics related to these two diagnoses.

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