



Chapter 4 Disability

Disadvantaged in both education and work, person with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty. Many children and young people with disabilities remain excluded from education. In all countries, persons with disabilities have lower literacy rates than persons without disabilities. The illiteracy gap among young women with and without disabilities is wider than among young men with and without disabilities.

Women with disabilities are less likely to be part of the labour force given that their levels of inactivity are higher than those of men with disabilities. They are also more likely to be unemployed than men with disabilities. Furthermore, persons with disabilities are more likely to be in vulnerable employment. In almost all countries, persons with disabilities are more likely to be own-account workers than persons without disabilities.



Disability

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which when interacting with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

In several countries, attitudinal and environmental barriers against disability, not gender, are the major factor driving the disadvantage experienced by women with disabilities. However, in terms of lack of access to employment and sexual violence, environmental barriers and negative attitudes against both sex and disability seem to play a significant role. Women with disabilities are often subjected to double discrimination due to their gender and disability status and continue to be at a disadvantage in most spheres of society and development. Available data suggest that the gap is stark when compared to both men and women without disabilities.¹

A. Prevalence of disability

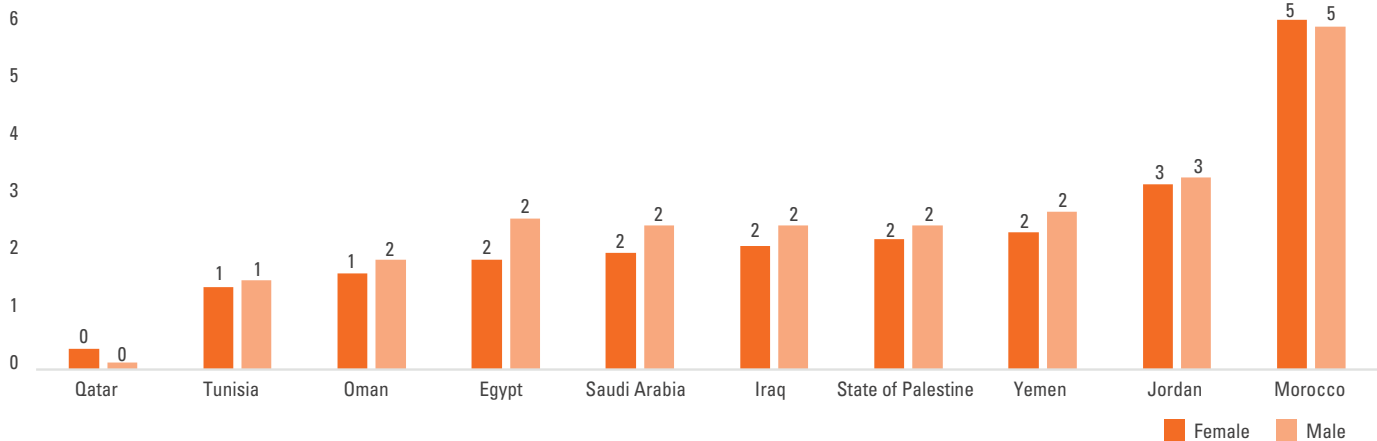
Around 60 million persons with disabilities live in the Arab States

Around six per cent of the world's persons with disabilities² live in the Arab States. The number of persons in the region with disabilities is estimated at nearly 60 million persons (based on 15 per cent world average) out of the world's 1 billion.³

Persons with disabilities are amongst the most marginalized and disadvantaged in the Arab world. This is not unique to the Arab region; it is a global phenomenon and is one of the reasons gathering data on persons with disabilities is at the core of monitoring the SDGs. Until recently, persons with disabilities have been largely invisible, and their situation not measured in a meaningful way.

The Washington Group on Disability Statistics has developed a methodology to uniformly measure disability in censuses and surveys. They have a short set of questions that aim to measure disability across six functional areas - seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care and communication – at four levels of severity: no difficulty, some difficulty, a lot of difficulty and unable at all. This methodology has been adopted in the majority of Arab countries. Further to that, ESCWA has published a Regional Guidebook to Improve Disability Data Collection and Analysis in the Arab Countries and recommends the Arab Washington Group Extended Short Set on Functioning (AWG-SS+) for better capturing the majority of persons with disabilities.⁴

Figure 44. Prevalence of disability, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

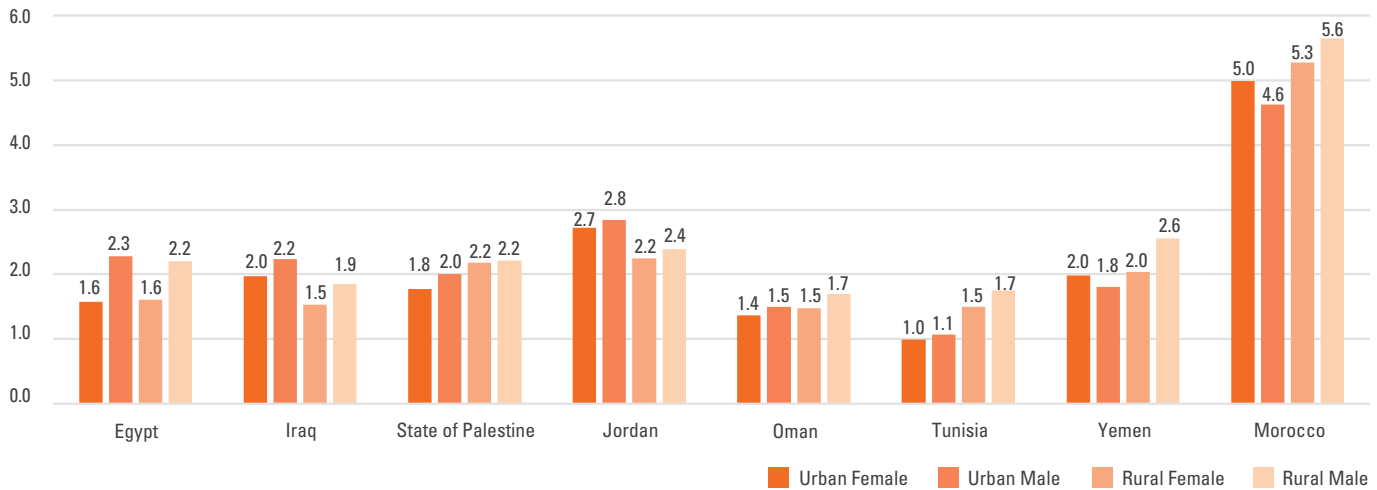
A review of data availability in 10 Arab countries that have applied the Washington Group short set of questions showed that the range of disability prevalence was between 0.2 and 5.1 per cent⁵ based on data from household surveys⁶ and population censuses⁷ **Figure 44.**

Without targeted policies and programmes, persons with

disabilities tend to be disadvantaged in work and education. Due to gender norms that limit women’s participation in work and decision-making, women with disabilities often face more challenges than men with disabilities. Furthermore, persons with disabilities in rural areas are more disadvantaged than those in urban areas. In Jordan and Iraq, however, the situation

is reversed, in that there were more females and males with disabilities in urban areas than in rural areas for both sexes. In all the countries with available data, males with disabilities were greater than females in both urban and rural areas with the exception of Morocco and Yemen; the urban females were more than urban males as shown in **Figure 45.**

Figure 45. Prevalence of disability by location, latest available data (percentage)



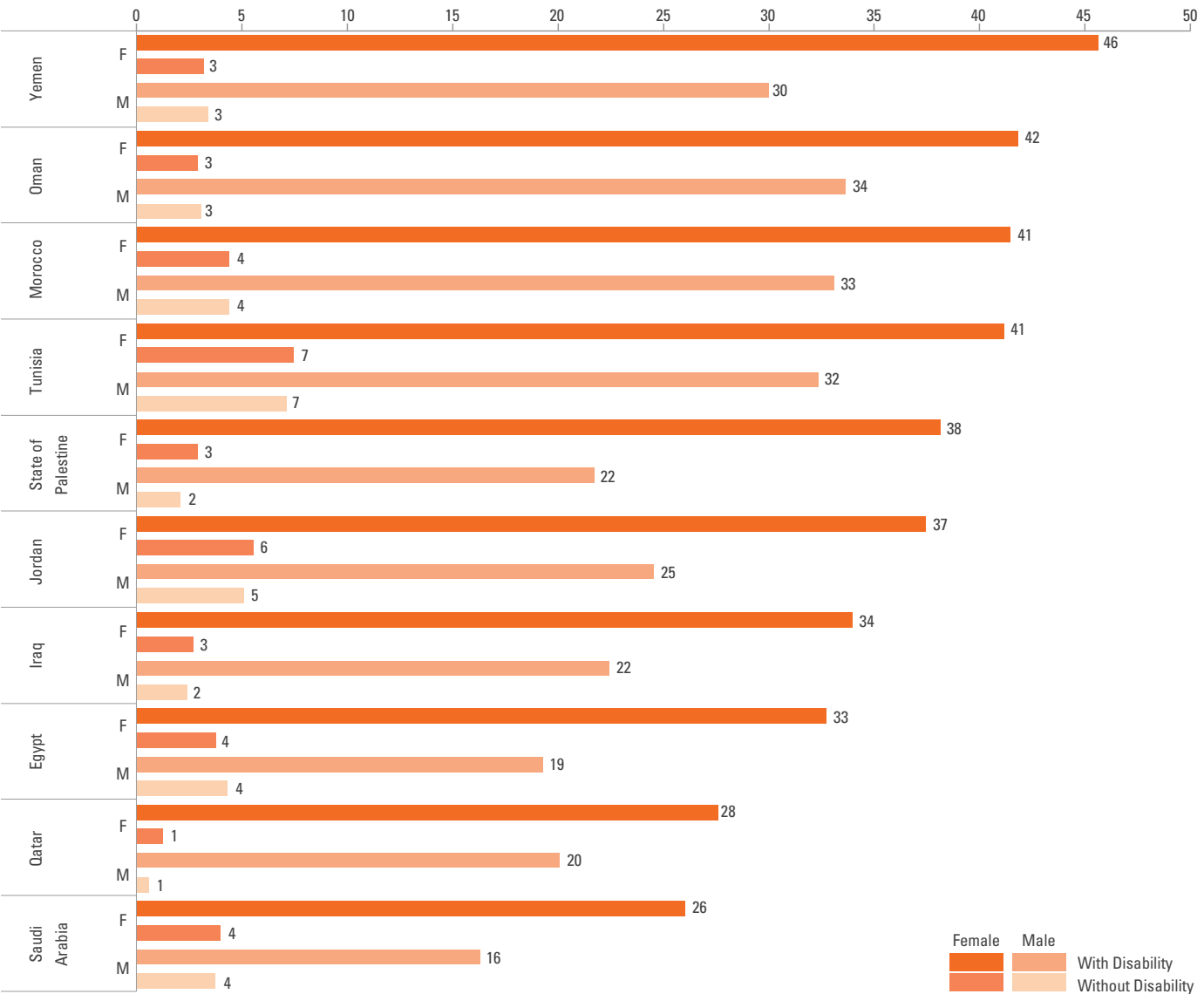
Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

B. Disability in old age

As disability increases with age, it is very likely that the rate of disability will increase over time as some countries of the region have a predominantly aging population. In addition, civil unrest and wars that have plagued parts of the region are likely to increase disability levels as people are injured and maimed. For every person killed in a conflict, many more are severely wounded or permanently disabled.

Age is a large factor in determining disability prevalence rates. Morocco, Oman and Yemen had the highest proportion of population over 65 years with a disability (37%). Qatar had at least one in every four people aged 65 years and older with a disability (20.5%) Saudi Arabia had the lowest proportion of population aged 65 years and older with a disability (20.5%) **Figure 46.**

Figure 46. Proportion of population aged 65 years and older among persons with and without disabilities, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

C. Marital status of persons with disabilities

Marital status of persons with disabilities depends on the age group under study. For example, older persons are more likely to have disabilities and also more likely to be married.

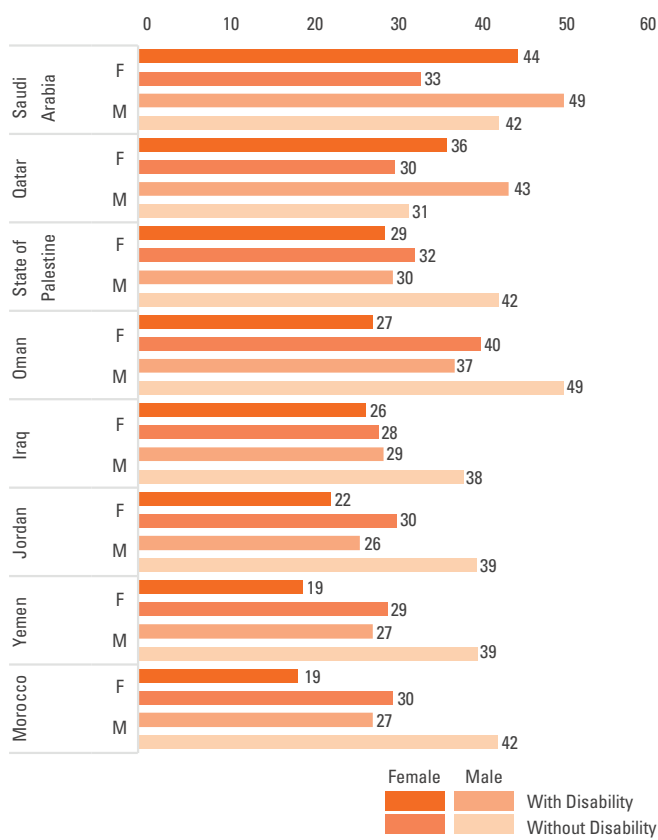
With the exception of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, data on the Arab States show that the rate of adult singlehood (15 years and older) was less for persons with disabilities than persons without disabilities. The proportion of

single adult males with disabilities was higher than single female with disabilities in all countries which implied the existence of a gender gap. The largest gender gap was reported in Oman at 10 percentage points followed by Morocco at 9 percentage points, Yemen at 8 percentage points and Qatar at 7 percentage points. However, the same gender gap also existed for single persons without disabilities **Figure 47**.

However, when data are specific to age groups a different situation emerges for single persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities aged 35-39 years, for

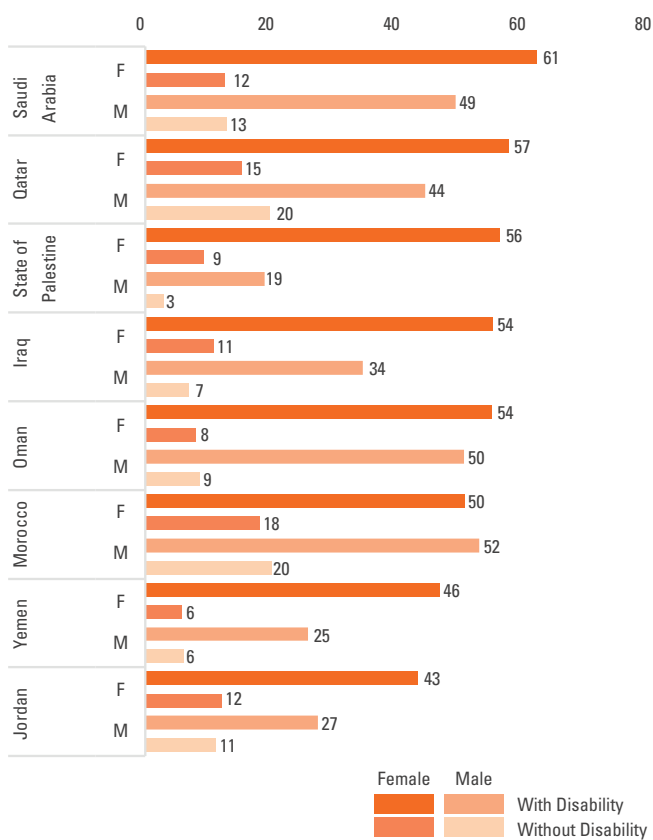
example, are more likely than persons without disabilities to be single. This was true for both females and males with disabilities in all the Arab States. The singlehood rates for females with disabilities were higher than males. Data in **Figure 48** show that the State of Palestine had the widest gender gap in singlehood between females and males with disabilities; there were nearly 37 percentage points more single females than single males with disabilities. The gender gap was minimal among persons without disabilities in all countries.

Figure 47. Proportion of singlehood among population aged 15 years and older by disability status, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

Figure 48. Proportion of singlehood among population aged 35-39 years by disability status, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

D. Disability and education

Many children and youth with disabilities remain excluded from education

There are significant differences in the education, employment and literacy outcomes for persons with disabilities compared to those without disabilities. The gap in education between persons with and without disabilities was greatest in Oman for both sexes. Omani women and men with disabilities, aged 25 years and older, were more than twice as likely to have no education or some primary education than those without disabilities. Women with disabilities in Oman had a lower level of education (91%) compared to women without disabilities (39%). Similarly, men with disabilities in Oman had a lower level of education (79%) compared to men without disabilities (24%).

Data in Figure 49 show that school attendance for both female and male children with disabilities, aged 5-14 years, is much lower than for those without disabilities. Egypt had the highest gap between females with and without disabilities by 55 percentage point followed by Oman and Iraq (52 and 43 percentage points, respectively). Oman had the highest gap between males with and without disabilities by 52 percentage points followed by Iraq and Egypt (47 and 45 percentage points, respectively).

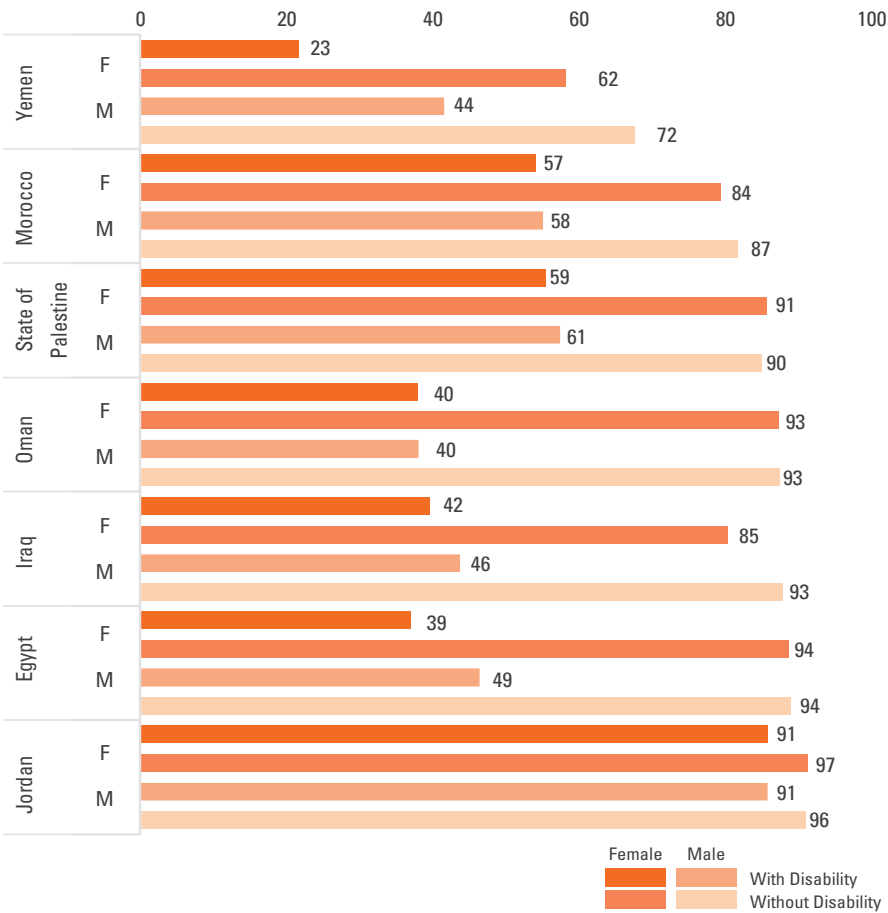
While the gender gap in school attendance for both females and males aged 5-14 years persist between sexes whether with or without disabilities, it varies



among Arab States. Yemen, for example, had the highest gender gap of school attendance between both sexes; there was a gender gap of 21 percentage points between

females and males with disabilities compared to a gender gap of only 10 percentage points for those without disabilities.

Figure 49. School attendance of population aged 5-14 years by disability status (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

Data in **Figure 50** also show that school attendance for both female and male youth, aged 15-24 years, with disabilities are much lower than those without disabilities. Egypt, for example, had a 40 percentage points gap between females with and without disabilities compared to a 39 percentage points gap between males with and without disabilities. Yemen had the highest gender gap of school attendance between both sexes; expressed as 6 percentage points for persons with disabilities compared to 19 percentage points for those without disabilities.

E. Literacy of persons with disabilities

In all countries, persons with disabilities have lower literacy rates than persons without disabilities

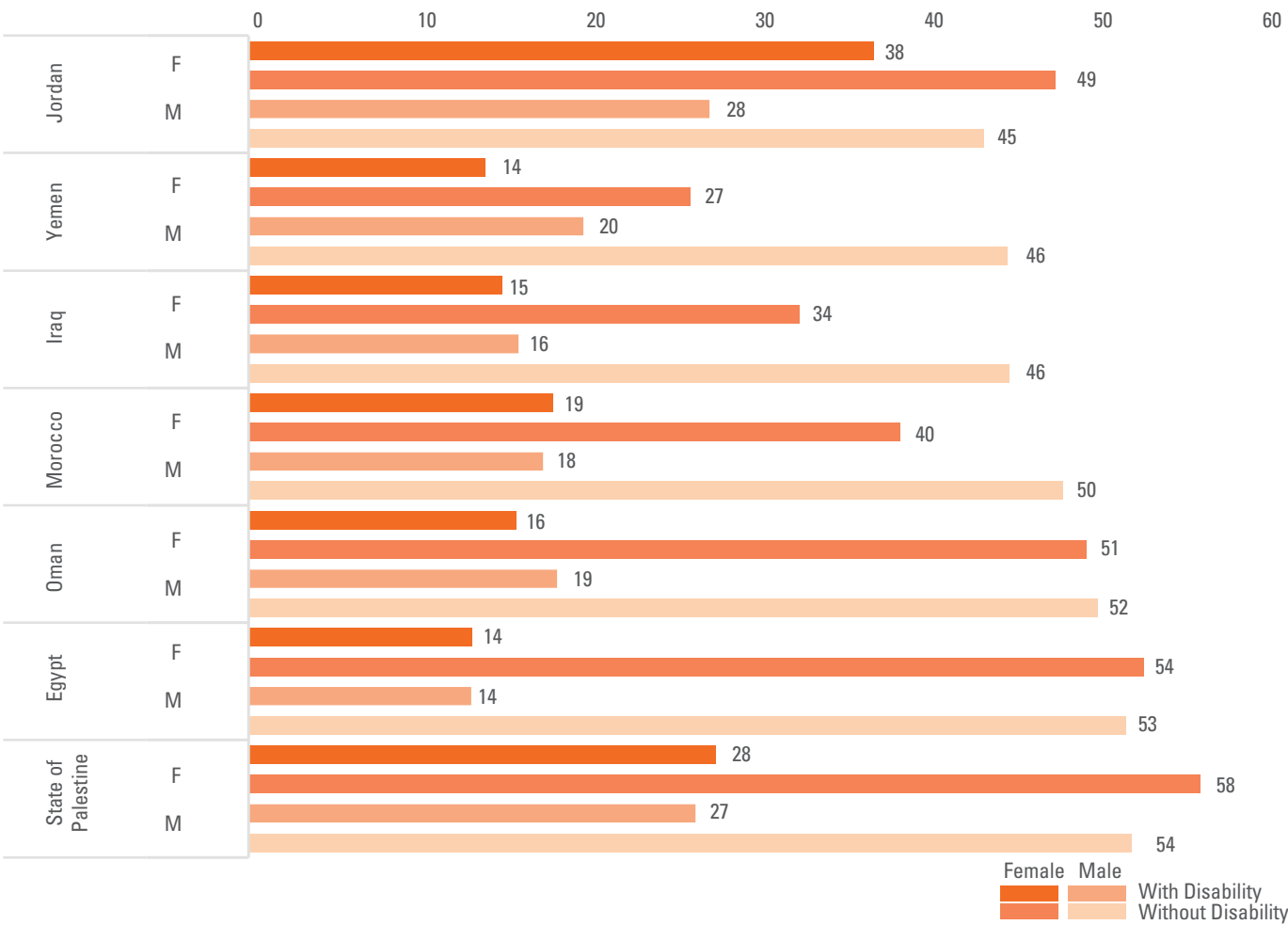
One outcome of low levels of education is low literacy. Youth illiteracy rates reveal the specific connection between education outcome and literacy. There is a massive difference in terms of the disadvantage of those with disabilities when comparing youth illiteracy rates

between persons with and without disabilities, between females and males with disabilities and between females and males without disabilities.

As shown in **Figure 51** illiteracy rates were highest in Iraq: illiteracy among the youth female population with disability was 61 per cent and youth male population 55 per cent, compared to 17 per cent for females and 10 per cent for males among the youth population without disability.

The gender gap in illiteracy between young females and males with

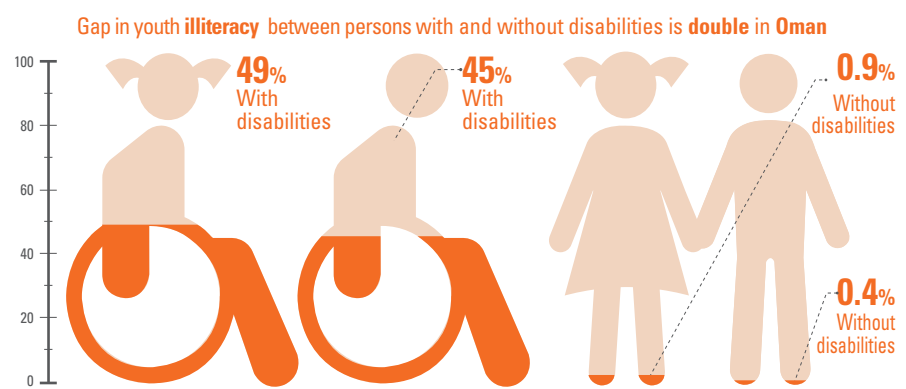
Figure 50. School attendance of population aged 15-24 years by disability status (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

disabilities is largest in the State of Palestine by 12 percentage points followed by Jordan at 8 percentage points. Morocco youth illiteracy gender gaps between those with disabilities were almost the same as those between youth without disabilities at around 7 percentage points.

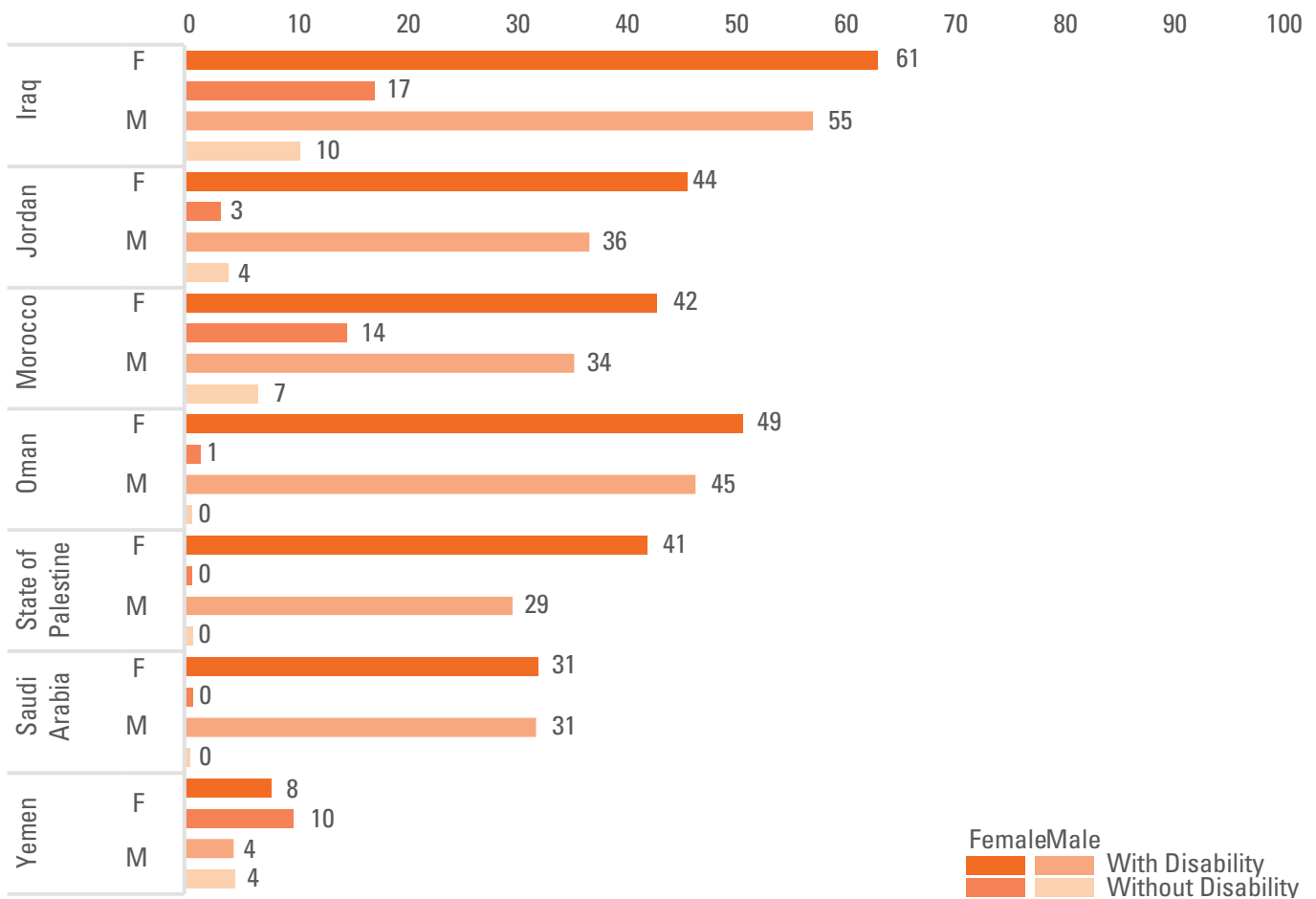
Data also show a bigger gap between illiteracy rates among young females with and without disabilities than between males. In Oman nearly half of the female youth with disabilities were illiterate. For every illiterate young woman without disabilities,



there were two young illiterate women with disabilities. Data also show a difference of around 40 percentage

points between females with and without disabilities in both Jordan and the State of Palestine.

Figure 51. Youth illiteracy rate of persons aged 15-24 years by disability status, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

F. Employment of persons with disabilities

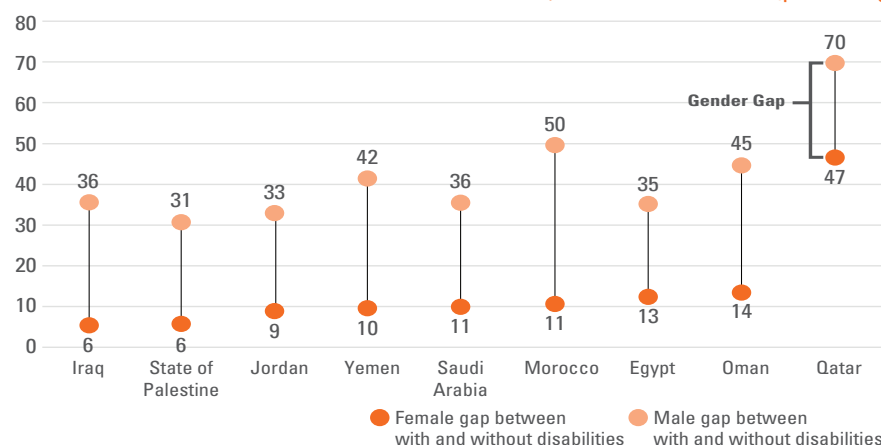
Lower rates of employment have been persistently observed for persons with disabilities.⁸ In most countries where data were available, persons with disabilities were less likely to be employed than their non-disabled counterparts.

The employment-to-population ratio is another measure revealing disability and gender gaps. Gender gaps in access to employment show that, in all Arab States, women with disabilities were less likely to be employed than men with disability, and women without disabilities were much less likely to be employed than men without disabilities.

The gap in employment between persons with and without disabilities within the same sex was also significant in all countries, particularly in Qatar where 96 per cent of men without disabilities were employed compared to only 26 per cent of men with disabilities (a gap of almost 70 percentage points) was the highest in the region. The gap in employment for men with disabilities was much greater than for women because men are more often participants in the paid workforce, while women are responsible for unpaid work. Only 4 per cent of women with disabilities in Qatar had employment compared to 51 per cent of women without disabilities (a gap of almost 47 percentage points) and also the highest gap among women in the region **Figure 52**.

Disadvantaged in both education and work, persons with disabilities were more likely to live in poverty. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will fall short of meeting their aspirations if men and women with disabilities are not included in the process. Significant proactive policies and programmes are

Figure 52. Disability gap in employment rate between persons with and without disabilities within same sex and between two sexes, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

needed to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind.

Data in **Figure 53** show that Saudi Arabia had the lowest proportion of employed females and males with disabilities in comparison to other Arab States. In Saudi Arabia, there were only a quarter of employed women with disabilities compared to two thirds (67%) of employed women without disabilities. The gap was almost as wide for men: 51 per cent of men with disabilities were employed compared to 89 per cent employed for men without disabilities.

Yemen, on the other hand, had the highest percentage of employed

women with disabilities among Arab States. The proportion of Yemeni employed women with disabilities was 94 per cent compared to 87 per cent of employed females without disabilities. In comparison, the highest proportion of employed men with disabilities was in Qatar where 98 per cent were employed compared to 100 per cent of men without disabilities.

Saudi Arabia had the widest gender gap in employment with disabilities of around 26 percentage points with more men employed, followed by Qatar and Jordan, at 25 and 17 percentage points, respectively.

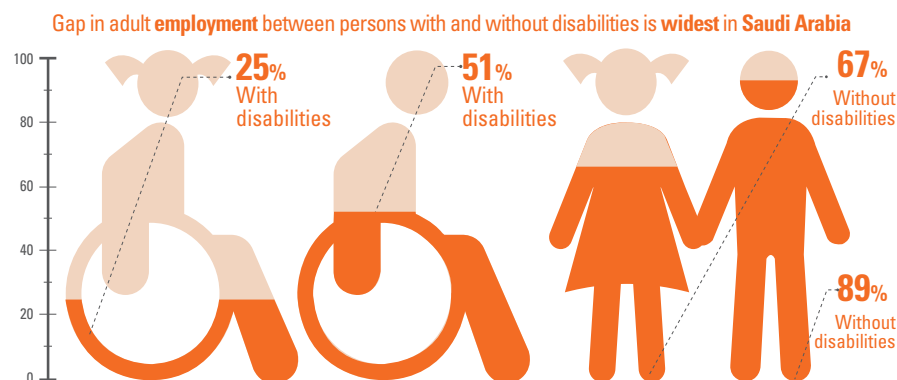
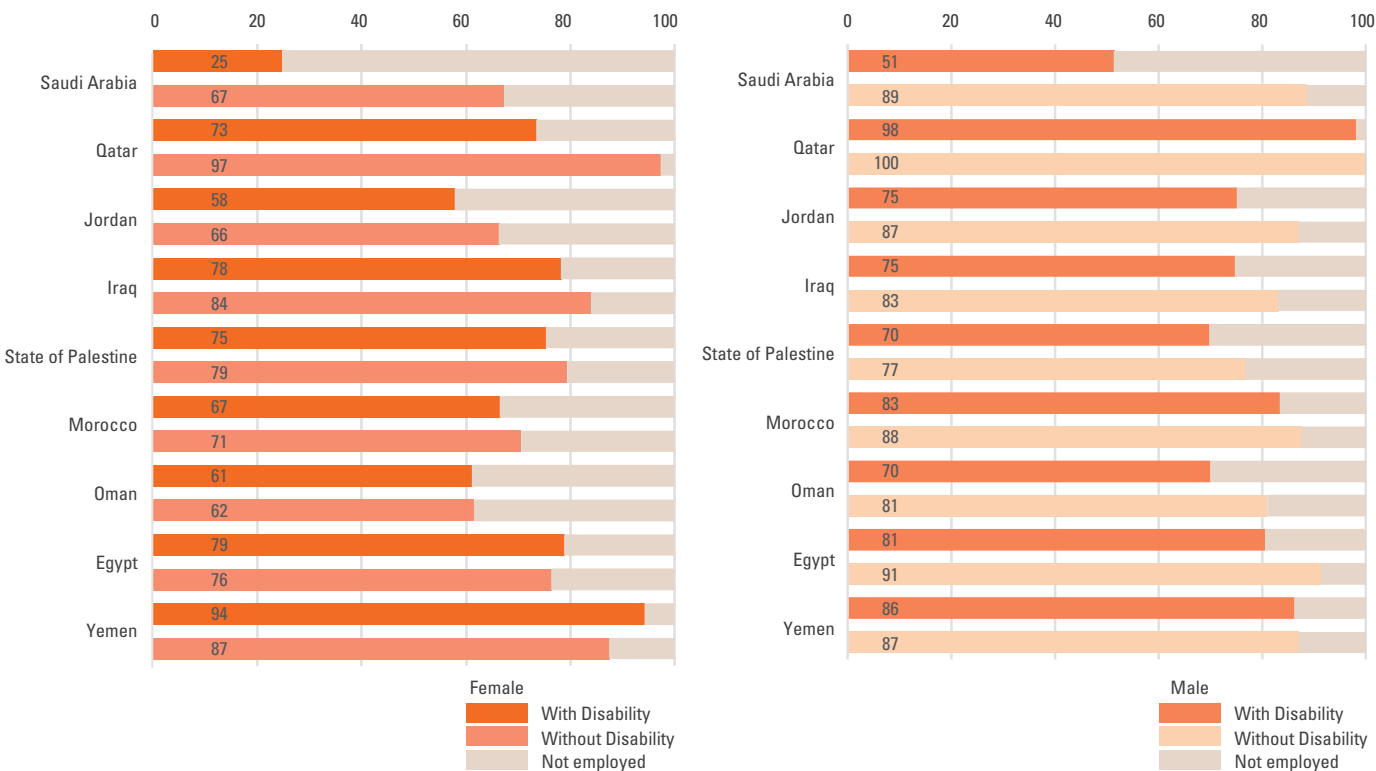


Figure 53. Proportion of employed persons with and without disabilities, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

G. Vulnerable employment of persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities are more likely to be in vulnerable employment

Even in countries where persons with disabilities are employed, they may face disproportionately precarious situations in comparison to the general population. Persons with disabilities are also more likely to be own-account workers.⁹

In all Arab States persons with disabilities were more likely to be own-account workers than persons without disabilities except females in Egypt. The proportion of own-account females without

disabilities (23%) was larger than females with disabilities (20%). However, rates of own-account male persons with disabilities were larger in all countries reported in Figure 54.

The gaps between own-account female workers with and without disabilities was 13 percentage points between females and 4 percentage points between males in Oman; between 12 percentage points for females and 14 percentage between males points in Morocco; between 10 percentage points for females and between 5 percentage points for males in the State of Palestine; and between 10 percentage points for females and between 2 percentage

points for males in Iraq. Similar gaps were reported between own-account male workers with and without disabilities.

In the countries with available data, as shown in Figure 54, rates for own-account female workers with disabilities ranged between 10 to 13 percentage points higher than 2 to 14 percentage points the rates for females without disabilities.

The majority of own-account persons work for their families. In Egypt, for example, 34 per cent of own-account female persons with disabilities and 13 per cent of own-account male persons with disabilities were family workers.

The gender gap of self-employed persons with disabilities in favour of males was highest in Morocco (21 percentage points), Iraq (10 percentage points) and the State of Palestine (4 percentage points). However, the self-employed females with disabilities were more than the males in Egypt and in Oman, by 10 percentage points.

H. Unemployment of persons with disabilities

Unemployment was higher among persons with disabilities in comparison to those without disabilities for both women and men in almost all countries. Saudi Arabia had the widest gender gap in unemployment between women and men with disabilities of around 26 percentage points higher for unemployed women. Moreover, unemployed Saudi women with disabilities (75%) are 2.3 times higher than unemployed women without disabilities (33%). Similarly, the gap between Saudi unemployed men with disabilities (49%) was 4.2 times higher than the rate for Saudi unemployed men without disabilities (12%) **Figure 55**.

The widest gender gap in unemployment between women and men with disabilities in Saudi Arabia

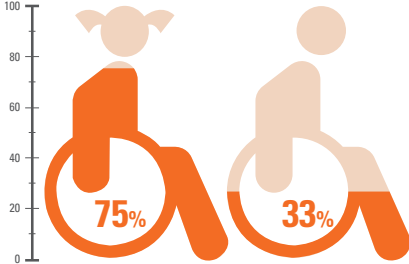
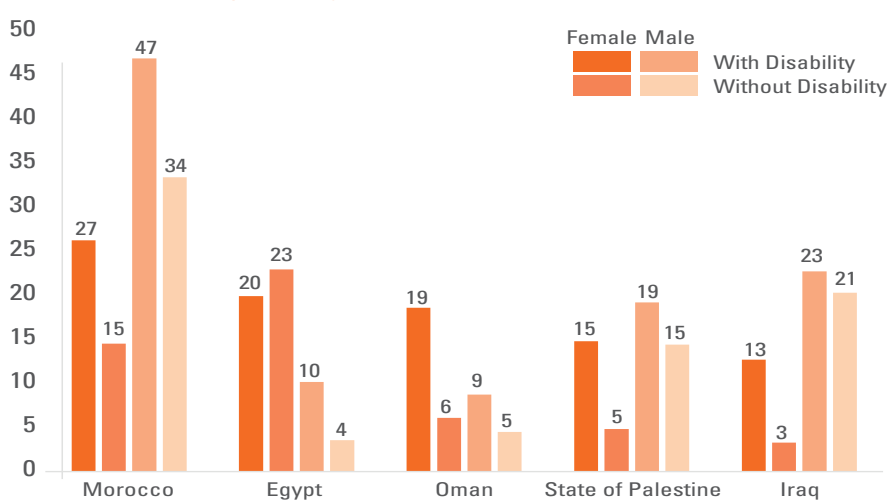
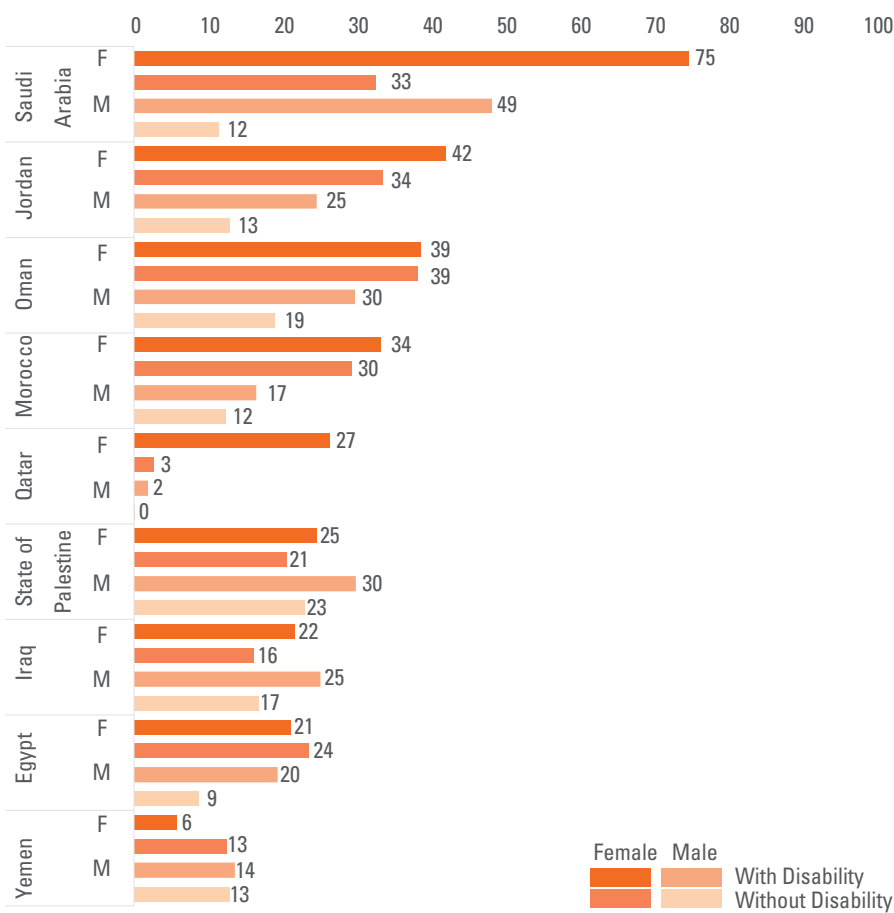


Figure 54. Proportion of own-account persons with and without disabilities, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.

Figure 55. Unemployment rate for persons aged 15 years and older by disability status, latest available data (percentage)



Source: Calculated by ESCWA from national statistical offices.