

Fact Sheet on Disability and Telework During the Pandemic

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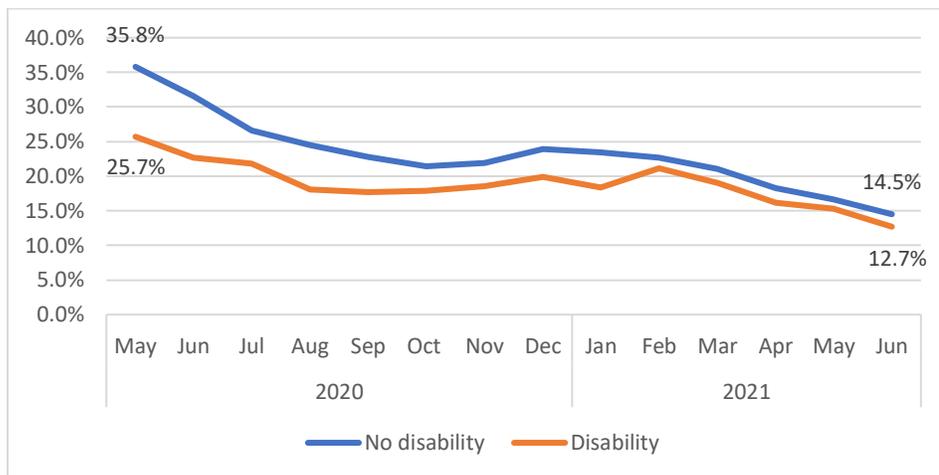
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While working from home can have benefits for workers in general, it may be especially helpful to workers who have disabilities that make it difficult or costly to commute. Having a disability can contribute to other challenges related to working a regular schedule outside the home, creating a need for flexibility. Before the pandemic, workers with disabilities were in fact more likely than those without disabilities to work from home²:

	No disability	Disability
Typically work from home, 2019	4.4%	5.5%

This pattern changed during the pandemic. Among people who remained employed, workers with disabilities were **less** likely than those without disabilities to be doing home-based work due to the pandemic. This disability gap narrowed but did not fully close as workers gradually returned to worksites from May 2020 to June 2021³:

Percent working at home because of the pandemic



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² Based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data analyzed in Lisa Schur, Mason Ameri, and Douglas Kruse. "Telework after COVID: a "silver lining" for workers with disabilities?" *Journal of occupational rehabilitation* 30, no. 4 (2020): 521-536.

³ Based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data analyzed in Douglas Kruse, So Ri Park, Yana Rodgers, and Lisa Schur, "Disability and Remote Work During the Pandemic with Implications for Cancer Survivors," forthcoming in *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*.

Why the difference between the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods? This is largely due to occupation:

- Workers with disabilities are disproportionately likely to be in blue-collar and service jobs (46.6% compared to 37.7%) than are not amenable to telework.
- Before the pandemic, about two-fifths of workers without disabilities were in jobs that could be done entirely at home, compared to only one-third of workers with disabilities.⁴
 - ⇒ This makes it even more remarkable that people with disabilities were more likely than those without disabilities to have worked at home before the pandemic. But when the big shock of the pandemic hit, workers with disabilities were left behind in the rapid expansion of telework because they were less likely to be in the types of jobs than could be done from home.

The importance of occupation in telework is shown in these figures⁵:

	Percent teleworking due to pandemic	
	No disability	Disability
Management	42.5%	36.4%
Professional	39.9%	39.5%
Office and administrative support	25.6%	25.5%
Sales	18.5%	12.5%
Service	4.3%	4.1%
Blue collar	3.2%	3.3%

Key takeaways:

- The pandemic may ultimately have a “silver lining” for people with disabilities if it causes employers to be more accepting of working from home, and to rethink the structure of workplaces that may increase other types of accommodations.
- Telework, however, is not a panacea: people with disabilities were less likely to do remote work in the pandemic, and are less likely to be in jobs that can be done remotely.
- Also, while telework may increase employment opportunities, people with disabilities still tend to be paid less when teleworking, and do not want to be “out of sight, out of mind” in receiving fair pay, accommodations, and equal opportunities for promotions.
- Policies to rectify these inequities include those that promote fair pay, facilitate accommodations, and provide equal opportunities for promotions.

⁴ Schur et al., *Op. cit.*

⁵ In more detailed analysis, occupation accounts for most of the disability gap in pandemic telework, while people with disabilities are actually slightly more likely to do pandemic telework when fully accounting for occupation, industry, and demographic characteristics (Kruse et al., *Op. Cit.*)