RUTGERS–NEW BRUNSWICK
School of Management and Labor Relations

Employer Disability Practices Center

RUTGERS School of Management and Labor Relations | Burton Blatt Institute Syracuse University | NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY | INDIANA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Telework: Work from Home as Rising, Universal Accommodation

Presentation to joint Syracuse/Rutgers RRTC conference
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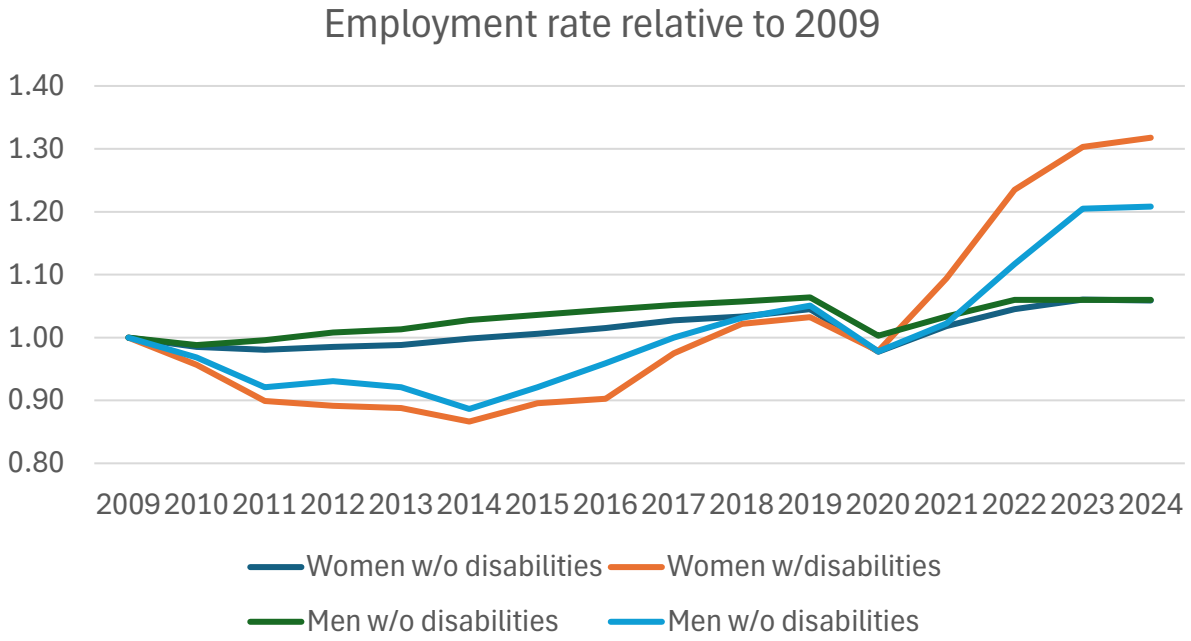
Employment of people with disabilities has improved since 2009, especially since pandemic



Why has employment improved recently for people with disabilities?

- One possibility: tight labor markets make it harder for employers to engage in discrimination
  --employers can't afford to discriminate when they really need workers, as shown by especially strong employment of Black workers when unemployment is low

- Another possibility: increased use of telework is favorable for people with disabilities

Role of telework/home-based work

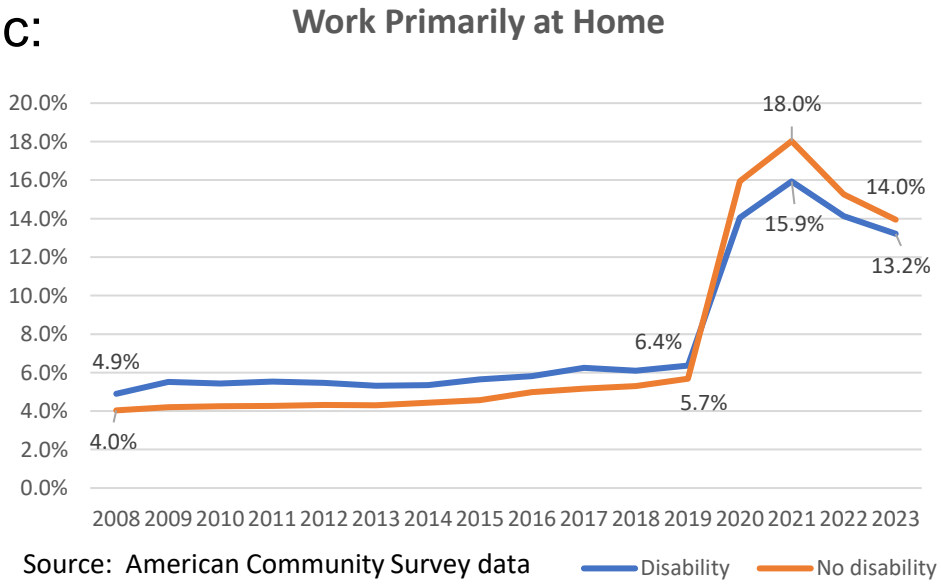
Working from home can have benefits for workers in general. But may be especially helpful to workers who have disabilities that:

- Make it difficult or costly to commute (e.g., wheelchair use, especially if no accessible private vehicle)
- Create a need for flexible schedules (e.g., due to therapy appointments, medical needs, unpredictable flare-ups)

But downsides as well: social isolation, blurred lines between family and work, being “out of sight, out of mind” for raises, promotions, training

Before the Pandemic

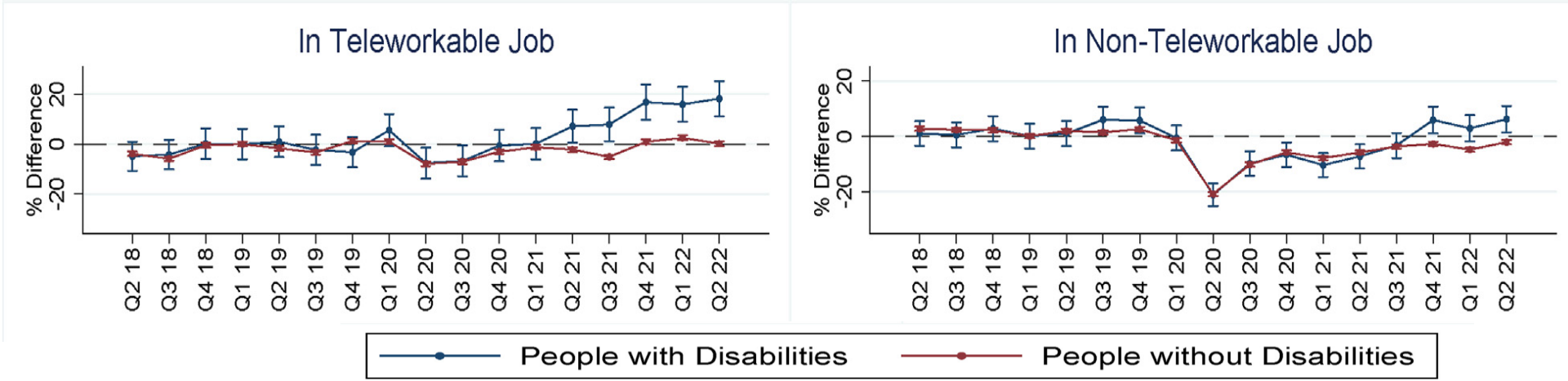
Workers with disabilities were more likely than those without disabilities to work primarily from home, but had a smaller increase in home-based work during pandemic:



Source: American Community Survey data

Since the Pandemic

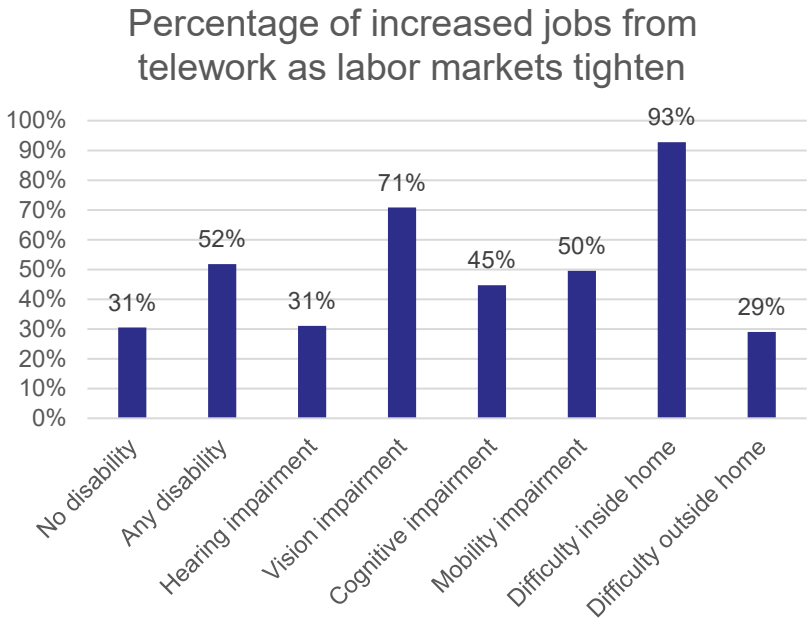
The biggest increases in disability employment post-pandemic occurred in “teleworkable” occupations (jobs that can be done remotely), suggesting that telework has especially helped their employment:



Source: Ne’eman, A., & Maestas, N. (2022). How Has COVID-19 Impacted Disability Employment? *Disability and Health Journal*, 101429.

This is Supported by Further Evidence

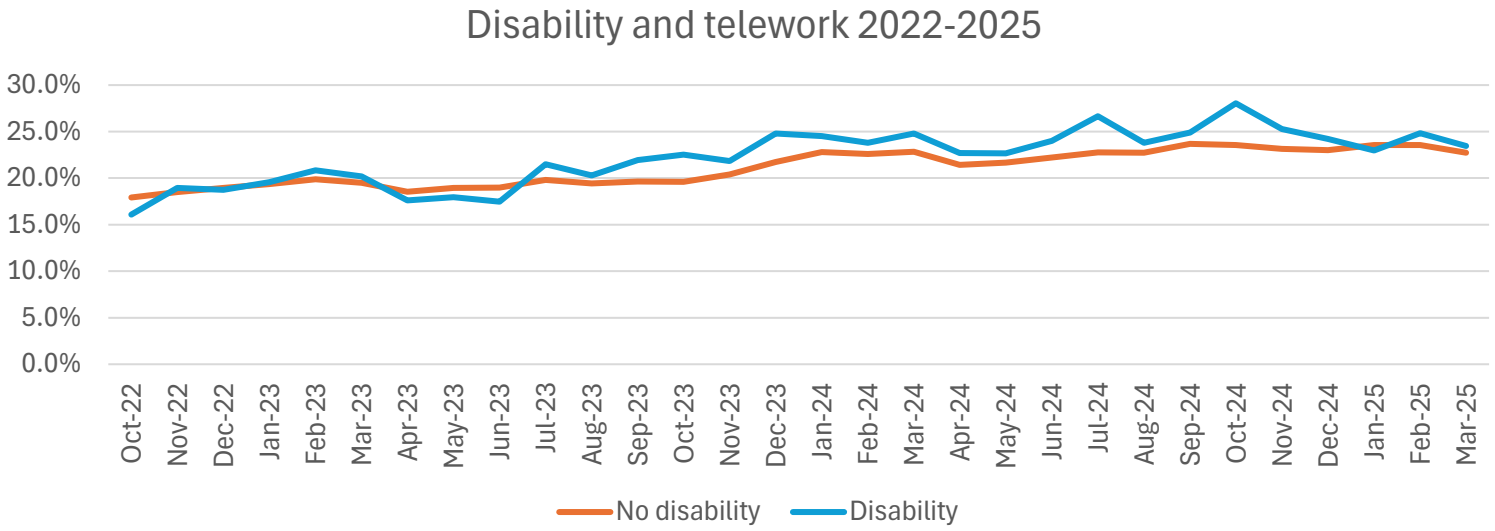
showing tight labor markets favor telework: As labor markets tightened since the pandemic, people with disabilities were especially like to take telework/home-based jobs:



Source: Mason Ameri, Douglas Kruse, So Ri Park, Yana Rodgers, and Lisa Schur, “Telework during the Pandemic: Patterns, Challenges, and Opportunities for People with Disabilities,” Disability and Health Journal, April 2023.

Extending the Trends Through March 2025

People with disabilities are slightly more likely to do ANY paid work at home:



Overall Since 2022,

Workers with disabilities are just 1.2 percentage points more likely to do any work at home compared to workers without disabilities.

- But when compared to otherwise-similar workers (by gender, race, education, and age) in the same occupations and industries, this gap widens to 3.8 percentage points

  => Indicating that people with disabilities are less likely to be in teleworkable occupations

Rate of Home-Based Work

The high rate of home-based work for workers with disabilities is partly due to an especially high rate among self-employed workers.

Compared to employees without disabilities, the rate of home-based work is:

- 3.3 percentage points higher among employees with disabilities
- 9.5 percentage points higher among self-employed people without disabilities
- 15.7 percentage points higher among self-employed people with disabilities

Pay Consequences

What are the pay consequences of working at home?

- Both disability and home-based work are linked to lower hourly pay
- Home-based workers are paid less than on-site workers:

Workers without disabilities	-6.5%
Workers with disabilities	-9.7%

- People with disabilities are paid less than those without disabilities in either arrangement:

On-site workers	-10.4%
Home-based workers	-13.5%

Pay Consequences cont

⇒ Which means that home-based workers with disabilities earn less on average than both home-based workers without disabilities, and on-site workers with disabilities

⇒ Despite this pay gap, home-based work appears to offer significant employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Potential to Increase Employment

What's the potential for greater home-based work to continue to increase employment among people with disabilities?

- COVID pandemic was a blow to all workers, but may ultimately have a silver lining for some workers with disabilities if it makes work from home easier and more acceptable.
- Potential is limited by job type: only 34% of workers with disabilities are currently in jobs with high potential for telework, compared to 40% of workers without disabilities

Potential to Increase Employment (cont)

- --people with disabilities are more likely to be in blue-collar and service jobs that can’t be done remotely, such as food service.
- More broadly, the pandemic has shaken up traditional workplace structures, leading many employers to rethink how essential tasks can be done, which may expand their views of workplace accommodations.

Conclusions

- Telework/home-based work has particular advantages for many workers with disabilities
- They were and are more likely than workers without disabilities to do home-based-based work both before the pandemic, and currently
- However, they were less likely to be part of the upsurge in home-based work during the pandemic, primarily because they are less likely to be in teleworkable jobs

Conclusions cont

- While many employers are emphasizing “return to office” (RTO), these numbers indicate home-based work is valued among employees both with and without disabilities
- The increased movement to home-based work, and the rethinking of how job tasks can be done and accommodations can be made, may be particularly beneficial for the employment of workers with disabilities in the next decade.