

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Employment Status of People With and Without Disabilities

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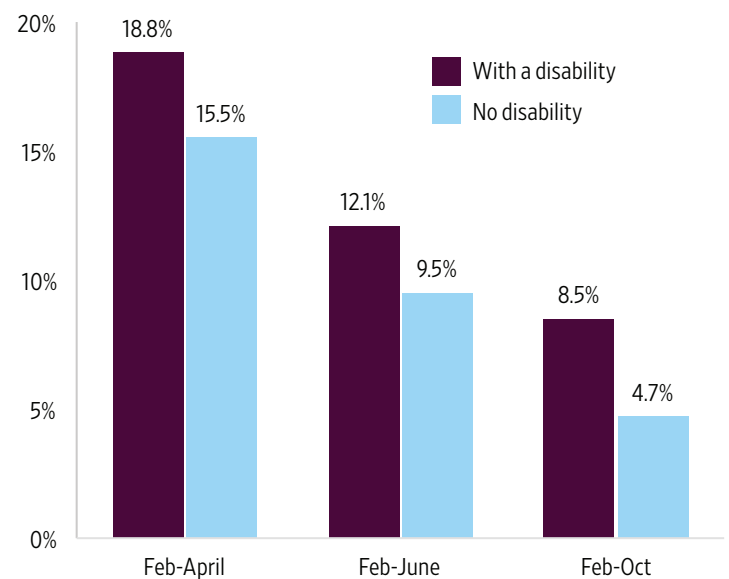
In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a national economic slowdown leading to millions of American workers being temporarily furloughed or losing their jobs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), the number of unemployed persons rose by 15.9 million to 23.1 million in April 2020 alone. This data note examines how individuals with disabilities¹ were affected by job losses compared to individuals without disabilities.

Using February 2020 as the baseline for pre-pandemic employment status, we compared the change in employment of individuals with and without disabilities between February 2020 and three successive months: April, June, and October. As Figure 1 shows, employment decreased by 18.8% for individuals with disabilities compared to 15.5% for people without disabilities between February and April of 2020 (please reference Table 1 for the exact numbers).

When comparing the change in employment from February to June 2020, we found that individuals with disabilities did not rebound as quickly to the February baseline as those without disabilities: 12.1% fewer individuals with disabilities were employed in June compared to February 2020, while 9.5% fewer individuals without disabilities were employed covering that same time period. In sum, fewer individuals with disabilities returned to work than those without.

A similar trend holds when comparing February to October 2020: 8.5% fewer individuals with disabilities were employed in October while 4.7% fewer individuals without disabilities were employed 8 months post-baseline. In summary, individuals without disabilities were almost twice as likely to rebound to pre-pandemic employment levels than individuals with disabilities between February and October.

Figure 1: Percentage Decrease in the Number Employed by Disability Status, February–October 2020



¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics defines a person with a disability as having at least one of the following conditions: is deaf or has serious difficulty hearing; is blind or has serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses; has serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; has serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs; has difficulty dressing or bathing; or has difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition.



Table 1: Number of People Employed With and Without Disabilities Age 16 and Over, February, April, June, August and October 2020

| | Number of people employed* with disability | Number of people employed* without disability |
|---------------|--|---|
| February 2020 | 5,918 | 152,100 |
| April 2020 | 4,805 | 128,520 |
| June 2020 | 5,201 | 137,610 |
| August 2020 | 5,254 | 141,970 |
| October 2020 | 5,417 | 145,016 |

*number employed is in 1,000s

References

Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020). The Employment Situation—April 2020. Economic News Release. Retrieved from: www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit_05082020.htm

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