



New York State Comptroller
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Economic and Policy Insights

Employment Recovery Is Slow for New Yorkers with Disabilities

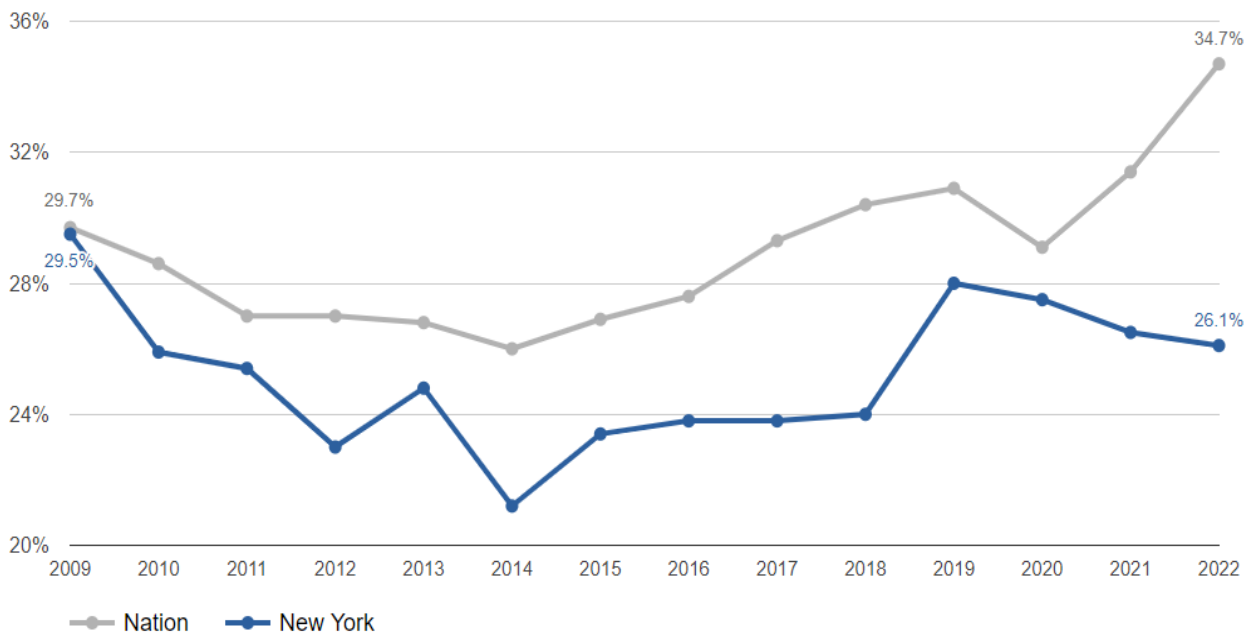
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People living with disabilities face unique daily challenges that can present barriers to employment. The COVID-19 pandemic led to soaring unemployment rates for people with disabilities, and these rates have not declined as quickly in New York as they have nationally.¹ In addition, the national share of people with disabilities who are working reached a new high in 2022, while the share in New York continued to decline from pre-pandemic levels. These data highlight the continued need for solutions that facilitate increased employment for people with disabilities in New York.

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, there were 827,200 people with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64 living in New York in 2022, representing 6.7 percent of the working-age population. Nationally, about 7.9 percent of the working-age population has a disability.² Between 2020 and 2022, the number of working-age people with disabilities grew 14.4 percent in New York and 10.9 percent nationally.

As shown in Figure 1, the national employment-to-population ratio for working-age people with a disability declined by 1.8 percentage points in 2020 to 29.1 percent. Since then, it has increased steadily to 34.7 percent in 2022, the highest rate on record dating back to 2009.³ In contrast, the ratio declined by only 0.5 percentage points in New York in 2020 and has continued to decline to 26.1 percent in 2022. New York’s ratio was 8.6 percentage points lower than the nation’s in 2022, the largest difference recorded in the past 13 years.

FIGURE 1
Employment-to-Population Ratios for People Ages 16 to 64 with a Disability, the U.S. and New York, 2009–2022



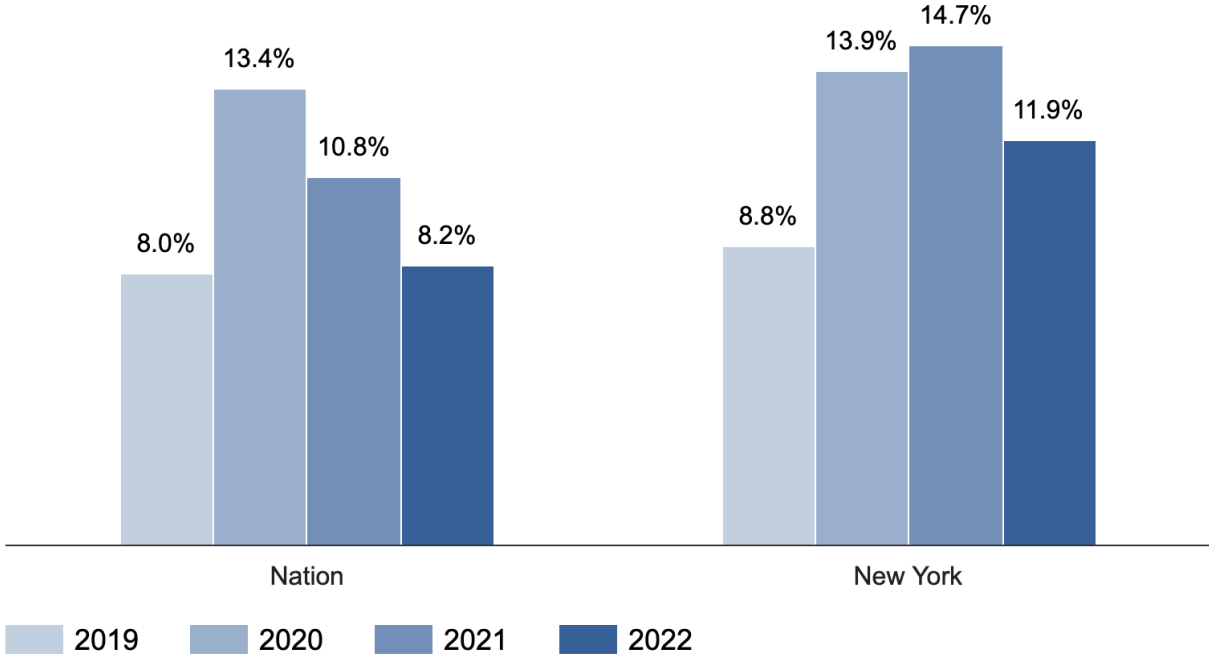
Note: New York data are not available prior to 2009.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics & Office of Disability Employment Policy.

Unemployment rates for people with disabilities similarly show slower recovery in New York than the nation. As shown in Figure 2, in 2019, the unemployment rate for working-age people with a disability was 8.0 percent nationally and 8.8 percent in New York. Unemployment rates for people with disabilities soared in 2020, reaching 13.4 nationally and 13.9 percent in New York. The national unemployment rate for people with a disability decreased by 5.2 percentage points between 2020 and 2022, dropping to 8.2 percent.

In New York, however, the unemployment rate continued to increase in 2021 before declining to 11.9 percent in 2022, a rate 3.7 percentage points above the national average. The unemployment rate for New Yorkers with a disability was 7.6 percentage points higher than for those who do not have a disability in 2022, a disparity that is also greater than the 4.7 percentage point gap nationwide.

FIGURE 2
Unemployment Rates for People Ages 16 to 64 with a Disability, the U.S. and New York, 2019–2022



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics & Office of Disability Employment Policy.

New York has made new efforts to increase opportunities for people with disabilities. In 2022, lawmakers expanded the State’s preferred source contracting program to boost opportunities for New Yorkers with disabilities and created a training and certification program for employers that have taken the State’s EmployAbility pledge to demonstrate their commitment to inclusive workplaces.⁴

In February 2022, the Office of the Chief Disability Officer (CDO) was established to coordinate State agency operations to fully implement the Americans with Disabilities Act and ensure that New Yorkers with disabilities are given the accommodations necessary to have equal opportunities for employment.⁵ In the State Fiscal Year 2023-24 Executive Budget, the Governor proposed increasing the number of State workforce positions designated under Civil Service Law 55-b for people with disabilities from 1,200 to 1,700 and giving these employees an opportunity to transfer into a competitive class position.⁶

According to the Executive, the Office of the CDO is also intended to make “specific, action-oriented” recommendations that address barriers to meaningful employment for people with disabilities.⁷ The recent employment data underscore the need for such solutions.

Endnotes

- 1 For more on the COVID-19 impact of unemployment on people with disabilities, see Office of the State Comptroller's report, *Pre-Pandemic Improvements in Employment Rates for People with Disabilities Have Been Derailed by COVID-19*, June 3, 2021, at <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/new-yorks-economy-and-finances-covid-19-era-june-3-2021>.
- 2 Data showing the New York State share of working-age population that has a disability was prepared by the New York State Department of Labor, Division of Research and Statistics using Current Population Survey (CPS) public use microdata for civilian, noninstitutional population. For the national data, see U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics, at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab6.htm>.
- 3 In this report, the employment-to-population ratio is the number of working-age (16 to 64) people with a disability that are employed divided by the total working-age population (ages 16 to 64) with a disability.
- 4 NYS Laws of 2022, chapters 564 and 565.
- 5 See Executive Law § 4-b; Office of Governor Kathy Hochul, Press Release, "Governor Hochul Establishes Office of the Chief Disability Officer," February 14, 2022, at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-establishes-office-chief-disability-officer>.
- 6 For individuals hired under Civil Service 55-b and 55-c programs. See SFY 2023-24 New York State Executive Budget, Public Protection and General Government Article VII Legislation, Part T, at <https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy24/ex/artvii/ppgg-bill.pdf>.
- 7 Governor Kathy Hochul, 2022 State of the State: *A New Era for New York*, pg. 67, at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/2022StateoftheStateBook.pdf>.

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