

Disability Status and Work

Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

Introduction

Measuring disparities in employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities is a crucial step in fostering a more equitable and inclusive workforce. This research note aims to illuminate these disparities within the United States (US), examining representation across dimensions such as industry, occupation, leadership roles, and interest in remote work. We examine representation using self-reported disability status data from LinkedIn members who choose to self-identify. While this offers a real-time glimpse into labor outcomes for this population, there are also inherent limitations. The likelihood of underreporting disability status by those who choose to self-report may potentially influence the measured disparities in uncertain ways. Additionally, the population opting into self-identification of their disability status, whether reporting a disability or not, may not fully represent the broader US workforce. Nevertheless, with millions of self-identified LinkedIn members included in this analysis, it provides an opportunity to quantify these disparities in support of better mitigating these gaps in the future.

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Key Findings

- Members reporting disabilities are 1.5 times more likely than members reporting no disabilities to work in the Consumer Services sector (e.g., household and personal services, repair and maintenance, civil and social organizations) compared to those reporting not having disabilities, as well as 1.4 and 1.3 times as likely to work in Government Administration, and Education (respectively). They are 40% less likely to work in Real Estate; Oil, Gas, and Mining; Construction; and Wholesale.
- Nearly half of members who report having a disability are in entry-level positions, 6.8 percentage points higher than for members who report not having a disability. In contrast, 10.5% of members who report disabilities occupy director, VP, or CXO positions, compared to 13.6% for members who report no disabilities.
- Members who report disabilities are 3.8 percentage points more likely to not have a current job listed as members who report no disabilities, a gap that has stayed consistent over the last five years.

Disability Status and Work: Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

- Members who report disabilities were 5.5 percentage points less likely to be working in a senior position (manager or higher) in July 2023 than members who report no disabilities, an expansion of the gap from July 2018, when it stood at 4.1 percentage points.
- Members who report disabilities are more interested in remote positions: in August 2023, 53.9% of job applications from members with disabilities were for remote positions, while 45.6% of applications from members without disabilities were for remote roles.

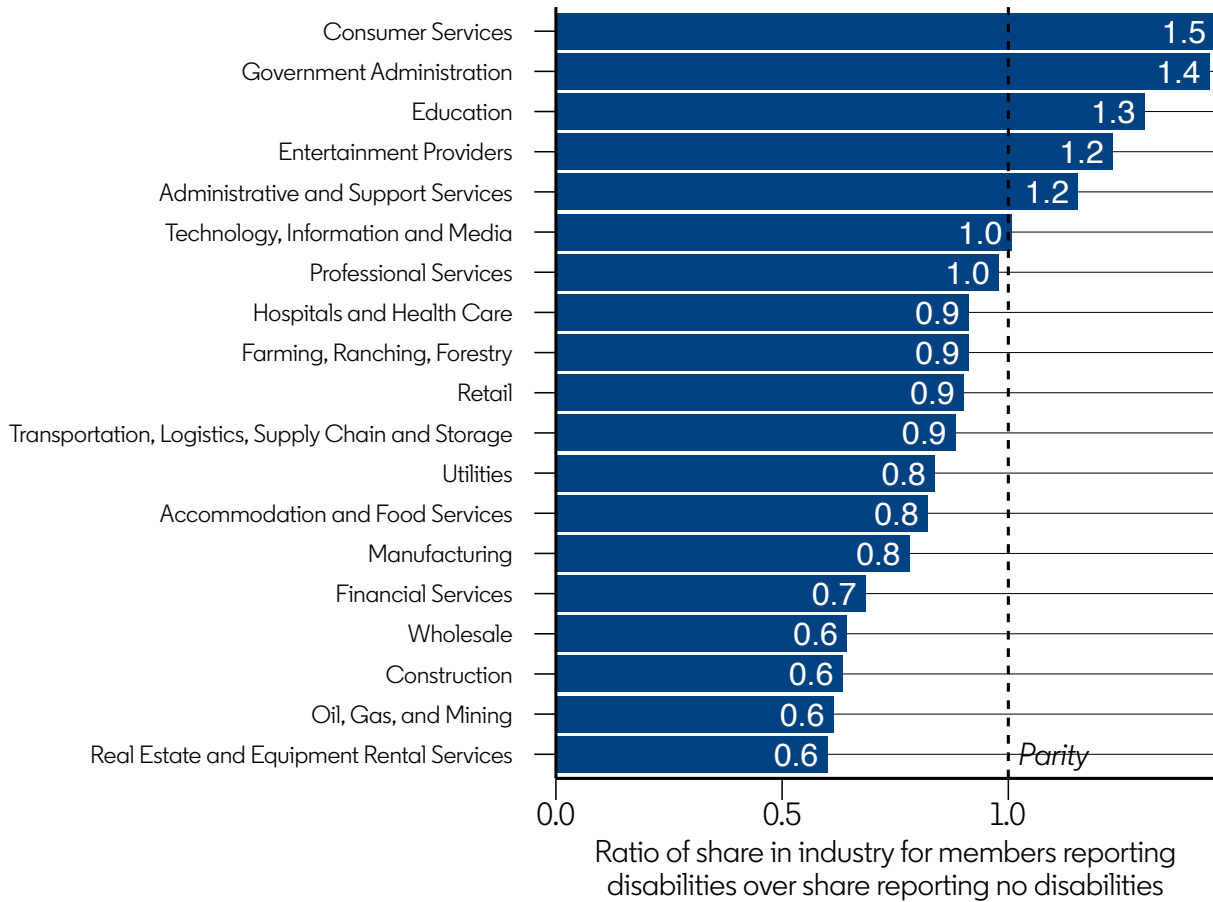
Disparities in industries and occupations of employment

Members reporting disabilities exhibit significant differences in industry representation when compared to those without disabilities. Specifically, workers with disabilities are 1.5 times more likely to work in Consumer Services, 1.4 times as likely to work in Government Administration, and 1.3 times more likely to work in Education, in contrast to their counterparts without disabilities. Conversely, they are less likely to be employed in certain other industries, being only 0.6 times as likely to work in Real Estate (approximately half as likely); Oil, Gas, and Mining; Construction; and Wholesale.

While this note does not delve into the underlying reasons for these industry differences, several factors may contribute to these disparities. Historical barriers in some industries, accommodations provided by others, and the overall advantages of previous representation could play a role. Additionally, specific industry policies aimed at increasing the representation of workers with disabilities might be contributing to these disparities. It is also important to note that achieving parity, as observed in sectors like technology, information, and media, does not necessarily mean that workers with disabilities are equally represented across all types of firms or occupations within the industry, in comparison to members not reporting disabilities. Substantial gaps may still exist due to occupational segregation (one group of workers having higher representation within certain sets of occupations within firms, or certain firms specializing in certain occupations and disproportionately hiring workers with or without disabilities), which are not captured by the parity measures reported in this study.

Disability Status and Work: Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

Figure 1: Relative probabilities of working in industries



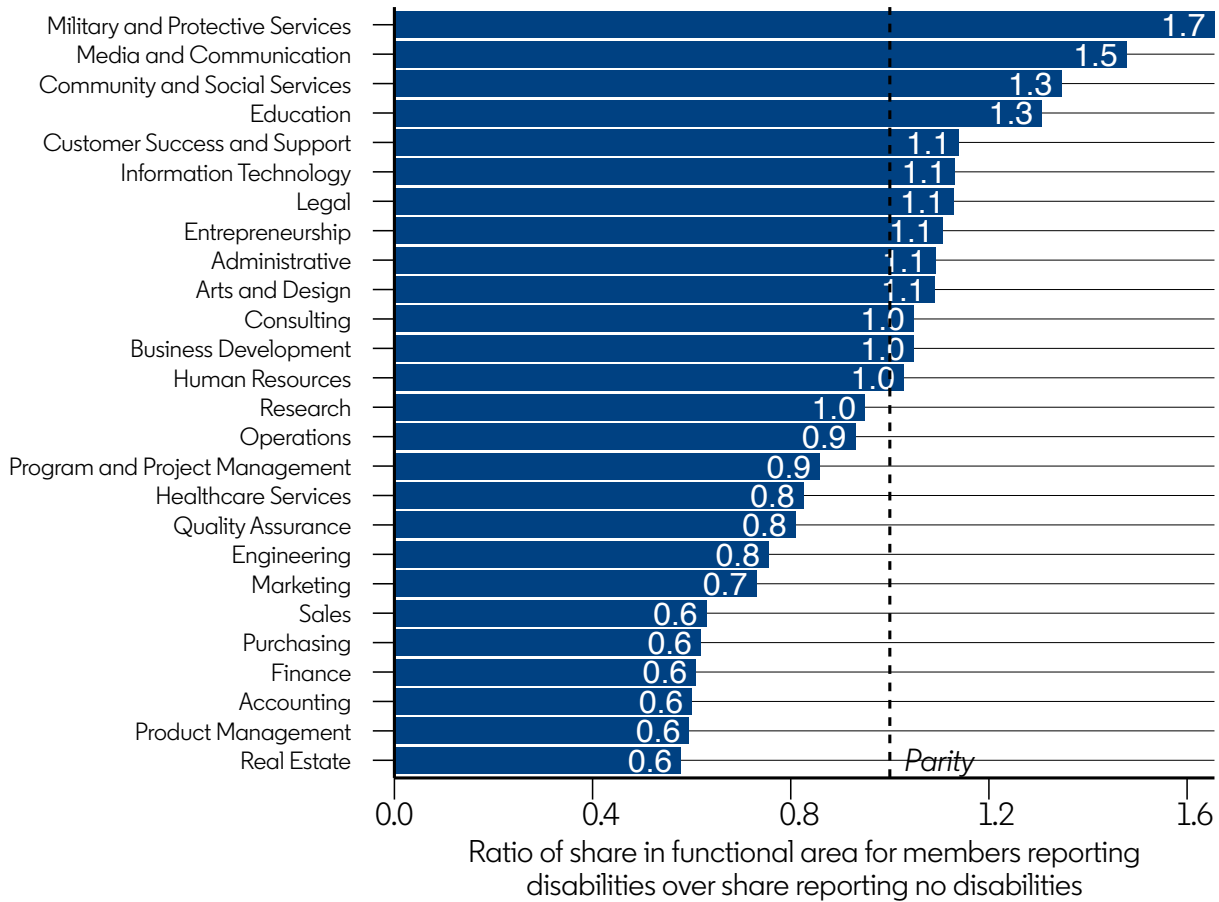
Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph. Note, numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth, while the bar length is not.

Additionally, significant differences in occupational representation, measured across broad functional areas, are also evident. Members reporting disabilities are 1.7 times more likely to work in Military and Protective Services compared to their counterparts without disabilities. Moreover, they are 1.5 times as likely to be employed in Media and Communication and 1.3 times as likely to work in Community and Social Services, as well as Education.

Conversely, workers with disabilities are notably less likely to work in several functional areas. They are only 0.6 times as likely (almost half as likely) to work in functional areas such as Real Estate, Product Management, Accounting, Finance, Purchasing, and Sales when compared to workers without disabilities.

Disability Status and Work: Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

Figure 2: Relative probabilities of working in functional areas



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph. Note, numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth, while the bar length is not.

Trends in position seniority

In addition to differences in industry and occupation representation, disparities exist in the distribution of workers across leadership levels. 48% of workers reporting disabilities are employed in entry-level positions versus 41.2% of those without disabilities—a substantial 6.8 percentage point difference. Further emphasizing this disparity, only 17.9% of workers with disabilities hold manager or higher positions (senior positions), compared to 23.2% of workers without disabilities. Only 10.5% of members with disabilities are in director, VP, or CXO positions, while the corresponding figure for members without disabilities is 13.6%.

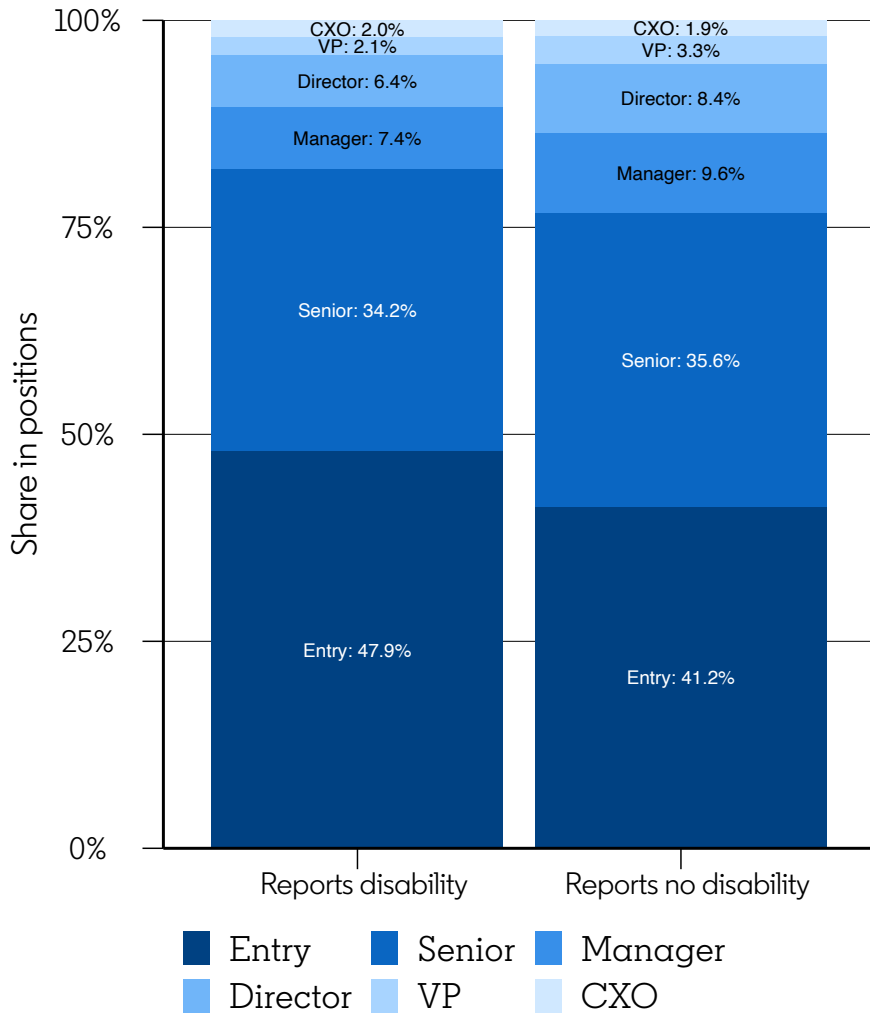
It is important to bear in mind the previously mentioned limitation of our sample, which is comprised of individuals who have chosen to self-report their disability status. Self-identification skews to younger and less senior individuals. To illustrate this limitation, we can compare the overall LinkedIn sample of US

Disability Status and Work: Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

workers (including those who have not self-identified their disability status, encompassing both those with and without disabilities). In this broader sample of US LinkedIn members, 3.7% of workers hold VP positions, exceeding the proportions in the self-identified sample (3.3% for those without disabilities and 2.1% for those with disabilities). This discrepancy suggests notable variations in seniority status among members who choose to self-identify.

Therefore, it is important not to interpret our findings as an assertion that 2.1% of the entire US workforce comprising individuals with disabilities are in VP positions. Instead, we can conclude that 2.1% of our *self-identified sample* of individuals with disabilities occupy VP positions. Nonetheless, our findings do indicate significant disparities in leadership representation *between* those reporting disabilities and those reporting no disabilities within the self-identified sample.

Figure 3: Share of workers in each seniority level, by reported disability status



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Disability Status and Work: Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

We next examine four employment outcomes together over the past five years. First, we explore the share of workers with no job currently listed (Figure 4, upper left panel). In every month over the last five years, members who report having a disability have had a higher share of individuals with no current job listed on their LinkedIn profile than those reporting no disability, with an average gap of 3.2 percentage points and a gap in July 2023 of 3.8 percentage points. That gap has been relatively stable over time, with the share of members with no job listed for each group together rising and falling to follow the broader macroeconomic environment. For both groups, we see a decrease in the share of workers reporting no current job from 2018 until the start of the pandemic. We then see a large spike in those with no job listed for both groups at the start of the pandemic, which starts to taper and returns to the pre-pandemic level by 2022. However, since mid-2022, the share of with no job listed has increased. The robustness and stability of the gap between those who report disabilities and those who report no disabilities is remarkable, showing no strong evidence of narrowing or widening.

The second panel of Figure 4 (upper right) displays the total share of members working in non-senior positions, considering all members, including those with no job currently listed. Members reporting disabilities tend to have a higher share of individuals working in non-senior positions compared to those reporting no disabilities. However, these shares converged during the early pandemic. Since then, the gap expanded again, with a July 2023 gap of 1.2 percentage points.

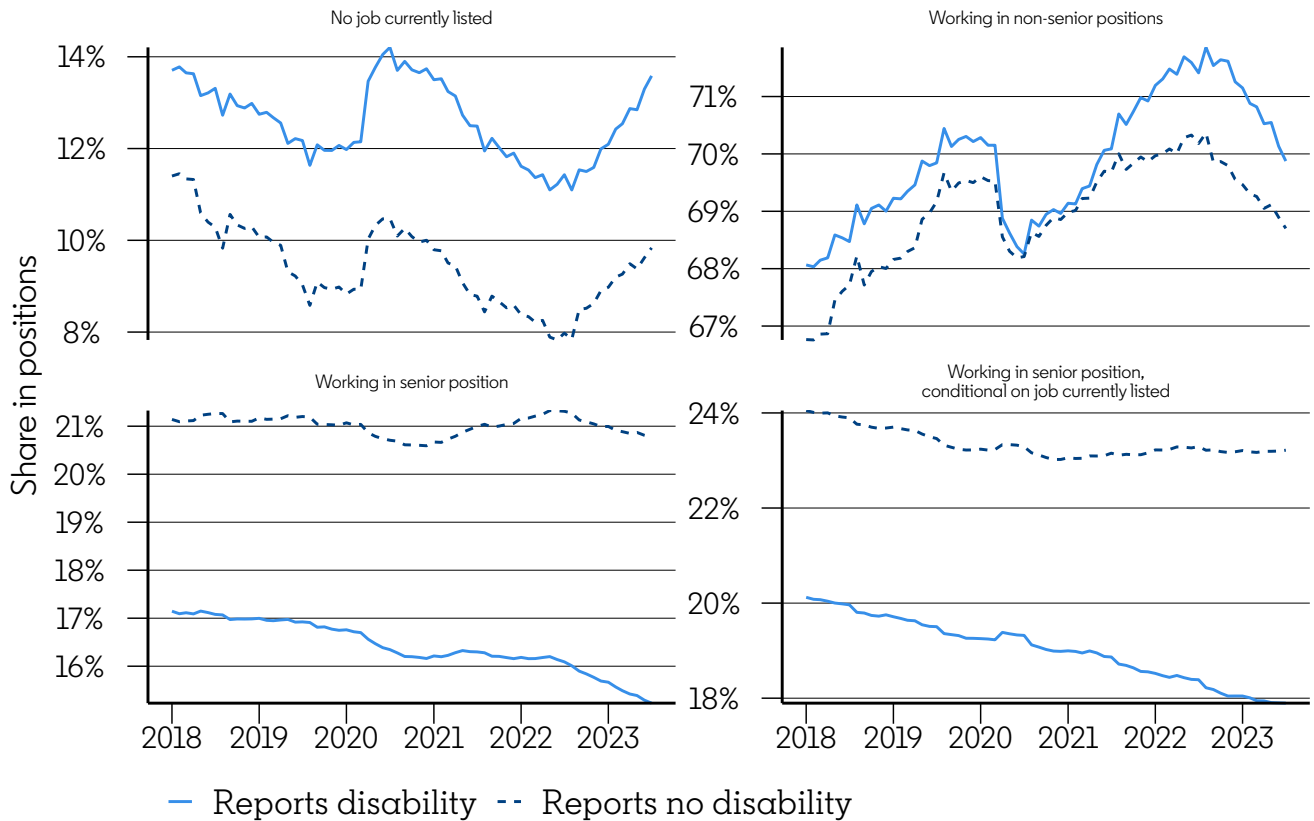
The third panel of Figure 4 (lower left) explores the share of members working in senior positions, once again considering both those working and not working. Here, we observe evidence of a widening gap over time. While the share of members reporting no disability who work in senior positions has remained relatively stable at approximately 21% with minor fluctuations, the same share for members reporting disabilities has declined from 17% in 2018 to 15.2% in July 2023. This resulted in the gap expanding from 4.1 percentage points in July 2018 to 5.5 percentage points in July 2023.

The last panel (lower right) in our chart examines the share of workers in senior positions, limiting the sample to members who report having a job. For instance, in July 2023 for the third panel of the chart, we find that 15.2% of members who report having disabilities are working in senior positions. However, 13.5% of the members who reported having disabilities were not working and therefore could not have held senior positions. Adjusting for this, we find that 17.9% of members reporting disabilities and currently employed in a job are working in senior positions. This figure is notably lower than the share of those working in senior positions among members reporting no disabilities, which stands at 23.2%.

Of particular concern is the widening gap over time. Among those with a job listed, in July 2018, 20.0% of members reporting disabilities were employed in senior positions, compared to 23.9% of members reporting no disabilities, resulting in a gap of 3.9 percentage points. Five years later in July 2023, this gap has increased to 5.3 percentage points.

Disability Status and Work: Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

Figure 4: Share of workers in different employment outcomes over time



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

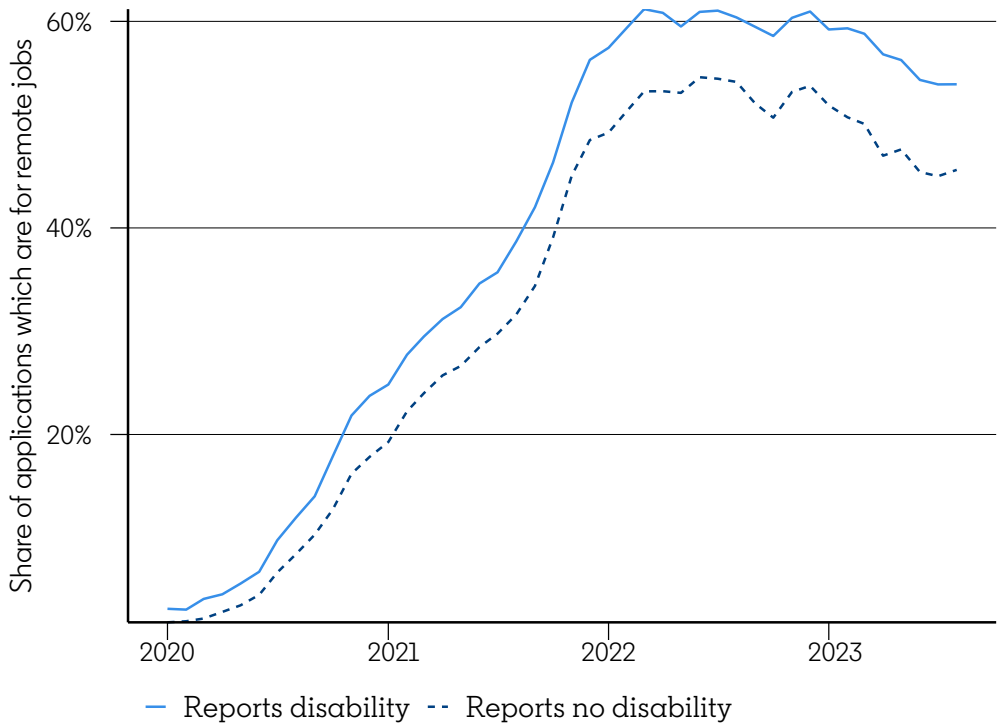
Interest in remote work

Interest in remote work opportunities has surged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The next chart illustrates this trend, with both individuals reporting disabilities and those reporting no disabilities showing substantial growth since 2020 in the share of job applications which were for remote positions. For instance, among those reporting disabilities, only 3.1% of applications in January 2020 were for remote positions. However, by mid-2022, these numbers soared to over 60% before settling at the August 2023 rate of 53.9%.

What is equally evident is the disparity between individuals reporting disabilities and those reporting no disabilities. In August 2023, the rate of applications from individuals with disabilities, at 53.9%, significantly exceeds the 45.6% share of applications coming from those reporting no disabilities. This gap was present at each month examined, with members reporting disabilities having higher interest for remote job positions.

Disability Status and Work: Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

Figure 5: Share of job applications for remote job postings



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Closing the gap

Using LinkedIn self-identification data, we find meaningful disparities in representation between members who report having a disability and those who do not. These disparities persist across industries, occupations, and seniority levels. Of particular concern is the widening gap between the share of workers employed in a senior position for those who report having a disability and those who do not. Identifying these disparities is a key step to reducing the barriers hindering the inclusion and contributions of people with disabilities.

We see that members who report having a disability became keenly interested in remote work during the pandemic and have remained so despite a [decline in its availability](#). This gap in interest suggests that remote work might be a key dimension to reducing the disparities we see. For some individuals with disabilities, remote work can increase accessibility and lower the barriers posed by onsite work, such as transportation. Remote work may also induce more parity across functions, as many of the functions where we see relatively fewer members reporting a disability can potentially be done remotely (e.g., engineering, finance, and accounting).

Disability Status and Work: Employment and Leadership Trends in the US

During the recovery from 2021 to mid-2022, the share of workers in a senior position (relative to no position and a non-senior position) held steady alongside the rise of remote work. While the exact contribution of remote work to this stability is unclear, it is more than probable that it had a meaningful impact on sustaining the share of members reporting a disability in a senior position. The decline in senior workers who report a disability has resumed amidst the ongoing hiring slowdown, making the need to create economic opportunity for persons with disabilities more critical than ever.

Appendix

Acknowledgements

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Methodology

Data and Privacy. This body of work represents the world seen through LinkedIn data drawn from self-identified members in the United States. We combine this self-identified disability status with anonymized and aggregated profile information of the members. As such, it is influenced by how members choose to use the platform, which can vary based on professional, social, and regional culture, as well as overall site availability and accessibility.

In publishing these insights from LinkedIn's Economic Graph, we aim to provide accurate statistics while ensuring our members' privacy. As a result, all data show aggregated information for the corresponding period following strict data quality thresholds that prevent disclosing any information about specific individuals.

Self-ID Data. Self-ID refers to a LinkedIn settings option wherein members can opt to privately self-identify their demographic information, including disability status.

Disability status is determined by the response to the question “Do you identify as having a disability or impairment?” A member is classified as having reported having a disability if their response to this question is yes, and are classified as not having a disability if their response is no.