



National Network

Information, Guidance and Training on
the Americans with Disabilities Act

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Sources for employment and disability data

What are the best data sources on the employment situation for individuals with disabilities?

There are two primary sources for current employment data for persons with disabilities.

- The Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) is recommended for employment information by geographic area (i.e., state or county), and disability type as well as other demographics. ACS data are released annually.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistic's Current Population Survey (CPS) provides the most current data available on disability employment, with data released monthly. Due to the smaller sample size of the CPS, the BLS only provides national level estimates by overall disability status.

Who is defined as a person with a disability in the ACS and CPS?

Employment rates vary greatly by disability type. Therefore, what a survey means by "to have a disability" has a significant impact on the employment rate it reports. The ACS and CPS each use a similar set of six questions to



identify persons with disabilities.¹ A “person with a disability” is someone who answers “yes” to one or more of the following six questions:

- *Hearing Disability*: Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing?
- *Visual Disability*: Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?
- *Cognitive Disability*: Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?
- *Ambulatory Disability*: Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
- *Self-Care Disability*: Does this person have difficulty dressing or bathing?
- *Independent Living Disability*: Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?

Note that the questions above do not identify all possible disabilities covered by the ADA. For example, they do not comprehensively identify those with mental illness or persons with upper body disabilities, or certain specific conditions.

Where can I find estimates about the employment situation for individuals with disabilities?

ACS-based national, state, and local level disability employment estimates

¹ The CPS and ACS estimates will not be identical due to differences in sampling, survey methodology, question wording among other reasons.



Sources for employment and disability data

The easiest place to find state and national level employment rates is DisabilityStatistics.org. The annual Disability Status Reports are based on the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) and provide a wealth of information that is easy to understand regarding employment as well as prevalence, income, poverty, education, and other topics by state and disability type. The interactive interface allows users to delve into more detail regarding employment by age group, gender, race and ethnicity.

<http://DisabilityStatistics.org/>

The US Census Bureau's American Factfinder provides access to a number of data tables at the national, state and local levels:

<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>

CPS-based monthly disability labor force estimates (BLS)

The Bureau of Labor Statistics uses the Current Population Survey (CPS) to provide the most current national monthly employment and unemployment numbers. The estimates (Table A-6) are updated on the first Friday of the month and can be accessed here:

Table A-6: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t06.htm>

Additional CPS disability information:

<http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsdisability.htm/>

CPS based annual averages of labor force participation (more demographic details):

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.toc.htm>



SIPP based employment rates

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) uses a much broader definition of disability that may be closer to the ADAA definition of disability than the CPS and ACS. The following Census Bureau report provides employment data (Table A-2) based on the 2010 SIPP and provides an extensive/detailed breakdown by disability type and severity.

www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p70-131.pdf

Numbers at a glance:

Prevalence and employment estimates based on the 2010 ACS, CPS and SIPP:

Data Source	Number with disabilities	Prevalence Rate	Employment rate
CPS (ages 20-64)	14,134,000	7.8%	29.2%
ACS (ages 21-64)	18,348,600	10.5%	33.9%
SIPP (ages 21-64)	29,479,000	16.6%	41.1%

What are the recommended practices for understanding employment statistics about people with disabilities?

Use employment rates (not unemployment rates)

We recommend *against* using the unemployment number or rate. While people often believe that the unemployment rate includes all individuals not working, it actually includes only those who are not working *and* actively looking for work. Unemployment numbers do not include individuals who are not working, but who are *not* seeking employment; this includes “discouraged workers” who have become frustrated and given up trying to



find work and individuals participating in government-sponsored training programs. Over the past few years, when the unemployment rate has dropped it has often not been because individuals found employment, but rather because they remained unemployed and stopped looking for work altogether, not a promising indicator.²

In contrast, the employment rate calculation includes all individuals. Thus, making employment comparisons between persons with and without disabilities provides a much better picture of the relative position of persons with disabilities. See the Disability Status Report for how this can be presented.

Use employment rate estimates based on the working age population

Because employment rate includes the entire population in the denominator of the ratio, it is important to consider the population of interest. Estimates can be misleading if they include individuals less than 16 years old, as they are likely not yet in the labor force. Similarly, individuals over 64 are both more likely to be out of the labor force and are more likely to have a disability. Including these groups could create a somewhat distorted picture of the employment situation for people with disabilities.

A number of factors can affect the employment rate including: definition of disability, definition of employment, and the age group. Different data sources have strengths and weaknesses. No data source currently available provides an accurate employment picture of the population covered by the ADA, however the SIPP may be closer than other sources.

² For more on how unemployment is calculated see: <http://disabilitystatistics.org/faq.cfm#Q6>



Content was developed by the Northeast ADA Center, and is based on professional consensus of ADA experts and the ADA National Network.



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