

# Research in Brief



Issue No 2026-06

Publication Date June 22 2026

ISSN 2092-7117

Building D, 370 Sicheong-daero, Sejong City 30147 KOREA **Korea Institute for Health & Social Affairs**

## Employment Trends Among Men and Women with Disabilities: From Pre- to Post-Pandemic Periods<sup>1)</sup>

**Eun Jung Kim**

Associate Research Fellow, KIHASA

This article examines pre- and post-COVID-19 employment trends among men and women with disabilities. The findings indicate that, in the post-pandemic period, the employment rate of people with disabilities increased among women but declined among men. The percentage of wage workers increased for both men and women with disabilities; however, this increase occurred mostly in less secure positions, including nonregular, part-time, and government-funded jobs, such as in public works and social welfare employment. The proportion of self-employment without employees increased among both men and women with disabilities, suggesting that this growth was concentrated in sole proprietorships and microbusinesses. Although the gender gap in employment rate narrowed, the employment rate of men with disabilities remained about twice that of women with disabilities, and the percentage of those holding regular, full-time positions at private-sector firms also remained higher among men. Labor market policies for persons with disabilities should be designed from a gender-sensitive perspective as well as with the goal of improving the quality of employment.

1) This article is an English translation of Issue and Focus No. 465, originally published in Korean in May 2026. The original article is available at <https://www.kihasa.re.kr/publish/regular/focus/view?seq=75519>. The views expressed in this article are the author's and may not represent the official viewpoint of KIHASA



## Introduction

While there is no dearth of studies comparing employment trends between men and women (Jung et al., 2025; Shin et al., 2021; Kim & Lee, 2020), relatively few have examined employment trends among people with disabilities, particularly women (Kim, 2022; Yeon et al., 2015; Jeon et al., 2015). Women with disabilities, who face disadvantages both as women and as persons with disabilities, are particularly vulnerable (Kim et al., 2019). As women, they often bear disproportionate caregiving responsibilities and experience gender-based discrimination in the labor market. Their employment opportunities are further constrained by disability-related stigma and assumptions regarding productivity.

COVID-19 had a substantial impact on the labor market (Lee et al., 2023). It is therefore necessary to examine how the pandemic affected employment among women with disabilities and whether these effects were temporary or long-lasting. Given their structural characteristics—greater caregiving responsibilities, concentration in less secure forms of employment, and reliance on publicly funded jobs—women with disabilities may exhibit employment outcomes distinct from those of other groups during and after external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study examines how employment outcomes among men and women with disabilities changed across three periods: the pre-COVID period (2017–2019), the pandemic period (2020–2022)<sup>2)</sup>, and the post-pandemic period (2023–2025).

This study uses data from the Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities, conducted by the Employment Development Institute of the Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities (KEAD), covering the period 2017 through the first half of 2025. The survey is an official national data source based on a sample of 11,000 registered participants with disabilities aged 15 and older. The survey was administered annually between May and July through 2021 and was converted in 2022 to a semiannual format, with waves fielded in the first half (May–July) and second half (October–December) of each year. For the 2022–2025 period, this study uses only first-half survey data to maintain consistency across the entire analysis.

.....

2) The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Korea occurred on January 20, 2020, and from February, cluster infections began to spread around the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony in Daegu. Accordingly, 2020 is set as the initial year of the pandemic period. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the end of the Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) for COVID-19 in May 2023. In this study, considering that the Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities is conducted annually from May to July, the pandemic period is defined as ending in 2022.

## Changes in employment rates in men and women with disabilities, before and after COVID-19

Following the onset of COVID-19, employment rates declined among men with disabilities but increased among women. These changes persisted into the post-pandemic period. For men with disabilities, the employment rate fell from a pre-pandemic average of 45.5 percent to 44.6 percent during the pandemic, and further to 43.1 percent in the post-pandemic period. For women with disabilities, the employment rate rose from 21.4 percent pre-pandemic to 22.7 percent during the pandemic, reaching 23.2 percent post-pandemic.

**[Table 1] Employment rates for men and women with disabilities**

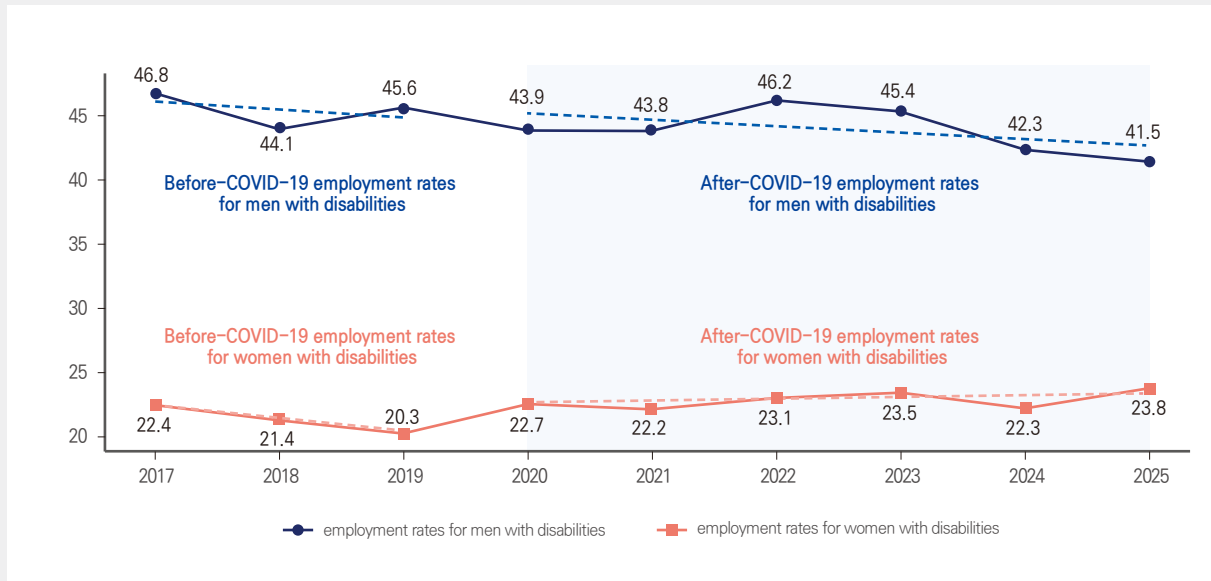
	Pre-COVID-19				During COVID-19				Post-COVID-19			
	2017	2018	2019	Average	2020	2021	2022	Average	2023	2024	2025	Average
<b>All</b>	36.5	34.5	34.9	<b>35.3</b>	34.9	34.6	36.4	<b>35.3</b>	36.1	33.9	34.0	<b>34.7</b>
<b>Men</b>	46.8	44.1	45.6	<b>45.5</b>	43.9	43.8	46.2	<b>44.6</b>	45.4	42.3	41.5	<b>43.1</b>
<b>Women</b>	22.4	21.4	20.3	<b>21.4</b>	22.7	22.2	23.1	<b>22.7</b>	23.5	22.3	23.8	<b>23.2</b>
<b>Difference</b>	24.3	22.8	25.3	<b>24.1</b>	21.2	21.6	23.1	<b>22.0</b>	21.9	20.0	17.7	<b>19.9</b>

Source: Survey on the Economic Activities of Persons with Disabilities 2017–2025, Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities (Employment Development Institute)

A Chow test<sup>3)</sup> was conducted to determine whether the observed changes were attributable to impacts specific to the COVID-19 period or represented part of a continuing trend independent of COVID-19. For men with disabilities, the shift in trend around the onset of COVID-19 (2020) was not statistically significant, suggesting that the observed changes were more likely a continuation of pre-pandemic trends than a pandemic-related break. For women with disabilities, whose employment rate was declining before the pandemic, the 2020 shift was statistically significant, indicating a change directly attributable to the pandemic, marking a turning point in their employment trajectory.

3) A method for testing whether the regression coefficients of two linear regression models are statistically equivalent or different using data from different periods. In this study, to examine whether the trend changed significantly at the onset of COVID-19 (2020), the sample is divided into 2017–2019 and 2020–2025, and the regression coefficients are compared and analyzed across these two periods.

[Figure 1] Trends in employment rates for men and women with disabilities (in %)



Source: Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities, Employment Development Institute, Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017–2025, raw data.

## Changes in employment among men and women with disabilities: before and after COVID-19

During the period 2017–2025, the percentage of wage workers among employed persons with disabilities was higher for women (75.0 percent) than for men (67.9 percent). Wage workers as a share of employed persons with disabilities increased in the wake of the pandemic for both men and women, rising more rapidly for women (from 71.2 percent to 78.3 percent) than for men (from 67.1 percent to 69.6 percent).

**[Table 2] Wage and non-wage workers with disabilities (in %)**

	Pre-COVID-19				During COVID-19				Post-COVID-19			
	2017	2018	2019	Average	2020	2021	2022	Average	2023	2024	2025	Average
<b>All</b>												
<b>Wage</b>	65.6	67.7	71.2	<b>68.1</b>	69.5	69.4	69.3	<b>69.4</b>	71.2	72.8	72.1	<b>72.0</b>
<b>Non-wage</b>	34.4	32.3	28.8	<b>31.9</b>	30.5	30.6	30.7	<b>30.6</b>	28.8	27.2	27.9	<b>28.0</b>
<b>Men with disabilities</b>												
<b>Wage</b>	64.6	66.9	69.8	<b>67.1</b>	67.8	67.5	66.0	<b>67.1</b>	68.8	70.8	69.1	<b>69.6</b>
<b>Non-wage</b>	35.4	33.1	30.2	<b>32.9</b>	32.2	32.5	34.0	<b>32.9</b>	31.2	29.3	30.9	<b>30.5</b>
<b>Women with disabilities</b>												
<b>Wage</b>	68.4	69.8	75.5	<b>71.2</b>	74.1	74.4	78.2	<b>75.6</b>	77.7	78.0	79.2	<b>78.3</b>
<b>Non-wage</b>	31.6	30.2	24.5	<b>28.8</b>	25.9	25.6	21.8	<b>24.4</b>	22.3	22.0	20.8	<b>21.7</b>

Note: The figures for each year add up to 100.0% (wage + non-wage)

Source: Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities, Employment Development Institute, Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017–2025, raw data.

Among workers with disabilities, men were more likely than women to hold permanent positions. Between 2017 and 2025, among wage workers with disabilities, 21.0 percent of women held permanent positions, and men were more than twice as likely as women (43.1 percent) to hold permanent positions. The share of workers in permanent positions declined from a pre-pandemic average of 46.3 percent to a post-pandemic average of 40.3 percent among men, and from 24.2 percent to 18.9 percent among women. Notably, the increase in the share of wage workers among both men and women was due largely to growth in nonregular employment rather than regular employment.

**[Table 3] Wage workers with disabilities in regular and nonregular positions (in %)**

	Pre-COVID-19				During COVID-19				Post-COVID-19			
	2017	2018	2019	Average	2020	2021	2022	Average	2023	2024	2025	Average
<b>All</b>												
<b>Nonregular</b>	59.4	59.4	60.0	<b>59.6</b>	59.4	67.8	64.9	<b>64.0</b>	67.3	67.0	64.5	<b>66.3</b>
<b>Regular</b>	40.6	40.6	40.0	<b>40.4</b>	40.6	32.2	35.1	<b>36.0</b>	32.7	33.0	35.5	<b>33.7</b>
<b>Men</b>												
<b>Nonregular</b>	55.3	54.3	51.6	<b>53.7</b>	51.5	61.8	58.4	<b>57.2</b>	60.5	60.2	58.2	<b>59.6</b>
<b>Regular</b>	44.7	45.7	48.4	<b>46.3</b>	48.5	38.2	41.6	<b>42.8</b>	39.5	39.8	41.8	<b>40.4</b>
<b>Women</b>												
<b>Nonregular</b>	70.5	73.2	83.7	<b>75.8</b>	78.5	82.5	79.7	<b>80.2</b>	83.0	82.8	77.5	<b>81.1</b>
<b>Regular</b>	29.5	26.8	16.3	<b>24.2</b>	21.5	17.5	20.3	<b>19.8</b>	17.0	17.2	22.5	<b>18.9</b>

Note: The figures for each category add up to 100.0% (regular + nonregular)

Source: Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities, Employment Development Institute, Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017–2025, raw data.

In the years from 2017 to 2025, 71.0 percent of employed men with disabilities were in full-time positions, compared to 38.8 percent of employed women with disabilities. From the pre-pandemic to the post-pandemic period, full-time employees as a share of wage workers with disabilities declined for both men and women, with a steeper decline for women (from 44.4 percent to 33.9 percent) than for men (from 74.9 percent to 67.4 percent).

**[Table 4] Full-time and part-time wage workers with disabilities (in %)**

	Pre-COVID-19				During COVID-19				Post-COVID-19			
	2017	2018	2019	Average	2020	2021	2022	Average	2023	2024	2025	Average
<b>All</b>												
<b>Full-time</b>	68.1	66.8	65.3	<b>66.7</b>	63.1	61.9	58.2	<b>61.1</b>	55.3	58.2	57.6	<b>57.0</b>
<b>Part-time</b>	31.9	33.2	34.7	<b>33.3</b>	36.9	38.2	41.8	<b>39.0</b>	44.7	41.8	42.4	<b>43.0</b>
<b>Men</b>												
<b>Full-time</b>	75.1	74.7	74.8	<b>74.9</b>	73.2	70.2	69.0	<b>70.8</b>	65.8	67.8	68.6	<b>67.4</b>
<b>Part-time</b>	24.9	25.3	25.2	<b>25.1</b>	26.8	29.8	31.0	<b>29.2</b>	34.2	32.2	31.4	<b>32.6</b>
<b>Women</b>												
<b>Full-time</b>	49.3	45.5	38.4	<b>44.4</b>	38.7	41.6	33.7	<b>38.0</b>	31.1	35.7	35.0	<b>33.9</b>
<b>Part-time</b>	50.8	54.5	61.6	<b>55.7</b>	61.3	58.4	66.3	<b>62.0</b>	68.9	64.3	65.0	<b>66.1</b>

Note: The figures for each year add up to 100.0% (full time + part time)

Source: Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities, Employment Development Institute, Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017–2025, raw data.

With respect to employer type, 70-83 percent of men and 48-65 percent of women wage workers with disabilities were employed by private-sector businesses. A relatively high percentage (21-40 percent) of employed women with disabilities worked in government-funded positions, including public works, welfare programs, and community jobs. Compared to the pre-pandemic period, the share of men and women with disabilities working for private-sector firms declined during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods, while reliance on government-funded job programs, and thus on the protected labor market, increased. Among male wage workers with disabilities, employment in private-sector firms fell from 80.8 percent pre-pandemic to 75.7 percent during the pandemic and to 71.9 percent post-pandemic. Meanwhile, the proportion in government-funded jobs rose from 7.1 percent to 11.1 percent and then to 15.5 percent.

Among female wage workers with disabilities, those employed by private-sector firms decreased from a pre-pandemic average of 59.6 percent to 53.9 percent during the pandemic and to 50.4 percent post-pandemic, while the share in government-funded employment increased from 23.8 percent to 33.0 percent and then to 35.4 percent.

**[Table 5] Wage workers with disabilities, classified by job type (employer type)**

	Pre-COVID-19				During COVID-19				Post-COVID-19			
	2017	2018	2019	Average	2020	2021	2022	Average	2023	2024	2025	Average
<b>All</b>												
Vocational rehabilitation centers	4.4	4.0	4.0	<b>4.1</b>	3.2	4.2	4.6	<b>4.0</b>	5.4	4.9	5.3	<b>5.2</b>
Government-funded jobs	10.9	10.3	13.5	<b>11.5</b>	14.3	18.6	20.0	<b>17.6</b>	20.2	22.1	22.7	<b>21.7</b>
Government and public institutions	7.8	8.7	10.9	<b>9.1</b>	12.4	8.9	6.3	<b>9.2</b>	8.0	8.8	6.9	<b>7.9</b>
Private-sector employers	76.9	77.1	71.6	<b>75.2</b>	70.1	68.3	69.0	<b>69.1</b>	66.5	64.2	65.1	<b>65.3</b>
<b>Men</b>												
Vocational rehabilitation centers	3.7	3.5	3.9	<b>3.7</b>	3.1	4.3	4.1	<b>3.8</b>	4.5	4.6	5.1	<b>4.7</b>
Government-funded jobs	7.1	6.3	7.8	<b>7.1</b>	8.9	13.2	11.2	<b>11.1</b>	15.3	15.6	15.6	<b>15.5</b>
Government and public institutions	6.0	8.5	10.7	<b>8.4</b>	12.0	9.2	7.0	<b>9.4</b>	8.3	9.5	5.9	<b>7.9</b>
Private-sector	83.2	81.7	77.6	<b>80.8</b>	76.0	73.2	77.8	<b>75.7</b>	71.9	70.4	73.4	<b>71.9</b>
<b>Women</b>												
Vocational rehabilitation centers	6.3	5.3	4.5	<b>5.3</b>	3.3	4.0	6.0	<b>4.4</b>	7.6	5.8	5.8	<b>6.4</b>
Government-funded jobs	21.1	20.9	29.6	<b>23.8</b>	27.2	31.6	40.3	<b>33.0</b>	31.5	37.3	37.3	<b>35.4</b>
Government and public institutions	12.7	9.4	11.5	<b>11.2</b>	13.4	8.0	4.7	<b>8.7</b>	7.3	7.2	9.1	<b>7.9</b>
Private-sector jobs, etc.	59.9	64.5	54.5	<b>59.6</b>	56.1	56.4	49.1	<b>53.9</b>	53.7	49.7	47.9	<b>50.4</b>

Note: 1. The figures for each category year add up to 100.0% (vocational rehabilitation centers + government-funded jobs + government and public institutions + private-sector jobs).

2. Examples of jobs in vocational rehabilitation centers—sheltered workshops, supported employment workplaces, etc.; examples of government-funded jobs—public works programs, welfare jobs, community job programs, etc.; examples of government and public institution jobs—civil servants, teachers, etc.

Source: Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities, Employment Development Institute, Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017–2025, raw data.

In terms of hourly wages<sup>4)</sup>, male workers with disabilities earned more than their female counterparts. Over the period 2017–2025, the average hourly wage was estimated at KRW 16,000 for men with disabilities and KRW 12,100 for women with disabilities. Across this period, the average hourly wage for men with disabilities increased moderately, from KRW 16,300 before COVID-19 to KRW 17,000 during the pandemic and KRW 17,200 after the pandemic. For women with disabilities, the hourly wage declined slightly to KRW 11,900 from KRW 12,000 before the pandemic, and then increased to KRW 12,400 after the pandemic.

.....

4) To adjust for distortions in nominal wages caused by changes in the price level, real wages are presented using the Consumer Price Index for June 2025 as the base.

**[Table 6] Wage workers with disabilities:  
hourly gender wage gap among workers with disabilities (in KRW 10,000)**

	Pre-COVID-19				During COVID-19				Post-COVID-19			
	2017	2018	2019	Average	2020	2021	2022	Average	2023	2024	2025	Average
<b>All</b>	1.47	1.46	1.61	<b>1.51</b>	1.54	1.50	1.61	<b>1.55</b>	1.57	1.55	1.58	<b>1.57</b>
<b>Men</b>	1.60	1.58	1.70	<b>1.63</b>	1.70	1.64	1.78	<b>1.70</b>	1.72	1.69	1.73	<b>1.72</b>
<b>Women</b>	1.14	1.13	1.34	<b>1.20</b>	1.19	1.16	1.24	<b>1.19</b>	1.23	1.23	1.26	<b>1.24</b>
<b>Difference</b>	0.46	0.45	0.36	<b>0.42</b>	0.51	0.48	0.54	<b>0.51</b>	0.49	0.47	0.47	<b>0.48</b>

Note: 1. Monthly average wages are divided by total monthly hours worked.

2. Since the Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities is conducted from May to July, real wages are presented using the June 2025 Consumer Price Index as a base in order to adjust for distortions in nominal wages caused by price changes.

Source: Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities, Employment Development Institute, Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017–2025, raw data.

Among non-wage workers with disabilities, the proportion of self-employed persons with employees declined during and after the pandemic, while the proportion without employees increased compared with the pre-pandemic period. For men with disabilities, the share of self-employed individuals with employees fell from 22.0 percent in the pre-pandemic period (2017-2019) to 20.6 percent during the pandemic (2020-2022) and further to 20.4 percent in the post-pandemic period (2023-2025). In contrast, the proportion of self-employed individuals without employees rose from 72.1 percent in the pre-pandemic period to 75.0 percent during the pandemic and 76.9 percent in the post-pandemic period.

Among female non-wage workers with disabilities, 13.9 percent were self-employed with employees in the pre-pandemic period. This proportion declined to 12.3 percent during the pandemic and further to 11.8 percent in the post-pandemic period. Conversely, the share of self-employed individuals without employees increased from 55.7 percent in the pre-pandemic period to 56.6 percent during the pandemic and 59.1 percent in the post-pandemic period. It is also important to note that, over these years, individuals identified as unpaid family workers constituted a relatively high proportion (25-38 percent) of female non-wage workers with disabilities.

**[Table 7] Non-wage workers with disabilities: self-employed and unpaid family workers**

	Pre-COVID-19				During COVID-19				Post-COVID-19			
	2017	2018	2019	Average	2020	2021	2022	Average	2023	2024	2025	Average
<b>All</b>												
<b>Self-employed with employees</b>	21.1	18.6	20.6	<b>20.1</b>	21.2	14.6	20.7	<b>18.8</b>	18.7	18.2	18.6	<b>18.5</b>
<b>Self-employed without employees</b>	68.4	67.5	69.2	<b>68.4</b>	67.9	73.7	71.0	<b>70.9</b>	74.2	72.7	72.0	<b>73.0</b>
<b>Unpaid family workers</b>	10.6	13.9	10.2	<b>11.6</b>	10.9	11.7	8.3	<b>10.3</b>	7.1	9.1	9.4	<b>8.5</b>
<b>Men</b>												
<b>Self-employed with employees</b>	23.9	20.2	21.8	<b>22.0</b>	22.4	16.7	22.6	<b>20.6</b>	20.4	19.8	20.9	<b>20.4</b>
<b>Self-employed without employees</b>	72.1	71.7	72.6	<b>72.1</b>	72.7	79.3	72.9	<b>75.0</b>	78.1	77.0	75.6	<b>76.9</b>
<b>Unpaid family workers</b>	4.0	8.1	5.6	<b>5.9</b>	4.9	4.0	4.4	<b>4.4</b>	1.6	3.3	3.5	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Women</b>												
<b>Self-employed with employees</b>	11.9	13.6	16.0	<b>13.9</b>	17.1	7.5	12.3	<b>12.3</b>	12.3	12.7	10.5	<b>11.8</b>
<b>Self-employed without employees</b>	56.4	54.6	56.3	<b>55.7</b>	52.3	54.7	62.9	<b>56.6</b>	60.0	58.3	59.1	<b>59.1</b>
<b>Unpaid family workers</b>	31.7	31.8	27.7	<b>30.4</b>	30.6	37.8	24.8	<b>31.1</b>	27.7	29.1	30.4	<b>29.1</b>

The monthly business (net) income of non-wage workers with disabilities was higher for men than for women. The gender gap widened significantly during the pandemic but narrowed considerably afterward. For both male and female non-wage workers with disabilities, net business income hit its lowest point in 2021—KRW 2,297,000 for men and KRW 1,055,000 for women—at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. For both groups, monthly net business income took an upward turn in 2022 but has yet to recover to its pre-pandemic level.

**[Table 8] Monthly (net) business income of non-wage workers with disabilities (in KRW 10,000)**

	Pre-COVID-19				During COVID-19				Post-COVID-19			
	2017	2018	2019	Average	2020	2021	2022	Average	2023	2024	2025	Average
<b>All</b>	250.0	210.8	252.1	<b>237.7</b>	233.4	209.5	269.1	<b>237.3</b>	220.7	253.5	220.3	<b>231.5</b>
<b>Men</b>	272.8	230.9	266.5	<b>256.7</b>	258.9	229.7	288.8	<b>259.1</b>	235.2	273.3	234.3	<b>247.6</b>
<b>Women</b>	150.7	124.2	184.5	<b>153.1</b>	110.1	105.5	157.3	<b>124.3</b>	150.7	158.1	143.1	<b>150.6</b>
<b>Difference</b>	122.2	106.7	82.0	<b>103.6</b>	148.7	124.2	131.5	<b>134.8</b>	84.5	115.2	91.1	<b>96.9</b>

Note: 1. Average monthly net income over the most recent three months (before tax deductions).

2. Unpaid family workers are excluded from calculation.

3. Since the Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities is conducted from May to July, real income is presented based on the June 2025 Consumer Price Index to adjust for distortions in nominal income caused by price changes.

Source: Survey on the Economic Activity Status of Persons with Disabilities, Employment Development Institute, Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017–2025, raw data.

## Concluding remarks

This study examined employment trends among men and women with disabilities between 2017 and 2025. These trends differed markedly between men and women. During the COVID-19 pandemic, employment rates declined among men with disabilities but increased among women with disabilities. These divergent patterns persisted into the post-pandemic period. Men with disabilities may have been more vulnerable to pandemic-related shocks because a larger proportion were self-employed or worked in the private sector. By comparison, employment among women with disabilities remained relatively stable, as they were more likely to be wage workers and to hold government-funded public-work jobs.

It is also likely that the expansion of publicly funded jobs (Joint Committee of Related Ministries, 2021) during the pandemic contributed to the increase in employment among women with disabilities. In 2021, the government announced that, in response to COVID-19, it would create 2,500 government-funded jobs for persons with disabilities and gradually raise the employment quota for disabled persons in the private sector from 3.4 percent in 2021 to 3.8 percent by 2024 (Joint Committee of Related Ministries, 2021). Given the high share of women participating in these employment categories, these policy measures may have contributed to increasing the employment rate of women with disabilities. In addition, in August 2021 the government allocated an additional KRW 4.9 billion to expand support for employment among disabled persons and increased the number of beneficiaries (from 5,000 to 6,000) covered by government-funded employment support programs for persons with severe disabilities (Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2021). These government-funded jobs likely only partially cushioned the pandemic's impact on employment among men with disabilities, whose employment was concentrated in the private sector and self-employment, with the result that their employment rates failed to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels.

The share of wage workers increased among both men and women with disabilities in the post-pandemic period. However, this increase was driven by growth in precarious employment, namely nonregular employment (a 5.9-percentage-point increase for men and a 5.3 percentage-point increase for women) and part-time employment (a 7.5-percentage-point increase for men and a 10.4-percentage-point increase for women). These findings suggest that policymakers should, when designing policies for persons with disabilities, consider not only raising their employment rate but also improving the quality of their employment, perhaps by making available more regular jobs with stable work hours. In addition, preventing excessive reliance on government-funded jobs will require expanding incentives for private-sector employers to hire persons with disabilities.

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of self-employed workers without employees increased among both male and female non-wage workers with disabilities. This suggests that growth was concentrated in sole proprietorships and microbusinesses. Overall, both men and women with disabilities have been severely affected by the pandemic, as evidenced by their business income reaching its lowest point in 2021, during the peak of the pandemic. Even after the pandemic ended, the net business income of these groups has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

To prevent self-employed individuals with disabilities from falling behind in an increasingly digitalized market, support should extend beyond financial assistance, such as loans, to include programs that help them adapt their businesses and enhance their digital capabilities. Despite the growth of digital and contactless industries since COVID-19, jobs created specifically for individuals with disabilities remain heavily concentrated in the manufacturing and construction sectors (Kim, 2022). This calls for providing occupational training in Industry 4.0 technologies and workshops on innovative business models.

Employment rates were twice as high for men with disabilities as for women with disabilities. Male wage workers earned about 1.4 times as much per hour as their female counterparts. Compared with male wage workers with disabilities, female wage workers with disabilities were 1.4 times more likely to hold nonregular positions, 2.1 times more likely to work part-time, and 2.0 times more likely to be employed in government-funded positions or at vocational rehabilitation centers. According to Yeon et al. (2015), the barriers to employment faced by women with disabilities are, first and foremost, “discrimination against persons with disabilities,” followed by “discrimination against women,” and “childcare and housework responsibilities.” The intersecting constraints faced by women with disabilities should be addressed through expanded public provision of care services and policies reflecting their specific characteristics. Also, as government-funded jobs have become a major pathway to employment among women with disabilities, there is a need to expand career-ladder programs (bridge jobs) that facilitate their transition into regular private-sector employment over time.

The findings suggest that post-pandemic labor market policies for persons with disabilities should go beyond simply increasing employment rates and aim to improve employment quality while addressing the gender-based structural disparities embedded in the labor market for men and women with disabilities.

## References

- Jeon, G., Lee, S., & Kim, Y. (2017). Unemployment status and policy challenges for women with disabilities. Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Joint Committee of Related Ministries. (2021, March 26). Measures to promote employment among persons with disabilities for 'inclusive recovery' after COVID-19 [Press release]. [https://www.moel.go.kr/news/enews/report/enewsView.do?news\\_seq=12069](https://www.moel.go.kr/news/enews/report/enewsView.do?news_seq=12069)
- Jung, S., Kang, M., Kim, H., & Kim, H. (2025). Characteristics and policy challenges of the women's labor market in an era of low birth rates. Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Kim, E. J., Parish, S., & Skinner, T. (2019). The impact of gender and disability on the economic well-being of disabled women in the United Kingdom: A longitudinal study between 2009 and 2014. *Social Policy and Administration*, 53(7), 1064–1080.
- Kim, E. J. (2022). A study on changes in employment status of men and women with disabilities before and after COVID-19. Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Kim, N., & Lee, S. (2020). Crisis status and policy challenges for women workers in employment safety net blind spots after COVID-19. *KWDI Brief*, 59. Korean Women's Development Institute.
- Lee, W., Ham, S., & Lee, J. (2023). Changes in labor market and income distribution after COVID-19. Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs.
- Ministry of Employment and Labor. (2021, August 2). [2nd Supplementary Budget] KRW 4.9 billion increase for employment support projects to expand jobs for persons with disabilities [Press release]. [https://www.moel.go.kr/news/enews/report/enewsView.do?news\\_seq=12549](https://www.moel.go.kr/news/enews/report/enewsView.do?news_seq=12549)
- Shin, S., Oh, E., & Jung, S. (2021). Prospects and challenges of women's employment policies after COVID-19. *Gender Review*, 61(Summer), 11–19.
- Yeon, M., Moon, Y., & Kim, Y. (2015). A study on expanding employment opportunities for women with disabilities. Korea Employment Agency for the Disabled, Employment Development Institute.