

# Rural people with disabilities are still struggling to recover from the recession

January 28 2019, by Lillie Greiman, Andrew Myers, Bryce Ward And Catherine Ipsen

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Since the Great Recession, the employment rate has gone up — but some rural groups lag behind. Credit: [Josh Sorenson](#), [CC BY](#)

After the devastating losses of the Great Recession, the U.S. has enjoyed

one of the longest expansions in its recorded history. For nearly [100 straight months](#), the U.S. economy has added jobs.

But not all groups have shared equally in the recovery. [African-Americans](#) and people in [rural communities](#) have been particularly slow to recover, compared to their white and urban peers.

Our team at the University of Montana's Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities published a [new analysis](#) on Jan. 10. Our research shows that people with [disabilities](#), particularly those in rural areas, have also experienced a longer, deeper recession and a much slower recovery.

In December, the U.S. Census released new [American Community Survey data, aggregating data from the years 2013 to 2017](#), for public use. Comparing these new data with summary data from 2008 to 2012 gave us the opportunity to see how [employment rates](#) have changed over time for rural people with disabilities in the context of changing economic conditions. We considered people [across disability type](#), including sensory, physical and mental disabilities.

For the U.S. as a whole, rates of [employment](#) increased across those two five-year study periods for people with and without disabilities. However, people without disabilities increased by 1.7 percentage points, while those with disabilities increased by just 0.8.

## Employment rates and disability

A new study compares data from two five-year periods in the U.S. In rural micropolitan and non-core counties, the employment rate for Americans with disabilities has gone down.

### People with disabilities



### People without disabilities



Metropolitan counties include at least one urban core of 50,000 or more people. Micropolitan counties include an urban core of 10,000 to 50,000 people. Non-core counties have an urban core population of less than 10,000 people. Credit: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND Source: University of Montana Rural Institute

What's more, people with disabilities are already much less employed than people without disabilities. We found that this difference is widening over time.

When it came to looking at rural and urban areas, the results from our analysis were bleak. We define rural and urban following the Office of Management and Budget's [metropolitan classification](#). Urban counties are defined as being part of a metropolitan area of 50,000 or more people. Rural counties are defined as micropolitan – where the largest town has 10,000 to 49,999 people – or non-core, if they only have towns of less than 10,000 people.

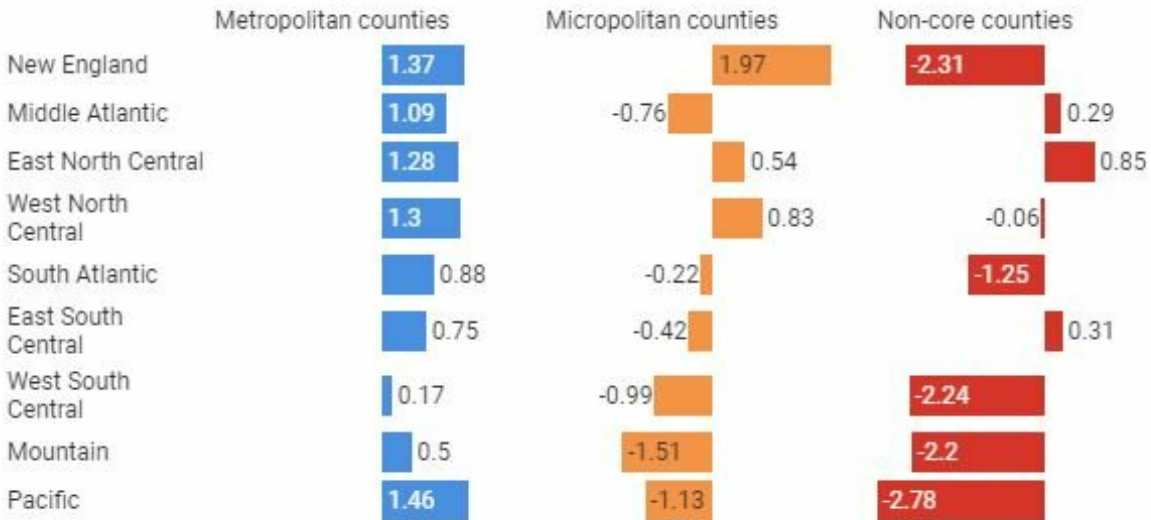
While [urban counties](#) reveal employment gains across the board, rural counties experienced significant declines in employment for people with disabilities. Between each five-year period in metropolitan counties, the most [urban areas](#), employment for people with disabilities increased by 1.01 percentage points. However, rates decreased in rural counties.

Rates varied significantly for different parts of the country. While people without disabilities experienced positive rate changes across nearly all [U.S. Census divisions](#), people with disabilities living in rural counties did not.

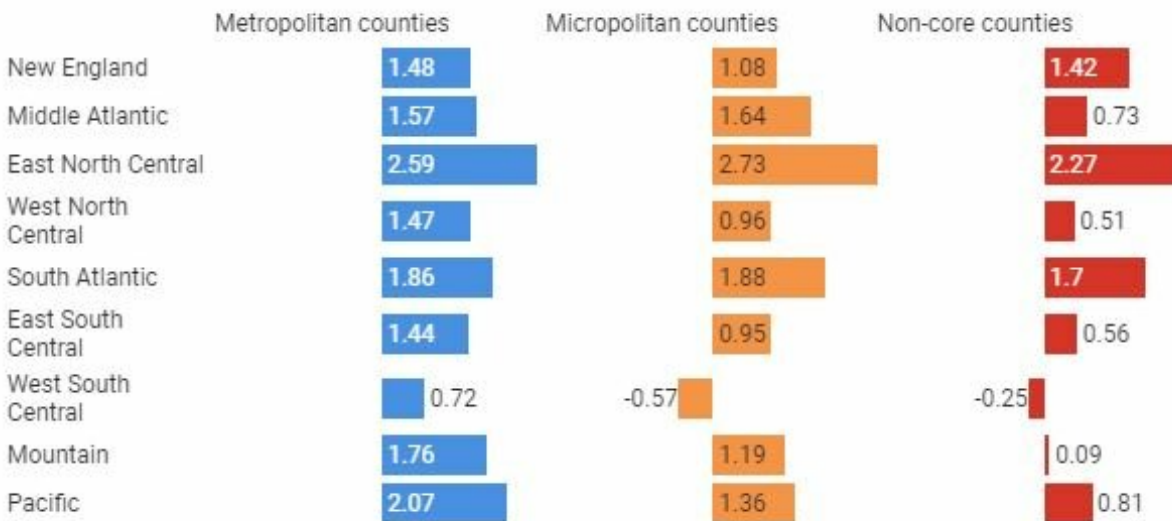
## Percentage point change in employment rate

A study looked at changing employment rates for Americans, between 2008-2012 government estimates and 2013-2017 estimates. The employment rate for people without disabilities increased by about 1.7 percentage points, on average. But employment rates for people with disabilities were more likely to decrease, particularly in rural micropolitan and non-core counties.

### People with disabilities



### People without disabilities



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In fact, employment decreased for rural people with disabilities in over half of the U.S. divisions, with rates in the most rural counties dropping by more than 2 percentage points in the New England, West South Central, Mountain and Pacific divisions.

These results clearly indicate that people with disabilities in [rural areas](#) are being left behind. Rural people with disabilities already experience [high poverty rates](#), less access to [health care](#) and [specialty services](#), and other barriers that prevent them from [participating in their communities](#). Depressed employment rates can have dire consequences for this group.

These lower rates lead to less access to health insurance, retirement benefits and other financial resources, which all threaten to further marginalize people with disabilities in [rural communities](#).

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