

Home-based workers became younger, more diverse in pandemic

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Lindsay Garfield, finance director at SquareFoot which helps companies find office space, works from home in New York on March 11, 2020. According to survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau, people working from home became younger, more diverse, better educated and more likely to move during the worst part of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Credit: AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews, File

People working from home became younger, more diverse, better educated and more likely to move during the worst part of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

In many respects, the demographic makeup of people working from home from 2019 to 2021 became more like workers who were commuting, while the share of the U.S. labor force working from home went from 5.7% in 2019 to 17.9% in 2021, as restrictions were implemented to help slow the spread of the virus, according to a report released last week based on American Community Survey data.

"The increase in homebased workers corresponded with a decline in drivers, carpoolers, transit riders, and most other types of commuters," the report said.

The share of people working from home between ages 25 and 34 jumped from 16% to 23% from 2019 to 2021. The share of home-based workers who are Black went from 7.8% to 9.5%, and it went from 5.7% to 9.6% for Asian workers. It remained flat for Hispanic workers, the report said.

The share of home-based workers with a [college degree](#) also jumped from just over half to more than two-thirds, and people working from home were more likely to have moved in the past year than commuters.

The two industry groups that saw the greatest jumps in people working from home were in information, where it went from 10.4% to 42%, and finance, insurance and real estate, going from 10.8% to 38.4%. Professional and administrative services, also went from 12.6% to 36.5%.

The smallest gains were in agriculture and mining; entertainment and

food services; and armed forces.

While every income level saw jumps in people working from home, those in the highest income bracket were most likely to work from home. While it doubled from 2019 to 2021 for workers in the lowest income bracket, it tripled for those in the highest, the report said.

Home-based work also varied by region. By 2021, it was more prevalent in the West and Northeast, making up about a fifth of the workforce, compared to 16.2% in the South and 15.8% in the Midwest. The variation may have been caused by the availability of Internet access, the cluster of information technology jobs on the coasts and the way people commute, whether by car or public transportation, the report said.

The tech-heavy San Francisco and San Jose metro areas had more than a third of their labor force working from home in 2021—the largest share among metros with more than 1 million residents.

Since most pandemic restrictions have been lifted since the 2021 survey was taken, it is unknown at this point if the growth in work-from-home is permanent.

"If only temporarily, the COVID-19 pandemic generated a massive shift in the way people in the United States related to their workplace location," the report said. "With the centrality of work and commuting in American life, the widespread adoption of home-based work was a defining feature of the pandemic era."

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