



Socioeconomic Inequalities Between Remote Workers and Commuters

New U.S. Census Bureau Data Show Detailed Characteristics of Home-Based Workers

January 16, 2025

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The share of the workforce working from home has declined in recent years but remains more than double what it was before COVID-19. New data reveal significant inequalities between remote workers and commuters: remote workers tend to be older, are more likely to be White and less likely to be in poverty.

Because of the increased prominence of home-based workers within the U.S. workforce, American Community Survey (ACS) tables have been updated beginning in 2023 to include their key sociodemographic characteristics.

These findings are consistent with earlier research that showed the generally higher earnings [\[library/publications/2023/acs/acs-52.html\]](#) of home-based workers and the disproportionately White composition [\[library/stories/2023/04/more-people-worked-from-home-2019-2021.html\]](#) of remote workers.

In 2023, 13.8% [\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0801\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0801) of U.S. workers usually worked from home — more than twice the 5.7% [\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.S0801\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.S0801) that did so in 2019, despite a decrease from 17.9% [\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2021.S0801\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2021.S0801) in 2021 and 15.2% [\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S0801\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S0801) in 2022.

Related America Counts Stories

Population

Remote Work During the Pandemic Shifted Daytime Population of Cities

February 21, 2023

U.S. Census Bureau tools show how the daytime population of urban job centers declined during the pandemic as more employees worked from [home](#).

[\[library/stories/2023/02/remote-work-during-pandemic-shifted-daytime-population.html\]](#)

Employment

Women Made Up Majority of Home-

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In 2019, around 9 million people [\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.B08006\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.B08006) worked from home in the United States. By 2023, that number had soared to more than 22 million [\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.B08006\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.B08006) .

New Data on Remote Workforce

Because of the increased prominence of home-based workers within the U.S. workforce, American Community Survey (ACS) tables have been updated beginning in 2023 to include their key sociodemographic characteristics.

Previously, the ACS subject tables describing worker characteristics according to their means of transportation to work (Tables S0802

[\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802) and S0804 [\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0804\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0804) , corresponding to workers' residence and workplace geographies, respectively) only accounted for workers who commuted by driving alone, carpooling, or public transportation – generally the most common commuting modes prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A “worked from home” category was added to both tables. Users can now explore the characteristics of home-based workers relative to other workers.

For example, the workers' residence geography table (S0802 [\[https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0802&tid=ACSST1Y2023.S0802\]](https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0802&tid=ACSST1Y2023.S0802)) shows these characteristics of U.S. home-based workers in 2023:

- Their median age was about 43.5, almost two years older than the median age of the total workforce (41.7).
- Roughly two-thirds were White, compared to about one-half of workers who carpooled.
- Around 3.6% were below the poverty level in 2023, compared to 9.3% of workers who commuted by public transportation.

These residence and workplace geography tables (S0802 and S0804) are also available for more detailed geographies like states, metro areas and counties. Examples of the comparisons possible using these publicly available tables include:

- In North Carolina [\[https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0802%20north%20carolina\]](https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0802%20north%20carolina) , the median earnings of home-based workers (\$65,652) were roughly twice that of public transportation commuters (\$30,664).
- In the Denver, Colorado, metropolitan area [\[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802?g=310XX00US19740\]](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0802?g=310XX00US19740) , 11.8% of home-based workers spoke a language other than English at home in 2023, compared to 20.5% of workers who commuted by driving alone.
- In New York's Bronx County [\[https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0802&g=050XX00US36005\]](https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0802&g=050XX00US36005) , 39.3% of home-based workers worked in the management, business, science and arts occupations, compared to 27.6% of all workers.

Other characteristics, such as industry, housing tenure and vehicle availability are also available in these tables, giving data users new insight into the make-up of different groups of commuters.

Based Workers During Pandemic

May 16, 2023

The spike in home-based workers during the pandemic slightly increased the share of women working from home.

[\[/library/stories/2023/05/women-majority-home-based-workers-during-pandemic.html\]](https://library/stories/2023/05/women-majority-home-based-workers-during-pandemic.html)

Employment

More People in All Race/Ethnic Groups Worked From Home 2019-2021

April 06, 2023

The number of White, Black, Asian and Hispanic home-based workers more than doubled.

[\[/library/stories/2023/04/more-people-worked-from-home-2019-2021.html\]](https://library/stories/2023/04/more-people-worked-from-home-2019-2021.html)

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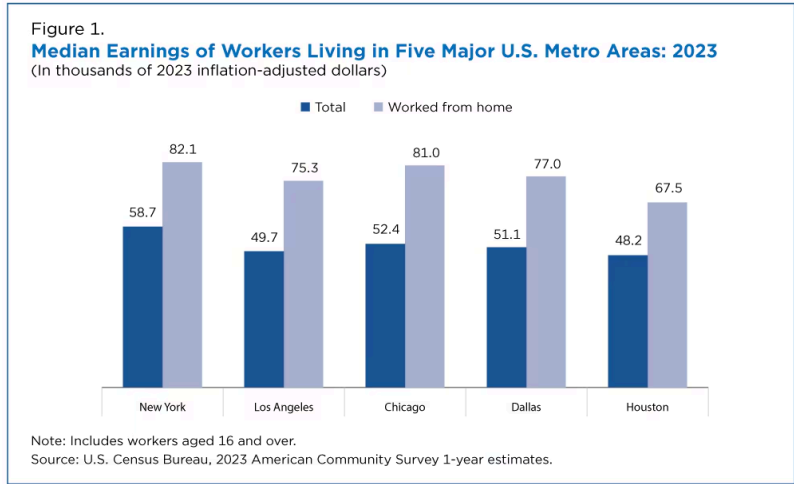
Because residence and workplace geographies are identical for home-based workers, statistics for this group are also identical in the two tables (S0802 and S0804).

Highlighting Inequality

Earnings and poverty status are common measures to describe inequality within a population.

In five of the most populous metropolitan areas in the United States, home-based workers consistently showed higher median earnings than all workers in 2023 (Figure 1).

Among home-based workers in these five metro areas, median earnings were highest in the New York and Chicago metros (over \$80,000), and lowest in the Houston metro (under \$70,000).

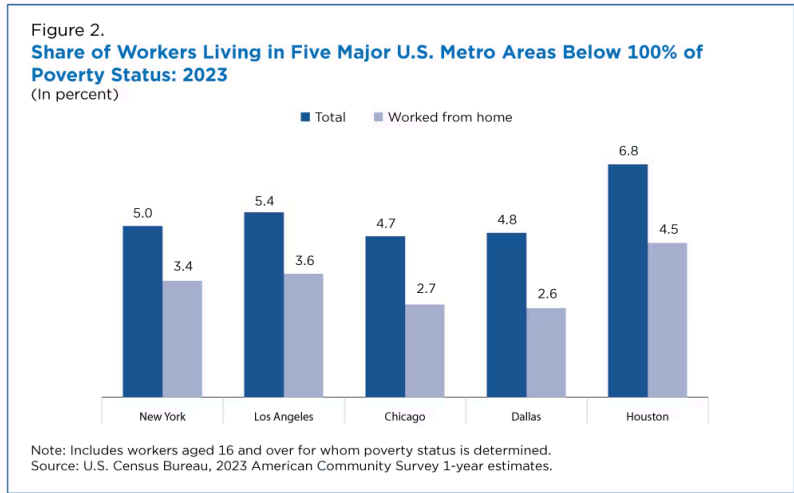


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Figure 2 displays the percentage of workers living below the poverty level in five of the most populous metro areas.

In line with their generally higher earnings, a smaller share of home-based workers lived below 100% of the poverty level in 2023 than all workers in each metro area included in this analysis.

Among all workers in these metro areas, the Houston metro had the highest percentage (6.8%) of all workers living below the poverty level.



[/content/dam/Census/library/stories/2025/01/work-from-home-inequalities/figure-2-work-from-home-inequalities.jpg]

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The dynamic relationship between people and their jobs provides valuable context for understanding numerous dimensions of individual wellbeing. The ACS will continue to collect data that help describe changing commuting and employment trends in the United States.

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America Counts: Stories about Employment



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Work from Home

Work from home refers to a worker's usage of the home as a workplace.



[/topics/employment/work-from-home.html]

Commuting (Journey to Work)

Commuting including means of transportation, time of departure, mean travel time to work, vehicles available, distance traveled, and expenses.



[/topics/employment/commuting.html]

American Community Survey (ACS)

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The American Community Survey is the premier source for information about America's changing population, housing and workforce.

[\[/programs-surveys/acs.html\]](/programs-surveys/acs.html)



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Population

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February 06, 2025

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[\[/library/stories/2025/02/super-bowl-lix.html\]](/library/stories/2025/02/super-bowl-lix.html) 

Migration

Homeward Bound: More People Moved Back Home at Height of Pandemic

January 22, 2025

Between 2019 and 2022, the share of movers who returned to their state of birth rose from about 4% to 5%.

[\[/library/stories/2025/01/return-home-migration.html\]](/library/stories/2025/01/return-home-migration.html) 

Employment

Socioeconomic Inequalities Between Remote Workers and Commuters

January 16, 2025

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[\[/library/stories/2025/01/work-from-home-inequalities.html\]](/library/stories/2025/01/work-from-home-inequalities.html) 

Veterans

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January 14, 2025

New U.S. Census Bureau data show how veterans fare when they transition to the civilian labor force.

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