



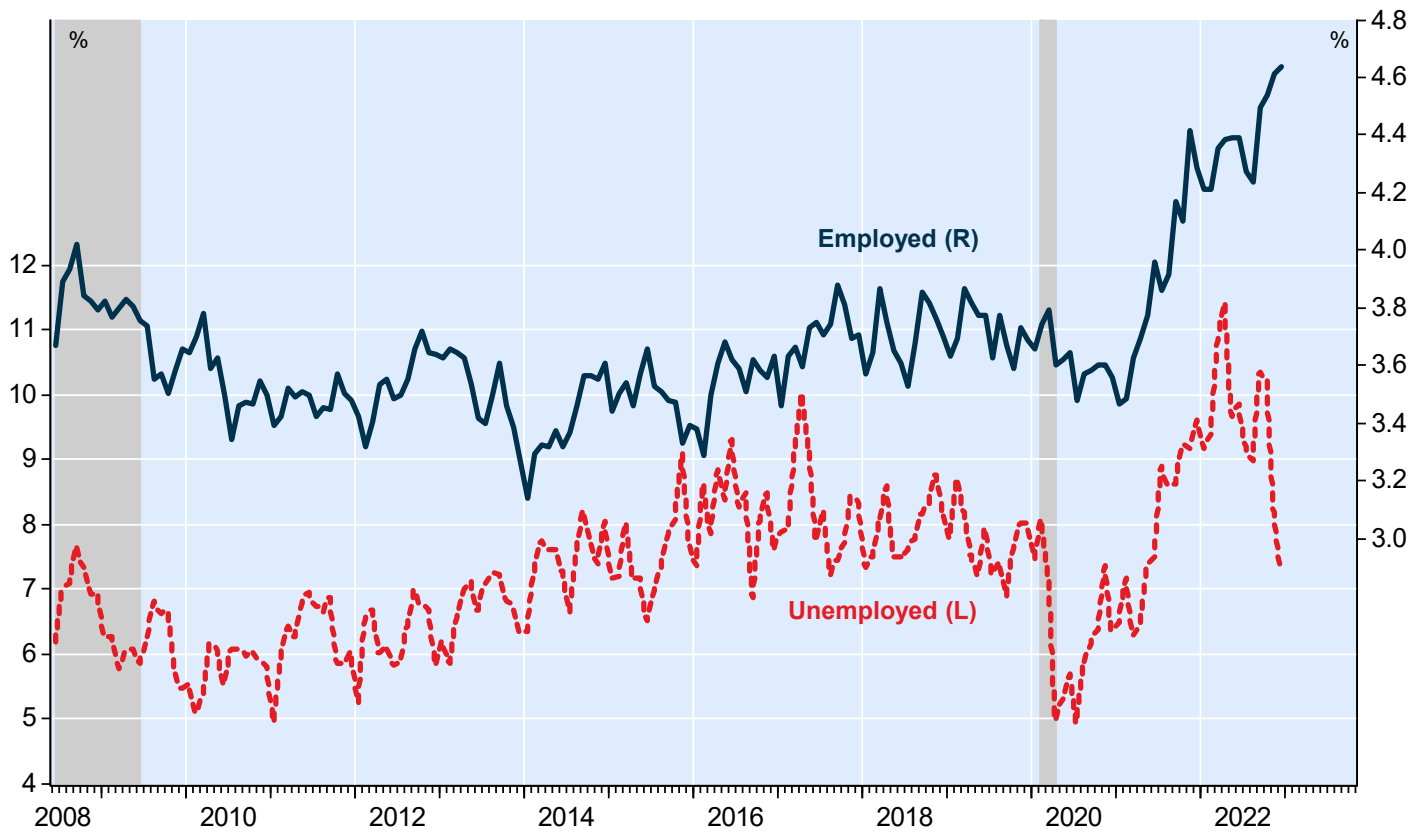
U.S. Watch

By Jocelyn Paquet

The acute phase of the pandemic may well be behind us, but its adverse effects continue to be felt in the U.S. economy, nowhere more evidently than on the labour market where a growing number of people report living with a disability, something the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines as a “conditions that cause serious difficulty [...] with daily activities” (deafness, blindness, other physical/mental conditions). To be sure, 12.4% of the population aged 16 and above reported being disabled last December, compared with roughly 11.7% before the pandemic. An increase of 0.7% may seem small at first glance, but it represents no less than 2.5 million people. The rise in the number of disabled Americans is not a surprise. After all, COVID-19 is the worst health hazard we’ve known since the Spanish flu a hundred years ago and, apart from long-COVID, it led to an exacerbation of several pre-existing conditions. We might have expected, however, that the consequences of the virus would be well distributed in the population, COVID having spared almost no one. But that hasn’t been the case. As today’s Hot Chart shows, the proportion of disabled *unemployed* persons rose in lockstep with that of *employed* persons in the first months of the pandemic, culminating at 11.4% in April 2022. It then started to drop precipitously, diverging from the trend set by disabled employed persons. This suggests that, as labor market became tighter, more disabled persons moved from unemployment into employment. From a societal point of view, this is a positive trend since it demonstrates greater openness on the part of employers. But it also raises questions about the long-term costs generated by the pandemic (future pressure on health systems, potential loss of productivity, etc.). Looks like the effects of COVID are going to be with us for a long time.

U.S.: Disabled Americans moving from unemployment to employment

Percentage of the labour force aged 16 and over who are disabled



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