



NEWS RELEASE

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As National Youth Disconnection Decreases, Rural Young Adults Are Left Behind

While the number of disconnected youth is down from the Great Recession, poverty, residential segregation, and race and ethnicity continue to be strongly associated with disconnection; 4.9 million young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 are neither working nor in school.

NEW YORK — [Measure of America, a project of the Social Science Research Council](#), today released *Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps: Youth Disconnection in America*, showing that one in eight young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 nationwide are neither working nor in school. While the disconnected youth population has fallen to 4.9 million from the post-Recession high of more than 5.8 million, disconnection rates remain high in rural areas, where one in five young people are disconnected. The average youth disconnection rate in rural counties (20.3 percent) is significantly higher than the average rate for urban centers, 14.2 percent, or for the U.S. as a whole, 12.3 percent.

Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps: Youth Disconnection in America is the fourth report in the Measure of America Youth Disconnection series that began in 2012. As public awareness of the problem of youth disconnection has grown and economic conditions have improved, the youth disconnection rate has fallen steadily. Nonetheless, the report shows that challenges remain. If all disconnected youth lived together in a single state, the population would be roughly equivalent to that of South Carolina or Colorado.

At the national level, poverty, race and ethnicity, and residential segregation are strongly associated with youth disconnection. In no state do black or Latino youth have lower disconnection rates than white youth. Asian Americans have the lowest rate of youth disconnection, 7.2 percent, while Native American youth have the highest rate, 25.4 percent. Latinos experience youth disconnection at a rate of 14.3 percent, and 18.9 percent of black youth are disconnected. The white disconnection rate is 10.1 percent. The national black-white gap is stark: even in the state where white youth are faring worst, they are still doing better than blacks on average, and even in the state where black youth are faring best, they are still not doing as well as whites on average.

“The good news is that some 900,000 fewer young people were disconnected in 2015 than in 2010,” said Kristen Lewis, co-director, Measure of America. “The bad news is that rates are still high, especially for black, Latino, and Native American youth as well as for young people living in rural area and low-income urban neighborhoods.”

According to Measure of America's analysis, youth disconnection cost taxpayers more than \$26 billion in incarceration costs, Medicaid, public assistance payments, and Supplemental Security Income payments in 2013 alone.

"Being disconnected from school and work as a young person too often leads to lower wages, higher unemployment, worse health, and more contact with the criminal justice system in adulthood," said co-director Sarah Burd-Sharps. "And society as a whole also pays a high price in the form of reduced competitiveness, lower tax revenues, and higher health and criminal justice costs, to name just a few.

The report highlights specific communities that have made progress in lowering the rates of youth disconnection, like Phoenix, Arizona. In 2012, Measure of America's *One in Seven* report ranked Phoenix as the worst of the twenty-five largest cities in America for youth disconnection, with a rate of nearly one in five. Coverage of the report prompted concrete, multifaceted action, including a series of coordinated responses from county and city officials, community leaders, the nonprofit and private sectors, and residents. The youth disconnection rate has since fallen 30 percent.

In addition to racial and ethnic, regional, and income disparities, the report takes a deep dive into other factors associated with youth disconnection. Youth with disabilities are three times as likely to be disconnected as their connected peers. Among women, disconnected youth are more likely to have children; while only 7 percent of connected young women are mothers, twenty-eight percent of disconnected young women have at least one child.

The report summarizes what recent evaluations suggest are good practices in reconnecting disconnected youth. Successful programs offer paid work, job training, and support for needs like childcare and housing. Policies like restorative justice, rather than zero tolerance policies that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, can help prevent youth from becoming disconnected in the first place. Rural youth in particular need programs like high-quality vocational and technical education tailored to local labor market demands, as opportunity is otherwise often far from home.

Finally, Measure of America recommends that the U.S. follow the lead of countries like Germany, which has multiple established pathways for young people to transition from school to work and offers numerous opportunities for apprenticeships, worker training, and other structured programs that help young people build their careers. It is also critical to establish concrete, ambitious, and achievable local and national goals for lowering the rate of disconnection. Because all at-risk youth need support from both communities and institutions that other youth might take for granted, all Americans have a role to play in creating pathways to opportunity for these young people.

The full report is available [online](#). You can also dive into the data with interactive maps and graphics [here](#).

About Measure of America

An initiative of the **Social Science Research Council**, [Measure of America](#) provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding the distribution of well-being and opportunity in America and stimulating fact-based dialogue about issues we all care about: health, education, and living standards.

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