

MORE THAN A MILLION REASONS FOR HOPE

YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN AMERICA TODAY



In 2016 the number of young people disconnected from both work and school declined for the sixth year in a row. The 2016 youth disconnection rate is 11.7 percent, an estimated 4.6 million youth. This represents a 20 percent decrease since 2010, when disconnection peaked in the aftermath of the Great Recession—about 1.2 million fewer young people.

Measure of America began calculating the youth disconnection rate and analyzing its causes and implications for human development in 2012. Disconnected youth, also known as opportunity youth, are teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. Disconnected young people are unmoored from the institutions that not only confer the credentials necessary to thrive as adults, but also give structure to their days and provide the opportunity to discover interests, form social networks, develop skills, and build confidence.

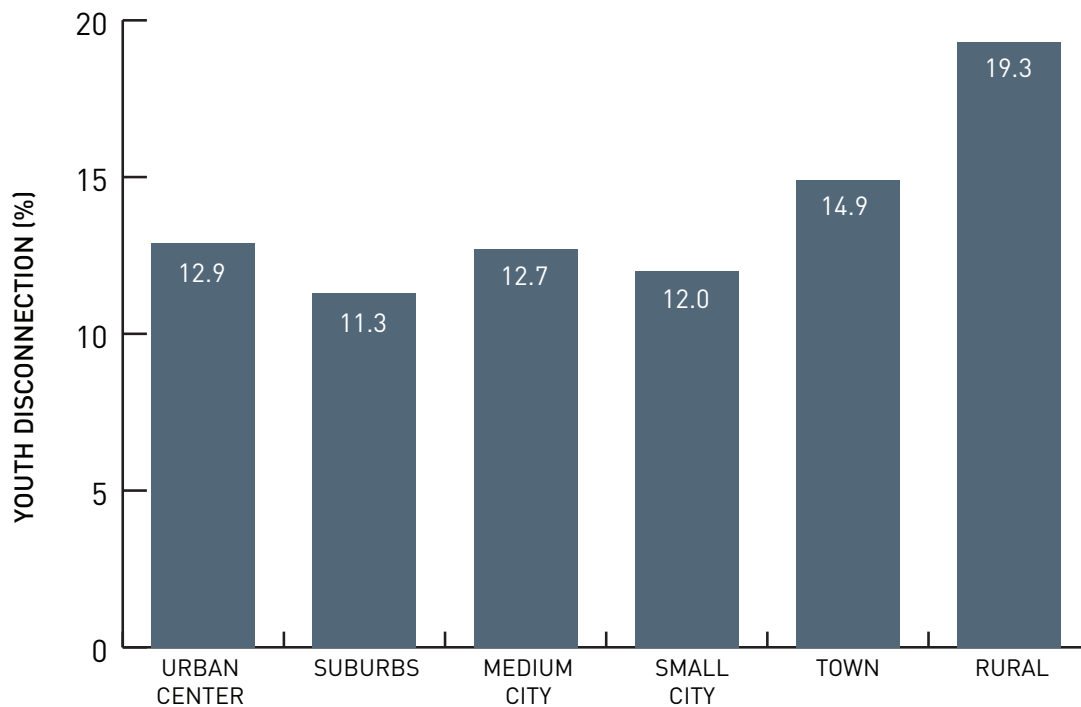
The sustained decline in the ranks of disconnected youth merits celebration. As the overall number of disconnected youth has shrunk, however, the gaps between different groups of young people persist. Young people—particularly young men—of color, youth living in poverty or with a disability, and young mothers are all far more likely to be disconnected than their peers. As the economy recovers and a portion of young people find their way back into the worlds of school and work, those left behind are the ones who face the greatest barriers to connection. Caregiving responsibilities, a criminal record, an absence of educational credentials, limited English proficiency, and undocumented status are all obstacles that can bar young people from the workforce and alienate them from the educational system even in the healthiest of economies.

More Than a Million Reasons for Hope analyzes youth disconnection in the United States by state, metro area, county, and community type, as well as by gender, race, and ethnicity. This report is the first in Measure of America's disconnected youth series to compare American and European metro areas and to examine disconnection by group characteristics such as poverty status, motherhood, marriage status, disability, English proficiency, citizenship, educational attainment, institutionalization, and household composition for different racial and ethnic groups.

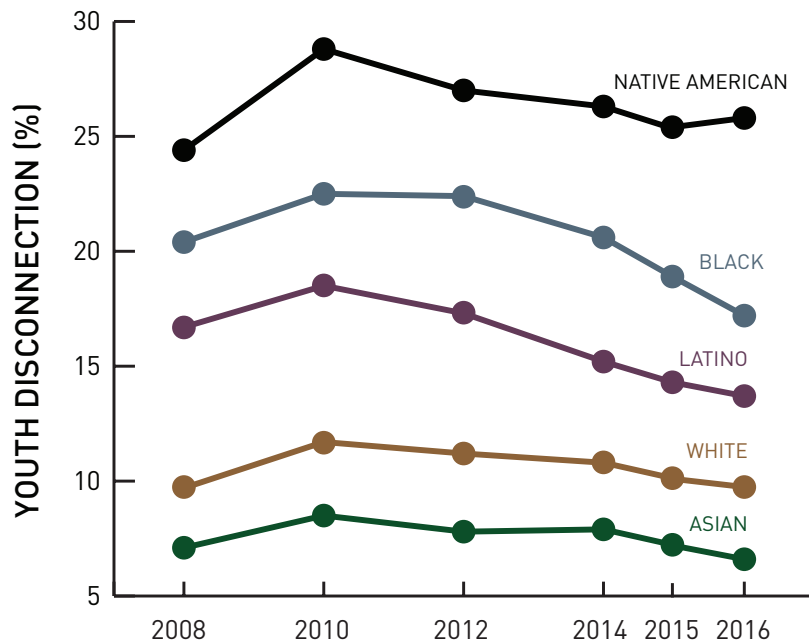
Key Findings:

- **OVERALL.** In 2016, **11.7 percent of young Americans were disconnected**, an improvement from the 2015 rate of 12.3 percent, and a 20 percent decrease from the 2010 peak rate of 14.7 percent. Yet 4.6 million young people remain out of work and out of school.
- **STATES AND REGIONS.** Youth disconnection ranges from 7 percent in North Dakota to 17.9 percent in Alaska. Young people in the Midwest are the least likely to be disconnected, with a rate of 10.2 percent, while young people in the South are the most likely, with a rate of 12.9 percent.

- **METRO AREAS.** Among the nearly one hundred most populous metro areas, disconnection rates range from 6.1 percent in the Des Moines metro area to 20.7 percent in greater Bakersfield, CA. Six European metro areas have rates lower than Des Moines, and Istanbul, the metro area with the highest rate of disconnection in Europe, has a rate just under that of Bakersfield, CA.
- **URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE.** Young people living in rural areas have the highest rate of disconnection, 19.3 percent, followed by those living in towns (14.9 percent) and urban centers (12.9 percent). Youth in the suburbs are the least likely to be disconnected, with a rate of 11.3 percent. Disconnection rates in rural counties vary immensely, from essentially 0 percent to 76.6 percent.



- **RACE AND ETHNICITY.** There is a chasm of nearly 20 percentage points in disconnection rates separating racial and ethnic groups. Asian youth have the lowest rate of disconnection (6.6 percent), followed by white (9.2 percent), Latino (13.7 percent), black (17.2 percent), and lastly, Native American (25.8 percent) youth. Youth disconnection has decreased over time for all major racial and ethnic groups; however, the gap between the groups with the highest and lowest rates has not narrowed appreciably.
- **GENDER.** Overall, young women are less likely to be disconnected, with a rate of 11.2 percent compared to the male rate of 12.1 percent. However, the rate of female disconnection varies widely by race and ethnicity, from 6.6 percent among Asian young women and 9.4 percent among white women; to 14.2 and 14.8 percent among black and Latina women, respectively; and 23.4 percent among Native American women. **Disconnected young women face particularly high poverty rates and unique challenges like early marriage and motherhood that merit attention and resources.**
- **SUBGROUPS.** Racial and ethnic categories can mask diversity within groups. Among Asians, Vietnamese youth have the lowest rate of disconnection, 4.5 percent, and Hmong youth have the highest, 15.1 percent. Among



situation often lack the emotional and financial support of parents or other consistent, caring adults—an additional barrier in the transition to adulthood.

- **INSTITUTIONALIZATION.** An alarmingly high proportion of disconnected black boys and young men—nearly a fifth—is institutionalized, compared to just 0.3 percent of the overall population in that age group.
- **LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND CITIZENSHIP.** About 40 percent of disconnected Asian youth—and nearly half of disconnected Asian girls—are noncitizens. A third of disconnected Asian girls and about a fifth of disconnected Latinas are not English proficient.
- **IMPROVEMENTS AND SETBACKS.** Thirty-eight states experienced a significant improvement since 2010. Over the past year alone, twelve states saw a significant improvement, but Washington, DC, and Nebraska had setbacks.

The report concludes with examples of effective approaches to tackling youth disconnection that take into account the many converging challenges that at-risk youth face. Decreasing the overall number of disconnected youth is commendable, but it is not enough; closing the gaps between different groups of young people is crucial as well. Where, to whom, or into what circumstances a child is born should not limit his or her chances to have a healthy, productive transition into adulthood. The data available in this report and its companion interactive tool can help identify areas of need and at-risk groups. Doing so allows policymakers and service providers to target resources toward reconnecting those young people who have fallen through the cracks and guiding policies to prevent disconnection from happening in the first place.

Latinos, rates range from 8.9 percent for South Americans to 14.9 percent for young people who trace their roots to the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

• LIVING ARRANGEMENTS.

Disconnected young people are about two-and-a-half times as likely to be living with family other than their parents, about twice as likely to be living with a roommate, and eight times as likely to be living alone. **Young people who do not have a stable living**