

Methodological Note

Who Are Considered “Disconnected Youth”?

Youth disconnection rates in this report are calculated by Measure of America using employment and enrollment data from the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) of the US Census Bureau. Disconnected youth, also referred to as opportunity youth, are teenagers and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. Young people in this age range who are working or in school part-time or who are in the military are not considered disconnected. Youth who are actively looking for work are considered disconnected.

Several official data sources exist that can be used for calculating youth disconnection. As a result, researchers working with different datasets, or using different definitions of what constitutes disconnection, can arrive at different numbers for this indicator. A good summary of these various definitions can be found on a Huffington Post blog piece from September 2016 [here](#).

Measure of America uses the Census Bureau’s ACS for four reasons: (1) it is reliable and updated annually; (2) it allows for calculations by state and metro area as well as by more granular census-defined neighborhood clusters within metro areas; (3) it includes young people who are in group quarters, such as juvenile or adult correctional facilities, supervised medical facilities, and college dorms; and (4) it counts students on summer break as being enrolled in school.

Methods

Disconnected youth rates and numbers in *More Than a Million Reasons for Hope* at the national, state, and metro area levels use 2016 data. Time series data are one-year estimates from the relevant year. County data are from 2012–2016.

The ACS is an annual survey conducted by the Census Bureau that samples a subset of the overall population. As with any data drawn from surveys, there is some degree of sampling and nonsampling error inherent in the data. Thus, comparisons between similar values on any indicator should be made with caution since these differences may not be statistically significant.

In order to arrive at the percentage of disconnected youth, the total number of disconnected young people and the total number of young people overall are calculated for each metro area from the ACS Public Use Microdata Sample. Not in school means that a young person has not attended any educational institution and has also not been home schooled at any time in the three months prior to the survey date. Not working means that a young person is either unemployed or not in the labor force at the time they responded to the survey. Disconnected youth are young people who are simultaneously not in school and not working. This population cannot be estimated by simply adding the number of young people not enrolled in school to the number of young people not working because many students in this age range do not work and many young workers are not in school.

Calculating Metro Area Youth Disconnection and Identifying the Largest Metro Areas

The US Census Bureau FactFinder provides a list of Metro Statistical Areas (MSAs) by population size. The top one hundred MSAs include Madison, Wisconsin, and Durham–Chapel Hill, North Carolina. But because the standard errors of the youth disconnection estimates for these two metro areas were too large to provide reliable estimates, these two MSAs are not included in this report.

The employment and enrollment data needed to calculate youth disconnection for metro areas are not available directly by metro area from the ACS. Metro areas were built up by Measure of America from the Census Bureau's Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) that make up metro areas. In cases where a PUMA falls partially within two or more metro areas, it is included in the metro area where it has the largest population. If the PUMA falls partly in and partly outside a metro area, it is included in the metro area.

Due to changes in the definitions of metro areas by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), findings from this report for specific metro areas are not directly comparable to findings from Measure of America's first three reports on youth disconnection: *One in Seven: Ranking Youth Disconnection in the 25 Largest Metro Areas*, *Zeroing In on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities*, and *Halve the Gap by 2030: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities*. They are comparable to last year's report, *Promising Gains, Persistent Gap: Youth Disconnection in America*.

European Union Geographies

The countries of the European Union have been tracking youth disconnection rates for decades and refers to this group as NEETs (neither in employment nor in education or training). The age range for NEETs differs; the European Union examines ages 15–24 whereas in the United States, the standard is ages 16–24. NEET data for European Union comparisons are obtained from [EuroStat 2016](#).

Counties

US county and county equivalent (as defined by the federal government) estimates are custom tabulations provided by special arrangement with the US Census Bureau. Counties range in size from over 10 million (Los Angeles County) to under one hundred residents (Loving County, Texas, and Kalawao County in Hawaii). Because many counties are relatively small, disconnected youth rates for each county in this report are calculated using five-year estimates using data from 2012–2016. Counties with disconnected youth populations considered statistically unreliable have been removed from the analysis.

TYPE OF COUNTY	DEFINITION
URBAN CENTERS (large central metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations 1,000,000 or more
SUBURBS (large fringe metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations 1,000,000 or more that are not urban centers
MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES (medium metro countries)	Counties within metro areas with populations between 250,000 and 999,999
SMALL CITIES (small metro)	Counties within metro areas with populations between 50,000 and 249,999
TOWNS (micropolitan)	Counties containing cities with populations between 10,000 and 49,999
COMPLETELY RURAL AREAS (non-core)	Counties with no cities larger than 10,000

The Urban and Rural Divide

There are multiple definitions of urban and rural areas used by different federal agencies in the United States. For the purposes of this report, Measure of America has opted to use the taxonomy developed by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Their schema places each of the 3,154 counties in the United States into one of six categories: large central metro, large fringe metro, medium metro, small metro, micropolitan, and non-core. Further details on this classification are [here](#). For ease of communication, these six categories have been renamed to commonly used terms: urban centers, suburbs, medium-sized cities, small cities, towns, and completely rural areas. The table above contains the definitions used by NCHS in classifying counties.

Based on the most recent NCHS county categorizations (2013), each county was assigned to a category in the above schema. Then, using county-level estimates prepared for MOA by the Census Bureau, we calculated an aggregate disconnected youth rate for each of the six county classifications by dividing the total number of disconnected youth in a given county classification by the total number of people ages 16–24 in a given county classification.

Definitions

Disability — Disability status in this report refers to any enduring emotional, physical, or mental condition that makes everyday activities like walking, dressing, or remembering things difficult and restricts an individual’s ability to work or to perform basic required tasks without assistance. This is self-reported; individuals who report having such a condition in the ACS are counted as having a disability. Those who do not are counted as not having a disability.

Group quarters — The US Census Bureau refers to people who live in any kind of non-household living arrangement as living in “group quarters.” These can be institutional group quarters such as correctional or supervised medical facilities or non-institutional group quarters such as college or university dormitories, military bases, or group homes. One of the primary advantages of using the ACS as the data source for this research is that the survey includes young people living in group quarters.

Metro area — Metro areas used in this report are formally known as metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), geographic areas defined by the OMB and used by the US Census Bureau and other government entities. MSAs constitute counties grouped around an urban center and include outlying suburban and exurban counties from which a substantial percentage of the population commutes to the urban center for work.

Racial and ethnic groups — Racial and ethnic groups in this report are based on definitions established by the OMB and used by the Census Bureau and other government entities. Since 1997, this office has recognized five racial groups and two ethnic categories. The racial groups include Asian, black, Native American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and white. The ethnic categories are Latino and not Latino. People of Latino ethnicity may be of any race. In this report, members of each of these racial groups include only non-Latino members of these groups. All references to Asians, blacks, Native Americans, and whites include only those who are non-Latino. Throughout the report, the Asian racial group combines the OMB categories of both Asian and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Due to the very small population sizes of some of the racial and ethnic groups in some states and metropolitan areas, we cannot always present reliable estimates of youth disconnection for these groups. These are denoted in the report’s tables.

In recognition of the fact that these racial groups are not monolithic, this report includes youth disconnection rates for seven of the largest Asian subgroups and the five largest Latino/a subgroups in the United States. The selection of these groups is based on national population estimates from the 2016 one-year ACS. The most populous Asian subgroups also include Japanese Americans and Cambodians, but because the standard errors of the youth disconnection estimates for these groups were too large to provide reliable estimates, they are not included in this report.

Regions — In the discussion of regional differences in disconnected youth rates, we use the four regions of the United States (Midwest, Northeast, South, and West) as defined by the [US Census Bureau](#).

Unreliable — Estimates with a coefficient of variance of greater than 0.2 are considered unreliable and are omitted from the report.