

NEWS RELEASE

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Covid-19 Pandemic Reversed a Decade-Long Decline in the Youth Disconnection Rate

Measure of America's latest report on teens and young adults who are neither working nor in school breaks down 2020 youth disconnection rates by race and ethnicity, gender, and place and shows that Native American and Black young people face the greatest challenges to pandemic recovery

BROOKLYN, NY – March 31, 2022 – [Measure of America](#), a project of the [Social Science Research Council](#), today released [A Disrupted Year: How the Arrival of Covid-19 Affected Youth Disconnection](#).

Data indicate that the 2020 youth disconnection rate is 12.6 percent, or 4,830,700 young people, up from 10.7 percent in 2019. In addition, due to Covid-19-related data-collection challenges in 2020, the report argues that this rate is likely an underestimate of the true extent of disconnection in the first year of the pandemic; in other words, the youth disconnection rate for 2020 is at least this high and very likely higher. The rate increase signals a Covid-fueled reversal of the decade-long decline in the share of the country's young people neither working nor in school. Between 2010 and 2019, the youth disconnection rate fell 27 percent, driven largely by the steady increase in youth employment in the years following the Great Recession. On the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic, the youth disconnection rate was lower than it had been in over a decade.

A Disrupted Year is the latest in Measure of America's series of annual reports on teens and young adults ages 16–24 years who are neither working nor in school, a group referred to as disconnected youth or opportunity youth. The youth disconnection rate is a vital metric of access to opportunity and societal well-being. People acquire skills, credentials, habits, and experiences fundamental to a rewarding, productive, and joyous life during their teens and early twenties. The youth disconnection rate thus tells us which young people in our society have the chance to lay the groundwork for freely chosen, flourishing lives and which groups face serious challenges in the transition to adulthood. Research shows that being disconnected as a young person has long-term consequences; it's associated with lower earnings, less education, worse health, and even less happiness in later adulthood.

"The country had been making steady, heartening progress in reducing the share of young people neither working nor in school," said Kristen Lewis, Director of Measure of America. "Unfortunately, the catastrophic health, educational, and economic impacts of Covid-19 reversed this positive trend; wrought particular harm on groups already more likely to experience disconnection, namely Native American and Black households as well as low-income communities; and worsened existing inequalities."

Key findings in *A Disrupted Year* include:

- **National rate:** The 2020 youth disconnection rate is 12.6 percent, or 4,830,700 young people.
- **Data challenges:** The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted the federal statistical collection and curation processes. These disruptions resulted in lower American Community Survey response rates not only from the very groups most likely to be out of school and work—such as low-income, Black, and Latino households—but also during the initial months of the pandemic, when the economy shed literally millions of jobs. Although the Census Bureau took

several steps to shore up the 2020 survey data by cross-referencing additional government data sources, the Bureau nonetheless released these data with a host of caveats and urged users to exercise caution when making comparisons to previous years' data. These caveats suggest that the estimates we provide in this report **understate the magnitude of youth disconnection in 2020**; in other words, we believe that the actual rates are at least this high and likely higher. That said, these data are still the most comprehensive and reliable available.

- **Gender:** As in past years, girls and young women are less likely to be disconnected than boys and young men, 12.1 percent versus 13.2 percent. The size of the gender gap varies by race and ethnicity, however.
- **Native American youth:** Nearly one in four Native American teens and young adults are neither working nor in school. The Native American youth disconnection rate is 23.4 percent, the highest of the United States' five major racial and ethnic groups.
- **Black youth:** Black teens and young adults have the second-highest disconnection rate, 19.6 percent, or 982,900 young people. Black young people have the largest gender gap in the youth disconnection rate of any racial or ethnic group—16.6 percent for Black girls and young women, compared to 22.5 percent for their male counterparts.
- **Latino youth:** The Latino youth disconnection rate stands at 14.0 percent, or 1,258,700 young people. In past years, Latina girls and young women were slightly more likely than their male counterparts to be disconnected, but in 2020, the male and female rates were the same, 14.0 percent.
- **White youth:** The disconnection rate for white teens and young adults is 10.6 percent, the second-lowest rate. White teens and young adults make up the largest absolute number of disconnected youth, 2,087,800 people.
- **Asian youth:** Asian teens and young adults have the lowest disconnection rate, 7.3 percent, or 156,100 young people. Rates vary widely by Asian subgroup and gender, however, from a low of 4.5 percent for Chinese and Japanese boys and young men to a high of 18.8 percent for Cambodian boys and young men.
- **States:** Nebraska has the lowest youth disconnection rate (7.8 percent), followed by New Hampshire (8.3 percent) and Minnesota (8.6 percent). New Mexico has the highest rate (19.6 percent), followed by Alaska (19.5 percent) and Arkansas (17.4 percent).
- **Metro areas:** Provo-Orem, UT (6.9 percent), boasts the lowest youth disconnection rate of the 100 most populous metro areas in the country, followed by San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA (7.0 percent), and Madison, WI (8.2 percent). Although Madison has one of the lowest rates overall, the rate for Black young people in that metro area is very high, 21.2 percent. The highest youth disconnection rate can be found in Albuquerque, NM (19.7 percent), followed by Bakersfield, CA (19.6 percent), and McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX (18.8 percent).
- **Congressional districts:** California's 52nd congressional district, which includes the bulk of the city of San Diego, has the lowest youth disconnection rate (5.3 percent). Michigan's 14th congressional district, which includes some of the lowest-income neighborhoods in Detroit, is home to the highest youth disconnection rate, 25.0 percent.

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.