

# Young Adults Neither Enrolled in School nor Working

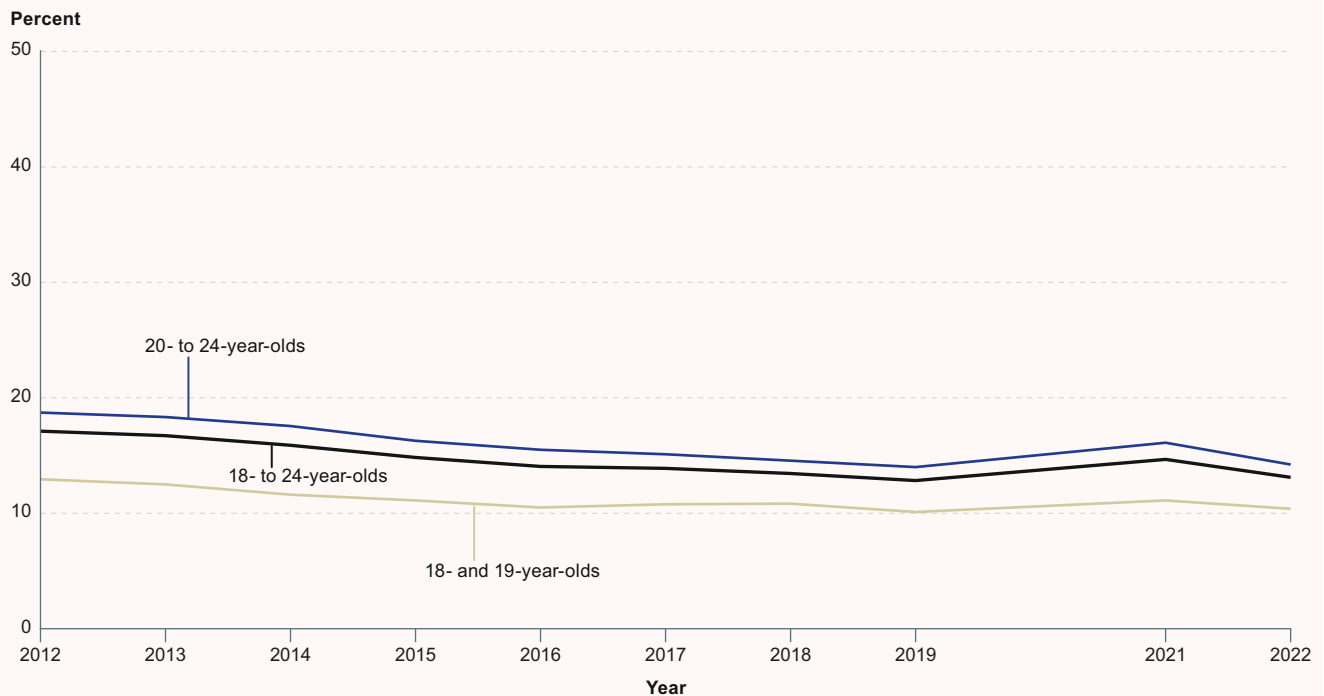
**The percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds neither enrolled in school nor working decreased from 17 percent in 2012 to 13 percent in 2019, the year before the coronavirus pandemic. In 2021, this percentage was 15 percent, but it fell again to 13 percent in 2022.**

Young adults who are neither enrolled in school nor working,<sup>1</sup> particularly if they are disconnected from these activities for several years, may have difficulty building a work history that contributes to future employability and higher wages.<sup>2</sup> Young adults may be detached from education and work for a variety of reasons. For example, they may be seeking educational opportunities or work but are unable to find them, or they may have left school or the workforce temporarily or permanently for personal, family, or financial reasons. Using data collected in the American Community Survey (ACS),<sup>3</sup> this indicator examines the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who are neither enrolled in school nor working.<sup>4</sup>

## Changes Over Time and Differences by Demographics

FIGURE 1.

**Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who were neither enrolled in school nor working, by age group: Selected years, 2012 through 2022**



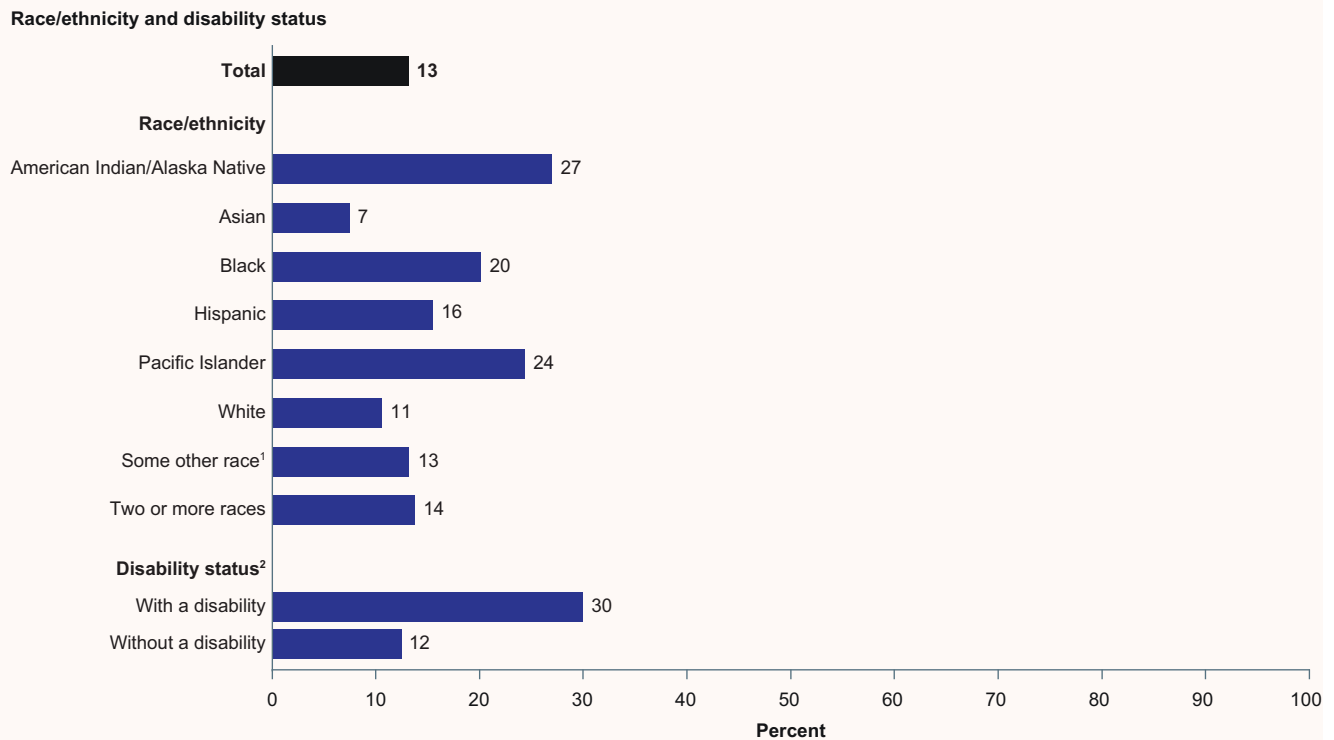
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including both noninstitutionalized persons (e.g., those living in households, college housing, or military housing located within the United States) and institutionalized persons (e.g., those living in prisons, nursing facilities, or other healthcare facilities). Institutionalized persons made up 1 percent of all 18- to 24-year-olds in 2022. Data for 2020 are not presented in this figure due to collection issues associated with the coronavirus pandemic. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data, 2012 through 2022. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 501.30.

In 2022, some 13 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds were neither enrolled in school nor working. This percentage was higher for 20- to 24-year-olds (14 percent) than for 18- and 19-year-olds (10 percent).

The percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who were neither enrolled in school nor working decreased from 17 percent in 2012 to 13 percent in 2019, the year before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States. In 2021, this percentage was 15 percent, but it fell again to 13 percent in 2022.<sup>5</sup> Similar patterns over time were observed separately for both 18- and 19-year-olds and 20- to 24-year-olds.

**FIGURE 2.**

**Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who were neither enrolled in school nor working, by race/ethnicity and disability status: 2022**



<sup>1</sup> Consists of respondents who wrote in some other race that was not included as an option on the questionnaire.

<sup>2</sup> Disability status identifies individuals who have serious difficulty with one or more of four basic areas of functioning (hearing, vision, cognition, and ambulation) or with self-care or independent living.

NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including both noninstitutionalized persons (e.g., those living in households, college housing, or military housing located within the United States) and institutionalized persons (e.g., those living in prisons, nursing facilities, or other healthcare facilities). Institutionalized persons made up 1 percent of all 18- to 24-year-olds in 2022. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

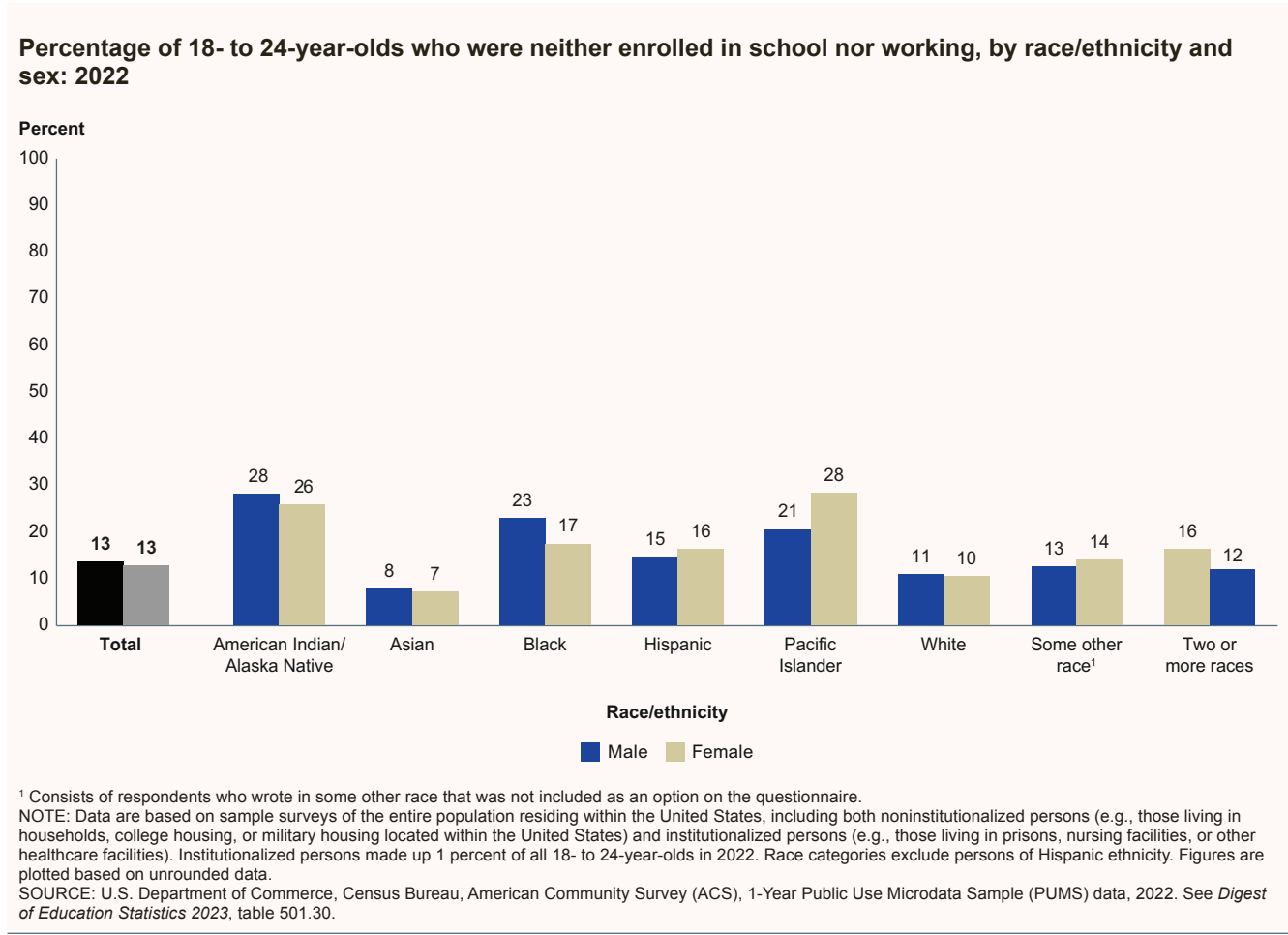
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data, 2022. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 501.30.

In 2022, the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who were neither enrolled in school nor working varied by race/ethnicity. The percentage who were neither enrolled in school nor working was

- higher for those who were American Indian/Alaska Native (27 percent), Pacific Islander (24 percent), or Black (20 percent) than for those of other racial/ethnic groups; and
- lowest for those who were Asian (7 percent).

In 2022, the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who were neither enrolled in school nor working was higher for those with a disability than for their peers without a disability (30 vs. 12 percent).<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 3.**



The percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who were neither enrolled in school nor working in 2022 was about 1 percentage point higher for males than for females overall, although both rounded to 13 percent. A gap between males and females was observed for some but not all racial/ethnic groups and typically reflected a higher percentage of males neither enrolled in school nor working. Specifically, the percentage was higher for males than for females among those who were

- Black (23 vs. 17 percent);
- White (11 vs. 10 percent); and
- of Two or more races (16 vs. 12 percent).

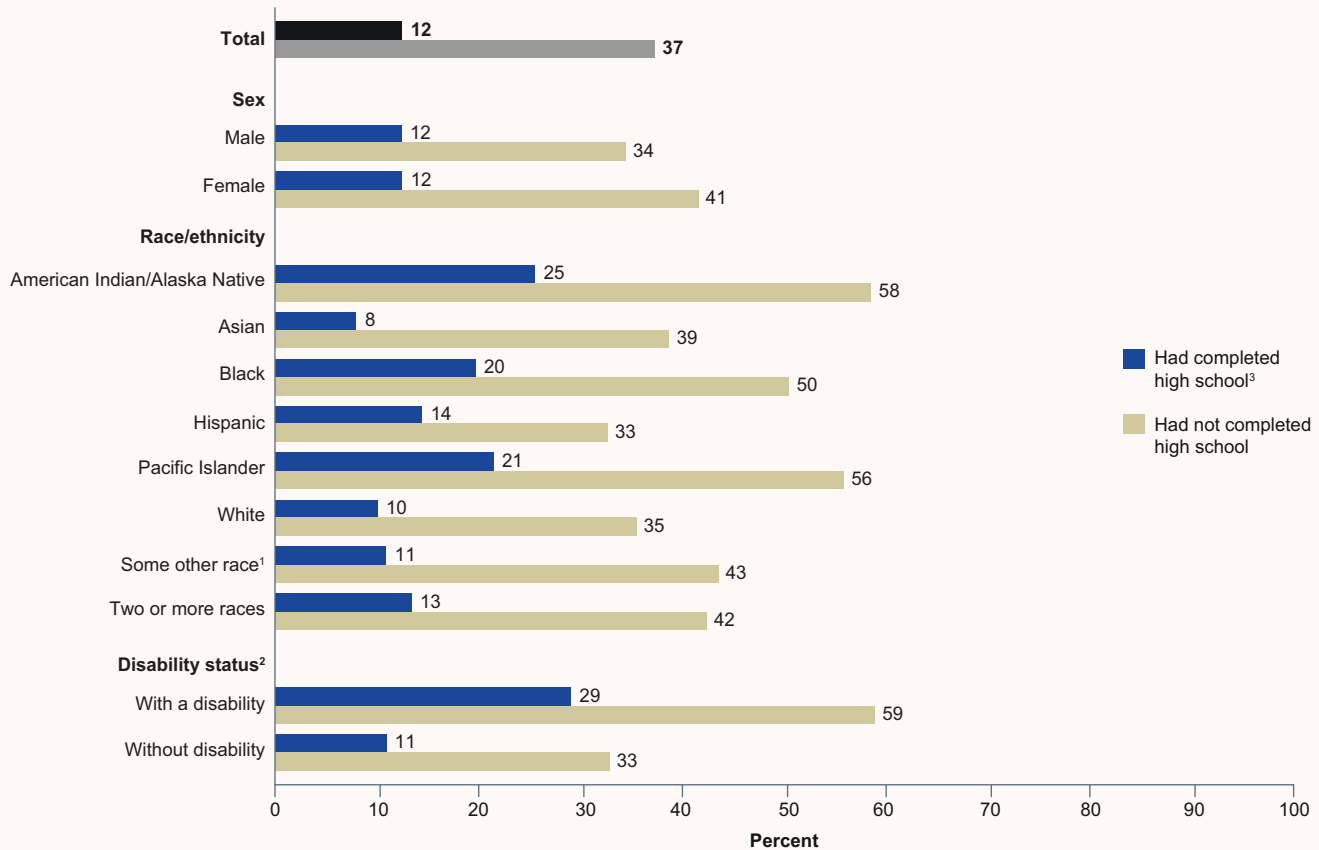
In contrast, among those who were Hispanic, the percentage was lower for males (15 percent) than for females (16 percent). For the other racial/ethnic groups, the percentage was not measurably different between males and females.

Gaps by High School Completion Status

FIGURE 4.

Percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds who were neither enrolled in school nor working, by sex, race/ethnicity, disability status, and high school completion status: 2022

Sex, race/ethnicity, and disability status



<sup>1</sup> Consists of respondents who wrote in some other race that was not included as an option on the questionnaire.

<sup>2</sup> Disability status identifies individuals who have serious difficulty with one or more of four basic areas of functioning (hearing, vision, cognition, and ambulation) or with self-care or independent living.

<sup>3</sup> Includes completion of high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.

NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including both noninstitutionalized persons (e.g., those living in households, college housing, or military housing located within the United States) and institutionalized persons (e.g., those living in prisons, nursing facilities, or other healthcare facilities). Institutionalized persons made up 1 percent of all 18- to 24-year-olds in 2022. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data, 2022. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 501.30.

In 2022, the percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds<sup>7</sup> who were neither enrolled in school nor working was higher for those who had not completed high school<sup>8</sup> (37 percent) than for those who had completed high school (12 percent). Gaps by high school completion status were also observed for males and females, for all racial/ethnic groups, and for those with and without disabilities. However, the gap by high school completion status differed between some groups and was

- narrower for males (22 percentage points) than for females (29 percentage points);
- narrower for those who were Hispanic (18 percentage points) than for those of most other racial/ethnic groups (ranging from 25 percentage points for those who were White to 33 percentage points each for those who were of Some other race<sup>9</sup> and those who were American Indian/Alaska Native);<sup>10</sup> and
- narrower for those without a disability (22 percentage points) than for those with a disability (30 percentage points).

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Also called “not in education, employment, or training (NEET)” in the social and educational literature. For instance, see Holte, B.H. (2018). Counting and Meeting NEET Young People: Methodology, Perspective and Meaning in Research on Marginalized Youth. *Young*, 26(1): 1-16. Retrieved December 3, 2023, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1103308816677618>.

<sup>2</sup> Fernandes-Alcantara, A.L. (2015). *Disconnected Youth: A Look at 16 to 24 Year Olds Who Are Not Working or In School* (CRS Report No. R40535). Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Retrieved December 3, 2023, from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40535.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The ACS is an annual survey that covers a broad population, including individuals living in households, individuals living in noninstitutionalized group quarters, and individuals living in institutionalized group quarters. Noninstitutionalized group quarters include college and university housing, military quarters, facilities for workers and religious groups, and temporary shelters for the homeless. Institutionalized group quarters include adult and juvenile correctional facilities, nursing facilities, and other health care facilities. Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States, including the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

<sup>4</sup> For general technical notes related to data analysis, data interpretation, rounding, and other considerations, please refer to the [Reader’s Guide](#).

<sup>5</sup> Data for 2020 are excluded from the analyses due to collection issues associated with the coronavirus pandemic.

<sup>6</sup> Disability status identifies individuals who have serious difficulty with one or more of four basic areas of functioning (hearing, vision, cognition, and ambulation) or with self-care or independent living.

<sup>7</sup> The narrower 20- to 24-year-old range was chosen to reduce the number of students still in high school in this analysis by high school completion status.

<sup>8</sup> High school completers include those persons who graduated from high school with a diploma as well as those who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.

<sup>9</sup> Consists of respondents who wrote in some other race that was not included as an option on the questionnaire.

<sup>10</sup> The gap by high school completion status was 34 percentage points for Pacific Islander 20- to 24-year-olds. However, this gap was not measurably different from the gap observed for those who were Hispanic.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 501.30

**Related indicators and resources:** [College Enrollment Rates](#); [Employment and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment](#); [Immediate College Enrollment Rate](#); [Youth and Young Adults Neither Enrolled in School nor Working](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]

**Glossary:** [Gap](#); [High school completer](#); [Racial/ethnic group](#)