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Youngest Workers Lose Ground in City's Strong Job Market

By [PATRICK MCGEEHAN](#)

The strongest job market New York City has had in decades has not helped the city's youngest workers find jobs, leaving them at risk of becoming permanently unemployable, according to a report an anti-poverty group released yesterday.

The report from the group, Community Service Society, an advocacy group for low-income New Yorkers, cited sharp decreases in employment among residents aged 16 to 24 from 2000 to 2006, a period in which employment rose for most other groups.

Slightly more than one-third of all city residents 16 to 24 held jobs last year, down from 44 percent in 2000, according to the report, which was based on federal census and labor statistics. Among people in that age group who were not attending school, employment also declined to 56 percent last year, from 64 percent in 2000.

During that same period, employment was rising and unemployment falling among other adults in the city. For all of 2006, the city's unemployment rate was 4.9 percent. It has rarely dropped below 5 percent in the last few decades.

But for teenagers looking for work in the city, prospects have not improved in recent years. The unemployment rate — the share of people actively looking for work and unable to find it — among those aged 16 to 19 was 28.4 percent, up from 18.9 percent in 2000 and little changed since 2003.

"We've got a very complex and difficult situation," said Mark Levitan, senior policy analyst with Community Service Society and the author of the report. "The shift is toward jobs that require more education, more literacy, more math, more ability to interact with customers and co-workers."

Young people who have dropped out of school "have a skills issue right there," Mr. Levitan said. He also said unemployment rates had remained high for black and Hispanic residents of all ages, especially men.

Despite the troubled tone of the report, some of the jobs data it cited contained glimmers of hope. While the unemployment rate for black New Yorkers was 7.4 percent last year, according to the report, that was down sharply from 12.9 percent in 2003. It was also lower than last year's unemployment rate for all blacks nationwide of 8 percent, said Michael L. Dolfman, the regional commissioner of the federal [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

Unemployment among Hispanics in New York also fell in the last three years, to 6.1 percent from 9.6 percent in 2003, the report showed.

Among city residents aged 20 to 24, unemployment was still high in 2006, at 10.9 percent, but it had fallen from 13.1 percent in 2003.

The rate of joblessness among teenagers in New York was nearly double the national rate of 15.4 percent, Mr. Dolfman said. But he added, "Historically, we have had high teenage unemployment rates."

One reason for that, he said, is the large number of immigrants with work skills but poor English who take low-level jobs to establish themselves in this country. "We have a large number of teenagers who are not getting the work skills that teenagers in other places are getting by taking entry-level jobs," Mr. Dolfman said.

David R. Jones, the chief executive of Community Service Society, attributed some of the joblessness among younger residents to a decline in emphasis on vocational training in the public school system. "There hasn't been much focus in this particular area in the city in a long time," Mr. Jones said.

He added that the government could help give young men leaving prison a second chance at work by changing the rules of parole and lowering some of the barriers that felons face in obtaining licenses to practice certain trades like plumbing. Young men who get locked up for drug offenses "are basically unemployable" after they leave prison, Mr. Jones said.

Even for those dropouts who stay out of legal trouble, there is an economic isolation, he said. If you live in heavily populated urban neighborhoods, "you don't find many job networks available to you," Mr. Jones said. "You have no real connection to the world of work."