JobsFirstNYC

ECONOMIC MOBILITY FOR NEW YORK CITY'S YOUNG ADULTS: WHERE PROGRESS MEETS PERSISTENT BARRIERS

October 2025

About JobsFirstNYC

JobsFirstNYC creates and advances solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults and their communities in the pursuit of economic opportunities. Since 2006, our innovative approach to developing new partnership models has helped shape public policy, philanthropic investments, and the practices of employers, colleges, workforce development providers, and high schools. JobsFirstNYC has worked with more than 200 organizations and institutions across New York City and State to build place-based partnerships, industry sector networks, school-based career pathway partnerships, and policy campaigns. These solutions have been replicated and integrated across workforce and education systems, strengthening institutional practice and expanding opportunity.

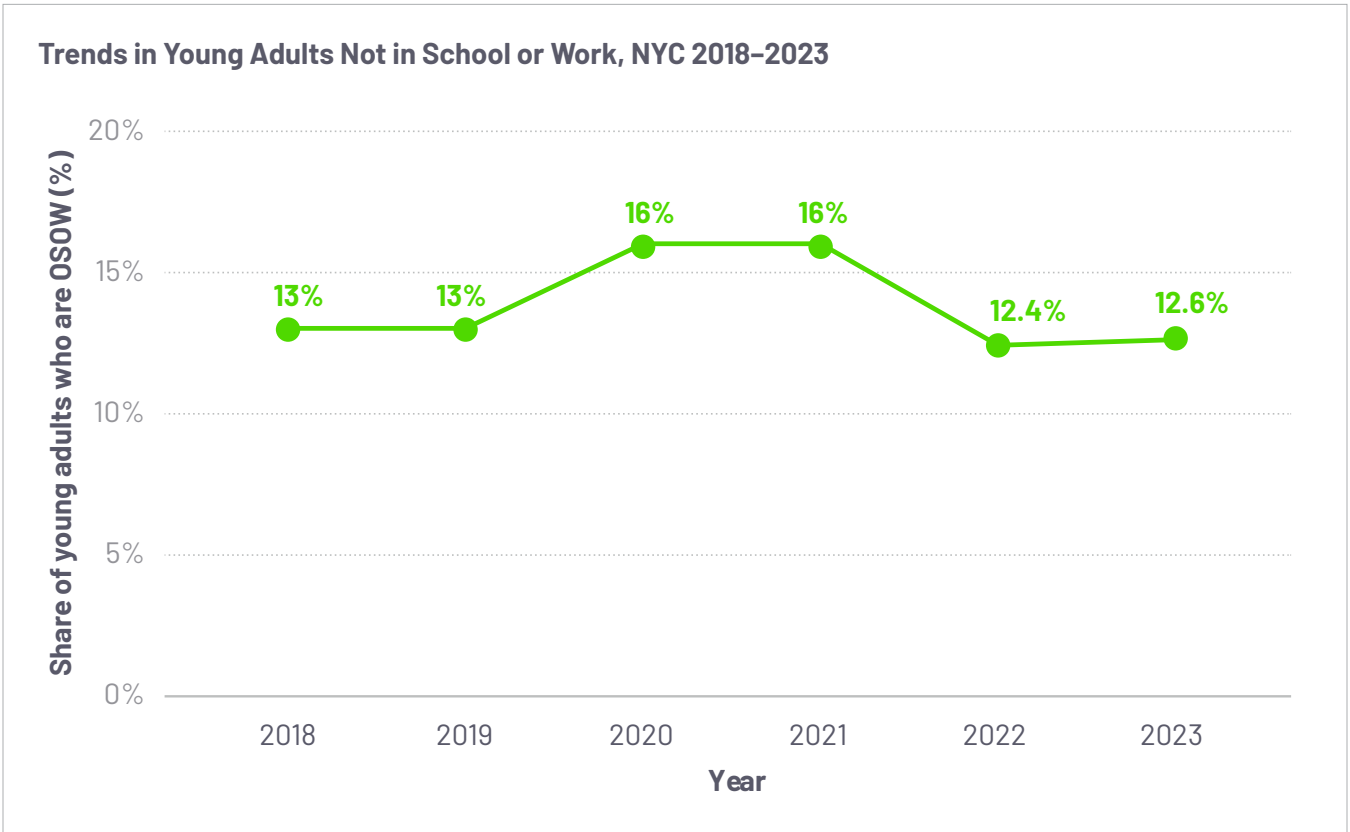
New data show that the number of young adults who are out of school and out of work (OSOW) is at an all-time low, but remains disproportionately high in some communities.

Today's national headlines often highlight low unemployment rates—but for New York City's young adults, the reality is much more complex. According to the newest available data from the American Community Survey,[1] **more than 106,000 young adults aged 16–24 are neither in school nor working**. While citywide unemployment rates suggest recovery, many young people continue to face structural and neighborhood-level barriers that limit access to education, training, and work.

Across neighborhoods with long histories of underinvestment, many young people still struggle to access opportunities that lead to financial security and economic advancement. Understanding who is affected, where, and why is critical to ensuring that all young adults can build the skills, experience, and confidence to thrive.

Prior to the pandemic, New York City's OSOW rates were at historic lows. Those gains were all but wiped out when the pandemic disrupted the city's labor market and educational systems. By 2022, much of the progress had been regained. The most recent data—drawn from 2023—allow us to take stock of what has stabilized, what has shifted, and where challenges remain, particularly in neighborhoods that face persistent barriers to opportunity.

NYC SEES STEADY PROGRESS RECONNECTING YOUNG ADULTS POST-PANDEMIC

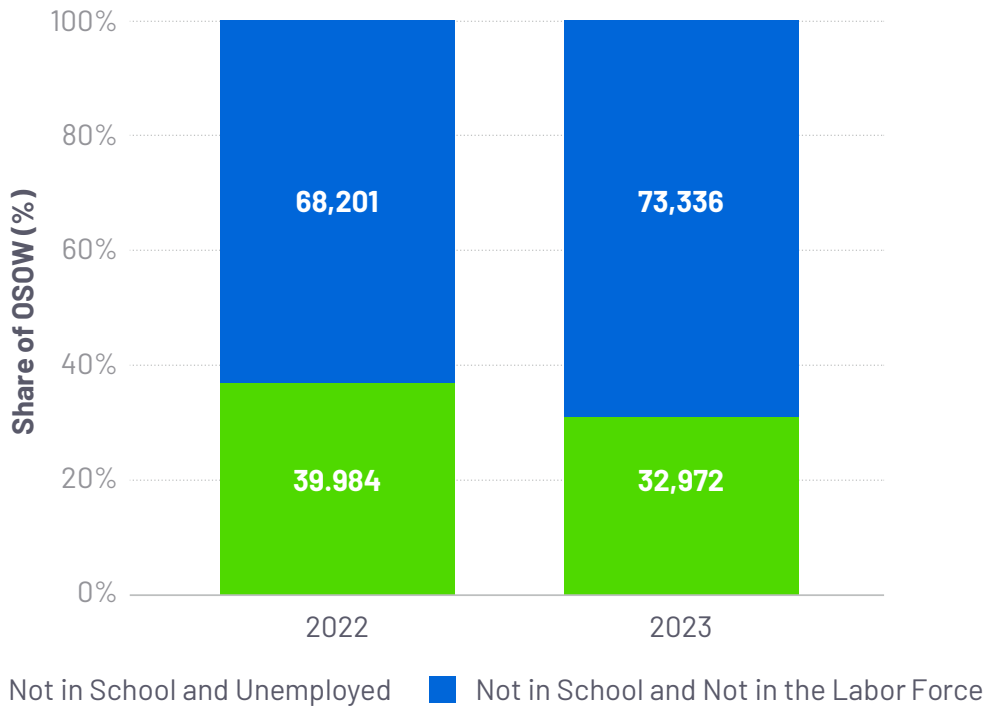


CITYWIDE TRENDS

The share of young adults in New York City categorized as OSOW has remained steady, shifting only slightly from **12.4% in 2022 to 12.6% in 2023**. While this small change might suggest stability, the composition of this group has shifted. The number of OSOW young adults who are unemployed has declined, while those not participating in the labor market have grown by more than 5,000—even as the overall young adult population has decreased. This means that a greater share of young adults are now outside the workforce altogether, reflecting challenges such as caregiving responsibilities or persistent discouragement. Understanding these dynamics is essential: while headline economic indicators such as unemployment paint a positive picture, underlying disengagement from the labor market is rising, signaling that systems and supports are not reaching all young people equally.

LABOR MARKET DISENGAGEMENT IS RISING AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

Shifts in Labor Market Participation Among Young Adults, NYC 2022–2023



WHO IS AFFECTED

The data also reveal key changes across race and gender. Young men are slightly more likely than young women to be OSOW. In addition, Black youth now represent a smaller share of young adults neither in school nor working, both in absolute numbers (down from 39,554 in 2021 to 27,496 in 2023) and in proportion of the OSOW population (28.6% to 25.9%). While this may suggest progress, it also reflects the steepest population decline among Black young adults during this period.

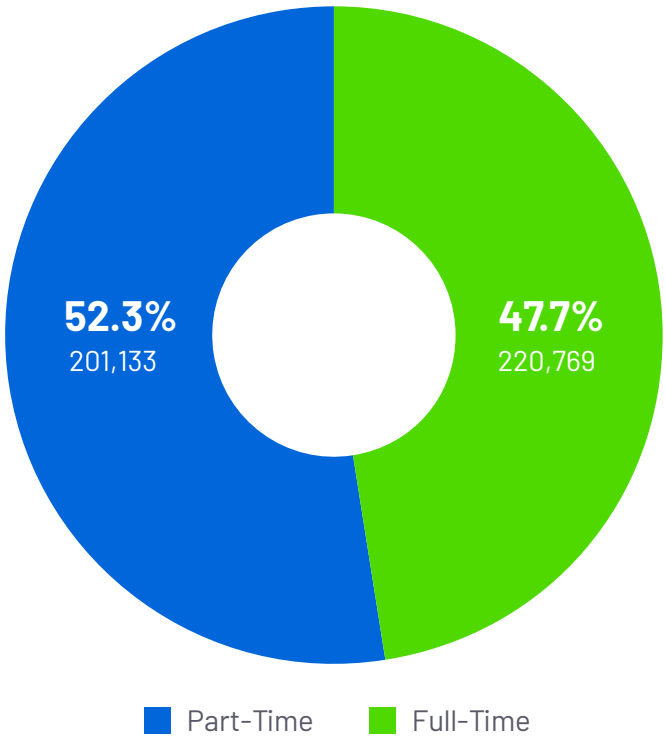
These demographic changes occurred amid an overall drop in the city's young adult population, as fewer have remained or returned to New York City following the pandemic.[2] This local trend sits within broader national demographic changes: across the US, the population of young adults has been shrinking due to a combination of factors, including migration patterns and lower birth rates.[3] For New York City, this means that the young adults who remain face both ongoing barriers and new pressures, shaping who can access education, training, and work.

UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Citywide rates of OSOW young adults alone do not capture the full economic picture. Many young adults are working part time without full financial stability. Over half of employed 18- to 24-year-olds work part time, compared with just 23% of the total employed population. In addition, 38% of young adults not currently in school or working live below the federal poverty line, meaning that tens of thousands of young adults are facing financial hardship. Yet because the official poverty measure understates the true cost of living in New York City,[4] many more youth are experiencing economic insecurity than the numbers suggest. As a result, even with overall unemployment approaching pre-pandemic levels, economic mobility for young adults remains far from guaranteed.

MOST YOUNG ADULTS WORK PART-TIME, LIMITING FINANCIAL STABILITY

Full-Time vs. Part-Time Employment Among Young Adults, NYC 2022–2023



NEIGHBORHOOD-LEVEL DISPARITIES

City averages mask critical neighborhood variances. Certain community districts have very high OSOW rates—24.5% in the Bronx neighborhoods of Melrose, Mott Haven, Longwood & Hunts Point; 20% in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Ocean Hill & Brownsville; and 16–16.2% in Central Harlem.[5] A historical perspective shows that while citywide OSOW rates may appear relatively stable over time, these persistent and emerging local disparities continue to impede economic mobility. Communities like the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and Harlem have faced decades of underinvestment in education, housing, health, and workforce infrastructure, leaving young adults there with fewer opportunities to connect to school or work.

LOOKING AHEAD

The newest data underscore that even as citywide rates of young adults not currently in school or working reach historic lows, **persistent disparities and financial vulnerability remain**. Many employed young adults continue to work only part-time, and tens of thousands live below the federal poverty line in a city where the cost of living is high. Neighborhood-level data make clear that **where a young person lives still shapes their access to education, work, and economic opportunity**. Together, these findings highlight the urgent need for **targeted, community-focused solutions** that give all young adults a fair chance to thrive, ensuring that progress at the citywide level translates into real opportunity in every neighborhood.

In neighborhoods with the highest rates of young adults not in school or working, JobsFirstNYC is investing in community-driven solutions that redefine what is possible. Central to this approach is listening to young people and centering their voices in the design of solutions. By understanding their experiences, aspirations, and barriers, partners can meet them where they are and reshape systems to better support success. For example, in Brownsville, the Brownsville Hub Cooperative connects workforce pipelines, small-business growth, and community healing through a resident-led model. In the Bronx, the Bronx Opportunity Network centers student well-being and career opportunities while strengthening cross-sector supports. And in Community District 8, partners are incubating a new collaboration around a shared vision that every young adult should have access to quality services and the support needed to flourish as active, valued members of their communities.

Ultimately data can illuminate need, but change depends on participation and partnership. By combining data-driven insight with place-based action—and listening to young people themselves—we can ensure that every young adult has the resources and opportunities to build a secure and thriving future.

Acknowledgment: *We thank our partners at the Center for New York City Affairs for preparing and analyzing the 2023 American Community Survey data, which made this reporting possible.*

ENDNOTES

1 Source: American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample for 2010 to 2023.

2 Andrew Perry and Emily Eisner, *Who Is Leaving New York State? Part II: Social and Labor Characteristics* (Fiscal Policy Institute, 2024), https://fiscalpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/FPI-Migration-Pt-2.pdf.

3 William H. Frey, "Growing Diverse and Immigrant Populations Drove the Nation's Post-Pandemic Demographic Rebound, New Census Data Show," Brookings (July 31, 2025), https://www.brookings.edu/articles/growing-diverse-and-immigrant-populations-drove-the-nations-post-pandemic-demographic-rebound-new-census-data-show.

4 See here for more on the True Cost of Living measure in NYC.

5 Community-level estimates for 16- to 24-year-olds are based on pooled 2022–2023 American Community Survey data to ensure sufficiently large sample sizes for reliable estimates.

JobsFirstNYC

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