

Only one in four US teenagers will find summer jobs

ISSE reporters
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Two and a half years after the Wall Street crash, the conditions of life for young people throughout the country are only getting worse. Along with rising tuition costs and closing schools, young people are now less likely to find work than at any time during the last 60 years.

Only 27 percent of teenagers will be employed over the summer. This figure has fallen from 46 percent in 2010, according to a recent report by the Center for Labor Market Studies.

But even those lucky enough to find jobs are seeing cuts to their wages, in addition to rising tuition and living costs. Max, 19, of Davenport, Iowa, is studying to be a registered nurse at Black Hawk Community College. He attended Augustana College in Rock Island for one year, but had to stop because it was too expensive. "I'm \$8,000 in debt for a degree I won't even receive," he said.

To pay for his expenses, Max works at the local hospital as a nursing assistant three days a week. "It's enough to pay for rent and basic expenses," he said, "barely." But even his small wage is under attack, "I recently got an e-mail from work saying they want to cut our wages by 20 percent."

As recreation centers, pools and libraries are being shut down throughout the country, young people are left without work and without anything to do this summer.

Last year, the unemployment rate for people aged 16 to 24 was 18.4 percent, the worst in 60 years. But there is no significant improvement in sight, and the rate has stayed almost unchanged for over a year.

The national youth unemployment rate currently stands at 24.2 percent for teenagers ages 16-19 and 16.3 percent for young adults between the ages of 20 and 24. These figures, meanwhile, are likely to rise amid new

signs of economic downturn in the US.

Recent high school graduates have been particularly hard hit: the unemployment rate for high school graduates under 25 is 22.5 percent, compared to 10.3 percent for people over 25 years of age.

As education costs have skyrocketed, college students have increasingly relied on summer jobs to pay for the costs of tuition, textbooks, and living expenses. For many students, income earned over the summer is the only way to continue their studies.

The miserable summer job prospects for young people are made worse by cuts to employment assistance and job training programs. In February, Congress made \$96.5 million in cuts to the Workforce Investment Act Youth Formula and Competitive Grants, and cut \$22.5 million from YouthBuild, which provide job training and temporary employment for low-income youth.

Justice Bey, an 11th grade student in New York City, tried to get a job this summer with the city's Summer Youth Employment Program, but was turned down. He was able to find work with the program for \$7.25 an hour last year, but this year could not find a job, despite applying as soon as spaces opened. "The government needs to stop cutting things like summer jobs, teachers and libraries," he said.

His friend, Julian Jones, a 17-year-old-student at Brandeis High School, was also turned down for a job at the summer jobs program. "It's a lot more competitive this year," he said, "and looking for a job outside the summer youth employment program is even harder."

In Illinois, youth unemployment has increased by 67 percent since 2005, now reaching a new record high for the state. "Conditions are horrible for people my age," said Cassandra David, 18, who will be a student at

Black Hawk Community College in Moline, Illinois, in the fall.

“I am working part-time at a restaurant to save up for college,” she said. “I used to work four days; now it’s down to one day. I can’t afford to live on my own, so I live with my parents.” Cassandra said her parents barely had enough money to make ends meet, forcing her to pay her own expenses. “I have only \$800 in savings, and that will barely cover gas and books,” she said.

John, a 21-year-old attending Black Hawk in the fall, moved from a small town in Northern California two weeks ago to find better employment and education prospects. “I’ve been looking for a job the whole time I’ve been here,” he said, “but I haven’t had much luck so far.”

“There were no decent jobs in California,” he said. “I worked lousy hours on minimum wage at Target, K-Mart and Sears. I got sick while working at Sears and tried to take time off, but I wasn’t given it, so I ended up getting fired and blacklisted.”

“I have to be occupied or I feel depressed,” John said. “I can’t just be idle. I can’t just sit on the couch. I need to use my hands and my mind.”

John continued, “One of the reasons I left California was because of the tuition hikes. I tried going to college after high school, but half the classes I wanted to take were closed because of budget cuts. I think it’s completely unfair that students, teachers and schools should be forced to pay for the economic crisis.”

“Making the workers and young people pay for the financial crisis is like making the fishermen and small businessmen pay for the BP oil spill in the Gulf,” John added. “Corporations control our government and our states and they don’t care about us one bit.”



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