

# Report reveals ongoing social crisis for Chicago's youth and young adults

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A recent report by the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) titled “Lost: The Crisis Of Jobless and Out Of School Teens and Young Adults In Chicago, Illinois and the U.S.” reveals the rise of unemployment in the past decade for Chicago’s youth and young adults.

The report begins on a sobering note. While attending a community hearing in Chicago two years ago, the authors of the report recall a statement from a young woman. “Two years ago, when we attended one of these hearings,” they write, “we listened intently, as young people shared their stories. Clear in our memories is the statement of a young woman who said, ‘My friend would be alive today if he had had a job.’”

Indeed, the social misery in which many young Chicagoans live—the rise of gang violence, poverty, the closing of schools—is the outcome in particular of a steady loss of jobs.

The report states that among 16- to 19-year-old Chicagoans in 2014, 12.4 percent of blacks, 15 percent of Hispanic or Latinos, and 24.4 percent of whites (non-Hispanic or Latino) were employed. The national figure for youth employment at the time was of 28.8 percent. Specifically, the unemployment rate for black 16- to 19-year-olds was a staggering 88 percent, while 85 percent of Hispanic or Latino 16- to 19-year-olds were jobless in 2014.

From 2005 to 2014, employment for Hispanic 16- to 19-year-old Chicagoans declined from 25.5 percent to 15 percent, a 42 percent drop. Female Hispanic 16- to 19-year-olds saw the largest decline, with employment dropping by 44 percent from 2005 to 2014.

Comparatively, for the state of Illinois as a whole in 2014, 84 percent of black 16- to 19-year-olds and 72 percent of Hispanics in this age group were without a job. From 2005 to 2014 employment rates dropped by

13 percent for blacks and 20 percent for Latinos. On the national level in 2014, 79 percent of black 16-to 19-year-olds and 74 percent of Latinos in this age group were unemployed, with employment rates decreasing 14 percent for blacks and 21 percent for Latinos from 2005 to 2014.

Then there are the 20- to 24-year-old Chicagoans whose employment rate can only be described as devastating. In 2014, 59 percent of black 20- to 24-year-olds were unemployed. For Latinos, the rate was 37 percent; for whites it was 27 percent. Meanwhile, 41 percent of blacks, 19 percent of Latinos and 7 percent of whites were out of school and without a job.

When tallied together, 31 percent of black 16- to 24-year-olds were out of school and unemployed in 2014 in Chicago, higher than the rate for blacks throughout the US, in Illinois, New York City and Los Angeles.

These staggering rates of unemployment for Chicago’s working class youth and young adults compound conditions of social distress. The report states: “Unemployment increases susceptibility to malnutrition, illness, mental stress, and loss of self-esteem, leading to depression. It also “injures self-esteem, and fosters feelings of externality and helplessness among youth.” The report adds that “increases in youth unemployment cause increases in burglaries, thefts and drug offences.”

“The result is a cycle, where the ‘permanent scars’ lead to conditions that are both a consequence and a precipitating factor that leads to further youth unemployment and parallel social conditions,” the report notes. “For example, in areas with high rates of teenage pregnancy, babies are being born to ‘babies’ in households with high rates of poverty and low levels of employment where feelings of low self-esteem,

depression, and powerlessness are often accompanied by substance abuse and in many cases, violence and crime.”

While the report points to the devastating effects of unemployment, the authors of the study frame the plight of Chicago’s working class youth and young adults as, above all, a racial question. While there is no doubt that racial policies are used by the ruling class to divide and ultimately pit workers and youth against each other, the fundamental issue is class and social inequality. To place the prior before the latter is to confuse a symptom for the disease.

Once known as an industrial center of the world, eloquently described by Carl Sandburg as the “city of big shoulders,” Chicago has seen a rampant deindustrialization over the past few decades and with it the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

In 2014, the WSWS wrote, “In the last 35 years, however, large swaths of Chicago, like Detroit and other cities, have been gutted by deindustrialization. Hundreds of thousands of manufacturing, transportation, health care and other relatively decent-paying jobs have been eliminated since the late 1970s, with 22 percent of manufacturing jobs lost in the city in the early 2000s alone.”

Deindustrialization, the slashing of jobs, the dismantling of pensions, and the gutting of wages are the expression in the lives of working class families of the capitalist system as the ruling class seeks to claw back concessions previously granted to the working class and squeeze out as much profit as possible.



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