

Workforce

Cleveland youth face barriers to good jobs

Even in recovery, young workers underemployed or locked out

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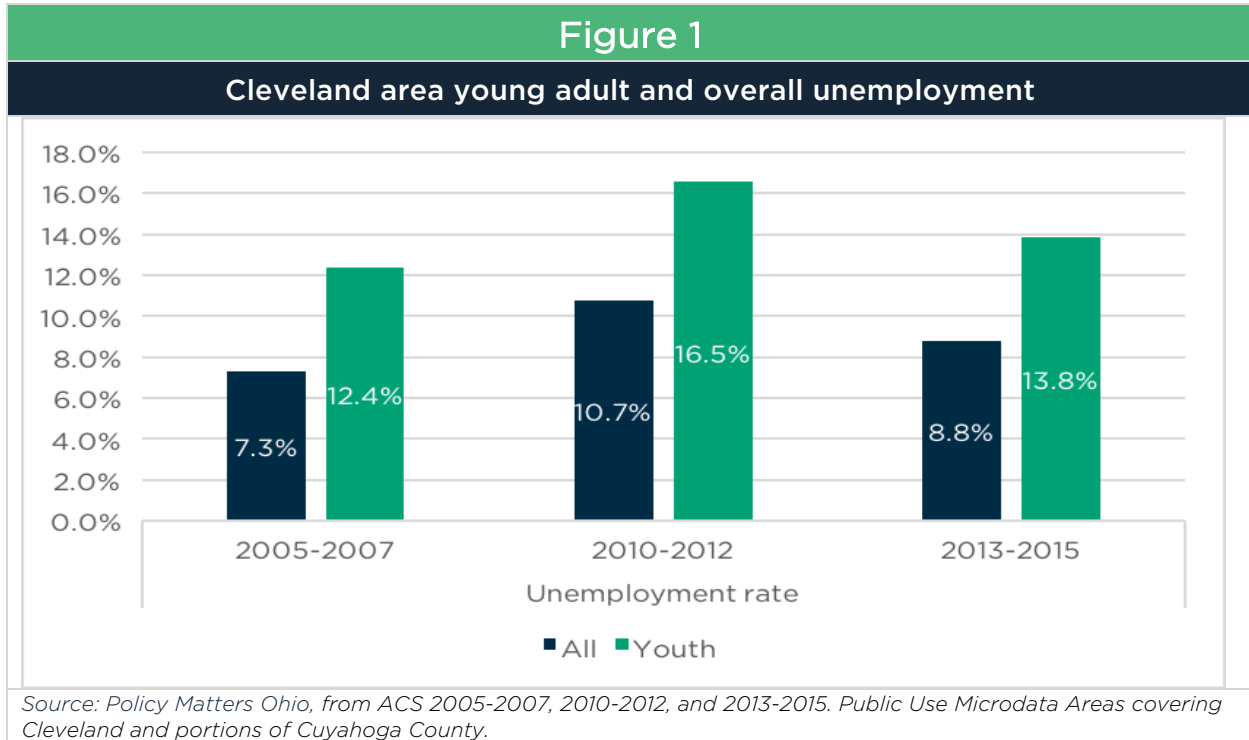
Young people in Greater Cleveland are struggling to find work, especially jobs that pay a living wage. This is despite the fact that young Clevelanders have increased their rates of high school graduation, post-secondary education and labor force participation. Greater Cleveland continued to endure high joblessness years into the recovery, and many communities have staggering rates of poverty. Young people, and especially youth of color, face special challenges.

Young Clevelanders struggle to find good jobs

- More than three-quarters of young Clevelanders are working or seeking work
- Young Clevelanders faced average unemployment rates of 13.8 percent from 2013 to 2015, when the rate for Cleveland as a whole was five points lower
- Most Cleveland college students work their way through school
- Young workers are concentrated in low-wage sectors
- Young people of color face lower employment levels and earnings

In the 2013 to 2015 period, young workers faced unemployment rates of 13.8 percent, five points higher than the overall rate for the city. While youth unemployment fell since the early recovery, it remained higher than unemployment for the overall workforce during the worst months of the Great Recession. This is despite higher labor force participation, which includes both work and active job-seeking. The share for 18-to-29-year-old Clevelanders was 76.8 percent in 2013-15, 11 points higher than the rate for the workforce as a whole.

The job market has improved substantially since this time, but across all windows young people face much higher jobless rates than the overall workforce, despite greater efforts to find a job.



Fewer Cleveland youth were idled – in neither work nor school – in the recent period than in the early recovery; 16.2 percent by 2013-2015, down from 20.2 percent in 2010-2012. By the 2013-2015 period, 66.2 percent of 18 to 29-year-olds in Greater Cleveland were working. The largest share (43.9 percent) was working and not enrolled in school. Even students were generally working – 22.3 percent of all youth, while 17.6 percent were students without jobs.

Educational attainment and enrollment in college and other higher education rose. The share of young people leaving high school without a diploma rose slightly from 9.1 percent from 2005 to 2007 to 9.8 percent from 2010 to 2012, then fell to 7 percent between 2013 and 2015.

Young people also earned just 59 percent of the median wage for all workers. While we expect young earners to earn less due to less workforce experience, the report finds youth clustered in low-wage sectors that lack stability and career ladders. This underscores the need to both invest in youth skills to enable them to transition into better jobs in aging industries whose workforce is nearing retirement, and to improve job quality across the board.

Policy Recommendations

- Pass a living minimum wage.
- Enforce anti-discrimination laws.
- Develop workers and connect them to career pathways.
- Protect the safety net and work supports.
- Deepen public investments.

Young people face higher rates of joblessness and underemployment than the overall workforce in good times and bad. For this reason, we must recognize that even modest jobless rates leave some populations especially vulnerable, and must account for their experiences in policy-making.