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YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT HITS 52-YEAR LOW

Data suggest more opportunities are available to some groups that historically struggled to find jobs

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The unemployment rate among young Americans fell to its lowest level in more than 50 years this summer, though the share of young people looking for work remained well below its peak in 1989.

Of Americans between 16 and 24 years old actively looking for work this summer, 9.2 percent were unemployed in July, the Labor Department said Thursday, a drop from the 9.6 percent youth unemployment rate in July 2017. It was the lowest midsummer joblessness rate for youth since July 1966.

One of those finding work was Teandre Blincoe, 17, who placed in a job this summer in an information technology division at Humana, a health insurance company based in Louisville, Ky., by KentuckianaWorks, which has partnered with JPMorgan Chase & Co. to place low-income youth in summer jobs.

With his first job under his belt, Mr. Blincoe said he would feel more confident looking for employment in the future. "I have a really solid idea of how I can present myself and actually get a job."

Low unemployment among young people shows that in a tight labor market more opportunities are opening to groups that historically have struggled to find jobs.

Similarly, the unemployment rate among older Americans who don't have a high-school diploma fell to a record low this year. The jobless rate also fell sharply for those who completed high school but never attended college. Among racial groups, the unemployment rate for Latinos fell to 4.5 percent in July, the lowest rate on records back to the 1970s.

The jobless rate for black Americans touched a record low this year before rising in the past two months. For black youth, the jobless rate ticked up this summer to 16.5 percent from 16.2 percent in 2017, meaning this segment of the population hasn't benefited as much as many others looking for work.

While millions of young people continue to enter the labor force in the summer months, the labor-force participation rate among young Americans – a measure of how many people are actively seeking employment – is still low by historical standards.

In July, the labor-force participation rate was 60.6 percent among young Americans, the same rate as last year and the highest since 2009. In 1989, the summer youth labor-force participation rate was 77.5 percent, and it has declined since.

Paul Harrington, an economist at Drexel University who studies the labor market for young people, said one reason for the decrease in the share of teenagers and young adults seeking summer work is the popularity of extracurricular activities and unpaid internships.

"If you don't do those extracurricular activities, it diminishes your chances of getting admitted to prestigious postsecondary institutions," he said.

For young people already admitted to college, unpaid internships, which the Labor Department doesn't classify as employment, are often important initial steps toward postgraduate employment.