



Economic News Release

College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates News Release

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COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AND WORK ACTIVITY OF RECENT HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE GRADUATES -- 2021

In October 2021, 61.8 percent of 2021 high school graduates ages 16 to 24 were enrolled in colleges or universities, little changed from the previous year, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Among 20- to 29-year-olds who received a bachelor's degree in 2021, 74.8 percent were employed, up from 67.3 percent in 2020. These data reflect the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Information on school enrollment and employment status is collected monthly in the Current Population Survey (CPS), a nationwide survey of about 60,000 households that provides information on employment and unemployment. Each October, a supplement to the CPS gathers more detailed information about recent degree recipients and school enrollment. In addition to data on recent high school graduates ages 16 to 24, this news release presents information on recent degree recipients ages 20 to 29. For more information, see the Technical Note in this news release.

Following are some highlights from the October 2021 data:

- Among recent high school graduates ages 16 to 24, college enrollment rates for men and women were 54.9 percent and 69.5 percent, respectively. (See table 1.)
- Among 16- to 24-year-olds, 39.1 percent of recent high school dropouts were working or looking for work, lower than the labor force participation rate of 66.9 percent for recent high school graduates not enrolled in college. (See table 1.)
- About 16.7 million persons ages 16 to 24 were not enrolled in school--44.8 percent of all persons in this age group. (See table 2.)
- Among 20- to 29-year-olds, 76.7 percent of recent associate degree recipients, 74.8 percent of recent bachelor's degree recipients, and 81.6 percent of recent advanced degree recipients were employed. (See table 3.)
- About one-fourth of recent bachelor's degree recipients ages 20 to 29 were enrolled in school. (See table 3.)
- Among 20- to 29-year-olds, unemployment rates for recent associate degree recipients, recent bachelor's degree recipients, and recent advanced degree recipients were 4.5 percent, 13.1 percent, and 2.6 percent, respectively. (See table 3.)

Recent High School Graduates and Dropouts (Ages 16 to 24)

Of the 2.7 million youth ages 16 to 24 who graduated from high school between January and October 2021, 1.7 million were enrolled in college in October. The college enrollment rate of recent high school graduates, at 61.8 percent in October 2021, was little different from the rate of 62.7 percent in October 2020. (See table 1.)

Among 2021 high school graduates ages 16 to 24, the college enrollment rate for young women, at 69.5 percent in October 2021, continued to be higher than the rate for young men (54.9 percent). The college enrollment rate of Asians (85.9 percent) also continued to be higher than the rates for recent Black (61.2 percent), White (61.0 percent), and Hispanic (58.6 percent) graduates.

The labor force participation rate (the proportion of the population that is employed or looking for work) for recent high school graduates enrolled in college in October 2021 was 33.2 percent. The participation rates for male and female graduates enrolled in college were 34.9 percent and 31.7 percent, respectively.

Among recent high school graduates enrolled in college in October 2021, about 9 in 10 were full-time students. Recent graduates enrolled as full-time students were less likely to be in the labor force (31.1 percent) than were their peers enrolled part time (54.1 percent).

Among recent high school graduates enrolled in college, 7 in 10 attended 4-year colleges. Of these students, 27.0 percent participated in the labor force in October 2021, lower than the 47.7 percent for recent graduates enrolled in 2-year colleges.

Recent high school graduates not enrolled in college in October 2021 were about twice as likely as enrolled graduates to be in the labor force (66.9 percent versus 33.2 percent). For both groups, labor force participation was little changed from the previous year. The unemployment rate for recent high school graduates not enrolled in college was 21.6 percent in October 2021, higher than the rate of 8.5 percent for recent graduates enrolled in college.

Between October 2020 and October 2021, 449,000 young people dropped out of high school. The labor force participation rate for recent dropouts (39.1 percent) continued to be much lower than the rate for recent high school graduates not enrolled in college (66.9 percent). The jobless rate for recent high school dropouts was 15.6 percent in October 2021; the rate for recent high school graduates not enrolled in college was 21.6 percent.

All Youth Enrolled in High School or College (Ages 16 to 24)

In October 2021, 20.5 million 16- to 24-year-olds, or 55.2 percent of youth, were enrolled in high school (9.3 million) or in college (11.2 million). The labor force participation rate for youth enrolled in school, at 36.6 percent, was little changed from October 2020 to October 2021. The unemployment rate (6.2 percent) for youth enrolled in school decreased from the previous year. (See table 2.)

In October 2021, high school students continued to be less likely than college students to participate in the labor force (23.2 percent, compared with 47.7 percent). The participation rates for male and female high school students were 21.5 percent and 25.0 percent, respectively.

Among college students, those enrolled full time were much less likely to participate in the labor force in October 2021 than were part-time students (42.7 percent versus 83.6 percent). Students at 4-year colleges were also less likely to be in the labor force than were students at 2-year schools (44.7 percent and 58.3 percent, respectively). Female college students were more likely to participate in the labor force than their male counterparts (50.2 percent, compared with 44.5 percent). By race and ethnicity, the labor force participation rate was lower for Asian college students (38.7 percent) than for their Black (44.3 percent), White (49.2 percent), and Hispanic (51.8 percent) counterparts.

The unemployment rates for high school students and college students in October 2021, at 8.3 percent and 5.4 percent, respectively, decreased from the previous year.

All Youth Not Enrolled in School (Ages 16 to 24)

In October 2021, 16.7 million persons ages 16 to 24 were not enrolled in school. The labor force participation rate of youth not enrolled in school, at 79.6 percent, changed little over the year. Among youth not enrolled in school in October 2021, young men continued to be more likely than young women to participate in the labor force (82.0 percent, compared with 76.7 percent). Labor force participation rates for not-enrolled young men and young women were highest for those with a bachelor's degree or higher (94.8 percent and 92.3 percent, respectively) and lowest for young men and young women with less than a high school diploma (62.8 percent and 54.1 percent, respectively). (See table 2.)

The unemployment rate for youth ages 16 to 24 not enrolled in school, at 9.0 percent in October 2021, decreased over the year. Among not-enrolled youth who did not have a high school diploma, unemployment rates in October 2021 were 14.0 percent for young men and 19.1 percent for young women. The jobless rates of young men and young women with at least a bachelor's degree were 9.4 percent and 3.7 percent, respectively. Among youth not enrolled in school, the unemployment rates for Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics were 7.9 percent, 13.7 percent, 11.8 percent, and 9.8 percent, respectively.

Recent College Graduates (Ages 20 to 29)

Between January and October 2021, 1.3 million 20- to 29-year-olds earned a bachelor's degree; of these, 940,000 (or 74.8 percent) were employed in October 2021, up from 67.3 percent in October 2020. The unemployment rate for recent college graduates with a bachelor's degree, at 13.1 percent, was little changed from the previous year. (See table 3.)

Among recent bachelor's degree recipients, women were more likely to be employed than were men in October 2021 (80.0 percent versus 68.0 percent). The jobless rate for female bachelor's degree recipients, at 7.0 percent, was about one-third the rate of their male counterparts (20.9 percent).

About one-quarter (or 332,000) of recent bachelor's degree recipients were enrolled in school in October 2021. These recent graduates who were enrolled in school were less likely to be employed than were those who were not enrolled (61.2 percent versus 79.6 percent).

Between January and October 2021, 382,000 persons ages 20 to 29 earned an advanced degree--that is, a master's, professional, or doctoral degree. About 8 in 10 of those who recently earned an advanced degree were employed (81.6 percent). The unemployment rate for recent advanced degree recipients was 2.6 percent in October 2021, down from 12.6 percent in October 2020.

Recent Associate Degree Recipients (Ages 20 to 29)

Of the 371,000 20- to 29-year-olds who completed an associate degree between January and October 2021, 76.7 percent were employed in October 2021, up from 59.2 percent in the previous year. The unemployment rate for recent associate degree recipients was 4.5 percent in October 2021, down from 15.8 percent in October 2020. (See table 3.)

Recent associate degree recipients ages 20 to 29 were more than twice as likely to have completed an academic program than a vocational program (67.9 percent, compared with 32.1 percent). Associate degrees in academic programs are primarily in the arts and sciences and are often transferable to a bachelor's degree program, while associate degrees in vocational programs prepare graduates for a specific occupation.

In October 2021, 53.1 percent of recent associate degree recipients were enrolled in school. Of the 197,000 recent recipients who were enrolled in school, 74.3 percent were employed. In October 2021, 79.4 percent of recent associate degree recipients who were not enrolled in school were employed.

Technical Note

The estimates in this release were obtained from a supplement to the October Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of about 60,000 eligible households that provides information on the labor force, employment, and unemployment for the nation. The CPS is conducted monthly for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the U.S. Census Bureau. Data in this release relate to the school enrollment status of persons in the civilian noninstitutional population in the calendar week that includes the 12th of October. Data about recent high school graduates and dropouts and the enrollment status of youth refer to persons 16 to 24 years of age. Data about recent associate degree recipients and college graduates refer to persons 20 to 29 years of age.

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Definitions

Definitions of the principal terms used in this release are described briefly below.

School enrollment. Respondents were asked whether they were currently enrolled in a regular school, including day or night school in any type of public, parochial, or other private school. Regular schooling is that which may advance a person toward a high school diploma or a college, university, or professional degree. Such schools include elementary schools, junior or senior high schools, and colleges and universities.

Other schooling, including trade schools; on-the-job training; and courses that do not require physical presence in school, such as correspondence courses or other courses of independent study, is included only if the credits granted count towards promotion in regular school.

Full-time and part-time enrollment in college. College students are classified as attending full time if they were taking 12 hours of classes or more (or 9 hours of graduate classes) during an average school week and as part time if they were taking fewer hours.

High school graduation status. Persons who were not enrolled in school at the time of the survey were asked whether they had graduated from high school. Those who had graduated were asked when they completed their high school education. Persons who had not graduated, that is, school dropouts, were asked when they last attended a regular school. Those who were enrolled in college at the time of the survey also were asked when they graduated from high school.

Recent high school graduates. Persons age 16 to 24 who completed high school in the calendar year of the survey (January through October) are recent high school graduates.

Recent high school dropouts. Persons age 16 to 24 who were not enrolled in school at the time of the survey, attended school a year earlier, and did not have a high school diploma are recent dropouts.

Recent college graduates. Persons age 20 to 29 who completed a bachelor's degree or an advanced degree--that is, a master's, professional (such as law or medicine), or doctoral degree--in the calendar year of the survey (January through October) are recent college graduates.

Recent associate degree recipients. Persons age 20 to 29 who completed an associate degree (either an academic program or a vocational program) in the calendar year of the survey (January through October) are recent associate degree recipients. Associate degrees in academic programs are primarily in the arts and sciences and may be transferable to a bachelor's degree program, while associate degrees in vocational programs prepare graduates for a specific occupation.

Reliability of the estimates

Statistics based on the CPS are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. When a sample, rather than the entire population, is surveyed, there is a chance that the sample estimates may differ from the true population values they represent. The component of this difference that occurs because samples differ by chance is known as sampling error, and its variability is measured by the standard error of the estimate. There is about a 90-percent chance, or level of confidence, that an estimate based on a sample will differ by no more than 1.6 standard errors from the true population value because of sampling error. BLS analyses are generally conducted at the 90-percent level of confidence.

The CPS data also are affected by nonsampling error. Nonsampling error can occur for many reasons, including the failure to sample a segment of the population, inability to obtain information for all respondents in the sample, inability or unwillingness of respondents to provide correct information, and errors made in the collection or processing of the data.

Additional information about the reliability of data from the CPS and estimating standard errors is available at www.bls.gov/cps/documentation.htm#reliability.

Table 1. Labor force status of 2021 high school graduates and 2020-2021 high school dropouts 16 to 24 years old by school enrollment, educational attainment, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, October 2021
[Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force						Not in labor force	
		Total	Percent of population	Employed		Unemployed			
				Total	Percent of population	Number	Rate		
RECENT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES									
Total, 2021 high school graduates⁽¹⁾	2,731	1,258	46.1	1,060	38.8	199	15.8	1,473	
Men	1,444	696	48.2	586	40.6	110	15.8	748	
Women	1,287	562	43.7	474	36.8	89	15.8	725	
White	2,022	1,003	49.6	858	42.4	145	14.4	1,019	
Black or African American	397	126	31.7	108	27.3	17	13.9	271	
Asian	142	34	24.3	23	16.0	12	-	108	
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	626	326	52.1	251	40.0	76	23.2	300	
Enrolled in college									
Total, enrolled in college	1,688	560	33.2	513	30.4	48	8.5	1,128	
Enrolled in 2-year college	506	242	47.7	228	44.9	14	5.8	265	
Enrolled in 4-year college	1,182	319	27.0	285	24.1	34	10.6	863	
Full-time students	1,533	477	31.1	433	28.3	43	9.0	1,057	
Part-time students	155	84	54.1	79	51.1	5	5.5	71	
Men	793	276	34.9	249	31.4	27	9.9	517	
Women	895	284	31.7	263	29.4	20	7.2	611	
White	1,234	451	36.6	428	34.7	23	5.2	783	
Black or African American	243	48	19.6	40	16.5	8	-	195	
Asian	122	19	15.7	11	8.7	9	-	103	
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	367	149	40.6	142	38.6	7	4.9	218	
Not enrolled in college									
Total, not enrolled in college	1,044	698	66.9	547	52.4	151	21.6	345	
Men	651	420	64.4	337	51.8	83	19.7	232	
Women	392	279	71.0	210	53.6	68	24.5	114	
White	788	552	70.0	430	54.6	121	22.0	236	
Black or African American	154	78	50.7	68	44.4	10	12.5	76	
Asian	20	15	-	12	-	3	-	5	
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	259	177	68.4	109	42.0	68	38.6	82	
RECENT HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS									

⁽¹⁾Data refer to persons who graduated from high school in January through October 2021.

⁽²⁾Data refer to persons who dropped out of school between October 2020 and October 2021.

NOTE: Detail for the above race groups (White, Black or African American, and Asian) do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data. Dash indicates no data or data that do not meet publication criteria (values not shown where base is less than 75,000).

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force						Not in labor force
		Total	Percent of population	Employed		Unemployed		
				Total	Percent of population	Number	Rate	
Total, 2020-2021 high school dropouts⁽²⁾	449	176	39.1	148	33.0	27	15.6	273
Men	256	88	34.4	69	26.8	19	22.1	168
Women	193	88	45.4	80	41.2	8	9.1	106
White	337	150	44.4	127	37.6	23	15.4	187
Black or African American	63	20	-	16	-	4	-	43
Asian	13	3	-	3	-	-	-	9
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	145	43	30.0	31	21.4	12	-	101

(1). Data refer to persons who graduated from high school in January through October 2021.

(2). Data refer to persons who dropped out of school between October 2020 and October 2021.

NOTE: Detail for the above race groups (White, Black or African American, and Asian) do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data. Dash indicates no data or data that do not meet publication criteria (values not shown where base is less than 75,000).

Table 2. Labor force status of persons 16 to 24 years old by school enrollment, educational attainment, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, October 2021 [Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force						Not in labor force
		Total	Percent of population	Employed		Unemployed		
				Total	Percent of population	Number	Rate	
Total, 16 to 24 years	37,222	20,785	55.8	19,121	51.4	1,663	8.0	16,437
Enrolled in school								
Total, enrolled in school	20,541	7,512	36.6	7,045	34.3	467	6.2	13,029
Enrolled in high school⁽¹⁾	9,324	2,165	23.2	1,985	21.3	180	8.3	7,159
Men	4,729	1,015	21.5	934	19.7	81	8.0	3,714
Women	4,595	1,150	25.0	1,051	22.9	99	8.6	3,445
White	6,750	1,742	25.8	1,592	23.6	150	8.6	5,007
Black or African American	1,409	250	17.7	238	16.9	11	4.6	1,159
Asian	459	41	8.9	39	8.4	2	-	419
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	2,227	400	18.0	338	15.2	62	15.4	1,827
Enrolled in college	11,217	5,347	47.7	5,060	45.1	287	5.4	5,870
Enrolled in 2-year college	2,479	1,445	58.3	1,360	54.9	84	5.8	1,034
Enrolled in 4-year college	8,738	3,902	44.7	3,700	42.3	202	5.2	4,835
Full-time students	9,845	4,200	42.7	3,967	40.3	232	5.5	5,645
Part-time students	1,371	1,147	83.6	1,093	79.7	54	4.7	224
Men	4,930	2,194	44.5	2,071	42.0	123	5.6	2,736
Women	6,287	3,153	50.2	2,989	47.5	164	5.2	3,134
White	7,996	3,936	49.2	3,769	47.1	167	4.2	4,060
Black or African American	1,606	711	44.3	646	40.3	65	9.1	895
Asian	1,057	409	38.7	379	35.8	31	7.5	648
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	2,359	1,222	51.8	1,157	49.0	65	5.3	1,137
Not enrolled in school								
Total, not enrolled in school	16,681	13,273	79.6	12,077	72.4	1,196	9.0	3,408
16 to 19 years	3,448	2,308	66.9	1,963	56.9	345	14.9	1,140
20 to 24 years	13,234	10,965	82.9	10,114	76.4	852	7.8	2,268
Men	9,018	7,392	82.0	6,699	74.3	693	9.4	1,626

(1). Includes a small number of persons enrolled in grades below high school.

(2). Includes persons with a high school diploma or equivalent.

(3). Includes persons with bachelor's, master's, professional, and doctoral degrees.

NOTE: Detail for the above race groups (White, Black or African American, and Asian) do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data. Dash indicates no data or data that do not meet publication criteria (values not shown where base is less than 75,000).

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force						Not in labor force
		Total	Percent of population	Employed		Unemployed		
				Total	Percent of population	Number	Rate	
Less than a high school diploma	1,063	668	62.8	574	54.0	94	14.0	395
High school graduates, no college ⁽²⁾	4,835	3,906	80.8	3,543	73.3	363	9.3	929
Some college or associate degree	1,919	1,679	87.5	1,549	80.7	130	7.7	240
Bachelor's degree and higher ⁽³⁾	1,201	1,139	94.8	1,032	86.0	107	9.4	62
Women	7,663	5,881	76.7	5,378	70.2	503	8.6	1,782
Less than a high school diploma	851	461	54.1	373	43.8	88	19.1	390
High school graduates, no college ⁽²⁾	3,408	2,502	73.4	2,216	65.0	285	11.4	906
Some college or associate degree	1,906	1,536	80.6	1,457	76.5	79	5.1	370
Bachelor's degree and higher ⁽³⁾	1,498	1,383	92.3	1,332	88.9	51	3.7	115
White	12,565	10,138	80.7	9,340	74.3	798	7.9	2,428
Black or African American	2,428	1,873	77.1	1,617	66.6	256	13.7	555
Asian	658	515	78.3	455	69.1	61	11.8	143
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	4,331	3,356	77.5	3,027	69.9	330	9.8	974

(1) Includes a small number of persons enrolled in grades below high school.
(2) Includes persons with a high school diploma or equivalent.
(3) Includes persons with bachelor's, master's, professional, and doctoral degrees.

NOTE: Detail for the above race groups (White, Black or African American, and Asian) do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data. Dash indicates no data or data that do not meet publication criteria (values not shown where base is less than 75,000).

Table 3. Labor force status of 2021 associate degree recipients and college graduates 20 to 29 years old by selected characteristics, October 2021 [Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force						Not in labor force
		Total	Percent of population	Employed		Unemployed		
				Total	Percent of population	Number	Rate	
RECENT ASSOCIATE DEGREE RECIPIENTS⁽¹⁾								
Total, 20 to 29 years	371	298	80.3	284	76.7	13	4.5	73
Men	149	112	75.3	98	66.3	13	11.9	37
Women	222	186	83.7	186	83.7	-	-	36
20 to 24 years	307	243	79.0	230	74.7	13	5.5	64
25 to 29 years	63	55	-	55	-	-	-	9
Vocational program	119	107	90.5	101	85.5	6	5.5	11
Academic program	252	190	75.5	183	72.6	7	3.9	62
Enrolled in school	197	152	77.2	147	74.3	6	3.8	45
Not enrolled in school	173	145	83.8	138	79.4	8	5.2	28
RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATES⁽²⁾								
Total, 20 to 29 years	1,639	1,402	85.5	1,252	76.3	150	10.7	238
Men	641	553	86.3	445	69.5	107	19.4	88
Women	999	849	85.0	806	80.7	43	5.0	150
20 to 24 years	1,109	954	86.0	855	77.0	99	10.4	155
25 to 29 years	530	448	84.5	397	74.9	51	11.4	82

(1) Data refer to persons who received an associate degree in January through October 2021.
(2) Data refer to persons who received a bachelor's or higher degree in January through October 2021.
(3) Data refer to persons who received a master's, professional, or doctoral degree in January through October 2021.

NOTE: Detail for the above race groups (White, Black or African American, and Asian) do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data. Dash indicates no data or data that do not meet publication criteria (values not shown where base is less than 75,000).

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force						Not in labor force
		Total	Percent of population	Employed		Unemployed		
				Total	Percent of population	Number	Rate	
Enrolled in school	398	258	65.0	244	61.4	14	5.5	139
Not enrolled in school	1,242	1,143	92.1	1,007	81.1	136	11.9	98
White	1,249	1,094	87.6	995	79.6	100	9.1	155
Black or African American	169	136	80.3	117	69.5	18	13.4	33
Asian	171	129	75.6	115	67.4	14	10.8	42
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	263	231	87.9	184	70.0	47	20.3	32
Bachelor's degree								
Total, 20 to 29 years	1,257	1,082	86.0	940	74.8	142	13.1	175
Men	550	473	86.0	374	68.0	99	20.9	77
Women	707	609	86.1	566	80.0	43	7.0	98
20 to 24 years	999	860	86.1	761	76.2	99	11.5	138
25 to 29 years	259	222	85.7	179	69.2	43	19.2	37
Enrolled in school	332	217	65.5	203	61.2	14	6.6	115
Not enrolled in school	926	865	93.4	737	79.6	128	14.8	61
Advanced degree⁽³⁾								
Total, 20 to 29 years	382	320	83.7	312	81.6	8	2.6	62
Men	91	80	87.8	72	78.8	8	10.3	11
Women	291	240	82.4	240	82.4	-	-	51
20 to 24 years	111	94	84.6	94	84.6	-	-	17
25 to 29 years	271	226	83.4	218	80.3	8	3.6	45

(1) Data refer to persons who received an associate degree in January through October 2021.

(2) Data refer to persons who received a bachelor's or higher degree in January through October 2021.

(3) Data refer to persons who received a master's, professional, or doctoral degree in January through October 2021.

NOTE: Detail for the above race groups (White, Black or African American, and Asian) do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data. Dash indicates no data or data that do not meet publication criteria (values not shown where base is less than 75,000).

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