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Contact
David Roscow, CIRCLE, 703-276-2772 x21
David B. Smith, NCoC, 202-294-4100

- National Hispanic Heritage Month Story -

IMMIGRANT YOUTH LESS LIKELY TO VOLUNTEER

**Report Examines Volunteering Trends Among U.S. Youth of Immigrant Parents
Education, Gender, & Citizenship Status Impact Rates**

Jonathan Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, Tufts University—Young people who have immigrated to the United States or whose parents were born outside the U.S. are far less likely to volunteer than youth of U.S.-born parents, according to a new report. This cohort represents the fastest growing portion of the youth population.

Conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University's Tisch College and released jointly with the National Conference on Citizenship (www.ncoc.net), the report found that 22 percent of youth with U.S.-born parents and 21 percent of U.S.-born youth with one foreign-born parent volunteer. Only 9 percent of young people born outside of the U.S. and 14 percent of youth with both parents born outside of the U.S. volunteer. The full fact sheet can be found at www.civicyouth.org.

Peter Levine, the director of CIRCLE, commented on the disparities between "immigrant-origin youth" and their peers. "We need young immigrants, one of the fastest growing segments of our population, to be involved in our communities," Levine said. "Volunteering benefits those who serve and those whom they help. Communities, policymakers, and institutions must provide better access to volunteer opportunities for young immigrants."

The report examined the relationship between volunteering and several key demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and citizenship status, using the most recent Census Population Survey (CPS) Volunteering Supplements from 2005 to 2007 and other related data.

Education had a strong impact on volunteer rates. Youth of immigrant origin who were enrolled in any kind of educational institution were almost twice as likely to volunteer as their non-enrolled peers, suggesting that education provides relevant knowledge and skills as well as opportunities to volunteer. Furthermore, the higher the level of education, the greater the volunteer rate, as twenty percent of youth of immigrant origin with a college degree volunteered, while only five percent with less than a high school diploma volunteered. Still, the difference in educational attainment between immigrants and non-immigrants does not explain the whole volunteering gap.

"Research has shown that education plays a major role in determining participation in youth volunteering and civic engagement," said David B. Smith, NCoC Executive Director. "Schools need to find a way to incorporate young people from all backgrounds in meaningful history and civics education programs so that they can develop into successful, contributing members of society."

Becoming a fully active participant in communities may take time. The number of years lived in the U.S. was found to be a strong predictor of volunteering rates. Youth of immigrant origin who spent more than 15 years in the U.S. or immigrated to the U.S. before age ten were far more likely to volunteer than those who had spent less time in the U.S.

It should be noted that a large number of youth of immigrant origin have been naturalized specifically to serve in the armed forces, which is not considered by this report as volunteering. The U.S. Department of Defense reported five percent of all armed forces personnel foreign-born, and of that personnel, two-thirds were naturalized.

Age is a strong predictor of volunteering. In the general population 18-to-24 year-olds volunteer at lower rates than high-school-age youth and individuals 25-to-29 year-olds. However youth of non-immigrant origin bucked this trend with 18-to-24 year-olds slightly more likely to volunteer than their older counterparts.

Gender also had an impact on volunteering among youth of immigrant origin. The report found 16 percent volunteer rate among young females of immigrant origin, while young males of immigrant origin volunteered only 9 percent of the time. This gap may be even larger as past research shows female immigrants under-report their volunteering activities.

When asked how they got involved with volunteering, youth of immigrant origin were more likely to mention social networks, while non-immigrant youth cited families. Families of youth of immigrant origin may be less likely to know about volunteering opportunities in the United States.

Levine believes the results of the report can serve as a guideline for schools and community leaders. “It is our goal to make sure everyone has the opportunity to volunteer. It is not acceptable to let any of our young people slip between the cracks,” he said. “Being civically engaged has shown to have tremendous positive effects on youth. It is time for society to become more responsible for its youth, regardless of their background.”

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CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) conducts and promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. A part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University, CIRCLE has received funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and several other foundations.

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, a national leader in civic engagement, prepares students from all fields of Tufts University to become engaged public citizens and community leaders.

Tufts University, located on three Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Medford/Somerville, and Grafton, and in Talloires, France, is recognized as one of the premier research universities in the United States. Tufts enjoys a global reputation for academic excellence and for the preparation of students as leaders in a wide range of professions. A growing number of innovative teaching and research initiatives span all Tufts campuses, and collaboration among the faculty and students in the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across the University's schools is widely encouraged.

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) measures, tracks and promotes civic participation throughout the United States. Guided by our Congressional Charter and the values of NCoC, we commission and publish the annual America's Civic Health Index, a quantitative means for measuring our nation's success or shortfalls under the goal of strengthening citizenship in America. In addition we hold our annual National Conference on Citizenship that brings together leaders in the civic engagement field to set concrete and ambitious goals to promote a more active and involved citizenry.