Migration & health

Young Mexican Immigrants in the U.S.
Migration and Health

Young Mexican Immigrants in the U.S.
Content

Aknowledgements / 4

Foreword / 5

Chapter I
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Mexican Youth in the United States / 7

Chapter II
Health Insurance Coverage and Type / 21

Chapter III
Access to Health Services / 33

Chapter IV
Health Conditions / 43

Conclusions / 57
Aknowledgements

The institutions that participated in writing this report acknowledge the collaboration of the following persons:

Authors

National population Council of Government of Mexico (CONAPO)
Telésforo Ramírez García, Director, Socio-Economic and International Migration
Mauricio Rodríguez Abreu, Consultant
Susana Zamora Alarcón, Research Assistant
Rodrigo O. Villaseñor, Consultant

Universidad de California (UC)
Xóchitl Castañeda, Director, Health Initiative of the Americas (HIA), School of Public Heath, UC, Berkeley
Steven P. Wallace, Associate Director, Center for Health Policy Research, School of Public Heath UC, Los Angeles
Mary Lou de Leon Siantz, Professor, Nursing School, UC, Davis
Claire Brindis, Director, Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health, UC, San Francisco

Collaborators
Paula Leite, Advisor to the Under Secretary for Population, Migration and Religious Affairs
Gudelia Rangel Gómez, Health Secretary of Mexico
Emily Felt, Public Policy Annalist, Health Initiative of the Americas (HIA)

Design and Layout
Myrna Muñoz, CONAPO
Virginia Muñoz, CONAPO

Editing
Armando Correa
Foreword

In recent years, Mexican migration to the United States has undergone significant changes. The migratory flow has changed in volume, modalities, ethnic composition, diversity of age groups, sex, and the of places of origin and destination. These changes also include the participation of children, teenagers and youth, who, for various reasons, have emigrated in search of new labor opportunities for themselves, or in company of their parents if they migrate at younger ages. Although young people have always formed part of the migratory flows to the United States, they currently constitute an important part of the Mexican population that is annually incorporated into the U.S. society, and significantly into the labor market, especially in industries that are critical to U.S. global competitiveness. Of the 11.6 million Mexicans living U.S., just over 3 million are youths between the ages of 12 and 29.

Seeing young people as actors in the migratory process is crucial, not only because of their role in the migratory flows and numbers among the Mexican immigrant population in the United States, but also because of the various problems they endure during their displacement. Such dislocation, in combination with the challenging processes of assimilation into the U.S. society, including socio-economic integration, places youths in a situation of social vulnerability, with restricted access to health care, and resulting in an increased risk for health disparities over the lifespan.

However, although it is true that young immigrants have a stock of “health capital”, difficult life and labor conditions, as well as limited access to health care, could reduce this capital and cause premature diseases and disabilities. In this sense, young Mexican immigrants’ limited access to health services means a serious problem. It affects not only their healthy growth and development, but also can bring health problems in adulthood and even in elderly. The promotion of healthy practices among young Mexican immigrants and their access to health insurance therefore constitutes a fundamental resource in protecting and ensuring their present and future health.

The health of Mexican immigrant youth must therefore be a priority on the agendas of the Mexican and United States governments. In this regard, the National Population Council (CONAPO for its Spanish acronym), Secretary of Health of Mexico (SS for its Spanish acronym), and the University of California (UC), that include researchers of the Center of Expertise on Migration and Health (COEMH) and the UC Global Health Institute (UCGH), with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) prepared this report in order to provide statistical information on migration and health that will serve as an input for the design and implementation of policies designed to improve the health conditions of the Mexican youth population residing in the United States. In that sense, it is important to recognize the efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME for its Spanish acronym), an institution always attentive to promote health among the Mexican communities, through Binational Health Week and Ventanilla de Salud Program.

This report is designed to deepen knowledge of the access and use of medical services as well as the health conditions of Mexican youth residing in the United States. Mexicans youths are compared with U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites, young people of Mexican origin,
African-Americans and immigrants from other countries and regions of the world. The data used in this report come from three U.S. government surveys: Current Population Survey (CPS), American Community Survey (ACS) and National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

The document is organized into four main chapters and one containing the conclusions. Chapter one provides a volume overview that includes trends, as well as sociodemographic, economic and migratory characteristics of the young Mexican population residing in the United States. Chapter two compares the level of access and type of health insurance coverage of young Mexican immigrants to other populations. It also highlights some of the factors associated with the inequalities in access to health insurance at state level. The third chapter describes the use and type of medical services sought by Mexican youth. Specifically, it presents various indicators of the regular use of health care services, their usual sources of health care and some of the personal, economic and institutional obstacles they face in receiving timely health care. The fourth chapter explores the health status of young Mexican immigrants by examining their perception of their physical and mental health status, including their sexual and reproductive health, the prevalence of disease, and behaviors that place them at risk. The fifth and last chapter summarizes the main findings of the study and provides recommendations for public policy.

We hope this report promotes the dialogue and stimulates share decision making in the binational context.

José Luis Ávila
Secretary General of the National Population Council

Xóchitl Castañeda
Director, Health Initiative of the Americas Berkeley School of Public Health University of California
Chapter I. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Mexican Youth in the United States

This chapter provides an overview of the volume, trends, and characteristics of the Mexican youth population ages 12 to 29 residing in the United States. It presents data on their sociodemographic profile, family conditions and financial situation in order to identify what are the factors that shape and affect their access to health services and health behavior. Bearing in mind the fact that the profound social inequities in the United States have an ethnic and racial basis, the study of the Mexican youth population is carried out from a comparative perspective with U.S.-born youth and other immigrants born in other countries and parts of the world.

Numbers and Trends

Mexicans are the largest group of immigrants in the United States

From its founding as a nation until recently, the United States has received large numbers of immigrants from different regions and countries and has the largest number of resident immigrants in the world. U.S. statistics show that between 1970 and 2000, the number of immigrants living in the country reflected a significant increase in both absolute and relative terms, rising from 10.5 to 33.1 million persons, accounting for 5.2% and 11.7% of the population during this period. In 2010, there were 42.4 million immigrants, equivalent to 13.7 per cent of the total U.S. population (Figure 1).

The constant influx of immigrants from different countries and at different times in U.S. history has resulted in significant changes in the ethnic composition and age and sex structure of American society. Whereas in 1970 nearly two thirds of the 10.5 million immigrant residents in the United States were of European origin (60%), currently over half the foreign-born population is from a Latin American or Caribbean country (51%); approximately 28% were born in Mexico. Mexico is not only the largest sender of immigrants to the United States, but also contributes more immigrants than any other region in the world (Figure 2).
The predominance of the Mexican immigrant population over other nationalities can be explained by the geographical proximity between Mexico and the United States, which has facilitated the migratory flow between the two countries. It is also due to the demand for labor by the U.S. economy for the past century and to the U.S. government’s immigration policies, which have affected the growth of the Mexican population in the United States, both documented and undocumented. According to the U.S. Census, during the period between 1980 and 2000, the number of Mexican residents in the United States doubled from 2.2 million in 1980 to 4.4 million in 1990, nearly doubling again during the following decade to 8.1 million in 2000. Currently, nearly 12 million persons born in Mexico and approximately 21 million second-and third-generation persons of Mexican descent reside in the United States (Figure 3). To give an idea of the scope of these 12 million Mexicans living in the United States, it is important to reflect that their number is greater than the total population of almost any of the states in the U.S. (44 of the 50 states have populations less than 12 million).

![Figure 2. Immigrant population in the United States by region or country of birth, 1970-2010](source)

*Selected countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

**Young Mexicans in the context of migration in the United States**

Within this context, it is important to highlight the importance of the immigration of young Mexicans under the age of 30. They are a segment of the population that arrives in the United States in search of better opportunities for their development and personal growth. Between 1996 and 2006, the number of young Mexicans between 12 and 29 years of age rose from 2.5 to 3.6 million, representing an accumulated increase of 39% in just ten years. After that period, the Figure remained above 3.6 million, subsequently falling to 3.2 million in 2010 (Figure 4). This drop is linked to the decline in Mexican international migration as a result of the U.S. economic crisis that started in 2008.

![Figure 3. Population of Mexican origin in the United States, 1900-2010](source)


---

1 In order to describe the target population, the authors adopted the definition of youth established by the National Youth Population Institute (IMJUVE), understanding by youth persons between the ages of 12 and 29.
The demographic, economic, and social contribution of young Mexican immigrants is magnified further if one includes the contingent of young people born in the United States, who are the offspring of Mexican immigrants, in other words, second- and third-generation youths. In 2000, this demographic group totaled 4.4 million and since then has increased considerably to 7.0 million in 2010 (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Young Mexican population ages 12 to 29 in the United States by year of arrival in that country, 1996-2010


Mexican youths, both immigrants and those of Mexican origin, constitute a social group of growing demographic importance in the United States. In particular, the demographic structures of the U.S. population and Mexican migrants and their offspring complement each other. The concentration of the Mexican population in potentially productive and reproductive ages tends to offset the demographic shortfall in the U.S. population (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Population pyramid of Mexican and U.S.-born in the United States, 2010


The demographic, economic, and social contribution of young Mexican immigrants is magnified further if one includes the contingent of young people born in the United States, who are the offspring of Mexican immigrants, in other words, second- and third-generation youths. In 2000, this demographic group totaled 4.4 million and since then has increased considerably to 7.0 million in 2010 (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Population ages 12 to 19 of Mexican origin in the United States, 2000-2010


Figure 5. Population ages 12 to 19 of Mexican origin in the United States, 2000-2010


Young people born in Mexico and of Mexican origin: the largest group among the youth population living in the United States.


Since contemporary migration from Mexico is predominantly labor-based, the population of Mexican origin has a very young age structure in comparison with non-Hispanic U.S.-born whites in the United States. In 2010, approximately 27% of Mexicans in the U.S. and 33% of the offspring of U.S.-born Mexican immigrants were aged between 12 and 29. These figures are similar to those of Central American and U.S.-born African-Americans, who account for 26% and 29% of the population within this age range, respectively. Conversely, among non-Hispanic U.S.-born whites and immigrants from other regions in the world, the percentage of youths is much lower: 23% and 19% respectively (Figure 7).
The higher concentration of the youth population of Mexican origin ages 12 to 17 can be explained by the high growth rates of this demographic group in recent years. Between 2005 and 2010, the number of young persons of Mexican origin born in the United States grew at an annual rate of 5%. This rate is significantly higher than those of the U.S.-born non-Hispanic white and African-American youth population (0.3 and 0.7%, respectively). By contrast, the youth population born in Mexico and Central America reported a negative growth rate (-3.3% and -3.4%, respectively). This decline, as already mentioned, is closely linked to the drop in labor migration from those countries between 2008 and 2010 (Figure 9).

These Figures show the importance of the children of Mexican migrants in U.S. population growth. An analysis of the growth rates by age group shows that in 2005 and 2010, young people of Mexican origin are the only group with positive growth rates at all ages in the 12 to 29 year age range. For example, the youngest age group, corresponding to U.S.-born descendants of migrants ages 12 to 17, registers a growth rate of nearly 4% annually (Figure 10). This situation has sparked concern among certain conservative groups in the United States about the possible effects that the immigrant population and their offspring could have on the characteristics of the U.S. population.

Figure 8. Youth population in the United States, by age group, region of origin and ethnic group or race, 2010

Figure 10. Annual growth rate of youth population in the United States, by age group, region of origin and ethnic group or race, 2005-2010

Over half the youth population living in the United States who were born in Mexico are men

The distribution by sex among the population of young people born in the United States is normally approximately 50% for each sex. Conversely, among Mexican immigrants in the U.S., approximately six out of every ten young persons are men (58.3%), similar to the distribution of young immigrants from Central America. This reflects the fact that historically, the migratory flow towards the United States has mainly comprised men, given the fact that migratory attraction is predominantly labor-based. However, increasing numbers of Mexican women have begun to participate in international migration (Figure 11).

A high percentage of Mexican young are married or living with their partners

Being married or living with a partner is more common among young Mexicans than among the U.S.-born population and other immigrants, with just over 45% living in marital or consensual unions. A similar situation can be observed among the young Central American population, in which the percentage of young people either married or living with their partners is 42%. It is important to note that approximately 5% of young Mexican and Central American immigrants who are members of a couple do not live in the same household as their partners. They are probably temporary immigrants who left their spouses or partners in their place of origin. Conversely, over 55% of U.S.-born youths are single, with the highest proportion (77%) being among African-Americans (Figure 12).
Young Mexican immigrants are located in all regions of the United States

Nearly every state in the United States has Mexican-born youths among its residents. However, 63% of Mexican youths are concentrated in just four states. In order of importance, they are: California (35.3%), Texas (17.6%), Illinois (6.2%), and Arizona (4%). This pattern of geographical concentration of the Mexican youth population can be explained by the fact that these states have traditionally received large numbers of Mexican immigrants, during which Mexicans have formed communities distinguished by their ethnic identity.

Overall, young Mexican immigrants represent over 5% of the total youth population in those same states, together with New Mexico, Nevada, and Oregon (Map 1).


Portal de la Ley de Fomento para el Progreso, Alivio y Educación para Menores Extranjeros (Development, Relief and Education of Aliens Minors Act "DREAM ACT"), en http://dreamact.info/


