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Immigration: Myths and Facts

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This article is from an earlier iteration of Diálogo which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

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I am continually surprised at how myths are perceived as facts. This holds particularly true given the current dialogue on immigration. Several recent analyses by the Latino Institute dispel common myths on the status of immigrants. "Selected Statistics on Illinois Immigrants" presents the "facts" to counter some of these misperceptions.

Myths and Facts About Immigrants

Myth: All immigrants are Latino.
Fact: Forty percent of metro-Chicago’s Latino population is composed of immigrants, and 37% of all immigrants are from a Latin American country. Said another way, 60% of all Latinos are United States citizens, and 63% of all immigrants are from world regions such as Europe, and Asia. In fact, the second largest group of immigrants is from Poland, followed by the Philippines, and then Germany.

Myth: Too many immigrants are on welfare.
Fact: In Chicago in 1989, immigrants were substantially less likely to receive public assistance income ("welfare") than non-immigrants. Approximately 3.9% of immigrants in Chicago had public assistance, income compared to 9.7% of non-immigrants.

Myth: Immigrants use more than their share of public services.
Fact: Overall, immigrants in the United States pay more in taxes every year -- $25 billion more -- than they use in government services, according to the Urban Institute. A disproportionate amount of taxes paid by immigrants, however, flows to the federal government rather than to state and local governments.

Myth: Immigrants are a "drain" on the economy.
Fact: Some 67.9% of immigrants in Chicago was in the labor force in 1990, compared to 62.9% of non-immigrants. Immigrants fill key roles within the Chicago area labor market, comprising 28.6% of physicians residing in Chicago, and 37.4% of Chicagoans employed in the manufacturing sector.

Myth: Immigrants are reluctant to learn English.
Fact: As a group, immigrants’ English proficiency increases steadily with length of residence. English is spoken exclusively or fluently by approximately 67.0% of pre-1991 immigrants, 75.0% of pre-1980 immigrants and 80.3% of pre-1970 immigrants.

The Latino Institute is a not-for-profit organization that through research, training, and advocacy seeks to empower individuals and groups serving the Latino community of Chicago. As part of a larger immigration project, the Latino Institute’s research efforts have also led to an analysis of the "non-citizen" population and the entire immigrant community of the Chicago metropolitan area. These publications provide additional "facts" which document the contributions of immigrants:

- Hopes and Dreams: A Statistical Profile of the Non-Citizen Population of Metropolitan Chicago;
- Indicators for Understanding: A Profile of Metro Chicago’s Immigrant Community.

For a copy of any of these analyses, please contact:
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