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RESEARCH BRIEF

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International Volunteerism in the United States, 2004-2010

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Between 800,000 and 1,100,000 individuals reported volunteering internationally each year from 2004 to 2010. Young, white, college graduates with higher-incomes, employed, and married people were the most frequent candidates for volunteer service abroad. The majority of international volunteers served with a religious organization.

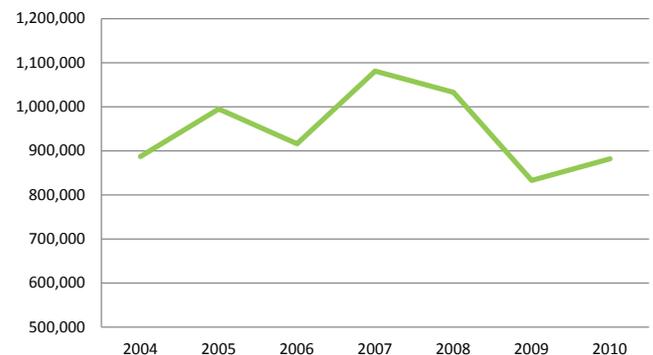
Data for this report were gathered from the September 2004 through September 2010 volunteer supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS)—a monthly survey of approximately 60,000 households. The volunteer supplement includes questions about service performed domestically and abroad. Two items specifically assess the rate and frequency of international volunteer service. More detailed information about sampling, definitions, and analysis can be found under Methodological Notes at the end of this report.

Prevalence and Service Duration

Volunteers serving internationally increased about 25% from 2004 to 2007. In contrast, from 2007 to 2009 the number of international volunteers declined by nearly 250,000; about 30% (see Appendix A and Figure 1). In 2010, nearly nine-hundred thousand people (881,797) reported volunteering internationally—a slight increase from 2009. The volunteer supplements do not have an accurate measure of service duration. However, of those volunteers who spent most or all of their volunteering time abroad, 45% spent 2 weeks or less

abroad (for a full breakdown see Appendix E).

Figure 1: Prevalence of International Volunteers from 2004 to 2010



Prevalence by Selected Demographics

Gender

Between 2004 and 2010, slightly more women reported volunteering internationally than men (51% and 49% respectively). However, among those who volunteered domestically or abroad, men were more likely than women to spend their volunteer time abroad.¹



Age

Young people aged 15 to 24 years old volunteered internationally most frequently (27%), followed by those aged 45 to 54 (20%). Participation of older adults 65 years or older had the greatest growth since 2008; increasing from around 88,000 in 2008 to around 127,000 in 2010—an increase of about 44% (see Figure 2). Conversely, young people aged 15-24 declined the most since 2008; decreasing from over 300,000 in 2008 to around 230,000 in 2010 - a 30% decrease (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: International Volunteers by Age Group 2004 through 2010

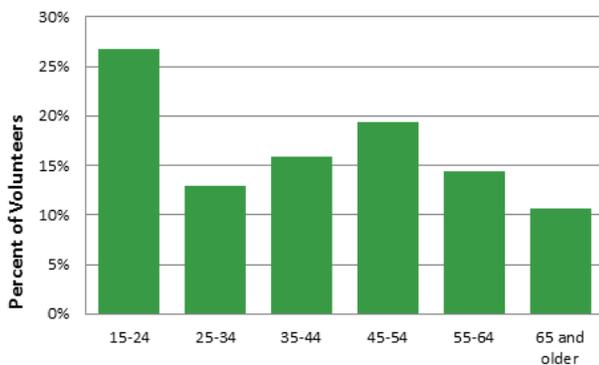
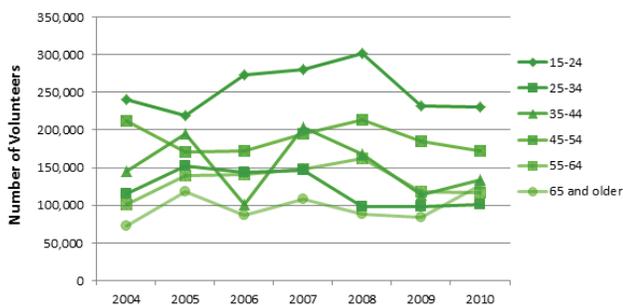


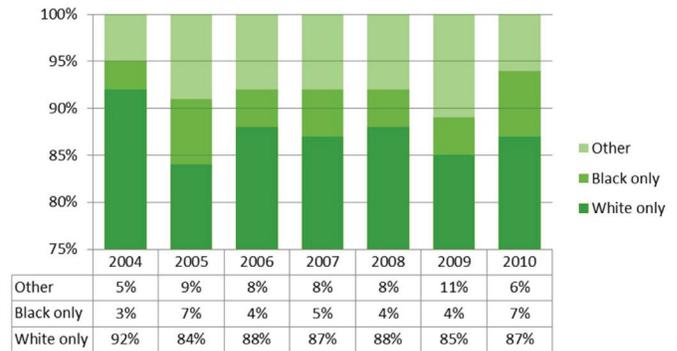
Figure 3: Number of International Volunteers by Age Group 2004 through 2010



Race & Ethnicity

From 2004 to 2010, considerably more white individuals reported volunteering abroad (87%), compared to those of other racial groups (13%). There does not appear to be a clear trend in volunteering year to year by racial group (see Figure 4).

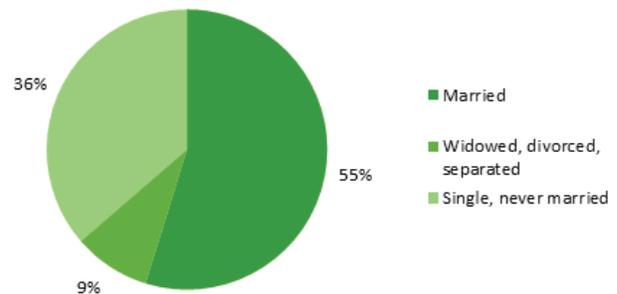
Figure 4: Percentage of International Volunteers by Racial Group, 2004 through 2010



Marital Status & Dependent Children

More than one half of volunteers were married (55%), and about three in ten were single and never married. The remaining 9% were divorced, separated or widowed. Three in four volunteers did not have children younger than 18 years of age living in the household (see Figure 5).

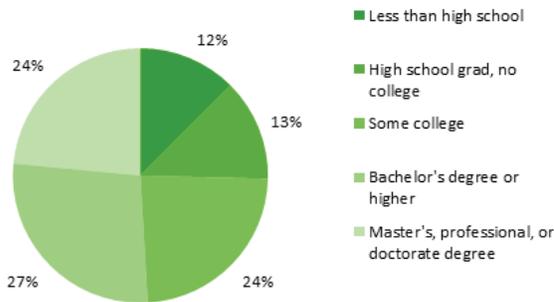
Figure 5: International Volunteers by Marital Status, 2004-2010



Education

Volunteers with higher education were more likely to volunteer abroad.² About one quarter (27%) of all international volunteers had a bachelor's degree. An additional one quarter had an advanced master's, professional or doctorate degree (24%). Three out of four volunteers had at least some college. Among the 25% that had not started college, more than half were under 24 years old (see Figure 6).

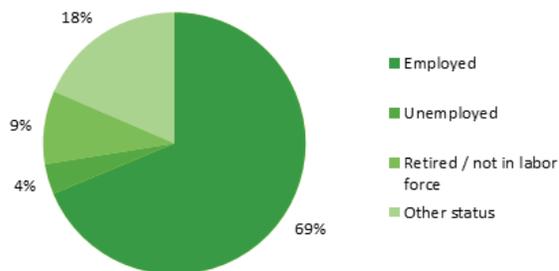
Figure 6: International Volunteers by Education, 2004-2010



Employment Status

About seven out of ten volunteers were employed part or full-time (69%). A small number of unemployed persons volunteered abroad (4%). The remaining 27% of international volunteers were retired, disabled, or otherwise not in the labor force. Of those unemployed, 40% were less than 24 years old (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: International Volunteers by Employment Status, 2004-2010



Income

Nearly one in three volunteers (32%) lived in households earning incomes of \$100,000 or more. More income was a significant predictor of volunteer status (see Figure 8).³ Nearly seven out of ten volunteers (67%) lived in households earning more than \$50,000 per year. Although 9% of volunteers came from households earning less than \$20,000 per year, many of these low-income volunteers (40%) were under 24 years old. Notably, between 2008 and 2009 when people from households earning moderate to higher incomes volunteered less, those from lower-income households (less than \$30,000) volunteered more (see Figure 9).

Figure 8: International Volunteers by Household Income, 2004-2010

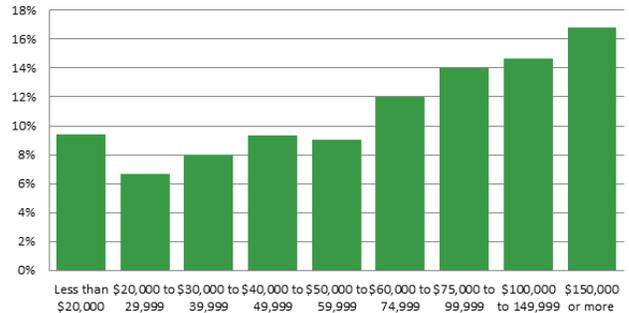
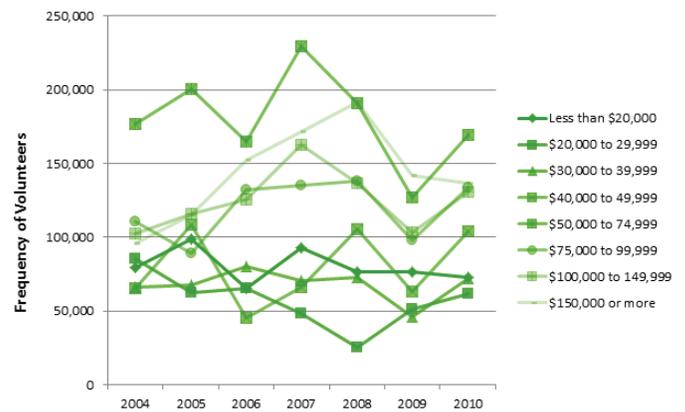


Figure 9: Number of International Volunteers by Income, 2004-2010



Number and Types of Organizations Sponsoring the Volunteer

Respondents were asked the type of organization they volunteered with. Due to the nature of data collection, it was not possible to isolate the type of organization by type of volunteer experience. Therefore, the type of organization sponsoring the international volunteer experience, specifically, is not known. To mitigate this issue, this section presents data from those who reported spending “all or almost all” of their time volunteering internationally.

For those who spent all or almost of their time volunteering internationally, 44% volunteered with a religious organization. This figure was significantly higher than for those who only volunteered domestically; with only 35% of domestic volunteers participating through a religious organization. Social or community service organizations accounted

for the next most frequent type at 11%, followed closely by children's education or recreational groups at 9% (see Appendix B).

Types of activities performed in the international volunteer's main organization varied widely (see Appendix F). The most common activities of volunteers who spent most or all of their time volunteering abroad included tutoring or teaching (27%), general labor (27%), mentoring youth (26%), and providing counseling or medical care (22%)

Summary and Conclusion

Each year, around one million individuals reported volunteering abroad. It seems that fluctuations in volunteer rates from year to year may be associated with the national economy but more research is needed. Currently available data make it difficult to determine the type of organization that sponsored the volunteer experience and the activities volunteer performed. Greater specificity is also needed in this area. Therefore, this report provides a limited picture of international volunteer service in the US population and the characteristics of those who engage in international volunteerism.

Young people aged 24 and under were the age group most likely to volunteer internationally. However, their participation has decreased significantly since 2008. In contrast, the number of older adults over age 65 that volunteer has increased since 2008. It is possible that opportunities or incentives to volunteer may have changed over this period.

Less volunteering abroad by people with lower incomes may indicate less access to international volunteer service. It is unknown why individuals from households earning between \$75,000 and \$100,000 had lower volunteer rates than other higher income groups. Individuals with the highest volunteer rates were under 24 years old, had no dependent children at home, and made less than \$20,000, suggesting that perhaps these individuals were students.

Higher education was strongly associated with service abroad. Those in college may have had greater exposure to international volunteer opportunities or may simply have stronger motivations to engage in international service. Most of those who volunteered abroad but did not have college experience were in the youngest age category; thus, one could deduce they were still in high school or had not yet entered college.

Although demographic data offer a description of

the volunteers, data on types of organizational sponsors and volunteer activities are not sufficient to draw conclusions. The ability to associate these variables with the type of volunteer experience would improve understanding of international volunteerism in the US population and establish a benchmark from which to study volunteer status, form, and function over time. Overall, these data are essential for understanding the field, identifying dimensions for further study, and generating implications for program and policy development.

Endnotes

1. After factoring in sampling bias among volunteers, men were more likely to volunteer internationally ($\chi^2 = 127$, $p < .001$, $df = 1$).
2. $\text{Wald}\chi^2 = 16.74$, $p < .001$, $df = 1$
3. $\text{Wald}\chi^2 = 7.32$, $p < .01$, $df = 1$

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges Amanda Moore McBride and Julia Stevens for their help and editorial assistance.

Appendix A: Frequency of international volunteers, 2004 through 2010

Year	Frequency
2004	887,120
2005	995,086
2006	915,923
2007	1,080,981
2008	1,032,780
2009	832,668
2010	881,797
Total	6,626,355

Appendix B: Type of main organization for volunteers who spent all or almost all of their time volunteering internationally 2007 through 2010

Type of Organization	Frequency	Percent ¹
Religious org.	117,762	48.0%
Social and community service	20,742	8.4%
Children's educational or sports	16,609	6.8%
Hospital, clinic, or healthcare	15,935	6.5%
Some other type of org.	12,207	5.0%
International org.	8,968	3.7%
Environmental or animal care	8,648	3.5%
Health research or health	8,415	3.4%
Youth services group	7,435	3.0%
Cultural or arts org.	5,546	2.3%
Other educational group	4,353	1.8%
Political party or advocacy	3,356	1.4%
Sports or hobby group	501	0.2%
Missing	15,055	6.1%

1. Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Appendix C: Number and percentage of those over age 15 volunteering abroad, 2004 through 2010 (weighted CPS volunteer supplement data, numbers in thousands)

Categorical variable	Volunteered internationally		Volunteered nationally only ¹	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender				
Men	3,245	49.0%	185,704	42.1%
Women	3,382	51.0%	255,620	57.9%
Age group by decade				
15-24	1,777	26.8%	64,572	14.6%
25-34	858	12.9%	64,944	14.7%
35-44	1,059	16.0%	93,296	21.1%
45-54	1,320	19.9%	92,998	21.1%
55-64	927	14.0%	64,484	14.6%
65 and older	685	10.3%	61,030	13.8%
Race				
White only	5,788	87.3%	379,067	85.8%
Black only	310	4.7%	38,760	8.8%
Other	529	8.0%	23,498	5.3%
Educational attainment				
Less than high school	827	12.5%	46,533	10.5%
High school graduate, no college ²	855	12.9%	92,281	20.9%
Some college ³	1,569	23.7%	128,092	29.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,817	27.4%	109,684	24.9%
Master's, professional, or doctoral	1,557	23.5%	64,735	14.7%
Marital status				
Single, never married	2,409	36.4%	101,188	22.9%
Married	3,629	54.8%	275,698	62.7%
Divorced, separated, widowed	588	8.9%	64,439	14.6%
Employment status				
Employed	4,553	68.7%	292,841	66.4%
Unemployed	247	3.7%	16,570	3.8%
Retired-not in labor force	600	9.1%	69,037	15.6%
Not in labor force-other ⁴	1,226	18.5%	62,878	14.2%
Income level ⁴				
less than \$20,000	563	9.4%	39,414	10.0%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	400	6.7%	32,719	8.3%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	476	8.0%	39,114	9.9%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	558	9.3%	34,437	8.7%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1,259	21.1%	86,592	21.9%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	837	14.0%	61,179	15.5%

Categorical variable	Volunteered internationally		Volunteered nationally only ¹	
\$100,000 to \$149,99	328	31.8%	15,596	25.3%
\$150,000 or more	1,005	16.8%	43,709	11.0%

1. Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding
2. Includes high school diploma or equivalent GED
3. Includes associates degree or no degree
4. Represents combined income of all family members in the household

Appendix D: Total proportion of all volunteer time spent internationally, among those who volunteered internationally, 2007 through 2010¹

	Frequency	Percent
Very little	1,384,954	36.2%
Less than half	778,286	20.4%
About half	350,093	9.2%
More than half	282,795	7.4%
All or almost all	1,019,454	26.7%
Don't know	8,361	0.2%

1. This measure is not included in volunteer supplements prior to the year 2007

Appendix E: Total duration of volunteering for those who completed all or almost all of their volunteer time internationally, 2007 through 2010

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 week	19,087	2.0%
1-2 weeks	408,327	42.8%
3-4 weeks	140,776	14.7%
1-2 months	81,768	8.6%
2-6 months	156,593	16.4%
More than 6 months	148,581	15.6%

1. This measure is not included in volunteer supplements prior to the year 2007

Appendix F: Type of activities completed in the main organization by those who completed all or almost all of their volunteer time internationally, 2007 through 2010

	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Tutor or teach	259,632	26.7%	712,687	73.3%
Engage in general labor	259,419	26.7%	712,901	73.3%
Mentor youths	256,132	26.3%	716,188	73.7%
Provide counseling, medical care, or protective services	211,739	21.8%	760,580	78.2%
Collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food	193,061	19.9%	779,258	80.1%
Collect, make, or distribute clothing, crafts, or goods	159,236	16.4%	813,084	83.6%
Fundraise or sell items to raise money	158,839	16.3%	813,480	83.7%
Provide professional or management assistance	104,228	10.7%	868,092	89.3%
Engage in music, performance, or other artistic activities	98,457	10.1%	873,862	89.9%
Provide general office services	84,821	8.7%	887,499	91.3%
Provide information, be an usher greeter or minister	82,569	8.5%	889,750	91.5%
Coach or referee	59,008	6.1%	913,311	93.9%
Any other type of activity	184,652	19.0%	787,668	81.0%

1. This measure is not included in volunteer supplements prior to the year 2007

Appendix G: Methodological Notes

Sampling

Data from the volunteer supplement were collected during one week in the month of September each year. Nearly 60,000 households are surveyed per year. All members of surveyed households were asked about their volunteer activities for the previous year. Those who answered “yes” were further asked whether “any of the volunteer work you’ve done since September 1st of last year [took] place in a foreign country, that is, outside the United States or any of its territories?” Because the CPS is designed to provide information for all members in a household, about 70% of responses were self-reports; the remaining 30% of responses were answered by another member of the household in proxy for inaccessible respondents.

Statistics obtained from the CPS contain both sampling and non-sampling error due to methods of data collection. A more detailed analysis of sampling error, including specific parameters for computing the standard error of various demographic characteristics can be found under attachment 16 of the CPS supplement file for each year.

Definitions

Volunteers in this report include civilian non-institutional individuals over 15 years of age who performed self-reported unpaid activities in an organization outside of the US and its territories at any point from September 1, of the previous year until the survey week in September of the next year. Voluntary activities include unpaid labor (excluding expenses) specific to a formal organization; specific examples of volunteer activities are listed in Appendix F. An organization includes one of 13 categories of structured groups that share a common goal (as listed in Appendix B). The organization under which the volunteers spent the majority of their voluntary activities during the year is classified as the main organization. If the individual volunteered for more than one organization, activities performed for the main organization may not necessarily refer to volunteer activities outside of the US.

Analysis

Tables in the appendices were constructed by crossing the international volunteerism variable with sample demographic variables and volunteer variables. Frequency, type, and length of volunteer activities include only those respondents answering affirmatively to volunteering internationally. Tables crossing specific demographic characteristics include both positive and negative responses to international volunteerism.

Raw data were cleaned and recoded as categorized in the tables, then weighted with the CPS volunteer supplement non-response weight, based on the standard CPS weighting program, to account for non-interviewed households and population distribution ratios. Final values as reported in the tables are weighted to approximate US population parameters for individuals volunteering for an organization in a foreign country. A more detailed description of weighting issues can be found under attachment two of the CPS supplement file for each year. See <http://www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html>

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