

Spotlight – August 2009

SOCIAL ISSUES

Down from the Mountain: Skill Upgrading and the Wages in Appalachia. *Institute for the Study of Labor.* June 2009.

The report compares Appalachia to other parts of the U.S., and finds that gaps in both skill levels and returns account for the lack of high wage male workers. For women, skill shortages are important across the distribution. Because rural wage gaps are insignificant, the results suggest that widening wage inequality between Appalachia and the rest of the U.S. owes to a shortage of skilled cities. [ARTICLE 652](#)

To Walk the Earth in Safety. *U.S. Department of State.* July 8, 2009.

The report summarizes the accomplishments of the U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program. In 2008, the Department of State provided \$123.1 million in mine clearance and weapons destruction assistance to 35 countries. Among the report's success stories is Cambodia, where U.S. humanitarian mine action has contributed to a 72% decline in explosives-related casualties. [ARTICLE 653](#)

America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2009. *Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.* July 2009.

The report is a compendium of indicators illustrating both the promises and the difficulties confronting young people. The report presents 40 key indicators on important aspects of children's lives. These indicators are family and social environment, economic circumstances, health care, physical environment and safety, behavior, education, and health. [ARTICLE 654](#)

Refugees and Asylees: 2008. *U.S. Department of Homeland Security.* June 2009.

The United States provides refuge to persons who have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution through two programs: one for refugees, persons outside the U.S., and one for asylees, persons in the U.S. The Office of Immigration Statistics' report provides information on the number of persons admitted to the United States as refugees or granted asylum in the United States in 2008. [ARTICLE 655](#)

Homes not Handcuffs: the Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities. *National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and National Coalition for the Homeless.* July 2009.

The housing and homelessness crisis in the U.S. has worsened over the past two years, particularly due to the current economic and foreclosure crises. People being evicted from foreclosed properties and the economic crisis in general have contributed to the growing homeless population. Even though most cities do not provide enough affordable housing, shelter space, and food to meet the need, many cities use the criminal justice system to punish people living on the street for doing things that they need to do to survive. [ARTICLE 656](#)

Social Protection for the Economic Crisis: the U.S. Experience by Gary Burtless. *Brookings Institution.* July 15, 2009.

As unemployment continues to climb, questions have arisen as to whether the stimulus package is working, how well it was designed and when it will have an impact. The author finds that efforts at creating a social safety net and fiscal relief for the states were appropriately targeted and are working. [ARTICLE 657](#)

Microfinance for Housing: Assisting the "Bottom Billion" and the "Missing Middle" by Sally R. Merrill. *Urban Institute.* Web posted July 15, 2009.

UN-HABITAT has calculated that one-sixth of humanity, 1 billion people, currently live in slums. In the next 30 years, this figure could rise to over 31% of the world's population. The vast majority of these households will never be able to afford, nor have access to, formal mortgage finance. Thus, increasing the availability of microfinance to help provide shelter and sanitation will become increasingly important. [ARTICLE 658](#)

Highlights of Foundation Yearbook. *Foundation Center*. July 2009.

The report provides an overview of the state of foundation giving in the current year and beyond, comparisons of foundation activities by foundation size, and breakdowns of foundation resources by geographic location and grant-maker type. [ARTICLE 659](#)

A Profile of Successful Pell Grant Recipients by Christina Chang Wei et al. *National Center for Education Statistics*. July 21, 2009.

The report describes characteristics of college graduates who received Pell Grants as compared to graduates who were not Pell Grant recipients. For both groups of graduates, data from the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study were analyzed to determine the time it took them to complete a bachelor's degree as well as the percentage who enrolled in graduate school within one year of college graduation. [ARTICLE 660](#)

Substance Abuse Prevention Dollars and Cents: a Cost-Benefit Analysis. *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*. July 21, 2009.

Communities can better develop comprehensive prevention strategies based on their unique needs and characteristics and use cost-benefit ratios to help guide their decisions with the help of the publication by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). [ARTICLE 661](#)

Aligning Temporary Immigration Visas with U.A. Labor Market Needs: the Case for a New System of Provisional Visas by Demetrios G. Papademetriou et al. *Migration Policy Institute*. July 24, 2009.

The report proposes creation of a new stream of visas to provide for the future flows of workers needed by the U.S. economy, stressing that comprehensive immigration reform legislation must include reform of the employment-based immigration system if it is to be effective. [ARTICLE 662](#)

A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S. by Allison Pond. *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*. July 24, 2009.

In Utah, July 24 is Pioneer Day, a state holiday commemorating the day in 1847 when the first Mormon settlers, led by Brigham Young, entered the Salt Lake Valley. Today, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other Mormon groups make up 58% of Utah's population and 1.7% of the total U.S. adult population, according to the report. [ARTICLE 663](#)

Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2008. *Institute of Medicine*. July 2009.

The report finds evidence that exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides used during the Vietnam War is associated with an increased chance of developing ischemic heart disease and Parkinson's disease for Vietnam veterans. The report is the latest in a congressionally mandated series by the IOM that reviews evidence on the health effects of these herbicides and a dioxin, TCDD, that contaminated some of the defoliants. [ARTICLE 664](#)

The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce by Jill Casner-Lotto et al. *The Conference Board*. July 14, 2009.

The report shows that U.S. employers continue to struggle with an ill-prepared workforce, finding new hires lack crucial basic and applied skills. For the most part, employer-sponsored readiness training is not successfully correcting these deficiencies. Almost half of respondents said they have to provide readiness training for new hires and the majority rates their programs as only "somewhat successful." [ARTICLE 665](#)

Unequal Employment: Racial Disparities in Unemployment Vary Widely by State by Algernon Austin. *Economic Policy Institute*. July 15, 2009.

The United States is suffering its most severe economic crisis in decades. This economic hardship is not shared equally, however, and unemployment rates in many states are far worse than the national figures would suggest, according to the study. The differences *between* states mask sometimes greater gaps *within* them, gaps defined by wide, sometimes growing disparities in unemployment rates by race and ethnicity. [ARTICLE 666](#)

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

Meme-Tracking and the Dynamics of the News Cycle by Jure Leskovec et al. *International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining*. July 2009.

Tracking new topics, ideas, and “memes” across the Web has been an issue of considerable interest, according to the paper. Recent work has developed methods for tracking topic shifts over long time scales, as well as abrupt spikes in the appearance of particular named entities. However, these approaches are less well suited to the identification of content that spreads widely and then fades over time scales on the order of days, the time scale at which we perceive news and events. [ARTICLE 698](#)

[Media as Global Diplomat](#). United States Institute of Peace. June 2009.

This report summarizes this day-long summit that explored the topic in a global dialogue through interactive panels, videoconferencing, a documentary screening, and the participation of bloggers from around the world to find recommendations for the new administration to reengage the world with a public diplomacy strategy adapted to the digital age. ***For a more detailed report please contact the American Reference Center**

The Media Landscape in Iran by Greg Bruno. *Council on Foreign Relations*. July 22, 2009.

Iranian authorities have reinforced controls on major domestic media following the upheaval over contested presidential election results in June 2009, says the report. One month after the disputed vote, nearly forty journalists remained in Iranian prisons. Yet Iran's media landscape, like many aspects of the theocratic regime, is riddled with contradictions. The flow of information into and within Iran has genuinely improved over the last decade. [ARTICLE 699](#)

Wireless Internet Use by John Horrigan. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. July 22, 2009.

The survey shows that 56% of adult Americans have accessed the internet by wireless means. The most prevalent way people get online using a wireless network is with a laptop computer. It also finds rising levels of Americans using the internet on a mobile handset. One-third of Americans have used a cell phone or Smartphone to access the internet for email, instant-messaging, or information-seeking. [ARTICLE 700](#)

Forcing the Net Through a Sieve: Why Copyright Filtering is not a Viable Solution for U.S. IPSS by Mehan Jayasuriya et al. *Public Knowledge*. July 2009.

The analysis shows that filtering of Internet content as advocated by big media companies will not work and will be harmful to the Internet. The report, “... examines for the first time the complex topic of content filtering from the technical, economic and legal perspectives. Content filtering fails in all of these tests. Filtering will not be the ‘magic bullet’ that the media moguls want, but it could degrade and alter the Internet for everyone while invading the privacy of every Internet user. There is no reason that any Internet Service Provider or media company should even think about engaging in such activity.” [ARTICLE 701](#)