

Financial Access for Immigrants – 2015 Remittances Survey Findings

Connecticut Summary

With partner nonprofit community organizations in Stamford, New Haven and Wallingford, Connecticut Appleseed conducted a 2015 survey of 172 respondents ([“Immigrant Finance – 2015 CT Remittance Report Data”](#)) to provide information about the use of remittances to send money home to families, relatives and friends by recent Connecticut immigrants.

Connecticut Appleseed collaborated with its sister Appleseed Centers in Texas, Nebraska, Kansas and Washington State in completing this survey to compile a broader nationwide picture ([“Sending Money Home”](#)) of immigrant remittance use to closely examine implementation of a late 2013 federal rulemaking on remittances by the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau (CFPB). The Appleseed network’s collaborative inquiry was assisted financially by the Ford Foundation.

Below are a few highlights from the Connecticut and 5-state results:

Connecticut survey respondents primarily sent money to these countries:

Guatemala (25%)
Mexico (15%)
Dominican Republic (15%)
Ecuador (11%)
Colombia (9%)
Other (25%)

The Importance, Cost and Users of Transfer Services in Connecticut:

- 69% of 2015 respondents use a store (e.g., Western Union) to send money home*
- 30% send more than \$500 home each time they remit
- 65% send \$200 or less home each time they remit

*While Connecticut Appleseed learned in our 2009 survey of immigrant finances ([“Financial Access – 2009 Immigrant Survey – Summary”](#)) that 65% of respondents thought it “very important” for a bank or credit union to offer wire transfer/direct account transfer services to banks where their relatives live, just 9% of 2015 respondents said they use banks or credit unions to send money to their families – only 9%.

Slight Improvement in Consumer Confidence since CFPB Rulemaking Implemented

20% of CT’s respondents reported that their confidence in sending money home improved either “greatly” or “somewhat” over the past year, compared to 21% of respondents in the four other states surveyed.

8% of CT's respondents reported that their remittance fees had gone down over the past year, while 28% reported their fees had gone up – slightly more than 24% increase reported across the other four states surveyed.

Plenty of Room for Improvement in Connecticut: Written Disclosures Are Not Fully Understood

(Key disclosure components include: Transfer Amount; Fees, Exchange Rate, Taxes and a Statement of Rights)

- 80% of CT respondents understand “very well” or “well” what is included in the disclosure, whereas only 13% understood “not well” what is included - slightly more than respondents in the 4 other states surveyed (9%).
- 49% in CT do not remember receiving a statement of their rights in case of error in the transaction, slightly more than the 44% of survey respondents across the four other states surveyed.
- 43% of CT respondents report receiving a statement of their rights in case of error with the transaction – which compares with an average of 47% across the four other states surveyed.

Although most CT immigrant remitters do not experience problems sending money home, confidence in receiving fair and honest treatment from the money transfer service is not high.

- 76% of CT respondents reported no problems.
- 19% of CT respondents cited problems – whereas the average among the four other states was 11%.
- 35% in CT said “very confident” in receiving fair and honest treatment - this compares poorly with the average among other states of 54%.
- 55% in CT “somewhat” or “not at all” confident in receiving fair and honest treatment – substantially more than the 43% found across the four other states.

Focus Group Findings:

NeighborsLink Stamford (www.neighborslinkstamford.org) collaborated with CT Appleseed to conduct a focus group in October, 2015 to explore not only remittance use among their clients, but to ask for elaboration about immigrant finances in general.

The focus group revealed that accountability and transparency with remittances may have improved slightly, but the broader picture remains in place of substantial immigrant mistrust of mainstream financial institutions.

Notably, in addition to broad dissatisfaction with bank services and fees, Connecticut immigrants' trust in banks has not improved since Connecticut Appleseed surveyed almost 600 immigrants on this same question in 2009.