

FLORIDA:

Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Innovation, and Welcoming Initiatives in the Sunshine State

In Florida, there is no doubt that immigrant entrepreneurs and innovators play an important role. Immigrant entrepreneurs bring in additional revenue, create jobs, and contribute significantly to the state's economy. Highly skilled immigrants are vital to the state's innovation economy, and to the metropolitan areas within the state, helping to boost local economies. Furthermore, local government, business, and non-profit leaders recognize the importance of immigrants in their communities and support immigration through local "welcoming" and integration initiatives.

Immigrant entrepreneurs contribute significantly to Florida's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 286,144 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Florida,¹ and in 2010, 29.7 percent of all business [owners](#) in the state were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had a total net business [income](#) of \$13.3 billion, which is 23.8 percent of all net business income in the state.⁴
- A couple of Florida metro areas have relatively high levels of immigrant business ownership relative to the foreign-born share of their populations.
 - In 2010, of the 25 largest U.S. metropolitan areas by total population, Miami had the highest foreign-born share of business owners: 45 [percent](#) of business owners in Miami are foreign-born, while 39 percent of Miami's total population consists of immigrants.⁵
 - The immigrant share of business owners in Tampa in 2010 was 17 [percent](#), while 13 percent of Tampa's total population was foreign-born.⁶
- Florida is currently home to seven of the 10 largest [Latino-owned](#) businesses in the country, many of which were founded by immigrants.⁷ With their Central and South Florida location, a large number of these firms play a valuable role boosting U.S. exports.
 - Quich Foods, for example, is a distributor of refrigerated and frozen foods and was originally founded by a Cuban immigrant.
 - Brightstar Corporation, founded by an immigrant from Guatemala, is one of the largest cell phone distributors in the world.⁸

- Immigrant [entrepreneurs](#) have been at the heart of many of Florida's economic success stories. WellCare Health Plans, originally founded by an Indian cardiologist who grew up in Zambia, is a Florida-based Fortune 500 health insurance firm.⁹
 - Several other firms based in the state, such as the transportation giant CSX, the communications firm Harris Corporation, and Office Depot also had at least one founder who either immigrated to the United States or was the child of an immigrant. Together, these firms employ more than 46,000 people today and bring in almost \$80 billion in annual revenue.¹⁰

Highly skilled immigrants are vital to Florida's innovation economy.

- Currently, high-skilled immigrant workers [contribute](#) to the success of many Florida-based companies and institutions with a significant presence in the state, including the University of Florida, System Soft Technologies, University of Miami, DGN Technologies, Management Health Systems, Florida International University, Florida Hospital, Siemens Energy Inc., University of Central Florida, Florida State University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Verizon Data Services, UST Global Inc., Nicoinfo Systems Inc., and the University of South Florida.¹¹
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 12,636 H-1B labor certification [applications](#) in Florida, with an average annual wage of \$62,269,¹² which is higher than Florida's median household [income](#) of \$47,827 or per capita income of \$26,733.¹³
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 18,100 new jobs in Florida by 2020.¹⁴ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$9 billion to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$8.7 billion.¹⁵ The following are [examples](#) of metropolitan area demand for high-skilled foreign-born workers.
 - The Jacksonville metropolitan area had 1,283 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 77.7 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations.¹⁶
 - The Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach metropolitan area had 7,094 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 35.2 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹⁷
 - The Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford metropolitan area had 1,365 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 47.3 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹⁸
 - The Tallahassee metropolitan area had 335 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 74.3 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.¹⁹

- o The Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metropolitan area had 2,126 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) in 2010-2011, with 71.2 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in STEM occupations.²⁰

While the numbers are compelling, they don't tell the whole story.

- In Florida, immigrants open businesses in communities throughout the state. From the historic immigrant businesses of Miami, to new immigrant restaurants, markets, and other services in Orlando and many other cities, towns, and suburbs across Florida, immigrant entrepreneurs are providing goods and services and creating jobs in local places.
- Due to its ties to Latin American trade and commerce, and its long history of welcoming immigrants from Latin America and other points of origin,²¹ Miami and other south Florida cities contain many examples of immigrant-owned businesses.
 - o [Researchers](#) of place-based immigrant entrepreneurship suggest that “it is not simply the number of foreigners that makes Miami ‘the Capital of Latin America.’ Miami’s Cubans, and to a lesser degree, some of its other Latino groups have achieved unprecedented economic...power.”²²
 - o In the Miami and Fort Lauderdale areas of South Florida, the Vilariño family, originally from Cuba, has owned and operated the popular Las Vegas Cuban Cuisine [restaurants](#) for nearly 30 years.²³ Today, there are over a dozen locations in and around the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach metropolitan area, with six opening within the past three years.
 - o In Doral, Bok H. An opened Sakura, his first Japanese [restaurant](#), in 1997, with another location in Miami-Dade County opening two years later. He later remodeled and expanded Sakura, renaming it Soo-Woo Japanese and Korean Steakhouse. An opened three additional restaurants within the past year in several neighborhoods such as Pembroke Pines and Country Walk.²⁴
- In Central Florida, Orlando and its surrounding suburbs are home to vibrant and growing suburban immigrant neighborhoods, which include immigrant-owned restaurants, markets, retail, and other goods and services providers.
 - o In Pine Hills, a new “Chinatown” [development](#) has sprung up along west Colonial Drive near Pine Hills Marketplace.²⁵ This 50-store development includes a variety of Asian-owned restaurant, market, retail, and service establishments, including First Oriental Supermarket, a Taiwanese bakery, Beijing Acupuncture, and various [other](#) businesses.²⁶
 - o Chinese immigrant Wai Kuen Pang’s company, Chinatown Development LLC, which has also developed similar shopping areas in Philadelphia, played a role in cultivating interest in the Orlando Chinatown [development](#) project.²⁷

- o The suburban Orlando Chinatown also [blends](#) with other nearby ethnic centers, including a Vietnamese shopping area and the Caribbean Supercenter across the street.²⁸
- o In Winter Park, Troy and Katja Gage immigrated from Canada around five years ago and started their grocery [business](#), Eat More Produce. Their store provides community members the opportunity to purchase locally sourced and organic produce. Since they opened the business in 2008, the owners have more than doubled revenue and employ more than 20 people in the local community.²⁹

Some localities have begun recognizing and supporting immigration through local “welcoming,” integration initiatives, and resolutions.

- Presently in Florida, local immigrant integration initiatives are typically led by place-specific non-profit, religious, and advocacy immigrant resource centers and organizations.
 - o **Jupiter: El Sol Jupiter’s Neighborhood Resource Center**, which [opened](#) in 2006, [provides](#) the local community with a place for native-born residents and immigrants to come together and actively engage in the two-way process of immigrant integration.³⁰
 - o Other examples have been found in recent years in places such as **Homestead**, **Lake Worth**, and **Loxahatchee**, and some communities, such as **West Palm Beach**, have expressed interest in creating similar local initiatives.³¹ However, funding and broader community engagement is often an issue in the process.
- Additionally, some cities have passed resolutions in support of comprehensive immigration reform and immigrant integration in their local communities. These actions are examples of local leaders recognizing the importance of immigrants in their communities.
 - o **North Miami:** The **City of North Miami** passed a [resolution](#) by the Mayor and City Council, in support of comprehensive immigration reform.³² North Miami’s resolution is one example of the [many cities](#) across the country in support of comprehensive immigration reform.³³
 - o Other Florida cities passing similar resolutions in support of comprehensive immigration reform in 2013 include [Margate](#), [Doral](#), [Lauderhill](#), [Sunrise](#), and [Pompano Beach](#). Davie, Oakland Park, Weston, and Fort Lauderdale may also [consider](#) similar resolutions.³⁴

Endnotes

¹ Robert W. Fairlie, [Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Success in the United States](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2012).

² Ibid.

³ The sample of new immigrant business owners during the time period includes individuals who do not own a business in the first survey month and report starting a business in the second survey month with 15 or more hours worked per week.

⁴ Robert W. Fairlie, [*Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Success in the United States*](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2012).

⁵ David Dyssegaard Kallick, [*Immigrant Small Business Owners: A Significant and Growing Part of the Economy*](#) (Washington, DC: Fiscal Policy Institute, 2012).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Partnership for a New American Economy, [*Map the Impact of Immigrants Across America: Florida*](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2013).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Neil G. Ruiz, Jill H. Wilson, and Shyamali Choudhury, [*The Search for Skills: Demand for H-1B Immigrant Workers in U.S. Metropolitan Areas*](#) (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2012); U.S. Department of Labor.

¹² Office of Foreign Labor Certification, [*Annual Report: October 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011*](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, [*State & County Quick Facts: Florida*](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

¹⁴ Frederick R. Treyz, Corey Stottlemeyer, and Rod Motamedi, [*Key Components of Immigration Reform: An Analysis of the Economic Effects of Creating a Pathway to Legal Status, Expanding High-Skilled Visas, and Reforming Lesser-Skilled Visas*](#) (Amherst, MA: Regional Economic Models, Inc., 2013).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Neil G. Ruiz, Jill H. Wilson, and Shyamali Choudhury, [*The Search for Skills: Demand for H-1B Immigrant Workers in U.S. Metropolitan Areas*](#) (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2012).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Heike C. Alberts, "The Multiple Transformations of Miami," in *Latinos in the New South: Transformations of Place*, edited by Heather A. Smith and Owen J. Furuseth (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006).

²² Qingfang Wang and Wei Li, [*Entrepreneurship, ethnicity and local contexts: Hispanic entrepreneurs in three U.S. southern metropolitan areas*](#), *GeoJournal* 63, 2-3, pp. 167-182, 2007.

²³ Miriam Valverde, [*Immigrants find their niche in restaurant businesses*](#), *Sun-Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Sun-Sentinel, February 15, 2013).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Babita Persaud, [*Chinatown on the rise*](#), *Orlando Sentinel* (Orlando, FL: Orlando Sentinel, July 13, 2007).

²⁶ Orlando Chinatown, [*Directory*](#), (Orlando: Orlando Chinatown, 2013).

²⁷ Babita Persaud, [*Chinatown on the rise*](#), *Orlando Sentinel* (Orlando, FL: Orlando Sentinel, July 13, 2007).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Troy Gage and Katja Gage, [*Clear the way for contributing immigrant business owners*](#), *Orlando Sentinel* (Orlando, FL: Orlando Sentinel, May 2, 2013).

³⁰ El Sol Neighborhood Resource Center, [*History and Background*](#) (Jupiter, FL: El Sol Neighborhood Resource Center, 2012). Program for Immigration, Religion, and Social Change, [*Immigrant Integration*](#) (Gainesville, FL: Program for Immigration, Religion, and Social Change, 2013).

³¹ Information from Jocelyn Skolnik, Executive Director of El Sol Neighborhood Resource Center, Jupiter, Florida, July 23, 2013.

³² City of North Miami, [*Resolution No. R-2013-27*](#) (North Miami, FL: City of North Miami, 2013).

³³ Indeed, at their 80th Annual Meeting in 2012, the United States Conference of Mayors, the official organization of the 1,304 cities in the U.S. with populations of 30,000 or more, adopted the "national new Americans initiative to promote U.S. citizenship at the federal, state, municipal, and community level" resolution. United States Conference of Mayors, [*A National New Americans Initiative to Promote U.S. Citizenship at the Federal, State, Municipal, and Community Level*](#) (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Mayors, 2012).

³⁴ Arun Sivasankaran, [*Lauderhill joins other cities in support of immigration reform*](#), *Sun-Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Sun-Sentinel, April 20, 2013).

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Florida

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$13.3
billion**

*in total net
business income*



286,144

*immigrants became new business
owners in Florida
between 2006-2010*

29.7%

*of business owners in
Florida are immigrants*

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