

Introduction

Arguably more than any other state in the U.S., Florida has long been a place that attracts immigrants, migrants from other states,¹ and domestic and international tourists alike. Over time, the state's economy and local communities have come to rely on this influx.

While not an exhaustive account, this fact sheet provides some critical facts about Florida's immigrants and their significant benefits to the state. It closes with commonsense policies Florida should prioritize to allow more immigrants to contribute.

Immigration Glossary

Asylee/asylum-seeker: Person in or entering the U.S. who is unable or unwilling to return to their nation of origin due to credible fear of persecution on basis of religion, nationality, or social or political group membership. Some asylee/ asylum-seekers are also refugees.

DACA recipient: Undocumented immigrant eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) program, granting temporary status and privileges to those brought here by parents/family before age 16 (who meet other requirements).

“Green card” holder: Immigrants who are legal permanent residents.

Immigrant: Person who leaves their nation of origin to settle into a new country.

Migrant: Person moving within or across borders, usually for economic reasons/ work (e.g., farm workers); seasonal workers are those in temporary farm work who do not move from permanent residence.

Refugee: Person entering the U.S. who is unable or unwilling to return to their nation of origin due to ongoing war, violence, or persecution.

Demographics and Diversity

- 4.3 million Floridians — more than 1 in 5 residents — are immigrants.
- Most Florida immigrants (57.4 percent or 2.48 million) identify as Hispanic or Latina/o.
- Florida has the second-highest share of Black immigrants in the United States: 713,600 (16.5 percent) of Florida's immigrants identify as Black or African American. Only New York has a higher Black immigrant representation.²
- The top five countries where Florida's immigrants arrived from are Cuba (23 percent of Florida immigrants), Haiti (8 percent), Colombia (6 percent), Mexico (6 percent), and Jamaica (5 percent).³

Residency

Most immigrants in Florida are naturalized U.S. citizens.

- The overwhelming majority of immigrant Floridians (77 percent, or 3.3 million) have made this state their long-term home for at least 10 years.⁴ Of those residents, two out of three have lived in the U.S. for more than 20 years.
- The majority of Florida's immigrants (55.9 percent) are naturalized United States citizens. This is higher than the national rate of immigrant citizenship (49.6 percent).⁵ Moreover, the number of immigrants who are undocumented — nationally and in Florida — has declined in recent years.^{6 7}

Contributions

Taxes

- Despite not being granted legal status and many of the public benefits that come along with it, Florida's undocumented immigrants have contributed over \$598 million annually in state and local taxes.⁸ This amount includes approximately \$77.6 million from DACA-eligible and DACA-recipient youth.⁹

Entrepreneurship

- Immigrants own 36 percent of Florida's small businesses. This share represents over 200,000 working-age immigrant Floridians.¹⁰

Education

- More than half of Florida's immigrant students (54 percent) are in college or graduate school. This equates to more than 281,000 tuition- and fee-paying Floridians.

Without immigrants — documented and undocumented — Florida's economy would be decimated.

Labor

- Immigrants make up more than 1 in 4 (28 percent) of Florida's 1.96 million frontline workers, who have been vital during COVID-19. These industries include health care; child and social services; public transit; trucking, warehouse, and postal services; and grocery, convenience, and drug stores.¹¹
- The majority of Florida's domestic workers (55.3 percent) are immigrants. Domestic workers care for and provide in-home cleaning services to families, children, people with disabilities, and older adults — a critical population in Florida.¹²
- Florida relies on 150,000 to 200,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers annually.¹³ Agriculture is one of the state's key industries, generating over \$7 billion in state revenue each year.¹⁴

Becoming a Welcoming State

Shared prosperity requires passing policies that allow everyone to work and participate fully. This is why cities and counties across the country have begun to extend an open invitation to immigrants looking to relocate and lay down roots. These “welcoming cities” are local governments who — recognizing the long-term benefits of including immigrants in their growth — implement commonsense solutions accordingly (e.g., financing/ entrepreneurship programs, culturally-appropriate services, information hubs).¹⁵ Alachua and Miami-Dade Counties are two Florida localities that have done so.¹⁶

During the 2022 legislative session, Florida can model this welcoming mentality statewide and pass the following:

- **SB 1838/HB 1463, “Student Financial Aid.”** Ensures Temporary Protected Status and DACA recipients eligible for in-state tuition are also eligible for state financial aid. For more information on this initiative, [click here](#).
- **SB 708/HB 415, “Native Language Assessments in Public Schools.”** Allows students enrolled in dual-language programs to take K-12 standardized assessments in Spanish, Haitian, or Portuguese so that their knowledge and skills can be more accurately reflected in their test scores.
- **SB 732/HB 887, “Heat Illness Prevention (In Outdoor Environment Industries).”** Provides training and education for agricultural and other outdoor employers and workers, highlighting the importance of water, shade, and rest in mitigating severe illness and death in the Sunshine State's increasingly hot environment.

Sustaining Florida's growth requires bringing everyone to the table.

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- ¹James Gregory, “Florida Migration History 1850-2017,” University of Washington America’s Great Migrations Project, Retrieved January 31, 2022, <https://depts.washington.edu/moving1/Florida.shtml>.
- ²United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates: Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-Born Populations,” 2019, <https://bit.ly/3scC0wz>.
- ³United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates: Place of Birth For the Foreign-Born Population In the United States,” 2019, <https://bit.ly/3v1Y7pL>.
- ⁴United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates: Selected Characteristics of the Foreign-Born Population By Period of Entry Into the United States,” 2019, <https://bit.ly/3v1ixPK>.
- ⁵Non-naturalized U.S. citizens may include refugees, asylees, undocumented immigrants, and legal permanent residents. See U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, *supra* note 5.
- ⁶Robert Warren, “In 2019, the US Undocumented Population Continued a Decade-Long Decline and the Foreign-Born Population Neared Zero Growth,” *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 9(1), April 26, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502421993746>.
- ⁷The most recent estimates of undocumented Floridians is 777,464, down by 8,338 people since 2010. See Center for Migration Studies, “Estimates of Undocumented and Eligible-to-Naturalize Populations by State,” 2021, <http://data.cmsny.org/>.
- ⁸Lisa Christensen Gee et al., “Undocumented Immigrants’ State and Local Tax Contributions,” Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, March 2017, <https://bit.ly/2RnXWXx>.
- ⁹Misha E. Hill and Meg Wiehe, “State & Local Tax Contributions of Young Undocumented Immigrants,” Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, April 30, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3eYHeH5>.
- ¹⁰U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, *supra* note 3. The U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey data used to determine business ownership only includes the “owner of non-incorporated business, professional practice, or farm” category/class of workers: <https://www.census.gov/topics/employment/industry-occupation/about/class-of-worker.html>. Unincorporated businesses are generally limited liability corporations (LLCs) and small businesses.
- ¹¹Alexis P. Tsoukalas, “Florida’s 2 Million Essential Workers: 5 Stark Realities and 5 Policy Solutions,” Florida Policy Institute, May 6, 2020, <https://www.floridapolicy.org/posts/floridas-2-million-essential-workers-5-stark-realities-and-5-policy-solutions>.
- ¹²Alexis P. Tsoukalas, “Undervalued Yet Indispensable: Florida’s Domestic Workforce,” Florida Policy Institute, August 4, 2021, <https://www.floridapolicy.org/posts/undervalued-yet-indispensable-floridas-domestic-workforce>.
- ¹³Florida Department of Health, “Migrant Farmworker Housing,” Updated March 9, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3fyZiqj>.
- ¹⁴University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture Research & Extension, “Florida: The Economic Contributions and Impacts of U.S. Food, Fiber, and Forest Industries,” Updated 2021, <https://economic-impact-of-ag.uark.edu/florida/>.
- ¹⁵Xi Huang and Cathy Yang Liu, “Welcoming Cities: Immigration Policy at The Local Government Level,” *Urban Affairs Review*, 54(1), November 23, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087416678999>.
- ¹⁶Welcoming America, “Welcoming Network Directory,” Updated 2021, <https://bit.ly/2SjclnF>.