

Miami Ranks 29th in Smoothing the Path for Immigrant Newcomers

By SUNSHINE STATE NEWS

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Citizenship Day panel in Miami

In a number of categories -- though certainly not all -- Miami is a good place for immigrants to feel welcome and to have an opportunity to experience the American dream, according to the findings of the first annual NAE Cities Index, a new national assessment of local integration policies and socioeconomic outcomes.

On Monday, Citizenship Day, hundreds of civic and business leaders, including members of Congress, mayors, city council members, and chamber of commerce executives, joined the New American Economy organization to release the NAE Cities Index -- the first comprehensive, national assessment of immigrant integration policy and socioeconomic outcomes in the largest 100 U.S. cities.

What impact immigrants are having on communities, and how well they are integrating, are two questions at the center of the national immigration debate. The NAE Cities Index provides the first comprehensive way to assess these questions and understand how immigrants and their destination communities are faring.

In celebration, Greater Miami elected leaders hosted a Monday press conference at Miami Dade College Wolfson Campus with Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, state Rep. Javier Fernandez, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Daniella Levine Cava, City of Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, and City of Doral Mayor Juan Carlos Bermudez to highlight the findings.

The NAE Cities Index examines 31 different policies and practices, as well as 20 different socioeconomic outcomes, to assess cities on their work to integrate newcomers. Assessment categories include government leadership, economic empowerment, inclusivity, community, and legal support, as well as job opportunities, economic prosperity, livability and civic participation.

Of the nation's 100 largest cities, Miami is in the top third, ranking No. 29 overall. Individual category scores include 5 out of 5 in economic empowerment and civic participation and 4 out of 5 in both inclusivity and government leadership

"Citizenship Day represents all that makes our nation great," said Miami Mayor Francis Suarez. "By coming together with local, state, and federal elected officials, we are demonstrating not only Miami's commitment, but our region's commitment to finding new ways to integrate immigrants. Together, we are focused on helping all those who want to attain U.S. citizenship and achieve the American Dream."

As part of the effort, NAE's comprehensive data on immigrants in Miami's economy was cited as a key reason for Miami to take action to encourage integration. At large, immigrants have substantial impact on the local economy:

- Immigrants in the Miami Metro Area pay \$13.3 billion in taxes every year
- There are 220,437 immigrant-owned businesses in the Miami metro
- In 2014, immigrant spending power was \$42.4 billion.

"This study shows South Florida is ahead of the curve; citizenship shouldn't be a partisan issue. Citizenship and having a right to vote in the country that you've chosen to be in is a privilege, one of the greatest privileges we are given as Americans. And we need to make sure the people coming to our country have an opportunity to develop as citizens, businesses and families because they are building the future of our economy," said City of Doral Mayor Juan Carlos Bermudez.

According to the study, smaller, more affordable cities top the socioeconomic outcomes category in the Index. St. Petersburg; Baton Rouge, La.; Newark, N.J.; Chula Vista, Calif.; and Henderson, Nev. -- each among the smallest third of the Index cities in terms of population -- took the top five socioeconomic outcome spots. These cities scored especially high in livability, pointing to smaller gaps in home ownership rates, health insurance rates, and educational attainment rates between immigrants and the U.S.-born.

For more information on the NAE Cities Index visit www.NewAmericanEconomy.org.