



OPPORTUNITY IN THE SUNSHINE STATE: CHARACTERISTICS OF RECENT MOVERS FROM PUERTO RICO TO FLORIDA



The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas—assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC, serving all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country. It has state and regional offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Phoenix, and San Antonio.

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Printed in the United States of America

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FROM PUERTO RICO TO FLORIDA**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This report was made possible through generous support from the Prudential Foundation. The views and conclusions expressed here are those of NCLR alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of our funders.





INTRODUCTION









The commonwealth of Puerto Rico is in a deep fiscal crisis and going through a period of significant economic hardship for the 3.5 million American citizens living on the island. Puerto Rico has lost more than one-quarter of a million jobs in recent years, the unemployment rate is twice the national average, and nearly half of the population lives below the federal poverty line.^{1,2} Residents are expected to face further adversity as Puerto Rico's private sector growth and investments lag, the public sector budget is strained by increased debt and other liabilities, and additional revenue-generating sources and options appear to dry up.³ Fiscal strain, economic decline, demographic change, and tight budgets will likely continue to increase job losses, cripple public transportation, close even more schools than the hundreds that have already shuttered, and threaten the provision of health care for thousands of residents.⁴ All families, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, are at risk of even deeper financial insecurity as the economy and the incomes of the population fail to grow appreciably.

Because of challenging economic, social, and fiscal conditions on the island, the flow of Puerto Ricans to the continental United States has increased to levels not seen in more than 50 years.⁵ In recent years, Florida has received the greatest number of Puerto Ricans moving from the island, and is now tied with New York as the state with the largest Puerto Rican population—about one million people in each state.⁶

As Puerto Rican movers seek opportunity on the mainland, they face significant disparities compared to the general Florida population and other Latinos.* Examining the status of newly arrived Puerto Ricans compared to other groups is critical to understand the effects of the crisis on individuals and how to improve their lives as they seek opportunity on the mainland. This statistical brief describes the population recently moving from Puerto Rico to Florida, includes an analysis of indicators that can provide an overview of the community's well-being, and offers considerations for public policies at the national and state level that can boost the economic security of Florida's Latino community, including recent movers from Puerto Rico. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) has a long history of working to improve opportunities for the Hispanic community and has a strong presence in the state of Florida that is grounded in the work of its Florida Affiliates.⁷ NCLR works in collaboration with this group of 14 Latino-serving organizations on a range of civic engagement activities, programs, and policy projects in Florida.

* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent. They may be of any race.

SNAPSHOT: RECENT PUERTO RICAN MOVERS COMPARED TO OTHER FLORIDA RESIDENTS, 2014

	Recent Movers ^c	Puerto Ricans ^d	All Latinos ^e	Florida ^f
 Population ^a	27,465	1,005,424	4.8 Million	19.8 Million
 Median age ^b	33 years old	33 years old	34 years old	41 years old
 Speak English very well or well ^b	58%	88%	73%	77%
 Have a bachelor's degree or higher ^b	17%	12%	15%	20%
 Have health insurance ^b	62%	79%	69%	80%
 Average personal income ^b	\$13,440	\$23,362	\$23,523	\$31,816
 Unemployment rate ^b	28%	12%	11%	11%
 Live in poverty ^b	40%	23%	23%	17%

Notes:

^a NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2014 one-year estimate.

^b NCLR calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates, rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

^c “Recent movers” includes individuals who reported moving from Puerto Rico to Florida within the past year.

^d This category includes any individual identifying as Puerto Rican, including those who were also recent movers.

^e “All Latinos” includes any individual identifying as Latino, including Puerto Ricans and recent movers.

^f “Florida” includes all residents of the state, including those who identify as Latino, Puerto Rican, or a recent mover.

METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

In order to evaluate the status of the Puerto Rican population in the state of Florida, NCLR analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The *American Community Survey* (ACS) one-year files for Florida from 2013 and 2014 were used to calculate the latest number of recent movers from Puerto Rico. All other analyses of specific characteristics are based on data estimates from the 2010–2014 five-year file from the ACS. The five-year sample permits more accurate estimates of the characteristics of the population, particularly movers from Puerto Rico, than the smaller sample size in the 2013 or 2014 one-year ACS data files alone.* Recent movers are defined as individuals moving within the past 12 months.† Data is organized into three main comparison groups: the total population of Florida, all Latinos in Florida—including Puerto Ricans who moved from the island in the past year—and recent movers, defined as individuals who moved from Puerto Rico to Florida within the past year. We do not separate data for Puerto Ricans who did not move recently, because the majority of indicators tracked closely with the indicators for all other Latinos in Florida.

Overview: Puerto Ricans in Florida

- **The number of Puerto Ricans in Florida has increased.** In 2013, 990,782 Puerto Ricans lived in Florida. By 2014, the total Puerto Rican population in the state increased to 1,005,424.‡ This means that 5.1% of the total state population now identifies as Puerto Rican. According to Pew Research Center, since 2000 there has been a 110% increase in the number of Puerto Ricans living in Florida, outpacing the growth rate for Latinos in Florida and for the state overall.⁸
- **A significant portion of Puerto Rican residents in Florida was born on the island.** In 2014, 57.7% of the total Puerto Rican population residing in Florida was born in the continental United States, 39.9% were born on the island of Puerto Rico, and 2.4% were born elsewhere.
- **Nearly half of Puerto Ricans moving to Florida in 2014 came from the island.** A total of 57,329 Puerto Ricans moved into Florida from places outside of the state. Nearly half of those (47.9%) came from the island of Puerto Rico and 52.1% came from other states in the continental United States or other countries.
- **The number of recent movers from the island increased.** The number of Puerto Ricans moving from the island has contributed to the growing number of Puerto Ricans in Florida. In 2014, there were 27,465 movers from Puerto Rico into Florida, an increase from 20,357 in 2013. The number of movers in 2013 represents a 79% increase over 2005 numbers.⁹

* The total population numbers and the estimate of the size of the cohort of movers from Puerto Rico differ between the one-year estimates for 2013 and 2014 discussed above and the estimates in the five-year (2010–2014) file and presented in the tables, as the population estimates in the five-year file are an average over the five-year period.

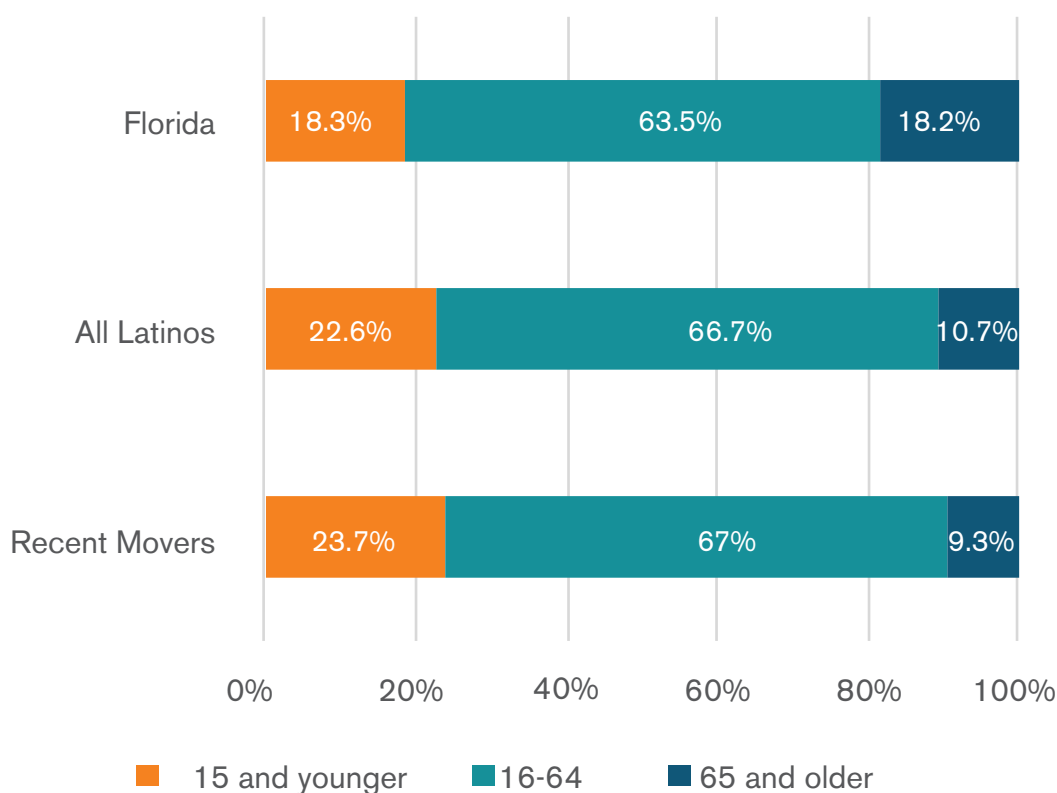
† Therefore, each year of data in the five-year file represents only people who moved within that year. For example, the 2010 file only includes movers within that year and those people are not included in the 2011 data set.

‡ Pew Research Center estimates around 1,006,542 Puerto Ricans in Florida in 2014.

PROFILE OF RECENT MOVERS: DEMOGRAPHICS

- Puerto Rican movers are younger than the general Florida population.** Nearly one-fourth (23.7%) of recent movers from Puerto Rico is younger than 15 years of age, compared to 22.6% of other Latinos and 18.3% of the total Florida population. At the other extreme of the age distribution, only 9.3% of recent movers are older than age 64, compared to 10.7% of other Latinos, and 18.2% for all Floridians.

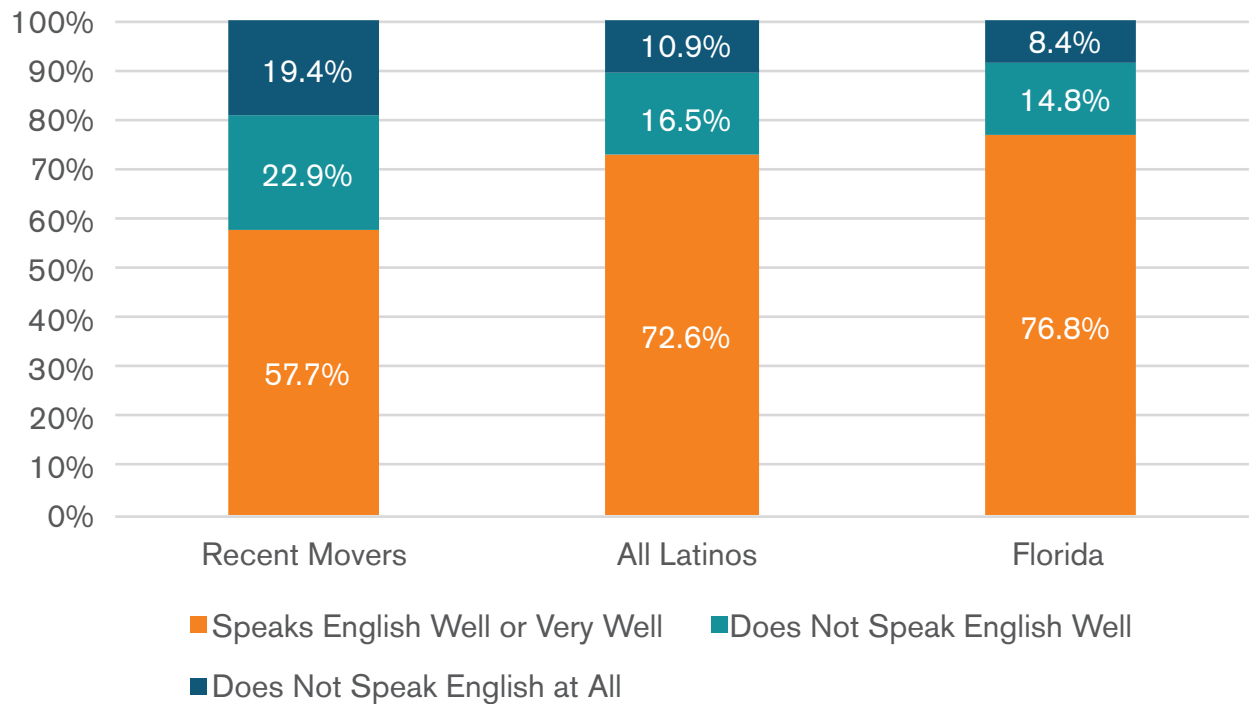
Figure 1: Distribution of Florida Residents by Age, 2010–2014



Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

- Roughly two out of five recent movers do not speak English well or at all.**
 - Only 57.7% of recent movers from the island of Puerto Rico can speak English very well or well, 22.9% do not speak English well, and 19.4% do not speak English at all.
 - Among all Latinos in Florida, 72.6% speak English very well or well, 16.5% do not speak English well, and 10.9% do not speak English at all.
 - As a whole, the majority of Florida residents speak English well: 76.8% of Florida residents speak English very well or well, 14.8% do not speak English well, and 8.4% do not speak English at all.

Figure 2: English Language Ability of Florida Residents, 2010–2014

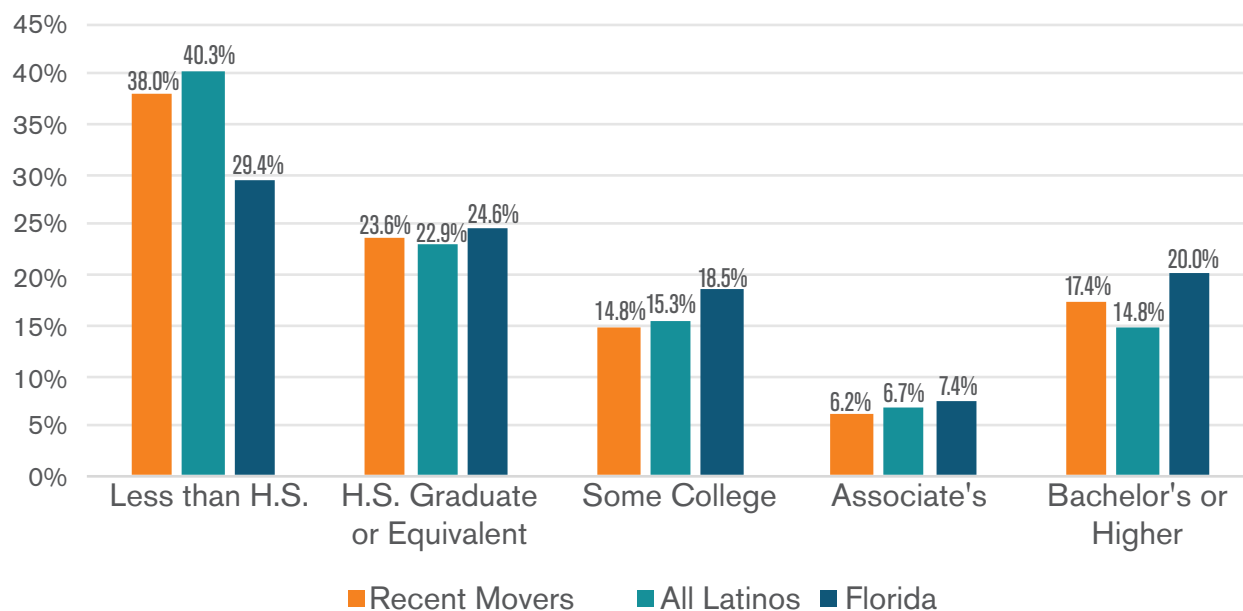


Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

- **Recent movers mirror the Latino community and have lower levels of educational attainment than other Floridians.**

- ☐ A significant share of recent movers from Puerto Rico (38%) does not have a high school diploma but this is roughly equal to the share of Latinos without a high school degree (40.3%). Overall, 29.4% of Florida's population does not have a high school diploma.
- ☐ At the upper end of the education distribution, there is a higher share of recent movers with a bachelor's degree or more; 17.4% of recent movers have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 14.8% of Latinos with a bachelor's degree or more.
- ☐ Overall, 20% of the state's population has a bachelor's degree or more.

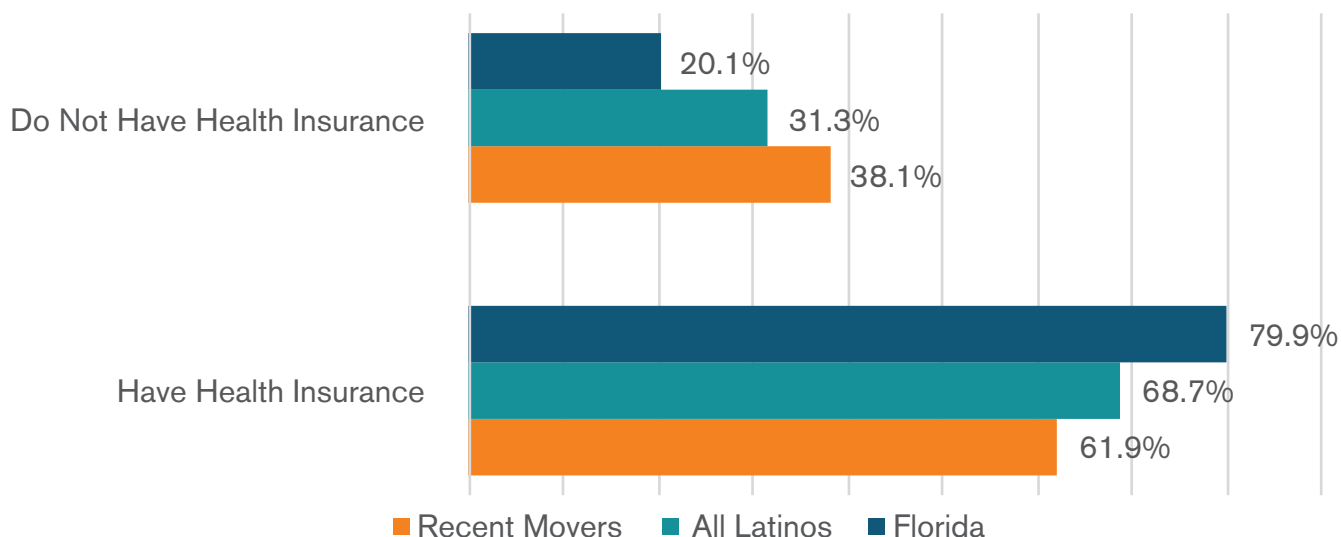
Figure 3: Educational Attainment of Florida Residents by Degree Type, 2010–2014



Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

- **Nearly 40% of recent movers from Puerto Rico lack health coverage.**
 - Recent movers have the lowest rate of health insurance (61.9%) compared to all other groups, with nearly four in 10 lacking health insurance.
 - Compared to recent movers, a larger share of Latinos in Florida (68.7%) report having health insurance. One in three Latinos in Florida does not have insurance.
 - Overall, 79.9% of the total population in the state of Florida said that they have health insurance and 20.1% said they do not.

Figure 4: Health Coverage of Florida Residents, 2010–2014

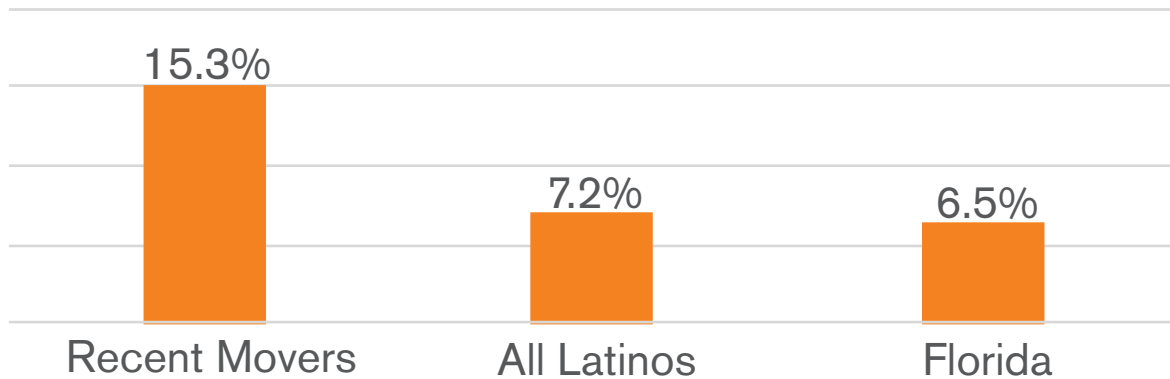


Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

PROFILE OF RECENT MOVERS: ECONOMIC SECURITY INDICATORS

- **The proportion of recent movers that are unemployed is more than double the state level.** The percent unemployed for recent movers is dramatically higher at 15.3% than the rate for Latinos at 7.2% and the rate for Florida's total population at 6.5%.

Figure 5: Percent of Florida Residents Unemployed, 2010–2014



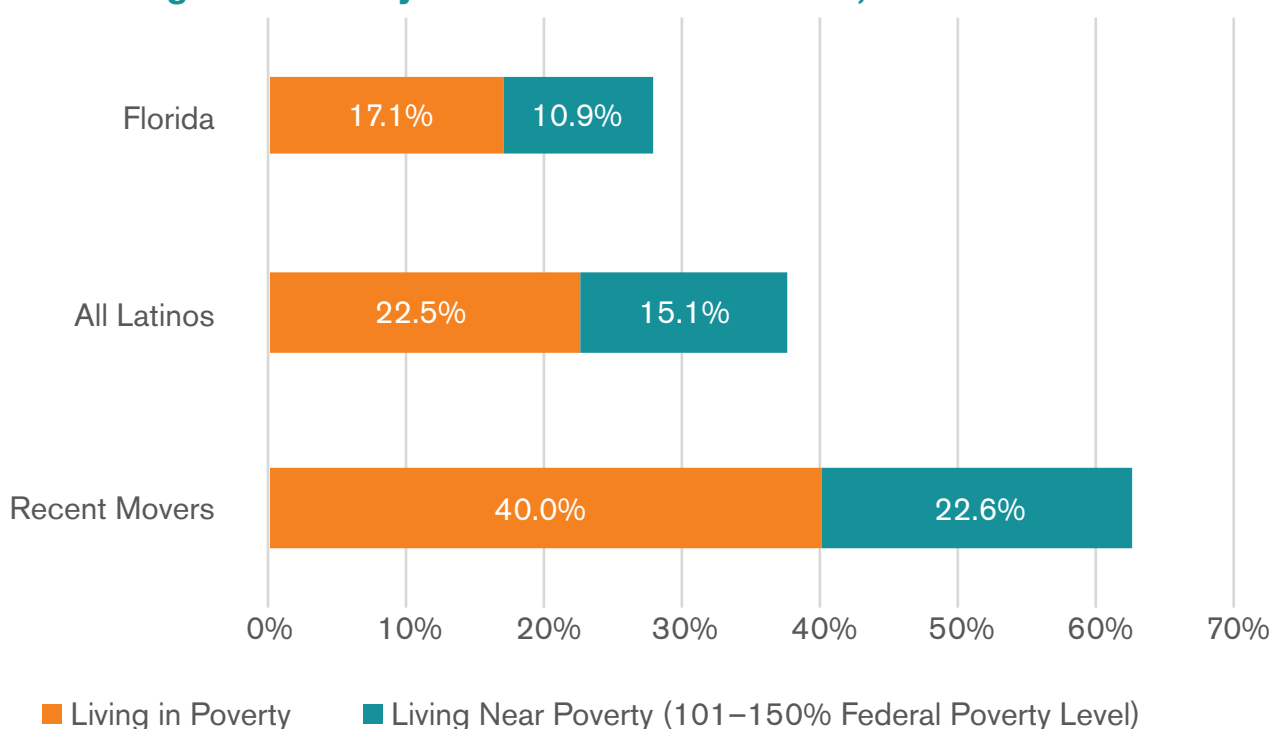
Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

- ❑ **Almost half of recent movers are not in the labor force.** The proportion of the population not in the labor force in the state of Florida is about 40.4%. Of all Latinos in Florida, only 34.2% are not in the labor force. In sharp contrast, about 46.0% of recent movers from Puerto Rico indicated that they were not in the labor force.
- ❑ **Recent movers report working fewer weeks.** Close to 74.3% of Florida workers work between 50 and 52 weeks of the year. That number is slightly higher for all Latinos, at 76.1%. In sharp contrast, only 47.5% of recent movers from the island of Puerto Rico have worked for 50–52 weeks in the previous year.



- **Nearly two-thirds of recent movers from Puerto Rico live in or near poverty.**
 - A significantly higher share of recent movers lives in poverty (40%) compared to other Latinos (22.5%) and the overall population (17.1%).
 - Similarly, the share of recent movers living near poverty (under 150% of the federal poverty level) is notably higher; 22.6% live near poverty, 15.1% of all Latinos live near poverty and 10.9% of Floridians overall live near poverty.

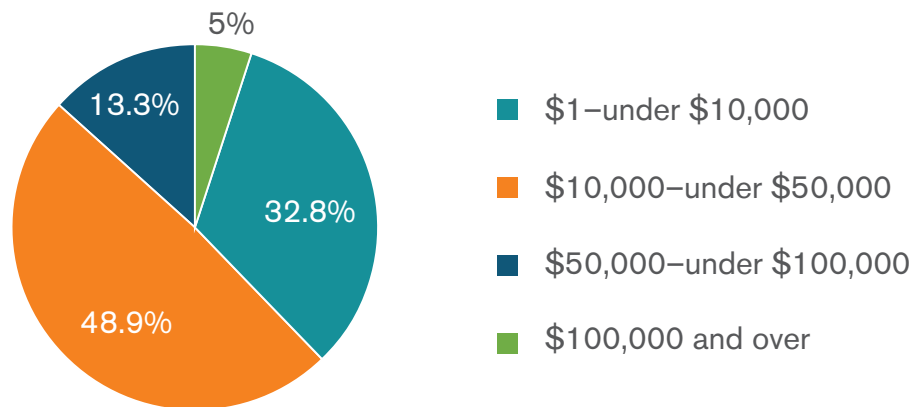
Figure 6: Poverty Level of Florida Residents, 2010–2014



Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

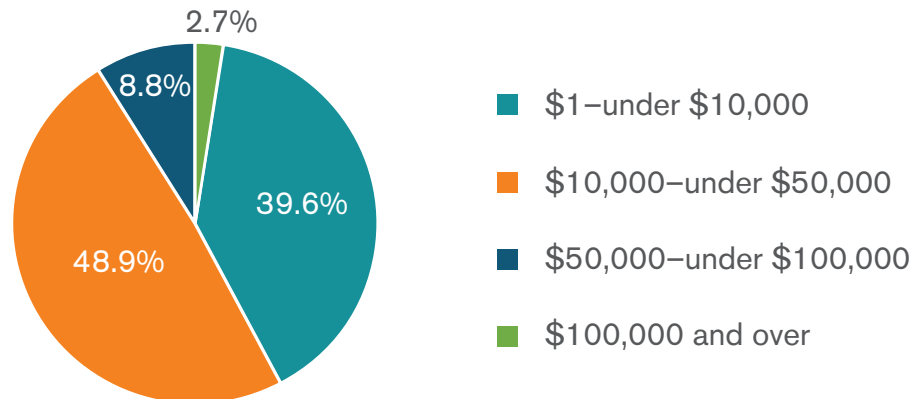
- **Recent movers are concentrated in the lower income ranges.**
 - Specifically, 32.8% of Florida’s population reported income of less than \$10,000, including 39.6% of the Latino population and 58.4% of recent movers from the island of Puerto Rico.
 - At the upper end of the income distribution, 18.3% of Floridians reported incomes higher than \$50,000, including 11.5% of the Latino population and only about 3.4% of recent movers from the island of Puerto Rico.

Figure 7: Total Personal Income, All Florida Residents, 2010–2014



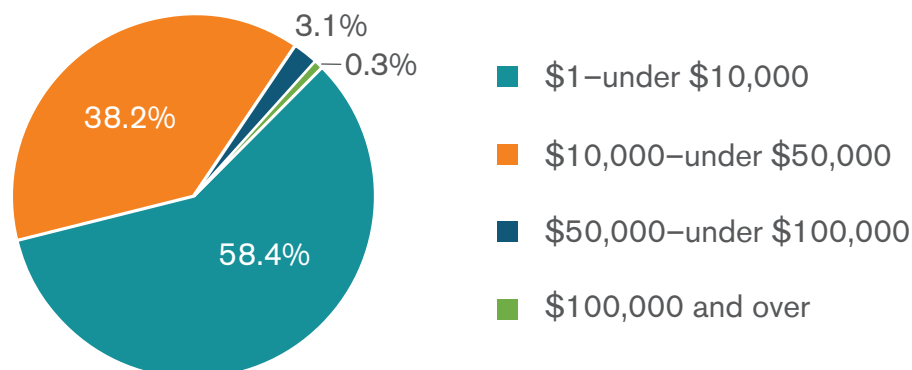
Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

Figure 8: Total Personal Income, All Florida Latinos, 2010–2014



Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

Figure 9: Total Personal Income, Recent Movers from Puerto Rico, 2010–2014



Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 2010–2014 five-year estimates.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The financial and humanitarian crisis affecting millions of American citizens in Puerto Rico has driven unprecedented numbers of residents to the mainland. Florida is at the center of this migration activity and is now home to more than one million Puerto Ricans with thousands more migrating annually. The data show that, in general, recent movers experience disparities in several areas compared to the overall Florida population, as well as other Latinos in the state. One other striking difference found is that recent movers report having a disability at double the rate of all Latinos in Florida (20.6% versus 9.8%, respectively). These differences highlight areas where more research can be done to understand the status of recent movers and develop solutions to improve their lives. This is critical because it is clear that the ongoing crisis from which they are fleeing places recent movers in a particularly vulnerable position even after they move.

Recent movers have the human capital and potential to make significant contribution to the social, political, economic, and cultural life of Florida. However, it is clear that after making a difficult decision to leave the island, recent movers face a number of significant challenges as they make the transition to life in Florida. While the period immediately following their move is challenging, Puerto Ricans will persist and, over time, conditions will improve for many as access to opportunity increases. But, it is evident that hard work of recent movers alone may not be enough. It is critical that state and federal policymakers, community-based organizations and service providers, the business community, and other key sectors recognize the challenges faced by recent movers from Puerto Rico and work to advance solutions that reward hard work and facilitate integration into the community so that they can reach their full potential and continue to contribute in multiple ways to the state of Florida. Some key policies that can help support these outcomes include:

- **Education.** Policies that support access to quality schools are essential to ensure the proportion of residents with high school and college degrees increases. While recent movers are currently more likely to have a high school or bachelor's degree, Puerto Rican movers are young, with about one in four under the age of 15. They are also more likely to not speak English well or at all. Therefore, steps must be taken to ensure that quality elementary, secondary, and adult educations are available and accessible to children and adults who do not speak English well. Policies like the Every Student Succeeds Act can ensure equitable achievement among more students, including those who are English learners.
- **Health.** State lawmakers can improve the health and economic well-being of Latino families by supporting efforts to increase access to health care for uninsured and recently arrived Floridians. A significant share of recent movers is uninsured. In many cases, these may be fully eligible for available programs but do not have access to the networks or information needed to apply. As such, efforts to simplify procedures for enrolling in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program can ensure that more eligible Latinos and recently arrived movers from Puerto Rico can enroll. However, there may be other factors preventing eligible recent movers from enrolling into plans. As such, other barriers to enrollment among recent movers should be explored. Additionally, state lawmakers can expand the state's Medicaid program as part of its implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Medicaid expansion in Florida would provide coverage to 850,000 Floridians, including 200,000 Latinos.¹⁰

- **Housing.** The availability of affordable and safe housing for recent movers is a key factor in one's ability to settle and find stability. Nearly two-thirds of Latino Floridians face high rental costs, where more than 30% of their monthly income goes to rent and utilities.¹¹ This concern is exacerbated for recent movers who, on average, have personal incomes that fall below other Latinos in the state. Therefore, this area is ready for further exploration and policy attention. In the interim, state lawmakers can keep rent affordable by fully funding the Local Government Housing Trust Fund and the State Housing Trust Fund during the annual state appropriations process.
- **Job Quality and Income.** The data—higher unemployment and fewer weeks worked—suggest that recent movers may be experiencing some transition-related difficulties and challenges in entering the labor market. Further exploration of the employment situation for recent movers can identify if there are other factors affecting employment indicators, such as retirement or child rearing. Efforts that support adult education, workforce development, and training programs could benefit this population. Given the language barrier, it is essential that these services are also available in Spanish. Further, access to public benefits, social supports, and community-based social services can help movers in transition get the available and needed resources for which they are eligible. Once a recent mover has a job, policymakers must ensure that hard work is rewarded. Policies to increase the minimum wage and provide access to paid sick and family leave would likely have a positive effect on Latino families and their chances to find financial security and contribute to the economy in the short, medium, and long term.

ENDNOTES

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