

# An Equity Profile of the Southeast Florida Region Summary

**PolicyLink**



Communities of color are driving Southeast Florida's population growth, and their ability to participate and thrive is central to the region's economic success now and in the future. Despite strong growth overall, high unemployment and low wages have plagued the region's economy, which was also hard-hit by the recent recession. Wide racial gaps in income, health, and opportunity – along with declining wages, a shrinking middle class, and high inequality – also place its economic future at risk.

Equitable growth is critical for the region's prosperity. By creating good jobs, connecting youth and vulnerable workers to training and career pathways, and increasing access to economic opportunities located throughout the region, the region's leaders can continue to put all residents on the path toward reaching their full potential, and secure a bright economic future for Southeast Florida.

## Foreword

Over the last three years, the Southeast Florida Regional Partnership has been engaged in the development of the Seven50: SE Florida Prosperity Plan. Informed by the input and direction of Partnership members and other stakeholders, data, and the Fair Housing Equity Assessment, this regional plan provides a framework for enhancing economic development and competitiveness, environmental sustainability, and communities through a focus on inclusion and access to opportunity.

As this regional effort transitions from vision to implementation, the work of charting a path of inclusive growth takes on renewed importance. The Southeast Florida Equity Profile provides an invaluable tool for the region's public, private, nonprofit, philanthropic, civic, and community partners as it highlights in a compelling way the challenges and opportunities facing the region. This information will add to the ongoing work of the region's leaders who are making strides toward ensuring that all residents – regardless of their race, ethnicity, birthplace, neighborhood of residence, or other characteristics – are fully able to participate in the region's economic vitality and contribute to the region's readiness for the future.

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## Overview

Across the country, state and regional planning organizations, community organizations and residents, funders, and policymakers are striving to put plans, policies, and programs in place that build healthier, more vibrant, more sustainable, and more equitable regions.

Equity – ensuring full inclusion of the entire region’s residents in the economic, social, and political life of the region, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, neighborhood of residence, or other characteristic – is essential to realizing and sustaining regional prosperity.

This equity profile of the Southeast Florida region was developed by PolicyLink and the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) to help the Southeast Florida Regional Partnership effectively address equity issues throughout its efforts to build a more integrated and sustainable region. We also hope this will be a useful tool for advocacy groups, elected officials, planners and others as they work to achieve economic vitality and sustainability for the entire Southeast Florida region.

This summary document describes the indicators framework used to create the profile, presents the key findings of the equity analysis, and shares implications derived from the analysis.

## The Equity Indicators Framework

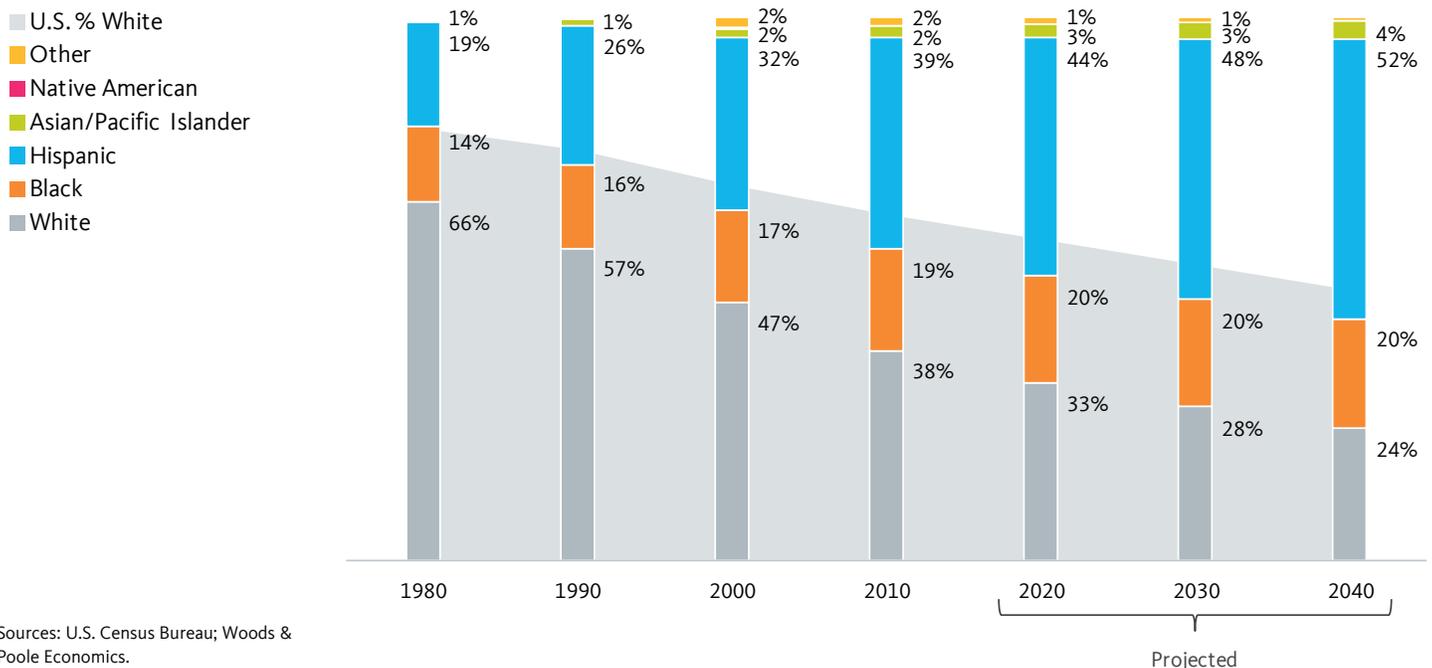
To plan for more equitable regions, communities first need to know where their region stands in terms of equity. To assist with that process, PolicyLink and PERE developed an equity indicators framework that communities can use to understand and track the state of equity in their regions. This indicators framework relies on a regional equity database maintained by our organizations that incorporates hundreds of data points from public and private data sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and Woods & Poole Economics.

The equity indicators framework examines four sets of indicators:

- 1) Demographics: Who lives in the region and how is this changing?
- 2) Economic vitality: How is the region doing on measures of economic growth and well-being?

The share of people of color is projected to increase through 2040

### Racial/ethnic composition, 1980-2040



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; Woods & Poole Economics.

- 3) Readiness: How ready are the region’s residents for the 21st century economy?
- 4) Connectedness: Are the region’s residents and neighborhoods connected to one another and to the region’s assets and opportunities?

**Defining the Southeast Florida region**

For the purposes of the equity profile and data analysis, we define the Southeast Florida region as the seven-county area served by the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils. All data presented in the profile use this regional boundary. Minor exceptions due to lack of data availability are noted in the “Data and methods” section of the complete profile.

**Equity Profile Highlights**

**Demographics: Communities of color are driving growth and change in the region**

Southeast Florida has experienced explosive population growth, growing from 3.5 million to 6.2 million since 1980. In the same time period, the share of the region’s residents who are people of color grew from 34 to 62 percent. Today Southeast Florida is the 17th most diverse region among the largest 150 regions. By

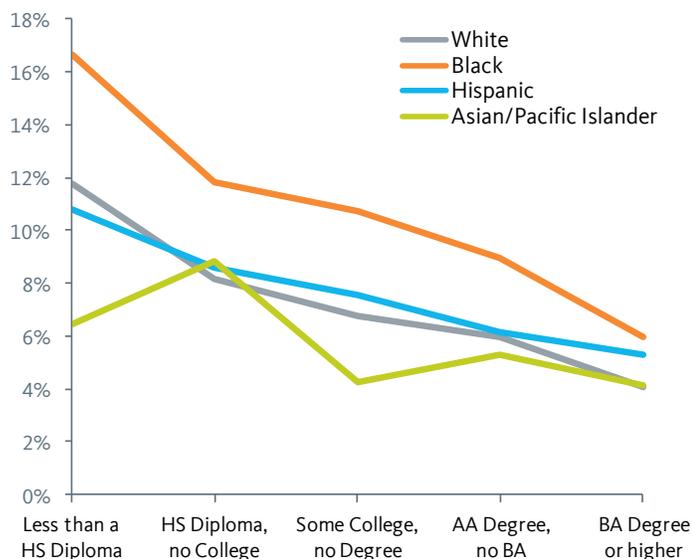
2040, 76 percent of Southeast Florida’s population is projected to be people of color.

Florida’s population growth since 2000 has come entirely from its communities of color. Diverse Hispanic, Asian, and black populations are leading the region’s growth. The Hispanic population grew by 38 percent in the past decade, primarily from births to residents, and the Asian population grew 48 percent, primarily due to immigration. The 23 percent increase in the state’s black (U.S.-born and immigrant) population was divided about evenly between new immigrants and U.S.-born blacks, and its white population shrank 9 percent.

Youth are at the forefront of the region’s demographic shifts. Seventy-one percent of Southeast Florida’s youth are now people of color, compared with 41 percent of the region’s seniors. This 30 percentage point racial generation gap between young and old is the 36th highest among the largest 150 regions. This large gap is a potential risk for the region because a large racial generation gap in regions often corresponds with lower investments in the educational systems and community infrastructure needed to support a youth population that is more racially diverse.

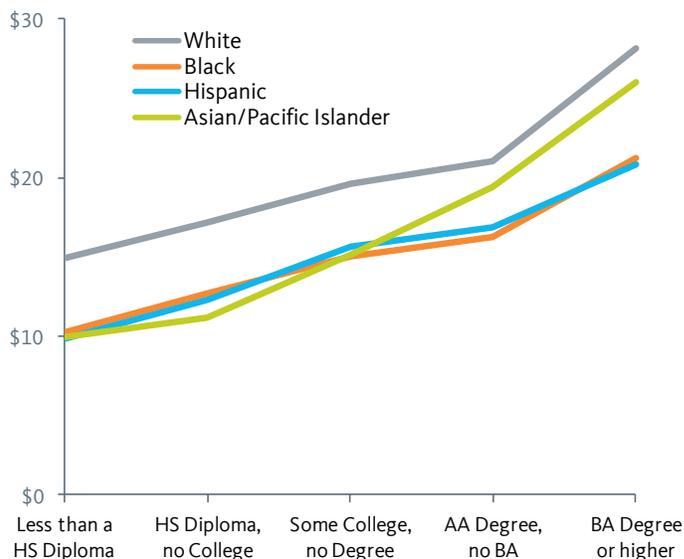
At nearly every education level, blacks and Hispanics have higher unemployment and lower wages than whites

**Unemployment Rate by Educational Attainment and Race/Ethnicity, 2006-2010**



Source: IPUMS. Universe includes the civilian non-institutional population ages 25 through 64.

**Median Hourly Wage by Educational Attainment and Race/Ethnicity, 2006-2010**



Source: IPUMS. Universe includes civilian non-institutional full-time wage and salary workers ages 25 through 64.

**Economic vitality: Inequality threatens the region's future prosperity**

Despite strong growth in jobs and output over the past several decades, the region has long suffered from high unemployment and low wages, and was hard-hit by the recession. High income inequality, declining wages, a shrinking middle class, and wide racial economic gaps place its economic future at risk.

Unemployment remains higher than the national average and Southeast Florida's fastest growing racial and ethnic groups – including Hispanic, and blacks – are much more likely to be jobless than white residents. Eleven percent of blacks are jobless, for example, compared with six percent of whites.

Income inequality is also an enduring problem in the region. Southeast Florida ranks 6th on income inequality among the largest 150 regions – climbing from 11th in 1979. Economic

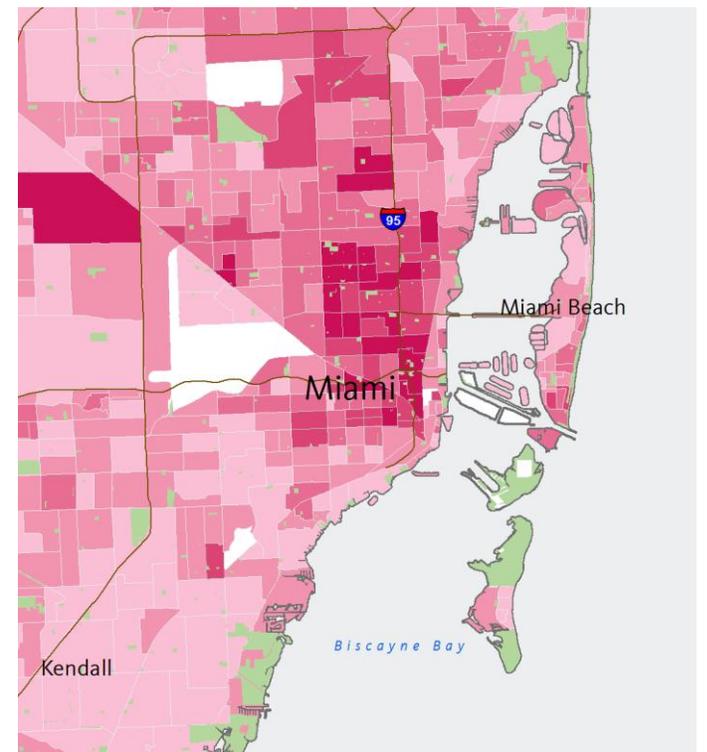
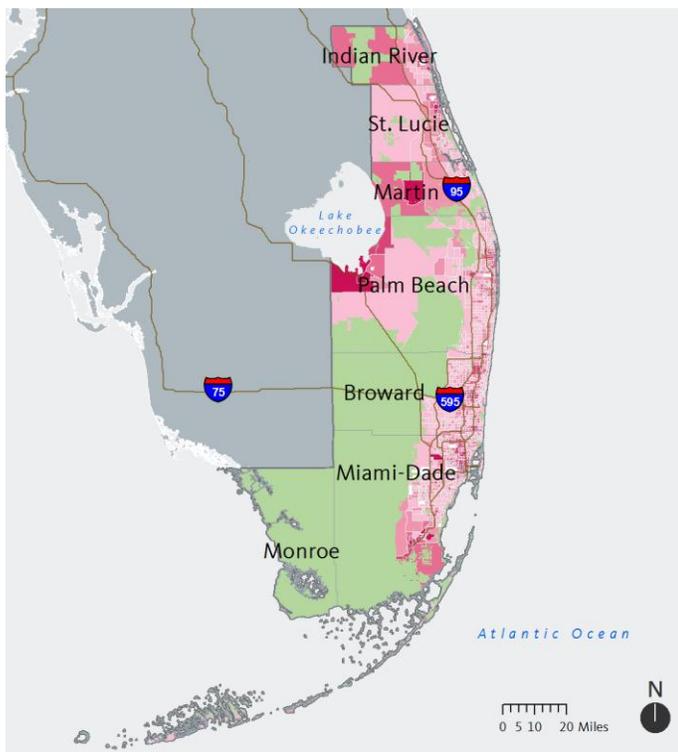
restructuring and declining or stagnant wages for all but the top earners have contributed to increasing inequality and a shrinking middle class. Over the past two decades, the region has added low- and high-wage jobs at a much faster pace than the middle-wage jobs that are critical for sustaining and growing the middle class. At the same time, wages are increasing much more quickly for the region's high-wage earners compared with its low- and middle-wage earners, and the majority of workers have seen their wages decline or stagnate over the past several decades after accounting for inflation. The bottom 10 percent of workers, for example, earn 9 percent less today than they did in 1979, while the top 10 percent earn 17 percent more.

Poverty and working poverty (defined as working full-time for an income below 150 percent of the poverty level) are on the rise and are most severe for communities of color. Nearly one in

Areas of high poverty (40 percent or higher) are found primarily in the coastal cities, particularly Miami, and rural areas

**Percent Population Below the Poverty Level by Census Tract and High People-of-Color Tracts, 2006-2010**

- Less than 10%
- 10% to 19%
- 20% to 29%
- 30% to 39%
- 40% or more
- 91% or more people of color
- Conservation areas and county parks



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Areas in white are missing data.

four of the region's blacks, and one in six of its Hispanics live below the poverty level – more than double the rates of whites. Working poverty is a major challenge in the region: Southeast Florida ranks 16th among the largest 150 metros on its share of working poor. Hispanics, blacks, and Native Americans are much more likely to be working poor than other groups. This means the populations that are growing the fastest are progressively suffering some of the worst economic conditions.

Although education is a critical pathway to greater opportunity for all populations, racial and gender gaps persist in the labor market. At every nearly education level, people of color have higher unemployment and lower wages than whites. Unemployment rates are particularly high for the region's blacks regardless of their educational attainment, and average wages for college graduates are \$7/hour lower for Hispanics and blacks, and \$2 lower for Asians compared with whites.

### **Readiness: Closing education and health gaps will ensure a strong workforce**

The region faces a potential education and skills gap between its fastest-growing demographic groups and the education and training demands of employers. According to the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce, 38 percent of Florida's jobs will require an associate's degree or above by 2018. While 48 percent of the region's white workers and 41 percent of its U.S.-born Hispanics have attained that level of education, just 26 percent of blacks (both U.S.-born and immigrant) and 32 percent of Hispanic immigrants have an associate's degree or higher.

Too many of Southeast Florida's youth are not finding their niche in the labor market. Although educational attainment for youth of color is on the rise, the number of "disconnected youth" who are neither in school nor working has increased, and black and Hispanic youth are disproportionately likely to be disconnected. Southeast Florida now ranks 37th out of the largest 150 regions in terms of its share of disconnected youth, and 20 percent of black youth and 15 percent of Hispanic youth are disconnected, compared with 11 percent of white youth.

The region's black community also suffers from greater health challenges, including higher incidences of some preventable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and asthma that are strongly influenced by social and environmental factors and insufficient access to medical care. Seventy-three percent of blacks are obese or overweight, for example, compared to 57 percent of whites.

### **Connectedness: Less access to affordable housing, transportation, and healthy food for communities of color**

Although residential segregation is decreasing in the region, neighborhoods are not yet integrated, and people of color disproportionately live in neighborhoods that provide fewer opportunities to live healthy, productive lives. For example, people of color are five times more likely than whites to live in the 3 percent of neighborhoods where poverty rates are 40 percent or higher. They are also much more likely to be carless and live in "food desert" neighborhoods that lack grocery stores.

Southeast Florida residents pay too much for housing across the board – the region ranks first among the largest 150 metros for renter and homeowner housing burden (defined as paying more than 30 percent of income for housing). The region's black, Hispanic, and other/mixed race residents face the highest housing burdens.

## **Implications**

Although Southeast Florida's economy is growing, that growth is highly unequal and it is not translating into widespread prosperity for the region's residents. Only the highest earners have seen income gains and there are wide racial gaps in employment; income; health; and access to transportation, affordable housing, and healthy food. At the same time, the region is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, and communities of color are contributing all of its population growth. Reversing the trend of growing inequality and better connecting its communities of color to jobs, housing, transportation, healthy neighborhoods, and quality education and training opportunities are critical to the region's long-term health, competitiveness, and quality of life.

Thankfully, the region's leaders in the public, private, and community sectors are working – increasingly in concert – to advance strategies that counter these trends and set the region on the course of equitable growth. Based on this analysis of equity indicators, PolicyLink and PERE suggest the following areas of focus as they continue to evolve their strategies and launch new efforts:

### **Bridge the racial generation gap.**

Bridging the racial generation gap between youth of color and a predominantly white senior population is important to the region's long-term economic growth and prosperity. The region needs high-quality public schools and workforce training programs to prepare its emerging workforce for the jobs of tomorrow, and support from seniors will be necessary to make

those public investments. Multigenerational communities, which “make cities and neighborhoods accessible, safe, and inclusive for children, youth, families, adults, and the elderly,” can help to foster relationships and understanding.<sup>1</sup> Such communities allow seniors to age in place while providing safe and healthy environments for families to raise children. Southeast Florida can also facilitate social interaction between residents of all ages through thoughtful investments in community facilities and public spaces. Promoting active and accessible public engagement in local and regional planning processes will also help the state build the diverse leadership it needs to succeed in the future.

### **Grow good jobs.**

A robust strategy for growing jobs that match the educational profiles of its workforce and provide family-supporting wages, benefits, and career ladders would reduce unemployment and working poverty. Focusing economic and workforce development efforts on the industry sectors and occupations that show signs of strength and pay living wages can help grow the “high-opportunity” jobs that anchor a broad middle class. Supporting policies and growth strategies that ensure strong and rising wages, especially for low-wage workers, is also important for reducing inequality and working poverty. Our analysis of strong industries in the region suggests that health care and wholesale trade are sectors in which public and private investment could help grow middle-wage jobs, and that boosting wages in the accommodation and food services sector would have a large payoff for many families.

### **Connect unemployed and low-wage workers to careers in high-growth industries.**

Creating ladders of opportunities into good jobs for communities of color, disconnected youth, unemployed and underemployed adults, and low-wage workers will help manifest the potential of the region’s residents to participate in the economy and contribute to economic growth. Workforce partnerships between employers, community colleges, unions, nonprofit training providers, and workforce agencies are a proven strategy to connect workers who have lower education levels and face employment barriers with advanced training, education, and other work supports that lead to careers. Our occupations analysis also shows that there are promising job opportunities for workers without college degrees in the infrastructure sector. Public investments in infrastructure, coupled with local hiring and construction career pathways strategies targeted to disadvantaged workers, can increase job access and incomes.

### **Strengthen educational pathways.**

Low educational attainment for blacks and Hispanics remains a critical issue for the region, even as the region’s public, private, nonprofit, and educational leaders have made progress over the last few decades to close racial gaps. The high number of youth not in school or work highlights the importance of increasing high school and associate degree graduation rates throughout the region.

### **Increase housing affordability.**

With the highest housing burden rates among the largest 150 metros for both renters and homeowners, the Southeast Florida region needs to incentivize and prioritize the development and preservation of housing affordable to lower-income residents and co-located with transportation and economic development investments. Our analysis of low-wage jobs and affordable rentals indicates that some counties in the region need to provide much more affordable rental housing in order to provide low-wage workers with an opportunity to live near work and reduce their commute time and associated costs.

### **Create healthier neighborhoods.**

Ensuring that the region’s neighborhoods promote health – by making it possible, easy, and affordable to choose a healthy diet and be physically active – would help close health gaps for people of color, create more vibrant places, strengthen economic productivity, and reduce health-care costs. Implementing healthy neighborhoods strategies such as complete streets for all users, access to healthy food, and pedestrian-friendly community design in low-income communities of color can foster healthy, active living among the groups who are most at risk for preventable diseases.

### **Expand transportation choices and mobility.**

The region’s public transportation system plays an important role in connecting its communities of color to jobs and other economic opportunities located throughout the region. By coordinating transportation investments with housing, education, and economic development investments, the region can more effectively revitalize neighborhoods and reduce concentrated poverty, segregation, and housing and transportation burdens.

### **Ensure diverse civic participation and leadership.**

Given the region’s rapid demographic shifts, it is important to take deliberate steps to ensure that all of Southeast Florida’s racial and ethnic communities can actively participate in local and regional planning processes. The public, private, and

philanthropic sectors should support leadership development and capacity-building efforts focused on the region's growing diverse communities to build the region's multicultural and multiracial regional leadership.

## **Conclusion**

Implementing a growth model that is driven by equity – just and fair inclusion into a society in which everyone can participate and prosper – is Southeast Florida's path to shared economic prosperity and community vitality. Through concerted investments and proactive policies, the region can leverage its rising diversity as an economic asset, and prepare all of its workers to lead it into the next economy.

Equity Profiles are products of a partnership between PolicyLink and PERE, the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at the University of Southern California.

The views expressed in this document are those of PolicyLink and PERE, and do not necessarily represent those of the Southeast Florida Regional Partnership.

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<sup>1</sup> American Planning Association, *Multigenerational Planning: Using smart growth and universal design to link the needs of children and the aging population*, 2011, <http://www.planning.org/research/family/briefingpapers/multigenerational.htm>