

Michigan: Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Innovation, and Welcoming Initiatives

In Michigan, 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 Michigan's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, immigrants founded 30,223 businesses in Michigan, and in 2010, 10.4 percent of all business [owners](#) [1] in Michigan were foreign-born.
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners had a total net business income of \$1.8 billion, which is 9.2 percent of all net business [income](#) [1] in the state.
- Michigan's foreign-born were more than [three times](#) [2] as likely as the native-born population to start a new business between 1996 and 2007.
- In particular, 32.8 percent of high-tech startups in Michigan between 1990 and 2005 had an immigrant founder, which places Michigan third out of all fifty states and means that Michigan's immigrants are six times more likely to start a high-tech firm than U.S.-born residents.

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

- High-skilled immigrant workers contribute to the success of many Michigan-based companies and institutions with a significant presence in the state, [including](#) [3] Henry Ford Health System, Wipro Limited, General Motors Company, Miracle Software Systems, the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University.
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor [certified](#) [4] 7,411 H-1B labor certification applications in Michigan, with an average annual wage of \$68,113, which is higher than Michigan's median household [income](#) [5] of \$48,669 or per capita income of \$25,482.
- The Detroit-Warren-Livonia metropolitan area had 4,653 H-1B high-skilled visa [requests](#) [3] in 2010-2011, with 65.9 percent of H-1B visa-holders working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations.
- An [expansion](#) [6] of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 14,100 new jobs in Michigan by 2020. By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) [6] around \$3.9 billion to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$3.8 billion.

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

- In southwest Detroit, Jordi Carbonell, originally from Spain, [opened](#) [7] a coffee shop founded on the basis that in order to create a strong community, the community needed a central gathering place.
 - Today, the bustling café is [integral](#) [7] to the life of the neighborhood. As the

president of the agency responsible for managing the commercial district notes, “It’s the kind of place where you know immediately you’re part of a community – of residents, high schoolers, travelers in cyberspace, and young and old hatching plots to save the world!”

- In southeastern Michigan, Basil Bacall, a Chaldean immigrant, along with his brother, started and grew a business of successful [hotels](#) [8]. Today, they own and operate several hotels, real estate, and shopping mall properties which all create jobs for Michigan residents.
 - Bacall also [founded](#) [8] a non-profit in 2007, the Adopt-a-Refugee program, that matches donors with persecuted families in the Middle East and has helped about 80,000 people and distributed \$1.5 million.
- In Keego Harbor, northwest of Detroit, Vladimir Gendelman, [originally from](#) [9] the former Soviet Union, owns and operates [Company Folders, Inc.](#) [10] Gendelman started Company Folders, a graphic design and printing company, in 2004.
 - Today, the company has clients throughout the United States and employs twelve people with plans to create several new positions as the company continues to grow. Speaking of starting and growing his company, Gendelman [stated](#) [9], “I knew if I worked my butt off, I could build something to be proud of.”

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

- **Welcoming Michigan** is a statewide [initiative](#) [11] that seeks to build mutual respect among foreign-born and native-born people residing in Michigan. The organization works to support Michigan’s “receiving community” members, the U.S.-born who live in communities with growing immigrant populations, in creating welcoming communities where immigrants can integrate into their adopted hometowns.
 - Steve Tobocman, Director of Global Detroit, describes Welcoming Michigan as an organization that “not only represent the values (hospitality, kindness, and friendliness) of the Midwestern state in which I was raised, but it actually creates the kind of welcoming environment essential for economic growth in a global economy. If Michigan is to compete, we have to welcome the investment, the jobs, the workers, and the ingenuity of immigrants and refugees. Welcoming Michigan is the foundation of a global economic growth strategy to return prosperity to our state.”
- **Global Michigan** is a collaborative [effort](#) [12] started in 2011 by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. The initiative recognizes immigrant contributions to the state and encourages immigrants to study, settle, and innovate in Michigan.
 - Among its various activities, Global Michigan works on strategies to attract talent to Michigan companies, retain university graduates, improve pathways for small business investment, connect immigrant business investors with local economic development, optimize the EB-5 investor program, and advocate for a more efficient H-1B visa program for high-skilled foreign-born workers.
- **Global Detroit.** Detroit, Michigan is an example of a Rustbelt city that has experienced severe post-industrial population decline. Yet, due in part to a growing immigrant population, areas of the city are experiencing growth and revitalization. Local leaders, through the Global Detroit initiative, recognize that immigrants play an important role.
 - Global Detroit’s [strategy](#) [2] includes acknowledging that immigrants are essential to urban population growth and stability, and immigrants provide neighborhood revitalization benefits and can play a crucial role in rejuvenating neighborhood commercial retail districts that might otherwise succumb to blight or abandon.
 - Specifically, the initiative [recognizes](#) [2] that “welcoming cities” understand that immigrant populations help to stabilize residential neighborhoods, revitalize commercial retail corridors, bringing a diversity of culture, food, language, goods, and services, all of which help decrease blight, decay, and abandonment, increase job

creation, employment, and property values, improve neighborhood quality of life, and foster a greater vibrancy and richness for the urban experience throughout a city.

- Local leaders involved with Global Detroit [realize](#) [2] that “nothing is more powerful to remaking Detroit as a center of innovation, entrepreneurship and population growth, than embracing and increasing immigrant populations and the entrepreneurial culture and global connections that they bring and deliver.”
- **Welcome Mat Detroit** is [committed](#) [13] to “strengthening communities and service capacity by broadening access to and knowledge of services and resources, fostering a welcoming atmosphere for all, and building capacity of immigrant service providers.”
 - Welcome Mat Detroit is an initiative that [stemmed](#) [14] from the 2010 Global Detroit study that identified the need for Detroit to capitalize on international talent to revitalize the metro area. The organization [partners](#) [15] with ACCESS, Global Detroit, and the International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit.
 - The [organization](#) [13] catalogs a network of immigrant service providers in Southeast Michigan and fosters collaboration between these providers. Such a network simplifies the process for immigrants to choose a provider best suited for them, and helps organizations share services and ideas with one another and identify gaps in essential services and opportunities for particular organizations to fill those gaps.

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in: **Michigan**

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$1.8
billion**

*in total net
business income*



10.4%

*of business owners in
Michigan are immigrants*

30,233

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

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- [2] http://www.globaldetroit.com/wp-content/files_mf/1327697728Global_Detroit_Study.full_report.pdf
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- [4] http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/2011AR_FINAL.pdf
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