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## **Study: County's immigrant Latinos have highest self-employment rate**

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**By Leslie Berestein**

Combined regional census and federal economic data show that in San Diego County, Latino immigrants have a higher rate of self-employment than that of nonimmigrant Latinos and even native-born U.S. citizens, according to a new report.

The report was released by the California Immigrant Policy Center, a statewide partnership of immigrant-rights groups that includes the Asian Pacific American Legal Center and the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles. It was compiled from U.S. Census data pooled from the American Community Survey from 2005 to 2007.

Researcher Murtaza Baxamusa of the Center on Policy Initiatives in San Diego shared local highlights of the report at a news conference yesterday in North Park.

According to the report, which also draws from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis, one-quarter of San Diego County's gross domestic product is generated by immigrant workers, either entrepreneurs or employed by others. Latino immigrants in the county have a self-employment rate of 13 percent, higher than native-born citizens, including native-born Latinos.

"It's something that needs to inform the discussion that happens in San Diego," said Baxamusa, director of research and policy for the center.

Speaking afterward, Estela de los Rios, president of the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium, said she welcomed the details of immigrants' economic contributions.

"Our economy is in crisis, but immigrants are contributing," said de los Rios, whose organization consists of community, legal and church-affiliated groups. "Having a job is more important to them than standing on a street corner."

According to the federal community survey data on which the report is based, 27 percent of the state's residents are immigrants, and 43 percent of those are naturalized U.S. citizens. Twenty-three percent of San Diego County residents are immigrants, and 45 percent of those are naturalized citizens.

Of the immigrants in San Diego County, 54 percent are from Latin America, along with 32.9 percent from Asia, 8.2 percent from Europe and 2.1 percent from Africa. Immigrants in the county make up nearly one-third of the labor force.

Alan Gin, a University of San Diego economics professor and a child of immigrant entrepreneurs, said San Diego County lends itself to entrepreneurship for all ethnic groups because of its relative lack of large employers.

“Businesses tend to be small and medium-sized,” he said. “These tend to be sometimes family-oriented. ... It might be more difficult for outsiders to come in, but you sometimes get networks established, where some people will come from a part of the foreign country, and attract people from the same area.”

Gin, whose parents ran a Chinese restaurant on the Central Coast, said self-employment works well for immigrants for several reasons.

“It makes sense because of the language difficulties, and there are lots of advantages to being your own boss,” he said.”

According to the report, Asian immigrants in San Diego County have a slightly lower self-employment rate than nonimmigrant Asians. One possible explanation for this, Gin said, is that the region’s academic, technology and biotech sectors attract skilled workers from Asia as employees.