

## Central Florida Population Growth Remains a Standout



Population growth across the US is moderating, but Florida, especially Central Florida, continues to outperform national averages. The growth in Florida is increasingly influenced by affordability and lifestyle preferences and in turn, influencing how commercial real estate must evolve to meet those changes.

### Central Florida Growth Continues

Florida added nearly 197,000 residents between July 2024 and July 2025, with about 90% of that increase driven by international migration. With natural population change remaining negative, the state continues to rely heavily on inbound migration.

Since 2020, the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford metro has grown by more than 280,000 residents, a 10.6% increase. Orlando's population rose 1.3% between 2024 and 2025, ranking among the fastest-growing large metros in the country and emerging as the only Florida market to achieve top-tier gains in total population. Growth extends beyond Orlando. Daytona Beach has expanded by 11.7% since 2020, while Melbourne has grown by 9.5%, both maintaining steady annual increases.

## Central Florida Population Growth Remains a Standout

Smaller markets are accelerating at an even faster rate. Ocala recorded the highest population growth in the nation between 2024 and 2025 at 3.4%. The Villages reached 157,772 residents, continuing to expand as a major retirement destination. Ocala, now at 442,660 residents, benefits from a diverse economic base that includes equestrian activity, manufacturing, and healthcare.

These trends show a clear shift, with larger metros driving overall population gains while smaller, more affordable markets capture a growing share of new residents.

### Affordability Is Redirecting Growth

Housing costs play a larger role in migration decisions. In the Orlando metro, the median home price rose from approximately \$275,000 in April 2020 to \$413,300 in July 2025.

As costs increase, some demand is moving toward more affordable markets, particularly among first-time buyers. This shift influences both where growth occurs and the pace at which it continues.

Relocation decisions are now more closely tied to cost of living, quality of life, and proximity to family. Smaller markets are attracting more attention as alternatives to dense urban areas.

Migration trends are also becoming less predictable across age groups. Younger households are targeting more affordable locations near urban centers, while retirees still favor lifestyle-driven destinations, though at a more moderate rate.

### Implications for Commercial Real Estate

These shifting population and migration trends are having a direct impact on commercial real estate strategies.

As affordability becomes a primary driver, demand is increasing for more practical and cost-conscious real estate solutions. This includes:

- Smaller-scale office environments
- Retail centers focused on necessity-based and value-oriented tenants
- Increased demand for supporting uses such as self-storage

For commercial real estate, this environment requires a more targeted approach- focusing on specific submarkets, aligning product types with evolving demand, and avoiding broad assumptions about sustained high growth.

### NAI Realvest Perspective

At NAI Realvest, we continue to monitor these shifting population and migration trends to help guide our clients in making informed real estate decisions. Understanding where growth is occurring, and why, is critical to identifying opportunities across Central Florida and beyond.