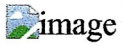


WSJ Print Edition



ALFONSO DURAN FOR WSJ (2)



Maria Eugenia Nucete, a real-estate agent, says her business is slowing as Venezuelans are leaving Doral.



Rents in Doral, Fla., have dropped to their lowest level in three years. ALFONSO DURAN FOR WSJ

Once-Vibrant Miami Suburb Sees Exodus of Migrants

BY DEBORAH ACOSTA

DORAL, Fla.—The two-story, terracotta-roof home in a gated community known as Doral Landings East seemed ideal for the Venezuelan family of four who moved in two years ago. Neighbors were surprised when one day the family disappeared, skipping out on rent, their landlord said, and leaving much of their furniture behind.

One by one, Venezuelans and other immigrants are starting to disappear from Doral, a Miami suburb on the doorstep of the Everglades known for a Trump resort where President Trump plans to host the G-20 summit next year.

Many Venezuelans are here with temporary legal permission to live and work in the U.S., part of a series of immigration programs expanded under the Biden administration. The Trump administration is trying to revoke that permission, leaving more than one million foreigners from various countries in some kind of legal limbo, depending on their type of status.

Few, if any, places in the U.S. are feeling the effects of the immigration-policy change more acutely than Doral, where about 40% of its 80,000 residents were born in Venezuela or are of Venezuelan descent. *Note*

Some Venezuelans have lived here for decades, eventually becoming American citizens and having Americanborn children. Others are more recent arrivals who built lives here over the past few years under the government's temporary programs.

Some of the Trump administration's efforts have been thwarted by an appeals court, but many immigrants are leaving anyway, uncertain whether they will be allowed to stay.

10%

The vacancy rate in certain buildings in the Miami suburb of Doral

Vacancy rates for apartments in municipalities surrounding Doral are 4.3%. In Doral, that rate has ticked up to 6.5% from 5.6% late last year. In certain Doral buildings, the vacancy rate is much higher—more than 10% in some cases.

Leasing agents at the buildings say the vacancies are driven by Venezuelans who have fled. Rents in Doral have dropped to their lowest level in three years.

"They're all telling me, 'No, I can't stay, my [temporary status] is expiring,'" said Maria Eugenia Nucete, a Venezuelan-American real-estate agent who has worked in Doral for decades. In March, she lost a Venezuelan tenant who moved to Italy, she said.

Doral's mayor, Republican Christi Fraga, says the rise in vacancies reflects a mix of factors, though immigrants leaving the city because they are fearful of being picked up by federal agents is part of it.

"I do personally know of some families that have self-deported. Their status was unsure and they didn't want to be here illegally," Fraga said. "I'm sure it will affect the housing market to a certain extent."

Those departing often leave behind homes, furniture, jobs and the remnants of new lives. Some migrants who spoke with The Wall Street Journal say they have plans to move to Italy and Spain. A few have even moved back to Venezuela, according to a real-estate agent who said her client handed in the keys to their apartment and left all their furniture behind.

"All of our plans here have collapsed," said Gabriela Hernandez, 26 years old, who said she plans to leave Doral soon. Hernandez and her boyfriend lived together in a brand new one-bedroom apartment with a balcony. He worked as an insurance broker and she works as a marketing executive at a law firm.

Her boyfriend, who expected to lose his temporary permission, has already left town, driving off in the middle of the night to avoid run-ins with federal agents, Hernandez said.

Hernandez, who arrived from Venezuela nearly a decade ago, said she is in the U.S. legally while she waits for her asylum application to work its way through the court system.

The couple now plans to emigrate to Spain once they save enough, joining an exodus of Venezuelans leaving their Doral building, according to residents.

Doral apartment-building owners say they want to know a family's immigration status before allowing them to rent. If a family has temporary permission to live in the U.S., many apartment buildings are now turning them away, worried that one court ruling could suddenly mean they are living in the U.S. illegally.

The U.S. government's Fair Housing Act, which became law in 1968, prohibits discrimination in sales and rentals of housing. Turning away people because they are from Venezuela risks violating this law, said Courtney Cunningham, a fair-housing attorney based in Miami.

"It could be viewed as a race-discrimination case or it could be viewed as a case involving allegations of discrimination based upon national origin," he said.

Immigrants make up a substantial portion of the renter population in South Florida, said Juan Arias, director of market analytics at the data company **CoStar Group**, adding that 70% of immigrants who have arrived since 2010 are renters. "All of this immigration crackdown is a net negative to the entire multifamily world," he said.

In July, the family of four at Doral Landings East fled their four-bedroom rental home because of immigration issues, according to their landlord. They had stopped paying their \$4,000 in rent because they had diverted so much of their cash to pay for legal help, the landlord said. The family left with most of their furniture and belongings inside.

Vanesa Eguillor, the homeowner's real-estate broker, said, "I've never seen anything like that."

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