THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN GEORGIA: HIGHLIGHTS

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) has prepared a report on the Status of Women in Georgia to inform Georgia residents about the progress of women in Georgia relative to women in other states, to men, and to national trends. In addition to this report, IWPR staff have produced reports on 12 other states and the District of Columbia as well as a national report that summarizes key findings for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

In each report, various indicators describe the status of women in four important areas: political participation, employment and earnings, economic autonomy, and reproductive rights. Basic health and demographic data are also provided. On three of the four aspects of women’s well-being for which IWPR calculated composite indicators, Georgia ranks in the bottom half of the nation. Georgia does not fare much better in relation to the rest of the South Atlantic region (which includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia in addition to Georgia). Thus Georgia still has room for improvement in the status of its women.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Ranks

The composite political participation rank is based on women’s voter registration and turnout, women elected officials at the state and federal levels, and women’s institutional resources in the state (such as a state commission for women). The national rank is of a possible 50, because the District of Columbia is not included in this ranking. The regional rank is of a maximum of eight and refers to the states in the South Atlantic region and also excludes the District of Columbia.

- Georgia ranks 42nd in the nation and sixth in the South Atlantic region on the political participation composite indicator.
- Georgia ranks 48th in the nation on women’s voter turnout. There are over 743,000 unregistered women who are eligible to vote in the state of Georgia.
- The only indicator for which Georgia ranks first in the nation is institutional resources for women. Georgia is fortunate to have a perfect record on the selected indicators. Georgia has both a government-appointed Commission on the Status of Women and a nongovernmental state agenda project that calls attention to issues important to women. In the state legislature, a women’s legislative caucus exists in both the House and the Senate.

Facts and Figures

- Forty-three of the 236 seats in Georgia’s state legislature were filled by women in 1996, placing Georgia 31st among all states in terms of the percentage of women in the state legislature. Additionally, one of Georgia’s 11 U.S. Representative seats is filled by a woman.
Since 1964, female voters in the United States have outnumbered male voters, but voter turnout is relatively low for both sexes by international standards. Fifty-six percent of eligible women and 52 percent of eligible men in Georgia reported that they voted in the November 1992 election.

### EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS

#### Ranks

The composite employment and earnings rank is based on women’s median annual earnings, the female/male earnings ratio, women’s labor force participation, and the proportion of working women in professional and managerial positions. The national rank is of a possible 51, referring to the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The regional rank is of a maximum of nine, referring to the states in the South Atlantic region and the District of Columbia.
Georgia ranks 18th in the nation and fifth in its region on the employment and earnings composite indicator.

Georgia’s worst employment and earnings indicator is women’s labor force participation, on which it ranks 29th in the nation and sixth in its region. Its best rank is on the ratio of women’s to men’s earnings, for which it ranks eighth in the nation and second in its region.

Facts and Figures

- Compared with the nation as a whole, Georgia women enjoy slightly greater earnings equality with men. In 1990, the ratio of the median annual earnings of women to those of men for full-time, year-round workers aged 18 to 65 was 68.5 percent in the United States and 72.0 percent in Georgia.

- In 1994, the unemployment rate for women in Georgia was 5.4 percent compared with the nation’s 6.0 percent female unemployment rate. Georgia had the fifth highest unemployment rate for women in the South Atlantic region and the 24th highest in the nation.

ECONOMIC AUTONOMY

Ranks

The composite economic autonomy rank is based on women’s access to health insurance, women’s educational attainment, women’s business ownership, and the proportion of women living above poverty.

- Georgia ranks 32nd in the nation and fifth in its region on the economic autonomy composite indicator.

- Georgia ranks 36th in the nation and sixth in its region in terms of the percentage of nonelderly women with access to health insurance.

Facts and Figures

- The proportion of women in poverty in Georgia (15.1 percent) is higher than in the United States (13.2 percent). The poverty rate for female-headed households with children is 44 percent in Georgia compared with 42 percent nationwide, much higher than for any other family type.

- The business receipts of women-owned businesses in Georgia rose by 210 percent in constant dollars between 1987 and 1992. This compares favorably with an increase of 87 percent in business receipts for women-owned firms nationally and 35 percent for all firms in the United States during this time period, also adjusted for inflation.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Ranks

The composite reproductive rights rank is based on information on legislation relating to access to legal abortions, the availability of public funding for abortions and infertility treatments, the position of the governor and state legislature on reproductive choice, maternity stay laws, and legislation regarding adoption by gay and lesbian couples.
Georgia ranks 26th in the nation and seventh in its region on the reproductive rights composite indicator.

Facts and Figures

- Fourteen percent of counties in Georgia have abortion providers, a proportion that is similar to that in the nation as a whole (16 percent).

- Thirty-five states have mandatory consent laws that require minors to notify one or both parents of the decision to have an abortion before a physician can perform the procedure. Georgia, which provides a judicial bypass procedure, is one of 24 states that enforced this law as of January 1995.

HEALTH AND VITAL STATISTICS

- Georgia has a higher infant mortality rate (deaths of infants under age one per 1,000 live births), a lower fertility rate (live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44), and a similar percentage of low birth weight babies when compared with the nation as a whole.

- The percentage of the population enrolled in HMOs in Georgia is less than half that in the United States as a whole (8.8 percent compared to 19.5 percent). Medicare and Medicaid recipients in Georgia are significantly less likely than those nationwide to be enrolled in an HMO.

BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS

- Compared with the nation as a whole, Georgia has a smaller female elderly population, a younger female population overall, and a smaller proportion of foreign-born women.

- The female population in Georgia is more racially and ethnically diverse than in the nation as a whole, with minority women making up 30.4 percent of women in Georgia and 24.1 percent of women in the United States as a whole. The proportion of female African Americans in Georgia is more than twice as high as in the nation as whole (27.8 percent compared to 12.1 percent).

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) is an independent, non-profit, scientific research organization founded in 1987 to meet the need for women-centered, policy-oriented research. This fact sheet is based on the report The Status of Women in Georgia, part of a larger research project funded by the Ford Foundation. The data used come from a variety of sources, primarily government agencies. Individuals and organizations in Georgia also assisted in locating data. The Advisory Committee for the report in Georgia was chaired by Stephanie Davis, Atlanta Women’s Fund and included Dr. Diane L. Fowlkes, Women’s Studies Institute, Georgia State University; Terry Cherniak, National Council of Jewish Women, Atlanta; Beverly Guy-Sheftal, Women’s Research and Resource Center, Spelman College; Marianne Webster, Women’s Action For New Directions, Atlanta; Doris Von Glahn, League of Women Voters, Atlanta/Fulton County; Jean Scher, Older Women’s League, Metro Atlanta; Nellie Duke, Georgia Commission on Women; Jeannette Foreman, Foreman and Associates; Ali Crown, Women and Children’s Center, School of Public Health, Emory University; Marisa Hebert, YWCA of Atlanta; Leah Creque, National Coalition of 100 Black Women; and Lorett Ross, Center for Human Rights Education.

This Research-in-Brief was written by Stacey Friedman and prepared by Megan DeBell and Jill Braunstein in March 1997. The full report, The Status of Women in Georgia, is available for $10.00 from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research. Members and affiliates of the Institute’s Information Network receive regular reports and information. For a copy of the full Georgia report or more information on membership, contact IWPR at 1400 20th Street N.W., Suite 104, Washington, DC 20036, phone 202/785-5100, fax 202/833-4362, or visit our web site at http://www.iwpr.org.

In Georgia, to obtain a copy of this report, contact: Atlanta Women’s Fund, 50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 449, Atlanta, GA 30303, phone 404/688-5525, fax 404/688-3060.