THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN ILLINOIS: HIGHLIGHTS

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) has prepared a report on the *Status of Women in Illinois* to inform Illinois residents about the progress of women in Illinois 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 each of the four aspects of women’s well-being for which IWPR calculated composite indicators, Illinois ranks in the middle third of the nation. Its best national ranks are in the areas of reproductive rights and economic autonomy. Illinois ranks first in the East North Central region (consisting of Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin in addition to Illinois) on three of the four composite indicators. Although Illinois does well within its region, it 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 five and refers to the states in the East North Central region.

- Illinois ranks 21st in the nation and second in the East North Central region on the political participation composite indicator.

- Illinois ranks 26th in the nation and third in its region on women’s voter registration. There are over one million unregistered women who are eligible to vote in the state of Illinois.

*Facts and Figures*

- Forty-one of the 177 seats in Illinois’s state legislature were filled by women as of April 1996, placing Illinois 21st among all states in terms of the percentage of women in the state legislature.

- Since 1964, female voters in the United States have outnumbered male voters, but voter turnout is relatively low for both sexes by international standards. Sixty-six percent of eligible women and 64 percent of eligible men in Illinois reported that they voted in the November 1992 election.
## Chart I. How Illinois Ranks on Key Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>National Rank</th>
<th>Regional Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMPOSITE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION INDEX</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Voter Registration, 1992-1994</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Voter Turnout, 1992-1994</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Elected Office Composite, 1996</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Institutional Resources, 1996</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPOSITE EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS INDEX</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Median Annual Earnings, 1990</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings, 1990</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Labor Force Participation, 1994</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 1994</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPOSITE ECONOMIC AUTONOMY INDEX</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with Health Insurance Among Nonelderly Women, 1991-1992</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment: Percent of Women with Four or More Years of College, 1990</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Business Ownership, 1992</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Women Above the Poverty Level, 1990</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPOSITE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS INDEX</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See Appendix I of The Status of Women in the States, available from IWPR, for a detailed description of the methodology and sources used for the indices presented here.

* The national rankings are of a possible 51, referring to the 50 states and the District of Columbia, except for the political participation indicators, which do not include the District of Columbia. The regional rankings are of a maximum of five and refer to the states in the East North Central region (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin).

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**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 plus the District of Columbia.

- Illinois ranks 21st in the nation and first in its region on the employment and earnings composite indicator.
- Illinois ranks 32nd in the nation and third in its region in terms of women's labor force participation.
**Facts and Figures**

- Compared with the nation as a whole, Illinois women have a lower 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 66.1 percent in Illinois.

- In 1994, the unemployment rate for women in Illinois was 5.5 percent compared with the nation's 6.0 percent female unemployment rate. Though lower than in the nation as a whole, the female unemployment rate in Illinois is the second highest in the East North Central region.

**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.

- Illinois ranks 18th in the nation and first in its region on the economic autonomy composite indicator.

- Illinois ranks 17th in the nation and first in its region in terms of women's educational attainment.

- Illinois's best rank nationally is on women's access to health insurance, on which it ranks 16th. However, within its region, Illinois ranks fourth, near the bottom, on this indicator.

**Facts and Figures**

- Women workers in Illinois are more likely to have employer-based health insurance than women in the United States as whole (65.6 percent and 63.7 percent, respectively).

- The business receipts of women-owned businesses in Illinois rose by 94 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 regarding legislation on 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.

- Illinois ranks 19th in the nation and first in its region on the reproductive rights composite indicator.

**Facts and Figures**

- Nine percent of counties in Illinois have abortion providers, a relatively low proportion when compared with the rest of the nation (16 percent).

- Illinois has no legislation regarding the issue of adoption by gay and lesbian couples.
HEALTH AND VITAL STATISTICS

- Illinois has a higher infant mortality rate (deaths of infants under age one per 1,000 live births) and a higher fertility rate (live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44) than the nation as a whole. In Illinois, the percent of low birth weight babies among white mothers is slightly lower than the national average, while the percent of low birth weight babies among African-American mothers is higher than the national average, indicating that women in Illinois may have differential access to pre- and postnatal care.

- The percentage of the population enrolled in HMOs in Illinois is somewhat lower than that in the United States as a whole (16.9 percent and 19.5 percent, respectively). Medicare and Medicaid recipients in Illinois are also less likely than those nationwide to be enrolled in an HMO.

BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS

- Compared with the nation as a whole, Illinois reflects national trends: Illinois has a similar proportion of elderly women, a similar distribution of households by type, and a similar proportion of foreign-born women.

- The female population in Illinois also resembles that of the nation in terms of ethnic diversity, with minority women making up almost 25 percent of women in Illinois and 24 percent of women in the United States as a whole.

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 Research-in-Brief is based on the report The Status of Women in Illinois, part of a larger research project funded by the Ford Foundation. The data used in the report came from a variety of sources, primarily government agencies, and individuals and organizations in Illinois assisted in reviewing the report. The Advisory Committee for the report in Illinois is chaired by Hedy Ratner, Women's Business Development Center, and includes: Sharron Mathews, Public Welfare Coalition; Ellen Cannon, Department of Political Science, Northeastern Illinois University; Jenny Knaus, Illinois Caucus for Teen Pregnancy; Nancy Shier, Kids Public Education and Planning Program; Lauren Sugarman, Chicago Women in Trades; Mary Kay Minaghan, Federation of Women Contractors; Margie Schaps, Health and Medicine Policy Group; Sharon Z. Alter, Division of Business and Social Science, William Rainey Harper College; Jon Kalish, Friends of the Auditorium; Sharon Green, Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization; Berta Hinojosa, Mujeres Latinas en Accion; Mary Schaafsma, Illinois Public Action; Lynn Robinson, League of Black Women; Anita Boswell, League of Black Women; Patricia Polos, ERA Illinois; The Honorable Mary Ann Smith, Alderman - 48th Ward; Sheila Lyne, Chicago Department of Public Health; June Lapidus, Department of Economics, Roosevelt University; Alice Dan, Center for Research on Women and Gender, University of Illinois, Chicago; Paul Kleppner, Office of Social Policy Research, University of Northern Illinois; Amy Coen, Planned Parenthood; Sylvia Puente, Latino Institute; Jackie Kean, Chicago Department of Public Health; Kathy Kessler Malcolm, Illinois Displaced Homemakers; Audrey Peeples, YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago; Pat Taylor, Older Women's League, Illinois; Suzanne Daniel, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Chicago; Sunny Fisher, Richard H. Driehaus Foundation; Kathe Jordan, Coalition of Labor Union Women, Illinois; Doreen Wiese, American Indian Economic Development Association; Nancy Kreiter, Women Employed; Shelley Crump, Southwest Women Working Together; Deborah Sawyer, Environmental Design International; Diana Conley, Illinois Business Council; and Judith Anne Gold, Alzheimer and Gray.

This Research-in-Brief was written by Stacey Friedman and prepared by Megan DeBell in March 1997. The full report, The Status of Women in Illinois, 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 Illinois 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 Illinois, for a copy of the report, contact the Women's Business Development Center, 8 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603, phone 312/853-3477, fax 312/853-0145.