

LATINA PORTRAIT



MUJERES
LATINAS EN ACCIÓN

LATINAS AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

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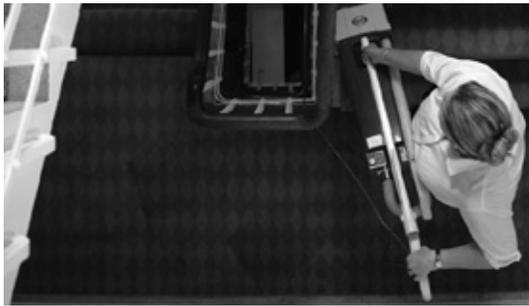


M U J E R E S
L A T I N A S E N A C C I Ó N

UIC CENTER FOR RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS ON WOMEN AND GENDER
AT CHICAGO

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Introduction

If Chicago is the city that works, it works on the backs of countless low-wage workers who do our laundry, clean our homes and offices, prepare our food, and care for our children. Of these low-wage workers, Latinas are in a most precarious state. *Mujeres Latinas en Acción* in partnership with the Center for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Illinois at Chicago, present this snapshot of Latinas and their position in low-wage work. Latin@sⁱ represent 16% of the state of Illinois, yet they make up 26.8% of Chicago's workforce.¹ In fact, 31.2% of all Chicagoans are part of the low-wage workforce and this has multiple repercussions, which we document in this *Latina Portrait*.²

A large challenge in creating this report is the lack of localized data and our reliance on regional and national data to paint this portrait. We utilize the most localized data at each point of this report. This report serves as not just a documentation of the situation low-wage Latinas live with, but also a call for additional research on the low-wage workers of Chicago. It will be difficult to put into place any recommendations without a complete picture of who our low-wage workers are.

The bottom-line of this portrait we paint here is that policies must change if Chicago is going to rise up to be the great city we believe it is and want it to be. It takes 2.5 days to pay for 5 days of child care for a worker earning the minimum wage.³ This is one example of the pressure that keeps low-wage workers on the job despite being sick. They cannot afford to take a day off and lose much needed wages. Yet, this creates a situation that puts everyone at risk when a sandwich maker comes to work with a cold or flu. This is why we call for paid sick days for the 42% of Chicago private sector workers who do not earn one sick day.⁴ We also call for an Illinois Domestic Workers Bill of Rights that can protect Latinas and others who care for our children, clean our homes and allow for our economy to benefit from everyone's participation.

Chicago is the city that works. From our storied rebirth after the Chicago Fire, we have excelled at evolving with the changing economy. Our challenge is to ensure that this evolution benefits all of our residents.

ⁱUsing Latin@ instead of "Latino" recognizes both Latinos and Latinas. For this *Latina Portrait*, we use Latin@ to differentiate between Latin@s of both genders and when we are just talking about Latina women.

“Since the 1970s, standard full-time, direct employment jobs with benefits have increasingly become part time, subcontracted, or contingent, and disproportionately low-wage and without benefits. Low-wage work is found in retail, manufacturing, food preparation and serving, administrative support, transportation and material moving, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, home health care and domestic work, and healthcare support industries.”

Introduction to Latin@s and Illinois

There are currently 2,027,578 Latin@s in Illinois, comprising 16% of the residents in the state of Illinois.⁵ Latin@s are an extremely heterogeneous group of women and men of various races, nationalities, nativity, and income levels. Illinois’ Latin@ population includes Mexicans (83% of Illinois Latino population), Puerto Ricans (9%), Central Americans (4%), Cubans (1%), and Dominicans (0.3%). U.S. born Latin@s make up 56% of Illinois’ Latin@ population and with 41% born abroad. Within this group of Latin@s born abroad, 71% of this number are not U.S. Citizens, a majority of whom entered the United States before 2000.⁶ These statistics show a large community of Latin@s in Illinois and suggests a large number of mixed-status families comprised of undocumented and U.S. citizen Latinos.

Latinas are extremely diverse in terms of education levels, ethnicity, class position, immigration history and status, and geographic residency. Yet as a broad group, Latinas in the U.S. disproportionately face unemployment, low-wage work, and barriers to upward mobility⁷ due to racial and gendered job segregation, discrimination, less access to education, and often racial and ethnic housing segregation limiting the breadth of networks they have for higher paying jobs.⁸ While Latinas share many similar barriers and discriminations as male Latinos, they also face gendered oppression at the hand of society, companies, the state, and even co-workers and partners. In this *Latina Portrait*, we focus on their experiences in particular and the work towards their economic security.

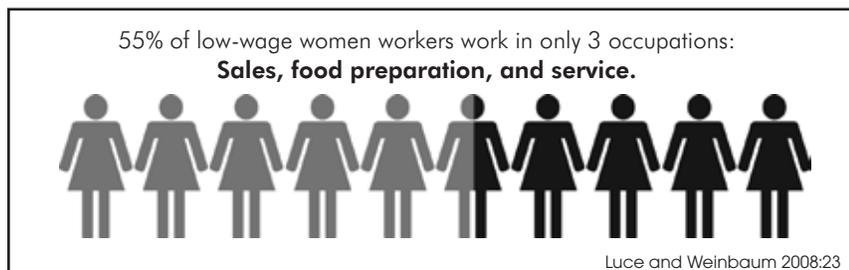
Low-Wage Work Defined

Neoliberal policies and projects implemented during the past few decades, including massive privatization and deindustrialization, have substantially restructured our society and labor markets. Since the 1970s, standard full-time, direct employment jobs with benefits have increasingly become part time, subcontracted, or contingent, and disproportionately low-wage and without benefits.⁹ Low-wage work is found in industries such as retail, manufacturing, food preparation and serving, administrative support, transportation and material moving, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, home health care and domestic work, and healthcare support industries.¹⁰ Low-wage jobs in these industries usually pay below \$12 an hour, have little or no benefits, no paid vacation or sick time off, irregular scheduling, and a lack of job security. They are often also characterized by unsafe working conditions which can include a lack of protective gear, limited or no health and safety training, dangerous machines, uncomfortable or dangerous work space temperatures, lack of ventilation, rapid work pace, slippery floors, injury from repetitive motion and lack of breaks, and harassment and intimidation from bosses.¹¹

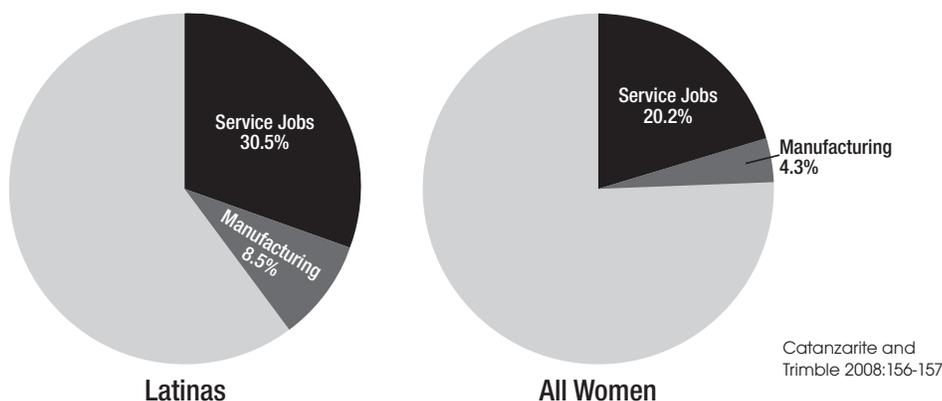
These national trends have re-shaped Chicago labor markets as well. Since 2001 there has been significant job loss while the local population has grown. Job growth, particularly since the 2007 recession, has been dominated by low-wage work. From 2001 to 2011, the percent of adult formal sector workers in low-wage jobs that paid no more than \$12 an hour rose from 23.8% to 31.2%.¹² Contrary to popular discourse around low-wage work, these employees were not generally “teen workers” or supplemental family income earners. Instead, many of these jobs are central to family income and around 56.7% of low-wage workers in Chicago in 2011 were living in households where all the wage earners worked in low-wage jobs.¹³ Due to structural racism, discrimination, and barriers to educational and career opportunities, it is women, people of color, and immigrants who historically and currently do low-wage work overwhelmingly. Yet increasingly, low-wage jobs also employ older, more educated, more white, and more male workers whose traditionally privileged labor market position has declined as less quality jobs are available. This means that others already in this work now also face greater competition and displacement.¹⁴ In particular, U.S. and foreign born Latinas make up a disproportionate number of the workers still in low-wage work or who are being displaced, and were the group that saw their unemployment double during the latest recession,¹⁵ all of which stifles their economic security and independence.

Latinas and Low-Wage Work

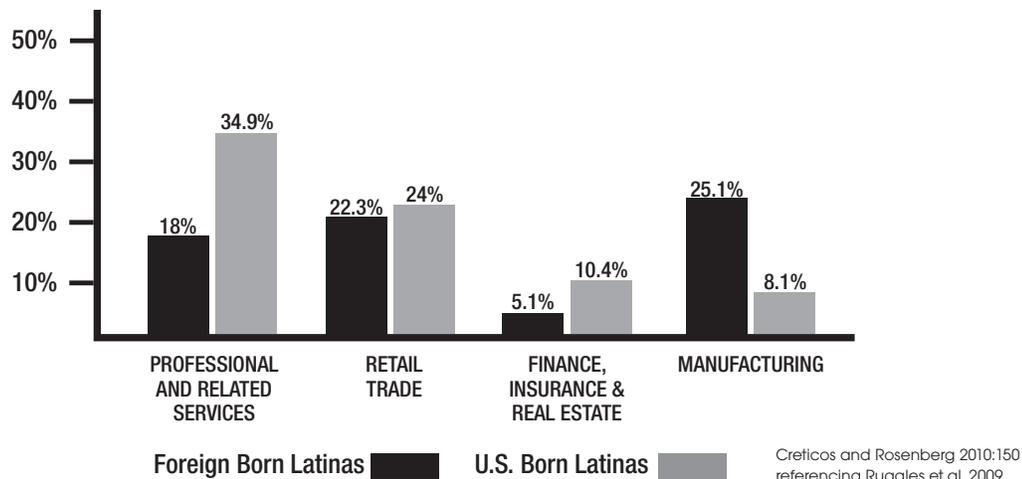
Latinas, especially Mexicans, have long worked in the United States as agricultural workers or in the informal economy, working in positions that are not taxed.¹⁶ Their employment in the formal labor market rose along with women in general starting after WWII¹⁷ due to the movements of the 1960s and '70s and growth of the service sector.¹⁸ Latinas generally still have less labor force participation rates than non-Latin@ African-Americans or whites, yet now over half of Latinas are in formal sector jobs, and for some groups of Latinas, like Puerto Ricans, this level is even higher. In the Chicago Metropolitan Area in 2006, 57.9% of Latinas were counted as active in the labor force.¹⁹



In terms of low-wage work, women in the U.S. make up the majority of workers, and 57.2% of women do not make enough to keep their families from being poor.²⁰ This is exaggerated for Latinas, of whom 15% are in low-wage jobs, which is twice as much as the general workforce.²¹ For instance, 30.5% of Latinas are in service jobs (compared to 20.2% of all women), 8.5% are in manufacturing jobs (compared to 4.3% of all women).²²



Nativity and immigration status also affects work placement and wages. For instance, while both groups work in retail at similar rates, far more U.S. born Latinas are employed in professional jobs and far more foreign born Latinas work in manufacturing.²³



Undocumented immigrants disproportionately work in manufacturing, restaurant, and cleaning jobs, and generally work in less safe conditions, experience higher rates of wage theft, and often do not have access to healthcare.²⁴

Latinas and the Minimum Wage

Latin@s make up 26.8% of Chicago workers, but 42.4% of low wage workers.²⁵ Throughout Chicago, 61% of Latin@ workers and 41% of all female workers make less than \$15/hour.²⁶ Latinas are the lowest paid group in terms of median weekly pay, earning just 60 cents to the dollar a white male worker makes.²⁷ When looking at women from different racial backgrounds, Latinas make the lowest average wage per week, \$518 compared to “white women (\$703), black women (\$595), and Asian women (\$751).”²⁸



This gap is often even lower for Latina immigrants without English language proficiency and authorized immigration documentation.²⁹ A significant factor in this income disparity is the low federal and the moderately higher state minimum wage, which African-American, Latina, and foreign-born women disproportionately earn. Currently the federal minimum wage is \$7.25 and in Illinois, a minimum wage worker receives \$8.25 per hour. A full-time worker in Illinois earning minimum wage makes \$17,160 per year³⁰ before taxes are taken out. The 2014 poverty level for a household of four, which is the average family size for Latin@ households,³¹ is \$23,850.³² This means a family of four with a single minimum wage earner would make \$6,632 under the poverty level. Even if there are two minimum wage earners in a family of four, the combined \$34,320 they earn would still put them below 150% of the poverty line. Yet these measures of poverty, some researchers point out, are far lower than the actual cost of living. Indeed, using a “self-sufficiency standard” which more adequately measures the basic cost of living by including area of residence and family characteristics, reveals that single adults on the North side of Chicago would need at least \$12 an hour, or around \$24,000 a year, and for a family of four with one wage earner would need the earner to make more than \$14 an hour.³³

Latinas and Wage Theft

Latinas also experience disproportionate wage theft, where earned wages are not paid to them in full. These violations range from being paid below minimum wage or for partial hours, being asked to work off the clock, being charged for services such as rides to work, not being paid overtime rates, having tips stolen, having checks split or in multiple names to avoid overtime pay, and having deductions taken out of checks without permission.³⁴ These violations are extremely common, and in a study about low-wage workers in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City by Bernhardt et al. (2009), the researchers found that women and immigrant workers were even more likely to experience minimum wage violations than men and U.S. born workers, respectively.³⁵ Foreign-born Latin@ workers had the highest rate among various racial and ethnic groups, though African-Americans also had much higher rates of wage violations than whites. The researchers found that "...minimum wage violation rates were most common in apparel and textile manufacturing, personal and repair services, and in private households (all of which had violation rates in excess of 40%). ... Industries such as restaurants, retail and grocery stores, and warehousing fell into the middle of the range, with about 20 to 25% of their workers experiencing a minimum wage violation."³⁶

Latinas and Low-Wage Industries

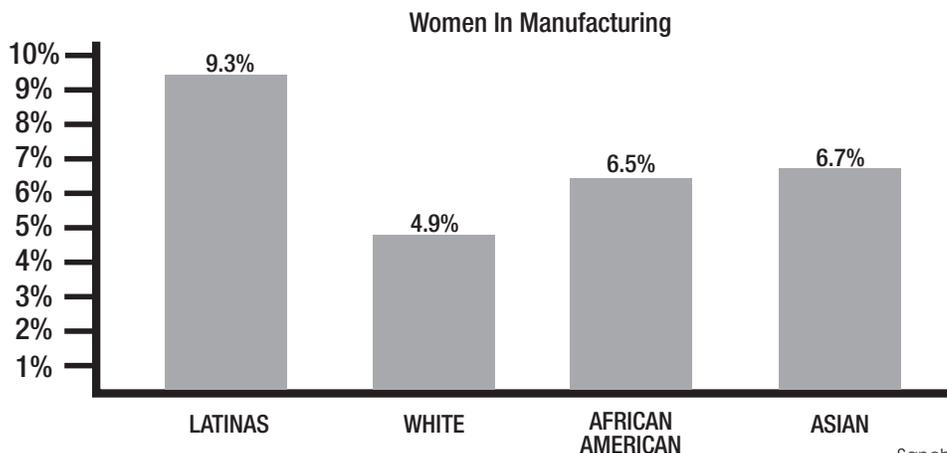
Latinas performing low-wage work are largely concentrated in a handful of industries. Below is a brief introduction to a few of these industries and what they mean for Latinas' economic security and independence.

Service Industry

Nationally, around 2.7 million, or over a third of Latina workers, are employed in the service sector.³⁷ Of these, 30.7% work in cleaning or maintenance, 27% in food or serving, 21.6% in personal service, and 17% in healthcare support jobs.³⁸ And Latin@s represent a staggering 24.8% of all restaurant workers. In restaurants, Latin@s are more likely to hold the lower-paying jobs, including "dishwashers, dining-room attendants, or cooks." In contrast, white restaurant workers are more likely to hold the higher-paying managing, waiting, and hosting positions. This is particularly important for Latinas as nationally women make up 72% of workers in tipped occupations such as servers in restaurants, bartenders, and salon workers. Workers who are in tipped occupations are twice as likely to be poor and rarely get health insurance from their employer. In general, 16.7% of restaurant workers live below the official poverty line for a family of four and 43.1% live under 200% of the poverty rate for a family of four.³⁹

Manufacturing, Distribution and Temp Work

Many Latinas, particularly Latina immigrants, work in manufacturing at some point in their lives. While African-American and working class white workers have long histories of manufacturing work, Latinas now are more likely to do so than other groups.



Sanchez et al. 2012: 34

The Chicago metropolitan area is one of the largest commercial manufacturing and distribution centers globally, with many facilities both in the city and even more near O’Hare International Airport, surrounding suburbs like Joliet and Aurora, and across the border in Indiana.⁴⁰ Much of the local manufacturing and distribution is comprised of food, plastics, and gift sets for retailers such as Walmart, Costco, and Aldi.

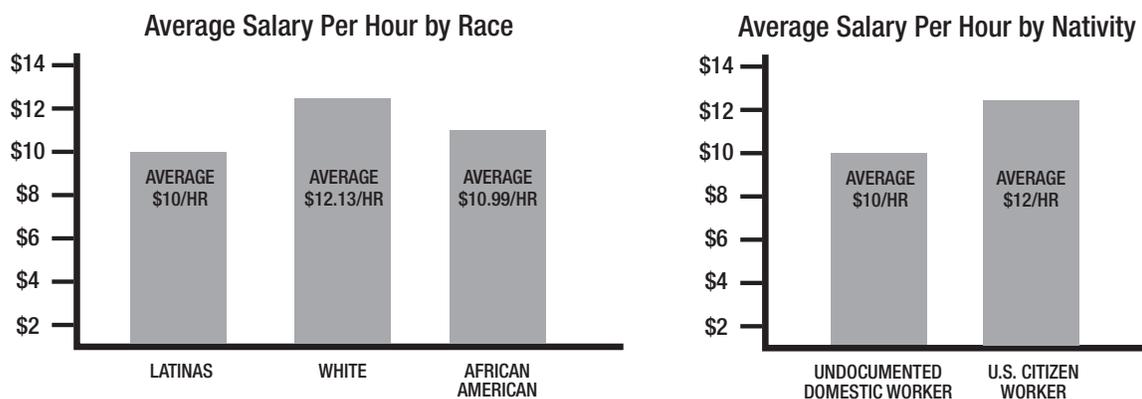
These manufacturing, assembly, distribution, and packaging jobs are increasingly staffed through agencies in the temporary staffing industry (TSI). The temporary staffing industry started in the 1950s in the clerical sector, but has grown exponentially in recent decades.⁴¹ There are around 2.8 million people working as temps now in the U.S. at any given time, and these jobs are overwhelmingly concentrated in industrial and manufacturing work.⁴² Staffing work is characterized by lower wages than direct hire jobs, higher rates of injury due to lack of safety training, racial, gender and age discrimination, and triangular employment relationships that makes it extremely difficult to organize.⁴³ Additionally, they are sites of frequent wage theft violations.⁴⁴ In Chicago, 40% of new jobs between 2009 and 2013 were temp jobs.⁴⁵ These jobs are disproportionately done by Latin@s and African-Americans. While many client company facilities are based in suburban locations, the temporary staffing agency offices are often located in deindustrialized and poor areas with high unemployment and few other job opportunities. Here in Chicago these agencies are mostly located in the south and west sides of the city, where African-American and Latin@s make up a large segment of the population.⁴⁶

Domestic Work

A domestic worker is a person who works within an employer’s household and includes housekeepers, nannies, childcare providers, caretakers, and home health aides. Currently, 17% of nannies and 52% of house cleaners in the U.S. are Latina.⁴⁷ Undocumented domestic workers make up 27% of maids and housekeepers⁴⁸ and 23% of those in private household employment.⁴⁹ One estimate indicates that 35% of domestic workers are foreign-born.⁵⁰

Low pay is extremely common in domestic work because workers are not protected by many national labor laws, including the right to overtime pay, and paid time off. , Additionally, domestic workers have also been excluded from the right to organize through the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and the right to minimum wage through the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Both domestic work and agricultural work—professions historically held by African-Americans – were excluded from the FLSA as a concession to the Southern states. Although the racial composition of domestic workers has shifted from African-Americans to Latin@s and immigrant workers, these exclusions continue to this day.⁵¹

In a national study that included domestic workers from Illinois, the National Domestic Worker Alliance examined wages received by domestic workers of different races and nativity/citizenship.⁵² The study revealed that wage differentials appear with citizenship status and race, especially impacting Latinas and undocumented workers. Latina domestic workers (including nannies, caregivers, and house cleaners) make an average of \$10/ hour. The figure is \$2.13 lower than white and \$0.99 lower than African-American domestic workers. Undocumented domestic workers receive an average of \$10/hour for every \$12/hour a U.S. citizen receives.⁵³



Burnham and Theodore 2012: 18, 21

These workers not only receive less pay, but face problematic and dangerous working conditions. According to the study, “85% of undocumented immigrants who encountered problems with their working conditions in the prior 12 months did not complain because they feared their immigration status would be used against them.”⁵⁴ This fear of deportation, a lack of familiarity with U.S. laws, and often a lack of English language proficiency, contribute to the vulnerability of many domestic workers,⁵⁵ making it easier to exploit undocumented Latinas and other immigrants through lower wages and abusive work conditions.⁵⁶

Barriers Faced by Latinas

In addition to structural labor market segregation, there are the challenges that Latinas experience disproportionately which serve as barriers to living wage employment and economic security. Below we outline some of these, including immigration status, English language proficiency, access to childcare, transportation and educational opportunities, and deportation of family members.

Immigration Status

In Chicago and throughout Illinois, the Latina immigrant population is diverse, and includes lawful permanent residents, naturalized citizens, and undocumented immigrants.⁵⁷ While each status comes with challenges, Latinas who are among the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. today face the largest barriers. For instance, Sanchez et al. (2012) reports that there are “Two million non-citizen Latinas (37%) in the U.S. living in poverty.”⁵⁸ And Mehta et al. (2002) suggest that undocumented Latin American women workers face a 36% wage penalty.⁵⁹ While longer residency, education, and English proficiency can help improve wages, an undocumented status still has significant impact. An undocumented status is often used to control workers through threats of deportation in any type of job, and proof of citizenship or work authorization are requirements for many higher paying jobs. The result is that many Latina immigrants, particularly if they are undocumented, are structurally pushed into informal work or less desirable low-wage formal jobs, and are often threatened with being fired or deported if they make demands for better pay or working conditions. This has local implication as women make up almost half (48%) of the undocumented population in Illinois.⁶⁰ And roughly 84% of undocumented immigrants, or 430,000 people, are from Latin America. In Chicago, 85% of undocumented people are from Latin America.⁶¹

Language Barriers

English language proficiency is often an official if not informal requirement for most well-paying and even many low-wage jobs. Yet due to varying backgrounds and educational opportunities, many Latina immigrants do not read, write, or speak English proficiently, or at all. Across Illinois, 41% of Latin@s speak English less than “very well.” That number is highest for Mexicans (45%) and Central Americans (47%), and lowest for Cubans (19%) and Puerto Ricans (18%), with Dominicans in between (34%).⁶²

Access to Affordable and Reliable Childcare

Families with young children who do not have a family member or friend to provide free or low-cost childcare face additional barriers to economic security. Immigrant Latinas are especially vulnerable, as many come to the United States without a familial support network. For many working families, the cost of childcare cannot be covered by a full-time job at minimum wage as monthly cost of childcare in Illinois can total \$1,469, while a minimum wage earner can make \$1,430 a month.⁶³ Programs like the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program helps low-income families pay for childcare, but this assistance is limited. The program takes the number of children, employment income, child support received, TANF, and Social Security

income into consideration to determine whether a family can receive this childcare stipend. A family of four (two earners, two children) making below \$3631 per month or \$10 per hour per head of household (\$3631 per month/176 hours per month) qualifies for childcare.⁶⁴ If the income rises slightly above this number, the family is ineligible for this support. In addition, the responsibilities of finding and managing childcare arrangements are disproportionately placed on the shoulders of women, particularly if they are the head of the household, which limits the type of work they can do to as they attempt to accommodate their schedules to avoid or minimize childcare costs. Such barriers keep many Latinas in low-wage work, and the cost of childcare perpetuates poverty.

Transportation

Latinas disproportionately live on the west and south sides, in port of entry neighborhoods or traditionally Latina neighborhoods like Pilsen and Little Village where jobs, especially well paying ones, are scarce. This creates not only difficulty in finding employment, but difficulties from commuting long distances in the city or out to the suburbs. On the other hand, due to gentrification in the city and the suburbanization of many manufacturing and service jobs, many Latinas and their families are relocating or initially settling in Cook County and surrounding suburbs and exurbs.⁶⁵ Cook County has seen a 23.6% increase in Latin@s between 2000 and 2010. Kane County, which includes Aurora and Elgin, has seen an increase in the Latin@ population of 30%. Lake, DuPage, and Will Counties have seen an increase of 19.5%, 13.2%, and 15.3%, respectively.⁶⁶ Yet many suburban areas are built around car use and do not have a public transportation system, causing increased financial strain and barriers to employment for low-income individuals or those without a license.⁶⁷

The issue of transportation becomes even more relevant when looking at undocumented Illinoisans. Suburban Chicago holds 54% of Illinois' undocumented population, while 36% live in Chicago.⁶⁸ Undocumented drivers face risk of detention every time they drive, particularly in the suburbs where racial profiling is more prevalent. With new legislation passed, undocumented residents of Illinois have been able to apply for a Temporary Visitor Driver's License (TVDL) since 2013. Already, 58,000 people have received TVDLs,⁶⁹ but many are still waiting to even get an appointment to apply, and many fear this license will not keep them safe from potential deportation if stopped while driving.

Education

Due to class disparities, structural racism, and geographic segregation there is still significant achievement gaps for Latina students. Only 60% of Latin@s in Illinois had a high school degree or above in 2010 and only 12% had a Bachelor's Degree or above.⁷⁰ Due to foreign born Latin@s either not being able to finish schooling in their home country, or U.S. or foreign born Latin@s disproportionately dropping out of school when in Chicago,⁷¹ Latin@s generally have the lowest educational attainment rates in the Chicago metro area.⁷² The recent Chicago Public School closings in primarily Latin@ and African-American neighborhoods will no doubt exacerbate this. And while Latin@s are increasingly enrolling in college, many still have limited access to quality education.⁷³ This is significant for many reasons, as lower educational attainment often translates into lower earnings and job opportunities. Indeed, workers with less than a college degree have suffered most from unemployment after the 2007-2009 recession.⁷⁴

Deportation and Family

Latinas with undocumented partners or spouses can face unique situations that strain their emotional and economic situation when their partner has limited job opportunities or is deported. In Illinois, 87% of households with one undocumented member are mixed-status families, meaning they comprise any mix of undocumented, U.S. citizen members, and lawful permanent residents. According to an Illinois Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights report, "in 55% of all Illinois married couples with at least one undocumented spouse, the other spouse is lawfully present (either native-born, naturalized, or lawful permanent resident). In 37% of these couples, the other spouse is a U.S. citizen."⁷⁵ For Latinas in mixed-status families, deportation of a partner or spouse could thrust them into poverty when they are left as a sole breadwinner.

Violence and Low-Wage Work

Sexual Violence in the Workplace

For many Latinas in low-wage work, maintaining employment is crucial to economic well-being, even when experiencing sexual violence in the workplace. Sexual violence includes sexual harassment (unwanted physical or verbal sexual advances) and sexual abuse/assault (unwanted sexual contact occurring without the consent of the recipient).⁷⁶ Although sexual violence can occur anywhere, Latinas and low-wage workers face particular burdens in the workplace. Of the over 30,000 cases brought to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, over 10,000 dealt with sexual harassment. Although information regarding Chicago is limited, 77% of Latinas surveyed reported sexual harassment as a major workplace issue in a study done by the Southern Poverty Law Center.⁷⁷ Restaurants, an area where many Latinas find employment, are particularly rife with abuse. According to a Restaurant Opportunities Centers United report, “one in ten [workers] reported that they or a co-worker had experienced sexual harassment in their restaurant.”⁷⁸

Survivors of workplace sexual violence experience the common reactions of sexual assault survivors more generally, including fear, stress, and loss of trust, but additionally feel these painful emotions in their workplace. Latinas may not report this abuse because they do not know their rights as employees, they lack trust in law enforcement and authorities, or are afraid of employer retaliation.⁷⁹ Survivors may feel ashamed if colleagues think the coerced or forced act was consensual. Those abused as children may be more likely to experience sexual violence as an adult because of conditioned beliefs of shame and self-blame that lead to “the desire to hide, disappear, or avoid exposure.”⁸⁰ Abusive coworkers might exploit this vulnerability, believing that the victim would not report the abuse to company management.

Sexual harassment is prevalent in low-wage industries such as hospitality, sales, and agriculture, in part because of the power imbalance between employees. In many of these jobs, supervisors are given control over hours worked, duties performed, and work location, a position of power that is well-positioned for abuse. Workers making low wages “are least able to absorb the financial blow of a reduction in hours, or of sudden changes in their work schedules that make it difficult for them to arrange childcare or transportation to work.”⁸¹ For example, supervisors are able to change these schedules to punish workers if they do not return sexual advances or if workers report these sexual advances to management. Low-wage workers must often put up with this abuse to keep their jobs.

Undocumented women are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace since they are not legally allowed to obtain work in the U.S. Thus, their status can be used as a tool for manipulation by employers and lack of work possibilities can force them to stay in otherwise dangerous jobs. Decisions to continue employment, even in the face of harassment, are decisions that Latinas make taking into account “immigration status, language ability, sexism, racism, poverty, family, and other factors that shape their lives. Many times this balancing of concerns results in women feeling compelled to remain in abusive environments.”⁸²

Survivor Stories

Eugenia* was raped by a supervisor from a cleaning temp agency where she worked. After the rape, she was told that if she reported the crime, she would be blacklisted from all other agencies in the area. She stayed in the job because she was undocumented, lived in a small suburban community, and was afraid that she would not find other employment. Eugenia came to Mujeres Latinas en Acción looking for help because the agency hadn't paid her. She ended up disclosing the abuse and Mujeres helped her file a police report.

Laura* worked at a company contracted to clean Chicago schools. She would be picked up at night by her supervisor and driven throughout the city to different schools to take out the trash, sweep, and mop. Often, while Laura was alone cleaning classrooms, her supervisor would touch her and verbally harass her. Laura didn't speak English, but the meaning of his words was clear. She was able to file a complaint with the EEOC through Mujeres, but soon after her hours were reduced and she was then fired. Laura hasn't been able to find another job, but hopes to find one doing similar work.

Berenice* works in a suburb outside of Chicago for a cleaning company. Although staff benefits included sick and vacation time, it was an unspoken rule that they were never to take it. Berenice had health issues that eventually became unbearable, and asked her supervisor for time off for a doctor's appointment. He told her that to get a day off, she must give him oral sex. Berenice, scared by the situation and afraid of losing her job, felt like she had no other choice. For weeks after the incident, the supervisor would approach Berenice and say, "Let me know if you want another day off. You know what you need to do." She continued to work at the cleaning company, even though the supervisor continued to text and harass her. Berenice became depressed and stopped cooking dinner and going on outings with her family. She didn't know how to explain the depression to her family and was worried that her husband would divorce her if he found out. She continues to work in the cleaning agency because she is undocumented and would have difficulty finding another job.

* names changed to protect privacy

Intimate Partner Violence and Low-Wage Work

Although intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs throughout all socioeconomic, racial, and gender groups, low-wage earners and Latinas can face unique burdens. Intimate partner violence can include emotional, physical, economic, and sexual abuse between two people who are in or have been in a relationship. IPV is similar to domestic violence, but specifically focuses on romantic partners instead of members of a household. Low-income earners may stay with an abuser for economic reasons, access to childcare, and child support, and due to economic abuse.

Latinas confront unique burdens with IPV. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey shows that 37.1% of Hispanic women living in the United States have experienced rape, stalking, or physical abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁸³ In 2013, the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence and partner organizations provided services to 9,750 Latinas, or 22% of the total served.⁸⁴ Patterns observed in Latina domestic violence survivors indicate that familial and social networks provide crucial physical and economic refuge. Latinas are less likely to use shelters when leaving domestic violence situations and often rely on friends or family members for help.⁸⁵ However, many immigrant Latinas do not have family living in the United States that they can rely on for emotional and economic assistance.⁸⁶ This places Latinas in a more vulnerable position economically when they seek to exit an abusive relationship.

Intimate partner violence can also perpetuate the cycle of poverty by decreasing the number of hours a woman is able to work.⁸⁷ Health issues, absenteeism, tardiness, and distraction at work are tangible impacts of IPV that impact ability to secure and maintain work.⁸⁸ For women earning a minimum wage, reduced work hours can put a family in a difficult economic situation.

Economic abuse, experienced by all types of IPV victims, is an especially difficult situation that low-income earners face. Economic abuse is “making or attempting to make an individual financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding one’s access to money, or forbidding one’s attendance at school or employment.”⁸⁹ In a study of low-income women experiencing IPV, “76% reported that their abusive partner was very much or completely responsible for their economic hardship.”⁹⁰

Economic hardship can impede many women from leaving abusive relationships, a difficulty that is exacerbated for low-income women. When they do leave, high costs associated with missing work to attend court dates and moving away from the abuser increase the financial burden. The high cost of childcare can also make it more difficult for women to leave an abusive relationship. In a study of low-wage earning women in domestic violence situations, Holly Bell (2003) observed that many subjects had jobs with irregular and inflexible hours and continued to maintain a relationship with their abuser to obtain childcare.⁹¹

However, increasing income could have a positive impact on domestic violence survivors. In “The Gender Wage Gap and Domestic Violence,” Anna Aizer (2010) examines the incidence of domestic violence and the wage gap between men and women. She discovers that a decrease in the wage gap between men and women “over the past 13 years can explain 9% of the reduction in violence against women.”⁹² Raising women’s income could accomplish this because an “economic theory of household bargaining that incorporates violence predicts that increases in a woman’s relative wage increase her bargaining power and lower levels of violence by improving her outside option.”⁹³ Studies like these highlight the importance for low-income female workers in general to achieve pay parity with their male colleagues.

Organizing for Economic Prosperity

Unions

One way Latinas have improved their economic security and independence is through labor organizing with unions. Through collective action and collective bargaining agreements, Latinas have improved health and safety conditions at work, increased access to employment, and of course improved wages for themselves and their communities. Latinas have long been involved in labor struggles, including organizing in agricultural jobs and garment factories in the early to mid 20th century, and in many service occupations since. Yet unions have also had a history of racism and sexism, which means that Latinas have often been excluded from organizing, or leading campaigns, limiting their access to improved economic prosperity. Nevertheless, since the 1990s many unions have become more welcoming and are actively organizing immigrants and people of color including Latinas, and many credit their energy in helping grow the labor movement again.⁹⁴ Indeed, as of 2013, 9.4% of Latinas were union members, although was lower than the national rate of 11.3 % of wage and salary workers.⁹⁵ Women who have unionized jobs earn 10.5% more than those who do not⁹⁶ and the difference is even greater for women of color. For instance, Latinas on average make anywhere from 15.9%⁹⁷ to 48%⁹⁸ more in unionized jobs than non-union ones, and are more likely to have benefits and paid time off.

Locally, unions including United Electrical Workers (UE), Workers United, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 881 (UFCW 881), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1, SEIU 73, SEIU HCII, Teamsters Local 743, and UNITE HERE Local 1, have been organizing with Latinas in hospitality, service, manufacturing, grocery, home health care, childcare, clerical, and healthcare jobs. Latinas have also been organizing with campaigns such as Fight for 15, where fast-food workers are advocating for increased wages and the right to organize unions without being retaliated against.

Worker Centers

Unfortunately, many Latinas are currently excluded from unionized jobs. Some, such as domestic workers, are employed in work that is formally excluded from union organizing and protection of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) due to a legacy of racialized exclusion. Others are in the fragmented, temporary, small, contingent, and part-time jobs that most labor unions are not actively organizing.⁹⁹ Fortunately, many Latinas are becoming involved in community based labor organizations called “worker centers” instead. Worker centers started emerging in the 1970s by and for predominantly Asian and Latina immigrants, as well as some African-Americans. They now number over 200¹⁰⁰ and keep growing. In general, worker centers focus on legal services, advocacy, organizing, policy work, political engagement, and worker education.¹⁰¹ They focus on rights for workers, but also issues affecting particular communities, such as immigration reform and access to driver’s licenses for immigrants.

Worker centers generally focus their efforts within a particular community or industry. For instance, the Chicago Community and Workers Rights (CCWR) and Centro de Trabajadores Unidos (CTU) organize workers in various jobs throughout Latin@ communities. In terms of the temporary staffing industry, five worker centers across the country, including the Chicago-based Chicago Workers’ Collaborative (CWC) and Warehouse Workers for Justice (WWJ) have come together to create the National Staffing Workers Alliance. Together they organize factory and distribution workers, including many Latinas, to fight for improved wages, safer conditions, more respect at work and fair treatment through policy work, media, and local organizing.¹⁰² In addition, the Latino Union and ARISE both organize Latina domestic workers, and the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) works with Latina restaurant workers. In addition, the Latino Union and ARISE both organize Latina domestic workers, and the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) works with Latina restaurant workers.

Coalitions and Legislation

Latin@s, women, and low-income workers are also joining together in Illinois, Chicago, and throughout the U.S. to build coalitions and produce legislation to create economic equity. Through these efforts, Latinas are demanding an end to low pay, discrimination, workplace violence, and exclusion.

Campaigns to Raise the Minimum Wage

Responding to the issue of income inequality, national, statewide and local campaigns have been advocating to raise the minimum wage, demanding salaries that provide a living wage. If the federal minimum wage had increased with inflation over the past 40 years, it would be \$10.90 instead of the current \$7.25.¹⁰³ The Congressional Budget Office estimates that raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour would directly benefit 16.5 million workers through increased income.¹⁰⁴ States and cities throughout the country are taking initiative raising minimum wage to reflect a living wage, a trend reflected in Illinois and Chicago.

- The Fight for 15 campaign in Chicago seeks to raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour for fast food and retail workers.¹⁰⁵
- The Minimum Wage Working Group, brought together by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, came up with a recommendation of raising Chicago's minimum wage to \$13/hour implemented over 4 years and indexing the minimum wage to inflation going forward. Raising the minimum wage in Chicago would account for the higher cost of living in the city. The group, comprised of business owners, community leaders, and Aldermen, made the recommendation based on town hall meetings across the city and research done on the impact of raising the minimum wage in cities across the country.¹⁰⁶
- The Raise Illinois campaign is advocating for raising the state minimum wage to \$10.65/hour.¹⁰⁷

Coalition Against Workplace Sexual Violence

The Coalition Against Workplace Sexual Violence was created by unions, anti-violence organizations, domestic violence and sexual assault organizations, worker centers, and local and national government departments. The group came together to address sexual violence in the workplace and come up with solutions. Together, this group formed a teaching curriculum for community educators to present to workers and unions and are working to foster relationships with other organizations to stop workplace sexual violence.

Earned Sick Time

Nationally, almost 80% of low-wage workers do not receive paid sick days through their employer. In Chicago specifically, 42% of private sector workers do not receive paid sick days, meaning employees either have to go to work while sick or miss work at the risk of losing their jobs.¹⁰⁸ Major cities throughout the country, including New York City and San Francisco, already require employers to provide paid sick time. The Chicago Earned Sick Time Ordinance would allow employees to earn sick time through time worked that could be used for a personal illness, medical appointments, or to care for a sick family member. The campaign also explicitly suggests it could also be used "to deal with domestic violence, sexual assault through medical attention, victim services or legal assistance."¹⁰⁹

The Illinois Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

Throughout the country, domestic worker organizations are advocating at a state level to be included in the basic labor protections offered to most workers. California, Massachusetts, Hawaii, and New York have signed bills to improve the lives of domestic workers by ensuring labor protections. These protections vary from state to state, but include written contracts, the right to minimum wage and overtime pay, freedom from harm on the job, and prior notice of termination. Currently, the Illinois Domestic Worker Coalition is advocating for a bill of

rights that would ensure domestic workers receive contracts, a minimum wage, one day off per week, and meal and rest breaks. Domestic workers would also be included in the Illinois Human Rights Act, so that if they faced abuse or harassment, could file a claim with the Illinois Department of Human Rights.¹¹⁰

Recommendations

While these campaigns can make significant change, they are just the beginning. We are committed to working with Latinas in Chicago as well as allies who are policy makers, labor organizers, service providers, and academics, to support Latinas in their fight for economic security and justice. Below is a partial list of actions we suggest to lead us on that path.

For Policy Makers

Minimum Wage

- Increase the minimum wage to \$15/hour in Chicago and \$10.65/hour in Illinois
- Tie the new minimum wage to inflation to avoid future erosion of the value of minimum wage. If the minimum wage had previously been tied to inflation, it would already be \$10.65/hour in Illinois¹¹¹
- Pass legislation that improves the lives of low-income workers, including Earned Sick Time and the Illinois Domestic Workers Bill of Rights
- Make pay equity between men and women a priority when creating and passing legislation
- Pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform or Administrative Action to start to address the needs of millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States
- Expand and improve access to transportation in the Chicago metro area
- Increase funding, support, and access to quality education, particularly for marginalized communities
- Raise the poverty threshold for public benefits, including childcare

For Labor and Service Providers

- Increase collaboration between labor and community organizations seeking to address issues of exploitation, wage theft, and sexual violence in the workplace and in the household.
- Increase immigration and labor related advocacy and organizing, and abuse counseling, particularly in the suburbs where there is much less support.
- Train employees and employers to recognize signs of workplace sexual violence and provide steps and support to help them address it
- Provide culturally and linguistically competent services and training for staff working with Latinas
- Work to become more familiar with the unique challenges and needs of Latinas, particularly those that are undocumented
- Provide on-site childcare for those seeking services

For Academics

- Continue to research and update existing research on low-wage workers, Latin@s, and women which can be used to advocate for change
- Work directly with labor and service provider organizations to share knowledge and create relevant reports to help with campaigns

Resources

Unions:

SEIU 73

300 S. Ashland Ave, 4th Floor, Chicago, IL 60607-2701
(312) 787-5868
<http://seiu73.org/>

SEIU HCII

2229 S. Halsted St, Chicago, IL 60608
(312) 980-9000
<http://www.seiuhcilin.org/>

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1

111 E. Wacker, Suite 2500, Chicago, IL 60601
(877) 233-8880 or (312) 233-8880
<http://www.seiu1.org/>

Teamsters Local 743

4620 S. Tripp Ave, Chicago, IL 60632
(773) 254-7460
<http://www.teamsterslocal743.com/>

UNITE HERE Local 1

218 S. Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 663-4373
<http://www.unitehere1.org/>

United Electrical Workers

37 S. Ashland Ave, Chicago, IL 60607
(312) 829-8300
<http://www.ueunion.org/>

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 881

10400 W. Higgins Rd, Rosemont, IL 60018
(847) 294-5064
<http://www.local881ufcw.org/>

Workers United- Chicago and Midwest Regional Joint Board

333 S. Ashland Ave, Chicago, IL 60607
<https://www.facebook.com/CMRJBWorkersUnited>

Worker Centers:

Arise Chicago

1436 W. Randolph Street, Suite 202, Chicago, IL 60607
(773) 769-6000
<http://arisechicago.org/>

Centro de Trabajadores Unidos (CTU)

3200 E. 91st Street, Chicago, IL 60617
(773) 349-2806
<http://www.centrodetrabajadoresunidos.org/>

Chicago Coalition of Household Workers

3416 W. Bryn Mawr, Chicago, IL 60659
(773) 588-2641
<http://www.latinunion.org/about.htm>

Chicago Community and Workers Rights (CCWR)

1900 S Carpenter St, Chicago, IL 60608
(773) 653-3664
<http://chicagoworkersrights.org/>

Chicago Workers Collaborative (CWC)

5014 S. Ashland, Chicago, IL 60609 (also locations in Waukegan and Rolling Meadows)
Toll Free: 1-877-775-8242
<http://www.chicagoworkerscollaborative.org/>

Latino Union

3416 W. Bryn Mawr, Chicago, IL 60659
(773) 588-2641
<http://www.latinunion.org/about.htm>

Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC)

77 W. Washington Street, Suite 812 Chicago, IL 60602
(312) 629-2892
<http://rocunited.org/chicago/>

Warehouse Workers for Justice (WWJ)

37 S. Ashland, Chicago, Illinois, 60607
339 W. Jefferson St, Joliet, IL 60435
(815) 722-5003
<http://www.warehouseworker.org/>

Sexual Abuse and Domestic Violence Resources:

Rape Crisis Hotline: 1-888-293-2080

Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-312-738-5358

Mujeres Latinas en Acción

2124 W. 21st Place, Chicago, IL 60608
7222 W. Cermak Rd. Ste. 509
(773) 890-7676
www.mujeerlatinassenaccion.org

YWCA- Metropolitan Chicago

1 N. LaSalle Street, Suite 1150, Chicago, IL 60602
(312) 372.6600
<http://www.ywcachicago.org>

ICASA

100 N. 16th Street, Springfield, IL 62703
(217) 753-4117
<http://www.icasa.org/>

Rape Victim Advocates

180 N. Michigan Ave #600, Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 443-9603
<http://www.rapevictimadvocates.org/>

Endnotes

- ¹García Zambrana and Bachman 2014: 20; Center for Popular Democracy 2014: 2
- ²Mehta et al. 2002:27
- ³Domineau 2014
- ⁴Women Employed 2014
- ⁵García Zambrana and Bachman 2014: 20
- ⁶García Zambrana and Bachman 2014: 30
- ⁷Catanzarite and Trimble 2008:149
- ⁸Cintrón-Vélez 2005
- ⁹This includes many of the jobs “created” after the 2008 recession (Bernhardt 2011, 2012).
- ¹⁰Doussard 2012:6 for distribution of workers per occupation
- ¹¹Mehta et al. 2002:27
- ¹²Doussard 2012:1
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Ibid.
- ¹⁵Sanchez et al. 2012:17
- ¹⁶Sanchez et al. 2012
- ¹⁷Women’s general labor market participation rose from 30% in 1950 to 60% in 2002 (Cintrón-Vélez 2005) and 59.4% in 2008 (Luce and Weinbaum 2008:20).
- ¹⁸Cintrón-Vélez 2005
- ¹⁹Creticos and Rosenberg 2010:144 referring to US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006
- ²⁰Luce and Weinbaum 2008: 22
- ²¹National Women’s Law Center 2014
- ²²Catanzarite and Trimble 2008: 156-157
- ²³see Creticos and Rosenberg 2010: 150
- ²⁴Mehta et al. 2002
- ²⁵Center for Popular Democracy 2014: 2
- ²⁶National Employment Law Project 2014: 2
- ²⁷Sanchez et al. 2012
- ²⁸Cárdenas 2012
- ²⁹Ibid., 90
- ³⁰\$8.25/hour x 40 hours/week x 52 weeks/year
- ³¹In 2010 the average family size for Latin@s in Illinois was 4.0 people, while it is 3.2 on average for the total population in Illinois. For Mexican-descendant Latin@s that number is 4.2 people and for Dominicans and Central Americans, that number is 3.8 people, and for Puerto Ricans and Cubans 3.4. (García, Zambrana and Bachman 2014: 26).
- ³²Illinois Legal Aid 2014
- ³³Doussard 2012: 3 “Based on the assumption of 50 work weeks at 40 hours per week (Doussard 2012:9).”
- ³⁴Bernhardt et al. 2009
- ³⁵Ibid., 5
- ³⁶Ibid., 4
- ³⁷Sanchez et al. 2012: 31-32
- ³⁸Ibid., 32 referencing BLS 2011
- ³⁹Shierholz 2014
- ⁴⁰Smith and McKenna 2014
- ⁴¹see Hatton 2011
- ⁴²Luo et al. 2010; Peck and Theodore 2007; Hatton 2011; Smith and McKenna 2014
- ⁴³Smith and McKenna 2014
- ⁴⁴Bernhardt et al. 2009
- ⁴⁵Smith and McKenna 2014:9 citing Wright 2013
- ⁴⁶see Peck and Theodore 2008
- ⁴⁷Burnham and Theodore 2012
- ⁴⁸Passel and Cohn 2009: 15
- ⁴⁹Ibid., 16
- ⁵⁰Burnham and Theodore 2012
- ⁵¹Benitez et al. 2013
- ⁵²The domestic worker profession is notoriously isolated, with many working in private homes and separated from others. Due to this characteristic of the profession, local statistics are often difficult to obtain.
- ⁵³Burnham and Theodore 2012
- ⁵⁴Ibid.
- ⁵⁵Labadie-Jackson 2008
- ⁵⁶Dominguez Migela 1999
- ⁵⁷

- Lawful Permanent Resident - “Any person not a citizen of the United States who is residing the in the U.S. under legally recognized and lawfully recorded permanent residence as an immigrant. Also known as ‘Permanent Resident Alien,’

- 'Resident Alien Permit Holder,' and 'Green Card Holder'" as defined by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
- Naturalized Citizen - "Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act" as defined by USCIS.
 - Undocumented Immigrant - "refers to foreign nationals residing in the U.S. without legal immigration status. It includes persons who entered the U.S. without inspection and proper permission from the U.S. government, and those who entered with a legal visa that is no longer valid. Undocumented immigrants are also known as unauthorized or illegal immigrants" as defined by U.S. Legal
- ⁵⁸Sanchez et al. 2012: 95
- ⁵⁹Mehta et al. 2002: 16
- ⁶⁰Tsao 2014
- ⁶¹Ibid.
- ⁶²García Zambrana and Bachman 2014
- ⁶³Terpstra et al. 2014
- ⁶⁴Child Care Resource Service 2009
- ⁶⁵This is part of a larger national trend wherein since the 1980s Latin American immigrants have increasingly settled in "new immigrant destinations" of the Midwest and South, small towns, as well as suburbs of traditional immigrant gateways (Massey 2008; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005).
- ⁶⁶García Zambrana and Bachman 2014:13
- ⁶⁷Cawthorne 2010
- ⁶⁸Tsao 2014
- ⁶⁹Perez 2014
- ⁷⁰García Zambrana and Bachman 2014:20-21
- ⁷¹Soltero, Soltero, and Robbins 2010
- ⁷²Creticos and Rosenberg 2010:161, citing Chicago Urban League, Northern Illinois University, and Roosevelt University, N.D.
- ⁷³Sanchez et al. 2012
- ⁷⁴Hout and Cumberworth 2014
- ⁷⁵Tsao 2014
- ⁷⁶Coalition Against Workplace Sexual Violence 2013
- ⁷⁷Southern Poverty Law Center 2009
- ⁷⁸Restaurant Opportunities Center United 2012
- ⁷⁹Sanchez et al. 2012
- ⁸⁰Tapia 2014
- ⁸¹Goss Graves et al. 2014
- ⁸²Vellos 1997
- ⁸³Black et al. 2011
- ⁸⁴Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence 2013
- ⁸⁵Ingram 2007
- ⁸⁶Vidales 2010
- ⁸⁷see Tolman 2011
- ⁸⁸Ibid.
- ⁸⁹U.S. Department of Justice 2014
- ⁹⁰Bell 2003
- ⁹¹Ibid.
- ⁹²Aizer 2010: 18
- ⁹³Ibid., 1
- ⁹⁴Delgado 2008
- ⁹⁵Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) 2014
- ⁹⁶Luce and Weinbaum 2008 citing Mishel, Bernstein, and Allegretto 2006
- ⁹⁷Luce and Weinbaum 2008:25
- ⁹⁸Gallagher Robbins and Frohlich 2014:2
- ⁹⁹Fine 2006; Gordon 2005
- ¹⁰⁰Narro 2013
- ¹⁰¹Fine 2006
- ¹⁰²Smith and McKenna 2014
- ¹⁰³Raise the Minimum Wage 2014
- ¹⁰⁴Furman and Stevenson 2014
- ¹⁰⁵Fight for 15 2014
- ¹⁰⁶Minimum Wage Working Group 2014: 1, 7
- ¹⁰⁷Raise Illinois 2014
- ¹⁰⁸Women Employed 2014
- ¹⁰⁹Earned Sick Time Chicago 2014
- ¹¹⁰Illinois Domestic Workers Coalition 2014
- ¹¹¹Raise the Minimum Wage 2014

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