

Women in Trades: Progress Report



Partners



The Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for The Future Skills Centre.



The Future Skills Centre is powered by a Canada-wide network of 5,000+ partners committed to solving Canada's most pressing labour market challenges. More than just a funder, we are an active partner in every project we support. We ask more of our partners — prioritizing collaboration, shared learning and openness — to foster long-term relationships and enable the ambitious approaches needed to drive real change.

The Future Skills Centre operates as a consortium of Toronto Metropolitan University (including Diversity Institute and Magnet), Signal49 Research and Blueprint. We are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills program.



The electricity industry is rapidly transforming. The emergence of new technology, electrification of sectors of the economy that have not previously been electric, and decarbonization more generally are driving demand for skilled workers in numbers never seen before. Canada is embarking on a nation-building exercise unlike any in recent history — and Electricity Human Resources Canada (EHRC) is the national voice on labour market intelligence and workforce planning for the electricity sector. EHRC works with employers, educators, labour representatives and governments to identify workforce gaps and evolving roles across the industry. That insight is translated into practical, industry-focused programs that advance diverse hiring and retention, engage more young people in the sector, and strengthen succession planning, change management and knowledge transfer. EHRC connects workforce insight to coordinated action across the sector.



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BuildForce Canada's mandate is to support the labour market development needs of the construction and maintenance industry. As part of these activities, BuildForce works with key industry stakeholders, including contractors, proponents of construction, labour providers, governments and training providers, to identify both demand and supply trends that will impact labour force capacity in the sector, and supports the career searches of job seekers wanting to work in the industry. BuildForce also leads programs and initiatives that support workforce upskilling, workforce productivity improvements, improvements to training modalities, human resource tools to support the adoption of industry best practices, as well as other value-added initiatives focused on supporting the industry's labour force development needs.



Electricity Canada promotes responsible solutions to the nation's energy transition, energy security and resiliency goals, and supports interactions between its members, governments, and regulators at all levels. It also facilitates its members' relationships with key industry partners, and with energy distributors in the U.S.. Electricity Canada provides an environment for its members in which professionals can exchange best practices and provides reliable information about electricity and electrification to the public, the media, and other interested parties. The association is evolving rapidly as its members' needs evolve. Electricity Canada constantly monitors the rapidly changing energy sector and adapts its services and approach accordingly.



Build a Dream is a national nonprofit organization that connects girls, women, and gender-diverse individuals with opportunities to explore, enter, and advance in meaningful careers in skilled trades, STEAM, emergency response, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Through career discovery experiences, workforce development programs, mentorship, professional development initiatives, and industry partnerships, Build a Dream helps strengthen talent pipelines, address workforce shortages, and build a more inclusive and future-ready workforce.

Since its founding in 2014, Build a Dream has engaged more than 100,000 participants and collaborated with employers, educational institutions, unions, industry associations, community organizations, and governments across Canada, creating pathways that connect potential to purpose, learning to opportunity, and talent to industry.

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Executive Summary

At a time when Canada's skilled trades sector is critically important to nation-building projects and the country's economy, it is facing a mounting labour shortage. Competition for qualified workers has intensified in recent years due to demographic shifts, including the retirement of a substantial cohort of tradespeople. At the same time, persistent labour market demand has been driven by activity in construction, manufacturing and, transportation. Continued low women's participation in the sector, caused by entrenched gender disparities, makes this problem even more difficult. Women make up only 7.3% of workers in trades, transportation, and equipment-operation occupations, and just 12.5% of those registered in apprenticeship programs. According to the 2021 Census, women represented 14.8% of Canada's Red Seal trades workforce. Women's representation is highly concentrated in a small number of service trades: When cooks, bakers and hairstylists are excluded, women represented just 5.2% of the Red Seal trades workforce. Women are also significantly underrepresented in apprenticeship pathways. In the core Red Seal trades of electrical,

carpentry, plumbing and automotive service, women represent only 4.3% to 6.9% of apprenticeship registrations. Progress here has been marginal. In 1996, women made up 7.6% of apprenticeship registrations across major trade groups and, nearly three decades later, that share has risen only to 12.5%. However, the evidence increasingly shows that retention and completion, not only recruitment, are the central barriers.

Canada is entering a period of sustained demand for skilled trades workers, driven by major investments in housing, infrastructure renewal, clean growth, electrification, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals and mining development, defence, and public-sector capital projects. Governments and industry across Canada have increasingly recognized that meeting these economic and industrial priorities will require a significantly expanded skilled trades workforce. In 2026, for example, the Government of Canada announced Team Canada Strong, an \$8 billion initiative intended to recruit, train, and hire up to 100,000 additional Red Seal workers over five years.

However, workforce expansion strategies will have limited impact if longstanding barriers to participation and retention remain unaddressed, particularly when men continue to make up the vast majority of workers in Red Seal trades. If women, Indigenous Peoples and other equity-deserving groups continue to face barriers in accessing apprenticeships, securing sponsorship, remaining in the workforce, and advancing in their careers, major workforce investments risk reproducing the same participation gaps that have constrained the sector's labour supply for decades. Inclusion measures must therefore be embedded across workforce planning, training, procurement, employer engagement, and retention strategies. Equity, diversity, and inclusion are not separate from skilled trades workforce planning, but central to ensuring that investments translate into a larger, more sustainable, and more resilient workforce.

The persistent obstacles to women's entry, retention, and advancement appear at societal, organizational and individual levels:

- > Societal stereotypes portray trades as inappropriate work for women. These stereotypes are reinforced by media narratives that overlook non-traditional career pathways and amplified by labour-market structure. The prevalence of micro-firms and self-employment produces informal and weakly regulated employment practices, leaving tradeswomen with fewer statutory and collective protections than women in more structured professions.
- > Organizational cultures within workplaces and post-secondary education can compound these barriers. Women apprentices report unequal access to hands-on opportunities, hostile climates characterized by microaggressions and harassment, and ill-fitting equipment that poses safety risks and underscores a lack of design consideration for women.
- > Finally, at the individual level, influencers and decision-makers in schools and at home often lack the information to recommend trades careers to girls.



Despite these challenges, promising practices have begun to reshape the landscape:

- > Targeted funding under the Government of Canada's national Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy (CAS) and the national Community Employments Benefits program, as well as national and regional Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) has tied infrastructure investments to explicit equity goals. This has prompted employers and training providers to prioritize women's recruitment and support.
- > Union and college-led initiatives like women's mentorship programs, wraparound supports, and women-only pre-apprenticeship streams provide structured training and retention supports that can improve completion rates. Some colleges have gone further by incorporating gender equity considerations into their core strategic planning, admissions and performance tracking activities.
- > Individual empowerment is also advancing through school-based outreach, hands-on workshops, peer-ambassador networks, and comprehensive career-mapping tools that demystify trade pathways and present them as accessible and rewarding for women.

There are many proven strategies to advance women's participation, but scale is the most pressing issue. Actions are needed at all levels, with an emphasis on amplifying what works.

At the societal level, government action must be prioritized. The skilled trades sector is highly fragmented and, as a result, so are EDI efforts. Governments – in collaboration with the education sector, employers, unions, non-profits and women themselves – are in the best position to drive change at a global level. The CAS is a

positive first step and should be fortified with additional funding and a more targeted effort. While funding grassroots union and non-profit programs is important, top-down planning, programming, and engagement are needed to ensure adequate coverage and scale.

Governments also have a role in supporting consortiums, training, and practical tools for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as providing wage subsidies to employers who hire women apprentices. Even when these supports are available, many SMEs lack the capacity to identify and use them effectively, so a concierge-style service could help close this gap. Such a service would include a single point of contact that helps SMEs identify relevant supports, navigate available funding, and implement practical changes suited to their size and sector.



The role of organizations, especially educational institutions, cannot be overstated. A more concerted effort in early outreach is needed, including trades-focused career exploration programs in secondary schools, hands-on workshops, panels and media featuring role models, and toolkits for parents and educators. These programs should be funded, standardized, and made available to school boards across the country. To drive systemic change, these initiatives should form part of an integrated strategy. Targets, disaggregated data, and tracking should be included from career exploration to trades college enrolment, employment, and beyond. In this regard, the efforts of Okanagan College stand out as an example of a thoughtful approach.

The actions of unions and employers can also go a long way to support women's inclusion in trades while helping to address skills shortages and promoting sector resilience. These efforts should start with leadership, ensuring diverse representation on leadership teams and clearly communicating the organization's commitment to EDI. Inclusive HR practices, family-friendly benefits and mentorship programs, along with enforcement of EDI and anti-harassment policies, will create a respectful and inclusive work environment for all, aiding employee engagement and retention.

Finally, data, analysis, reporting and transparency are essential. The current structure of funding works against data sharing. Because federal and provincial grants are awarded competitively, organizations have little reason to disclose what works, as sharing outcomes risks strengthening a rival's next funding application. The result is that promising practices remain siloed and evaluations rarely reach the public domain.

Funders should consider building data-sharing obligations into grant conditions and establishing neutral platforms where programs can report outcomes without competitive disadvantage. Rigorous, independent evaluations can help successes be identified, disseminated, and scaled.





Introduction

Canada's skilled trades sector faces a significant demographic challenge. An aging workforce is approaching retirement while fewer young people are choosing careers in trades. The scale of this demand is substantial. National priorities spanning housing, infrastructure renewal, clean growth, electrification, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals and mining, defence, and public-sector capital work are generating sustained workforce pressure that cannot be met without a significantly larger pool of qualified tradespeople. The Government of Canada's 2026 Team Canada Strong initiative underscores just how acute that pressure has become.

Despite the economic importance of these occupations and growing labour shortages, women remain substantially under-represented across most trades. This persistent gender disparity is reinforced by significant barriers to women's entry, retention, completion, and advancement, with emerging evidence indicating that while there has been progress in recruitment efforts, retention and completion remain critical bottlenecks limiting the sector's access to talent.

This report examines the systemic barriers that prevent women from entering and succeeding in skilled trades, while identifying strategies and initiatives designed to address these

challenges. The analysis draws on Canadian and international experiences to understand these obstacles, as well as the approaches being taken by governments, employers, unions, and educational institutions to promote greater inclusion and equity within the trades.

The report is structured to examine barriers and solutions across societal, organizational, and individual levels. It begins by analyzing the current landscape of women's participation in skilled trades, then explores the multi-layered barriers that perpetuate gender disparities. It concludes by reviewing initiatives and practices aimed at advancing women's workforce integration in the trades sector.



Context

The under-representation of women in trades is a long-standing issue in Canada. Occupational segregation limits women's employment and earning potential and impedes the sector's ability to address its significant skills and workforce shortages. Moreover, diverse teams deliver better performance and have a greater capacity for radical innovation.

The breadth of national priorities depending on a larger trades workforce — from housing and infrastructure to clean growth, electrification, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals, defence, and public capital projects — underscores the scale of the challenge. The Government of Canada has committed \$8 billion in federal funding over five years through Team Canada Strong: \$6 billion to recruit, train and hire 80,000 to 100,000 new Red Seal trades workers, and an additional \$2 billion to provinces and territories through bilateral agreements to expand training capacity and create more pathways into Red Seal trades.^{1,2} Achieving those targets will require not only new entrants to the sector, but a fundamental broadening of the talent pool.

A brief overview of the skilled trades landscape in Canada

The skilled trades system covers a diverse range of occupations that are essential to Canada's economic priorities, including infrastructure development, housing supply, and the transition to a net-zero economy.

Canada formally recognizes more than 300 designated trades, 54 of which carry the interprovincial Red Seal endorsement that allows qualified workers to practise freely across provincial and territorial borders without additional certification ([Appendix A](#)).^{3,4} Collectively, about one in five Canadian workers are employed in these occupations, and four in five apprentices are enrolled in Red Seal programs.⁵ The Red Seal Program establishes common national standards for designated skilled trades across Canada and supports the recognition and mobility of qualified tradespeople across provinces and territories. As shown in Table 1, skilled trades are present across a range of goods- and service-providing industries classified by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Table 1

Selected industries employing skilled trades, GDP contribution, and examples of common occupations, 2022

NAICS industry	2022 Canadian GDP contribution		Skilled trades employed by sector, examples of common occupations
	\$ in millions	% of GDP	
Manufacturing	259,782	10%	Tool and die makers, industrial mechanics (millwrights), metal fabricators, etc.
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	245,971	9%	Welders, pipefitters, heavy equipment operators, oil and gas drillers and servicers, etc.
Construction	202,987	8%	Electricians, carpenters, plumbers, steamfitters/pipefitters, welders, heavy equipment operators, crane operators, painters, etc.
Transportation and warehousing	119,512	4%	Automotive service technicians, heavy-duty equipment technicians, motorcycle technicians, etc.
Information and cultural industries	76,308	3%	Instrumentation and control technicians and machinists
Utilities	58,439	2%	Electricians, powerline technicians, instrumentation, and control technicians, etc.
Accommodation and food services	53,329	2%	Cooks, bakers, etc.
Other services	47,883	2%	Hairstylists, landscape horticulturists, etc.

Sources:

Statistics Canada. (2025). *Table 36-10-0710-01 Gross domestic product (GDP) at basic prices, by industry (x 1,000,000)*. <https://doi.org/10.25318/3610071001-eng>

Employment and Social Development Canada. (2024). *Discover careers in the skilled trades*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/campaigns/skilled-trades.html>

The skilled trades system is under mounting demographic pressure, driven by an aging workforce and insufficient entry of younger workers. Up to 700,000 tradespeople are expected to retire by 2028, further tightening an already limited labour supply.

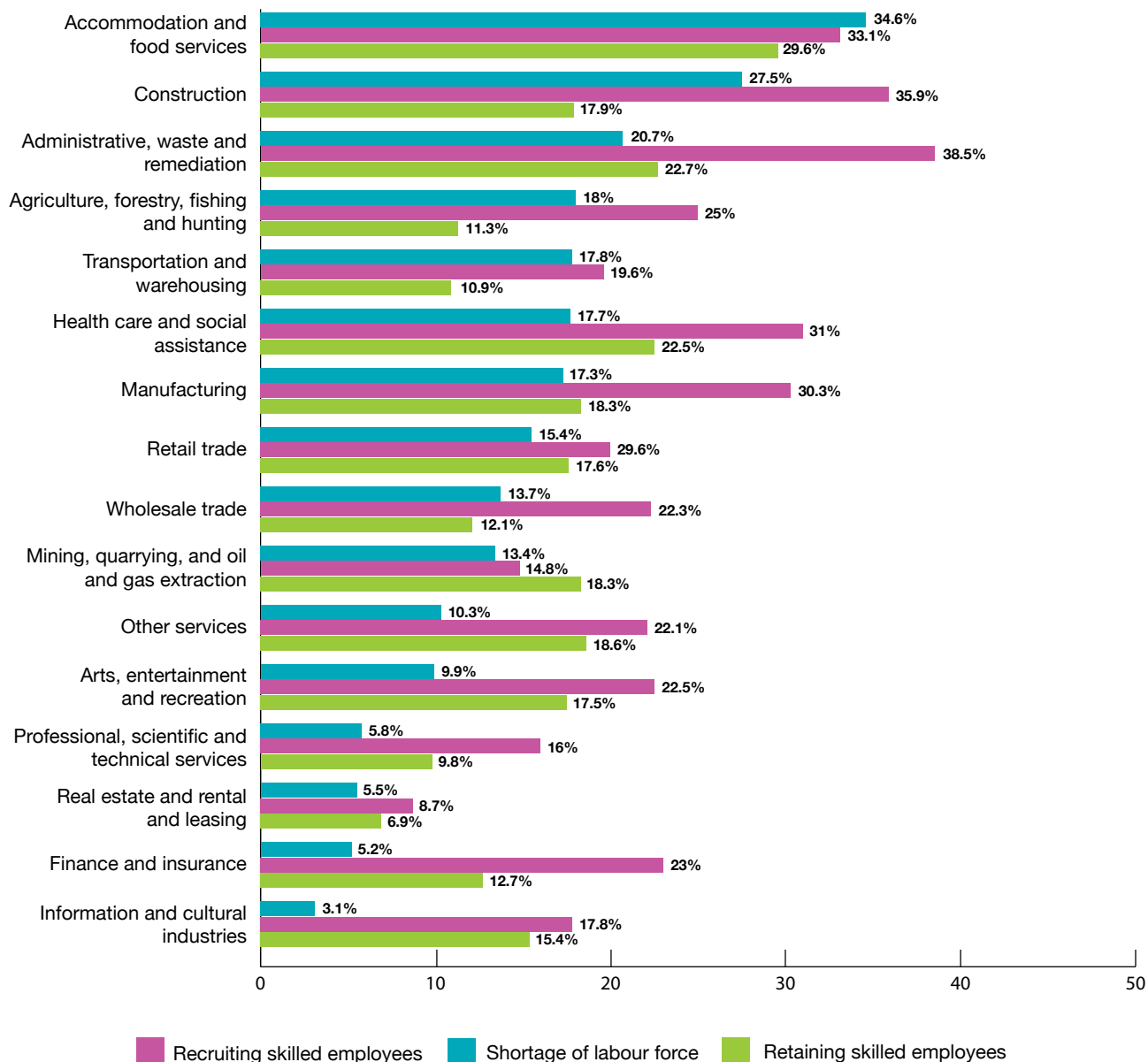
In manufacturing, the workforce is notably older. Only about one in 10 workers is under the age of 25, compared to roughly one-quarter aged 55 or older.⁶ Construction faces parallel challenges, as more than 245,100 construction workers are expected to exit the labour force by 2032 and 22.1% of workers in construction trades requiring an apprenticeship are already aged 55 or above.^{7, 8, 9} While apprenticeship registrations have increased, completion remains a significant challenge, suggesting that there are structural barriers affecting the retention of young workers.¹⁰

The resulting supply-demand gap is substantial. In the construction sector alone, Canada is expected to require more than 1.4 million new tradespeople by 2033 to keep pace with projected demand.¹¹ Employers are already expressing concern, with 30% of manufacturing firms and 36% of construction companies reporting that shortages of skilled workers are constraining their growth plans, as shown in Figure 1.¹²



Figure 1

Percentage of Canadian businesses experiencing labour shortages and challenges recruiting and retaining skilled employees by industry, Q1, 2026



Source:

Statistics Canada. (2026, February 27). *Business or organization obstacles over the next three months, first quarter of 2026*. <https://doi.org/10.25318/3310110001-eng>



Women's current participation in the skilled trades

Despite the size and economic importance of the trades, participation by women remains low. Statistics Canada's 2025 occupational data indicate that women account for only 7.3% of workers employed in trades, transportation, and equipment-operation occupations (excluding management), compared to 47% of women's representation across all occupations. Little has changed since 1996, when women made up 6.9% of the workforce in these occupations.¹³

The pipeline into trades is similarly limited, where women represented only 12.5% of all individuals registered in apprenticeship programs in 2024.¹⁴ An examination of the major trades groups reveals further occupational segregation. Figure 2 shows that women's representation in apprenticeship registrations differs by an order of magnitude between trades.

Women made up a small minority of electrician (6.2%), carpentry (6.6%), plumbing (4.3%), and automotive service (6.9%) programs, which together constitute the largest share of trade registrations. By contrast, women constituted 95.9% of early childhood educator apprentices, 85.4% of community and social service worker apprentices, 85.4% of hairstylist and esthetician apprentices, and 41.8% of food service-related trades.

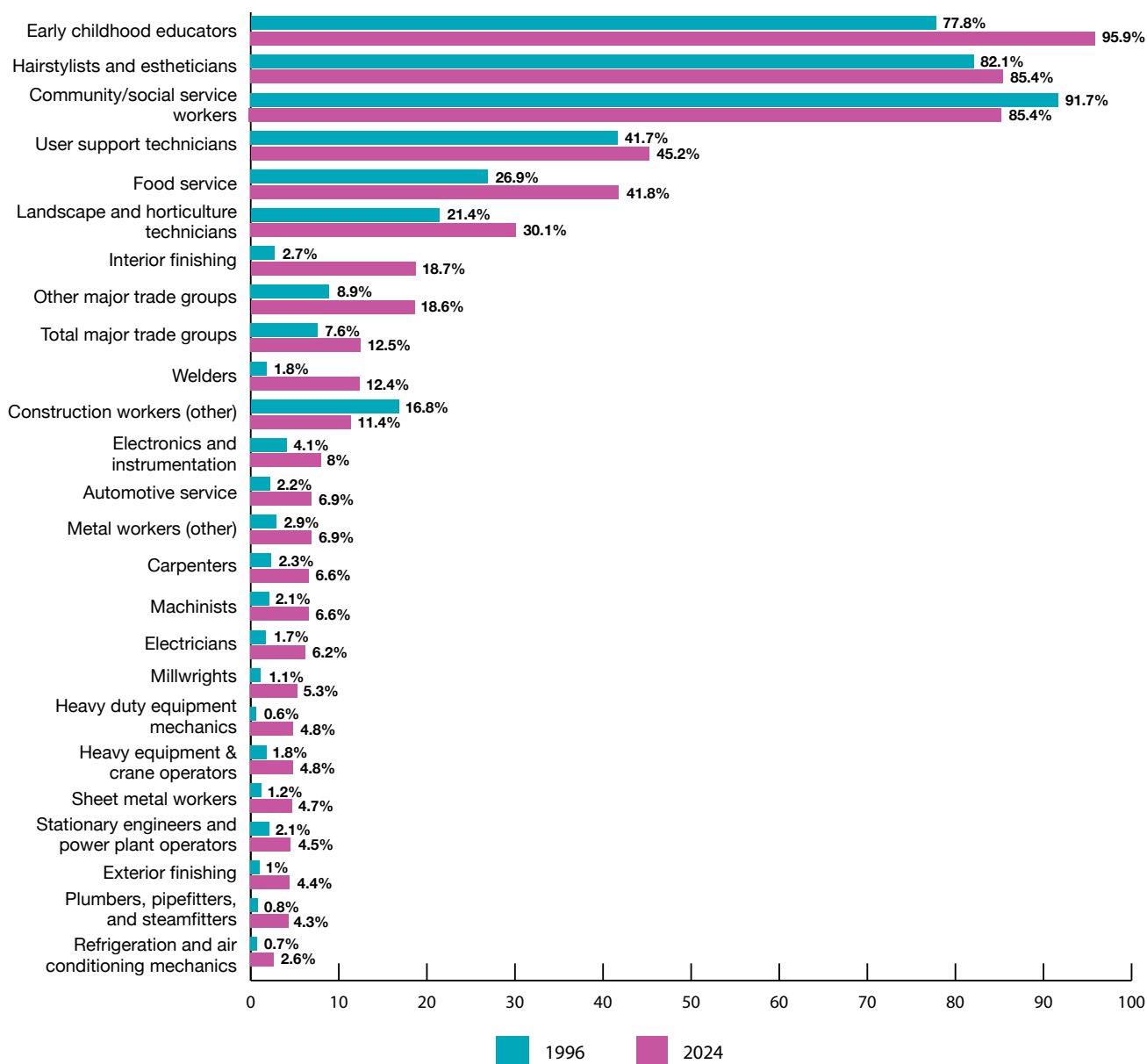
Put differently, nearly one-half of women apprentices are clustered in four care- and service-oriented trades, while their presence in the bulk of construction and industrial occupations remains minimal.



*Statistics Canada's 2025 occupational data indicate that **women account for only 7.3% of workers employed in trades, transportation, and equipment-operation occupations (excluding management).***

Figure 2

Percentage of apprenticeship registrations held by women by major trade group, 1996 vs. 2024



Source:

Statistics Canada. (2025). *Table 37-10-0219-01. Apprenticeship programs by age groups, major trade groups, sex and registration status*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=3710021901>



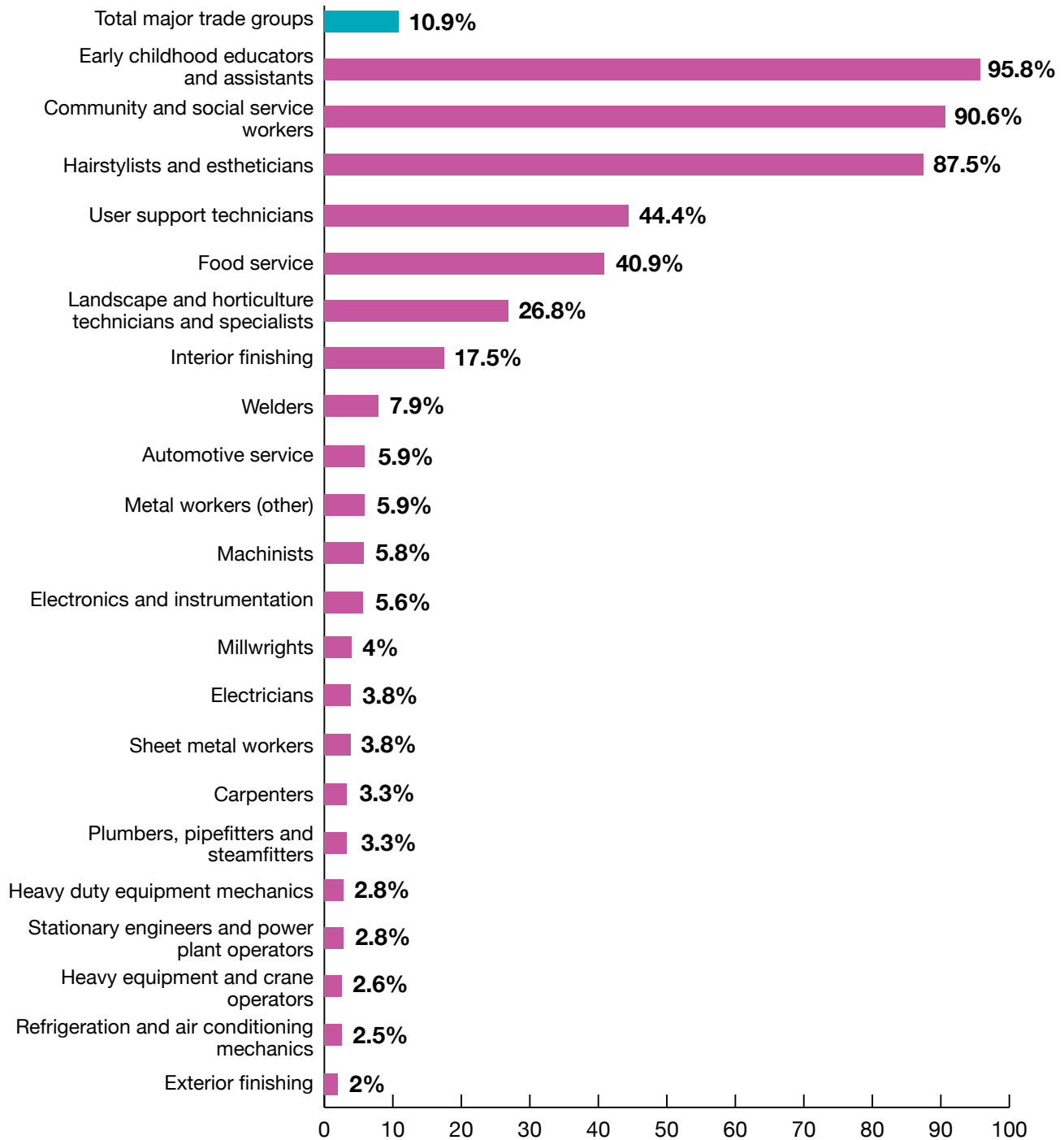
Longitudinal data confirms how persistent these gendered patterns have been. In 1996, women represented only 1.7% of electrician apprentices and, almost three decades later, that figure has risen to just 6.2%. Over the same period, women's participation increased more substantially in service-oriented trades. For example, women added about 7,000 registrations in food service, raising their share from 26.9% to 41.8%. Even where women's participation has increased in absolute numbers in construction and industrial trades, their overall share has risen only gradually as total registrations have expanded.

The gender disparity is also clearly evident at the point of certification. In 2024, women received 10.9% of all trade certificates granted. Their share was lower among certificates granted in Red Seal trades, at 8.8%, compared with 16.8% in non-Red Seal trades.¹⁵

Looking more closely at certification outcomes across trades in Figure 3, women's representation remains consistently low in many of the largest and most in-demand occupations. In carpentry, for example, women accounted for just 3.3% of certifications, while they represented 3.8% in electrical trades, and 2.6% in heavy equipment operation.

Figure 3

Women's representation in trade certifications across major trade groups, 2024



Source:

Statistics Canada. (2025). *TTable 37-10-0089-01: Number of certificates granted to registered apprentices and trade qualifiers*. Statistics Canada. <https://doi.org/10.25318/3710008901-eng>

The pattern is replicated within the Red Seal system. Of the 1,969,900 people in Canada's Red Seal trades workforce in 2021, 14.8% were women, and the number of women in this workforce declined by 4.7% between 2016 and 2021. Women were also highly concentrated in a small number of service trades. When cooks, bakers, and hairstylists are excluded, women represented just 5.2% of the Red Seal trades workforce.¹⁶

Women's participation varies across provinces, but the degree differs by trade. As outlined in [Appendix C](#), women make up between 4.5% and 8.6% of electrician apprentices depending on the province, while their share of heavy equipment operator registrations ranges from 2.3% in Quebec to 15.6% in British Columbia. Do these disparities simply reflect differences in the regional industrial structure? Or are they influenced by outreach initiatives, government policy, the availability of wraparound supports, or other factors? More robust data collection is needed to answer these important questions.



Women holding a Red Seal certificate earn, on average, only 46% of men's earnings eight years after certification.

Labour market outcomes

Low participation is compounded by unequal employment outcomes. Across Canada, women who complete apprenticeships in trades where men are highly concentrated are less likely to be employed, work fewer hours on average, and earn markedly lower wages than men working in the same fields.¹⁷

While the gender wage gap has narrowed since the late 1990s, it persists. Women aged 25 to 54 years earn 89 cents for every dollar earned by men.¹⁸ The disparity is even more pronounced in the skilled trades, where women holding a Red Seal certificate earn, on average, only 46% of men's earnings eight years after certification.¹⁹ The resulting wage gap within Red Seal trades is nearly five times larger than the 11% gender wage gap observed across the broader Canadian labour market.

Occupational segregation plays a decisive role. High-remuneration trades such as crane operation, heavy-duty equipment mechanics, industrial electrical work and power-line maintenance have average annual earnings between \$161,400 and \$200,200 – yet women make up less than 2% of the workforce in each of those fields. Conversely, the three trades that employ the majority of certified women have post-certification earnings of only \$44,700 for hairstyling, \$51,880 for cooking, and \$54,100 for baking. All three fields are well below the average employment income of \$111,500 for a Red Seal trade in Canada.²⁰



Even where women and men share the same certification, wage gaps persist. Eight years after qualifying, women hairstylists, cooks, and bakers earn about \$27,000 to \$41,000. This compares with \$36,000 to \$51,000 for men in the same fields, while women electricians earn \$72,500 on average, vs. \$85,100 for men. Research tracking cohorts over time confirms that these gaps appear as early as one year after certification and widen thereafter, regardless of whether the trade itself is dominated by men or women.²¹

Intersectional factors likely exacerbate these disparities, although disaggregated data is not available. Studies of the overall Canadian labour market show that women who identify as Indigenous, immigrant and racialized, as well as women living with disabilities, experience larger wage deficits than other women.²² Within the trades, these groups, together with women in general, remain under-represented. Racialized persons make up 18.2% of the Red Seal workforce, persons living with disabilities account for 13.8%, and immigrants 19.2% – all well below their respective shares in the national labour force. An important exception is Indigenous Peoples, whose participation doubled between 2016 and 2021 to 5.8%, surpassing their 4.2% share of the overall workforce.²³

The economic stakes are significant, given that many of the occupations predicted to see the greatest shortages over the next decade are among the best compensated. Addressing the systemic barriers that deter women from entering and advancing within these trades is not only an equity imperative, but a pragmatic response to Canada's looming skills deficit.

Taken together, the evidence paints a picture of a large, economically crucial labour market segment where demographic trends and entrenched gender disparities threaten supply. The data underscore two related challenges: First, Canada must accelerate the overall inflow of apprentices to replace a rapidly retiring cohort. Second, it must broaden the talent pipeline by making the skilled trades a viable, attractive, and rewarding option for women and other equity-deserving groups. Central to both challenges is the recognition that retention and completion are where significant losses occur. Strategies that focus on recruitment without addressing why women leave will continue to fall short. Subsequent sections of this report examine the barriers that perpetuate occupational segregation and outline strategies for advancing the workforce integration of women in the skilled trades.



Barriers

Despite growing recognition of labour shortages in the skilled trades and increased efforts to expand participation, women continue to face persistent and interconnected barriers across the training and employment pathway, with retention and completion emerging as key points of attrition. These challenges are not isolated to a single stage but emerge across societal norms, education systems, workplace practices, and industry structures. The following section outlines these barriers, highlighting how structural, cultural, and institutional factors interact to limit access, retention, and progression for women in the trades.

Societal barriers

Women's under-representation in the skilled trades is influenced by cultural norms, structural constraints, institutional gaps, and other societal barriers. These begin early and continue across the career pathway, are interconnected and often reinforce one another across education, training, and workplaces.

Cultural norms and gendered stereotypes

Canadian girls and young women still receive powerful cues that they are unwelcome in skilled trades. Everyday socialization, entrenched gender stereotypes, and media imagery portray blue-collar work as dirty, dangerous, and for men. This discourages exploration long before

career decisions are made. There is a persistent belief that the long hours, work environment, and physicality of trades make them unsuitable for women, while care sector occupations such as nursing (which share these exposures) are deemed appropriate.^{24, 25} Governments, employers, and unions have launched pilot outreach campaigns to shift these perceptions. However, these efforts remain too small and fragmented to counter prevailing cultural narratives in a sustained way.^{26, 27, 28}

Barriers across education and training pathways

The schooling system lays the foundation for gendered occupational segregation. In kindergarten through Grade 12, girls have fewer role models in technical fields, are less

likely to receive encouragement from career counsellors, and often encounter skepticism about the viability of careers in the trades.^{29, 30} Guidance staff themselves often acknowledge important information gaps, with many lacking the knowledge needed to advise women effectively about trade occupations. In turn, this can reinforce gendered streaming.³¹

These patterns often continue into post-secondary training and apprenticeship pathways. In pre-apprenticeship courses, women report being steered toward less complex projects and being taken less seriously by instructors and men in their cohort.^{32, 33} Bias in classroom settings can reinforce the idea that men are better suited to trades and technical fields, shaping learning experiences and confidence.³⁴ Women in trades training have also reported experiences of sexual harassment in the classroom, including sexist comments, the sexualization of course content, and a failure to address inappropriate behaviour among men in their cohort.³⁵

These conditions can undermine persistence and completion. The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America's Canadian District notes that women face distinct barriers in apprenticeship training and, on average, take six years to complete programs designed to last four.³⁶ Women are also less likely than men to complete their apprenticeship after enrolling.³⁷ Workplace bias, bullying, fewer mentorship and networking opportunities, and limited access to tailored support programs have all been cited as contributing factors.^{38, 39}



Labour market fragmentation, union structures, and weak protections

Fragmentation within the labour movement compounds the problem. Many unions are associated with the more than 300 designated trades, with varying levels of commitment to gender equity.⁴⁰ Historically, many of those unions were formed to defend the wages and status of workers who were primarily men. The masculine heritage has long-lasting impacts on workplace culture, prompting some men to fear that greater women's participation may downgrade occupational prestige.^{41, 42, 43}

At the same time, informal and weakly regulated employment practices shape many parts of the skilled trades. Many environments do not have unions and rely heavily on short-term contracts and casual labour, leaving employment relationships opaque.⁴⁴ The construction industry in particular is highly fragmented and dominated by micro-firms that have one to four employees.⁴⁵ The work's precarious nature is further magnified by significant levels of self-employment. In 2021, 17% of certified Red Seal tradespeople were self-employed,⁴⁶ a share that jumps to 24% in construction.⁴⁷ Reliance on subcontracting and sole proprietorships also limits the reach of statutory and collective protections, leaving tradeswomen with fewer formal safeguards than women in more structured professional settings.⁴⁸ By contrast, sectors such as electricity are more likely to have unionized roles and formalized pathways^{49, 50} and barriers tend to show up more in access to opportunities, workplace culture, and progression within existing systems.⁵¹

This fragmented employment structure also has implications for training. Although many tradespeople eventually become self-employed or run small businesses, skilled trades pathways do not always prepare them for that reality. Entrepreneurship-related skills, such as financial management, client relations, business operations, and navigating regulatory requirements often receive limited attention despite their practical importance for long-term success in the sector.⁵²

Intersecting identities and compounding disadvantages

Gender stereotypes create significant barriers to entry but intersecting identities – including race, immigration status, disability, motherhood and sexual orientation – also shape women's experiences in the trades. These factors influence access to the trades, along with retention, safety, and day-to-day workplace experiences.





Many 2SLGBTQ+ tradeswomen face exclusionary workplace cultures where their presence may be seen as challenging traditional norms.

Racialized women are more likely to face discrimination in hiring, workplace interactions, and supervisory practices.⁵³ Immigrants face structural barriers, such as difficulties with foreign credential recognition, limited access to apprenticeship networks, and language barriers that hinder workplace integration.⁵⁴ ⁵⁵ Caregiving responsibilities further intensify these challenges,⁵⁶ as child care costs and scheduling constraints can force women, particularly single parents, to turn down work.⁵⁷ In the electricity sector, these pressures are often compounded when roles are located in rural or remote areas, or involve travel, shift work, or emergency response. All of these create additional barriers for those with caregiving responsibilities.⁵⁸ Women living with disabilities encounter additional hurdles, including insufficient accommodations in training, rigid apprenticeship requirements, and persistent stigma that contributes to their dropout rates.^{59, 60} Likewise, many 2SLGBTQ+ tradeswomen face exclusionary workplace cultures where their presence may be seen as challenging traditional norms.^{61, 62} This can lead to harassment, microaggressions, poor health outcomes, and a lack of supportive networks.⁶³

Organizational barriers

Organizational barriers affect access to apprenticeship opportunities, day-to-day working conditions, retention, and advancement. Evidence across surveys, longitudinal studies, and qualitative research shows that these barriers are not limited to isolated incidents. Rather, they are embedded in recruitment processes, supervision, workplace design, leadership structures, and systems of accountability. Together, these conditions make it more difficult for women to enter, remain in, and progress within the skilled trades.

Barriers to entry and apprenticeship sponsorship

Securing an employer sponsor is a critical step in the apprenticeship journey, yet many women face barriers at this stage. Women have been found to be far more likely than men to encounter discrimination when seeking employer sponsors.^{64,65} Research points to discrimination in recruitment, fewer networking opportunities, and limited access to clear information about pathways. For example, in the electrical trades, hiring is often shaped by word-of-mouth networks and union referrals. Because these spaces have traditionally been dominated by men and tended to favour men in referrals, women are often left out.⁶⁶ For those with caregiving responsibilities, these challenges can be compounded by apprenticeship requirements that may involve relocation or other work arrangements that are difficult to balance with care obligations.⁶⁷



Women from racialized communities report heightened exclusion and discrimination,^{68, 69} while informal recruitment and selection practices can operate in ways that favour white men through networks, familiarity, and assumptions about fit.^{70, 71} In these contexts, access to apprenticeship opportunities and workplace acceptance may depend on whether a worker is seen as belonging, in addition to skill. In some cases, this exclusion is explicit, with employers openly unwilling to hire women tradespeople or continuing to favour men in hiring decisions.⁷²

These exclusionary dynamics are compounded by the practical constraints many employers identify in taking on and training apprentices. Employers often report concerns about the time required for supervisors and journeymen to train apprentices, the lower productivity of new entrants during early stages, and the added costs associated with mentorship, tools, materials, and mandatory training.^{73, 74} While these constraints affect apprenticeship opportunities more broadly, they can interact with gender bias in ways that further narrow women's access to sponsorship and meaningful training.

Workplace culture, harassment, and exclusion

For many women, barriers continue after entry into the trades. Findings from Toronto Community Benefit Network's Her Path Forward study suggest that, from pre-apprenticeship through to journeyworker status, women encounter unequal access to meaningful skill-building, harassment and unsafe jobsite cultures, discrimination shaped by intersecting identities, and inadequate facilities and equipment.⁷⁵ This also extends to ill-fitting personal protective equipment (PPE), such as boots, gloves, and fall harnesses. This can make inherently dangerous field-based jobs even riskier, especially in the electrical trades where proper safeguards are essential, and discourage women from remaining in the trades.^{76, 77}

A consistent issue is unequal access to learning and advancement on the job. Women report being passed over for meaningful skill-building opportunities, assigned simpler tasks, and monitored more closely than men.^{78, 79} Some also describe supervisors as unwilling to train them fully or taking their abilities less seriously, assuming that women are less committed to a long-term career in the trades because they are "simply women" or have family obligations.⁸⁰ When this happens over time, women are excluded from day-to-day learning and left at a disadvantage in progressing through the trade.

Women in the skilled trades further report microaggressions, sexual harassment, wage gaps, and jobsite environments that are unsafe or unwelcoming.^{81, 82, 83} Quantitative evidence underscores the scale of these harms. A longitudinal Alberta study of 1,886 welding and electrical apprentices found that women were more likely than men to experience bullying or harassment during training. This has consequences for mental health. Among welders, 38% of women reported depression, compared with 30% of men. During training, 73% of women welders and 55% of women electricians encountered harassment, compared with 42% and 15% of men, respectively. This pattern continued after certification, when 63% of women welders and 44% of women electricians reported harassment, compared with 24% and 15% of men.⁸⁴ Forty-four percent of women welders and electricians reported sexual harassment from supervisors or colleagues during apprenticeship, compared with 3.2% of men. One-half said they were harassed by a co-worker and one-third by a supervisor. Indigenous participants and those identifying as 2SLGBTQ+ reported even higher levels of harassment.⁸⁵

A British Columbia survey of tradeswomen in fields dominated by men reached similar conclusions. Forty-five percent cited gender-biased recruitment, 45% said supervisors under-utilized tradeswomen's skills, 41% reported gender-based isolation, and 42% reported bullying and harassment as significant challenges on the job. Moreover, 41% indicated that diversity policies lacked enforcement. Even more alarming, 14% of the women

identified sexual assault and 6% physical assault as significant issues.⁸⁶ International qualitative research echoes these findings, pointing to long hours, sexual harassment, ill-fitting PPE, and physical strain as recurring workplace hazards for tradeswomen.⁸⁷

These workplace conditions also affect advancement. In a survey of leaders in Ontario's construction industry, two-thirds agreed that women in the skilled trades were not given equal opportunities for growth compared with men. In the same study, 91% said women were more likely to face harassment from colleagues, and 44% indicated that dealing with harassment claims was a challenge when hiring women.⁸⁸ Framing the issue this way shifts attention away from the behaviour creating the harm and toward women themselves. In practice, it can shape career progression by making women appear more difficult to employ, rather than prompting organizations to address misconduct directly.



Reporting systems also often fail women. Research from British Columbia found that women who report harassment are often moved to another project or post, rather than seeing the perpetrator removed or disciplined.⁸⁹ This can discourage reporting and reinforce the perception that raising concerns carries professional risk. A YWCA study of tradeswomen in Nova Scotia similarly found that workplace cultures often legitimize harmful gender norms, including the association of femininity with weakness, and belittle attitudes toward asking for help or showing sensitivity.⁹⁰ Employers themselves have acknowledged that workplace culture in sectors such as construction and electricity needs to shift toward greater inclusion and safety.⁹¹

Exclusion can also be reinforced through missing basic supports. For example, women often face limited access to parental leave, child care, and other non-financial resources that are important to retention.^{92, 93} In the energy sector, insufficient flexible work arrangement and child care policies are among the most frequently cited challenges for women.⁹⁴ In some workplaces, the entry of women has even required basic physical changes, such as the addition of a women's washroom.⁹⁵ When employers see these kinds of adjustments as burdensome or unnecessary, exclusion can continue even without being openly expressed.^{96, 97}

This helps explain why retention and advancement remain difficult even where there is some openness to hiring women or other workers from equity-deserving groups.



Without adequate workplace supports, fair access to training, effective responses to harassment, and a culture that treats women as capable tradespeople rather than exceptions, entry alone does not translate into inclusion or long-term participation.

Leadership and accountability

A major organizational barrier lies in leadership and accountability. Employers, industry associations, and trade unions continue to be led largely by white men, many of whom do not see gender inclusion as part of their role.⁹⁸ This matters because leadership influences organizational culture and decision-making. The sectors heavily dependent on skilled trades also tend to have relatively low representation of women in management, including construction (16.3%), manufacturing (22.8%), transportation and warehousing (25.4%). By contrast, sectors such as health care (59.8%) and retail (44%) show much higher shares of women in leadership positions.

In Canada's electricity sector, recent Electricity Human Resources Canada (EHRC) research points to a clear leadership bottleneck for women, though experiences vary across the industry. While utilities has the second-highest share of women officers (39.4%) and women directors (34.1%) across industries,⁹⁹ EHRC also found that women hold only 30% of board seats and account for just 26% of senior executives. Nearly one-half of electricity companies have no women in C-suite roles. In addition, women executives were disproportionately concentrated in corporate functions and legal roles, rather than in the operations and technical positions that often lead to CEO and other top decision-making roles.¹⁰⁰

Individual level

Barriers at the individual level include how women understand the skilled trades, whether they see them as a viable and rewarding path, and whether they feel supported in pursuing them. Access to information, confidence, encouragement and exposure to role models all influence how career options are assessed. The trades may seem less accessible or less desirable when women receive limited information about the sector, encounter negative assumptions, or lack support from family, schools, and broader social networks. These individual-level factors can discourage interest, weaken persistence, and narrow the range of opportunities women see as realistically open to them.

Limited exposure and misconceptions

Many secondary school girls have never met a tradeswoman and rarely see women represented positively in construction or other trade occupations. As a result, they may have limited information about wages, working conditions, career progression, or the range of opportunities available in the sector.¹⁰¹ Even those who express interest often receive a lukewarm response or outright discouragement from entering the trades.^{102, 103}

At the same time, however, there are emerging examples, particularly in Ontario, where school boards, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) coordinators, and community organizations, such as Build a Dream are actively working to promote trades pathways for young women through targeted programming and partnerships (e.g., Career Discovery).¹⁰⁴ These efforts demonstrate that schools can serve as important allies in expanding awareness and access, though such approaches are not yet consistent across the country.

Parents often steer young people toward college or university due to misconceptions that skilled trade careers are low-skilled, low-paying, unstable, and lacking in long-term career prospects.^{105, 106} Moreover, the sector has been viewed as a fallback option, especially when compared to traditional, hierarchical education pathways that are

associated with financial viability and long-term growth opportunities.¹⁰⁷ As a result, apprentices frequently report feeling that peers, parents, and teachers look down on them for choosing a trades career.¹⁰⁸ Until the industry can guarantee respectful environments and equitable opportunity, these private reservations will continue to steer talent elsewhere.

Confidence and self-efficacy

Support for personal development can help women navigate trade occupations where they remain under-represented. Confidence, self-efficacy, and resilience can affect whether women feel prepared to enter these fields, respond to challenges, and continue pursuing opportunities over time.¹⁰⁹ In workplaces where women may encounter doubt, exclusion, or heightened scrutiny, these personal resources can help sustain persistence and reinforce a sense of capability and belonging. At the same time, this should not be read as placing responsibility on women to overcome structural barriers on their own. Rather, it points to the value of ensuring that women have the personal support needed to navigate environments that may still be difficult to enter and remain in.

Social capital

Women are more likely to experience isolation and often have less access than men to the networking, mentorship, and informal relationship-building opportunities that support entry, retention, and advancement in the trades.^{110, 111} This can limit the development of social capital and leave women at a disadvantage over the course of their careers. Because the trades span a wide range of

occupations, and about one-fifth of employed tradespeople are self-employed or work as contractors, many workers are outside the formal structures that might otherwise provide support, such as employers or unions.¹¹² In this context, opportunities to build networks and find mentors can be even more limited, making it harder for women to access information, referrals, and informal guidance.





Advancing the Workforce Integration of Women in Trades

Societal level

Addressing women's under-representation in the skilled trades depends on wider policy, regulatory, educational, and industry systems. These influence how trades are promoted, how pathways are structured, and what supports are available to women across recruitment, training, retention, and advancement. International and Canadian examples show that this is a widespread and persistent challenge, including in countries often seen as leaders in gender equity.

They also suggest that isolated programs, while valuable, are rarely enough on their own. Broader progress depends on sustained coordination across governments, unions, employers, training institutions, and community organizations – along with clearer accountability for results.

Practices outside of Canada

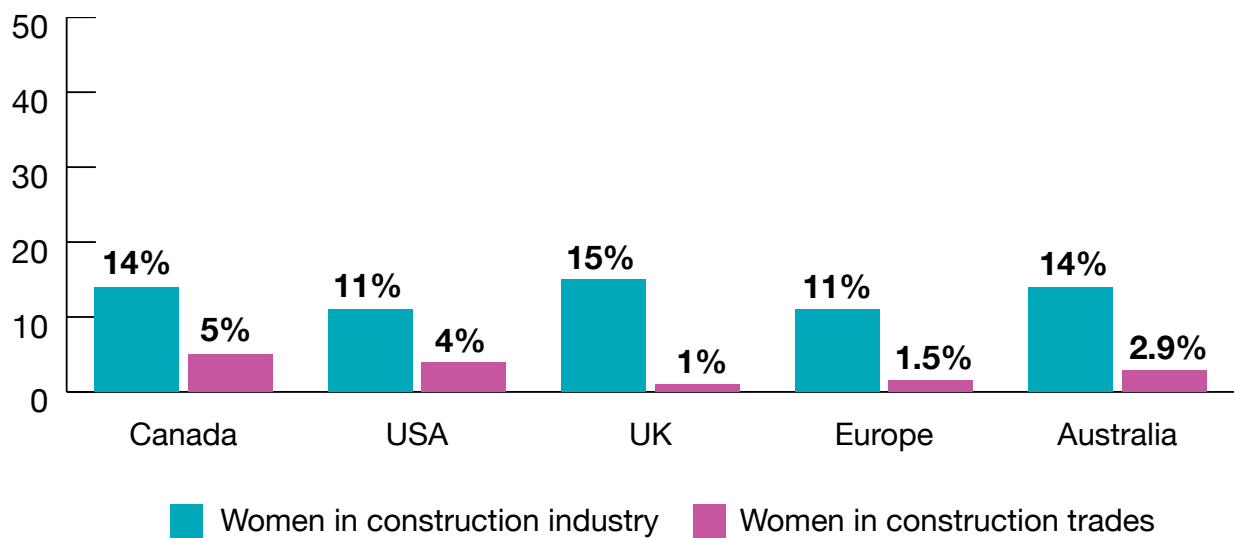
Canada's global peers have not performed any better at attracting women to skilled trades in sectors historically dominated by men. In the United Kingdom, women accounted for 52.5% of apprenticeship starts in 2024-25.¹¹³ However,

this overall figure masks strong occupational segregation. Women were concentrated in health, public services, and care (85%) and in education and training (84%),¹¹⁴ but represented only 1% of apprentices in construction. This represents an increase of just 0.7 percentage points over the past decade.¹¹⁵ In the United States, women dominate early-childhood education (97.4%) and cosmetology (92.2%) yet account for 4.2% of electricians, 5.2% of carpenters, 3.5% of pipefitters, 2.5% of plumbers and under 5% of construction trade workers overall.^{116, 117}

Figure 4 compares women's representation in the broader construction industry and in skilled construction trades across five jurisdictions. Women make up 14% of Canada's construction sector, but only 5% of construction skilled trades.¹¹⁸ Comparable gaps appear elsewhere, such as in the U.S., where women account for 11% of the construction workforce and 4% of construction tradespeople.¹¹⁹ In the United Kingdom, these numbers are 15% and 1%,¹²⁰ in Europe they are 11% and 1-2%,^{121, 122} and in Australia, 14% and 2.9%.^{123, 124}

These figures highlight the persistence of occupational segregation and point to a shared international challenge: increasing women’s participation in the higher-paying, higher-demand core trades rather than continuing to channel them into fields where women are already more heavily represented.

Figure 4
Global comparison of women’s representation in the construction industry and trades



Sources:

Statistics Canada. (2023, November 15). *Table 98-10-0594-01 - Labour force status by occupation minor group, industry sectors, age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810059401>

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BuildSkills Australia. (2024, August 19). *More young women working in construction than ever before*. <https://buildskills.com.au/news/more-young-women-working-in-construction-than-ever-before>

Several jurisdictions have launched multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at loosening structural barriers. For example, the European Union launched its Women Can Build initiative in 2017¹²⁵ to support vocational training that advances equity in the construction industry. It has a focus on four main audiences: teachers, women trainees, employers, and the construction sector more broadly. The initiative delivers research, training, and toolkits that help instructors model gender equality and build their own competence in inclusive pedagogy.^{126, 127}

During the Biden administration, the U.S. Department of Commerce launched its Million Women in Construction project.¹²⁸ The initiative, announced in 2022, aimed to double the number of women employed in the construction industry from one million to two million. Early implementation focused on scaling apprenticeship opportunities tied to federal infrastructure spending, strengthening wraparound supports, and mandating robust

diversity reporting among contractors. However, the project has lost its momentum under the Trump administration, following 2025 cuts to federal programs related to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI).^{129, 130, 131}

Canadian initiatives

Canadian efforts to improve women's access to the skilled trades span multiple levels of government.

They involve a wide range of actors, including unions, regulators, employers, colleges, and community organizations. While these initiatives reflect growing recognition that women's under-representation in the skilled trades requires targeted action, much of this work remains project-based, uneven across regions and trades, and difficult to scale. Examining these initiatives helps illustrate the breadth of current efforts and the continuing need for stronger coordination, consistent data, and a more integrated national approach.



Government programs

There have been a number of initiatives at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels to widen women's access to skilled trades. These actions have generally taken the form of discrete programs rather than an integrated, coordinated effort across levels of government.

At the federal level, the Women in the Skilled Trades Initiative under the Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy (CAS) channels funding to women's organizations, community colleges, unions, and employers to design recruitment, training, and retention programs.¹³² Funded organizations have developed marketing campaigns and outreach, and targeted pre-apprenticeship programs, mentoring and networking systems. They have also subsidized wraparound supports that improve apprenticeship completion rates.

Some provinces and municipalities are embedding equity targets into public works contracts. British Columbia's Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) aims to expand apprenticeship and employment opportunities in the construction trades for Indigenous groups and women.¹³³ The CBAs for projects such as the Pattullo Bridge replacement and the Trans-Canada Highway upgrade between Kamloops and Alberta require contractors to prioritize hiring and training women and Indigenous workers.¹³⁴ Consequently, women made up 13% and Indigenous Peoples 17% of the workforce, double their historic 6% shares in B.C. construction.¹³⁵

At the municipal level, the Vancouver Island Highway Project shows what well-designed CBAs can deliver. Completed in 2003 for \$1.3 billion, the upgrade finished on time and under budget while recording the highest proportion of equity hours worked in North America.^{136, 137} Achieving this result required a high level of collaboration between operators, contractors, unions, and equity group representatives, facilitated through the formation of an equity integration committee.^{138, 139}

Cross-sector collaboration is key to advancing gender equity in the sector. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the provincial government partnered with the Women in Resource Development Corporation and the Office to Advance Women Apprentices (OAWA) to embed gender targets in resource projects and deliver results.¹⁴⁰ Now, OAWA operates in seven provinces – Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. It offers scholarships, career services, connections with employers, employer wage subsidies, mentorship, wraparound supports, and exam preparation. Through numerous local and regional initiatives such as OAWA, it has supported 4,000 tradeswomen and enabled more than 2,000 job placements.^{141, 142, 143, 144} Additional federal and provincial programs are summarized in [Appendix B](#).

Regulators and unions

Regulators and unions also play an important role in helping Canada retain tradeswomen through their policies, standards of conduct, and professional development initiatives. Some Canadian unions have been active in advancing policies and programs to support women in the trades, including benefit provisions, pre-apprenticeship and job placement programs, conferences, women's committees, community outreach, and other initiatives. For example, the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry now pays up to 24 weeks salary to pregnant members who must leave jobsites for safety reasons. It also offers parental leave top-ups to both women and men, benefits that offset income instability during critical career stages.¹⁴⁵



*Some Canadian unions have been active in advancing policies and programs to support women in the trades, including **benefit provisions, pre-apprenticeship and job placement programs, conferences, women's committees, community outreach, and other initiatives.***

The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners (UBC) – working with the CSA Group and a technical committee made up of apprentices, journeypersons, regulators, employers, unions, and other apprenticeship stakeholders – developed a national standard on EDI and accessibility in apprenticeship. This standard, called CSA Z301, guides training curricula and union operations. The UBC has since launched a nationwide mentorship network and a recognition program that highlights members and employers who are advancing inclusive workplace culture.¹⁴⁶

Unions are also broadening outreach through education, research, and mentorship. The Canada's Building Trades Unions organization operates Build TogetHER chapters that visit schools, universities, and community organizations. They promote trades careers, provide networking for tradeswomen, and advocate for safer, more equitable worksites. (Read more in [Appendix B](#)).¹⁴⁷ Parallel initiatives such as Ontario Building and Construction Tradeswomen, from the Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario,¹⁴⁸ and the UBC's Canadian District's Sisters in the Skilled Trades¹⁴⁹ supply mentorship, training, and wraparound supports designed to reduce attrition.



Electrical unions offer a related model. Women members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have formed local women's committees that address issues such as ill-fitting PPE and provide mutual support networks.¹⁵⁰ The biannual IBEW Women's Conference, which was attended by 800 delegates across North America in 2024, delivers workshops, panels and community-building sessions.¹⁵¹ At the local level, IBEW 353 in Oshawa runs a 25-week Pathway Program combining 15 weeks of electrical trade training and a 10-week job placement for women, under-represented genders, Indigenous participants, racialized newcomers, and others. Participants receive mentoring during training and on-the-job follow-up, while all instructors undergo evidence-based equity and mental health training. Topics include Mentorship Matters, Equity Diversity Decolonization Inclusion, Be More Than a Bystander, The Working Mind, and Mental Health First Aid.¹⁵²

Across Canada, dozens of additional women-focused programs operate at the local level, where unions, colleges, employers and community groups collaborate closely with participants to dismantle gender-specific barriers. (See [Appendix B](#) for more.)

This grassroots energy is vital, yet its impact on women's representation remains uneven because efforts are fragmented by trade, geography and organizational capacity. Data collection has also been limited, with a lack of transparency and data sharing on what's working. More rigorous evaluation is needed to assess short- and long-term outcomes and overall impact, rather than focusing only on participation rates. A comprehensive national strategy that scales proven models, supports the sharing of data and resources, and establishes common metrics could strengthen these promising but fragmented efforts.

A 2020 report commissioned by Canada's federal government, involving over 55 stakeholder interviews and a review of 607 program documents and datasets, found that siloed best practices have not led to results.¹⁵³ The report notes that recommendations and efforts to address the under-representation of women in trades date back to the 1988 Canadian Conference on Women in Trades and Technology, as well as initiatives in British Columbia, Ontario, and Manitoba in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet little has changed. More collaborative efforts are needed, involving government, industry, unions, educational institutions, community organizations, and women training and working in the skilled trades.

The 2020 report identified the following requirements to support gender equity in apprenticeships and trades:

- > Government support of women's apprenticeship equity
- > Dedicated leadership within government and related programs
- > Collaboration across unions, colleges, primary and secondary schools, employers, governments, and non-profits
- > Widespread recruitment efforts to attract women to the trades
- > Equity-driven candidate assessments
- > Training opportunities, including academic upgrading, technical skills, pre-apprenticeship training, workplace culture, and communication skills
- > Job placement, apprenticeship, and retention supports.

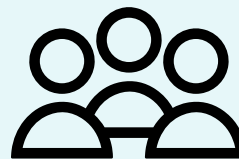
The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum's task force and subsequent National Strategy for Supporting Women in the Trades are more recent examples of a cross-sector effort to drive change at the national level.¹⁵⁴ The task force, which included employers, unions, and educational institutions, set a target to increase women's representation in manufacturing, construction, and transportation-related apprenticeships from 4.5% in 2020 to 15% by 2030. This goal is supported through collaborative programs, including its Champions4Change initiative. While 15% remains a modest target, it nonetheless represents a meaningful step forward in establishing clearer benchmarks and strengthening accountability for progress.

Organizational level

At the organizational level, promising practices are emerging among employers, educational institutions, industry organizations, and community-based providers that are working to improve women's recruitment, retention, workplace culture, and advancement in skilled trades.

Employers

Industry employers, especially large organizations, are beginning to prioritize EDI. The sector needs to do more to match the progress made in banking, insurance and other industries, but there are some encouraging signs.



*The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum's task force, which included employers, unions, and educational institutions, **set a target to increase women's representation** in manufacturing, construction, and transportation-related apprenticeships **from 4.5% in 2020 to 15% by 2030.***



Leveraging its extensive research on EDI, the Diversity Institute developed the Diversity Assessment Tool (DAT), a comprehensive framework that helps organizations assess their performance and advance EDI within their workplaces.¹⁵⁵ Using the DAT's six parameters as a lens, the following examples highlight promising practices across skilled trades employers.

Governance, leadership, and strategy

Organizations with diverse boards and executive teams draw on a wider range of perspectives when setting direction. Setting clear representation targets for women and other equity-deserving groups has proven an effective way to surface, develop, and advance diverse talent into senior management. Seeing women in leadership signals to women throughout the organization that their career aspirations are attainable.

At Canadian Natural Resources (CNRL), the importance of EDI is communicated through its Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement and related corporate communications. The company aims to maintain a board on which at least 40% of its independent directors are women. Currently, four of its 10 independent director nominees are women, and the board has also committed to identifying and recruiting diverse candidates.¹⁵⁶

Similarly, ArcelorMittal Dofasco is a signatory to the Government of Canada's 50 – 30 Challenge, committing to gender parity and 30% representation of other equity-deserving groups on its executive team and/or board of directors. It has also committed to doubling the share of women in leadership by 2030, supported by an EDI strategy, a dedicated EDI team, and a five-year diversity and inclusion roadmap.¹⁵⁷

Human resources processes

An organization's human resources practices play a central role in shaping a diverse and engaged workforce. Inclusion needs to be considered across the full employee life cycle, from job design, recruitment, and hiring to training, promotion, and exit. In hiring, this can include using gender-neutral language in job postings and reaching equity-deserving candidates through partner networks, matching platforms, community organizations, or advocacy groups. It also means relying on diverse interview panels and objective assessments, such as skills tests or work samples, so that decisions are based on competence rather than impressions.

Ledcor offers one example of this approach in practice. Recognized as one of Canada's best diversity employers, the company has built partnerships with employment agencies to broaden the hiring pool, provides EDI training for leaders and employees, and offers a mentorship program for women and other equity-deserving groups.^{158, 159}

Values and culture

Embedding EDI in company policies and values fosters a workplace where women and other equity-deserving employees feel genuinely supported. Supportive cultures are further strengthened by practical work-life measures, including family-friendly benefits, parental leave, mental-health and wellness programs, and flexible work arrangements.

BC Hydro shows how these commitments can be reflected in practice. The organization supports several employee resource groups, including the Women's Network, each with executive-level sponsors.¹⁶⁰ They offer a hybrid work option, flexible work hours, telecommuting, and 17 flex days in addition to regular vacation allowances.¹⁶¹ The organization offers an Employee and Family Assistance Program and additional mental health benefits.¹⁶²

Meanwhile, EHRC has developed a support strategy and procedure framework to help employers and other workplace actors prevent and respond to gender-based harassment and violence in the workplace. The resource provides guidance on policies, reporting processes, risk mitigation, and survivor-centred supports, including connections to relevant services and legal recourse.¹⁶³

Measurement and tracking

Organizations can strengthen EDI commitments by setting clear targets and regularly tracking progress across priority areas. Anonymous employee surveys, along with transparent reporting of results, can help reinforce accountability and demonstrate that leadership is taking these commitments seriously.

EllisDon provides one example of this approach. The company aims to build a workforce that reflects the diversity of Canada's population and monitors employee diversity through a voluntary self-identification survey. As of January 2026, the survey achieved a response rate of 84%, with 19% of people leaders and 28% of employees identifying as women or gender diverse.¹⁶⁴ The company initiated the WomanAct survey where employees were



encouraged to confidentially disclose their encounters with gender-based harassment and discrimination. The survey feedback resulted in trauma-informed updates to EllisDon's Respect in the Workplace Policy and resources and further actions are being developed and implemented.¹⁶⁵

Gender equity and diversity across the value chain

Applying an EDI lens across the value chain – from procurement and research and development through product design, marketing, and customer service – builds inclusion into everyday operations. Supplier-diversity programs that set targets for vendors owned by women and other equity-deserving groups can build more resilient supply chains.

Aecon, a North American infrastructure company, takes this approach, positioning supplier diversity as part of its broader EDI and economic inclusion strategy.¹⁶⁶ It tracks procurement spending with women-owned, Indigenous-owned, and minority-owned businesses, defined in its reporting as businesses that are at least 51% owned by members of those groups. In 2024, Aecon reported spending \$15.3 million with women-owned businesses, alongside substantial spending with Indigenous-owned and minority-owned suppliers.

Outreach and expanding the pool

Outreach involves partnering with governments, community groups, and philanthropic organizations to widen the talent pipeline. This brings more diverse candidates into skilled trades and promoting EDI across the wider ecosystem.

Aecon Women in Trades (AWIT), for example, is a paid training program that supports women to launch a career in construction trades.¹⁶⁷ It involves classroom training followed by an on-the-job placement where women are paired with a mentor.¹⁶⁸ Suncor, a Canadian energy company, partnered with Women Building Futures (WBF) and funds the Suncor Haul Truck Training program. It consists of two weeks of offsite training and a paid co-op of up to six months at one of Suncor's Fort McMurray, Alberta sites.¹⁶⁹ Many employers have partnered with WBF through their Employer of Choice program including Bird, Cenovus, Bison, Kiewit, Enbridge, Kamatsu, LaFarge, Finning CAT, Cummins, CN, and others.¹⁷⁰



Supplier-diversity programs that set targets for vendors owned by women and other equity-deserving groups can build more resilient supply chains.

Educational programs and apprenticeships

Because many tradespeople are self-employed¹⁷¹ or work for micro-firms,¹⁷² and are often outside union agreements and many employer supports,¹⁷³ educational programs at colleges and training providers may offer women the only structured pathway into the trades and support once they arrive. Community colleges are also well positioned to engage the sector through strategic enrolment management and partnerships with secondary schools and employers. Over the past decade, a range of approaches has emerged, including women-only pre-apprenticeship cohorts,¹⁷⁴ redesigned curricula and pedagogy,¹⁷⁵ mentorship,¹⁷⁶ and early-stage outreach that reframes how girls and their families perceive skilled trades.¹⁷⁷

Program design and outcomes

Niagara College offers women-only pre-apprenticeship programs for automotive service technicians, general machinists, and construction and maintenance electricians.¹⁷⁸ Each 24-week cohort combines eight weeks of preparatory instruction, eight weeks of trade-specific training, and an eight-week paid job placement.¹⁷⁹ An evaluation of the electrician stream found that more than 70% of graduates secured full-time jobs or registered apprenticeships within one year of completing the program.¹⁸⁰ Conestoga College's tuition-free, 33-week Women in Skilled Trades (WIST) Carpentry and Residential Installations program follows a similar model, while also introducing participants to plumbing and HVAC systems and embedding employment-readiness coaching throughout the curriculum.¹⁸¹



Mentorship and transition supports

Recognizing that classroom gains can fade without workplace guidance, Fanshawe College created the national ConnectHER mentorship program for women in the trades, now delivered through multiple institutions. (See [Appendix B](#).)¹⁸² The network pairs senior tradeswomen with apprentices and journey-level mentees, offers leadership development, and provides a forum to troubleshoot on-site challenges. This kind of support has been shown to reduce first-year attrition.

Early-stage outreach and educator training

Changing perceptions before post-secondary decision points is critical. The YWCA Hamilton's Advancing Women in Trades partnership with ArcelorMittal Dofasco and two Hamilton school boards equips teachers for students in grades 9 to 12 with toolkits on inclusive language, microaggression intervention, role model integration, and classroom respect protocols.¹⁸³ Its eight Wonder Girls workshops introduce teenagers to a spectrum of skilled trades careers, while a roster of vetted mentors attend school events to provide visible women role models.¹⁸⁴ The Advancing Women in Trades program has also developed tools to help employers build more inclusive workplaces.¹⁸⁵



Gender based strategic enrollment management strategies

Some colleges have applied a more integrated and strategic approach by incorporating gender considerations into their core planning and admissions. Algonquin College in Ontario and Okanagan College in B.C., for example, have equity-based admissions for women.

Recognizing that admissions are shaped by recruitment, pipeline development, and outcomes, Okanagan College also introduced an integrated program that includes:

- > Tracking women's applications and enrollments weekly by program and measuring employment outcomes by gender
- > Tracking representation for Trades Sampler programs aimed at youth and young women and tracking their transition to foundation or apprenticeship programs
- > Co-hosting new outreach and career awareness events such as Try a Trade, and girls and mixed-gender day camps
- > Engaging parents and instructors to build inclusive learning environments, support systems and accountability.

Okanagan instructors have noted that women's inclusion has improved the level of professionalism on-site and in the classroom. Although women still represent a minority in welding and carpentry classes, for example, they are disproportionately rated outstanding in terms of their expected contribution to the industry.¹⁸⁶

These examples demonstrate the importance of having interventions across the pipeline: targeted recruitment, women-centred cohorts, integrated work placements and post-graduation mentorship. Together they create mutually reinforcing stages that move women from interest to certification to sustained employment. They also highlight the need for integration, targets, measurement and making instructors and others accountable for shifting the narrative.

Non-profit organizations

Women's advocacy groups and non-profit organizations have played an important role in program development. Organizations such as Women Building Futures, the YWCA, Skills for Change, Blue Door, the Progressive

Intercultural Community Service Society (PICS), MAP Strategic Workforce Services Inc., the Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering, Science, Trades and Technology (CCWESTT), the CWB Welding Foundation, and others offer programs to advance and support women in their skilled trades journey. (See [Appendix B](#)). Some of the most successful programs have developed strong relationships with employers. This helps companies develop more inclusive workplaces and support women with direct pathways to employment. For example, in the WBF Employers of Choice program, members commit to being champions of change in fostering inclusive workplaces.¹⁸⁷ Eighty percent of WBF program graduates gain employment in their field within six months of completing their program – including 45% with one of WBF’s employer-of-choice partners. And, for 2023-24 WBF program graduates, the average starting wage rate was \$26.23 per hour.¹⁸⁸

Non-profit business organizations such as the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) also provide training. OCC provides business and EDI training (e.g., Skills Bridge) and other supports to expand the capacities of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).¹⁸⁹ These programs help SMEs hire and retain women and other equity-deserving groups. Consortiums can help address the training economies of scale issue that SMEs face, while helping them to gain specialized knowledge in the space.

Individual level

Many of the initiatives introduced by governments, employers, educational institutions, and non-profits also operate at an individual level. Career counselling and mentorship programs offer role models and support systems that empower women and girls and reinforce their career decisions. Employers, unions, and other training providers can educate decision makers and hold them accountable, helping individuals address their biases, build inclusive work environments, and become allies. Similarly, individual teachers, when equipped with the right tools, can inspire the next generation of women tradespeople. Ultimately, sustained progress also depends on individuals recognizing the importance of this effort and taking responsibility for advancing it.



*Some of the most successful programs have developed strong relationships with employers. This helps companies **develop more inclusive workplaces and support women with direct pathways to employment.***



Conclusions and Recommendations

A worsening shortage in Canada's skilled trades workforce poses a threat to critical infrastructure, commercial construction, and housing development. It is also a concern for the country's manufacturing base, economic growth, and long-term prosperity. Addressing this challenge requires a broad, accelerated effort to eliminate the barriers to women's representation, full participation, and advancement in the sector.

Canada is entering a period of sustained demand for skilled trades workers, driven by major investments in housing, infrastructure renewal, clean growth, electrification, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals and mining development, defence, and public-sector capital projects. Governments and industry across Canada have increasingly recognized that meeting these economic and industrial priorities will require a significantly expanded skilled trades workforce. For example, the Government of Canada has committed \$8 billion in federal funding over five years through Team Canada Strong: \$6 billion to recruit, train and hire 80,000 to 100,000 new Red Seal trades workers, and an additional \$2 billion to provinces and territories through

bilateral agreements to expand training capacity and create more pathways into Red Seal trades.

In addition to recruitment, the evidence increasingly shows that retention and completion are major barriers to women's participation in the skilled trades. Women who enter apprenticeships are less likely than men to complete them, and many leave the sector shortly after starting. Addressing this requires sustained investment not only in bringing women into the trades, but also in the supports, workplace cultures, and systemic changes needed to keep them there.

This issue has long been recognized and proven strategies exist to address it, yet little has changed over three decades. The most pressing issue is scale. Promising yet disparate efforts need to be amplified through a comprehensive national strategy that grows proven models, shares data and resources, and sets common metrics.

Action at the societal, organizational, and individual levels can move women's participation to the critical mass required for systemic change.

Societal level recommendations

The skilled trades sector is highly fragmented, dominated by micro-firms, self-employment, and multiple unions, all with varied levels of commitment to gender equity. As a result, EDI efforts are equally fragmented.

Governments – working in partnership with the education sector, employers, unions, non-profits, and women themselves – are best positioned to set direction, establish common standards, and fund the infrastructure needed to scale what works. The actions below would shift the sector from reliance on disparate grassroots initiatives to a coordinated, measurable national effort.

- > Challenge cultural norms and gendered stereotypes about the trades through public awareness campaigns, role model campaigns, and the inclusion of trades-positive messaging in national career guidance communications.
- > Fortify the Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy (CAS) with additional funding and more targeted efforts for women, combining grassroots union and non-profit programming with top-down planning to ensure adequate coverage and scale.
- > Tie federal funding of R&D, infrastructure, and housing development to explicit equity goals, reporting, and results, encouraging provincial and municipal governments to adopt Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) modelled on successful jurisdictions such as B.C.
- > Use government procurement and major project funding to drive women's recruitment, retention, and advancement, drawing on models such as the U.S. Million Women in Construction initiative that link workforce diversity expectations to public investment.
- > Strengthen enforcement of health and safety and labour law, including oversight of harassment reporting and response.
- > Support SMEs, which lack the capacity and specialized EDI expertise to recruit, train, and retain a diverse workforce. Fund consortiums, as well as shared toolkits, and wage subsidies for employers who hire women apprentices. Provide a concierge-style single point of contact to help SMEs navigate available supports.
- > Require data-sharing and independent evaluation as conditions of public funding, and establish neutral platforms where programs can report outcomes without competitive disadvantage, so that promising practices can be identified, disseminated, and scaled.

Organizational level recommendations

Organizations translate policy into day-to-day practice. Educational institutions, unions, employers, and non-profit organizations each play a critical role in shaping whether women enter the trades, succeed in their apprenticeships, and build sustainable careers. Strong leadership, inclusive practices, accountable measurement, and cross-sector partnerships are essential.

- > Expand early outreach across Canada by standardizing and scaling trades-focused career exploration programs in secondary schools, as well as hands-on workshops, panels and media featuring women role models. Develop toolkits for parents and educators, so that trades are perceived as accessible, high-opportunity pathways for girls.
- > Build an integrated strategy, modelled on Okanagan College's accountability-driven approach, with clear targets and disaggregated data tracking across the pipeline – from career exploration to college enrolment, apprenticeship, employment, and advancement.
- > Offer women-only pre-apprenticeship streams, wraparound supports, scholarships, equity-based admissions, and dedicated retention resources in post-secondary institutions to improve completion rates.
- > Scale up collaboration with women's advocacy groups and non-profit organizations such as Women Building Futures, whose proven training, supports, and pathways to employment have demonstrated results but require sustained funding to reach more women.
- > Start with leadership. Ensure diverse representation on leadership teams in unions, employer organizations, and firms, and clearly communicate the organization's commitment to EDI.
- > Adopt inclusive HR practices, family-friendly benefits, flexible scheduling, structured mentorship and sponsorship programs to support recruitment, engagement, retention, and advancement of women.
- > Enforce EDI and anti-harassment policies, and integrate sexual and gender-based harassment and violence (SGBHV) prevention, response, and training into workplace health and safety culture with clear, accessible reporting channels.
- > Implement metrics, benchmarking, and transparent reporting on representation, pay, promotion, and workplace climate to hold organizations to account.
- > Build partnerships with community organizations and educational institutions to attract women to the skilled trades and develop long-term talent pipelines.
- > Audit and redesign work environments, including tools, equipment, facilities, and PPE, to ensure they are fit and safe for a diverse workforce.

Individual level recommendations

The people who shape girls' and women's individual career decisions, including parents, teachers, guidance counsellors, and peers, often lack the information needed to present the trades as a viable option. Women also face practical barriers to entering, completing, and advancing in the trades. Addressing these challenges requires better information for those guiding career decisions, greater visibility of role models and pathways, and the wraparound supports needed to help women succeed.

- > Equip parents, teachers, and guidance counsellors with accurate, accessible information about trades careers, earnings potential, and pathways so they can confidently recommend these options to girls.
- > Make women role models visible, for example through media features and mentoring, so that girls and women can see themselves in the sector.
- > Provide comprehensive career-mapping tools that demystify trade pathways, certifications, and progression, including supports for women re-entering the workforce or transitioning from other sectors.
- > Provide structured mentorship and peer networks that support women through apprenticeships and early career, then into leadership. Recognize that retention, completion, and advancement require sustained support, in addition to recruitment.

Appendix A

Table A

Red seal trades and national occupational classification¹⁹⁰

NOC code	NOC title	Red Seal trade
14401	Storekeepers and parts persons	Parts technician
22114	Landscape and horticulture technicians and specialists	Landscape horticulturist
22312	Industrial instrument technicians and mechanics	Instrumentation and control technician
63200	Cooks	Cook
63202	Bakers	Baker
63210	Hairstylists and barbers	Hairstylist
72100	Machinists and machining and tooling inspectors	Machinist
72101	Tool and die makers	Tool and die maker
72102	Sheet metal workers	Sheet metal worker
72103	Boilermakers	Boilermaker
72104	Structural metal and platework fabricators and fitters	Metal fabricator (Fitter)
72105	Ironworkers	Ironworker (Generalist)
		Ironworker (Reinforcing)
		Ironworker (Structural/ornamental)

NOC code	NOC title	Red Seal trade
72106	Welders and related machine operators	Welder
72200	Electricians (except industrial and power system)	Construction electrician
72201	Industrial electricians	Industrial electrician
72203	Electrical power line and cable workers	Powerline technician
72300	Plumbers	Plumber
72301	Steamfitters, pipefitters and sprinkler system installers	Sprinkler fitter
		Steamfitter/pipefitter
72302	Gas fitters	Gas fitter - Class A
		Gas fitter - Class B
72310	Carpenters	Carpenter
72311	Cabinetmakers	Cabinetmaker
72320	Bricklayers	Bricklayer
72321	Insulators	Insulator (Heat and frost)
72400	Construction millwrights and industrial mechanics	Industrial mechanic (Millwright)
72401	Heavy-duty equipment mechanics	Agricultural equipment technician
		Heavy duty equipment technician
72402	Heating, refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics	Refrigeration and air conditioning mechanic
72410	Automotive service technicians, truck and bus mechanics and mechanical repairers	Automotive service technician
		Transport trailer technician
		Truck and transport mechanic
72411	Auto body collision, refinishing and glass technicians and damage repair estimators	Auto body and collision technician
		Automotive refinishing technician
72420	Oil and solid fuel heating mechanics	Oil heat system technician

NOC code	NOC title	Red Seal trade
72421	Appliance servicers and repairers	Appliance service technician
72423	Motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle and other related mechanics	Motorcycle mechanic
		Recreation vehicle service technician
72500	Crane operators	Mobile crane operator
		Tower crane operator
73100	Concrete finishers	Concrete finisher
73101	Tilesetters	Tilesetter
73102	Plasterers, drywall installers and finishers and lathers	Drywall finisher and plasterer
		Lather (Interior systems mechanic)
73110	Roofers and shinglers	Roofer
73111	Glaziers	Glazier
73112	Painters and decorators	Painter and decorator
73113	Floor covering installers	Floorcovering installer
73400	Heavy equipment operators	Heavy equipment operator (Dozer)
		Heavy equipment operator (Excavator)
		Heavy equipment operator (Tractor-loader-backhoe)
75110	Construction trades helpers / labourers	Construction craft worker

Appendix B

Table B
Women in Trades Programs and Initiatives

Build TogetHER		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
British Columbia and across Canada	Building Trades Unions	Union
Description		
Build TogetHER aims to increase the recruitment, retention and advancement of women in trades through education, support and mentorship. In B.C., the initiative partners with the BC Centre for Women in the Trades and reaches women through presentations at schools, universities and community organizations. It connects women working in the trades with networking and mentorship opportunities and seeks to improve the work environment for women in the trades through research, advocacy and education.		
Link(s)		
BC: https://www.buildtogetherbc.ca/news https://bcbuildingtrades.org/campaigns/women-in-trades		
National: https://www.buildingtrades.ca/en/women-in-the-trades/		

Million Women in Construction initiative		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
U.S.	Department of Commerce	Federal government agency
Description		
This initiative aims to double the number of women working in the U.S. construction industry from one million to two million in the next 10 years. Currently, women represent 11% of employees in the industry but only 4% of its skilled trades workers. The program is linked with various infrastructure projects and government funding where procurement and new workforce training programs are leveraged to develop a diverse trades workforce. For example, applicants for funding under the CHIPS and Science Act are asked to conduct outreach and retain women in construction jobs.		
Link(s)		
https://www.commerce.gov/news/blog/2022/10/secretary-raimondo-calls-more-women-construction-industry-nabtu-tradeswomen-build		

Women in Skilled Trades (WIST)		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Canada	Skills for Change	Non-profit
Description		
The WIST program aims to empower and support women apprentices in Red Seal trades. Its mission is to provide education, leadership development and networking opportunities, particularly for newcomer and racialized women, in a variety of skilled trades (including but not limited to welding, carpentry, and horticulture). They offer specialized training, mentorship and mental health support.		
Link(s)		
https://skillsforchange.org/wist		

50 – 30 Challenge		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Canada	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	Government
Description		
The goal of the program is to challenge Canadian organizations to increase the representation and inclusion of diverse groups within their leadership and workplaces, while highlighting the benefits of EDI. Signatories commit to achieving gender parity (50% women and/or non-binary people) on Canadian boards and/or in senior management, as well as significant representation (30%) on Canadian boards and/or senior management of members of other equity-deserving groups, including those who identify as racialized, Black and/or people of colour, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ and Indigenous Peoples.		
Link(s)		
https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/ised/en/50-30-challenge-your-diversity-advantage		

BC Centre for Women in the Trades (BCWITT)		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
British Columbia	Canada-BC Labour Market Development Agreement, BC Federation of Labour	Agency
Description		
This program provides skills training and employment opportunities to participants interested in pursuing the trades. It includes a support network of mentorship and pre-employment coaching, work experience, work placement, and participant financial supports.		
Link(s)		
https://www.workbc.ca/explore-training-and-education/trades-training/pre-apprenticeship-programs/women-trades-training#		

Women in Skilled Trade Initiative		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission (SATCC)	Arms-length government
Description		
This new initiative is aimed at attracting women to the skilled trades and helping them achieve journey person certification. From Jan. 8, 2024, until June 30, 2026, women in eligible Red Seal trades receive a rebate on their apprenticeship registration fee and Level 1 technical training tuition. The SATCC is also employing two consultants to coach and mentor women apprentices.		
Link(s)		
https://saskapprenticeship.ca/women-in-skilled-trades-initiative/		

Supporting Women in Skilled Trade		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Alberta and Newfoundland	Office to Advance Women (OAWA) Apprentices	Support organization
Description		
Its mandate is to increase employment opportunities for tradeswomen and women entering apprenticeable trades and support women working in construction trades. Includes connecting tradeswomen to employers, career services, employment supports, and networking opportunities. Engages and builds partnerships with employers, trades unions, and training providers to support women in trades.		
Link(s)		
https://www.womenapprentices.ca/		

Immigrant Women Trades Apprenticeship Program (IWTa)		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
British Columbia	Progressive Intercultural Community Service (PICS) Society	Non-profit
Description		
Ten-week program, including six-week skills training program and four-week work placement. Supports immigrant women apprentices from intercultural equity-deserving groups in five Red Seal trades. Includes fully funded training, work integrated learning and wraparound supports designed to assist women in securing long term employment in trades.		
Link(s)		
https://pics.bc.ca/free-programs-services/immigrant-women-trades-apprenticeship-program/		

Trade Starters for Equity-Deserving Groups Training Project		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
British Columbia	Progressive Intercultural Community Service (PICS) Society	Non-profit
Description		
Aims to address the under-representation of certain demographics in trades recognized by SkilledTradesBC by providing comprehensive pre-apprenticeship training and skill development. The program targets individuals who face barriers to entering the workforce, offering them opportunities to obtain sustainable employment, skilled trades positions, or apprenticeships.		
Link(s)		
https://freetrainings.ca/ste-trade-starter-program		

Women's Interconnection and Retention in Electrical Disciplines (WIRED)		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
British Columbia	The Western Joint Electrical Training Society (JETS)	Non-profit
Description		
Provides education, mentorship, and hands-on training to encourage women to pursue careers in skilled trades and to support women in advancing their careers in trades.		
Link(s)		
https://wjets.ca/wired/		

Ontario Building and Construction Trades- women (OBCT)		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Ontario	Provincial Building & Construction Trades Council of Ontario	Union
Description		
The OBCT promotes women in trades by conducting research, offering monthly information sessions for women considering a career in trades, providing training opportunities, a mentoring program, and featuring the stories of women in trades and through its committee work.		
Link(s)		
https://www.obctradeswomen.com/		

Sisters in the Skilled Trades		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Canada	United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC) Canadian District	Union
Description		
Provides financial and wraparound supports for women apprentices enrolled in technical training. Includes financial support for child care, housing, commuting, textbooks, tools, PPE, tutoring and other supports to reduce attrition and support higher retention rates for women in apprenticeship programs.		
Link(s)		
https://ubcbuilt.ca/programs-initiatives/sisters-in-the-skilled-trades/		

ConnectHER Mentorship Program for Women in the Trades		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Canada	Fanshawe College of Applied Arts and Technology	College
Description		
National program focused on building a community of women in skilled trades and providing mentorship, networking, training, and skills development opportunities.		
Link(s)		
https://www.fanshawec.ca/partnerships/training-skill/workplace-training/trades/connecther		

Supporting Women in Skilled Trades (SWiT)		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Canada	Canadian Apprenticeship Forum	Non-profit
Description		
Professional, skills and leadership development programs for women and toolkits for employers, unions, educational institutions and tradeswomen to support the advancement of women's careers in trades. Its CHAMPIONS4CHANGE program aims to gain commitments from employers to achieve targets and report progress. This organization also conducts research and collects data to track progress.		
Link(s)		
https://www.clac.ca/Your-voice/Article/supporting-women-in-the-trades-swit		

LaunchHER into Trades		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Manitoba	First Peoples Development Inc.	Non-profit
Description		
Aims to promote the retention of women in Red Seal trades in Manitoba and assist women in progressing within a Red Seal trade career path. Provides mentorships, networking opportunities, and other supports.		
Link(s)		
https://fpdinc.ca/program/launcher-into-trades/		

Women in Skilled Trades Leadership Academy (WiSTLA)		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Toronto	Skills for Change	Non-profit
Description		
Supports newcomer and racialized women who are emerging apprentices and interested in a career in Red Seal trades. Offers specialized leadership training, networking, mentorship, and mental health support to provide a pathway to employment in the skilled trades.		
Link(s)		
https://skillsforchange.org/wistla		

New Boots: Progressing Women+ in Trades		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
New Brunswick	MAP Strategic Workforce Services	Non-profit
Description		
Initiative targeted at women considering a career in trades, studying for trades occupations, apprentices or those working in trades. Connects tradeswomen with a network, provides mentorship program, resources tools, referrals, job search support and community outreach.		
Link(s)		
https://nb-map.ca/new-boots/		

Advancing Women in Apprenticeship		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency	Non-profit
Description		
Supports women in their apprenticeship journey through incentives for new apprentices, learning supports, mentorship and engagement with women, employers and industry partners.		
Link(s)		
https://www.nsapprenticeship.ca/get-started/women-trades#aw		

We Are Trades		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Canada	Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering, Science, Trades and Technology (CCWESTT)	Non-profit
Description		
Initiative targeting employers, providing them with information to understand the business case for EDI as well as tools and support to help them create safe and inclusive work environments for women in skilled trades. The program was informed by research and a pilot program to understand what works.		
Link(s)		
https://wearetrades.ca/step/		

Journey to Trades & pre-apprentice-ship programs		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan	Women Building Futures	Non-profit
Description		
Free pre-apprenticeship programs in construction, as well as for auto and heavy-duty equipment service technicians, heavy equipment operators and other trades. These include in-class learning and work placements. Offers Journey to Trades hands-on introductory program. Includes wraparound supports such as affordable housing, financial aid and a success coach. Strong industry and employer connections.		
Link(s)		
https://womenbuildingfutures.ca/		

Construct		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Ontario	Blue Door	Non-profit
Description		
Partners with local construction unions, private sector, social services organizations and community colleges to prepare equity-deserving group members for careers in trades. Program delivery includes eight weeks of in-class training, wraparound supports, hands-on experience and connections to employers and unions.		
Link(s)		
https://constructgta.ca/		

Women of Steel program		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Ontario	CWB Welding Foundation	Non-profit
Description		
Offers pre-employment and upskilling programs to equip women with the skills and certifications needed for employment and apprenticeships in welding and welding-related industries. Partners with an extensive list of employers, unions, industry leaders and tradespeople to support career pathways and the development of more inclusive workplaces.		
Link(s)		
https://www.cwbweldingfoundation.org/programs/wos/		

YWCA Apprenticeship & Pre-Apprenticeship Programs		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Various	YWCA	Non-profit
Description		
Various YWCA locations offer apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training in skilled trades such as tile setter, terrazzo/tile/ marble setter, auto body collision repairer, construction craft worker, automotive service technician, refrigeration and air conditioning systems mechanic, and others. In addition to technical training, job coaching and career services are provided.		
Link(s)		
https://www.ywcatoronto.org/ourprograms/employmentandtraining/trades-and-technology-programs		

Building Opportunities: Advancing Women in Non-Traditional Occupations		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Ontario	YWCA Hamilton and Workforce Planning Hamilton (WPH)	Non-profit / government
Description		
A project to research, understand, and communicate the barriers and opportunities for women pursuing careers in trades that are dominated by men. It worked with employers, educators and tradeswomen to develop toolkits for employers, and educators to promote the trades, dispel stereotypes and build more inclusive classrooms and workplaces.		
Link(s)		
https://advancewomenintrades.com/advancing-women-in-trades/about		

Jill of All Trades (JOAT)		
Region	Organization	Organization Type
Canada and U.S.	Conestoga College	College
Description		
Launched in 2014, JOAT aims to introduce young women in grades 9 through 12 to the possibilities of a career in skilled trades. Events take place across Canada, including at various college campuses. Events include hands-on workshops in industrial, motive power and construction trades (e.g., using an excavator), as well as guest speakers and tours of college campuses, all in a comfortable, women-focused environment.		
Link(s)		
https://jillofalltrades.college/		

Appendix C

Table C

Provincial apprenticeship registrations, percentage of women in 2024¹⁹¹

Program	Canada	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.
Automotive service	6.9	4.8	6.2	7.3	4.0	0.9	4.5	5.0	9.9	11.2	8.6
Carpenters	6.6	7.4	6.7	9.8	10.4	5.0	7.6	5.6	10.3	9.5	8.2
Early childhood educators and assistants	95.9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	95.9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Community and social service workers	85.4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	90.0	80.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Electricians	6.2	6.5	5.9	7.7	5.5	4.5	5.2	6.7	7.1	7.6	8.6
Electronics and instrumentation	8.0	8.3	N/A	8.7	2.1	7.8	13.7	0.0	6.0	7.7	6.3
Exterior finishing	4.4	36.4	N/A	4.9	2.2	3.9	4.7	3.0	3.4	5.8	5.2
Food service	41.8	40.0	34.3	46.7	41.9	40.4	41.2	69.2	61.1	46.3	42.0
Hairstylists and estheticians	85.4	87.5	87.5	66.7	N/A	89.4	86.7	87.0	86.1	80.5	91.5
Heavy-duty equipment mechanics	4.8	4.7	8.3	4.5	5.6	2.9	4.7	3.2	3.1	5.2	5.6
Heavy-equipment and crane operators	4.8	15.1	N/A	7.1	2.8	2.3	7.3	2.5	6.8	4.3	15.6

Program	Canada	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.
Interior finishing	18.7	20.0	0.0	15.0	14.3	21.1	14.2	12.4	25.0	19.4	14.4
Landscape and horticulture technicians	30.1	100.0	12.5	33.3	20.0	29.6	28.1	34.9	0.0	40.9	34.0
Machinists	6.6	N/A	10.0	6.9	8.3	7.1	6.1	2.6	10.0	4.6	7.7
Metal workers (other)	6.9	11.1	N/A	10.8	5.1	7.4	5.1	3.6	8.9	5.0	9.5
Millwrights	5.3	6.3	0.0	8.7	4.0	1.9	5.6	6.3	5.6	6.8	4.9
Oil and gas well drillers, servicers, testers	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters	4.3	4.9	11.1	5.4	5.6	2.3	3.0	3.7	3.9	6.9	5.1
Refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics	2.6	2.4	3.7	4.8	2.5	1.6	2.2	3.4	1.6	3.5	3.2
Sheet metal workers	4.7	15.0	N/A	6.9	2.1	5.2	3.6	2.8	1.5	4.4	6.4
User support technicians	45.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	45.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Welders	12.4	11.5	12.3	16.0	11.7	4.5	14.2	10.1	13.7	14.0	15.0
Stationary engineers/power plant operators	4.5	14.3	N/A	8.2	0.0	4.3	16.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Construction workers (other)	11.4	N/A	N/A	N/A	16.7	N/A	11.1	18.2	15.1	N/A	12.4
Other major trade groups	18.6	N/A	22.7	6.8	N/A	19.2	14.9	6.1	50.0	8.0	23.4

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