

Fact Sheet

IWPR #C479

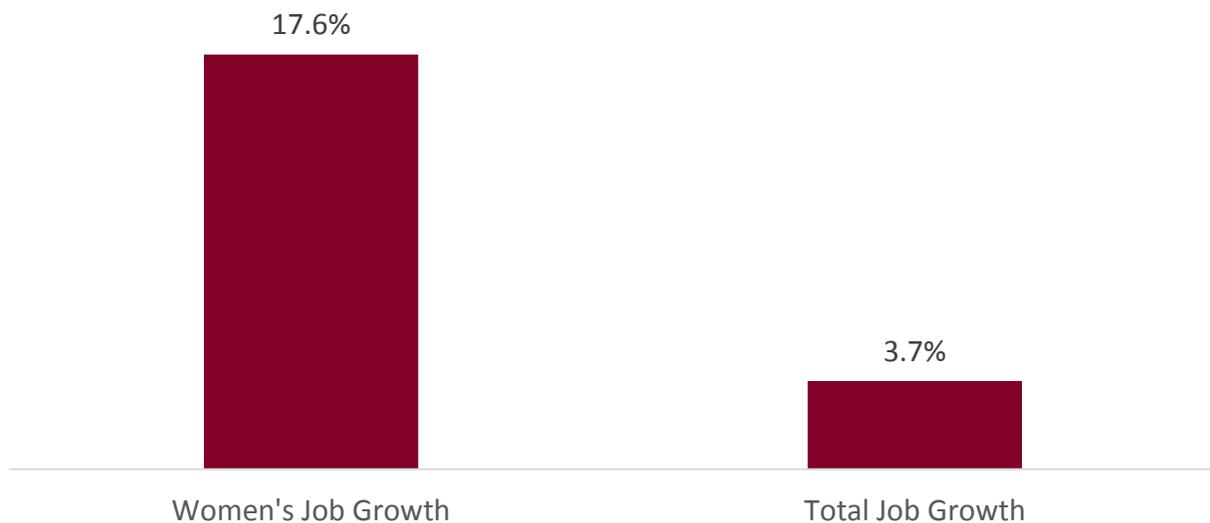
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Women Gain Jobs in Construction Trades but Remain Underrepresented in the Field

Between 2017 and 2018, the number of women working in construction trades increased by 17.6 percent, rising to well over a quarter of a million women (276,000).¹ This is substantially higher than job growth of 3.7 percent in construction occupations overall (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Women's Job Gains Outpace Overall Job Growth in Construction Trades between 2017 and 2018

Change in Employment in Construction Trades, 2017 to 2018

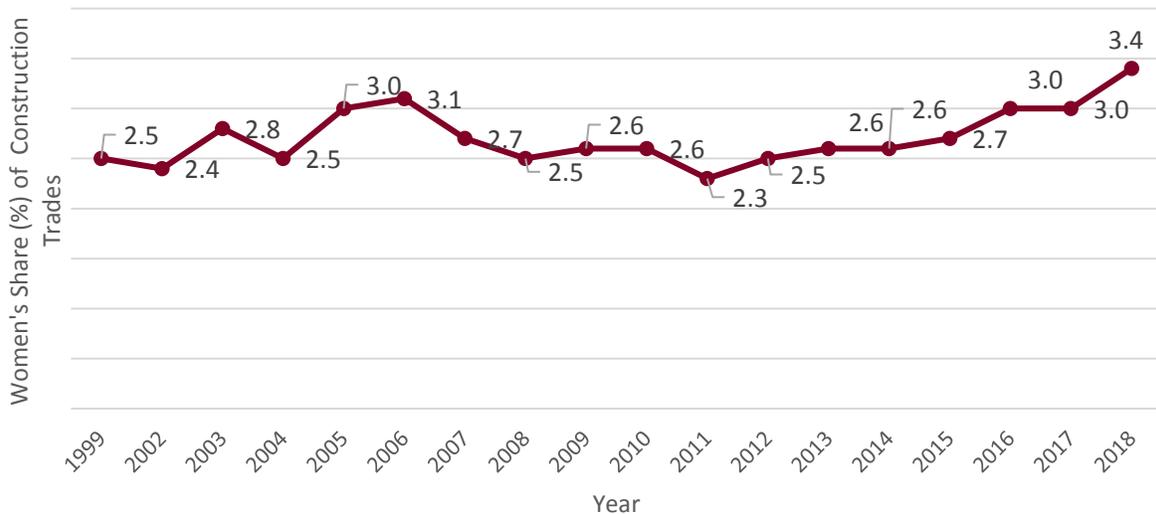


Notes and sources: see Table 1.

The share of women working in construction trades in 2018 is the highest in twenty years (Figure 2), but women remain strongly underrepresented in the trades: fewer than one in twenty (3.4 percent) of construction trades workers in 2018 were women. The only other time since 1999 when the share was above 3.0 percent was in 2006, also a period of high demand for workers in the industry. In the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009 and recovery that followed, tradeswomen disproportionately lost jobs in the industry, compared with men.

Figure 2. Women’s Share of Jobs in Construction Occupations Highest in Twenty Years

Share (%) of Workers in Construction and Extraction Occupations that are Women, 1999-2018



Notes and sources: See Table 1; data for 2000 and 2001 are not published.

Women’s share of jobs in construction is slightly higher in construction management than in the trades: one in thirteen (7.7 percent) Construction Managers were women in 2018. Even when administrative and back office staff working in construction are included, women were fewer than one in ten (9.9 percent) workers employed in the sector (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Fewer than 1 in 20 Construction Trades Workers are Women

Share of Workers in Construction Occupations that are Women, 2018



Notes and sources: See Table 1.

Within several individual trades, women improved their share of jobs between 2017 and 2018, but progress was uneven. Women saw significant employment growth—a 67 percent increase within the last year—as ‘Construction and Building Inspectors,’ bringing their share of workers

in this occupation to 14 percent (up from 10.2 percent in 2017). ‘Laborers,’ ‘Painters,’ and ‘Pipelayers, Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters’ also saw strong job growth and increases in women’s share of jobs. Women’s employment as Electricians declined by 0.6 percent, despite employment growth of Electricians overall (Table 1).

Table 1. Women Working in Construction Occupations, 2017 and 2018

	2017		2018		2017 to 2018
	Women	(%)	Women	(%)	Change in numbers
Construction Tradeswomen	235,590	3.0%	276,998	3.4%	17.6%
Laborers	64,218	3.3%	78,070	3.7%	21.6%
Painters, construction & maintenance	35,640	6.6%	43,704	7.2%	22.6%
Carpenters	29,722	2.2%	30,250	2.2%	1.8%
Pipelayers, plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters	13,200	2.2%	22,435	3.5%	70.0%
Electricians	21,425	2.5%	21,288	2.4%	-0.6%
First-line supervisors	19,170	3.0%	22,190	3.5%	15.8%
Construction and Building Inspectors	9,078	10.2%	15,120	14.0%	66.6%
Women Construction Managers	79,994	7.4%	78,617	7.7%	-1.7%
All Women in the Construction Industry	972,972	9.1%	1,106,919	9.9%	13.8%

Note: Employment totals for Construction Tradeswomen exclude workers in extraction and mining occupations, with the exception of First-line Supervisors but are calculated by applying the % women for women in construction and extraction occupations.

Source: Author’s calculations based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Current Population Survey, Tables 11 and 18, for 2017 and 2018 <<https://www.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm>>.

Construction trades provide well-paid jobs that do not require a college degree. In 2018, the median weekly earnings for women working full-time in construction and extraction occupations were \$785, compared with \$834 for men. This gender earnings ratio of 94 percent is much higher than the gender earnings ratio for all full-time weekly workers (81.1 percent in 2018).² (There are too few women workers in construction occupations to provide earnings or employment estimates for women by race/ethnicity.) Construction careers are accessible through apprenticeships, which provide paid on-the-job learning combined with postsecondary classroom instruction. Women-focused, pre-apprenticeship programs have been successful in increasing women’s access and success in construction careers.³

Access to high-wage careers is critical for women’s economic advancement. Women, particularly women of color, face discrimination in hiring and employment and experience high rates of sexual and racial harassment in construction.⁴ Such adverse conditions mean that women are less likely to complete their apprenticeships than men and are more likely to leave the industry. The increase in the number of women working in construction presents an opportunity to prepare the industry for a sustainable future and provide a working environment that is welcoming to all workers, regardless of their gender, race, or ethnicity.

Notes

¹ Tradeswomen’s employment in construction is calculated based on the share of women working in Construction and Extraction Occupations, as published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), “Table 11. Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity,” Current Population Survey Household Data <<https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.pdf>>. Job growth for women and all workers in construction was estimated by deducting extraction trades; extraction occupations only account for 2 percent of jobs in Construction and Extraction; separate estimates of women’s share of share of employment in construction as compared to extraction occupations are not available. The BLS does not publish estimates for women’s share of Construction and Extraction Occupations by race and ethnicity (sample sizes are too small for reliable estimates). Among all workers in Construction and Extraction Occupations in 2018, 87.5 percent were White, 7.1 percent Black, 1.6 percent Asian, and 37.0 percent Hispanic or Latinx (Hispanics can be of any race).

² Earnings data for construction and extraction occupations based on unpublished data provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; for data on the gender wage gap for all workers see Ariane Hegewisch and Heidi Hartmann (2019), “The Gender Wage Gap: 2018 Earnings Differences by Race and Ethnicity,” IWPR Fact Sheet #C478 <<https://iwpr.org/publications/gender-wage-gap-2018/>>.

³ For a list of organizations and toolkits focused on improving women’s access and success in apprenticeships, see Workforce GPS (2018), “Expanding Apprenticeship for Women,” at <https://apprenticeshipusa.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/03/13/10/10/Expanding-Apprenticeship-for-Women>. The National Center for Women’s Equity in Apprenticeship and Employment at Chicago Women in the Trades has several good-practice briefs on women’s success in apprenticeship programs in construction and manufacturing, as well as resources for experienced tradeswomen and employers focused on creating a welcoming work environment, <http://womensequitycenter.org/>. The Tradeswomen Taskforce provides stories and resources for individual women working in the trades, <https://tradeswomentaskforce.org/>.

⁴ See, for example, Ariane Hegewisch and Brigid O’Farrell (2015), *Women in the Construction Trades: Earnings, Workplace Discrimination, and the Promise of Green Jobs*, IWPR Report #C428 <<https://iwpr.org/publications/women-in-the-construction-trades-earnings-workplace-discrimination-and-the-promise-of-green-jobs/>>.

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