

Quick Figure #106

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Numbers Matter: Women Working in Construction

In 2022, the number of women working in the trades reached the highest level ever. Almost 354,000 worked in construction and extraction occupations. In the five years since 2017, the number of tradeswomen increased by more than 100,000, growth of 47.3 percent. Construction careers are attracting an increasing number of women. Yet, even with this growth, tradeswomen are only 4.2 percent of those who work with the tools in construction. In three of the five largest trades, their share of jobs is even smaller, just 3.5 percent of carpenters, 2.2 percent of electricians, and just 1.1 percent of plumbers, pipelayers and pipefitters (Table 1).

Construction trades are accessible through earn-as-you-learn apprenticeships. Careers do not require a college degree, and, especially in union jobs, provide good pay with benefits. In 2022, there were 8,649 women apprentices, 4.3 percent of all active construction apprentices, reflecting 64.9 percent growth since 2017 (Table 1).

TABLE 1. WOMEN WORKING IN CONSTRUCTION, 2017 TO 2022

Construction & Extraction Occupations, Apprentices, and Industry	2017 Women		2022** Women		Change 2017-2022
	Numbers	(%)	Numbers	(%)	(%)
Construction and Extraction occupations, including	240,930	3.0%	353,934	4.2%	46.9%
Construction Laborers	64,218	3.3%	109,123	4.9%	69.9%
Painters and paperhangers*	35,640	6.6%	67,620	10.5%	89.7%
Carpenters	29,722	2.2%	44,870	3.5%	51.0%
Electricians	21,425	2.5%	20,196	2.2%	-5.7%
Pipelayers, plumbers, pipefitters*	n/a		6,710	1.1%	n/a
Construction and building inspectors	9,078	10.2%	13,334	11.8%	46.9%
First-line supervisors	19,170	3.0%	28,423	4.3%	48.3%
Women apprentices (active)	5,245	3.1%	8,649	4.3%	64.9%
Construction managers	79,994	7.4%	89,845	8.5%	12.3%
Construction Jobs on Payroll (incl. office/admin) (May**)	876,000	12.6%	1,120,000	14.1%	27.9%
Construction Industry All Workers (incl. office/ admin)	971,000	9.1%	1,284,000	10.9%	32.2%

Notes: Data that allow analysis by race/ethnicity and gender are not published. *In 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics amended the definitions of some occupations; this means that 2017 and 2022 data are not fully comparable. **Annual averages are not released for Current Employment Statistics; data are for May 2017 and May 2023. Sources: IWPR calculations based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey Annual Averages, Table 11 and Table 14, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm>; Current Employment Statistics Series CES2000000010 and CES2000000001; and Apprenticeship USA (2003) 'Data and Statistics' <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/data-and-statistics>.

Progress towards attracting and retaining women varies between trades. Among the largest trades, the number of women painters and paperhangers grew by close to 90 percent between 2017 and 2022, of construction laborers by almost 70 percent, and of carpenters by 51 percent. Yet, the number of women electricians fell in both absolute terms (a decline of 5.7 percent) and in relative terms (a decline in their share of all electricians from 2.5 to 2.2 percent) (Table 1).

Women made slightly better inroads in jobs as construction managers. Women's share of construction managers is 8.5 percent, almost double their share of workers in the trades or of first-line supervisors. When all working in the construction industry are counted, including office, administrative, and professional workers in positions such as project managers and estimators, women's share of jobs rises to 10.9 percent. Only counting those directly on employers' payrolls, including administrative, office and professional workers, women's share rises to 14.1 percent; this measure, however, excludes the self-employed who are more likely to work on the tools, and may double-count anyone working for more than one firm.

We need to tackle discrimination to accelerate growth and support women in the industry. Women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented in these occupations.¹ Too many women, particularly women of color, face discrimination in hiring and employment and experience sexual harassment and gender or racial bias on the job.^{2,3} Women are less likely to be retained on core crews, promoted to field leadership positions, or to receive the same on-the-job technical training as men. Such adverse conditions mean that women are less likely to complete their apprenticeships than men and are more likely to leave the industry.

Numbers matter. The industry benefits greatly from access to the skilled work of tradeswomen, particularly with unprecedentedly high investments in the nation's infrastructure and clean energy. Data can create accountability and help policymakers ensure that women have access to quality apprenticeships and sustainable careers in construction, with adequate work hours, workplace policies that support work/family balance, and freedom from bias and sexual and racial harassment.

NOTES

1. Ariane Hegewisch. 2023. Women Earn Less Than Men Whether They Work in the Same or in Different Occupations: The 2022 Weekly Gender Wage Gap by Race, Ethnicity and Occupation. Institute for Women's Policy Research <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Gender-Wage-Gaps-2023-003.pdf>>.

2. Chandra Childers et al. 2021. Here to Stay: Black, Latina, and Afro-Latina Women in Construction Trades Apprenticeships and Employment. IWPR and National Center for Women's Equity in Apprenticeship and Employment at Chicago Women in the Trades <<https://cwit.org/here-to-stay/>>.

3. Ariane Hegewisch and Eve Mefferd. 2021. A Future Worth Building: What Tradeswomen Say about the Change They Need in the Construction Industry. Institute for Women's Policy Research <<https://iwpr.org/a-future-worth-building-report/>>.

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