

Quick Figure #109

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Numbers Matter: Women Working in Construction

In 2023, the number of women working in the trades reached the highest level ever, with 363,651 working in construction and extraction occupations. In the five years since 2018, the number of tradeswomen increased by more than 80,000, a growth of 28.3 percent. Construction careers are attracting an increasing number of women. Yet, even with this growth, tradeswomen are only 4.3 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 3.1 percent of carpenters, 2.9 percent of electricians, and just 2.2 percent of plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters (Table 1).

Construction trades are accessible through earn-as-you-learn apprenticeships. These careers do not require a college degree and, especially in union jobs, provide good pay with benefits. In 2023, there were 10,257 women apprentices, 4.7 percent of all active construction apprentices, reflecting 55.5 percent growth since 2018 (Table 1).

TABLE 1. WOMEN WORKING IN CONSTRUCTION, 2018 TO 2023

Construction and extraction occupations, apprentices, and industry	2018 Women		2023 Women		Change 2018–2023
	Numbers	(%)	Numbers	(%)	(%)
Construction and extraction occupations, including	283,492	3.4%	363,651	4.3%	28.3%
Construction laborers	70,070	3.7%	100,035	4.5%	28.1%
Painters and paperhangers*	n/a	n/a	58,344	10.5%	n/a
Carpenters	30,250	2.2%	39,525	3.1%	30.7%
Electricians	21,288	2.4%	27,811	2.9%	30.6%
Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters*	n/a	n/a	13,970	2.2%	n/a
Construction and building inspectors	15,120	14.0%	12,075	10.5%	-20.1%
First-line supervisors	22,190	3.5%	35,802	5.1%	61.3%
Women apprentices (active)	6,617	3.5%	10,257	4.7%	55.0%
Construction managers	78,617	7.7%	120,416	10.6%	53.2%
Construction jobs on payroll (incl. office/admin) (in December+)	956,000	12.9%	1,159,000	14.3%	21.2%
Construction industry all workers (incl. office/admin)	1,106,919	9.9%	1,284,000	10.9%	16.0%

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 (2023) 'Data and Statistics' <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/data-and-statistics>.
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 2018 and 2023 data are not comparable. **Annual averages are not released for Current Employment Statistics; data are for December 2018 and December 2023.

Women made more progress for construction managers than for construction trade workers.

Women's share of construction managers is 10.6 percent, more than double their share of workers in the trades (4.3 percent) or of first-line supervisors (5.1 percent). In the last five years, the number of women construction managers grew by 55 percent, the number of women construction trade workers by half as much at 28.3 percent. 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 14.3 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 unprecedented 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 and Hannah Gartner. 2024. Women Earn Less Than Men Whether They Work in the Same or in Different Occupations: The 2023 Weekly Gender Wage Gap by Race, Ethnicity and Occupation. Institute for Women's Policy Research. <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Occupational-Wage-Gap-2024-Fact-Sheet-1.pdf>

2. Chandra Childers, Ariane Hegewisch, and Lark Jackson. 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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