



Advancing Recruitment and Retention of Women in the Building Trades

Results from the 2025 OBCT Tradeswomen Survey

1. Overview

The construction industry is a key driver of job creation, infrastructure development and economic growth in Ontario. There is a significant need to expand and diversify the sector's workforce over the long term as anticipated growth combined with increased retirements creates a projected need to recruit 154,100 workers in the province over the next decade. Recruitment and retention of women will be critical during this period, as women currently make up only 5% of the construction sector in Ontario (a total of 22,570 in 2024), according to BuildForce Canada.¹ The number of women on-the-tools in Ontario (excluding those in roles such as managers and supervisors) was even fewer at 14,200 in 2024.²

There are many hurdles for women and other underrepresented groups to working and succeeding in the construction sector which must be addressed.

The Ontario Building and Construction Tradeswomen (OBCT) led the 2025 Recruitment and Retention Research Initiative to explore how to better support women to enter and stay in the construction trades. OBCT is a committee made up of hundreds of Ontario tradeswomen who are working together to advocate for women and underrepresented gender identities in the trades to ensure they feel inspired, welcomed, motivated, challenged and empowered.

This report shares a summary of the findings of this work and a series of recommendations designed to improve recruitment and retention of women in the trades in the years and decades ahead (see Appendix for more information on methodology and for acknowledgments).

1 BuildForce Canada (2025). Ontario Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward: Highlights 2025-2034. Available at: <https://www.buildforce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-ON-Constr-Maint-Looking-Forward.pdf>

2 BuildForce Canada (2025). Custom data request.





2. Key Report Findings

OBCT's 2025 Recruitment and Retention Research Initiative included a survey of 342 tradeswomen in Ontario and builds on a previous survey led by OBCT in 2022.³ In addition to the survey of tradeswomen, interviews with employers and employer partners, and a review of relevant literature, were conducted to gain additional insights on opportunities and challenges for tradeswomen in Ontario.

Many tradeswomen in Ontario report strong and positive experiences working in the trades. However, they also face many barriers throughout their journeys, starting with initial awareness through to career advancement – with very few women in leadership positions.

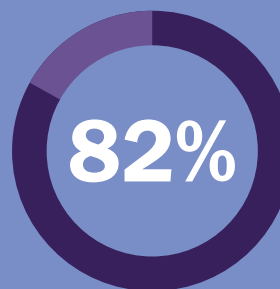
While some progress has been made in recent years to improve the experiences of women in the trades, gaps remain and there are opportunities to better support inclusion and enable more positive work experiences for tradeswomen across the province.



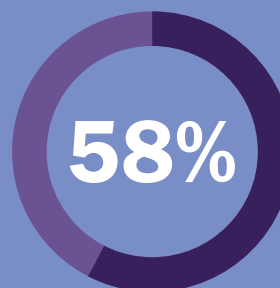
3 Note: The 2025 survey builds and expands on the 2022 survey. While there are some similar questions, it also covers new territory. Therefore, findings are not directly comparable. For 2022 survey results, see: OBCT (2022). Tradeswomen: Recruitment and Retention. Available at: https://www.obctradeswomen.com/files/ugd/382dc3_000adb041dc0473784cce6939c903def.pdf

The following top five key findings emerged from this work:

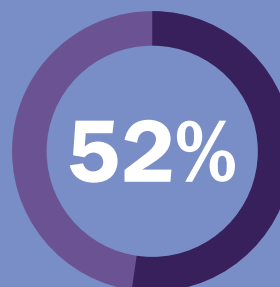
- 1) **Tradeswomen in Ontario demonstrate a strong commitment to working in the construction industry, with a significant majority planning to continue their careers over the long term.** The majority of survey respondents reported that they see themselves still working in the industry in the next two to five years (82%), are satisfied with their job and work environment (62%) and are satisfied with their current compensation and benefits (65%). Most tradeswomen across the province indicate they are engaged in the industry and committed to working in it over the long term.
- 2) **Many women discover trades later in their careers, suggesting untapped potential if they were reached earlier on through more targeted recruitment efforts.** More than half of survey respondents joined the trades as a second career (58%) and entered the trades after the age of 25 (54%), indicating that women are open to to transition into trades when they learn about opportunities. Many tradeswomen highlighted that they lacked exposure to the trades in high school and only discovered opportunities later on in their careers through friends or family.
- 3) **Recruitment and retention of tradeswomen in construction is significantly impacted by work site culture, which will require systemic change to address.** More than half of tradeswomen reported they experienced harassment at work (52%), yet reporting mechanisms were found to be left wanting. Among those who noted having experienced harassment and reporting it, 51% indicated they were not satisfied with how it was handled. While this represents a declining proportion of women indicating they had been harassed or felt unsafe at work compared to the 2022 OBCT survey, the proportion remains high which can lead to a culture in which women feel unsafe and unwelcome.



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More than half of survey respondents joined the trades as a second career

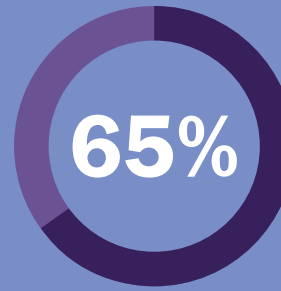


More than half of tradeswomen reported they experienced harassment at work

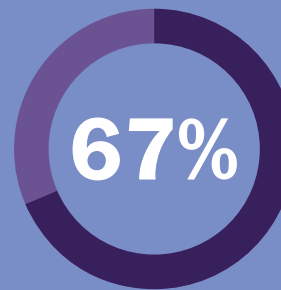
- 4) **Tradeswomen face unique structural barriers in construction requiring sector-specific solutions that existing efforts have not gone far enough to address.** A lack of appropriate facilities and equipment were a key problem identified by tradeswomen that need to be addressed for them to succeed in the sector in the long-term, with nearly two-thirds of survey respondents (65%) identifying the need for personal protective equipment designed for women and appropriate bathroom facilities, building on important policy changes that have been in the works in Ontario.

Limited child care supports were also identified as key factors impacting the ability of tradeswomen to succeed on the job, with more than half of survey respondents who reported they had children noting they had to turn down work due to child care arrangements (57%) and identifying hours of work as a problem when managing child care (56%), issues amplified for single parents.

- 5) **Advancing women to leadership positions is essential for the growth of the sector and a top priority for retention.** More than two-thirds of survey respondents (67%) identified “more women in leadership positions” as needed for long-term retention - the top recommendation by survey respondents. While a little more than half of women indicated they had access to advancement opportunities comparable to male colleagues, there is a notable absence of women in many senior leadership roles. As well, the top barrier identified by survey respondents related to seeking advancement opportunities was “gender bias in decisions,” with more than one-third of tradeswomen (37%) highlighting it as a challenge to progressing their careers.



A lack of appropriate facilities and equipment were a key problem identified by tradeswomen



“more women in leadership positions” [cited] as needed for long-term retention [of tradeswomen]



3. Recommendations and Next Steps

Overall, women highlight that there are good opportunities in the trades and many express a strong commitment to staying in the trades for years to come. However, there are key challenges that need to be addressed to make the trades a more welcoming place for women to enter and stay, as well as to succeed and thrive in their careers.

When women are supported with programs and supports tailored to their needs, they are in a better position to succeed, thrive and advance their careers in the skilled trades. Creating equitable workplaces for women creates safer, stronger workplaces for all.

The ongoing challenges that women encounter in skilled trades necessitate coordinated solutions and strong leadership. To achieve progress and create lasting change, broad coalitions involving employers, labor unions, government, and skilled tradespeople are essential. As key drivers of recruitment, training, and hiring, building trades unions are essential to workforce growth – and OBCT is uniquely positioned to bring these efforts together for greater impact.

The following 16 recommendations outline actions that can be undertaken by key partners to support recruitment and retention of tradeswomen in Ontario.



Focus Area	Recommendations
Target early intervention and education 	1. Support outreach about opportunities in the trades in elementary and high school 2. Incorporate a workforce development lens on major projects that includes hiring women and equity-deserving groups, supported by government funding and incentives 3. Develop culturally appropriate training programs for Indigenous women that address the “whole person” through comprehensive wraparound supports 4. Build more robust mentorship programs and networking opportunities for women in the trades
Improve worksite culture 	5. Support strong and consistent enforcement by employers of zero-tolerance policies for harassment and discrimination 6. Create multiple independent reporting pathways for harassment and discrimination, including neutral workplace advocates, that encourages all individuals to voice concerns without fear of repercussion 7. Require more robust anti-discrimination and anti-harassment training across the construction, including government-mandated training as part of apprenticeship curriculum and in training provided by unions and employers
Address structural barriers to success 	8. Ensure employers are implementing properly fitting personal protective equipment and appropriate washroom facilities 9. Support development of industry child care solutions to address barriers for tradespeople such as hours of availability 10. Explore flexible scheduling options (where feasible) to help better balance work with family responsibilities 11. Explore ways to better target recruitment of women and preserve the positions of women on work lists so they can return to work after maternity leave
Prioritize leadership development 	12. Set specific targets for women in leadership positions and supervisory roles on job sites 13. Encourage employer organizations and unions to develop and support women’s committees 14. Showcase success stories of women in leadership positions
Strengthen accountability and stakeholder collaboration 	15. Leverage opportunities to collaborate with key stakeholders and facilitate partnerships between labour and employers, helping to share and promote effective models to improve worksite culture and increasing hiring of tradeswomen 16. Track and report on industry progress, including developing and maintaining a database of women working on-the-tools

4. Appendix: Acknowledgments and Methodology

The 2025 Recruitment and Retention Research Initiative was led by OBCT, with support from Medow Consulting.

The data included in this report are based on 342 responses to a survey available from June to August 2025. Screener links were distributed to OBCT newsletter subscribers and shared across its affiliate networks. Tradeswomen who met the eligibility criteria were invited to complete the full survey. The survey provides key insights on trends in the sector, building and expanding on the number of tradeswomen surveyed in the 2022 survey conducted by OBCT. However, the survey was not random and overrepresents tradeswomen in Ontario with existing connections to OBCT. The project team would like to thank all tradeswomen who completed the survey.

The project team also interviewed 11 employers and employer partners to inform this report's findings and recommendations. The project team would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for sharing their insights.

- Jim Brown, Vice President of Construction Services, Ontario Power Generation
- Jason Campbell, Labour Relations Manager, Aecon
- Scott Clark, Senior Director and Head of Labour Relations and Strategic Resourcing, Bruce Power
- Jackie Easton, Senior Labour Manager, PLAN Electric
- Tony Fanelli, Executive Director, Construction Labour Relations Association of Ontario
- Caitlin Gascon, Labour Relations Manager, Electrical Power Systems Construction Association
- Bryce Mesley, Director of Field Operations, Walters Group
- Jack Mesley, President, Ontario Erectors Association
- Patricia Penney-Rouzes, Executive Director, The Association of Millwrighting Contractors of Ontario
- Wayne Peterson, Executive Director, The Construction Employers Coordinating Council of Ontario
- Valerie Vanderwyk, Executive Director, Indigenous Skills, Employment, Apprenticeship and Development (ISEAD)

In addition, a literature review was conducted to complement qualitative work, providing key insights on context, identifying best practices and incorporating relevant related research.

This report was prepared by Sara Ditta and Jon Medow of Medow Consulting, with research and analysis support from Rachelle Soliman and Maneshae Farhan.





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