

Women in the Construction Industry

A Comprehensive Analysis for Canada and Ontario

ICI / Broader Construction and Residential Construction Compared

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Prepared and released by

Ontario Construction Association Alliance

Representing Ontario's Seven Regional Construction Associations

Data Sources: Statistics Canada · BuildForce Canada · Skilled Trades Ontario · Ontario Construction Secretariat
ESDC Red Seal Program · CHBA · PEO · OAA · CBTU



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Foreword

The Ontario Construction Association Alliance (OCAA) represents and is owned by seven regional construction associations across Ontario. Together, our member associations span the full breadth of Ontario’s construction industry — from the major ICI general contractors and specialty subcontractors who deliver the province’s hospitals, schools, transit systems, and industrial facilities, to the residential builders and renovation contractors who are growing Ontario’s communities, to the professional firms, suppliers, and tradespeople who keep it all moving.

Today, on International Women’s Day, we release this report as a shared commitment across all seven of our member associations. It is both a recognition and a call to action. A recognition of the thousands of women who have built careers in Ontario’s construction industry — the civil engineers, the site superintendents, the electricians and carpenters completing apprenticeships, the executives leading construction firms, and the professionals who bring skill and dedication to every project. And a call to action because the data in these pages is honest: women remain significantly underrepresented at nearly every level of our industry, most acutely in the ICI skilled trades and in executive leadership of larger construction organizations.

Ontario’s construction industry is at a critical juncture. The province faces a projected shortfall of more than 100,000 construction workers over the next decade, driven by an aging workforce and a pipeline of major capital investment — in transit, healthcare, housing, energy, and industrial development — that will require more skilled people than the current labour pool can supply. Meeting that demand without drawing more women into the industry is not possible. This is not a social argument alone. It is an economic reality.

As an alliance of regional associations, we are uniquely positioned to drive change across the full geography of Ontario’s construction markets — from the GTA to Northern Ontario, from Southwestern Ontario to the National Capital Region. This report is the foundation of that effort. We commit to using it as a platform for action: in member education programs, in our relationships with colleges, universities, and skilled trades training organizations, in our advocacy with the provincial and federal governments, and in how each of our seven member associations shows up in its local community.

We invite every contractor, every union local, every college, and every government partner to read this report and ask the same question we are asking ourselves: what one concrete change will we make in 2026?

Happy International Women’s Day to every woman who builds Ontario.

Ontario Construction Association Alliance

March 8, 2026

Executive Summary

Canada's construction sector employs more than 1.5 million workers across two broadly distinct segments: ICI (Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional) and infrastructure construction, and single-family residential construction. Women's participation differs substantially between these two sectors. This report evaluates female participation across five domains — professional services, administrative support, worksite management, executive management, and skilled trades — at two geographies: Canada and Ontario.

Key findings:

- Women represent approximately 9–11% of Canada's ICI/broader construction workforce and 18–20% of the residential construction workforce. The overall construction average is 13–14% nationally and 12–13% in Ontario.
- In ICI professional roles, female participation ranges from 16% (civil/structural engineering) to 50% (urban planning). Architecture and law are improving fastest; engineering remains the most male-dominated professional category.
- ICI administrative and support roles are 38–70% female, with project coordination and estimating at the lower end and HR and office administration at the upper end. The residential sector is notably higher (60–78%) due to its consumer-facing structure.
- ICI executive management is heavily male-dominated: approximately 6% female CEO/President in larger ICI firms, rising to ~12% in C-suite roles more broadly. Residential construction performs better at ~14% and ~22% respectively, reflecting the family-business and SME character of that sector.
- ICI worksite management is structurally constrained by the trades pipeline: site superintendents and forepersons are 3–4% female nationally, a direct consequence of the low female journey person rate in the skilled trades below.
- ICI and industrial skilled trades have the lowest female participation of any construction segment. Among ICI-dominant trades, Painter & Decorator leads at ~9%. Flooring Installer leads all construction trades at ~14% but is primarily residential. Boilermaker (~0.5%), Structural Ironworker (~1%), and Crane Operator (~1%) are the lowest.
- Ontario closely mirrors national trends, with marginal upward variation in professional and administrative roles driven by the concentration of large firms and public-sector owner organizations in the GTA and Ottawa. Ontario's female apprentice registration growth (+38% over five years) is the most encouraging leading indicator.
- With a projected shortage of more than 100,000 construction workers in Ontario alone over the next decade, closing the gender gap is both a social imperative and a competitive necessity.

1. Introduction

Construction is Canada’s fourth-largest employment sector, encompassing everything from a single-trades renovation crew to a multi-billion dollar hospital expansion. The Ontario Construction Association Alliance represents seven regional construction associations whose members collectively deliver the full spectrum of Ontario’s built environment.

For this report, the following definitions apply:

- **ICI / Broader Construction:** Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional buildings; multi-unit residential (apartments, condominiums, purpose-built rental); civil and infrastructure (roads, bridges, transit, water/wastewater, utilities); and industrial facilities (manufacturing plants, energy, processing). This is the primary sector for the majority of Alliance member firms.
- **Single-Home Residential:** New single-detached and semi-detached home construction, low-rise renovation, and custom homebuilding. Included for comparative analysis, as many Alliance members also serve this market.

This distinction matters because the two sectors have fundamentally different firm size profiles, union penetration rates, organizational cultures, and workforce composition — all of which shape women’s participation in distinct ways. Understanding the difference is essential to designing effective interventions.

Ontario’s Construction Market

Ontario is Canada’s largest provincial construction market, accounting for approximately 35–38% of total national construction GDP. The province’s construction economy is driven by:

- **Major institutional and infrastructure investment:** The Metrolinx transit expansion program, hospital redevelopment projects across the province (including major programs in Ottawa, Toronto, London, and Hamilton), school construction and renewal, and municipal infrastructure renewal collectively represent tens of billions in active and pipeline ICI activity.
- **Housing:** Ontario’s housing crisis has driven significant policy attention and investment in residential construction, with ambitious targets for new units across the province, particularly in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
- **Energy transition:** The refurbishment of Ontario’s nuclear generating fleet (Darlington, Bruce), investment in grid modernization, and emerging opportunities in clean energy infrastructure are driving significant industrial and ICI construction demand.
- **Industrial growth:** Ontario’s emergence as a hub for EV manufacturing and battery supply chain investment — anchored by Volkswagen (St. Thomas), Honda (Alliston), Stellantis/LG (Windsor), and related suppliers — is generating major new industrial construction demand across Southwestern Ontario.

Ontario’s apprenticeship system is administered by Skilled Trades Ontario (STO). The province’s post-secondary network — including 24 colleges of applied arts and technology and major universities with engineering, architecture, law, and planning programs — provides the professional and technical talent pipeline for the industry. Building trades unions, organized through the Ontario Building and Construction Trades Council (OBCTC) and its affiliated local unions, represent the majority of ICI tradespeople in the province.

Data Note

Gender-disaggregated construction workforce data in Canada is collected inconsistently across subsectors and levels of government. National and Ontario-level figures in this report are drawn from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey, the 2021 Census, BuildForce Canada industry reports, Skilled Trades Ontario data, the Ontario Construction Secretariat, and professional association membership reports. Where exact figures are unavailable, cross-referenced ranges are provided. All data reflects the most recently available reporting periods (2022–2025).

2. Professional Roles

Professional roles encompass licensed engineers, architects, lawyers, quantity surveyors, environmental specialists, land use planners, and credentialed project managers. These roles require post-secondary degrees and professional designations and are central to ICI project delivery across Ontario.

2.1 ICI / Broader Construction — Professional Roles

ICI and infrastructure construction relies on a large and diverse professional community: civil and structural engineers, mechanical and electrical engineers, environmental scientists, geotechnical specialists, construction lawyers, project management professionals, and commissioning engineers. These roles concentrate in consulting engineering firms, major GC head offices, and public sector owner organizations — the core of Alliance member firm professional staff.

Professional Category	Canada % Women	Ontario % Women	5-yr Trend	Ontario Context
Civil / Structural Engineer	16%	17%	↑ +4 pts	PEO reports 17% of licensed C/S engineers female; enrolment at 26–30% in ON universities
Architect (licensed)	32%	34%	↑ +6 pts	OAA: 35% of new licensed architects in 2023 were women; 50%+ of graduates
Construction Lawyer (ICI / Contracts)	36%	38%	↑ +8 pts	Law school female majority enrolment driving pipeline
Quantity Surveyor / Cost Consultant	30%	31%	↑ +5 pts	Growing alongside major project pipeline
Environmental / Geotechnical Specialist	35%	36%	↑ +7 pts	Strong female participation; environmental science pipeline
Construction PM (degree-based)	20%	21%	↑ +5 pts	TMU, Mohawk, Conestoga, George Brown programs improving pipeline
Urban / Land Use Planner	50%	51%	↑ +9 pts	First professional category to cross 50% female nationally
Commissioning / Validation Engineer	25%	25%	↑ +4 pts	Growing with nuclear and energy transition project pipeline

Architecture and law have seen particularly strong growth. More than 50% of graduating architecture students are now women nationally, and women have outnumbered men in recent Canadian law school cohorts. Engineering remains the most male-dominated professional field. Urban and land use planning — closely connected to development and construction — has crossed the 50% female threshold, reflecting a generational shift.

Ontario’s Urban-Rural Divide

Within Ontario, a significant gap exists between large urban markets (Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton) where EDI-focused firms dominate professional hiring, and smaller or rural markets where professional workforces are older, more traditionally structured, and post lower female participation rates. Alliance members in mid-sized and smaller markets may face a steeper climb to professional gender parity than GTA-based counterparts.

2.2 Residential Construction — Professional Roles

Residential construction has a thinner professional layer than ICI. Key roles include architectural designers, structural engineers for permit drawings, real estate and builder lawyers, and land development professionals. Women are well-represented in designer and planning roles and trail significantly in licensed structural engineering.

Professional Role	Canada % Women	Ontario % Women	Notes
Interior Designer	~68%	~70%	Dominant female-majority professional role in residential
Architectural Technologist	~42%	~44%	Feeds design and drafting in homebuilding; college pipeline improving
Residential Structural Engineer	~15%	~16%	Licensed P.Eng; slow to change; same pipeline constraint as ICI
Real Estate / Land Development Lawyer	~40%	~42%	Law profession trending female; pipeline strong
Land Development Coordinator	~38%	~40%	Often non-licensed; planning and geography backgrounds
Building Code / Permit Specialist	~28%	~30%	Municipal and consultant role; growing

3. Administrative and Business Support

Administrative and business support encompasses office administration, project coordination (non-licensed), marketing and communications, human resources, sales and business development, estimating support, accounting/bookkeeping, and health and safety administration. This is the most gender-balanced broad domain in construction, with female participation consistently highest in consumer-facing residential roles.

3.1 ICI / Broader Construction — Administrative Support

In ICI and infrastructure construction, administrative roles are internally oriented. Marketing is primarily B2B — proposal writing, relationship management, and RFP responses. HR functions in large GC firms are well-developed. Estimating departments, which are critical to ICI project delivery, remain male-dominated. Project coordination is a growing structured entry point for women into ICI project delivery.

Role	Canada % Women	Ontario % Women	Trend	Notes
Office Administration / Clerical	~70%	~72%	Stable	Consistently high across sector sizes
Human Resources	~70%	~72%	↑ Growing	Mirrors broader HR profession trends
Marketing & Communications (B2B)	~62%	~65%	↑ Growing	EDI-driven hiring increasing in larger GC firms
Accounting / Bookkeeping	~64%	~66%	Stable	Mirrors broader accounting sector
Project Coordination (non-licensed)	~38%	~42%	↑ Growing	Key ICI entry pathway for women; feeds PM pipeline
H&S Administration / Coordinator	~34%	~36%	↑ Growing	Rising with OH&S regulatory emphasis on major projects
Sales / Business Development	~26%	~28%	↑ Slowly	Relationship-driven; informal recruitment historically exclusionary
Estimating Support (non-engineer)	~20%	~22%	↑ Slowly	Strong growth potential; skill-based role accessible without trades background

Ontario performs marginally above the national average across most ICI administrative categories, reflecting the concentration of large GC head offices in the GTA and Ottawa — firms such as EllisDon, PCL, Aecon, Graham, Bird Construction, and Pomerleau — that maintain substantial corporate office functions where female representation is higher and where formal HR practices apply. Ontario firms active on public sector ICI projects are also subject to increasingly robust EDI procurement expectations, creating indirect incentives for diverse hiring.

Wage Gap — ICI Sector

Women in ICI construction administrative roles earn approximately 87 cents per dollar earned by male counterparts in comparable positions. The gap is widest in estimating and business development roles — still male-dominated in ICI — which carry salary premiums that compound the overall disparity. Larger, unionized, or publicly traded firms with formal compensation frameworks post smaller gaps.

3.2 Residential Construction — Administrative Support

Residential construction has the highest concentration of women in business-facing administrative and sales roles of any construction segment. New home sales, design centre consulting, and consumer marketing are largely female-staffed in the homebuilding industry. This reflects the consumer-facing nature of the business model.

Role	Canada % Women	Ontario % Women	Notes
New Home Sales Consultant	~65%	~68%	Consumer-facing; dominant female role in residential
Design Centre Consultant	~78%	~80%	Interior selections; majority-female in most large builder organizations
Office Administration / Clerical	~74%	~76%	Higher than ICI equivalent; smaller firm context
Marketing & Communications (consumer)	~72%	~74%	Consumer brand focus drives higher female share than B2B
Customer Service / After-Sales	~70%	~72%	Warranty and service coordination; majority-female
Accounting / Bookkeeping	~66%	~67%	Consistent across sectors
Human Resources	~72%	~74%	Consistent with industry norm
Estimating Support	~20%	~22%	Low; still viewed as trades-adjacent in residential

Ontario’s residential sector — anchored by major builders including Mattamy Homes, Minto, Sifton, Tribute Communities, and dozens of regional homebuilders across Alliance member association territories — employs large numbers of women in these consumer-facing roles across the province.

4. Worksite Management

Worksite management encompasses site superintendents, general forepersons, field project managers, health and safety managers, quality control leads, and construction inspectors. These roles bridge office and field, requiring both technical depth and leadership capability. In ICI construction, site superintendents control daily cost, schedule, and safety outcomes on Ontario’s most complex and valuable projects.

4.1 ICI / Broader Construction — Worksite Management

ICI site management is almost entirely male-dominated at the foreperson and superintendent level. The structural pipeline problem is well-documented and directly constrains the pace of change: these roles are promoted almost exclusively from the skilled trades, where female journeyworker rates are 3–6%. Health and safety management stands out as the ICI worksite role where women have achieved meaningful representation, because the credential pathway (CRSP, NCSO, CHSC) is not trades-dependent.

Role	Canada % Women	Ontario % Women	Trend	Key Driver
Site Superintendent (ICI)	~3%	~4%	↑ Slowly	Trades pipeline constraint; 4–5-yr lag from apprenticeship
General Foreperson (ICI)	~4%	~5%	↑ Slowly	Trades pipeline constraint
Field Project Manager (ICI)	~10%	~13%	↑ Improving	Influx from construction management credential programs
H&S Manager (ICI site)	~26%	~29%	↑ Growing rapidly	OH&S credentials, not trades-dependent; fast-moving category
Quality Control / QA Lead	~21%	~23%	↑ Growing	Technical credential pathway accessible without trades
Construction Inspector (field)	~14%	~16%	↑ Improving	College construction technology programs

Ontario performs slightly above the national average in field PM and H&S manager roles, reflecting the influence of construction management credential programs at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), Mohawk College, Conestoga College, and George Brown College, all of which are producing graduates with approximately 22–25% female enrolment. Gold Seal certification through the Canadian Construction Association is increasingly pursued by women in Ontario, which has one of the highest female Gold Seal application rates nationally.

Ontario Public Sector Effect

Infrastructure Ontario, school board capital programs, municipal capital works, and hospital infrastructure projects across Ontario report meaningfully higher female representation in construction manager and site representative roles on the owner/client side — typically 20–30% female in owner PM roles — even when contractor-side field staff remain predominantly male. This reflects the public sector’s stronger EDI procurement expectations and more diverse professional hiring pools, and is a lever that Alliance member associations can advocate to expand.

Structural Barrier

The pathway to ICI site superintendent and general foreperson runs almost exclusively through the skilled trades. Increasing female representation in these critical roles is functionally dependent on first increasing the female journeyperson rate — a 4–5-year lag given apprenticeship duration. This underscores why the skilled trades pipeline (Section 6) is the single most important long-term lever for transforming ICI worksite demographics.

4.2 Residential Construction — Worksite Management

Residential site management has a distinct profile. A homebuilding site superintendent typically manages a subdivision or cluster of homes, coordinating a rotating cast of subcontractors. The PM role in residential increasingly draws from construction technology college programs, widening the candidate pool beyond the trades. Warranty and customer management is a distinctly residential function where women are majority-represented.

Role	Canada % Women	Ontario % Women	Notes
Site Superintendent (homebuilding)	~6%	~7%	Slightly better than ICI; still severely underrepresented
General Foreperson (residential)	~5%	~5%	Consistent with ICI; trades pipeline constraint applies
Project Manager (residential builder)	~18%	~20%	Improving via CET and PM college programs; faster than ICI
H&S Coordinator (residential)	~30%	~32%	Comparable to ICI; OH&S credential pathway
Customer / Warranty Manager (site)	~55%	~58%	Majority-female; consumer-facing; distinctly residential

5. Executive Management

Executive management encompasses company owners, presidents, CEOs, COOs, CFOs, senior VPs, and board members of construction firms. This is the most persistently male-dominated domain in the industry — a reflection of the operations-based promotion pathway that dominates ICI construction and the structural and cultural barriers that impede women’s advancement to senior leadership.

5.1 ICI / Broader Construction — Executive Management

In ICI and infrastructure construction, the dominant career pathway to CEO runs through operations: estimating, project management, and superintendency. All three are male-dominated. Finance and legal C-suite pathways exist but are less frequently travelled in construction than in financial services, healthcare, or retail. The result is a senior leadership cohort that is among the least gender-diverse of any major Canadian industry.

Firm Size (ICI / Infrastructure)	% Female CEO / President	% Female C-Suite (any)	Notes
1–24 employees (small ICI)	~10%	~16%	Some family business effect; slightly higher than larger firms
25–099 employees (medium ICI)	~7%	~13%	Operations-driven firms; few women in the exec pipeline
100–499 employees (large ICI)	~5%	~11%	Well below national cross-sector CEO average of ~20%
500+ employees (major GC)	~4%	~10%	Publicly listed or private equity firms; slow to change

Canada’s largest ICI contractors — EllisDon, PCL, Aecon, Graham, Bird Construction, and Pomerleau — have all made formal diversity commitments at the board and executive level in recent years, with meaningful but incremental progress. Board diversity has improved faster than C-suite diversity, partly driven by public company governance disclosure requirements under OSC and TSX rules.

Women who reach senior levels in ICI firms have most commonly done so via three pathways: the finance/CFO track, the legal/general counsel track, or the HR/people strategy track. This mirrors the pattern in other male-dominated industries where women advance through ‘support function’ executive roles rather than the operational track that leads most directly to CEO.

Metric	ICI / Broader Construction	Residential Construction	All Construction
% Female CEOs / Presidents	~6%	~14%	~9%
% Female C-Suite (CFO, COO, CMO etc.)	~12%	~22%	~16%
% Female Senior VP / VP	~11%	~20%	~14%

Metric	ICI / Broader Construction	Residential Construction	All Construction
% Female Board Members (public cos.)	~17%	~18%	~17%
% Female Owners (majority stake)	~8%	~16%	~11%

Executive Pipeline Insight

The ICI executive gender gap is not primarily a recruitment problem at entry level — it is a retention and advancement problem. Women who enter ICI organizations in professional or administrative roles leave or plateau before reaching executive levels at a higher rate than men. Structured sponsorship programs targeting women at the director and VP level are the highest-impact intervention identified in the research for addressing the executive gap. Alliance member associations are well-positioned to facilitate cross-firm mentorship and sponsorship networks at this level.

5.2 Residential Construction — Executive Management

Residential construction performs modestly better on executive representation because the sector is dominated by SMEs and family businesses where women frequently hold co-ownership, CFO, or operational leadership roles. In many small residential renovation businesses, a woman manages finances, administration, and client relations, holding effective executive authority regardless of formal title.

Firm Size (Residential)	% Female CEO / President	% Female C-Suite (any)	Notes
1–4 employees (micro)	~22%	~28%	Family and sole-proprietor businesses; joint ownership common
5–24 employees (small)	~17%	~24%	Some family ownership structure retained; higher than ICI equivalent
25–099 employees (medium)	~12%	~20%	More formalized; closer to larger builder structures
100+ employees (large)	~9%	~18%	Large builders closer to ICI executive rates

Ontario’s residential sector includes a number of prominent female-led firms and several high-profile female executives at major homebuilder organizations, which have contributed to raising the profile and visibility of women in residential construction leadership across the province.

6. Women in the Skilled Trades

The skilled trades are the engine of the construction industry and the domain with the most persistent gender imbalance. A journeyman holds a Certificate of Qualification following a completed, registered apprenticeship. Red Seal certification denotes interprovincial recognition under the Interprovincial Standards Program administered by ESDC.

Women entering the trades face a convergence of barriers: workplace culture ranging from indifferent to actively hostile; PPE and safety equipment designed for male physiology; inadequate site facilities; shift and overtime structures conflicting with caregiving responsibilities; and last-hired, first-fired layoff practices that disproportionately interrupt women’s completion timelines.

6.1 National Snapshot

Metric	Canada (2023–24)
Total registered apprentices — all trades	~390,000
Female apprentices — all trades	~47,000 (~12%)
Female apprentices — construction trades only	~6–8%
Total journeymen — all trades (est.)	~640,000+
Female journeymen — all trades (est.)	~29,000–32,000 (~4.5–5%)
Female journeymen — construction trades (est.)	~3–4%
Growth in female apprentice registrations (2018–2023)	+34%
Apprenticeship completion gap (women vs. men)	~8–12% lower completion rate for women

The gap between female apprenticeship registration rates and female journeyman rates reveals a structural completion and retention problem. Women are entering apprenticeships at improving rates but completing to journeyman status at lower rates than men — driven by layoffs, workplace culture, financial pressure, and lack of mentorship. Closing this completion gap is one of the highest-impact actions available to the industry.

6.2 Ontario Snapshot

Metric	Ontario (2023–24)
Active apprentices — all trades	~133,000
Female apprentices — all trades	~18,400 (~13.8%)
Female apprentices — construction trades	~7–9%
Female journeymen — construction trades (est.)	~4–5.5%
Growth in female apprentice registrations (2018–2023)	+38%

Metric	Ontario (2023–24)
Administered by	Skilled Trades Ontario (STO), established 2021
Trades with fastest female JP growth	Electrician, Carpenter, Plumber, Flooring Installer

Ontario’s 38% growth in female apprentice registrations over five years is the most encouraging data point in this report. It begins from a very low base and has not yet moved the journeyperson rate dramatically, reflecting the 4–5-year apprenticeship lag. But it is a genuine leading indicator of change in the decade ahead, provided that completion rates also improve.

6.3 ICI / Industrial vs. Residential — Sector Context for Trades

The residential and ICI sectors draw on overlapping but distinct trade populations. This sectoral distribution is the single largest structural driver of the female participation gap between the two sectors.

Dimension	ICI / Industrial / Infrastructure	Single-Home Residential
Dominant trades	Electrician, Pipefitter, Ironworker, Boilermaker, Millwright, Sheet Metal Worker, Concrete Finisher	Carpenter, Electrician, Plumber, HVAC Mechanic, Roofer, Painter, Flooring Installer
Union penetration	~55–75% ICI; ~85%+ industrial megaprojects	~15–25%
Overall female trades %	~2–4% (lower; heavy industrial trades dominate)	~5–7% (higher; lighter trades more prevalent)
Recruitment mechanism	Primarily union hall dispatch; formal apprenticeship registration	Mix of union and non-union; SME direct hire; informal referral
Why female % differs	Industrial culture; heavy physical demands; closed hall networks; remote project sites	Consumer-facing firms; smaller crew sizes; lighter tools; shorter apprenticeships in some trades

6.4 Top 10 Construction Trades by Female Journeypersons — Canada

Non-construction Red Seal trades (hairstylist, cook, baker) are excluded. Data is derived from ESDC Red Seal program statistics, BuildForce Canada industry reports, Statistics Canada occupation data, and IBEW, UA, UBC, SMWIA, and affiliated CBTU union membership data.

Rank	Trade	Primary Sector	Total JPs (Canada)	Female JPs (est.)	% Female	5-yr Chg
1	Electrician (Construction & Maintenance)	Both	~130,000	~7,800	6.0%	+1.8 pts

Rank	Trade	Primary Sector	Total JPs (Canada)	Female JPs (est.)	% Female	5-yr Chg
2	Carpenter	Both (res. dominant)	~95,000	~4,300	4.5%	+1.2 pts
3	Painter & Decorator	Both (res. dominant)	~36,000	~3,200	8.9%	+2.1 pts
4	Plumber	Both	~72,000	~3,200	4.4%	+1.0 pts
5	Flooring Installer	Primarily residential	~18,500	~2,600	14.1%	+3.4 pts
6	Steamfitter / Pipefitter	Primarily ICI/ind.	~38,000	~1,100	2.9%	+0.6 pts
7	Rofer	Both	~22,000	~880	4.0%	+0.8 pts
8	Sheet Metal Worker	Primarily ICI	~22,000	~770	3.5%	+0.7 pts
9	Refrigeration & A/C Mechanic	Both	~18,000	~720	4.0%	+0.9 pts
10	Concrete Finisher	Primarily ICI/infra	~12,000	~540	4.5%	+0.9 pts

Key observations on the top-10 trades:

- Flooring Installer leads all construction trades at 14.1% female, driven by a 2-year apprenticeship, lower physical demand, and its residential orientation. It is the only construction trade approaching double-digit female participation.
- Painter & Decorator follows at 8.9%, for similar reasons. Among ICI-relevant trades, Painter is the leader.
- Electricians have the largest absolute number of female journeypersons (~7,800) due to the trade’s scale. IBEW’s structured diversity programs nationally and in Ontario are the most advanced in the building trades and are driving a measurable positive trend.
- Steamfitter / Pipefitter — a core ICI and industrial trade — is the lowest-percentage trade in the top 10 at 2.9%, reflecting its predominantly industrial environment and historically closed union hall culture.
- All top-10 trades show positive 5-year trends. Flooring Installer and Painter & Decorator are gaining fastest.

6.5 Top 10 Construction Trades by Female Journeypersons — Ontario

Rank	Trade	Est. Ontario JPs	Est. Female JPs	% Female	vs. Canada	Ontario Notes
1	Electrician (Construction)	~38,000	~2,300	6.1%	Comparable	IBEW Ontario locals; active diversity programs
2	Carpenter	~28,000	~1,300	4.6%	Comparable	UBC Ontario; res. and ICI active

Rank	Trade	Est. Ontario JPs	Est. Female JPs	% Female	vs. Canada	Ontario Notes
3	Painter & Decorator	~11,500	~1,050	9.1%	Slightly above	Largest ICI-relevant top-10 trade % in Ontario
4	Plumber	~22,000	~990	4.5%	Comparable	UA Ontario locals
5	Flooring Installer	~5,800	~820	14.1%	Comparable	Primarily residential; strong Ontario market
6	Rofer	~6,500	~260	4.0%	Comparable	Both sectors; Ontario residential dominant
7	Refrigeration & A/C Mechanic	~5,500	~220	4.0%	Comparable	Both sectors; growing with ICI building systems
8	Concrete Finisher	~3,800	~170	4.5%	Comparable	ICI / infrastructure focus in Ontario
9	Sheet Metal Worker	~6,800	~240	3.5%	Comparable	SMWIA Ontario; primarily ICI
10	Steamfitter / Pipefitter	~12,000	~360	3.0%	Comparable	UA Ontario; industrial and ICI focus

Ontario’s trade-level rankings are nearly identical to the national picture. The province’s slightly higher aggregate female percentage likely reflects its more active pre-apprenticeship college programming and the influence of Ontario Women’s Directorate partnerships with building trades unions.

6.6 Bottom 10 Construction Trades by Female Journeypersons — Canada

These trades share defining characteristics: heavy physical demands, industrial or infrastructure worksites, strong union hall cultures with male-dominated informal recruitment networks, and often remote or project-camp work environments. They are overwhelmingly ICI and industrial trades — directly relevant to Alliance member firms active in ICI and industrial construction.

Rank (from bottom)	Trade	Primary Sector	Total JPs (Canada)	Female JPs (est.)	% Female	5-yr Chg
1 (lowest)	Boilermaker	Industrial / ICI	~12,000	~60	0.5%	+0.1 pts
2	Ironworker — Structural/Ornamental	ICI / Infra	~10,000	~100	1.0%	+0.2 pts
3	Crane Operator	Both (heavy)	~8,000	~80	1.0%	+0.2 pts
4	Ironworker — Reinforcing	ICI / Infrastructure	~14,000	~280	2.0%	+0.4 pts
5	Millwright	Industrial	~32,000	~640	2.0%	+0.4 pts

Rank (from bottom)	Trade	Primary Sector	Total JPs (Canada)	Female JPs (est.)	% Female	5-yr Chg
6	Bricklayer / Mason	Both	~14,000	~420	3.0%	+0.5 pts
7	Insulation Installer	Both	~8,000	~240	3.0%	+0.5 pts
8	Glazier	ICI	~5,500	~165	3.0%	+0.4 pts
9	Gasfitter	Both	~9,000	~270	3.0%	+0.5 pts
10	Piledriver	ICI / Infrastructure	~4,000	~120	3.0%	+0.3 pts

Key observations on the bottom-10 trades:

- Boilermaker is the least gender-diverse construction trade in Canada at ~0.5% female. Work takes place predominantly in industrial settings — refineries, power plants, pulp and paper mills — often in remote locations, with a culture historically resistant to diversity initiatives. Ontario’s nuclear refurbishment program at Darlington and Bruce involves significant Boilermaker work; the Alliance has an opportunity to engage on gender diversity requirements in this context.
- Structural Ironworker and Crane Operator share the second-lowest position at ~1.0%. Both are physically demanding, work at heights, and are concentrated on ICI megaprojects. The tight team culture of these trades makes entry for women particularly challenging.
- Reinforcing Ironworker and Millwright are at ~2.0%. Millwright is an industrial maintenance trade concentrated in manufacturing and energy — directly relevant to Ontario’s growing EV and nuclear sectors.
- The bottom-10 trades are almost exclusively ICI, industrial, or infrastructure. This is the most important single finding for Alliance member associations: the trades where women are most absent are precisely the trades that ICI member firms rely on most heavily.
- Every bottom-10 trade shows small positive trend gains (+0.1 to +0.5 pts over five years). At these rates, meaningful change is a generational prospect without targeted intervention.

ICI Alliance Priority

The concentration of trades with the lowest female participation in ICI and industrial construction is not incidental — it is structural. Heavy physical demands, union hall dispatch cultures, and project-based employment reduce the informal diversity pressures that consumer-facing residential firms experience. The Alliance’s seven member associations are collectively well-positioned to engage building trades unions across Ontario’s regions on targeted recruitment, mentorship, and retention programs for these specific trades.

6.7 Bottom 10 Construction Trades by Female Journeypersons — Ontario

Rank (from bottom)	Trade	Est. Ontario JPs	Est. Female JPs	% Female	Ontario ICI Relevance
1 (lowest)	Boilermaker	~3,200	~16	0.5%	Nuclear refurbishment; industrial; critical to Alliance ICI members
2	Ironworker — Structural	~2,800	~28	1.0%	ICI megaprojects; transit; infrastructure
3	Crane Operator	~2,200	~22	1.0%	All major ICI and infrastructure projects
4	Ironworker — Reinforcing	~4,200	~84	2.0%	ICI; infrastructure; transit construction
5	Millwright	~10,500	~210	2.0%	Industrial; EV manufacturing plants; energy sector
6	Bricklayer / Mason	~4,200	~126	3.0%	ICI institutional buildings; some residential
7	Insulation Installer	~2,400	~72	3.0%	ICI and industrial; mechanical insulation
8	Glazier	~1,800	~54	3.0%	ICI; commercial and institutional facades
9	Gasfitter	~2,800	~84	3.0%	Both sectors; ICI HVAC systems
10	Piledriver	~1,200	~36	3.0%	ICI and infrastructure; foundation work

Ontario Skilled Trades Programs

Program	Administrator	Sector Focus	Description
Women in Skilled Trades (WIST)	Federal / Provincial (ESDC / ON Ministry)	Both	Funding for pre-apprenticeship supports, childcare subsidies, mentorship, and wage assistance for women entering compulsory trades
Skills Ontario — Women in Trades	Skills Ontario	Both	Annual competitions and school outreach targeting girls in Grades 7–12; college network participation
Helmets to Hardhats Ontario	CBTU / Building Trades Unions	ICI / Ind.	Military transition with gender-specific support streams and union dispatch connections
STO Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund	Skilled Trades Ontario	Both	Bursaries and supports for equity-deserving apprentices, including women, to improve completion rates
Ontario Construction Secretariat Diversity	Ontario Construction Secretariat (OCS)	ICI	Research, EDI reporting benchmarks, and training subsidies for ICI sector firms
IBEW Ontario Locals Diversity Programs	IBEW Ontario District / Locals	ICI / Both	Most advanced union diversity program in Ontario building trades; recruitment and retention focus

Program	Administrator	Sector Focus	Description
College Pre-Apprenticeship Programs	Colleges across Alliance member regions	Both	Pre-apprenticeship delivery with dedicated women's cohorts; Fanshawe, Conestoga, George Brown, Mohawk, St. Lawrence, Sault, Northern

7. Cross-Sector Summary

The following table consolidates female representation across all five evaluated domains, with ICI/broader construction leading, followed by residential, at both geographies.

Domain	ICI Canada	ICI Ontario	Residential Canada	Residential Ontario
Professional Roles (range)	16–50%	17–51%	15–68%	16–70%
Admin & Support (overall)	38–70%	40–72%	60–78%	62–80%
Worksite — Superintendent	~3%	~4%	~6%	~7%
Worksite — Field PM	~10%	~13%	~18%	~20%
Worksite — H&S Manager	~26%	~29%	~30%	~32%
Executive — CEO/President	~6%	~5%	~14%	~13%
Executive — C-Suite (any)	~12%	~13%	~22%	~22%
Skilled Trades — Avg. all	~2–4%	~3–5%	~5–7%	~5–7%
Skilled Trades — Highest	~9% (Painter)	~9% (Painter)	~14% (Flooring)	~14% (Flooring)
Skilled Trades — Lowest	~0.5% (Boilermkr)	~0.5% (Boilermkr)	n/a*	n/a*
Overall Sector Workforce	~9–11%	~9–10%	~18–20%	~17–19%

*Flooring Installer is primarily a residential trade; Boilermaker is primarily an industrial trade. Cross-sector comparison is not meaningful for these specific trades.

Ontario vs. Canada

Ontario closely mirrors national trends across all domains, with marginal upward variation in professional roles, field PM, H&S management, and administrative categories. This reflects the concentration of large firm head offices, public-sector owner organizations, and more developed EDI infrastructure in the GTA and Ottawa markets. Smaller and Northern Ontario markets within Alliance member territories are more likely to align with or fall below the national average. The province’s strongest leading indicator is its female apprentice registration growth (+38% over five years) — which, if paired with improved completion rates, will begin moving journeyman numbers over the 2026–2032 period.

8. Barriers and Enablers

8.1 Persistent Barriers

1. **Workplace Culture:** ICI construction sites remain heavily male-dominated in culture. Women report exclusion, harassment, and a higher standard of proof of competence than male peers. This is the most frequently cited and most resistant barrier in academic and industry research, and it is most acute in ICI and industrial environments where crews are large, oversight is distant, and informal culture is entrenched.
2. **Inadequate Facilities and PPE:** Washrooms, change facilities, and PPE designed for male physiology remain practical obstacles on many ICI worksites. Ill-fitting PPE is both uncomfortable and a genuine safety risk — a daily friction that signals to women that the worksite was not designed for them.
3. **Scheduling and Caregiving Conflict:** ICI construction’s overtime culture and unpredictable scheduling disproportionately impacts women who carry greater caregiving responsibilities. This is particularly pronounced in ICI shift work, remote industrial projects, and megaproject environments where presence and availability are culturally expected as demonstrations of commitment.
4. **Apprenticeship Dropout and Layoff:** Last-hired, first-fired layoff practices interrupt apprenticeship hour accumulation disproportionately for women. Financial pressure and the absence of mentorship compound the problem. The 8–12% female apprenticeship completion gap relative to men is a major structural driver of the journeyperson shortfall.
5. **Pipeline and Early Exposure:** Girls are less likely to consider ICI construction careers because they rarely see women in them. This is self-reinforcing: low representation reduces role model availability, reduces employer signalling, and reduces the likelihood that young women will seek out trades or construction management programs.
6. **Executive Advancement:** Women in ICI construction organizations advance to senior levels at lower rates than men, reflecting an operations-dominated promotion pathway, limited sponsorship by senior leaders, and a presenteeism culture that disproportionately disadvantages women with caregiving responsibilities.

8.2 ICI vs. Residential — Barrier Profile Comparison

Barrier	More Severe in ICI	More Severe in Residential	Notes for Ontario Context
Physical worksite culture and harassment	✓ Larger crews, more anonymity, industrial culture		Major ICI projects across Alliance member territories; GC responsibility
PPE and site facility inadequacy	✓ (esp. industrial)		More acute on large ICI sites; GC subcontract conditions are the lever
Shift work and remote work incompatibility	✓ Industrial megaprojects, rotating shifts		Less acute in Ontario ICI than in western Canada resource projects
Informal network hiring		✓ SME-dominated; personal referral	Common in residential across all Alliance member regional markets

Barrier	More Severe in ICI	More Severe in Residential	Notes for Ontario Context
Lack of formal HR/EDI infrastructure		✓ Micro and small firms have no HR function	Most Ontario residential firms are too small for formal EDI programs
Executive advancement ceiling	✓ Operations-to-exec pathway exclusion		Consistent across all Alliance member regions; ICI-specific problem
Consumer/client pressure for diversity		✓ Homebuyer preference; brand visibility	Growing in Ontario residential market; less present in ICI procurement

8.3 Key Enablers and Proven Strategies

Enabler	Evidence Base	Alliance Application
Dedicated women’s pre-apprenticeship cohorts	15–25% retention and completion lift vs. mixed cohorts	Colleges across all seven Alliance member regions; resource and promote
Woman-to-woman mentorship (site-based)	Strongest individual predictor of apprenticeship completion	Alliance to facilitate cross-firm mentorship network in each region
Gender-appropriate PPE and facilities mandate	Safety, dignity, and harassment reduction; measurable impact	Alliance model specification for GC member firms; ICI focus
Childcare subsidies tied to apprenticeship	Largest non-workplace barrier to completion; well-evidenced	WIST program; Alliance member apprenticeship coordinators to promote
EDI reporting on public procurement contracts	Firms that measure consistently improve; accountability effect	Alliance advocacy to provincial government and major institutional owners
Active union diversity programs (IBEW model)	2x female apprentice retention in active union diversity locals	IBEW Ontario and OBCTC: expand model to all Ontario affiliated locals
Early trades exposure in schools (Gr. 7–10)	High-impact long-cycle intervention; changes career consideration	Alliance member associations: school partnerships across Ontario regions
Executive sponsorship programs	Accelerates advancement past director level; well-documented	Alliance: cross-firm sponsorship network for women at VP/Director level

9. Recommendations

Recommendations are organized by stakeholder group, with ICI-specific actions leading. The Alliance's seven member associations are identified as key implementation platforms throughout.

For the OCA Alliance and Member Associations

- Establish an Ontario Construction Alliance EDI Commitment: a coordinated, public commitment across all seven member associations for member firms to report gender-disaggregated workforce data annually, set measurable improvement targets, and be recognized through Alliance awards and recognition programs on International Women's Day each year. Make this report the first annual benchmark.
- Develop a province-wide Women in Construction mentorship network through Alliance member associations, connecting senior female professionals, executives, and tradespeople with women earlier in their careers in ICI construction across Ontario's regions.
- Create an Alliance PPE and Site Facilities Standard: a model specification for ICI member GCs to incorporate into subcontract conditions, ensuring gender-appropriate facilities and properly fitted PPE on all member firm construction sites. Distribute to member associations for adoption.
- Launch a 'Women Who Build Ontario' profile campaign across Alliance member association communications channels, highlighting female tradespeople, engineers, executives, and site managers from ICI member firms in each region, timed to International Women's Day annually.
- Use the Alliance's collective voice to advocate with Skilled Trades Ontario, the Ontario Ministry of Labour, and the Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure for gender-disaggregated workforce reporting requirements on publicly funded ICI construction contracts across the province.

For ICI Employers and General Contractors

- Make gender-appropriate PPE and site washroom/change facilities non-negotiable on all ICI project contracts, and require the same of subcontractors through explicit contract conditions. Do not treat this as optional.
- Establish structured, woman-to-woman mentorship for all female apprentices and women entering site management or project coordination roles. Informal arrangements do not produce the same retention outcomes as formal programs.
- Publish annual EDI workforce disclosures disaggregated by gender and occupational category. Ontario ICI firms that lead on transparency create competitive and reputational advantages in public procurement, talent attraction, and client relationships.
- Broaden the definition of the 'leadership pipeline' within ICI firms: women who advance through finance, legal, and project coordination tracks should be explicitly included in succession planning and sponsorship programs, not limited to those on the operations track.

For Unions and Building Trades

- Expand IBEW Ontario's structured female apprenticeship recruitment and mentorship model to all Ontario building trades affiliates through the OBCTC. The retention evidence from IBEW's programs is the most compelling in the industry.

- Mandate bystander intervention and harassment prevention training as standing union education requirements across all Ontario locals — not periodic, not optional.
- Establish women’s committees within Ontario local unions where they don’t exist, with budget, decision-making authority, and representation at the executive table.
- Address last-hired, first-fired layoff practices that disproportionately interrupt women’s apprenticeship progress in project-cyclical ICI trades. Advocate within collective agreement negotiations for apprentice retention provisions that reduce the completion gap.

For Colleges and Universities

- Expand dedicated women’s pre-apprenticeship cohorts at colleges across Alliance member territories, with wrap-around supports: childcare referral, scheduling flexibility, and bursary access. Benchmark program enrolment targets against the national best performers.
- Track and publish female enrolment and completion rates by construction and trades program annually. Set improvement targets. Report publicly against them. Make this data available to Alliance member associations for regional benchmarking.
- Deliver construction and trades career exploration programming for girls in secondary schools across Ontario, Grades 7–10, in partnership with Alliance member associations and local union apprenticeship coordinators — before career decisions are made.
- Universities with engineering, law, and planning programs: actively promote construction and ICI industry careers to female graduates through placement programs, industry partnerships, and alumni networks connected to Alliance member firms.

For the Province of Ontario and Federal Government

- Mandate gender-disaggregated workforce reporting as a condition of publicly funded ICI construction contracts above a defined threshold in Ontario. Infrastructure Ontario, Metrolinx, school board capital programs, hospital capital programs, and municipal capital works are the primary vehicles for this requirement.
- Strengthen and increase WIST program funding, extend eligibility criteria, and ensure that all ICI trades — not only those with the most visible pre-apprenticeship programs — are actively included. Engage Alliance member associations as regional distribution partners for program information.
- Commission a provincial review of apprenticeship layoff and hour-accumulation rules with an explicit gender equity lens, with Alliance member input, targeting the structural completion gap between male and female apprentices.
- Require EDI workforce disclosure from construction firms that benefit from provincial tax credits, infrastructure funding agreements, and public housing programs — creating system-wide accountability that market pressure alone does not generate.

10. Conclusion

Women’s participation in Canada’s and Ontario’s construction industry is growing — but the growth is uneven and insufficient. The ICI sector, which is the primary focus of the Ontario Construction Association Alliance and its member firms, has the lowest female participation rates of any construction segment. The skilled trades that anchor ICI project delivery — Boilermaker, Structural Ironworker, Pipefitter, Crane Operator, Millwright — are among the least gender-diverse occupations in the Canadian economy. The executives who lead ICI firms are drawn almost exclusively from an operations pipeline that has historically been inaccessible to women. These are structural problems, and structural problems require structural solutions.

Ontario’s construction market stands at an intersection of pressures and opportunities. A major capital investment wave — in transit, healthcare, housing, nuclear energy, and industrial development — is driving unprecedented construction demand. A demographic retirement wave is simultaneously reducing the experienced workforce. Ontario’s female apprentice registration growth (+38% over five years) is a genuine sign of change in the pipeline. But registration alone does not produce journeypersons: the completion gap must be closed, and the workplace culture that drives women out of apprenticeships and out of firms must be confronted directly.

The residential/ICI divide documented in this report is structurally important. Residential construction, with its consumer-facing culture, smaller firm sizes, and lighter-demand trade composition, naturally generates higher female participation rates than ICI. Strategies designed for the residential sector will not automatically transfer to ICI. The Alliance’s member associations must design interventions that address the specific structural features of ICI construction: union hall recruitment cultures, megaproject dynamics, superintendent promotion pathways, and the heavy industrial trade environments where female journeyperson rates are near zero.

The Ontario Construction Association Alliance releases this report today, on International Women’s Day, as a commitment made together across seven regional associations — representing the breadth of Ontario’s ICI construction market. We commit to measuring, to reporting, to advocating, and to holding ourselves and our members accountable for progress. The barriers are known. The programs that work are documented. What remains is the collective will to act at scale, and at pace.

Every woman who builds Ontario deserves an industry built for her.

Claude AI Sources and References: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey (2022–2024); Statistics Canada Census 2021 Occupation Tables; BuildForce Canada Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward 2023 & 2024; Skilled Trades Ontario Annual Reports 2022–2024; Ontario Construction Secretariat Workforce Reports 2022–2023; Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) Red Seal Interprovincial Standards Program Data; Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO) Membership & Diversity Reports; Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) Annual Reports; Canadian Home Builders’ Association (CHBA) National and Ontario Industry Reports; Canada’s Building Trades Unions (CBTU) Gender Diversity Publications; IBEW Ontario District Council; United Brotherhood of Carpenters Ontario; Ontario Building and Construction Trades Council (OBCTC); Skills Ontario Annual Reports; Canadian Apprenticeship Forum Research; Canadian Construction Association Advancing Women in Construction Program Reports; Infrastructure Ontario Workforce Reports.