

EMPLOYMENT

FACT SHEET

Women in Construction: 6.9 Percent Is Not Enough.

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In 1978, the Office for Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) set a goal for women to work 6.9 percent of federal construction contractors' work hours pursuant to Executive Order 11246. The Executive Order requires federal contractors to take affirmative action to ensure that equal opportunity is provided in all aspects of their employment and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in federal contractor workplaces.¹ This 6.9 percent utilization goal has not been updated in over thirty years; it was based on the overall population of working women at the time but has not kept pace as women's participation in the civilian labor force has steadily increased in the last three decades.²

Rates of Women's Participation in Nontraditional Fields Indicate That There is Much Room For Growth in Construction.

Despite the 6.9 percent goal, women constitute a miniscule percentage of workers in the construction and extraction occupations.³ In 2010, only 2.6 percent of the more than 8.4 million workers in construction trades and related occupations were women.⁴ As indicated in the table below, although women have increased their share of jobs in many occupations that used to be more heavily male-dominated, women's share of construction jobs has remained virtually unchanged.

The share of women in many "dirty and dangerous" jobs similar to those in the construction trades, such as correctional officers, firefighters, and heavy equipment mechanics, has grown in the past three decades. This growth in similar occupations indicates that there is room for much greater growth in women's participation in the construction trades.

The low percentages of women in the construction industry are driven in part by gender inequity in construction vocational and training programs. Instead of being encouraged to enter these programs, women are often pushed by mentors, family, and friends into occupations that align with traditional gender stereotypes. Such practices contribute to vocational training in secondary and post-secondary programs that are highly segregated by gender, with females concentrated in low-wage, traditionally-female areas.⁶ Women are also discouraged from enrolling in and completing construction training programs by barriers such as gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, a lack of awareness about opportunities in construction, and insufficient instruction. In addition, the barriers that women face in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs drive their miniscule share of the field.⁷ Raising the goal for women's participation in construction trades would provide incentives for employers to address the barriers that prevent women from entering and progressing through construction training and apprenticeship programs.

Table 1. Percentages of Women in Nontraditional Occupations

Occupation	Percentage of women in 1983	Percentage of women in 2010
Construction trades and related workers	2.6	2.6
Engineers	6.1	12.0
Physicians	15.6	37.0
Dentists	6.0	26.4
Lawyers	14.5	33.4
Police, detectives, and private investigators	9.7	13.2
Sheriffs, bailiffs, correctional institution officers	16.5	30.9
Firefighters, prevention workers, and inspectors	0.9	7.5
Butchers and meat cutters	20.9	24.6
Heavy equipment and farm equipment mechanics	0.9	3.7
Drilling and boring machine operators	20.5	24.6

Source: NWLC calculations based on Integrated Public Use Microdata Series-Current Population Survey, Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota.⁵

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Increasing Women’s Participation in Nontraditional Fields, Including the Construction Trades, is Vital to the Economic Security of Women and Their Families.

The low percentages of women in nontraditional jobs are particularly problematic in light of the persistent and severe wage gap: the typical American woman who works full time, year round is paid only 77 cents on the dollar compared to her male counterpart.⁸ The Center for American Progress estimated that over the course of a 40-year career, the average woman loses \$434,000 to the wage gap.⁹ Women constitute nearly half of the U.S. labor force,¹⁰ but they remain disproportionately clustered in jobs with lower pay and fewer benefits.¹¹ Furthermore, women remain severely underrepresented in nontraditional jobs, which are often higher-paying than traditional female occupations.¹²

The construction field is a prime example of the problems presented by this underrepresentation.

Occupational Employment Statistics data show that the median hourly wage for construction and extraction occupations was \$18.79 in 2010, which is roughly double the median hourly wage for women-dominated occupations such as home health aides, maids, housekeepers, and child care workers.¹³ Because construction jobs have the potential to provide women with better pay and career opportunities, increasing the number of women in such jobs is vital to the economic security of women and their families.

Conclusion

As women’s participation in historically male-dominated occupations increases, their share of jobs in the construction trades – which are often relatively highly-paid and highly-skilled – should be no exception. The 6.9 percent goal set for women by the OFCCP can no longer be viewed as adequate. It should be raised to help increase women’s participation in the construction trades.

- 1 Due to data constraints, we examine women’s participation in these fields as measured by the percentage of workers who are women rather than the percentage of hours worked by women.
- 2 In 1980 the women’s civilian labor force participation rate was 51.5 percent (compared to 77.4 percent of men). Mitra Toosi, A century of change: the U.S. labor force, 1950-2050, MONTHLY LAB. REV., May 2002, at 15, 24, *available at* <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2002/05/art2full.pdf>. In 2010, the civilian labor force participation rates were 58.6 percent of women and 72.2 percent of men. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by age, sex, and race, in HOUSEHOLD ANNUAL DATA AVERAGES 2010, *available at* <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lfaa2010/pdf/cpsaat3.pdf>.
- 3 NWLC calculations from Integrated Public Use Microdata - Current Population Survey (IPUMS-CPS), Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota, *available at* <http://cps.ipums.org/cps/index.shtml> (last visited May 16, 2012).
- 4 Id.
- 5 Id. IPUMS-CPS is an integrated dataset compiled from 50 years (1962-2011) of March Annual Social and Economic Supplement CPS data. NWLC uses data from the 1984 and 2011 surveys for 1983 and 2010 data. The Bureau of Labor Statistics changed occupational categories in 2003, so comparisons pre-2003 and post-2003 were not possible without a harmonized data set. For this reason, numbers may be slightly different compared to Bureau of Labor Statistics occupational data. NWLC created the “construction trades and related workers” variable by matching occupations listed in the Occupational Outlook Handbook (2010-2011 Edition) definition of “construction trades and related workers” as well as supervisory construction occupations to IPUMS-CPS data, in order to best encompass the OFCCP definitions of the occupation category. Additionally, the “engineers” variable was created by summing all types of engineers together in the IPUMS-CPS database.
- 6 NATIONAL COALITION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN EDUCATION, INVISIBLE AGAIN: THE IMPACT OF CHANGES IN FEDERAL FUNDING ON VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS 7-8 (2001). Id.
- 7 T. SHAWN TAYLOR, THE PATHWAY TO APPRENTICESHIP: ROADBLOCKS TO REGISTRATION OF MINORITIES AND WOMEN IN BUILDING TRADE UNION APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING PROGRAMS IN NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS 26 (2006), *available at* <http://www.napequity.org/pdf/Pathways%20Apprenticeship.pdf>; see also FLORIDA DEPT. OF EDUC., MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT WOMEN IN NONTRADITIONAL JOBS, *available at* <http://www.fldoe.org/workforce/ced/pdf/nontraditional-job-opportunities.pdf> (last visited May, 16, 2012).
- 8 NWLC calculations from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2010 – People 15 Years Old and Over, by Total Money Earnings in 2010, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex, *available at* <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032011/perinc/toc.htm> (last visited May 16, 2012).
- 9 Jessica Arons, Lifetime Losses: The Career Wage Gap 4 (2008), *available at* http://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2008/pdf/equal_pay.pdf. These calculations were not adjusted for inflation.
- 10 NWLC calculations from U.S. Dep’t of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Table A-1: Employment status of the civilian population by sex and age, seasonally adjusted, *available at* <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm> (last visited Dec. 20, 2011)
- 11 Employee Benefits Research Institute, Sources of Health and Characteristics of the Uninsured, Analysis of the March 1998 Current Population Survey (1998) (women are heavily concentrated in low-income jobs, where employers are less likely to offer health insurance).
- 12 Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Averages, Table 11: Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity and Table 39: Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by detailed occupation and sex, *available at* <http://www.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm#annual> (last visited Jan. 12, 2012); see also State of California Employment Development Dept., Nontraditional Employment for Women, *available at* <http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/article.asp?ARTICLEID=657> (last visited Jan. 12, 2012); Carrie Mayne & Lecia Parks Langston, Utah Dept. of Workforce Serv., Utah Careers Supplement for Women: Nontraditional Jobs for Women, *available at* <http://jobs.utah.gov/wi/pubs/womencareers/nontradjobs.pdf> (last visited Jan. 12, 2012).
- 13 Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2010, *available at* http://bls.gov/oes/current/oes_alpha.htm#P and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Averages, Table 11: Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, *available at* <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.pdf>. In 2010, nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides were 88.2 percent women, maids and housekeepers were 89.0 percent women, and child care workers were 94.7 percent women. In 2010, the median hourly wage was \$9.89 for home health aides and \$9.28 for maids and housekeeping cleaners and child care workers.