



Workforce solutions built by industry

Ontario's construction industry will need to recruit 103,900 new workers over the coming decade to keep pace with retirements and additional demand

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Ottawa – The Ontario construction market, led by the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), is expected to retain its intensity through the coming decade, spurring the need for 103,900 additional workers, according to the labour market forecast released today by BuildForce Canada.

BuildForce Canada's [2019–2028 Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward provincial report](#) anticipates major project requirements across the province to rise to 2020, with the remainder of the decade seeing high levels of overall employment sustained by major nuclear refurbishment projects in the GTA and Southwestern Ontario, and continued investment in public transportation and infrastructure. Consequently, keeping pace with increasing employment demands across most of the province's regions will remain a challenge.

While total residential employment is expected to recede slightly through to 2022, it should strengthen again and remain at near current levels across most regions over the decade. The pace of activity in new housing construction is expected to moderate across the 2019–2028 scenario period, but population growth will likely sustain high levels of demand for apartment and condo units in urban centres.

Non-residential construction continues on a steady upward trajectory, with investment expected to peak in 2020 and then plateau for three years, driven by several transportation (public transit, roads, highways, and bridges), utility (including nuclear refurbishment), and industrial projects. Beyond 2020, investment is expected to decline modestly from the peak, though employment is anticipated to remain well above historical levels.

“Ontario's five regions – Central, Eastern, GTA, Northern and Southwestern – each tell a slightly different labour market story as employment demands stack up across the province,” says Bill Ferreira, Executive Director of BuildForce Canada.

The most significant near-term growth is expected in **Southwestern Ontario**, where requirements related to nuclear refurbishment, the Gordie Howe International Bridge, and the construction of industrial buildings increase non-residential employment by 4,000 workers between 2018 and 2021 – an 18% increase over three years.

Over the same period, the **GTA** will likely require an additional 5,300 workers to meet peak demands for the Eglinton LRT (light rail transit), Ontario Power Generation's Darlington nuclear refurbishment, and other major public transportation and infrastructure projects.

In **Eastern Ontario**, phase two of the Ottawa LRT, new hospital projects, and revitalization projects at Canadian Nuclear Laboratories' Chalk River facilities contribute to an additional 3,200 workers needed by 2021 – or a 15% increase compared to 2018.

Labour demands for projects in **Central Ontario** are more modest, but also positive, while in **Northern Ontario**, mining and utility projects sustain employment to 2022 and then decline slightly to 2025 before growth resumes.

“Competing non-residential demands across regions are likely to limit the potential for labour force mobility to meet peak major project requirements, which draw on many of the same trades and occupations,” says Ferreira. “The anticipated slowing pace of residential construction presents a potential supply pool of workers for those with matching skills and qualifications.”

Sustaining capacity over the latter half of the decade will be made more challenging by the expected retirement of 91,100 workers – one quarter of Ontario's current construction labour force. When coupled with demand increases, the province will need to find an additional 103,900 construction workers to meet its future needs. Attracting new workers to the industry will be crucial to meet long-term needs. The industry can potentially draw 77,800 new entrants aged 30 and younger from the local population, but a projected gap of close to an additional 26,100 workers will need to be met from outside the province's construction labour force.

The development of skilled tradespersons in the construction industry takes years, and often requires participation in a provincial apprenticeship program. Over the past five years, more than 54,000 apprentices registered in Ontario's 15 largest construction programs, with 35,500 completions registered during that period. An ongoing commitment to training and apprenticeship development will be necessary to ensure there are sufficient numbers of qualified tradespeople to sustain a skilled workforce over the long term.

Building a sustainable labour force will also require the construction and maintenance industry to increase recruitment from groups traditionally underrepresented in the current construction labour force, including women, Indigenous Canadians, and new Canadians.

In 2018, women in Ontario's construction and maintenance industry represented just 13% of the industry's labour force and accounted for only 3.9% of workers employed in direct on-site project construction. In the province's total labour force, however, women represented 48% of workers.

Similarly, Indigenous Canadians were also underrepresented in the industry, accounting for little more than 2.7% of the province's construction labour force. Increasing the participation rate of both these groups would go a long way to helping the industry address its future labour force needs.

Over the coming decade, Ontario is expected to welcome an average of 131,000 newcomers every year, making the immigrant population an important future source of potential workers for the province's construction and maintenance industry. Currently, Ontario's construction workforce is made up of approximately 26% new Canadians.

BuildForce Canada is a national industry-led organization that represents all sectors of Canada's construction industry. Its mandate is to provide accurate and timely labour market data and analysis, as well as programs and initiatives to help manage labour force requirements and build the capacity and the capability of Canada's construction and maintenance industry. Visit www.constructionforecasts.ca.