

# Growing Labor Shortage Spurs Innovative Ways to Fill Construction Worker Gap

May 10, 2021 by [Grant Cameron](#)



If you're a young person looking for work, or someone in the workforce looking for a change of career, the construction industry could be what you're looking for. Over the next decade, there will be plenty of jobs in the field available to new talent.

Employment in the industry is expected to rise by 64,900 workers over the next 10 years in Canada, according to a survey released by [BuildForce Canada](#), an organization which provides national labour market data and analysis.

The organization's [2021-2030 Construction & Maintenance Looking Forward](#) report forecasts that the construction and maintenance industries will have to replace nearly 259,100 workers by the end of the decade. That's about 22 per cent of the current labour force, due mainly to Baby Boomers reaching retirement.

## Strong Construction Outlook = Worker Demand

The strength and pace of the recovery is expected to vary among provinces. However, the industry should be looking forward to a long list of public transit, health care, education, roadwork and other civil infrastructure projects.

“Canada’s construction outlook is strong for 2021 and well into the middle portion of the decade thanks to gains in the residential and non-residential sectors,” explains BuildForce Canada executive director Bill Ferreira.

“And while we forecast growth to slow over the later years of our forecast period, we nonetheless expect that the industry will be challenged to recruit more than 309,000 new workers to replace retirees and keep pace with demand.”

Overall, non-residential employment is projected to increase by more than 39,800 workers between 2021 and 2025 and another 5,000 to 2030. The sector is expected to end the decade up 44,800 workers, or eight per cent, compared to 2020.

Meanwhile, the residential sector is expected to see strong growth post-2021 and end the decade with an increase of nearly 20,100 workers, a four-per-cent increase compared to 2020 levels.

Based on historical data, it’s anticipated that although the industry will draw 228,100 new entrants, it will still be short as many as 81,000 workers by 2030. An ongoing commitment to training and apprenticeship development will therefore be necessary to ensure sufficient numbers of qualified tradespeople.

## Companies Taking Action

So what’s being done to offset the possible shortage of workers?

Companies like [EllisDon](#) are taking action to get more youth into the industry. The company is anticipating that the industry will be short roughly 100,000 tradespeople in 10 years, mainly in the Toronto and Vancouver areas. EllisDon is already seeing shortages among people who lay rebar and pour concrete.

To counteract the potential shortage, EllisDon has partnered on ventures like the [Build A Dream](#) initiative, which aims to help female students explore careers in fields where women are still underrepresented. Camps, workshops and career discovery expos are being held to highlight career paths for women.

More companies are also turning to off-site or modular construction as building prefabricated modules in a heated warehouse environment for assembly on-site is seen as a way to attract more youth to the industry.

A report by global research company [MarketsandMarkets](#) indicates the global modular construction market size is projected to grow from (U.S) \$82.3 billion in 2020 to (U.S) \$108.8 billion by 2025.

## Unions and Colleges Making Inroads

[Canada's Building Trades Unions \(CBTU\)](#) has also been working to address this issue. A decade ago, CBTU developed [Build Together](#), a workforce development program. It kicked off a Build Together: Women of the Building Trades, which has since grown to a vast network of tradeswomen within seven provincial chapters.

Build Together chapters include tradeswomen representatives from 15 affiliated international unions working to make the industry more diverse and inclusive. Through the network, the Office to Advance Women Apprentices in Newfoundland and Labrador was introduced. Build Together's website explains how to get started in the industry.

Colleges with construction trades and apprenticeship programs are also getting in on the action. [Conestoga College](#) in Kitchener, for example, continues to see strong enrolment in its construction trades training programs.

## Immigration as a Solution

To help offset any future shortage, the [Residential Construction Council of Ontario \(RESCON\)](#) is asking the federal government to continue harmonization of skilled trades in the Red Seal program to allow for greater inter-provincial mobility. It also wants to reward compliant businesses with a streamlined process to hire immigrant workers.

The government is proposing amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. It would prioritize candidates who can support Canada's labour demands, including construction.

A \$470-million investment will also help establish an Apprenticeship Service to help Red Seal-trade apprentices find opportunities and jobs with employers.

RESCON is pleased that the government is taking steps to deal with the economic crisis caused by COVID-19 but also focuses on the future by investing in programs to ensure industries like construction will have the skilled workers needed, said Richard Lyall, president of the organization.

"These are difficult times, but we must ensure that we are taking the steps that are necessary to ensure our youth get the training they need."