



Manitoba employment flattens as several large projects conclude

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Ottawa – A sustained period of industry expansion in Manitoba concluded in 2020 and could signal the beginning of a decade of relatively flat employment growth.

The latest labour market data released today by BuildForce Canada suggests that declines in major project requirements, alongside lower anticipated levels of institutional building and new-home construction, could limit employment growth for much of the decade. Modest growth in road, highway, and bridge construction, industrial buildings, and other infrastructure projects is expected to partially offset these declines. By 2030, industry employment will be marginally lower, reduced by approximately 1% from 2020 levels.

BuildForce Canada's [2021–2030 Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward report](#) for Manitoba projects construction employment to drop by 4% through 2024 as work concludes on several major projects. Employment should remain largely flat through the remainder of the forecast period with growth of just under 500 workers in the residential sector offset by a loss of 650 workers in the non-residential sector.

“Manitoba is coming off the peak of an extended construction expansion that was fuelled by electrical power generation and transmission, pipeline, and infrastructure projects, and immigration-driven population growth over the last decade,” says Bill Ferreira, Executive Director of BuildForce Canada. “The industry added more than 12,000 new workers, or about one-third of its total workforce, over that period. With several of those large projects concluding in 2020, and a slowdown in the residential construction industry, the province’s workforce is expected to contract in the short term before rising again after 2025.”

Although overall employment is expected to see little change over the next 10 years, the construction and maintenance industry must keep a steady focus on hiring, training, and retaining workers. BuildForce Canada expects that 8,000 workers – or nearly 20% of the current labour force – will retire by 2030. At the same time, the industry is expected to attract an estimated 8,300 new workers under the age of 30 from the local population.

“Manitoba enjoys a relatively younger population compared with other provinces,” says Ferreira. “Having said that, all industries are faced with aging populations, and this is likely to increase competition for qualified workers. The industry has an excellent opportunity right now to recruit and train new workers so that it can satisfy its labour market requirements through the end of the decade.”

The development of skilled tradespersons in the construction industry takes years, and often requires participation in a provincial apprenticeship program. New registrations in the province’s top 15 trade programs dropped by 23% between 2013 and 2019, which was a significant decline compared to overall construction employment, which increased by 20% over the same period. New registrations reached a low of 1,009 in 2018 before increasing slightly in 2019.

Based on projected new registrations and completion trends, most trades are expected to meet or exceed the number of new certified journeypersons required by 2030. Those likely to be undersupplied include boilermakers, industrial electricians, mobile crane operators, and welders. An ongoing commitment to training and apprenticeship development will remain necessary to avoid potential future skills shortages in the industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly complicated apprentice registration and completion rates in Manitoba. Limited data collected to date suggests that the pandemic has imposed significant obstacles to the in-school delivery of training, testing, and certification. These impacts are likely to reduce the near-term numbers of new certified workers.

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

In 2020, there were approximately 5,600 women employed in Manitoba’s construction industry, of which 25% worked directly on construction projects. Of the 37,400 tradespeople employed in the industry, women made up only 4% of the total.

Manitoba has done exceptionally well at attracting Indigenous people into the construction industry. Approximately 16% of the province’s construction labour force is made up of Indigenous people – compared with about 13% of the province’s overall working-age population. Of those in the construction and maintenance industry, about 81% work directly on construction projects. Given the predisposition of Indigenous workers to consider careers in construction, there may be scope to further increase the recruitment of Indigenous people into the industry.

Manitoba’s construction industry may also leverage new Canadians over the coming decade to meet anticipated labour market requirements. The province is expected to welcome an average of nearly 8,000 new international migrants each year between 2021 and 2030. This will make the immigrant population a growing segment of the overall labour force. Currently, Manitoba’s

construction labour force is comprised of approximately 15% new Canadians, which is just slightly lower than the overall share of new Canadians in the provincial labour force.

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 capability of Canada's construction and maintenance industry. Visit www.constructionforecasts.ca.

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This report was produced with the support and input of a variety of provincial construction and maintenance industry stakeholders. For local industry reaction to this latest BuildForce Canada report, please contact:

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