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### **A steady pace of growth in Manitoba's construction sector should ease labour market pressures**



MARCH 26, 2024 – OTTAWA, ONTARIO

Construction activity in Manitoba was almost unchanged from 2022 levels in 2023. A small gain in non-residential construction investment levels, which was propelled by growth in the industrial, commercial, and institutional (ICI) buildings sector, was offset by a slightly larger contraction in residential investment levels that was driven by rising interest rates and cooling demand for new-home construction.

BuildForce Canada released its 2024–2033 Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward report for Manitoba today. The outlook calls for investment in both the residential and non-residential components to increase to 2033.

Non-residential employment is expected to rise by approximately 15% by 2033, with strong gains in ICI buildings construction. Residential employment levels, meanwhile, are projected to contract into 2032. A large loss in employment relating to new housing contracts overall employment by 6% by 2033.

Note that these numbers are based on existing known demands and do not take into account public-sector initiatives to address housing affordability challenges, nor the anticipated increase in demand for construction services related to the retrofit of existing residential, industrial, commercial, and institutional buildings to accommodate the electrification of the economy. Both scenarios are addressed in separate reports to be released by BuildForce Canada at a later date.

“Although overall construction activity in Manitoba stepped back in 2023, the decline was not as pronounced as it could have been. The conclusion of work at the Keeyask Dam, which had been a big driver of non-residential employment, was more than offset by strong demand for ICI buildings,” says Bill Ferreira, Executive Director of BuildForce Canada. “The good news is, going forward, growth in the province will be consistent, meaning that we are unlikely to see large spikes in demand that strain labour markets.”

BuildForce Canada expects that approximately 9,100 workers, or about 20% of the province's 2023 labour force, will retire by 2033. At the same time, the industry is expected to attract an estimated 10,200 new workers under the age of 30 from the local population. When combined with employment growth created by rising construction demands, the industry could be left with a shortfall of 2,900 workers that will need to be recruited from outside the local construction labour force.

“The development of skilled tradespersons in the construction industry takes years, and most often requires participation in a provincial apprenticeship program,” says Ramona Coey, Executive Director of the Mechanical Contractors Association of Manitoba. “After years of declines, it was encouraging to see a record level of new apprentice registrations in Manitoba's 17 largest trade programs. However, with projected shortfalls, the Government of Manitoba must develop an industry-informed labour strategy promoting skilled trades as a viable career. Manitoba's construction industry builds Manitoba and is the gateway to economic development.”

“The construction industry is working collaboratively to build a more diverse and inclusive labour force. To that end, efforts are ongoing to enhance the recruitment of youth, individuals from equity-deserving groups traditionally under-represented in the construction sector, and from outside the country through permanent immigration,” says Paul de Jong, President of the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada.

In 2023, there were approximately 6,380 women employed in Manitoba's construction industry. Of them, 34% worked directly in on-site construction. Women represented just 5% of the 42,300 tradespeople employed in Manitoba's industry in 2023.

The Indigenous population is another under-represented group that presents recruitment opportunities for Manitoba's construction industry. In 2021, Indigenous workers accounted for approximately 17% of the province's construction labour force. That figure was the highest among all provincial labour forces and is notably higher than the share of Indigenous People represented in the overall labour force (13%). As the Indigenous population is the fastest growing in Canada and Indigenous workers seem predisposed to the pursuit of careers within the sector, there may be scope to further increase the recruitment of Indigenous People into the province's construction industry.

The construction industry is also committed to the recruitment of newcomers to Canada to meet anticipated labour market requirements. Based on current trends, Manitoba is expected to see elevated levels of immigration over the forecast period. This will make newcomers a key contributor to the industry's labour force. Currently, newcomers and more established immigrants make up about 16% of the province's construction workforce. This figure is notably lower than the share in the overall provincial labour force.

“To avoid chronic labour force shortages, increasing the participation rate of women, Indigenous People, and new Canadians will be imperative to help Manitoba's construction industry meet its future labour force needs,” says Darryl Harrison, Director of Stakeholder Engagement with the Winnipeg Construction Association.

BuildForce Canada is a national industry-led organization that represents all sectors of Canada's construction industry. Its mandate is to support the labour market development needs of the construction and maintenance industry. As part of these activities, BuildForce works with key industry stakeholders, including contractors, proponents of construction, labour providers, governments, and training providers to identify both demand and supply trends that will impact labour force capacity in the sector, and supports the career searches of job seekers wanting to work in the industry. BuildForce also leads programs and initiatives that support workforce upskilling, workforce productivity improvements, improvements to training modalities, human resource tools to support the adoption of industry best practices, as well as other value-added initiatives focused on supporting the industry's labour force development needs. Visit [www.buildforce.ca](http://www.buildforce.ca).

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This report was produced with the support and input of a variety of provincial construction and maintenance industry stakeholders, and was funded in part by the Government of Canada's Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program.

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