**Fiscal Facts: Amid Robust Development Pace, Metro Milwaukee Construction Workforce Tightens**

Amid a brisk pace of development activity in metro Milwaukee, the region’s construction labor market is as tight as it has been in at least 20 years.

The outlook is not entirely alarming, as the report finds the region’s pipeline of new workers is strong. Still, more apprentices may be needed in some trades, and ongoing efforts to diversify the construction workforce may need to be bolstered.

A recent Wisconsin Policy Forum report examines the supply of and demand for construction workers in the four-county Milwaukee metro area. Data from federal, state, and local sources is complemented with information from a survey of local construction labor unions and interviews with construction contractors and industry leaders.

While metro Milwaukee’s pace of development is producing jobs and boosting overall economic activity, it also has raised questions about whether the region has enough construction workers to meet demand.

Construction employment in metro Milwaukee remained stable and even ticked upward during the pandemic. Unemployment in construction is near a historic low, and job openings in the sector are at a more than 20-year high.

Active union construction workers are being stretched to work more hours on average than they were a decade ago, local pension fund data show. Meanwhile, half of the unions that responded to our survey reported having fewer available workers than before the pandemic. Taken together, these data show that the regional construction sector is experiencing a particularly challenging labor market.

Meanwhile, there are mixed signals about the region’s pipeline of new construction workers. After increasing for many years, the current pool of apprentices is as large as it has been since at least 2000, and most unions expect their apprenticeship classes to grow in the coming years. Still, five area unions have seen their apprenticeship numbers decline significantly. And three report not having enough workers ready to begin apprenticeships to replace those expected to retire in the next few years.

Efforts to strengthen gender and racial diversity in the construction workforce may need to be modified or expanded. Despite the growing diversity of metro Milwaukee’s population, limited progress has been made in diversifying the construction workforce. Hispanic representation among area apprentices has increased considerably, but Black and female workers remain highly underrepresented.

Looking long term, the level of demand for construction workers becomes difficult to predict. But demographic trends, including the ongoing retirement of baby boomers and declining birth rates, suggest the need for expanded recruitment efforts.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*