

# Policy and Practice: Women's Experiences and Advancement in Construction

Workforce Development Report



2025

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## Workforce Development Report

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This report is part of a series of publications focused on workforce development, training effectiveness, and leadership training within the construction and industrial sectors. Additional publications and resources related to these topics can be found at <https://www.nccer.org/research>

### Partnership Acknowledgment

This study was conducted in partnership with Ambition Theory, whose expertise and collaboration were instrumental to the research process. Their contributions in providing training and facilitating data collection were critical to the success of this study.



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## Abstract

This study explores the experiences of women in the construction industry through an extensive survey of 775 female participants directly involved in the industry. The research examines key challenges, including workplace culture, mentorship opportunities, leadership development, and career progression. Results reveal that while progress has been made toward greater advancement and promotion of women, significant barriers persist. This paper offers actionable recommendations for advancing women employees in the construction industry, including enhancing leadership programs, fostering inclusive workplaces, and supporting women's resource groups.





## Introduction

The construction industry has long struggled from low female participation with only a small fraction of its workforce made up of women (Eisenberg, 2018). However, as the industry evolves to address these labor shortages including women as a more substantial part of the workforce has become more critical (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023). Increasing opportunities for women to enter the construction industry and supporting their career growth are essential for strengthening the workforce and industry talent pool. A more diverse and growing workforce can foster innovation, improve decision-making, and help alleviate the industry's growing labor shortage. Despite these benefits, women's representation in construction has increased slowly, and the experiences of women currently in the industry reveal persistent challenges in accessing opportunities.

Women represent a significantly underutilized workforce pipeline. Effective recruitment and training strategies could not only help fill vacant positions but also bridge the widening skills gap and bring fresh perspectives to the field (Edirisinghe, 2024). Targeted efforts to recruit and train women are vital to meeting these challenges. To gain deeper insight into the experiences and challenges faced by women in construction, the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) in partnership with Ambition Theory conducted a comprehensive survey aimed at identifying key barriers and opportunities for their recruitment,

training, and retention. The survey revealed, in part, that providing women with access to tailored training programs, leadership development opportunities, and clear career advancement pathways could both help address labor shortages and create an environment for a more innovative workforce.

The construction industry has long been a pillar of economic growth for the U.S., yet the industry faces ongoing and continual challenges in workforce development and skills shortages. Since its founding in 1996, NCCER has played a critical role in addressing these challenges by developing industry-recognized training programs, credentialing systems, and workforce development initiatives that equip construction professionals with the skills needed to succeed. As a nonprofit education foundation in partnership with leading construction and academic organizations, NCCER is dedicated to standardizing training and promoting career pathways that strengthen the construction industry.

A key part of NCCER's mission is to better understand the evolving workforce and support the industry in fostering a growing and skilled talent pool. This commitment includes examining the experiences of underrepresented groups, such as women in construction, to identify barriers to career growth and opportunities for greater advancement. By conducting studies like this one, NCCER hopes to provide data-driven insights that help organizations create policies, training programs, and workplace cultures that support the development and success of all workers.

This report presents findings from a comprehensive survey conducted in late 2024 by NCCER and Ambition Theory, which explored the experiences and perspectives of women in the construction industry. The results serve as a foundation for understanding workforce challenges and developing actionable strategies to promote gender diversity, strengthen leadership pipelines, and enhance retention. With this research, NCCER reaffirms its dedication to equipping construction professionals with the tools they need to thrive while supporting the broader industry through informed workforce development initiatives. The survey and this analysis build on the results of a similar survey conducted in 2023 by the same organizations, and the series of reports on that survey published in 2024. The results of our survey and corresponding analysis serve as the foundation for this report and related works, offering insights and recommendations for industry organizations and leaders on how to better support and develop their workforce.

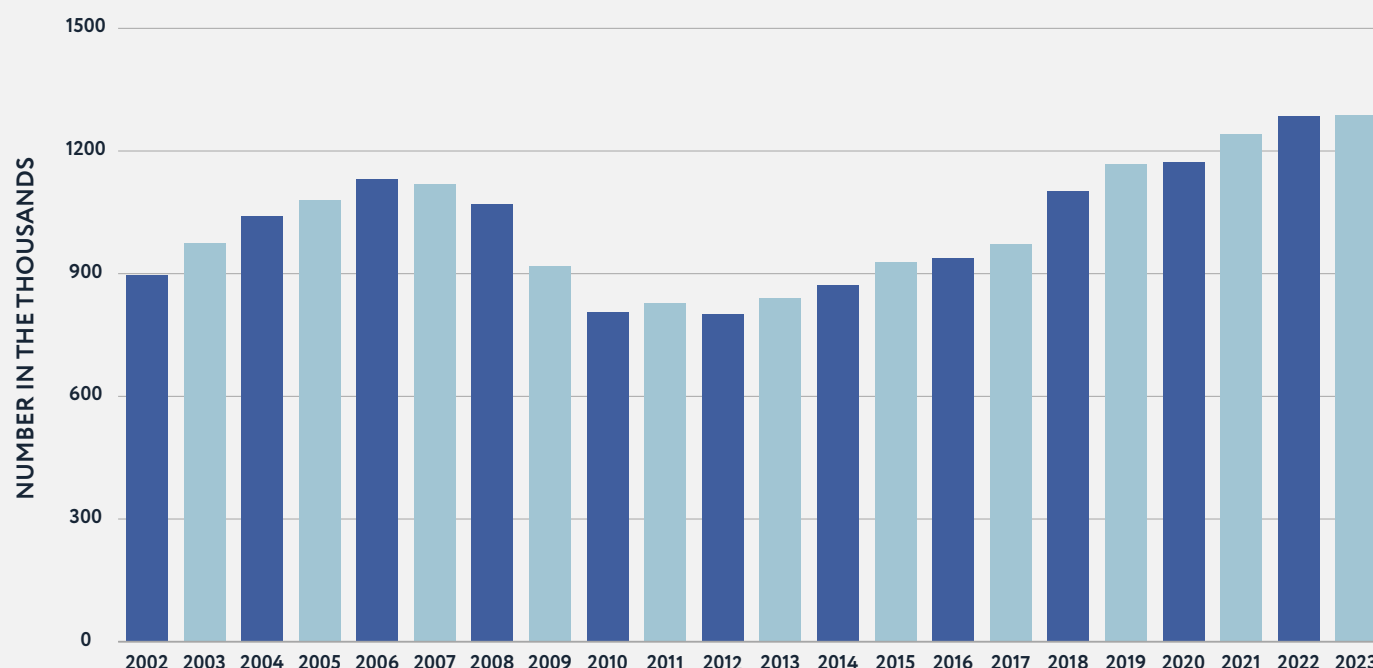


## Literature Review

The construction industry has long been recognized as one of the most male-dominated in the U.S., with women comprising only a small percentage of the workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], n.d.). As of 2024, women constitute approximately 11.2% of the construction industry workforce in the U.S., totaling about 1,343,000 women (Martincevic, 2024). Although this may be an increase from previous years, women's representation in on-site and skilled trade roles remains low with only 4% of field construction and maintenance occupations held by women (BLS, 2022). Despite growing awareness of the need for greater representation by women, systemic barriers continue to hinder women's full participation and career advancement in the industry. These barriers, deeply ingrained in workplace culture and organizational structures, present significant challenges not only for attracting new women into the industry but also for women seeking to advance to leadership and management roles.

**FIGURE 1**

### Women in Construction



\* Graph recreated using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022, April).

A critical theme in the literature regarding women in construction is the lack of structured career advancement opportunities tailored to the unique challenges women face in male-dominated industries. Traditional career development programs often fail to address gender-specific barriers, such as implicit and unconscious bias, limited access to networks, and a lack of visibility in leadership pipelines. Addressing these gaps requires the intentional design and implementation of development and support initiatives focused on the distinct needs of women.

Along with distinct and dedicated career advancement opportunities, mentorship and sponsorship are often underutilized or misaligned to the needs of women in construction. Mentorship provides women with valuable guidance, confidence, and insights into navigating workplace dynamics. Sponsorship, where influential leaders actively advocate for women's promotions and advancement, has been shown to have a more direct impact on helping women achieve leadership roles.

Finally, research highlights that organizations with leaders who actively promote the development of women are more likely to see improvements in the representation of women in leadership roles (Dhatt et al., 2017). Leaders who prioritize workplace practices focused on the development of women in the workplace can ensure that the initiatives translate into meaningful outcomes (Baker et al., 2023; Grindstaff, 2022).

With these topics in mind—career advancement, mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership support—this literature review delves into three key themes, presenting a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities for women in construction and identifying actionable strategies to drive meaningful change. These three themes include: (a) women's career advancement opportunities and challenges, (b) training, mentorship, and sponsorship as opportunities to help advance and support women, and (c) the importance of leadership support for the promotion of women.

## Career Advancement

Career advancement remains a significant challenge for women in the construction industry, often due to deeply ingrained biases and systemic barriers (Kermanshachi, S., & Pamidimukkala, A., 2022). Despite increasing awareness of these challenges, opportunities for upward mobility remain disproportionately limited for women

in construction compared to their male counterparts (Pamidimukkala et al., 2023). This disparity becomes evident when comparing the low percentage of women in senior leadership roles, project management positions, and other influential roles within the industry. Women in construction often face challenges in advancing their careers that are unique from their male counterparts. These challenges include limited access to leadership roles, fewer opportunities to showcase their capabilities, and systemic biases that undermine their contributions (Navarro-Astor et al., 2017; Watts, 2009).

Additionally, while general training opportunities exist for women in construction, few are designed to address the unique challenges women face in male-dominated workplaces, such as overcoming biases, developing self-confidence, and networking effectively in potentially unwelcome environments (Ely et al., 2011; Van Oosten et al., 2017). Leadership programs that fail to acknowledge and address these gender-specific challenges often leave women feeling overlooked and underprepared for advancement opportunities (Debebe, et al., 2016).

Programs designed specifically for women, hosted by women, or that include genderspecific audiences, also prioritize psychological safety, a key factor in learning and growth, allowing women to fully engage without fear of judgment or failure (Debebe, 2011).

The lack of visibility into career pathways further compounds the problem. Many women in construction report uncertainty about how to progress to leadership roles, citing unclear promotion criteria (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020). This lack of transparency can leave women feeling stuck in mid-level positions without the resources or support needed to advance. Moreover, the perception that career development programs are designed primarily for men often discourages women from fully participating in existing initiatives (Debebe, et al., 2016).

## Workplace Support

Effective workplace support may include traditional training programs, but it extends beyond that in today's work environments. Now, it includes mentorship, sponsorship, and structured support groups that help employees grow, navigate challenges, and advance within the organization.

While mentorship is often celebrated for its role in helping workers bridge the gap between classroom training and field skills, its impact extends far beyond skills development. Sponsorship on the other hand can help individuals move up the corporate ladder and advance their careers. Both of these critical initiatives can help employees develop and grow, build confidence, and can be a part of building supportive networks.

Mentorship is a cornerstone of professional development, offering employees guidance, support, and insights from experienced colleagues. For individuals in the construction and industrial workforce, mentorship opportunities can bridge the gap between formal training and real-world application, providing a platform to learn from seasoned professionals who understand the unique challenges of the industry (Nkomo et al., 2018). Mentorship is especially critical for underrepresented groups, as it can help build confidence, networks, and access to opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach. Female employees, in particular, benefit from mentorship relationships that help them navigate workplace dynamics and foster leadership skills (Feeley et al., 2024). Studies have shown that women with sponsors are significantly more likely to secure leadership positions and critical assignments, yet these programs remain scarce in the construction industry (Lekchiri & Kamm, 2020).

Sponsorship is equally essential, as it involves influential leaders actively advocating for the career advancement of their protégés (Fuhrmanns, 2023). Unlike mentorship, which focuses on guidance and advice, sponsorship actively promotes women for key roles, stretch assignments, and leadership positions. Studies

have shown that women with sponsors are more likely to achieve their career goals, as sponsorship provides both opportunities and credibility within their organizations (Hewlett et al., 2024).

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or Women's resource groups, play a pivotal role in fostering supportive workplaces for women. Welbourne and Rolf (2015) emphasize that ERGs not only provide a platform for underrepresented groups but also contribute to organizational learning and innovation by bringing diverse perspectives to the forefront. Their research suggests that ERGs can enhance employee engagement, retention, and leadership development, particularly for women navigating traditionally male-dominated industries.

ERGs also provide safe spaces for open discussions and skill-building, which are crucial for professional growth. A study by the Boston College Center for Work & Family (2023) found that participation in women's ERGs led to increased confidence, expanded professional networks, and greater access to leadership opportunities. These groups, they find, facilitate knowledge sharing and empower women to navigate organizational hierarchies more effectively.

## Leadership Engagement

In the construction industry, leadership engagement is crucial not only for fostering women's career advancement but also for ensuring their overall success, retention, and well-being. Leaders who actively promote and prioritize women's continued development create an environment where women feel valued and supported in their roles. This support extends beyond career progression to include addressing workplace challenges such as safety, fostering a sense of belonging, advocating for a more appropriate work-life balance, increasing self-confidence within the workplace, and ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities (Bee et al., 2019).

Leadership support is especially crucial for bridging the gap between just having a policy and making career

advancement a sustainable practice. While many organizations have adopted initiatives to include addressing challenges that women face, these efforts often fall short without visible and sustained leadership support. Leaders who champion women's resource groups and actively participate in mentorship or sponsorship programs send a clear message that advancing women's careers is a priority. Creating a workplace culture that provides women employees opportunities similar to those provided to male employees is another vital aspect of leadership support. Leaders can foster a supportive environment by addressing everyday challenges, such as bias or prejudice, and setting a tone of mutual respect and collaboration.

Finally, leadership support for women in construction must adapt to the evolving demands of the workforce. As the industry evolves, leaders must prioritize continuous learning and professional development, ensuring that women have equal access to training opportunities in emerging technologies, sustainable practices, and other innovations shaping the future of construction (Al Salaheen et al., 2024).



## Research Questions

To assess the extent to which the construction industry has adopted opportunities to support women in these areas, this study focused on the following three research questions:

- 1 What types of support have the most significant impact on helping women advance their careers in construction?
- 2 How effective are current initiatives in driving meaningful progress for women in the construction industry?
- 3 How can leadership move beyond passive support to actively dismantle barriers and drive measurable change in women's leadership opportunities?

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives. This research design is widely endorsed for its ability to provide a more nuanced and holistic understanding of complex issues (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Quantitative data was gathered on the survey through scaled agreement ratings, using Likert scales, and multiple-choice questions to measure trends and patterns across the participant pool. For the Likert scale questions, respondents rated their agreement with statements on a five-point scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” These responses were assigned numerical values (e.g., 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree) to facilitate analysis, including calculating averages and identifying patterns. This method allowed for capturing subjective opinions and comparing or interpreting results across the sample.

Open-ended responses were captured for several questions in the survey. This allowed participants to elaborate on their perspectives and provide context beyond the structured questions. These qualitative responses were analyzed for themes, in order to identify deeper insights and complement the quantitative data. This dual approach enriched the findings and ensured that the complexity of the participants’ experiences and viewpoints was adequately represented.

The survey collected responses from 775 participants representing diverse roles and demographics within the construction sector. The survey focused on exploring women’s experiences in the industry, specifically career progression, workplace culture, mentorship, and the role of women’s resource groups in their organizations.

Participants were women affiliated directly or indirectly with the construction industry, including those employed in traditional construction, industrial construction, commercial construction, or related contracting organizations. Most respondents accessed

the survey due to their prior association with the research teams overseeing the study, Ambition Theory and NCCER, or were invited to participate via a snowball sampling method, where the survey link was shared among women in the industry. All respondents self-identified as female and indicated a connection to the construction sector. To ensure a diverse representation across geographic regions, professional roles, and career stages, the survey was distributed widely, and participation criteria were not restrictive. This approach, aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities women face in construction and would allow for generalization of the results across the industry.

The survey was modeled on previous surveys and research conducted by these organizations, leveraging established methodologies and frameworks for consistency and comparability. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and providing the option to withdraw at any time. Only one participant declined to consent to have their data used in this study.

The survey was conducted over six weeks, from November 11, 2024, to December 22, 2024, using an online survey tool previously used by the organizations. It was comprised of 57 individual questions. This timeframe allowed ample opportunity for participants across diverse roles and geographic locations to provide input and ensured respondents had the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience. Efforts were made during this period to maximize response rates through targeted outreach and reminders.

The resulting data offers a rich, multifaceted view of the challenges and opportunities for women in construction, serving as a foundation for actionable recommendations to advance opportunities for women in the industry.



## Results And Analysis

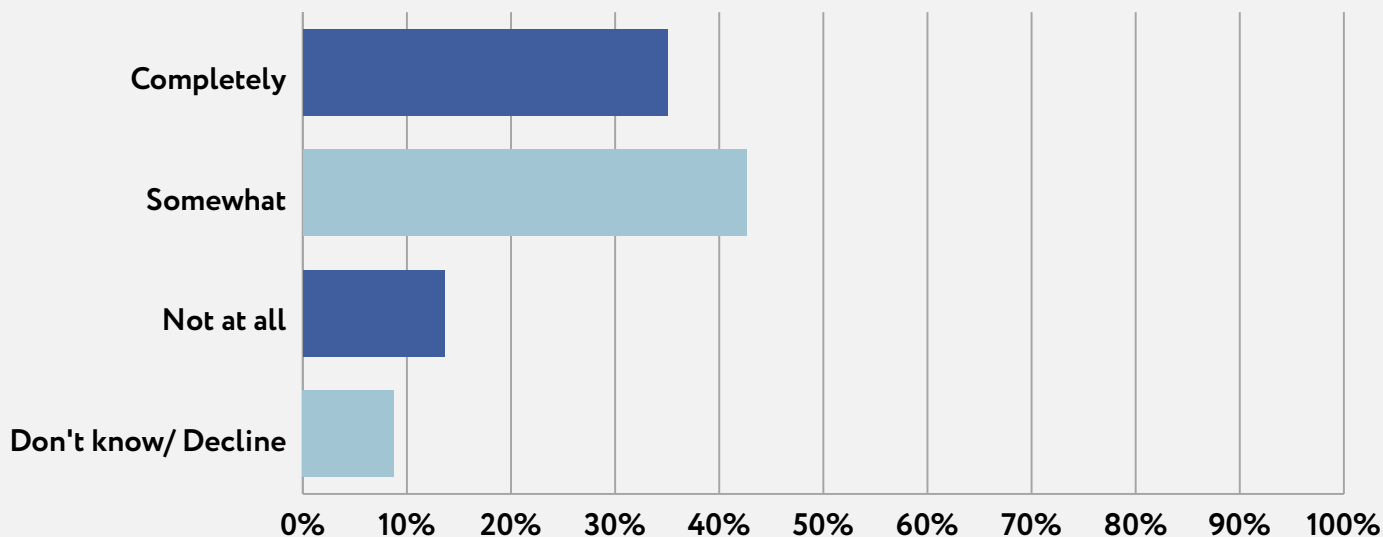
### Overview

The survey data from the participant responses provides valuable insights into the representation and experiences of women in the construction industry. While the responses indicate areas of progress, they also highlight ongoing challenges in creating a more supportive and balanced environment for women. These findings point to systemic issues that organizations must address to better engage, promote, and retain this vital segment of the workforce.

Women's experiences in the construction workplace reveal some alignment between intended policy and the practice of implementation. Of the 434 (56%) survey participants who answered the question regarding their organization's stated commitment and the actual policy implementation, only 152 (35%) felt that their companies' stated commitment to supporting women "Completely" aligned with their actual experience, and 185 (43%) felt their experiences "Somewhat" aligned with their companies' stated goals (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2 – Company's Stated Commitment to Support Women Aligns with Actual Experience**

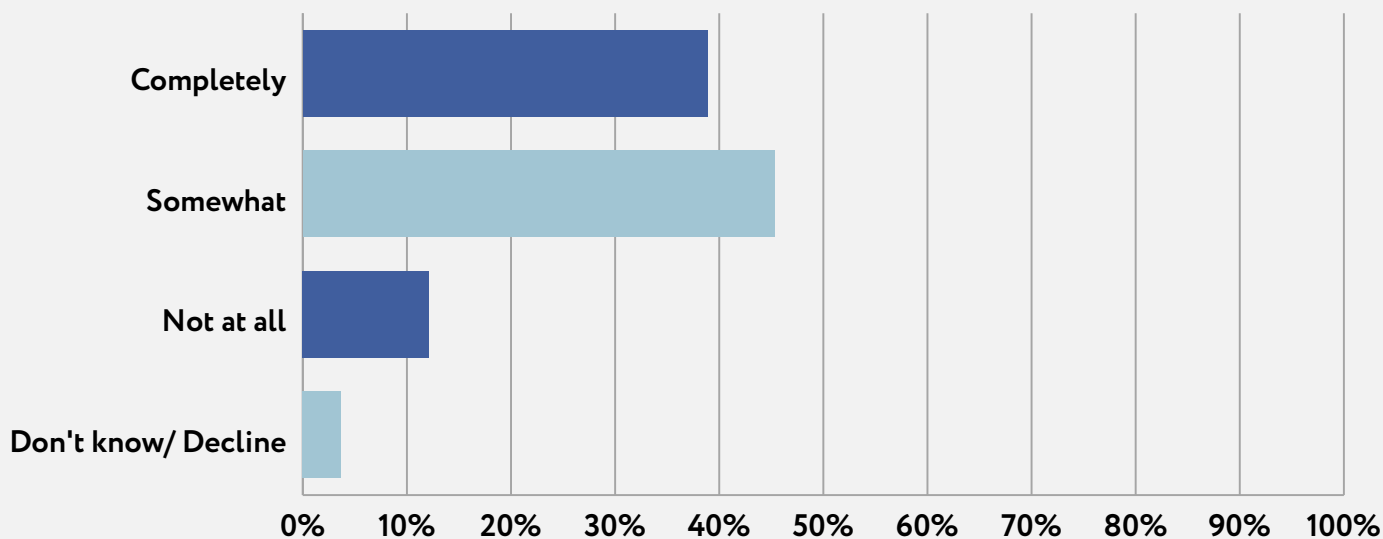
Does your company's stated commitment to supporting women align with your actual experience?



In terms of their company's efforts to advance gender diversity and inclusion, 437 (56%) of the 775 total participants responded, and 170 (39%) indicated their companies "Completely" took steps, while 198 (45%) felt their companies were making "Somewhat" of an effort (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3 - Company is Taking Steps to Advance Gender Diversity and Inclusion**

Is your company taking the necessary steps to advance gender diversity and inclusion?



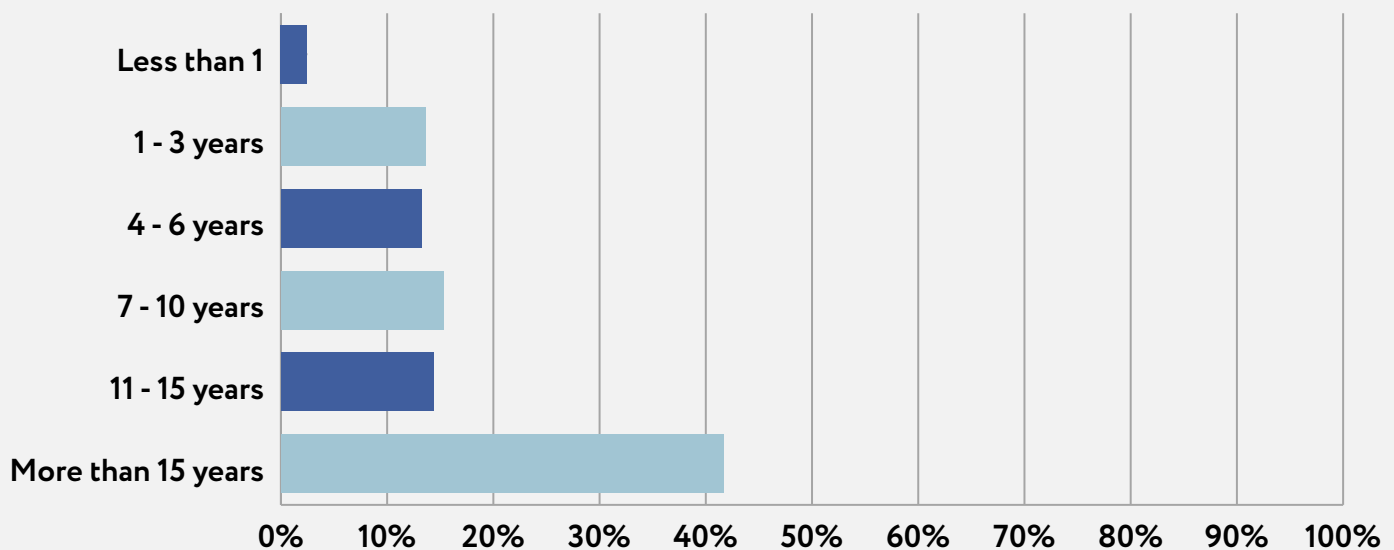
While 446 (58%) of the total participants expressed a desire for career growth, only 363 (47%) reported that their companies offered career advancement programs tailored to women. This disparity highlights a critical gap between employee aspirations and organizational resources and is discussed in more detail in the following sections of this report.

The survey participants' ages were approximately normally distributed across five age ranges.

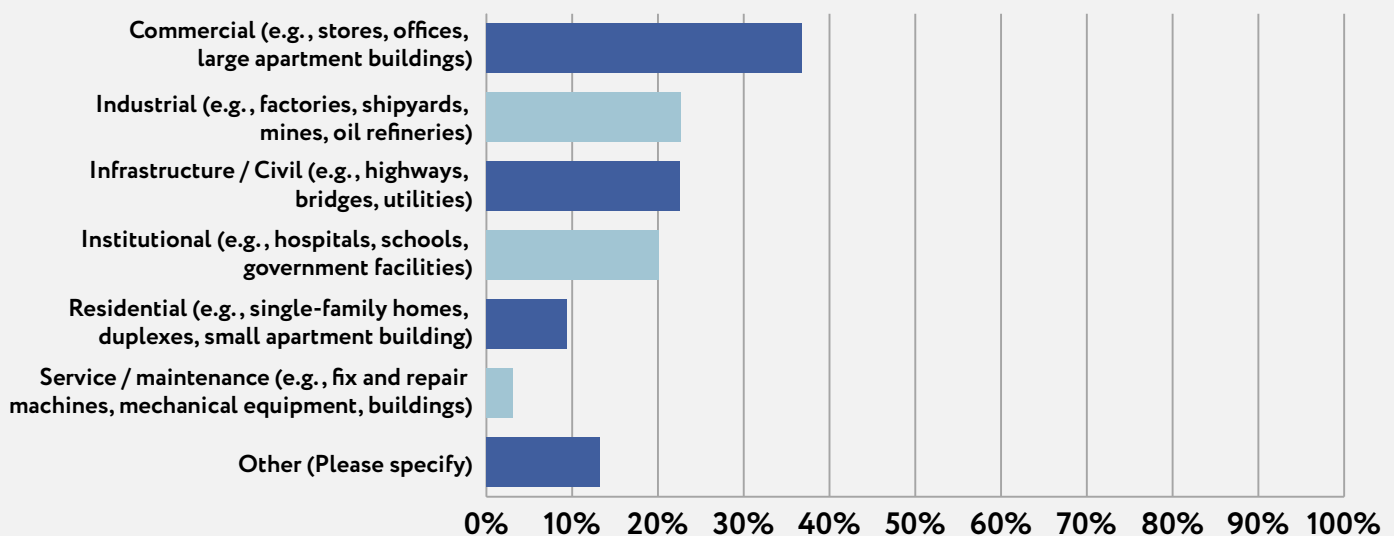
The participant pool was disproportionately represented by highly experienced respondents, with 321 (41%) of the total survey respondents indicating that they had more than 15 years of industry experience (Figure 4). The remaining respondents were relatively evenly distributed (13%-15%) across the other experience ranges, except for those newest to the industry, where only 19 (2%) reported they had less than one year of experience. This abnormal distribution of experience among respondents may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Regarding race/ethnicity, 598 (77%) identified as White, and 115 (15%) identified as Hispanic. No other race/ethnicity category (Asian, Black, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, or Other) represented more than 4% of respondents. This lack of racial/ethnic diversity among respondents may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Regarding location, most respondents (81%) resided in the U.S., followed by Canada (16%), with a small percentage (5%) from other regions. This likely reflects the survey's target audience or the organization's primary operations being centered in the U.S. Given the number of participants from the U.S., the survey results are likely to reflect trends, practices, and concerns specific to the U.S. construction industry.

**FIGURE 4 - Study Participants' Experience (Years)**

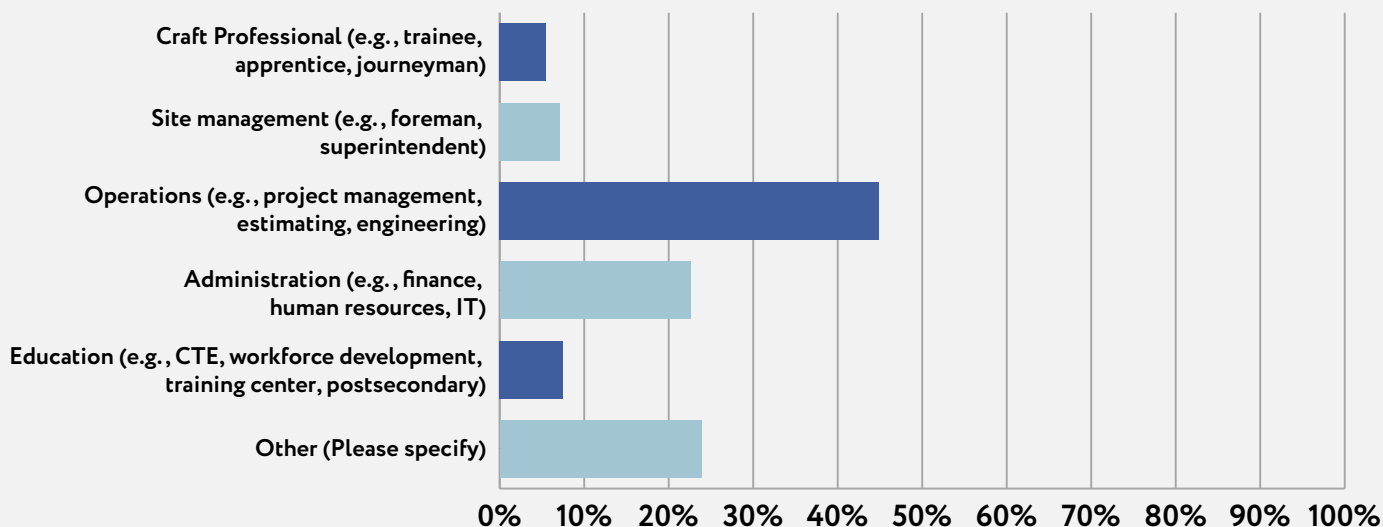
There was a slight variation in the distribution of respondents across the various construction industry sectors (Figure 5). The “Commercial” sector was the most frequently represented.

**FIGURE 5 - Study Participants' Fields of Work**

Regarding job types (Figure 6), of the 771 (99%) participants who answered this question, “Operations” was the most common response with 346 (45%) answering with this selection.

**FIGURE 6 - Study Participants’ Roles**

What is your current role within the construction industry?



## Career Advancement Opportunities

Our analysis reveals that career advancement remains a substantial challenge for women in the construction industry, underscoring systemic barriers and a lack of tailored support mechanisms. Although many companies publicly support the hiring and promotion of women, the data reveals a disconnect between these commitments and employees’ lived experiences.

The dominant theme in the open-ended responses regarding career advancement opportunities concerned advancement into leadership roles. Many women expressed aspirations for senior positions, such as director, vice president, and other executive-level positions. Recurring themes included mentorship, skill-building, and paving the way for other women in the industry, indicating a strong desire to impact organizational culture and promote greater inclusion and support.

These open-ended responses generally framed career advancement positively, describing it as a natural progression or a goal to strive for. Leadership roles, mentorship, and achieving work-life balance were consistently viewed as potential growth opportunities for the respondents. This was particularly evident in responses to the question, “My career aspirations include...” Many responses highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for other women, signaling a commitment to providing greater support for other women in the industry and community-building. Additionally, many expressed a desire for balance between career and personal life.

**ONE PARTICIPANT WROTE:**

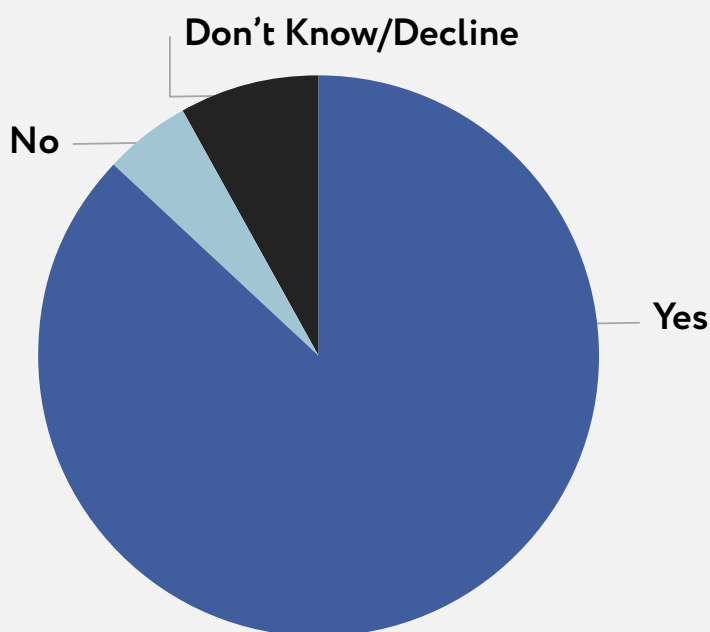
*"A leadership role in which I can help mentor and support other women, to be able to help them be loud and proud as women in construction... We need more women supporting and nurturing women, showing each other that together we rise above."*

**ANOTHER WROTE:**

*"...involved in high complexity, high-profile projects, and leave a legacy in the engineering and construction fields by mentoring future engineers and advancing sustainable practices."*

Overall, in response to this and other open-ended questions regarding career aspirations, positive mentions outnumbered negative ones. However, the negative comments, while fewer, included feelings of being overwhelmed by the workload, limited options within the company, and personal life conflicts, themes that could make advancement seem daunting or less appealing.

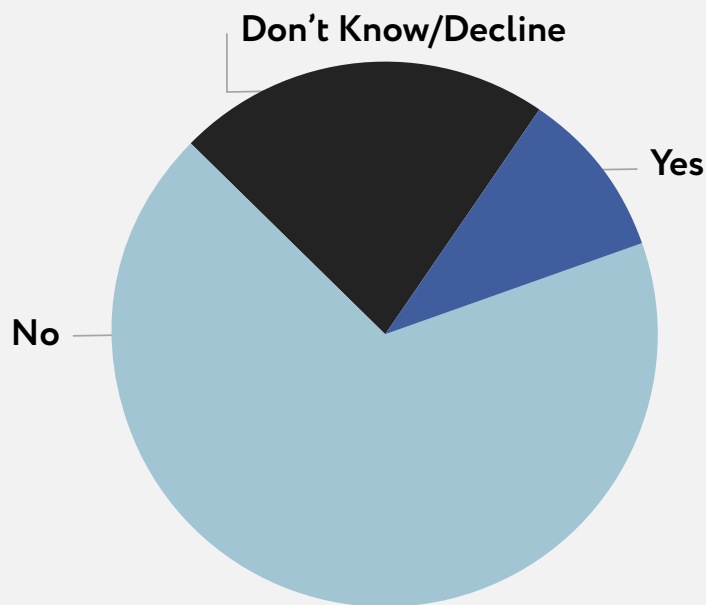
Of the 446 (58%) survey participants who responded to this question, 388 (87%) expressed interest in career growth opportunities within their roles and at their organizations (Figure 7). However, of the 363 (47%) who answered the question about whether their company offered such career advancement opportunities, 248 (68%) indicated their company lacked these resources and programs (Figure 8). A significant gap that these questions show, highlights a critical disconnect between employee aspirations and available organizational support.



**FIGURE 7 - Study Participants' Desire to Grow in Their Careers**



**FIGURE 8 - Companies Have Career Advancement Programs Tailored to Women**

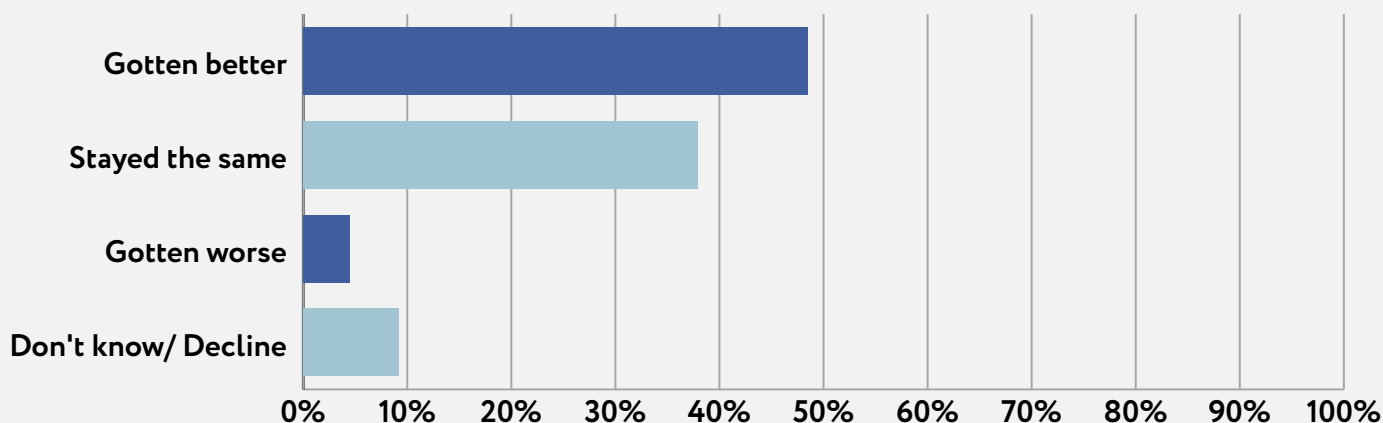


Despite this disparity between the desire for more opportunities and the availability of programs tailored to women's career advancement, 437 (56%) participants responded to the question about whether they thought their organization was taking necessary steps to support women within their organization. Of those 368 (84%) felt their organization was taking such steps (Figure 3), as mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the significant impact of organizational policies—or lack thereof—regarding women's career progression. Of the 359 (46%) participants who answered the question, "In the last two years, women's opportunities for growth and advancement in construction have: (a) gotten better, (b) stayed the same, or (c) gotten worse," 174 (48%) indicated improvements, while 152 (42%) felt they stayed the same or worsen (Figure 9).

**FIGURE 9 - Study Participants' Opportunities for Growth in the Last Two Years**

In the last two years, women's opportunities for growth and advancement in construction have:



The fact that 48% of participants reported positive changes in women's growth opportunities over the past two years suggests slow and uneven progress. With only 42% reporting that opportunities have remained the same or worsened, it's clear that many organizations still face systemic barriers and challenges in fostering opportunities for women. Despite public commitments regarding their desire to support women, the disconnect between stated goals and employees' experiences suggests considerable room for improvement.

In response to the open-ended survey question, "In your experience, describe the factors that most influence promotions or advancements in your company," the dominant theme was the importance of networking and relationships. Many responses highlighted the role of personal connections, leadership advocacy, and being part of influential circles. Secondary themes included performance and results, as well as politics and favoritism, which sometimes overshadowed merit-based advancement. Factors like performance, dedication, skill-building, leadership traits, and mentorship were mentioned positively as contributing to advancement.

Conversely, favoritism, nepotism, gender bias, and politics were also recurring critiques, with many respondents expressing frustration over systemic biases and the overemphasis on personal relationships rather than qualifications or achievements. Many participants expressed through their responses that they perceived promotions as biased, particularly influenced by "good ol' boys' clubs," social compatibility, and personal interests.

**ONE PARTICIPANT WROTE THAT:**

*"Promotions are influenced by strong connections, leadership skills, and the ability to bring in more business... but the loudest voices often dominate the room."*

**ANOTHER PARTICIPANT WROTE:**

*"Unfortunately, in my experience, I do still see being part of the 'good ol' boys club' influencing promotions and/or advancements. We, as women, have created quite a way already but we are still in a male-dominant field. I am fortunate to have many business partners, both male and female, that have supported and pushed me in this industry, but I still witness the male dominance play a part."*

However, in response to another open-ended survey question, "Describe the type of support that the most successful people in your organization receive," one participant wrote:

*"The most successful people in our organization receive strong mentorship, regular feedback, and access to professional development opportunities. They also benefit from clear career paths, recognition for their contributions, and opportunities to expand their networks. Additionally, they are supported with resources that help them maintain a good work-life balance, allowing them to perform at their best."*

This response, which was representative of many others, highlighted the need for a supportive environment that fosters career advancement while addressing the need for structured programs, mentorship, and work-life balance.

Overall, regarding career advancement, the survey revealed a strong desire among women to advance their careers, with 58% of respondents expressing this aspiration. However, the availability of tailored career advancement programs remains limited, as only 47% of participants reported that their companies offered such programs, and only 45% had participated in any formal leadership training.

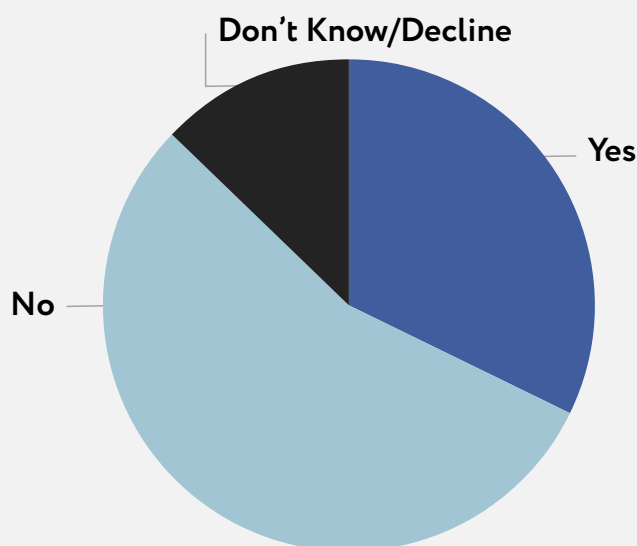
## Workplace Support

While training, mentorship, and sponsorship are pivotal for advancing women's careers, their influence extends beyond professional growth to foster confidence, leadership development, and a more inclusive workplace culture. In industries where men significantly outnumber women, these tools are even more critical. However, according to the results of our survey, participation, and access to programs and tools by women remains limited.

Only 290 (37%) participants reported involvement in mentorship initiatives, and even fewer still engaged in sponsorship programs. Of the 363 (47%) participants who answered the questions about formal mentorship programs, 246 (68%) did not know or responded that their company did not provide one (Figure 10). A similar situation exists with sponsorship programs. Of the 357 (46%) total survey participants who responded, 323 (90%) indicated no formal sponsorship program or did not know (Figure 11).

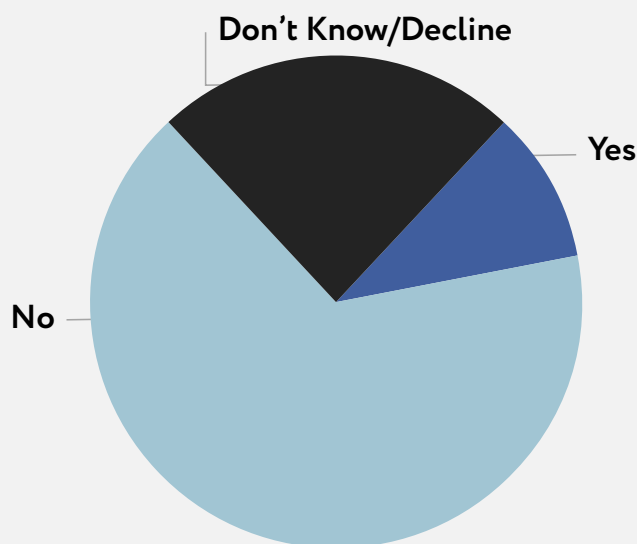
**FIGURE 10 - Companies Offering Formal Mentorship Programs**

Does your company offer a formal mentorship program?



**FIGURE 11 - Companies Offering Formal Sponsorship Programs**

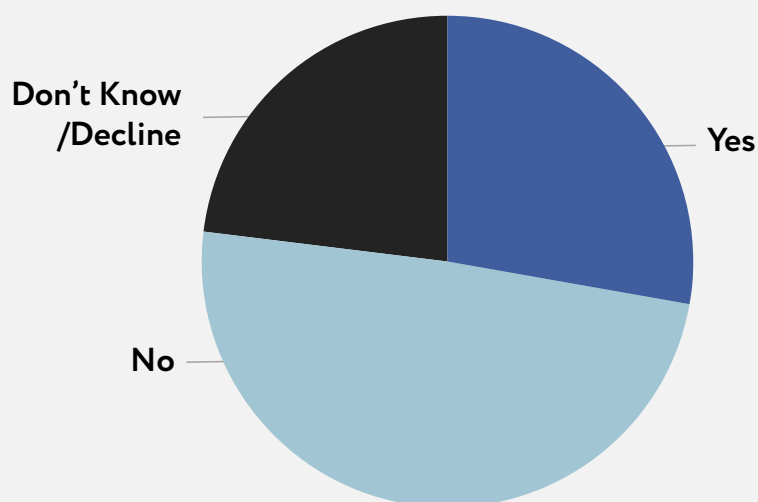
Does your company offer a formal sponsorship program?



Regarding participation, of the 290 (37%) survey participants who answered the mentorship question, only 81 (28%) participated in their company's mentorship program (Figure 12). For sponsorship, of the 290 (37%) survey participants who responded, only 18 (6%) indicated they were a part of their company's sponsorship program (Figure 13).

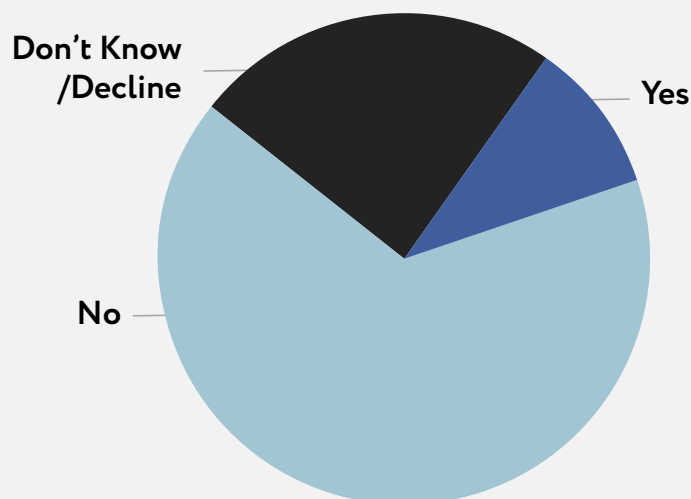
**FIGURE 12 - Study Participants Participating in Mentorship Programs**

Do you participate in your company's mentorship program?



**FIGURE 13 - Study Participants Participating in Sponsorship Programs**

Do you participate in your company's sponsorship program?



Mentorship and sponsorship are critical, yet these opportunities remain limited for women in the construction industry. Sponsorship is particularly crucial, as it involves senior leaders actively advocating for women's advancement and support. The limited reach of these programs, according to this survey, suggests that organizations are missing opportunities to effectively support women in the workplace.

In response to the open-ended question “What does mentorship mean to you?”, participants emphasized the value of advocacy, structured programs, and action-oriented mentorship for promoting and supporting women in construction. Many participants highlighted the importance of having someone advocate for their growth and create opportunities they might not otherwise access. The survey responses indicated that effective mentorship involves directing mentees toward beneficial networks, groups, and training opportunities. Participants viewed mentorship as most impactful when it includes active sponsorship—advocating for them behind the scenes and taking concrete steps to ensure career advancement.

Informal mentorship appears more prevalent in the answers of the open-ended responses, with many women expressing a desire for more structured, formal programs. A recurring theme was the distinction between mentorship and sponsorship. While mentorship involves guidance and advice, sponsorship is viewed as action-oriented, involving advocacy and resource allocation.

**REGARDING ADVOCACY, ONE PARTICIPANT WROTE THAT MENTORSHIP IS:**

*“Someone to advocate for you when it matters—job assignments, promotions, etc.”*

**ANOTHER WROTE:**

*“Advocacy (is) when you’re not in the room.”*

**REGARDING SPONSORSHIP, ONE PARTICIPANT WROTE:**

*“Sponsorship, to me, is a step beyond mentorship—it’s active advocacy and support that directly influences career advancement. It means having someone who will put you forward and give you opportunities to succeed in your tasks and move up in your career. It’s about a person actively representing you in the company, being your cheerleader when you are and are not present, and helping you navigate moving up in the company. It’s not just about guidance or advice but about bringing you into conversations and letting you get real exposure, even if it means taking risks on your behalf.”*

This last quote captures the distinction between sponsorship and mentorship, emphasizing active advocacy, career advancement, and the critical role of exposure and opportunity in professional growth.

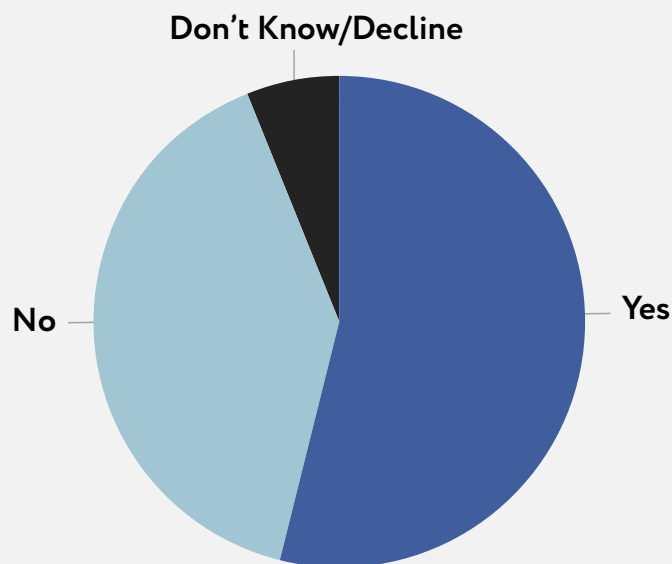
Regarding women’s resource groups (defined as “employee resource groups,” “affinity groups,” “business resource groups,” or “employee network groups,”) another form of support for women in the industry, 220 (54%) of the 407 (53%) total survey participants who responded indicated that their company had such a group (Figure 14). Of the 393 (51%) survey participants responding, 107 (27%) were actively involved, 79 (20%) were somewhat involved, and 38 (10%) did not participate (Figure 15).





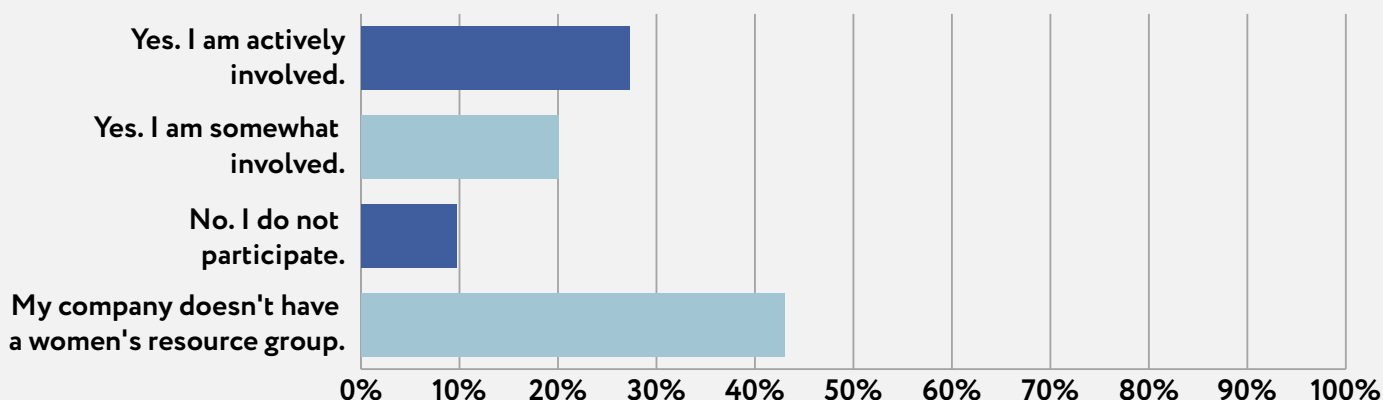
**FIGURE 14 - Companies Have a Women's Support Group**

Does your company have a group focused on supporting women in the workplace?



**FIGURE 15 - Study Participants Involved in Women's Resource Groups**

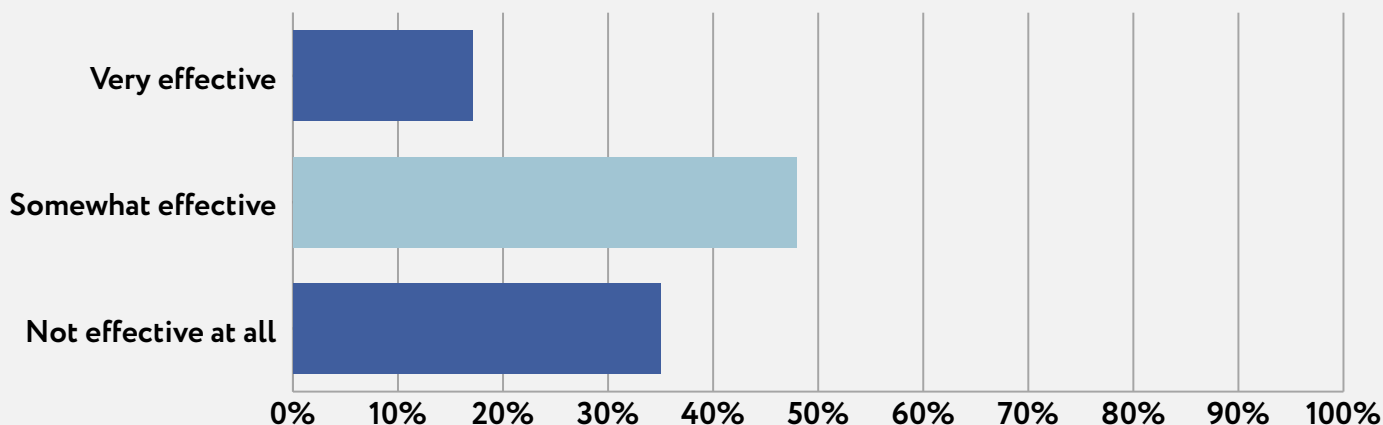
If your company has a women's resource group, are you involved with it?



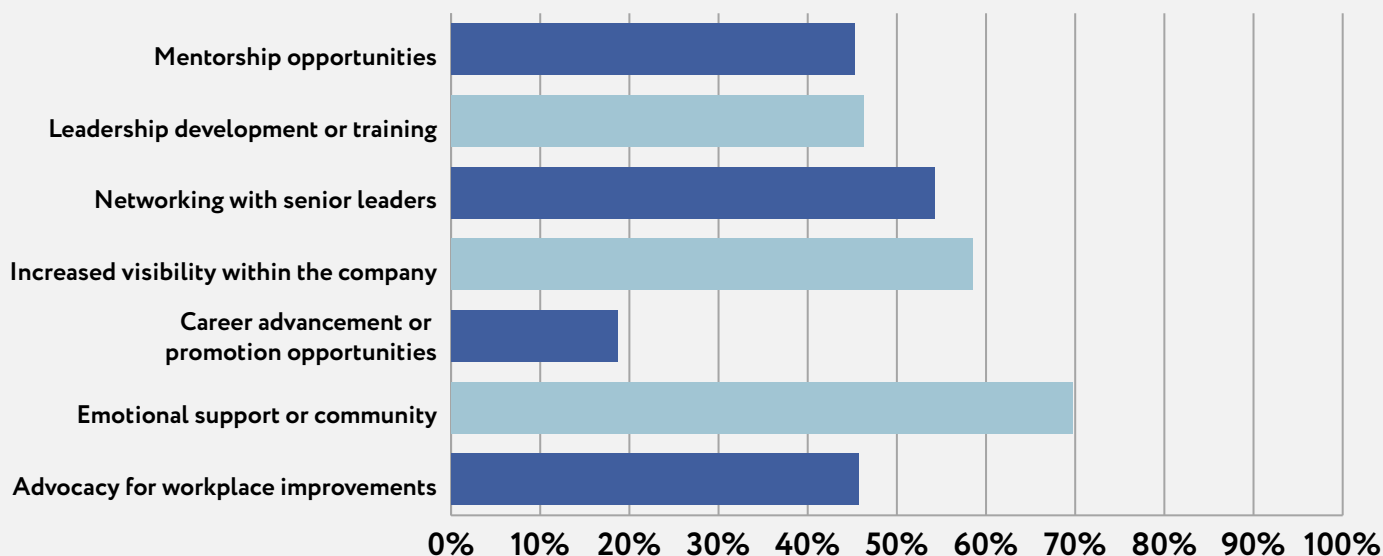
Of those who were involved in these resource groups, 240 (31%) responded regarding whether they felt the group helped advance their careers. Of those responding, 41 (17%) found the groups very effective, 115 (48%) found them somewhat effective, and 84 (35%) found them not effective at all (Figure 16). Regarding specific benefits, of the 188 (24%) survey participants who answered, most felt the groups provided emotional support or a sense of community and increased visibility within the company (Figure 17).

**FIGURE 16 - Effectiveness of Resource Groups in Advancing Careers**

If you are involved, how effective do you think the women's resource group is at helping advance your career?

**FIGURE 17 - Benefits Gained from Participation in Resource Groups**

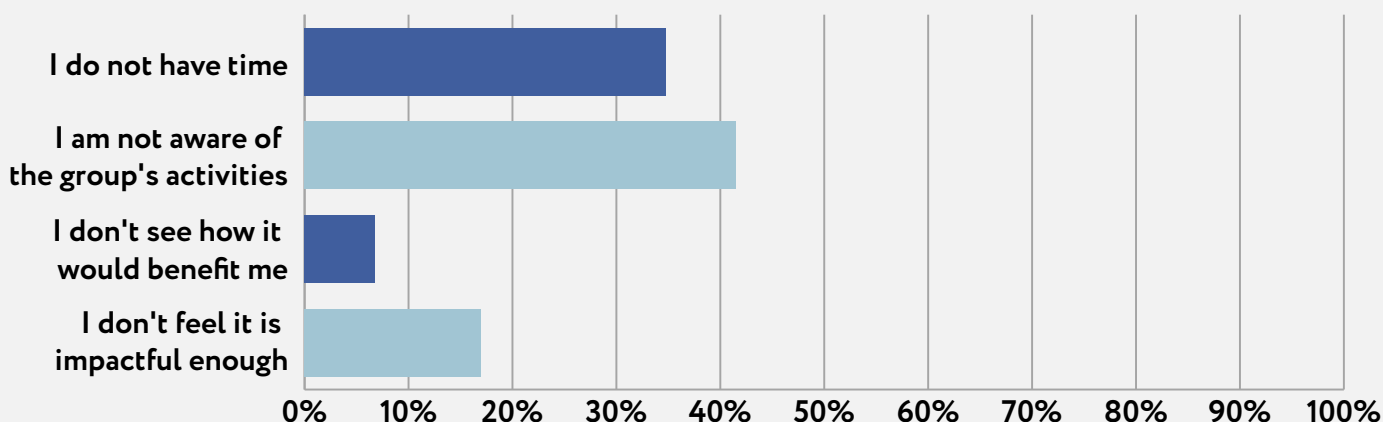
If you are involved, what specific benefits have you gained from participating in a women's resource group?



Of the 118 (15%) of the survey participants who responded about why they didn't participate in these resource groups, 41 (35%) cited lack of time, 49 (41%) were unaware of the group's activities, 8 (7%) saw no benefit in participating, and 20 (17%) didn't feel participation would be impactful (Figure 18).

**FIGURE 18 - Reasons for Not Taking Place with Women's Resource Groups**

If you do not participate in the women's resource group, what is the main reason?



The survey also asked participants an open-ended question about the challenges faced by women's resource groups. Recurring themes included the lack of meaningful support and involvement from senior leadership. Participants also mentioned the challenge of balancing full-time jobs with volunteering for these groups. Difficulty engaging male allies, with some men perceiving these groups as exclusive or unnecessary, was another frequent concern. Finally, groups often struggle with logistics due to members being geographically dispersed, making coordination and participation difficult.

Regarding how women's resource groups could be more effective, dominant themes included the need for more meaningful leadership involvement, including male allyship, to ensure these groups are not seen as exclusive or marginalized. Participants also emphasized the need for clear goals and actionable strategies to ensure the groups provide value and address real issues. Another key theme was the belief that there is a need to ensure groups support diverse roles, including women in field positions, rather than focusing predominantly on administrative roles.

**ONE PARTICIPANT WROTE:**

*"Focus more on the field employees than the admin employees. Some gifts that have been given are leaning towards admin employees instead of craft."*

**ANOTHER WROTE:**

*"Include trade-level women's feedback and targeted initiatives."*

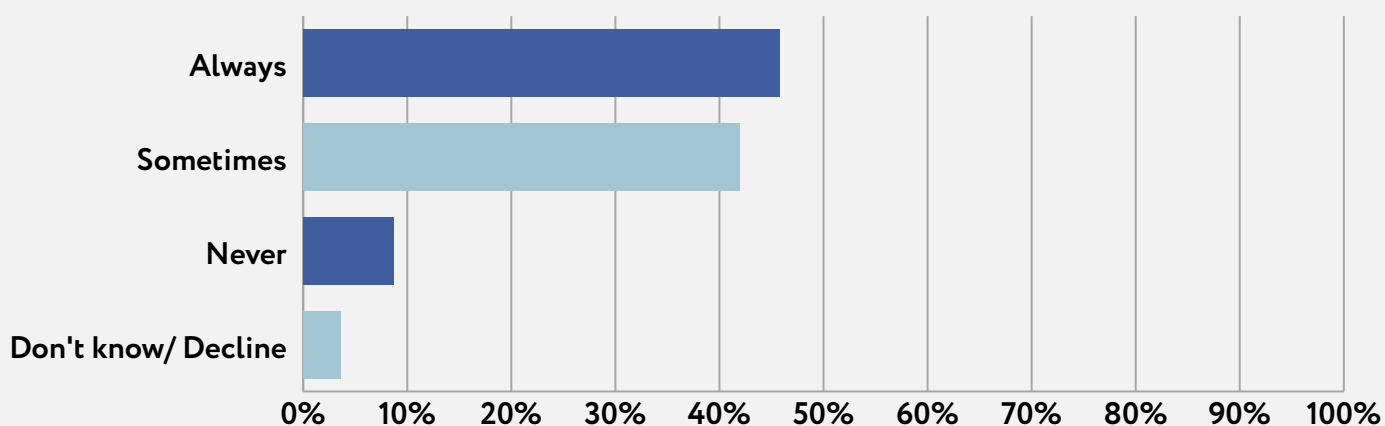
These findings underscore the complex and multifaceted challenges women face in the construction industry regarding organizational support systems. Mentorship and sponsorship programs, while valuable, require greater alignment with the specific needs of women in construction. Additionally, the data show that while there are some opportunities provided by organizations, women continue to be hesitant to use these tools and support groups to their fullest potential.

## Leadership Support

While leadership support is critical for driving meaningful progress for women in the construction industry, this study highlighted significant gaps in this area. Of the 391 (51%) total survey participants who responded to the question, “To what extent do your direct managers or supervisors actively support your career growth?”, 343 (88%) felt that their leaders supported their career growth (Figure 19). Only 34 (9%) thought their leaders never contributed to their career growth, and 14 (4%) did not know or declined to answer.

**FIGURE 19 - Study Participants' Leadership Support of Career Growth Opportunities**

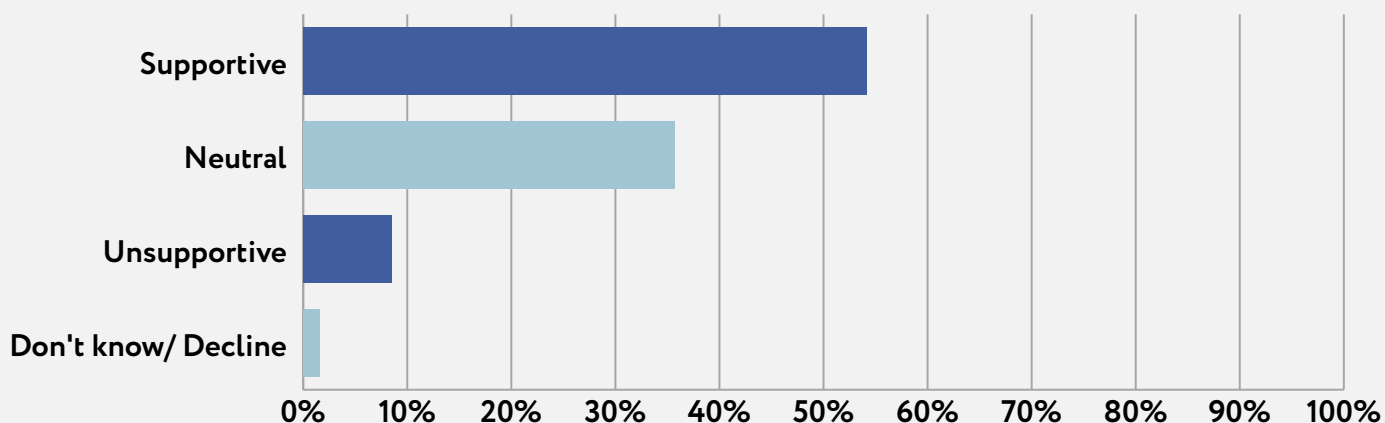
To what extent do your direct managers or supervisors actively support your career growth?



Regarding support from male colleagues, a question that was presented immediately after the question regarding their leadership support, of the 375 (48%) of total survey respondents who answered, 203 (54%) described the relationship as “Supportive,” while only 32 (9%) felt that it was “Unsupportive” (Figure 20).

**FIGURE 20 - Study Participants' Support from Men in the Workplace**

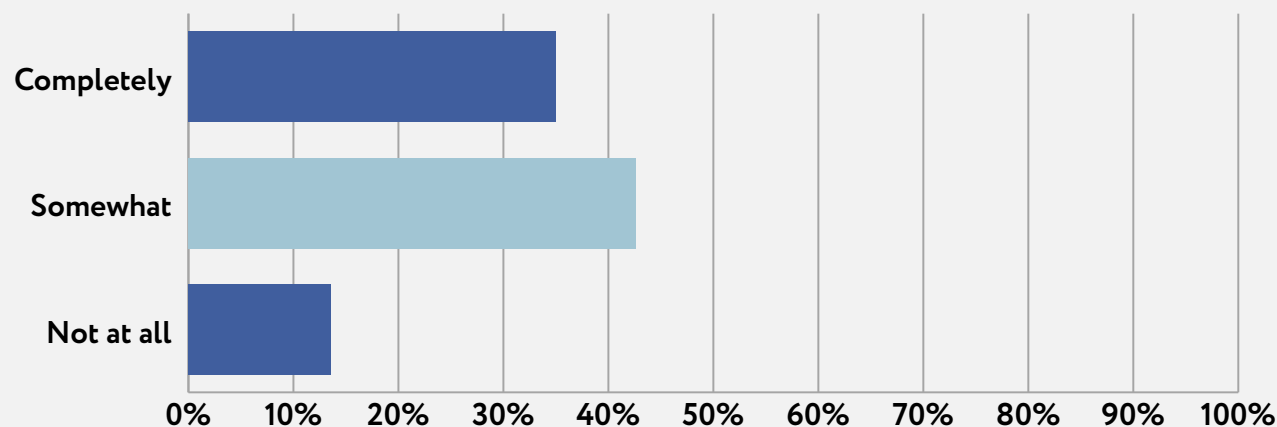
How would you describe the support you receive from the men in your workplace regarding your career?



Regarding alignment between actual experience and stated company values concerning advancing women, of the 396 (51%) participants who responded, 152 (38%) answered that the organization was “Completely” aligned, and 185 (47%) answered “Somewhat” aligned (Figure 21). Only 59 (15%) felt their company’s stated goals were not at all aligned with their actual experiences.

**FIGURE 21 - Study Participants’ Company Commitment Aligns with Actual Experience**

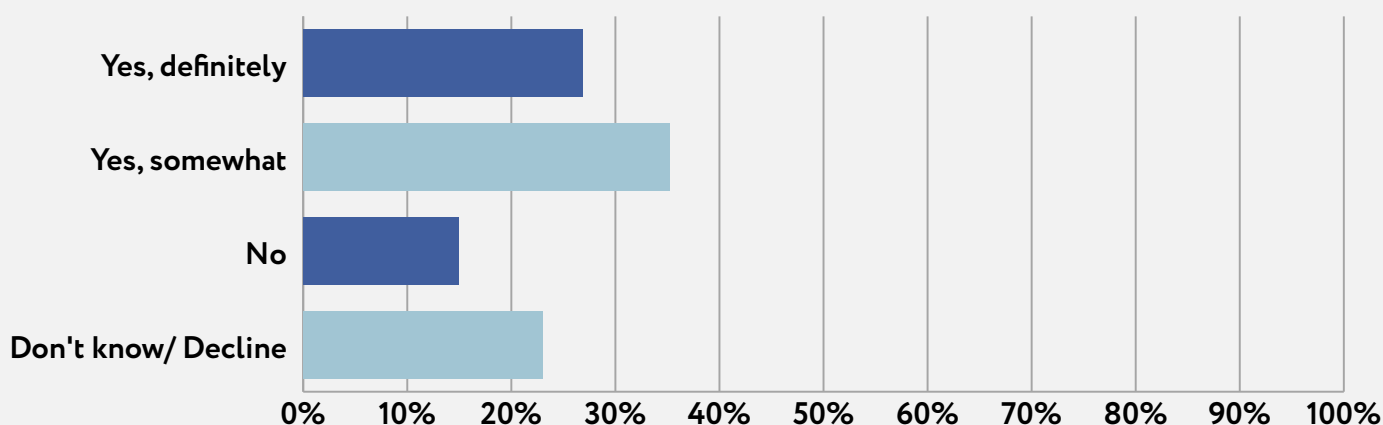
Does your company’s stated commitment to supporting women align with your actual experience?



Notably, regarding leadership support for resource groups, of the 287 (37%) survey participants who responded, 178 (62%) felt their resource group had the necessary support from the company leadership to make a meaningful impact. Only 43 (15%) felt the resource group lacked leadership support to be impactful, and 66 (23%) did not know or declined to answer (Figure 22).

**FIGURE 22 - Study Participants Believe Leadership Supports Women’s Resource Group**

Do you believe the women’s resource group has the support it needs from company leadership to make a meaningful impact?



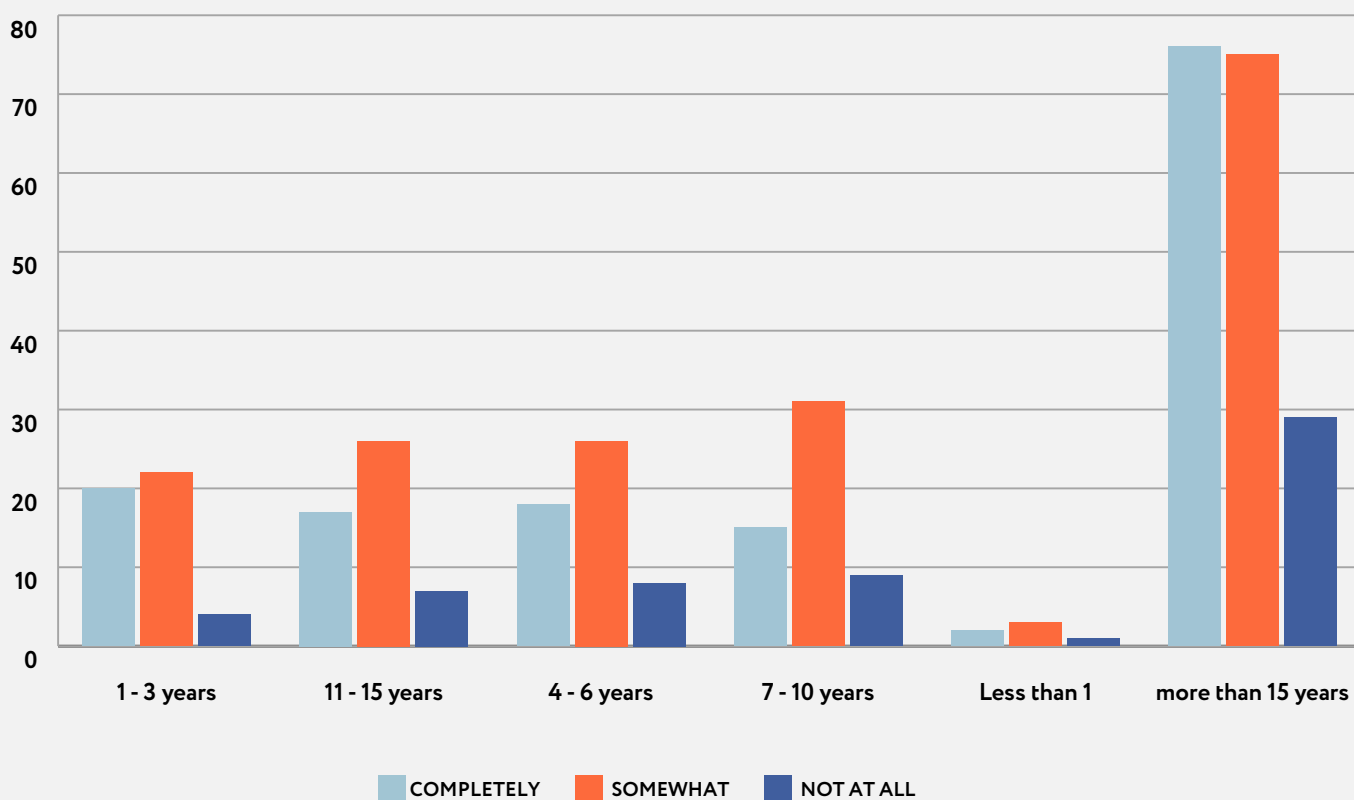


Regarding the alignment of actual experience with company goals for supporting women, of the 434 (56%) survey participants who responded, 152 (35%) felt that their companies' stated commitment "Completely" aligned with their experience, while 185 (43%) felt "Somewhat" aligned.

A deviation appeared when responses were analyzed by experience level (Figure 23). Those with more than 15 years of experience were the only group where "Completely" aligned responses outnumbered "Somewhat" aligned responses. This group also had the largest number of responses, suggesting that longer-tenured employees may perceive greater alignment. This same relationship is found among older participants (55-64 and 64+ years old) (Figure 24).

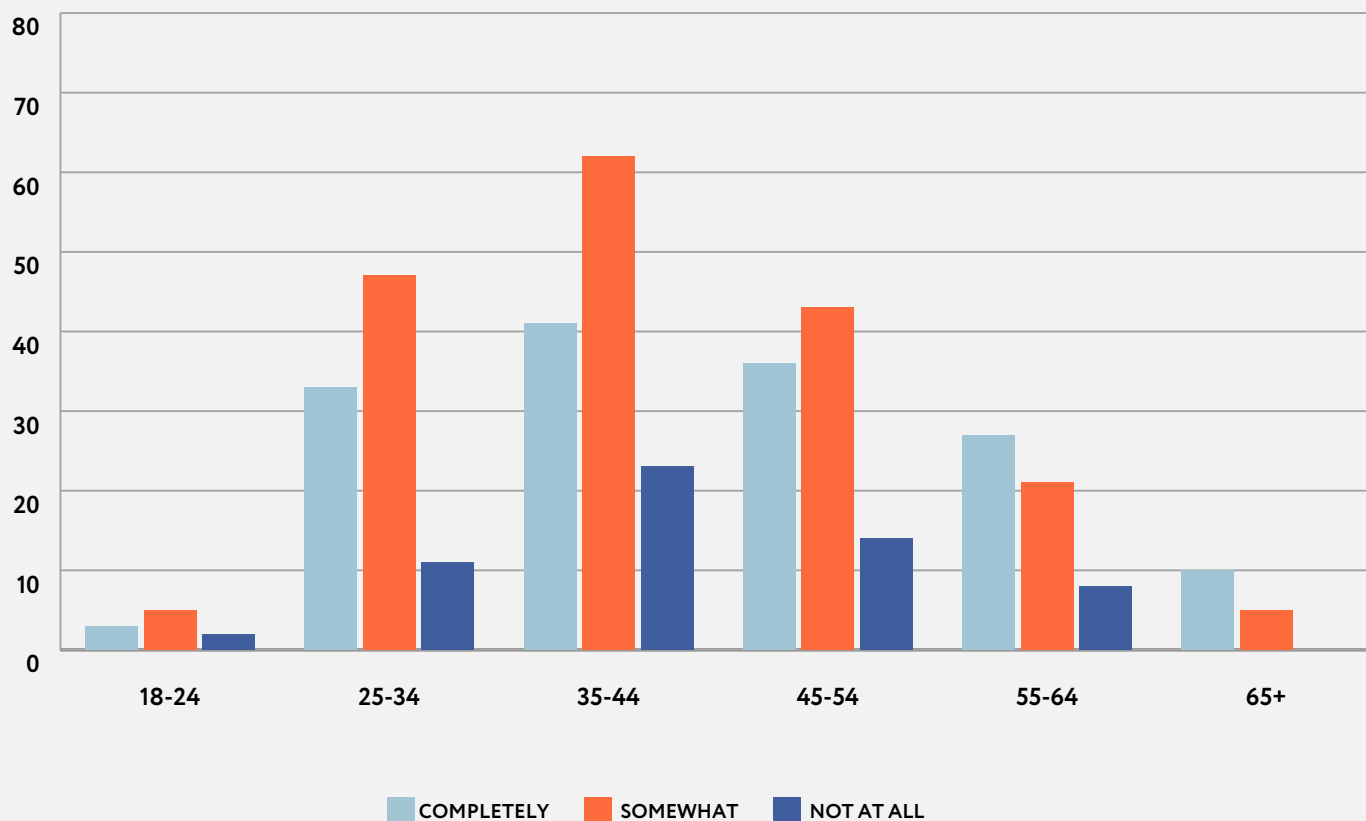
**FIGURE 23 - Company's Stated Commitment to Women vs Experience by Experience (Years)**

Does your company's stated commitment to supporting women align with your actual experience by experience?



**FIGURE 24 - Company's Stated Commitment to Women vs Experience by Age (Years)**

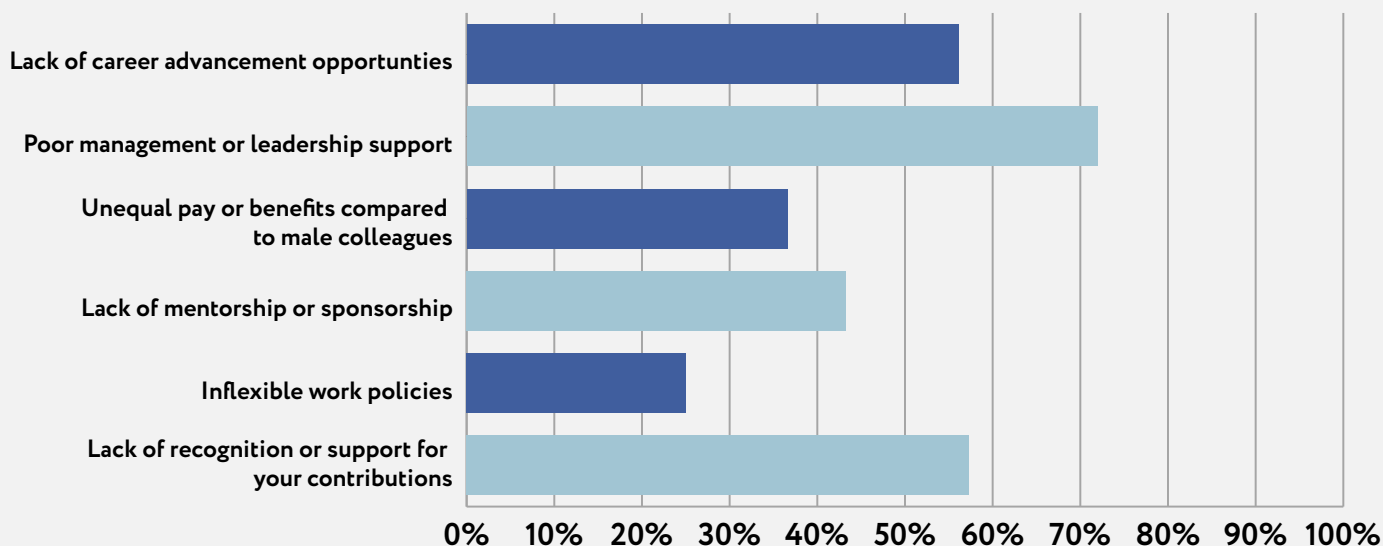
Does your company's stated commitment to supporting women align with your actual experience by age?



When asked if they were considering leaving their jobs and why, of the 164 (21%) total survey participants who answered, 118 (72%) said that "Yes" they were considering leaving their organizations. Poor management or leadership support was a factor for 118 (72%) of these respondents. Other factors included: (a) lack of recognition or support for contributions (57%), (b) lack of career advancement opportunities (56%), (c) lack of mentorship (43%), (d) lack of mentorship or sponsorship (37%), and (e) inflexible work policies (25%) (Figure 25).

**FIGURE 25 - Reasons for Considering Leaving Company**

Are any of the following a factor in your consideration of leaving your current company?

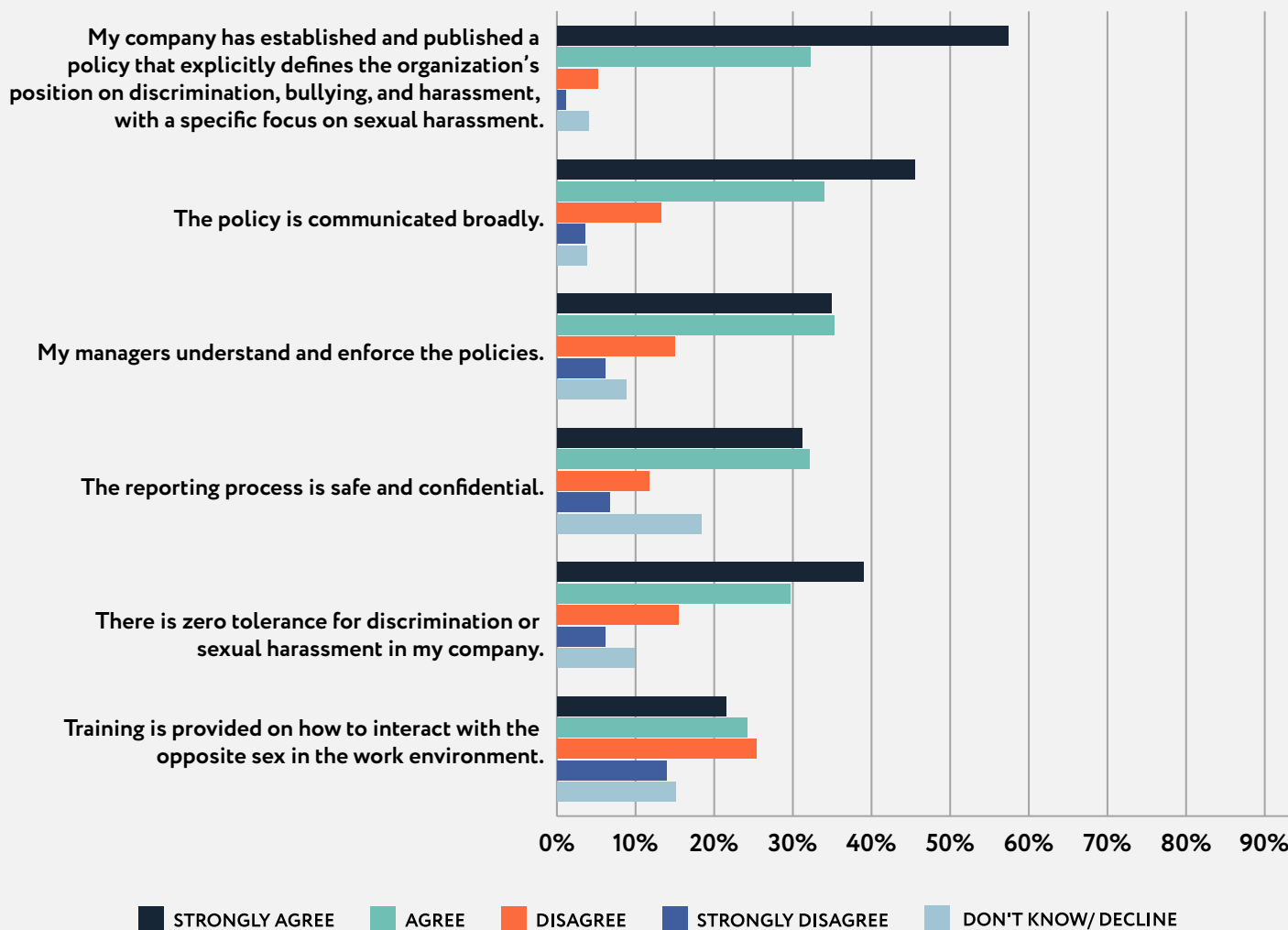


Of the survey participants, 345 (45%) responded to a question asking about their level of agreement with statements regarding management and leadership support for women's careers and success. Regarding company policies, 198 (57%) "Strongly Agreed" that their company has established and published a policy explicitly defining the organization's position on discrimination, bullying, and harassment, specifically focusing on sexual harassment. Of those responding, 155 (45%) indicated the policy was broadly communicated, and 119 (35%) indicated that their managers understand and enforce the policies. Concerning other supporting policies, 134 (39%) stated their company has a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination or sexual harassment, but only 74 (22%) indicated training is provided on interacting with the opposite sex in the work environment (Figure 26).



**FIGURE 26 - Women's Policies in Use**

Indicate your level of agreement with the statements below as they relate to your current job and company:



Open-ended responses to the question, “How could your direct manager(s) or supervisor(s) better support your career growth?” consistently emphasized mentorship and leadership support as key drivers of career growth for women in construction. Participants highlighted the importance of leaders who actively provide opportunities, offer constructive feedback, and advocate for their advancement. Many desired regular performance reviews, clear feedback, and career path discussions. Access to new responsibilities, leadership roles, and high-visibility projects was also frequently mentioned as critical for professional development.

Several participants also noted that career advancement was harder for them compared to men, citing issues like unequal workload distribution and promotions based on the potential for men but proven results for women.



**ONE PARTICIPANT WROTE:**

*"A lot of men get promoted based on potential, while women need to prove they can do the job. We need more people to believe in us. I get a lot of compliments about my work, but it usually ends with me only receiving more work."*

**ANOTHER SURVEY PARTICIPANT WROTE REGARDING HER COMPANY:**

*"Some managers don't discuss career paths with women as they do with men, leaving us guessing while our male counterparts are being prepared for the next role."*

Effective leadership support extends beyond policy creation; it requires active participation in initiatives that promote inclusivity, mentorship, sponsorship, and a sense of organizational support. Leaders must visibly champion programs that empower women and address systemic barriers. Without such support, efforts to create equitable workplaces risk becoming symbolic rather than substantive.

The data show that although most respondents of the survey felt supported by their managers and male colleagues, a substantial portion of women cited poor management or leadership support as a key reason for considering leaving their companies. While policies addressing discrimination, harassment, and bullying exist in many organizations, their enforcement and communication remain inconsistent, with limited training on fostering gender-inclusive workplace interactions. To retain talent and ensure meaningful progress for women in the industry, leaders must prioritize active support, mentorship, career development opportunities, and consistent enforcement of inclusive workplace policies.



## Recommendations

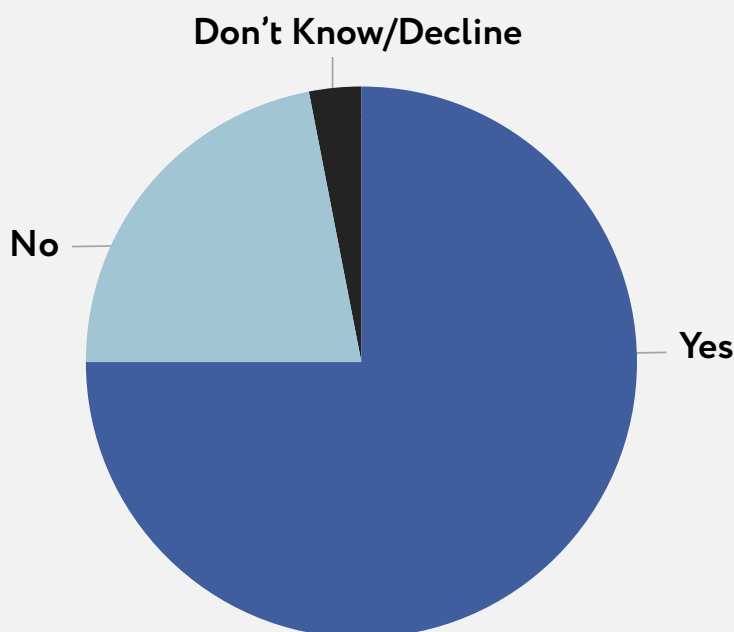
The survey findings reveal a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities. While many organizations publicly commit to increasing amount of support for women, a disconnect persists between stated or intended policy and actual practices. Career advancement programs tailored to women are scarce, and workplace cultures that deliberately include greater support for women require further development. Additionally, internal support mechanisms like mentorship and women's resource groups remain underutilized. To create meaningful change, organizations must adopt targeted strategies that: (a) enhance leadership development programs, (b) foster greater support for women in the organizations, (c) empower resource groups, and (d) increase the visibility of career pathways.

### Enhance Leadership Training and Development Programs

Organizations must design and implement leadership training initiatives that explicitly address the barriers women face in construction. These programs should address women's unique challenges in male-dominated industries like construction. While 263 (75%) of the 352 (45%) participants who responded had taken leadership training (Figure 27), only 43 (13%) of the 322 (42%) participants who answered indicated the training was directly tailored to address the unique barriers or challenges women face in the construction industry. 156 (52%) indicated that the training was not at all tailored to women in construction (Figure 28).

**FIGURE 27 - Study Participants' Participation in Leadership Training**

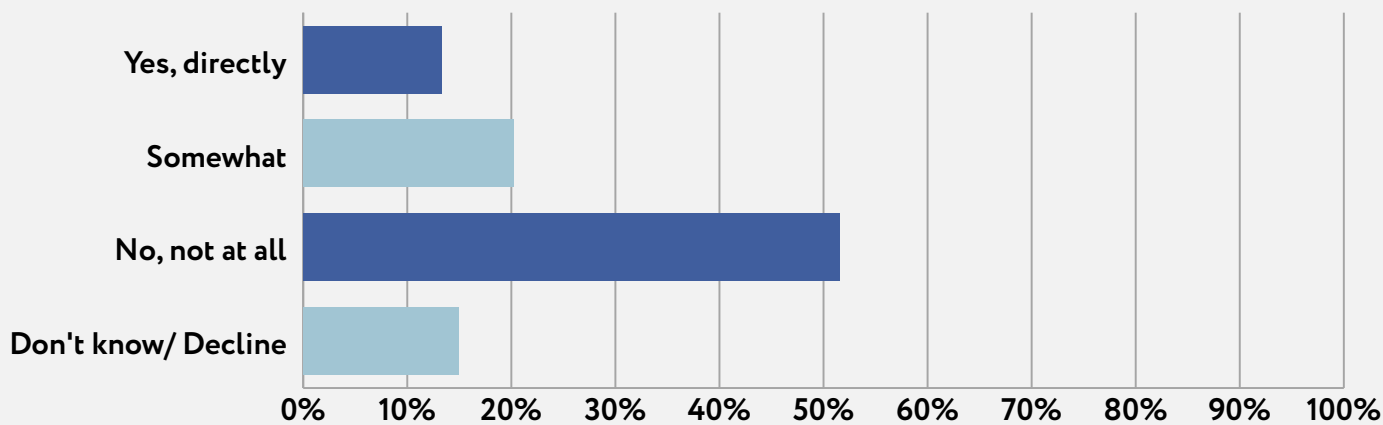
Have you ever participated in leadership training or development programs offered by your company or another organization?





**FIGURE 28 - Leadership Training Tailored to Women Specifically**

Was the leadership training tailored to address the unique barriers or challenges women face in the construction industry?



#### Leadership programs should include:

- **Tailored Training** - Training should be specific to the needs, challenges, and opportunities that women in construction face. These challenges include addressing barriers such as confidence-building, negotiation, and overcoming implicit biases. Additionally, gender-specific training should provide greater opportunities for transformative learning moments.
- **Structured Pathways** - Provide clear benchmarks and support for progression into senior roles. These pathways should be clearly defined and offer women opportunities to understand how they can advance within the industry and their careers.
- **Sponsorship and Mentorship** - Connect women with influential leaders who will advocate for their advancement. Mentorship should be purposeful and supported by leadership. Women at all levels should be encouraged to participate and contribute.

Regular evaluations and feedback mechanisms should support these programs to ensure they meet the participants' needs.

#### Foster Supportive Workplaces

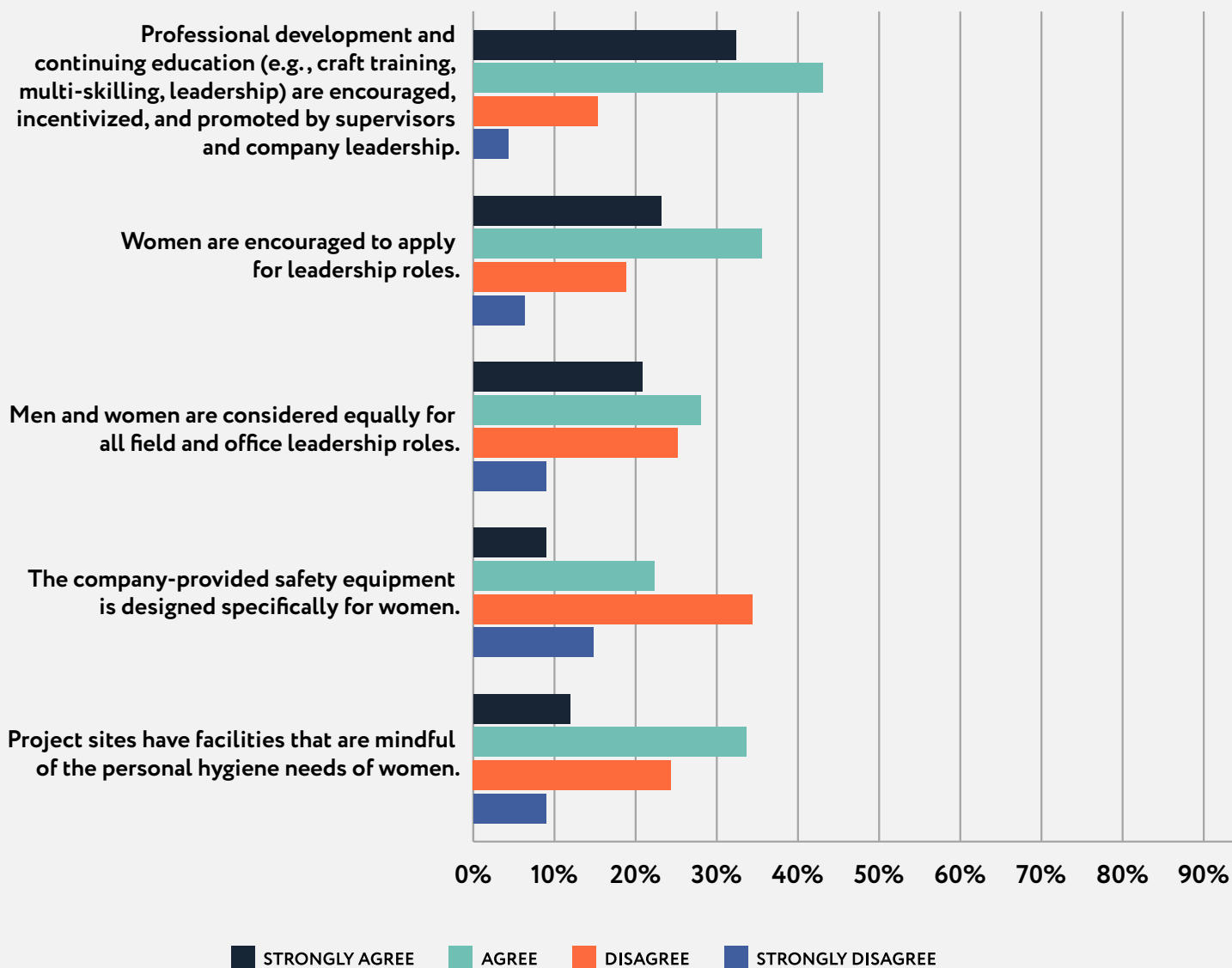
Workplace practices must go beyond developing and enforcing policies to actively shape company culture and organizational dynamics. Although 88% of respondents felt supported by their managers, poor leadership and a lack of support were among the top reasons for considering leaving their jobs.

While 88% of respondents felt supported by their managers in general, when asked about specific worksite support for retaining women, of the 346 (45%) of the total survey participants who answered, 261 (75%) felt professional development and other skills training were positively promoted by the company, and 203 (59%)

were encouraged to apply for leadership roles. However, only 108 (31%) positively responded that safety equipment is specifically designed for women, and only 157 (45%) positively responded that project sites have facilities mindful of women's specific hygiene needs (Figure 29).

**FIGURE 29 - Women's Support Systems in Use**

Indicate your level of agreement with the statements below as they relate to your current job and company:



Key actions to improve organizational support in this area might include:

- **Bias Awareness Training** - Managers, both men and women, must receive consistent and ongoing training on recognizing and mitigating biases that impact women's career growth. Beyond recognizing prejudice and bias, training should include what colleagues and coworkers can do to promote and support women.
- **Policy Enforcement** - Ensure consistent implementation of zero-tolerance policies for harassment and discrimination. Leadership support must be active and focused on transforming the culture.
- **Project Site Improvements** - Implement measures to make worksites more accommodating and supportive for women without waiting for women to ask for these measures. This includes ordering and supplying safety equipment specifically designed for women and upgrading facilities to address women's hygiene needs, such as clean and accessible restrooms and changing areas.

Organizations that embed active support for women workers into their daily operations will retain talent and create environments where women feel empowered to contribute and grow.

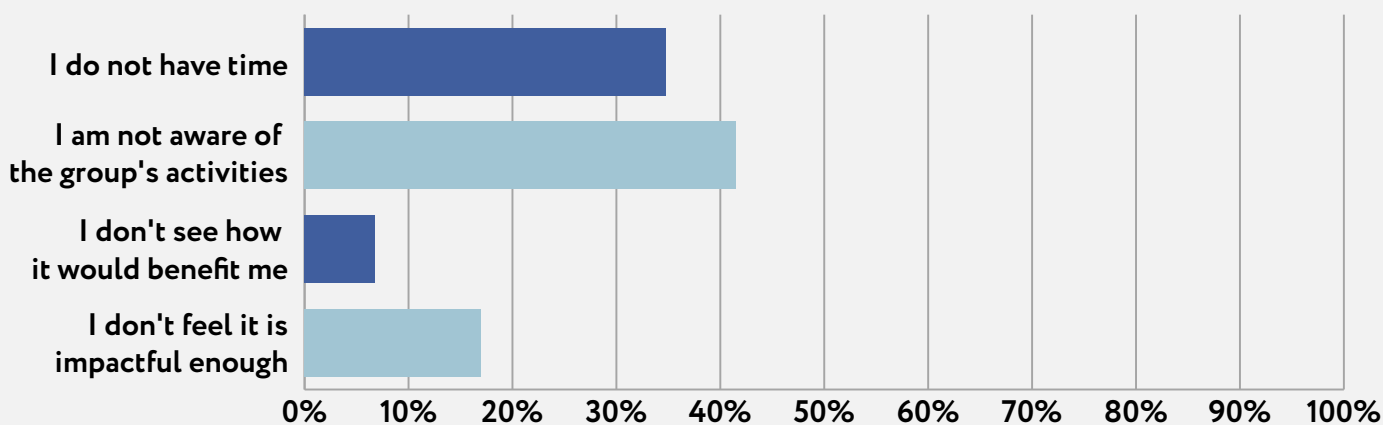
### Empower Women's Resource Groups

Women's resource groups should have the power, leadership support, and clear objectives to enact meaningful change for their members. These groups can serve as platforms for advocacy, mentorship, and professional growth, providing emotional support, mentorship, and increased visibility. However, as noted earlier, participation remains low, with only 27% of respondents actively involved.

Organizations should consider the reasons survey participants gave for not utilizing women's resource groups and develop solutions aligned with addressing these issues. Of the 118 (15%) participants who answered this question, 41 (34%) cited lack of time, 49 (42%) were unaware of the group's activities, 8 (7%) didn't understand the group's benefits, and 20 (17%) didn't feel it was impactful enough (Figure 30).

**FIGURE 30 - Study Participants' Reasons for Not Participating in Women's Resource Groups**

If you do not participate in the women's resource group, what is the main reason?



**To increase effectiveness:**

- **Leadership Backing** - Ensure women's resource groups have sufficient resources and visible leadership support to enact change. If your organization doesn't have such support, investigate how to start and support one.
- **Defined Objectives** - Establish clear goals for these resource groups, such as mentoring programs or career workshops. Clear goals provide the attendees with a vision and can help them define steps to achieve the objectives. Organizational leadership should collaborate with the group to develop and support these goals.
- **Active Promotion** - Promote the group's activities and achievements to boost participation and engagement and increase awareness. Leaders at all levels should be aware of the group's activities and goals to help ensure their achievement.

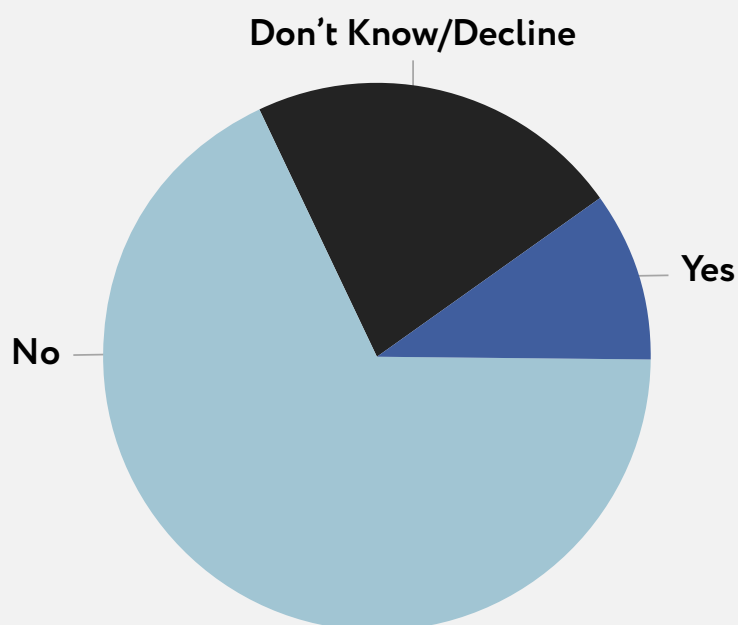
Empowered resource groups can serve as professional development and advocacy platforms, helping women navigate workplace challenges and advance their careers.

### Increase Visibility of Career Pathways

Organizations must develop transparent career pathways to leadership, ensuring women have equal access to opportunities. Outreach programs targeting women in the early stages of their careers can also encourage greater participation in the industry. The lack of transparent career pathways was a recurring theme; only 42% of respondents felt that leadership programs addressed their needs. Of the 363 (47%) of participants responding, only 37 (10%) indicated their organization had career pathways that were dedicated to and tailored to women (Figure 31).

**FIGURE 31 - Companies Have Career Advancement Programs**

My company has career advancement programs tailored to women:



To address this:

- **Clear Progression Frameworks** - Develop roadmaps outlining the steps to achieve leadership positions, including required skills and key milestones.
- **Early Outreach** - Outreach to women should begin early and target multiple entry points into the industry. Programs to promote, recruit, and onboard women should target women in high schools, trade schools, entry-level positions, and other roles throughout the company to showcase opportunities in construction.
- **Showcase Success Stories** - Sharing success stories can inspire others and highlight examples of women who have advanced to leadership roles within the organization.

By increasing the visibility of career pathways, organizations can attract more women to the industry and empower current employees to pursue leadership opportunities.



## Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into women's experiences in the construction industry, several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations may affect the generalizability of the findings and highlight areas for future research and refinement.

As discussed earlier, 77% of respondents identified as White, with Hispanic participants comprising 15%. Other racial and ethnic groups were underrepresented, with no group exceeding 4% of the total sample. This limited diversity may constrain the study's ability to capture the full range of experiences across different cultural and racial backgrounds in the construction industry.

While the study captured valuable insights from women across the construction industry, perspectives from craftswomen currently working in field-based roles were less represented in the survey responses. Most participants came from supervisory, instructional, or administrative backgrounds, which may have influenced the types of challenges and priorities highlighted in the findings. This imbalance limits the depth of understanding related to on-the-ground jobsite experiences — such as daily interactions with coworkers, equipment access, and site-specific conditions. Ensuring stronger participation from field-level workers in future research will be critical to painting a more complete picture of women's experiences in the trades.

Another limitation is the disproportionate number of highly experienced respondents. 41% of the participants reported over 15 years of experience in the industry, while only 2% had less than one year of experience. This skewed distribution may underrepresent the perspectives of early-career professionals, whose challenges and needs could differ significantly.

While the survey included both quantitative and qualitative components, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response bias. Participants may have provided socially desirable answers or could not accurately recall specific experiences.

The study did not deeply examine differences in organizational culture, size, or regional practices. These variables could significantly influence the effectiveness of policies and programs supporting women in construction.

Future research will explore the perspectives of early-career women in construction. A longitudinal study tracking women working in the skilled trades in the construction industry during their first five years in the industry could provide insights into the unique challenges new entrants face and assess the effectiveness of onboarding, mentorship, and early-career development programs. Periodic surveys and interviews with a cohort of new hires could monitor their progress and experiences, helping organizations refine their strategies for supporting emerging talent.



Research comparing men's and women's experiences in the construction workforce could also illuminate workplace dynamics and perceptions of inclusivity. A mixed-gender study could examine career advancement opportunities and inclusion initiatives, identifying areas of alignment and divergence in perceptions. Comparing survey results and interviews across genders could offer a nuanced understanding of how men and women view leadership roles and workplace culture.

Future research will also evaluate the long-term impact of sponsorship and mentorship programs on career advancement. Comparing outcomes for participants in organizations with formal programs against those without, researchers could identify the key factors that make these initiatives successful. Both qualitative and quantitative methods could help measure the impact of these programs on women's progression to leadership roles.



## Conclusion

The construction industry is at a crossroads. Addressing labor shortages and advancing opportunities for women in the industry is critical for its sustainability and growth. Women, as an underrepresented yet highly capable segment of the workforce, have the potential to transform the industry by bringing fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and diverse leadership styles. However, as this study highlights, systemic barriers, cultural challenges, and gaps in support mechanisms continue to hinder their full participation and career progression.

The survey findings underscore that while progress has been made, significant work remains to bridge the gap between stated organizational commitments to support women in construction. To achieve meaningful change, the industry must adopt a multifaceted approach: (a) enhancing leadership programs tailored to women's needs, (b) fostering more supportive workplace cultures, (c) empowering resource groups, and (d) increasing the visibility of career pathways. These actions not only benefit women but also strengthen the industry, driving innovation, improving retention, and building a more sustainable workforce.

Fostering a workplace that is more supportive for women is not just a moral imperative; it's a business necessity for any organization that wants to compete in the modern construction industry. By addressing the challenges outlined in this study and implementing actionable recommendations, the construction industry can unlock the potential of its entire workforce, creating a more supportive and dynamic environment where all employees—regardless of gender—can thrive and contribute to the industry's long-term success.



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