2S/LGBTQ+ populations in the trades in Canada: Exploratory insights

Final report

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INNOVATION • EXPERIMENTATION • EVALUATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a first attempt to address gaps in understanding regarding the context of 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the trades in Canada. This work, funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), is intended as the starting point for additional much-needed research and data collection, with a view to informing effective and equitable policy and program responses.

DATA SOURCES FOR THE PROJECT

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) and from semi-structured stakeholder interviews, to address the following questions:

- What are the employment patterns and socio-demographic profiles of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) populations in the trades in Canada?; and

- What are the perceptions of key stakeholders in terms of the experiences, barriers, and available supports for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the trades?

Most tradespeople (93 per cent according to the CCHS) identify as heterosexual men. Proportionately few, 0.3 per cent identify as heterosexual women, 0.5 per cent as gay men, 0.6 per cent as lesbian women, 0.2 per cent as bisexual men, and 0.2 per cent as bisexual women. While the available data are limited (i.e., there is no way to currently identify gender minority individuals within the sample) and these results are likely underestimates due to nondisclosure, the CCHS data does support our study in providing a population-level snapshot of LGB tradespeople.

Eleven stakeholders interviewed at length by SRDC in the fall of 2022 over Zoom offered valuable insights that allowed us to explore one key trades sector: construction. Interviewees included union leaders, employers, training instructors, non-profit representatives, and individual tradespeople who were identified as leaders within the sector. In some cases, key informants noted that they were 2S/LGBTQ+ themselves, which further informed and enriched the insights they shared.

Interviewees responded with uncertainty when asked more broadly about the current status of 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades, emphasizing the lack of evidence currently available. They were unsure how many 2S/LGBTQ+ people might work in the construction sector, as well as

what trades they may be working in, where, and at what level. The absence of data about 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople was widely attributed to a lack of effort to collect gender and sexuality data within the sector, as well as an unwillingness to share what limited information was collected. As one interviewee put it, *"there's still a lot of reluctance for people to self-identify, so it's hard to say where they're working...It's always hard to get that data."*

EXPERIENCES AND BARRIERS

Interviews explored the journeys of 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals from considering trades careers through their training for and obtaining jobs through to outcomes and effects. A perpetual theme was **visibility and representation,** highlighting how the lack of out 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople ends up perpetuating itself, reducing the attractiveness of trades careers on several dimensions. Factors discouraging interest in trades included: **perceptions of construction as unsafe or unwelcoming, stereotypes about who "fits" in the trades** and **toxic masculinity,** among others**.** Two key effects of the real and perceived culture of the construction trades among 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals are that **construction trades are not actively promoted** among 2S/LGBTQ+ youth and 2S/LGBTQ+ people **specifically avoid the trades or self-select out.** One interviewee illustrated this, describing the experience of a trans colleague: *"He was really scared...to work in construction. That's what he likes, but he was really scared that he would not be accepted, and...about being judged as someone who is not competent in what he's doing because of who he is rather than just being accepted. So he decided not to go any further in construction, which was pretty sad."*

We also heard about the lack of supportive networks and uncertainty around finding safe and fulfilling apprenticeship opportunities. Key informants acknowledged the efforts of **sector-based programs** dedicated to addressing the barriers faced by equity-deserving apprentices but noted these could exclude 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals through the language used to describe them, eligibility rules, or requirements to disclose. Students unintentionally excluded from such programming may choose to leave trades training prematurely or choose to conceal their 2S/LGBTQ+ identity, to protect their safety, wellbeing, or future career prospects.

When it came to hiring, **discrimination** continues to pose a major barrier, while 2S/LGBTQ+ candidates might also exclude themselves from a wide range of opportunities where their safety could be in doubt. Once in the workplace, **microaggressions, homo-, bi-, or transphobic language, bullying, physical violence, sexualization or sexual harassment,** and a **lack of management support** (e.g., inappropriate benefit packages or washroom facilities, reticence to outwardly support 2S/LGBTQ+ employees) all contributed to negative workplace experiences among 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals.

HEALTH AND INCOME OUTCOMES

The threat of **physical violence** aimed at 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople and the constant requirement of having *"just one more thing to deal with"* given the negative workplace experiences could place 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople at risk of serious **mental health consequences.** Indeed, results from the survey data show that overall, sexual minority respondents report poorer physical and mental health compared to their heterosexual counterparts, with 16.1 per cent of sexual minority women reporting themselves to be in fair and poor health compared to 8.0 per cent of heterosexual women. In addition, 7.0 per cent of sexual minority men reported fair and poor health compared to 6.5 per cent of heterosexual men.

Sexual minority respondents also reported significantly **lower rates of life satisfaction**. Specifically, heterosexual men were more likely to report being very satisfied or satisfied with their life, followed by heterosexual women, sexual minority men, and sexual minority women. Sexual minority respondents were generally more likely to report **higher work stress levels** than their heterosexual counterparts. They were also more likely to report that life was quite a bit stressful or extremely stressful.

Key informants framed mental health consequences as closely connected to negative effects on **workplace productivity and performance,** with consequences for career progression. Indeed, the survey found sexual minority respondent groups to have **significantly lower median annual income** than heterosexual men, with particularly large earnings differences for subgroups of sexual minority respondents. SRDC ran regressions to estimate the factors directly associated with lower personal annual income and found sexual orientation and sex significantly affecting income even after controlling for a range of other influences including socioeconomic characteristics and health. The income gaps relative to heterosexual men ranged from -19 per cent for sexual minority men to -22 per cent for sexual minority women.

FACTORS SHAPING THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Key informants pointed to a number of workplace-specific factors that they felt fundamentally shaped the experiences of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople in the construction sector. These factors included **geography and associated political climates**: *"some parts of the country are a little more progressive than others."* The survey similarly found sexual minority individuals were consistently more likely than their heterosexual counterparts, to reside in urban, higher-density areas, such as Vancouver or Montreal.

Interviewees discussed how important **workplace leadership and unions** were in shaping 2S/LGBTQ+ workers' experiences and broader workplace cultures. But they shared mixed

opinions about the extent to which these stakeholders were adequately supporting equity for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals.

Some important distinctions emerged when interviewees discussed systems perpetuating disadvantage. Some minorities may fare worse than others. Discussions have shifted to recognize more often **heterosexual/gay/lesbian identities** within the trades but less often trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse tradespeople. Masculine-presenting 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople were even sometimes perceived as better treated. These findings point to ongoing **devaluation of femininity and difference** within the construction sector and more broadly. Interviewees were eager to highlight the ways in which systems intersected and interacted to produce distinct – and often disproportionately-negative – outcomes for multiply-marginalized tradespeople.

One consequence of differentiated marginalization was **variation in the levels of provision of supports targeted specifically to 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals relative to other equity deserving groups.** Those advocating to improve this situation often felt they were being required to compete for resources and rights in a sector that has already been identified as exclusionary for other equity-deserving groups, including women, Indigenous and racialized people.

Ultimately many viewed the culture in construction trades as trailing other industries in embracing inclusion and equity. The industry consists primarily of white, cisgender, heterosexual men and is **poorly equipped to support employees who fall outside this norm**, including but not limited to women, racialized people, and 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals: as one interviewee summarized, *"everything you do says you don't belong here."*

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Key informants described practices, supports, or initiatives that exist to improve experience and lift barriers for 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades.

They identified **supportive colleagues and leadership** and especially the importance **of "out" tradespeople** as key supportive factors. The last of these was seen as crucial in not only fostering a safe space but also supporting industry-wide changes: *"I think this trickles down into supports, into initiatives, into all sorts of things. That's where practices, supports, and initiatives can grow."* Furthermore, it directly linked to the availability and accessibility of formal and informal mentorship.

Other initiatives and supports promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) play an important role in facilitating 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion and acceptance at a workplace. Developments that various interviewees felt showed promise included:

- **Government incentives and mandates** including for example the Apprenticeship Service providing funds to employers hiring from equity-deserving groups. Such initiatives indirectly support queer and trans tradespeople by focusing employers' attention on diversity and inclusion in the industry.

- **Employee benefit packages** that are more expansive and inclusive of different employees and family types.

- **Union-specific EDI initiatives and programs** referenced in interviews included IBEW Strong (a union-wide EDI strategy) and IBEW's Connections to Success (a mentorship program). One interviewee noted how each mentorship program is framed and marketed (e.g., making explicit whether it supports trans women) helps bring attention to issues of tradespeople from queer and trans communities.

- **Education and training programs** that focus specifically on providing trades and leadership training to 2S/LGBTQ+ people and others focused on 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion.

- **Company efforts** such as: codes of conduct and statements of values; anonymous reporting systems; gender-inclusive gear and washrooms; toolbox talks specific to diversity and inclusion; community building and involvement; employee resource groups; and EDI committees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study also explored with interviewees the way to improve the future for 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades, focusing on recommendations and perceptions of existing opportunities.

- **Training and education** were consistently highlighted as critical tool to building 2S/LGBTQ+ competency and fostering a more inclusive culture within the construction sector, challenging harmful attitudes and beliefs.

- **Promoting strong leaders and managers who are committed to advancing 2S/LGBTQ+ equity and inclusion.** Key informants saw industry leaders within unions, trades organizations, and companies as responsible for establishing a tone and expectations, challenging harm and bias, acting as champions and allies, and overall leading by example.

- **Support 2S/LGBTQ-specific interventions and initiatives** to build a sense of community. Most uniquely safety in identifying is an issue. There is a need to develop programs that avoid requiring people to out themselves in order to participate.

- **Build sustainable, meaningful, and accountable processes** for safety and inclusion equipping decision-makers with the practical knowledge or tools to effect change: compiling guidelines and inventories of promising practices; engaging in proactive and ongoing review of policies and procedures; and recognizing the need for and enforcing accountability.

- **Address barriers to entry in order to shift trades culture** by attracting 2S/LGBTQ+ youth. Specific strategies include: pursuing opportunities for career exploration for 2S/LGBTQ+ youth; challenging and shifting stereotypes about who "fits" in the trades; and specifically seeking out diversity in recruitment by working with partners, indicating commitment to inclusion, and so on.

- **Foster safe, welcoming, and inclusive trades environments**. Employers but also to unions, associations, non-profits working in this space. Can in the short term move to offer: Appropriate washroom facilities, PPE, Toolbox talks Visible signs of inclusion (e.g., helmet stickers) Recognition/celebration of Pride; participation in other community events/initiatives Competent and safe go-to person for concerns, issues, Respect for/use of pronouns and chosen names (e.g., on tickets) and ensuring strong allies and supporters on staff.

- **Engaging 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals within and across communities** is critical in any inclusion efforts/initiatives directed at them. This is because lived experience is key to informing programming, policy, and research in this space. Interviewees recounted important factors to bear in mind including: recognizing the value of this participation (if possible, compensated); respecting input as meaningful and not tokenistic; pursuing allyship and collaboration across equity-deserving communities. Efforts to support 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades need to be developed (and seen to be actualized) to work alongside (not against) those supporting women, Indigenous people, newcomers, and so on.

- We found a general lack of evidence to support this area of policy in the labour market and thus end with the recommendation to build improved knowledge going forward. Across many topics, interviewees identified the need for more research and data collection. Lack of research and relevant data was a key factor underlying inaction in advancing 2S/LGBTQ+ equity and inclusion because without data, the sector does not know how it is doing or where it needs to improve. The solution starts with building the structures and processes for data collection and analysis within the sector requiring advocacy for why this is relevant and important. At the same time, it must be undertaken safely and inclusively, with practices that take into account legal and ethical obligations.

At an overarching level, all interviewees identified a need for a cultural shift within the sector to promote inclusive environments for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals: *"It's not on the LGBTQ2S+ community to make sure the trades are ready for them. I think it's on our industry to make sure we're inclusive. That is a culture change [that's needed]."*

INTRODUCTION

Skilled trades are a key component of the Canadian economy, employing over 3 million Canadians (or about one in six of the labour force).[1] Despite this, a number of equity-deserving groups remain underrepresented in the skilled trades, including the 2S/LGBTQ+ community.[2] Moreover, there is limited understanding of the experiences, journeys, and outcomes of 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals who are in the trades. Very little is known, for example, about their employment conditions (e.g., income, employment status, hours worked), other characteristics or experiences (e.g., education, general health, work stress). This report is a first attempt to fill these gaps in understanding of the context of 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals who are in the trades. It is intended as a starting point for gathering essential evidence to inform effective and equitable policy and program responses.

This work, funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), uses a mixed-methods approach, combining multi-cycle data from Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey with key stakeholder interviews to address the following questions:

1. What are the employment patterns and socio-demographic profiles of lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations in the trades in Canada?; and

2. What are the perceptions of key stakeholders in terms of the experiences, barriers, and available supports for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the trades?

Drawing on these quantitative and qualitative data, we can begin to describe the current landscape, identify urgent or emerging issues, and point to potential areas for intervention. We recognize this as an exploratory project that can only offer initial insights, analyses, and recommendations regarding 2S/LGBTQ+ skilled tradespeople in Canada. Thus, we recognize the ongoing knowledge gaps in this area, and also seek to highlight areas for future research, data collection, and analysis, along with the value of doing so.

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[1]   Government of Canada backgrounder (2022).

[2]   While this report uses 2S/LGBTQ+ to refer to Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, and other gender and sexual minority individuals as a community, terminology is evolving, and others may prefer different acronyms. The "+" in 2S/LGBTQ+ intends to convey the inclusion of individuals whose identities may not be explicitly represented in this acronym. We recognize the challenges of using one term to convey a rich diversity of gender and sexual identities, and associated experiences and outcomes.

METHODS

QUANTITATIVE DATA SOURCES

The quantitative analysis within this report is based on the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). We used different cycles of the CCHS from 2007 to 2020[3] to answer the research questions. The CCHS is a nationally-representative, cross-sectional survey of a sample of individuals aged 12 and older residing in Canada at the time of interview. The survey relies on a large sample of respondents (around 130,000 in 2003, 2005 and 65,000 respondents starting in 2007) and is designed to provide reliable estimates at the health region level. Excluded from the CCHS sampling frame are individuals living on First Nations reserves and Crown lands, those residing in institutions at the time of data collection, full-time members of the Canadian Forces, and residents of remote regions (e.g., Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon). Topically, the CCHS focuses primarily on health status and determinants of health of the Canadian population while also capturing socioeconomic information, including income and employment status. Another important limitation for this study is related to the CCHS's approach to capturing data regarding both gender and sexual identity. In terms of gender identity, the available data draw from iterations of the survey that have not captured information regarding gender minority individuals (e.g., trans and/or non-binary people) via a two-step gender question or other approach. As such, we are unable to identify gender minority individuals within our existing sample. In addition, while the CCHS does include a question asking respondents to self-report their sexual orientation, the available response options for this question are limited to heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual. As a result, other sexual minority identities (e.g., pansexual, asexual, etc.) as well as identities that span gender and sexual identity (e.g., Two-Spirit, queer) are not fully reflected in our quantitative analysis. While not without its limitations, the CCHS offers some of the highest-quality data available on LGB individuals in Canada with respect to the research questions posed.

Study sample

The sample for this study focuses exclusively on sexual minorities, which, in the case of the CCHS, includes individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The population of interest in this study consists of individuals of working age who work in trades occupations. As the sexual

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[3]   Only January to September data were available for 2020.

orientation question is asked only of respondents aged 18 to 59,[4] the sample is limited to respondents in this age range. In addition, the CCHS includes a question about respondents' occupation, which allowed us to restrict our analysis to individuals who work in trades occupations. This study is the first exploration of national-level data specific to LGB individuals working in trades. While there is likely nondisclosure and no data on gender minority identities, the survey does support a population-level snapshot of LGB people in trades.

The main approach used in answering our research questions include:

- Descriptive statistics of sociodemographic characteristics, health and wellbeing and employment characteristics.

- Regression analysis examining differences in earnings and full-time working status by sexual orientation.

The primary variable is self-reported sexual orientation, based on the CCHS question: "Do you consider yourself to be: a) heterosexual (sexual relations with people of the opposite sex)? b) Homosexual, that is lesbian or gay (sexual relations with people of your own sex)? c) Bisexual (sexual relations with people of both sexes)?" The main exploratory variable in this report is total annual income, adjusted to 2020 dollars. We focus on self-reported personal annual income in the CCHS. We also explored other employment variables, such as full-time working status, self-employment, and working hours. Additionally, we provide information about sociodemographic characteristics of respondents in trades by their sexual orientation.

Descriptive analysis on the health and wellbeing of respondents in trades is also included in this report.

QUALITATIVE DATA SOURCES

While the quantitative component focused on the skilled trades more broadly, our qualitative methods focused on the construction trades with a view to seeking more in-depth insights on a specific sector/industry. We interviewed key construction trades stakeholders across the country positioned as leaders in the sector, particularly with regard to advancing equity and inclusion for equity-deserving communities within the trades. These key informant interviews offered the opportunity to explore new themes and lines of inquiry, in addition to providing further nuance and context to the quantitative findings. Interviewees were not necessarily 2S/LGBTQ+

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4   Starting in 2015, the sexual orientation question is asked to respondents aged 15 or older. To make the analysis consistent over the period of interest, the sample used here was restricted to respondents aged 18 to 59.

tradespeople themselves – but were well-positioned to offer insights into not only what was happening within job sites, but also how the sector and institutions within it were (or were not) thinking about advancing equity and inclusion.

Our team adopted a multi-phase, iterative approach to recruitment. To begin, a list of prospective key informants was developed based on SRDC's work in this area, which was further informed and refined in consultation with ESDC. From there, we prioritized prospective interviewees based on our knowledge of who would be best positioned to answer the posed questions, as well as who might be able to identify other potential informants. While we are limited by a small sample size, we also pursued diversity within our sample in terms of organization type (e.g., employer, union, training institution, etc.) as well as geography, where feasible. Interview invitations were sent out in small batches based on this prioritization, with additional invitations sent out as interviews were completed or as invitations were declined or left unanswered. In some cases, individuals who declined our invitations to participate referred us to others who they felt would be better suited to take part in the research. We also received further suggestions for contacts during the interviews, inviting others to participate in subsequent stages of recruitment. As such, our sampling strategy represents a combination of purposive and snowball sampling.

Ultimately, we conducted 9 key informant interviews with 11 individuals. Interviewees brought experience from across Canada's construction trades ecosystem, and included union leaders, employers, training instructors, non-profit representatives, and individual tradespeople who were identified as leaders within the sector. In some cases, key informants noted that they were tradespeople and/or 2S/LGBTQ+ themselves, which further informed and enriched the insights they shared.

Semi-structured interviews took place over Zoom in the fall of 2022. Each interview was conducted by two SRDC researchers who took turns taking notes and facilitating. The majority of interviews involved one key informant, with two interviews conducted with two participants. Participants were sent the protocol prior to their interview. Each interview lasted the full 90 minutes scheduled. At the beginning of the interview, participants were given an overview of the project and went through a verbal consent process. Key informants were asked to indicate how they wished to be identified as contributing to the final report (e.g., with name and affiliation, affiliation only, or completely anonymous), recognizing that any quotes shared in project outputs would be anonymized. A list of key informants who contributed to the qualitative component is provided in Appendix A, with interviewees' names, titles, and/or affiliations included or excluded according to their preference.

Interviews were recorded with participants' consent, with recordings accompanied by detailed notes taken during the interview. Following each conversation, the two SRDC researchers who facilitated the discussion combined their notes and added separate annotations to the transcript

to identity key emerging themes. These preliminary themes were further discussed and refined by the research team, and informed the structure of the subsequent findings.

FINDINGS

CURRENT CONTEXT: WHO ARE 2S/LGBTQ+ TRADESPEOPLE?

From the survey data, we found evidence that out of the survey sample of 45,899, most respondents in the trades (93 per cent) identified as heterosexual men. Comparatively, just 0.3 per cent identified as heterosexual women, 0.5 per cent as gay men, 0.6 per cent as lesbian women, 0.2 per cent as bisexual men, and 0.2 per cent as bisexual women. Due to the small sample sizes of those who identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) in the trades, we grouped these respondents together for reporting purposes. Therefore, we categorized our sample into heterosexual men, heterosexual women, sexual minority (i.e., gay and bisexual) men, and sexual minority (i.e., lesbian and bisexual) women.

There are differences in individual demographic characteristics by sexual orientation (Table 1).[5] For example, heterosexual men and women were slightly older than their sexual minority counterparts, on average. Heterosexual women were the oldest group, with an average age of 40.6 years, followed by heterosexual men, averaging 39.3 years. Sexual minority men had an average age of 37.9 years, while sexual minority women averaged 36 years in age. Compared to those born in Canada, immigrant respondents were less likely to identify as sexual minority women but more likely to identify as sexual minority men. In addition, both sexual minority women and men were more likely to identify as Indigenous ("Aboriginal person" in the CCHS) than their heterosexual counterparts. The percentage of individuals who identified as Indigenous was lowest among heterosexual men at 5.4 per cent. Regarding racial groups, most individuals in all four groups identified as white. However, there were differences: approximately 81.1 per cent of heterosexual men identified as white, compared to 76.3 per cent of sexual minority men.

Around 50 to 58 per cent of heterosexual and sexual minority respondents reported having some form of postsecondary education, indicating that education levels for those working in the trades were similar regardless of sexual orientation (Table 2).

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[5] The results for sexual minorities and women should be interpreted with extra caution due to the small sample sizes.

Table 1   Individual demographic characteristics, by sexual orientation and sex

	Heterosexual men	Heterosexual women	Sexual minority men	Sexual minority women
Average age†				
years	39.3	40.6	37.9	36.0
Immigrant†				
Yes	20.0%	20.4%	21.3%	5.7%
No	80.0%	79.6%	78.7%	94.3%
Aboriginal identity†				
Yes	5.4%	6.1%	9.4%	10.5%
No	94.6%	93.9%	90.6%	89.5%
Visible minority				
Yes	14.3%	16.4%	16.1%	9.5%
No	85.7%	83.6%	83.9%	90.5%
Racial/cultural group, including Aboriginal†				
White	81.1%	78.4%	76.3%	80.4%
Aboriginal	4.6%	5.2%	7.6%	10.1%
Visible minority	14.3%	16.4%	16.1%	9.5%
Language†				
English only	66.4%	66.7%	67.7%	70.2%
French only	11.8%	13.8%	9.7%	11.3%
More than one language	21.5%	19.0%	22.6%	18.5%
Neither English nor French	0.4%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%

† **Note**: Shows a statistically significant difference (at the 5 per cent level) using either a t-test or a chi-squared test.

Table 2   Education, by sexual orientation and sex

	Heterosexual men	Heterosexual women	Sexual minority men	Sexual minority women
Education†				
High school or less	42.4%	50.5%	41.7%	49.3%
Some postsecondary education	57.6%	49.5%	58.3%	50.7%
Current student†				
Yes	4.6%	6.0%	4.9%	8.1%
No	95.4%	94.0%	95.1%	91.9%

† **Note**: Shows a statistically significant difference (at the 5 per cent level) using either a t-test or a chi-squared test.

In terms of family composition, compared with their heterosexual counterparts, sexual minority individuals were less likely to be in a marriage or common law relationship but more likely to have never been married and less likely to have children. Notably, sexual minority women in the trades were less likely to have children (Table 3).

In interviews, key informants typically responded with uncertainty when asked more broadly about the current status of 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades. Aware of the lack of data in this area, many emphasized that their views reflected what they had observed or experienced firsthand in their work. While more qualitative research in this area is undoubtedly needed – including that focusing more narrowly on the experiences of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople themselves – our findings offer valuable context to some of the quantitative findings previously discussed.

Key informants were unsure how many 2S/LGBTQ+ people might work in the construction sector, as well as what trades they may be working in, where, and at what level. Anecdotally, we heard about 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople being concentrated in carpentry and electrical trades, although the reasons behind this perception remain unclear. We also heard perceptions of sexual minority women and gender minority individuals being over- and underrepresented in construction, respectively. The absence of data about 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople was widely attributed to a lack of effort to collect gender and sexuality data within the sector, as well as an unwillingness to share what limited information is collected. As one interviewee put it, "*there's still a lot of reluctance for people to self-identify, so it's hard to say where they're working...It's always hard to get that data.*"

Table 3   Family composition, by sexual orientation and sex

	Heterosexual men	Heterosexual women	Sexual minority men	Sexual minority women
Marital/partnership status†				
Married or common law	66.2%	62.7%	39.6%	41.8%
Ever married	6.7%	12.1%	7.2%	7.4%
Never married	27.1%	25.2%	53.2%	50.8%
Has children†				
Yes	30.0%	28.4%	14.4%	12.6%
No	70.0%	71.6%	85.6%	87.4%

† **Note**: Shows a statistically significant difference (at the 5 per cent level) using either a t-test or a chi-squared test.

When it comes to the limited data that is available, we heard mixed opinions about its accuracy. Several interviewees affirmed the finding that 2S/LGBTQ+ people were underrepresented in construction, pointing to issues of safety and diversity within the sector:

> *"I don't think I can honestly identify many queer and trans folks within the construction industry...I have no clue where the queer folks are. I would imagine not in construction...It's known that construction ranks low on any kind of diverse or vulnerable population. We're not a diverse group. We are very homogenous."*

Others questioned this assumption, wondering about the extent to which quantitative data is capturing the whole story:

> *"Knowing some queer men in the trades right now, I know for a fact that the only reason I know they're queer is because they know I'm queer. They're not out to their union. They're not out to their employer. They're not out to their coworkers. I don't know that they would feel comfortable [identifying as queer] on a survey, even if it was guaranteed anonymity...So in terms of data, I think it's a hard one to put a finger on, just because so many people are holding back."*

For the most part, informants' accounts suggest that both of these realities may be true. While 2S/LGBTQ+ people are almost certainly underrepresented in the construction trades compared to their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts, it is also likely that 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople are undercounted in the existing data. This has important implications for policy and program

interventions, gesturing at the need to focus not only on recruiting more 2S/LGBTQ+ people into the trades, but also ensuring safety, equity, and inclusion for those who are already in these careers.

In the following sections, we summarize key informants' perceptions about 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople's construction journeys, the barriers and supports available to them along the way, and ideas for fostering greater safety, inclusion, and equity within the sector. While our interviews undeniably exposed several challenges, they also shed light on the persistence of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople, as well as opportunities for progress and hope.

BREAKING GROUND: EXPERIENCES AND BARRIERS IN 2S/LGBTQ+ CONSTRUCTION JOURNEYS

This section summarizes key themes that emerged in interviews about the perceived experiences of 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the construction trades, with a particular focus on the challenges and barriers shaping these journeys. Moving chronologically, we begin with initial career exploration, followed by training and apprenticeship and experiences on-the-job. We close by highlighting some of the outcomes or effects of these experiences in 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople's careers.

Exploring trades careers

Key informants widely shared the belief that for a number of reasons, 2S/LGBTQ+ people – and particularly youth – are less likely to consider the trades as a viable career path in the first place.

Some pointed to issues of **visibility and representation,** highlighting how the lack of out 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople ends up perpetuating itself: *"When we're going out and trying to attract individuals into the trades, if they don't see themselves reflected...they're going to have a hard time seeing themselves doing that type of work."*

We also heard about how **stereotypes about who "fits" in the trades** can create or foreclose opportunities for 2S/LGBTQ+ jobseekers. This was most often discussed in relation to masculinity within construction, including dominant ideas about construction workers being tough, strong, and stoic. While interviewees saw this as something that may make the trades appear more welcoming to certain (i.e., more masculine-presenting) queer women, many felt that the opposite was often true for queer men:

> *"The industry has that stereotypically masculine appearance as a whole, and there is quite a good degree of toxic masculinity that exists...Knowing some queer men within the industry, that just doesn't really align with how they want to be treated or represented, or an atmosphere where they would feel comfortable working."*

Indeed, **toxic masculinity** was named by several key informants as playing a significant role in shaping 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals' decisions about whether or not to enter the trades: *"Maybe gay men don't want to work in the trades because of the fear of harassment, the toxic masculinity, the workplace culture...It's so entrenched."* In this context, construction may represent a space of exclusion for 2S/LGBTQ+ people – especially men – who do not adhere to traditional, hegemonic gender roles.

Those we spoke with widely shared the belief 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals may be more likely to perceive **construction as unsafe or unwelcoming** for them, informing decisions during the career exploration stage. Key informants speculated that 2S/LGBTQ+ people considering a trades career may worry about their safety on job sites, access to queer community and colleagues, or their ability to be their full and authentic selves at work. One interviewee noted that:

> *"The industry...already has a perception of being unwelcoming and very traditional...Even not knowing anything about construction, you just already assume that it's kind of not safe for those who are in marginalized groups."*

For this same informant, this was apparent in other youth outreach work in which they were involved: *"The toxic culture of the trades precedes it. So many of these kids are like, 'no, I don't want to be in the trades. I want someone to respect my pronouns, and respect my sexual orientation, and treat me like a human being.'"* For many key informants, these concerns were framed as unfortunate – especially given the income security that a trades career might offer to 2S/LGBTQ+ youth in particular – but ultimately reasonable and understandable.

When thinking about career exploration, key informants observed two key effects of the real and perceived culture of the construction trades among 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals. The first is that the **construction trades are not actively promoted** among 2S/LGBTQ+ youth. Rather than subject 2S/LGBTQ+ to an industry that may not be safe or accepting, those in a position to influence young peoples' career decisions may encourage them to consider other options. For instance, one key informant described a gay man they knew whose family explicitly dissuaded him from pursuing a trades career out of concern for his safety, despite many of these same family members working in the trades themselves. The second outcome is that 2S/LGBTQ+ people specifically **avoid or self-select out** of construction trades careers. This is clearly illustrated in the following example, where an interviewee shared the journey of a trans colleague who chose to leave his trades career (although later returned):

> *"He was really scared...to work in construction. That's what he likes, but he was really*
> *scared that he would not be accepted, and...about being judged as someone who is not*
> *competent in what he's doing because of who he is rather than just being accepted. So he*
> *decided not to go any further in construction, which was pretty sad."*

These findings offer valuable insights into the apparent underrepresentation of 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the construction trades. While many may be tempted to attribute this disparity to a lack of interest or skill among 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals, our data paint a more nuanced picture of what may be happening at the career exploration stage. 2S/LGBTQ+ people do not seem inherently less interested in the construction trades; rather, their career decisions are shaped by broader factors of exclusion, with many making informed decisions to pursue careers that are perceived to offer greater safety, inclusion, and community. At the same time, it is essential to note that many 2S/LGBTQ+ people *do* pursue careers as tradespeople, including via training and apprenticeship.

Pursuing training and apprenticeship

For many 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals, the challenges and complexities associated with considering a career in the construction trades persist through training and apprenticeship. One issue that emerged in interviews related to **instruction within trades training and education.** This included the absence of out queer instructors, as well as a lack of training or capacity-building related to 2S/LGBTQ+ competency and safety among instructors and administrators alike. We also heard about 2S/LGBTQ+ learners **lacking supportive networks** to draw on during their trades training or apprenticeships. Challenges also emerged about **finding safe and fulfilling apprenticeship opportunities** for 2S/LGBTQ+ learners, particularly in the context of stereotypes, prejudice, and bias:

> *"Maybe [employers] bring you on as a labourer, but they refuse to actually indenture you as*
> *an apprentice...[You're] being questioned about your capabilities depending on your sexual*
> *identity, and I think this is probably more prevalent amongst gay men...Being told that*
> *you're weak because of your identity."*

While key informants acknowledged the efforts of **sector-based programs** dedicated to addressing the barriers faced by equity-deserving apprentices, many suspected that these same programs may have unintended consequences for 2S/LGBTQ+ learners. For instance, programs that support women in training and apprenticeship often fail to acknowledge the effects of gender-based oppression extend to others besides cisgender women. As a result, these initiatives may end up excluding 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals, either intentionally (e.g., through eligibility criteria) or unintentionally (e.g., language used to describe the program, its participants, and the

barriers they may face). Key informants most often mentioned this in the context of trans and non-binary tradespeople, but the observation is also relevant for sexual minority individuals:

> *"A big barrier is that programs are designed to exclude people outside of the gender binary. When we're looking at women in trades programs…[trans men] wouldn't fit into that program, although that might be the best place for them to actually explore the trades in a safer space…Some of the programs that we've developed to help individuals explore the trades are actually exclusionary for [2S/LGBTQ+] individuals."*

As a result of these experiences, many 2S/LGBTQ+ students may choose to leave their trades training prematurely. For others, continuing to pursue this path may mean making the difficult choice to conceal their 2S/LGBTQ+ identity in order to protect their safety, wellbeing, or future career prospects.

Getting, maintaining, and advancing in trades jobs

While the underrepresentation of 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the construction trades was a central theme of our interviews, it is worth reiterating that many 2S/LGBTQ+ people already are considering, pursuing, or working in these roles. On-the-job, key informants had observed 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople endure risk, hardship, and injustice in a way that fundamentally differed from their cisgender, heterosexual peers.

To begin, just finding a job in the trades – especially with a safe and inclusive employer – was perceived as a major challenge. Several interviewees speculated that **discrimination during the hiring process** continued to pose a serious barrier, particularly for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals who may be unwilling or unable to conceal their identity to employers: *"Folks often have difficulties gaining employment depending on what their gender identity or presentation is…You get out into the field and you can't find employment because of how you look or who you are."* At the same time, identity-based discrimination can be easy to discount, and as a result, difficult to quantify or measure. As one key informant reflected:

> *"How many employers decide not to employ someone because of their sexuality? You will never get an answer to that. That is something I am always wondering. What is the real reason you didn't hire this person, you didn't keep that person, once you found out they are part of the LGBTQ community?"*

Even in the absence of explicit prejudice or bias during the hiring process, 2S/LGBTQ+ jobseekers may **struggle to find employment opportunities** that align with their own needs and values. In fact, 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople may expend considerable effort to evaluate a workplace's safety, culture, and overall fit, as one key informant illustrated: *"It comes down to…whether the environment is evaluated as being safe. I promise you that those of us in the queer community, we evaluate actions, words, nuances, policies, and the attitudes of employers."*

Upon finding employment, 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople encounter challenges related to **navigating how, with whom, and in what contexts they share their identity** at work. While this is a reality in any sector, key informants emphasized the uniqueness of construction given the reality of regularly working in different sites and with different people: *"It's like 50 subcontractors on a job site. You never know who's coming in."* This can have distinct implications for 2S/LGBTQ+ workers:

> *"In construction you're job hopping, and so there's that need to prove yourself and prove your worth and show that you're capable of doing that job every time you go into a job site. [In other jobs] you may really only have to deal with that once when you first start, and then you kind of get established. In construction…maybe you finally get to a point where you're comfortable and people accept you for who you are, and then that project wraps up…You're going in and perceiving every environment as potentially hostile, and then having to read that room and figure out, 'okay, do I have any allies here? Is there anybody I can actually be myself with?' It's a really hard thing to go through."*

Key informants also highlighted challenges related to workplace isolation among 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople. This can manifest in a number of ways, including a **lack of supportive peers, mentors, and supervisors.** At the leadership level, several interviewees had observed hesitation when it came to outwardly supporting 2S/LGBTQ+ employees or addressing issues where they do arise. Many attributed this to managers being *"so reluctant to do anything because they don't want to do the wrong thing; they don't want to say the wrong thing."* Relatedly, we also heard about the **absence of 2S/LGBTQ+ networks or resources** within the construction trades, making it difficult for individuals to access community or support.

On a day-to-day basis, those we spoke with all agreed that 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople were confronted with a series of negative workplace experiences. In many cases, this is a matter of ongoing exclusion that may not be explicit or intentional. Because the stereotypical construction worker is assumed to be cisgender and heterosexual, **2S/LGBTQ+ employees are often an afterthought.** As a result, 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople do not see themselves or their lives reflected, whether that be in benefit packages or appropriate washroom facilities.

Key informants also perceived **microaggressions** – comments or actions that may otherwise seem trivial can cause substantial harm – to be a common occurrence. This might include *"inappropriate comments or jokes"*: for instance, a colleague who claims to respect his trans co-worker, but proceeds to make derogatory comments about trans athletes at work. While several interviewees believed that prejudice or bias against 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople was rarely motivated by a desire to cause harm, the result was often harmful.

The frequent use of **homo-, bi-, or transphobic language** on job sites also emerged as a key challenge, from derogatory slurs to graffiti: *"The amount of homophobic rhetoric constantly thrown around on a construction site is ludicrous…It is just so toxic."* We heard about

discomfort from and discrimination by clients, as well as experiences of **bullying** and even **physical violence** on-the-job. Echoing research on women's experiences in the trades, key informants also described instances of **sexualization or sexual harassment** aimed at 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople.[6] Although some perceived 2S/LGBTQ+ people, particularly women, to be at a lower risk of this, others felt differently:

> *"I would be the only non-cis man on the site, and you could see the looks I would get, even if it was never spoken. I never strayed far away from my crew…[I would] try to keep close, at least [have] a buddy system or something, because I didn't want to be in some quiet spot by myself."*

Finally, a few interviewees had seen out 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople face **tokenism** in their roles. Some saw this as an opportunity to be taken advantage of: *"[2S/LGBTQ+ people] get into those spaces, we climb the ladders and then we start elevating others around us."* Despite this, tokenism was described as a frustrating and unfair experience, particularly when larger problems remain unaddressed:

> *"I would get shoulder tapped to go to the job at [the queer] couple's house, because [my employer] knew that maybe this would make them feel more comfortable… I kind of felt like it was tokenism, because here I am, the only queer person working for the company, and it's like, 'you go work for the gays.' At a certain point that becomes irritating…Why can't we all go work for the gays and treat them with respect and dignity?"*

Trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse tradespeople

While key informants described negative workplace experiences across the 2S/LGBTQ+ community, we frequently heard about the distinct inequities and challenges faced by gender minority tradespeople. For instance, trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals are disproportionately affected by a lack of inclusive washroom facilities on job sites, being misgendered by coworkers, and by the stress and scrutiny of pursuing social transition on-the-job. Some also felt that the changing nature of trades job sites and coworkers was especially difficult for gender minority individuals who may be forced to endure *"the whole trauma of having to go through your identity and stand up for yourself [again and again]."* These experiences were often attributed to confusion or misunderstanding among employers, especially in the case of individuals whose identities lay outside the gender binary. As a result, several interviewees had observed trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse tradespeople make the difficult choice to sustain transphobic treatment at work as a protective measure against further conflict.

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6   See, for example: Halpenny, C., Currie, S., Pakula, B., & Poitevin-DesRivières, C. (2021). "Can you bring down the systemic barriers in construction?": An exploratory study of barriers affecting women in trades initiatives & organizations. Ottawa: SRDC; Pakula, B., & Gurr, S. (2020). BC Centre for Women in the Trades: Final Evaluation Report. Submitted to the B.C. Federation of Labour. Vancouver: SRDC.

Taken together, these experiences can have considerable impacts on 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals' construction careers.

Outcomes and effects of trades experiences

Key informants identified several outcomes or effects associated with the overwhelmingly negative experiences they had witnessed 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople encounter. We heard about 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople habituated to the **anticipation of discrimination** at work. Many framed this as an ongoing sense of fear: *"fear of facing discrimination, fear of harassment, fear of being a problem, fear of not being able to...do your job."* Despite this, interviewees also suspected that 2S/LGBTQ+ people may regularly **avoid raising issues or concerns** where they do occur, perceiving all available courses of action to be unsafe or infeasible. While these are understandable reasons for not reporting instances of bias, harassment, or other forms of discrimination, this can end up sustaining employers' lack of knowledge, understanding, or action regarding 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion on the job site.

Perhaps the most commonly-mentioned result of 2S/LGBTQ+ peoples' experiences in the trades was a decision to **remain in the closet or conceal their identity** at work. One illustration would be those employed in the trades not identifying their sexual orientation in the CCHS cited earlier. While recognizing that not everyone has the option to conceal, key informants suspected that those who could and did make this "choice" did so for several reasons. Concerns about safety and wellbeing were paramount:

> *"I do know some individuals, they've come into the trades after transition[ing] and people don't know, and they're not willing to disclose that. They don't think it's safe...Even though they're proud of who they are, it's not safe to disclose."*

Another interviewee echoed this: *"Threats of violence, and because of that silencing, forced closeting. People don't come out at work. They can't."* Others – particularly those who are newer to the trades – may worry about potential career repercussions, including losing jobs or advancement opportunities. One participant spoke to this from personal experience:

> *"I stayed closeted as an apprentice because I wanted to make sure that I solidified my role within the company...I think that some...stay closeted their entire experience, whether they're a journeyperson or not. They don't feel comfortable being out at work because there are incidents that occur where they're being harassed to the point of being forced to leave the trade permanently."*

For others, non-disclosure represents a strategy to avoid unwanted emotional labour, especially for those who are regularly called on to "explain" their identities:

> *"I know some individuals who identify as they/them, and they don't necessarily feel comfortable saying that on job sites. They'll just kind of go with whatever side they get lumped into…[Their employer] is like, 'okay, we've hired another woman'…They won't necessarily speak up and be like, 'oh, actually my pronouns are they/them,' because then that sparks the whole conversation that may not be met with friendliness…'What are you talking about, you're a woman,' these are the comments that come up. It's just one more thing for them to deal with."*

In the constant face of "just one more thing to deal with," 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople may also risk serious **mental health consequences.** Key informants widely described the compounding mental health effects associated with navigating microaggressions, identity disclosure, and outright discrimination:

> *"There's still a very toxic culture whe[n] it comes to…queer people in the industry. There is a lot of language and behaviour in the industry that is kind of taken as status quo that shouldn't be…I don't think people recognize how much that [affects] people that are in that community, whether they're out or not. That really has a detrimental effect on your mental health…I know there are still situations where people just don't feel comfortable being themselves at work. That takes a mental toll, and it's mentally taxing."*

We heard about the mental health toll that results from workplace isolation, bullying, and making decisions seen to be *"less mentally taxing"*: for instance, enduring ongoing misgendering by colleagues. In this context – and given the absence of apparent solutions or repercussions – 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople are required to demonstrate resilience that is simply not expected of their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts. As one interviewee put it*, "I think they're incredibly tough and resilient people. I don't think they should have to be."*

Results from the survey data support these findings, and show that overall, sexual minority respondents report poorer physical and mental health compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Fully 16.1 per cent of sexual minority women reported being in fair or poor health compared to just 8.0 per cent of heterosexual women. In addition, 7.0 per cent of sexual minority men reported fair or poor health compared to 6.5 per cent of heterosexual men (Table 4). Sexual minority respondents also reported significantly lower rates of life satisfaction. Specifically, heterosexual men were more likely to report being very satisfied or satisfied with their life, followed by heterosexual women, sexual minority men, and sexual minority women. Regarding stress, sexual minority respondents were generally more likely to report higher work stress levels than their heterosexual counterparts. They were also more likely to report that life was quite a bit stressful or extremely stressful (Table 6).

Table 4   Physical and mental health, by sexual orientation and sex

	Heterosexual men	Heterosexual women	Sexual minority men	Sexual minority women
General health†				
Fair & poor	6.5%	8.0%	7.0%	16.1%
Excellent, very good, & good	93.5%	92.0%	93.0%	83.9%
Mental health†				
Fair & poor	4.8%	6.5%	12.8%	15.9%
Excellent, very good, & good	95.2%	93.5%	87.2%	84.1%

Table 5   Life and job satisfaction, by sexual orientation and sex

	Heterosexual men	Heterosexual women	Sexual minority men	Sexual minority women
Life satisfaction†				
Very satisfied	37.6%	35.8%	29.4%	25.6%
Satisfied	56.6%	57.0%	58.4%	64.0%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	4.1%	4.9%	7.7%	5.0%
Dissatisfied	1.5%	2.0%	3.7%	4.3%
Very dissatisfied	0.2%	0.3%	0.8%	1.0%
Job satisfaction†				
Very satisfied, satisfied, and neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	85.5%	81.8%	82.5%	76.0%

† **Note**: Shows a statistically significant difference (at the 5 per cent level) using either a t-test or a chi-squared test.

Table 6   Stress, by sexual orientation and sex

	Heterosexual men	Heterosexual women	Sexual minority men	Sexual minority women
Work stress†				
Not at all stressful	10.3%	11.0%	9.4%	7.5%
Not very stressful	21.5%	22.4%	27.1%	20.3%
A bit stressful	45.2%	43.5%	34.2%	40.7%
Quite a bit stressful	19.2%	17.8%	24.1%	24.7%
Extremely stressful	3.7%	5.3%	5.3%	6.8%
Life stress†				
Not at all stressful	10.4%	7.9%	9.7%	3.8%
Not very stressful	22.7%	20.0%	22.3%	19.2%
A bit stressful	45.7%	47.0%	41.1%	46.2%
Quite a bit stressful	18.2%	21.1%	24.7%	25.1%
Extremely stressful	3.0%	4.0%	2.2%	5.7%

† **Note**: Shows a statistically significant difference (at the 5 per cent level) using either a t-test or a chi-squared test.

Key informants framed mental health consequences as closely connected to negative effects on **workplace productivity and performance.** They observed 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople working in fear, silence, and isolation, and feeling disconnected from their company as a result. Relatedly, many also perceived poorer outcomes among 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals with regards to **career progression.** This was linked to several factors. Some highlighted issues around stereotypes as to what a "good" or "successful" tradesperson looks like, with 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople being undermined or undervalued. Many challenged these stereotypes, suggesting that 2S/LGBTQ+ tradesworkers were as skilled – if not more so – than their non-2S/LGBTQ+ counterparts, putting this down to the constant need to prove their capabilities. Finally, we heard about 2S/LGBTQ+ people having fewer opportunities to gain appropriate experience in their roles (e.g., through overtime shifts, extra hours, etc.), which is a crucial part of advancement in trades jobs. Key informants had observed a similar trend across several equity-deserving populations pursuing apprenticeships:

"What happens to people is they get put on inventory or garbage; they don't actually get trained. We hear about it a lot from women, people of colour, and Indigenous folks. When we look at the quality of their training because of their identities, I think there needs to be some better metrics [about that] as they go through their apprenticeship."

In our quantitative analysis, all sexual minority respondent groups were found to have **significantly lower median annual income** than heterosexual men, with particularly large earnings differences for subgroups of sexual minority respondents. Both sexual minority men and women earned less than heterosexual men, with the differences being most pronounced for sexual minority women. Specifically, median annual personal income for heterosexual men was the highest among all four groups at $77,500, while heterosexual women had a median income of $65,680. Sexual minority men and sexual minority women had lower median incomes, at $58,420 and $56,990, respectively.

Regarding **full-time work status,** Table 7 shows that heterosexual men were most likely to work full-time of all groups, at 95.6 per cent. This was followed by sexual minority men (91.5 per cent), sexual minority women (87.5 per cent), and heterosexual women (79.6 per cent).

Finally, the results indicate that when it comes to working hours, both heterosexual and sexual minority men tend to work 50 hours or more per week. In contrast, heterosexual and sexual minority women are **less likely to work the same number of hours.**
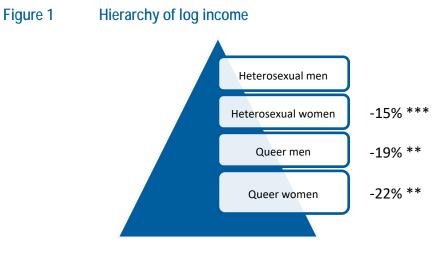
In Figure 1, we estimate the correlation between some labour market outcomes and sexual orientation or sex. Our regression estimates revealed a difference in personal annual income between groups of individuals based on their sexual orientation or sex, even after accounting for demographic (e.g., age) and socioeconomic characteristics as well as health. Specifically, compared to heterosexual men, heterosexual women had an annual personal income $8,257 lower on average. Sexual minority men and women had even lower annual personal incomes ($9,904 and $10,507 lower, respectively) than heterosexual men. Figure 1 shows the ranking of the final regression model using log of annual personal income as the outcome, comparing sexual minority individuals to heterosexual men. Income gaps are presented as percentages, ranging from 19 per cent for sexual minority men to 22 per cent for sexual minority women.

Table 8 shows that heterosexual women had significantly lower full-time work status than heterosexual men. Specifically, after controlling for other factors in the regression analysis, heterosexual women were 3.6 percentage points less likely to work full-time than heterosexual men. However, the analysis also revealed that there was no significant difference in full-time work status between sexual minority men and heterosexual men, nor between sexual minority women and heterosexual men.

Table 7 Employment characteristics, by sexual orientation and sex

	Heterosexual men	Heterosexual women	Sexual minority men	Sexual minority women
Annual personal income (median) †				
$	77,500	65,680	58,420	56,990
Full time†				
Yes	95.6%	79.6%	91.5%	87.5%
No	4.4%	20.4%	8.5%	12.5%
Self-employed				
Yes	16.5%	15.0%	15.3%	8.1%
No	83.5%	85.0%	84.7%	91.9%
Hours of work†				
0 to 34 hours	7.0%	27.4%	13.8%	20.7%
35 to 49 hours	59.8%	53.9%	53.5%	62.3%
50+ hours	33.2%	18.7%	32.7%	16.9%

† **Note**: Shows a statistically significant difference (5 per cent level) using either a t-test or a chi-squared test.

Figure 1   Hierarchy of log income

Note: Asterisks denote statistically significant differences: *** p<0.01.

Table 8   Relationship between full-time working status and sexual orientation/sex

Model	Baseline	Include demographics	Include education	Include health
Heterosexual men (Reference category)				
Heterosexual women	-0.160***	-0.156***	-0.0361***	-0.0360***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Sexual minority men	-0.0404	-0.0328	-0.00273	-0.00268
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Sexual minority women	-0.0803*	-0.0664*	0.0103	0.0111
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.029)	(0.029)

Notes: Coefficients denote the size and direction of independent relationships with full-time employment status relative to the reference category (hence no coefficients appear on the first row). Standard errors are in parentheses. Asterisks denote statistical significance: *** p<0.01.

Correspondingly, interviewees perceived **poor retention** of 2S/LGBTQ+ – particularly trans and gender-diverse – individuals in the construction trades as a pressing challenge:

> *"Once [2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople get confronted with reality, how many are not happy, not comfortable, depressed, because of the tension, the toxicity at the place they're working? How many people just quit? That is something we should work on. If we find out that 75% of people quit because of the reality of the workplace, that's a problem. I do believe that's what's happening, I do believe that's the case. Either you quit or you go back to the closet. Both of these are unacceptable to me."*

High rates of attrition were characterized as an unfortunate, yet understandable reality given the context of the construction sector:

> *"I've talked to individuals that have left the trades [and have said], 'I absolutely loved my job but I was tired of dealing with that'…I wish they stayed because they're really great workers, but I also completely understand where they're coming from. They shouldn't have to deal with that every day."*

In addition to 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals leaving the trades as a result of negative experiences or mistreatment, some key informants felt that queer, trans, and gender-diverse tradespeople were more likely than their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts to be **laid off,** especially in times of economic downtown. As one interviewee shared, *"if they don't fit the traditional mold of what a construction worker is, they get laid off under shortage of work."* This example illustrates the distinct forms of disadvantage faced by 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople in their roles, even if they may not be immediately perceptible or enforceable.[7]

KEY FACTORS SHAPING THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Having provided an overview of the key barriers and challenges characterizing 2S/LGBTQ+ peoples' careers in the construction trades, this section highlights some of the reasons for these negative experiences of 2S/LGBTQ+ working in the trades. Critically, key informants emphasized that negative circumstances did not stem from 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople themselves; rather, it's *"the circumstances that they're put in within construction that can…be very difficult."*

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[7]   See, for example: Gyarmati, D., Pakula, B., Nguyen, C., & Leonard, D. (2017). Enhancing Retention and Advancement of Women in Trades in British Columbia: Final Report. Ottawa: SRDC.

Workplace factors

Key informants pointed to a number of workplace-specific factors that they felt fundamentally shaped the experiences of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople in the construction sector. For instance, several perceived **geography and associated political climates** to play an important role in determining the level of 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion and acceptance at a workplace: *"I think a lot of it depends on where in the country they're working...some employers are doing a really good job at being more inclusive, and some parts of the country are a little more progressive than others."*

We used the available survey data to gain some insights into the geographic location of sexual minorities in the trades. There were differences in geographic locations by sexual orientation and sex. Compared with their heterosexual counterparts, sexual minority tradespeople were consistently more likely to live in urban, higher-density areas, such as Vancouver or Montreal.

Beyond geography, when asked about other workplace factors, key informants pointed to the influential role of **leadership** in shaping 2S/LGBTQ+ workers' experiences and broader workplace cultures:

> *"I actually think that the experience of those in the [2S/LGBTQ+] community is very much dependent on their team and the person that they report to. Unfortunately...it's not consistent...If you have a great leader who's open, who's bought in and doesn't really care too much about anything other than you and you being well and you doing the job, I think you have a different experience than somebody who's still trying to understand it...I think that peoples'... manager is the determining factor of how well somebody feels valued or included."*

This was echoed by other interviewees, who further acknowledged that for the most part, leadership roles within the construction trades have and continue to be held overwhelmingly by cisgender, heterosexual men.

The role of **unions** also came up frequently in our conversations, with interviewees sharing mixed opinions about the extent to which these stakeholders are adequately supporting equity for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals. While some saw trades unions as essential in protecting 2S/LGBTQ+ members from identity-based discrimination and supporting fairness more broadly, others felt that an emphasis on equality and fairness (rather than equity) resulted in 2S/LGBTQ+ identities being made invisible in trades contexts. In other words, they perceived that unions' objectives to treat all members the same may result in the distinct needs and disadvantages of 2S/LGBTQ+ members being overlooked.

Table 9   Geographic characteristics, by sexual orientation and sex

	Heterosexual men	Heterosexual women	Sexual minority men	Sexual minority women
Area of residence†				
Population centre	76.5%	74.9%	80.6%	85.7%
Rural area	23.5%	25.1%	19.4%	14.3%
Central Metropolitan Area (CMA) of residence†				
No CMA assigned	29.7%	30.6%	19.4%	23.9%
Montreal	7.7%	6.5%	7.4%	8.5%
Toronto	10.5%	10.6%	5.7%	7.0%
Vancouver	4.7%	4.3%	10.4%	10.1%
Others	47.5%	48.0%	57.1%	50.4%
Province of residence†				
Atlantic region & territories	6.9%	5.8%	6.9%	6.0%
Quebec	22.5%	21.2%	24.9%	21.8%
Ontario	35.1%	37.5%	23.8%	29.0%
Manitoba & Saskatchewan	7.4%	6.9%	8.4%	7.1%
Alberta	15.1%	16.3%	18.1%	21.1%
British Columbia	12.9%	12.3%	17.9%	15%

† **Note**: Shows a statistically significant difference (5 per cent level) using either a t-test or a chi-squared test.

"One of the guys:" Systems of disadvantage, power, and oppression

In addition to workplace-specific factors, we heard about the ways in which systems of power and oppression significantly affected 2S/LGBTQ+ peoples' careers in trades. For instance,

transphobia was a prominent theme in interviews, with many key informants sharing the perception that trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse tradespeople have disproportionately negative experiences. Several interviewees attributed this to the way gender is widely understood within the sector: *"People are having a really hard time wrapping their head around genders outside of the binary, and I think that non-binary and trans individuals face a disproportionate amount of disrespect."*

In terms of sexuality, our interviews also suggest that there is currently **little discussion of identities beyond heterosexual/gay/lesbian** within the trades. Referencing bisexual tradeswomen in particular, one interviewee felt that *"they kind of get put in the same category as gay women."* This points to the ongoing erasure of certain sexual minority identities (e.g., bisexual, asexual, pansexual, etc.), a trend documented in the broader literature on 2S/LGBTQ+ issues and identities.

Our interviews signal ways in which 2S/LGBTQ+ peoples' experiences in the trades are deeply influenced by **hegemonic gender norms as well as patriarchal and sexist attitudes.** For example, despite the previously-mentioned prevalence of transphobia, we also heard about the perceived relative privilege of being seen as *"one of the guys"* as a transmasculine tradesperson. Relatedly, interviewees frequently described sexual minority men as more disadvantaged than sexual minority women within the trades. This was seen as closely connected to how masculinity is heralded within the construction sector. Where queer men might be more likely to be seen as effeminate (and therefore somehow "at odds" with a trades career), queer women who are more masculine-presenting may align more closely with stereotypes about who tradespeople "should" be. Several key informants saw sexual minority women as having an advantage not only over sexual minority men in the trades, but also heterosexual women: *"Especially if you are a masculine [queer] woman, you could fit in the trades a lot better than a straight woman. So there are more opportunities because you sort of get to be one of the guys."* One participant described their own experience of this, pointing clearly to the implications of this reality:

> *"I've had the privilege of being invited to go fishing, to golf tournaments, into all those networking things that happen within the skilled trades because I fit more in that stereotypical presentation...I've definitely heard feedback from many people that they don't get those same kind of invitations and acceptance and inclusion, which is a way of informally accessing promotions within the industry and finding out about opportunities and networking with people in positions of power."*

The relative privilege afforded to certain 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades may be read optimistically, even as a sign of progress. However, our interviews highlight the importance of acknowledging why some sexual or gender minority individuals experience greater acceptance or inclusion than others. When masculine-presenting 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople are treated better as a result of being seen as "one of the guys," this speaks less to shifts in regressive attitudes and behaviours than it does the **persistent devaluation of femininity and difference** within the

construction sector and society-at-large. To illustrate, some interviewees suggested that sexual minority women may have a comparative advantage in the trades due to perceptions that they are less likely to take parental leave and face less risk of sexual harassment or advancement from colleagues. These examples point to an ongoing unwillingness among construction employers to pursue changes that would make their workplace more inclusive or accepting to those other than cisgender, heterosexual men. This perspective also risks overlooking the challenges that masculine-presenting 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople do continue to face in their roles. For instance, one interviewee spoke to the hypersexualization of sexual minority women and their partners by colleagues, describing it as *"still harassment, but in a different way."*

Looking more broadly, many key informants felt that **various systems of power and oppression** – including but not limited to cisheterosexism, racism, and ableism – operated through similar mechanisms, and tended to produce similar results for different groups of equity-deserving tradespeople. As such, the need to address these structures simultaneously was framed as a question of justice and allyship: *"We've got to do this for the sake of everybody who is feeling unsafe at work."* Relatedly, interviewees were eager to highlight the ways in which these systems intersect and interact with one another to produce distinct – and often disproportionately-negative – outcomes for multiply-marginalized tradespeople. Key informants widely shared the belief that racialized 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople faced amplified barriers:

> *"A lot of people of colour I know who are queer tradespeople don't come out because it just raises too many questions. Where people already feel like they're dealing with so much isolation in the trades as a person of colour, why would you add that in as well?"*

Describing the compounding nature of disadvantage, another interviewee summarized: *"The more you look at different layers – the more identities and lived experiences you add to it, I think there's more challenges."*

Culture of construction: "Everything says you don't belong"

Interviewees suggested that the dominant culture of construction workplaces and the sector more broadly plays a major role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople. Overall, there was a widespread sense that construction was **behind other industries when it came to inclusion and equity,** both for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals and more generally. As one interviewee put it, *"it's a little bit old school...the industry is just a little bit out of touch."* While many were eager to acknowledge the ongoing and necessary commitment of certain sector stakeholders in advancing equity and inclusion within construction, they equally highlighted how much more work remained, which could feel overwhelming: *"There's still a lot of work to be done there, and because it's constantly changing, it's really tough...It's not impossible, but it becomes a lot more complicated to change an entire industry's culture. You start one job site at a time or one contact at a time."*

Despite ongoing efforts to diversify the sector, interviewees also noted that demographically, the construction sector continues to consist primarily of white, cisgender, heterosexual men. As a result, **the industry is poorly-equipped to support employees who fall outside this norm,** including but not limited to women, racialized people, and 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals: as one interviewee summarized, *"everything you do says you don't belong here."* Beyond this sense of being an afterthought, others had observed 2S/LGBTQ+ people and issues be received with confusion and even skepticism. One key informant spoke to this in detail, as well as the implications for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople themselves:

> *"It's basically as if you're not a straight white man and you're coming into construction, you're almost seen as a liability. It's an unfortunate thing to be perceived that way because you're just trying to come in and do a job, but it immediately becomes…'okay, we've got [an LGBTQ person], what problems is that going to create?' That's how they perceive you, and I think individuals in those groups are very aware of that. They carry that. You come in and you feel like you're coming into a hostile place already. You've already got to watch your back because of your identity. A lot of that just comes down to the fact that there are no policies and procedures already in place…Queer folks will know when they get there that this has not been thought through before."*

As a result of this, the onus overwhelmingly falls on 2S/LGBTQ+ and otherwise-marginalized tradespeople to "prove" their value and fit, despite the industry not having done the work to welcome them there in the first place.

Conversations with key informants also revealed the ways in which traditional ways of working within the construction sector may be contributing to negative experiences and exclusion for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople. As previously mentioned, the sector's **contract-based nature** can make it more challenging to establish a sense of trust and community among workers, with 2S/LGBTQ+ workers needing to navigate disclosure on an ongoing basis and *"prove [them]self over and over again."* Others pointed to a culture of **non-reporting in cases of harassment or discrimination** – *"if you do report it typically puts a target on your back"* – as well as a lack of enforcement where these issues are brought forward.

Some saw the sector's **lack of focus on psychological and emotional safety** – despite stronger concerns with physical wellbeing – as helping perpetuate several of these challenges. Relatedly, interviewees perceived a lack of openness on construction job sites, lending to workplaces where conversations about personal lives are not necessarily well-received. This can further contribute to a culture of non-disclosure, and a perception that one's gender, sexuality, or any other identity *"doesn't matter as long as you're good at your job."* Indeed, several interviewees perceived a trend where **discussions about identity and inclusion were deemed inappropriate or irrelevant** because workers' skills or capacity were the primary concern. However, this message can disregard the significant role identity plays in individuals' lives, as well as the tangible role gender and sexuality have in shaping peoples' experiences in the trades and more broadly.

One key informant we spoke with patently challenged this perspective, suggesting that a company's explicit commitment to openness and inclusion actually *supports* an environment where skills and competencies can be valued.

Notably, key informants attributed the culture of the construction sector (and its implications for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople) not to malice, but a lack of awareness, knowledge, and representation. Despite this, the consequences for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople were a dominant theme in our discussions.

Lack of appropriate, relevant, population-specific supports

Key informants identified the absence of population-specific supports and services as another key factor contributing to 2S/LGBTQ+ peoples' experiences in the construction trades. While initiatives related to equity, diversity, and inclusion have become increasingly prevalent in the construction trades landscape, **those targeted specifically to 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals remain sparse.** As a result, 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople may experience reduced access to relevant and appropriate supports in their roles, including at points their careers where this support may be most valuable.

Where the few 2S/LGBTQ+ initiatives do exist within the sector, interviewees mentioned concerns about their **stability and sustainability**. As one interviewee noted, *"[2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion] work is dependent on individual people in specific positions. It's scary because it's so unstable. If I were gone, I don't think this work would continue."* Others highlighted **concerns about safety and disclosure** when accessing population-specific supports and resources, which further limits 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals' ability to benefit from such programming. Lower engagement in sector-based EDI programming among 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals may also be attributable to the visibility and exposure that often comes with these programs, especially those focused on leadership. As one interviewee noted, *"if you don't feel safe at work, why would you want to move into a leadership role?"* As such, initiatives targeting 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople may unintentionally risk outing participants who may not wish to or feel safe disclosing their identity at work.

While existing initiatives may struggle to reach and support 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the construction sector, interviewees identified ongoing barriers to developing and implementing programs that better address these needs. As mentioned previously, a **culture of fairness** (rather than equity) meant that some interviewees had faced challenges convincing sector stakeholders that 2S/LGBTQ+-focused programming was not *"asking for anything special for anybody,"* but a recognition that *"everybody deserves respect and dignity."* We also heard about the challenges of advancing 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion in a sector that also perpetuates exclusion for women, Indigenous and racialized people, and other equity-deserving groups. In this context,

some interviewees felt that EDI work within the construction trades reflected **a need to compete for resources and rights.** As an example of this, one interviewee spoke to some of the tensions they had observed within efforts to support both women and 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in construction:

> *"When you see your rights as pie, when you have a slice, people are like, 'you're taking out of my pie!' I'm like, 'it's not a pie, and there should be enough pie for everyone.' I feel like cisgender, heterosexual women partake in this kind of violence against queers because they are worried their own rights will be taken away. It's a scarcity model."*

This "rights as pie" mentality was echoed by other interviewees, who spoke to the shared aims of various equity-deserving groups, yet the practical challenges of pursuing these aims collectively given the sector's resistance to change. This "win-lose" mentality in EDI work was clearly articulated by another interviewee:

> *"We are constantly in this power struggle and trying to convince people that diversity does not mean that you take from one and give it to others. There is enough for everybody, but it is a constant battle. Even from a benefits perspective, for us to be fully inclusive in our benefits....there is a common thought...that we could pay for [access to gender-affirming care] but then where do we have to cut from? Why do we do that? We pit all these different groups against each other. The barrier is that mentality that diversity and inclusion means it's a win-lose situation. That somebody has to give something up to make room for somebody else."*

Scarcity emerged as a predominant theme in conversations with key informants about the availability of existing supports. Existing efforts were described as "inconsistent" or "scattered." Some characterized supports as a *"neglected"* area from an industry perspective, with key informants working in federal contexts saying they were not aware of broader industry-wide initiatives with an intentional focus on 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople.

> *"What I've seen is that 2SLGBTQI people are very much an afterthought...There hasn't even really been a desire to address queer and trans people. I think it comes from not knowing and thinking that it's a lot of work to try and figure this out. There's a more binary focus – let's focus on women, Indigenous people. I feel like 2SLGBTQI tradespeople are very much an afterthought."*

The quote above reflects closely related comments from other key informants about the lack of company-level data collection to permit the current state of both needs and supports to be assessed. Where progress towards inclusion had been observed, key informants referenced individual examples undertaken by specific companies or unions and connected to overarching EDI initiatives in the sector. We heard such good examples are the exception, not the rule, and that they typically are not supported or facilitated by a centralized or structured effort: *"There's no intention behind any contact, if that makes sense...it's not organized...If it is, it's haphazardly."*

Nearly all of the key informants offered their perceptions regarding the reasons for the current support landscape. These discussions centered around key common themes, providing further context to understanding what they felt were limited existing supports for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople in Canada. We describe these briefly below as they shed light on potential barriers to expanding existing initiatives and practices, or implementing new ones.

The consistent sentiment expressed in the interviews was that "not enough" was being done for queer and trans folks in the trades. While recounting examples of supports, interviewees emphasized how these tended to be led by and dependent upon the presence of out queer tradespeople who were initiating programs and willing to take the work forward, in various spaces. In many cases, we heard this work was done *"off the side of [people's] desks"* without dedicated resources. In some cases, simply being an out queer tradesperson, spurring conversations with others about queer and trans inclusion within their organizations, was perceived as championing 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople: *"Some of it might look revolutionary, it's really not…it's just being a person in this space."*

Common and interconnected themes surrounding reasons for the current landscape included: lack of funding and resources, perceptions that the work was too challenging, lack of leadership, and the overarching context of other EDI initiatives in the sector. As one interviewee explained:

> *"Within organizations, there are still barriers within leadership. There are some incredible people, but I think there's still just that hesitancy or that reluctance. Sometimes it's a lack of resources. You're dealing with all of these things, where EDI becomes like a nice to have. Job safety may be a priority because we don't want people to get electrocuted or fall off things, but EDI is, oh we'll get to it. My one wish would be that EDI is integrated into every policy and everything we do. But it's how resources are allocated, there isn't enough for this… in my opinion, it should be integrated."*

There was a consensus among the interviewees that there were persistent barriers to various types of EDI work in the trades where solutions were hard to get moving, leadership often lacked the knowledge or comfort level on how to tackle issues of diversity and inclusion, and there were other competing resource priorities that overshadowed equity considerations. As a result, we heard that existing initiatives tended to focus on the low hanging fruit or specific populations that were mandated or incentivized as an area of focus:

> *"There is a perception that it would be a really difficult or challenging area to focus on in the industry. The tradeswomen programs came up more organically. The government funding puts a lot of focus on women and Indigenous people. I think there's just the comfort level of using the language, and talking about it. It's sort of driven by the government and their priorities for funding. That's sort of where the wind blew and that's where we've been going. I think there's also a comfort level of dealing with these issues. Being a leader, sometimes you feel frozen, like what do I do, what should I do?"*

In the case of women's programming, for example, several interviewees recounted barriers they had witnessed over the years to implementing more systemic changes in the industry to facilitate the inclusion, retention, and promotion of tradeswomen, among other groups. There was a sense that *"even to get the WIT programs going, women were singled out."* Several interviewees referenced the male-dominant culture of the trades, including those in positions of power, who they felt either did not understand the challenges some groups faced or were resistant to change: *"I am going to boldly say that undoubtedly one of those barriers comes down to the attitudes of those who have traditionally held power and privilege. They can be a resistant bunch."*

Some also pointed out that although more EDI work was in fact taking place across the industry, it tended to be supported by a patchwork of group-specific supports and funding envelopes. While this increased attention to EDI may give the impression that the needs of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople will inevitably or automatically be covered within general diversity and inclusion training and programming initiatives, some warned that the lack of more systemic and intersectional approaches to equity issues could risk perpetuating other forms of exclusion. As an example of this, several key informants – while emphasizing the clear need for and value of women in trades initiatives – equally felt that it could be *"hard to navigate those supports because a lot of the official supports are [for] women."*

Absence of data and knowledge

While similar themes emerged across the interviews we conducted, key informants widely acknowledged that they were relying primarily on their own perceptions and experiences – as well as anecdotes shared by others – in relaying their perspectives. As mentioned previously, interviewees widely highlighted the **lack of sector-based data about 2S/LGBTQ+ issues, individuals, and outcomes.** This was attributed to several factors, including ongoing discomfort collecting this information, concerns about privacy and safety among individuals whose data would be collected, a lack of mandatory data collection requirements or accountability procedures, and concerns about the legality of seeking this information from employees. Where data about 2S/LGBTQ+ do exist, interviewees raised questions about its validity. Many felt that 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople may be hesitant to disclose their identity on a survey and be undercounted as a result.

The absence of reliable, high-quality data about 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople and their experiences may have several important implications, including for the **shaping of policy and program responses.** For instance, if the actual number of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople is higher than current estimates suggest, priority might shift from recruiting 2S/LGBTQ+ apprentices to supporting those who are already in these roles. More generally, interviewees were clear that without a clear understanding of the problem, advancing solutions would remain a challenge: *"We can't do better with what we don't know, and right now there's a lot we don't know."* In other words, the

absence of data (and therefore knowledge) might legitimize inaction when it comes to promoting 2S/LGBTQ+ equity and inclusion within the construction trades.

Visibility, representation, and cycles of exclusion

As mentioned earlier on, several key informants felt that 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals were less likely than their non-2S/LGBTQ+ to pursue and remain in trades careers. The absence of out 2S/LGBTQ+ people in construction may contribute to a **vicious cycle where these problems continue to be reinforced** contributing to a perpetuation of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople's experiences**.** Concerns about safety, acceptance, and wellbeing clearly justify 2S/LGBTQ+ people self-selecting out of or leaving trades careers, or not disclosing if they do pursue these roles.

However, these tendencies may sustain the lack of 2S/LGBTQ+ representation and visibility within the sector. This can result in ongoing barriers to change and progress:

> *"Fear, intimidation, probably not completing apprenticeships and getting employment in the industry…There's probably a lot of turnover. Just the industry not changing and remaining the same and it looking the same because people are leaving and society isn't being represented…The industry remains unchanged. The culture remains unchanged."*

With this in mind, the following section considers the current landscape of supports and services for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople in Canada.

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS: MAPPING EXISTING SUPPORTS

In interviews, we asked key informants to describe current practices, supports, or initiatives that exist for 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades, either in their organization or in the industry more broadly. These could be formal or informal including, for instance: training or mentorship, on-the-job supports, and human resource policies. We first present broader factors supportive to 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople, such as supportive colleagues, then move on to describe more formal supports. Formal supports include: (a) initiatives and supports promoting equity, diversity, and Inclusion in the trades; (b) education and training programs; (c) company efforts to support 2S/LGBTQ+ workers, and (d) social and community networks. This presentation is not exhaustive nor meant to be prescriptive and its scope is high level, not capturing the effectiveness of different supports. Many of the initiatives are not 2S/LGBTQ+ specific, but we include several noted to contribute to greater safety and acceptance for gender and sexual minority people working in the trades.

People power: supportive colleagues, strong leaders, and the role of visibility for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople

Broad factors identified as supportive to 2S/LGBTQ+ people working in the trades centred around the power of supportive individuals who created safe and inclusive environments. Three common themes emerged in interviews: supportive colleagues, strong and supportive leadership, and the role of out tradespeople in facilitating safety.

Supportive colleagues were identified as a key factor in creating a more inclusive environment for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the trades. Informants noted that having colleagues who were willing to raise issues and concerns, and who encouraged others to do the same, was crucial to fostering inclusive environments on and beyond the worksite:

> *"I've witnessed times where people have been incredibly supportive…We had almost 600 people at our women's conference last month. When a trans woman shared her story, you could just see the support in that room. And so, I think the fact that we have spaces where someone can not only feel comfortable sharing their story, but have sharing of that story be a positive experience as well."*

Having allies and supportive people in the trades was identified as a key factor in creating a sense of safety and belonging for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals. For instance, interviewees provided examples of specific situations where someone was willing to speak up and intervene in response to inappropriate or discriminatory comments or behaviours.

> *"I think there are examples of people who have stood up for each other…they are willing to say, 'that's not cool, we don't do that here.' Although everyone's kind of in a different spot, there is truly a willingness to learn and to try to understand… But I think that's something to say because 10 years ago, they wouldn't have tried, they wouldn't have cared, so I think there's this openness that we're experiencing now that we haven't had before."*

Strong and supportive leadership was identified as another factor in creating more inclusive environments for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the trades. Informants described how leaders who were vocal about their commitment to inclusion – whether on job sites or at the company level – helped establish and maintain clear expectations around workplace culture, emphasizing that the responsibility for creating an inclusive environment *"starts at the top."* One company described how this commitment informed not only expectations of current employees, but also decisions around hiring:

> *"But what we have done well at [our company] is establish that expectation that we are looking to you to be that leader, regardless of whether you want to be or not. If you want to work here, that's the expectation of you. There are things that are non-negotiables, how we treat people, how we treat each other, in those values. If you don't fit, you will literally self-select [out]."*

At the same time, strong and active leadership may take the form of small actions that signal safety and inclusion to others. Specific examples we heard about included business managers and supervisors including pronouns in their email signatures, posting an inclusion statement on a company website, and explicitly discussing equity and inclusion in workplace contexts:

> *"I've seen some business managers start to put their pronouns in their email signature, and some of them have a link to explain why that's important. They're starting to be champions and others see it. It sets that tone. It also lends to people bringing more ideas, like 'let's participate in the Pride parade.' It's an opening."*

Finally, key informants identified the **presence of "out" tradespeople** as a key supportive factor for other 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople who may or may not be out themselves at work. Those who were committed to being out and visibly queer were seen as helping to challenge the narrative that *"your identity doesn't matter, just your skills do."* Furthermore, informants noted that having 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in positions of relative power who were willing to make waves for others and who provided informal mentorship was crucial in not only fostering a safe space, but supporting industry-wide changes: *"I think this trickles down into supports, into initiatives, into all sorts of things. That's where practices, supports, and initiatives can grow."*

The presence of tradespeople who were out and visible was seen as directly linked to the availability and accessibility of formal and informal mentorship. A few key informants who were out tradespeople themselves described being frequently sought out by apprentices, colleagues, and managers for mentorship, advice, and support. They felt that being openly out in the industry was itself an important way of creating a safe space as well as an opening for others to both share and to ask questions around diversity. We also heard several examples of how mentorship received by queer and trans tradespeople had supported retention and positively affected career trajectories. For instance, several of our key informants who were themselves part of the 2S/LGBTQ+ community had described building meaningful and supportive relationships with other 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople, including those who may not be out or be just starting on their careers.

Initiatives and supports promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the trades

Government incentives and mandates include federal government financial incentives to hire first-year apprentices (e.g., ESDC's Apprenticeship Service, quoted at $10K for someone from an equity-deserving group). We heard unionized trades are required to take SkillPlan courses on EDI and mentorship to be eligible. These types of incentives for hiring from equity-deserving groups, along with mandating EDI focused training and education as a prerequisite for accessing them, were identified as indirectly supporting queer and trans tradespeople through greater attention to diversity and inclusion in the industry. In general, these types of external incentives

and requirements can be helpful to spur change in individual companies (e.g., clients increasingly asking companies about their EDI practices following government mandates).

Employee benefit packages that are more expansive and inclusive of different employees and family types were also listed in interviews as formal practices that can support the entry and retention of 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades. Some interviewees emphasized the importance of having established and proactive policies around wellness and benefits packages as a way of signifying forethought and an active effort towards inclusion.

> *"I know one local in particular has funding for gender [affirmation] surgery...We want anybody with our ranks [to know] these are the things we're offering. We may never need to use it, but it's there if folks need to. I think that's a really big piece...Let's lay the groundwork and show that we're accepting and open to anybody."*

In speaking about the efforts to expand existing benefit coverage at one company, two informants talked about the need be informed by lived experience and the role employee resource groups (ERGs) can play in this process:

> *"We're in the process of looking at our pregnancy and parental leave and opening it up to those who are adopting, going through surrogacy or fostering so that there's coverage for them as well. This was initiated by our ERG. We're in the process of renewing or getting a new benefits provider. What we've been doing in the background is having folks from all different walks of life provide input on what our benefits should cover. Our goal is then to put a request for proposals to see what vendors can meet that criteria. It does include things like medication, [gender] affirmation surgery..."*

Finally, a couple of interviewees stressed that unions have both an opportunity and a responsibility to offer and maintain more consistent policies and practices around benefits and wellness, providing 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople more security as they shift from job to job through their career trajectories.

Specific examples of **union-specific EDI initiatives and programs** referenced in interviews included IBEW Strong (a union-wide EDI strategy) and IBEW's Connections to Success (a mentorship program). One interviewee noted that the way a mentorship program is framed and marketed (i.e., explicitly stating that it aimed to support women including trans women) helps bring attention to issues of tradespeople from queer and trans communities.

Although EDI initiatives mentioned were typically not focused on 2S/LGBTQ+ communities, rather other equity-deserving groups, some informants felt they nonetheless helped support important shifts in the industry, such as the adoption of gender-neutral language (e.g., foreperson, supervisor, parent, etc.). Initially aimed to support the inclusion of women in the trades, this language shift was identified as having supported gender non-binary and other gender minority tradespeople. Examples specific to 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople included instances of individual

unions or CBTU chapters participating in Pride events. Although these tended to be ad-hoc and informal, a couple of informants felt they represented a way to signal openness and support for queer and trans tradespeople, provided there was respect for privacy and confidentiality.

> *"[A union local] participated in a Pride parade in Toronto. Their policy was that any photos [from the parade] had to be signed off by all members in that photo before being published in the local union publication. In case somebody didn't want to be in the union newsletter, or maybe they weren't out. You may feel safe in the parade, but you don't want your photo all of the sudden appearing in your local union newsletter. This came from the individuals from within the community and what was driving this was safety. It also speaks to the importance of having a diversity of opinions and people to share their voices – you may not have thought about this immediately. And then having people who are willing to bring that forward to leadership, who are willing to listen and put it in place."*

Women in trades initiatives and programming, offered in different forms and by different organizations across the country, were also identified as offering supports to queer and trans tradespeople. Notwithstanding the limitations of women-specific programming discussed at length by the interviewees and described in an earlier section, they were considered by some as a vehicle towards greater inclusion within the industry for a variety of equity deserving groups. For example, Facebook groups, networking events, and other meet-ups, such as those organized by the BC Centre for Women in the Trades (BCCWITT), were identified as fora where queer and trans women could connect with each other and find support and allies. At the same time, interviewees cautioned that while some queer women may benefit from participating in these initiatives, they are not necessarily inclusive of or aimed at other members of the 2S/LGBTQ+ community. While some women in trades programming explicitly welcome trans women, the actual experiences of trans women in these programs remain unknown: *"[Some Build Together chapters] had intentional language around this...that is honestly the only move that I've seen at all in the industry to acknowledge [trans women's] experiences."*

Education and training programs

Several education and training programs, including those focused specifically on 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople, were identified in interviews. Some aimed to provide trades and leadership training to 2S/LGBTQ+ people while others (including the final two listed below) focused on 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion and were broadly available.[8]

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[8] This list is not exhaustive nor meant to provide a description or assessment of the programs offered.

- Reckoning Trades Project is a US-based initiative dedicated to widening employment opportunities in the skilled trades for women, communities of color, and LGBTQIA+ workers. We heard that Project's conferences and workshops are frequently attended by queer and trans tradespeople from Canada although it was not clear who was sponsoring their participation.

- The Regional Representative Program Leadership Training is an initiative of the BCCWITT and SkilledTradesBC. The goal of the training is to increase the number of tradespeople from underrepresented groups (Indigenous, people of colour, 2SLGBTIAQ+, immigrants, people with disabilities, women) in leadership positions as both volunteers and staff within the skilled trades sector in BC.

- Camosun College's Trades Development & Special Project offers specialized training to equity seeking groups. This includes a summer exploration program, through the South Island Partnership, offered to women and non-binary high school students. The program works with community partners to find you safe jobs once they graduate, it also intentionally features queer speakers to support queer visibility in the trades:

  "[The speaker we brought in] is a wonderful out queer person in the community, and also an electrician. These kids were just super excited to kind of see themselves represented and they did share that they felt really seen and I think that's super important...I think that it's really important to have that visibility."

- John Howard Society of Victoria offers a 3-week construction training program to young people. We heard that the Society has organized and run two LGBT-specific cohorts of the program to-date.

- Pipefitters Union offers a 2-hour training module on diversity, including 2S/LGBTQ+ specific content along with topics on microaggressions, harassment, and discrimination. We heard the training is available to every UA member, with locals having the discretion to assign it (e.g., to new members or supervisors, or as a follow up to disciplinary issues).

- The BCCWITT's Be More than a Bystander is a training and educational program that equips participants with practical tools and strategies to intervene in bullying, harassment and violence. We heard that other organizations have used this program to model and deliver similar training (e.g., IBEW's allyship workshop for men).

Company efforts to support 2S/LGBTQ+ employees

Interviewees shared examples of individual companies taking steps to support 2S/LGBTQ+ employees through various initiatives and efforts. Some of the efforts described that were perceived to support 2S/LGBTQ+ workers were:

- **Codes of conduct and statements of values:** Some companies have developed internal documents that outline the expectations and culture they hope to foster. We heard about the importance of making the code of conduct a mandatory component of onboarding, establishing the tone and culture right from the start. For example, one company's code of conduct includes guidelines for employees that the company believes are integral to building an open and inclusive workplace culture: *"I want everyone to be happy and say, it's Monday, I am happy to go back to work. Once you're there you'll laugh, you'll be happy."* While these types of value statements typically serve as non-binding guidelines for employees, one key informant shared the promising practice of developing a code of conduct that is embedded in contracts with clients, with documented implications (e.g., termination of contracts) for clients who do not comply.

- **Anonymous reporting systems:** Some companies use HR tools such as the SPOT app to allow employees to report issues of harassment and discrimination anonymously. The reports go directly to the employers to be addressed. One interviewee felt this was an important vehicle available for employers although the specific resources available to employees to follow up on complaints were unclear.

- **Gender-inclusive gear and washrooms:** The provision and availability of gender inclusive equipment was noted as a critical effort to foster greater 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion within the industry. We heard in several interviews that to effectively signal openness and inclusion, gender-inclusive resources must be made available proactively, rather than waiting for employees to request for them, which also requires disclosure. One company highlighted the importance of providing gender-inclusive safety wear for employees, acknowledging its cost:

"A bold and important initiative we have embarked on and are about to roll out has been around providing gender inclusive safety wear. The industry traditionally provides big, baggy, stocky male sized wear, which is not safe, isn't comfortable, and it doesn't distribute weight properly. It has not been created with various genders, shapes and sizes and people in mind. What we have found is that because the industry has been built for men, everything available in the industry is for men. So even PPE for construction, we've had to go out and design and manufacture on our own, because the ones available in the market are either non-functional, or lower quality than those of their male counterparts. What we've uncovered in that process of trying to be inclusive is not only that we have more work to do because it's currently not available, but it's going to cost us more. So from a barrier perspective, organizations will have to go over that hump if we are going to prioritize inclusivity across the board."

- **Toolbox talks:** Some companies conduct toolbox talks specific to diversity and inclusion. Although these tend to be more focused on respectful workplaces rather than 2S/LGBTQ+ specific issues, some interviewees felt they still represent a step some companies have taken towards creating more inclusive workplaces: *"As part of their daily toolbox talks, some [companies] have started to talk about respectful workplaces and how to conduct yourself professionally. At least they're inching their way into it."*

- **Community building and involvement:** We heard examples of companies taking a more proactive approach to community building and involvement. For example, one key informant's organization sought to support 2S/LGBTQ+ owned businesses in their community by hiring them where possible for their own needs (e.g., catering for work events). Other examples we heard about included companies working with organizations such as Pride at Work Canada, bringing in guest speakers from the community to discuss topics around diversity in the workplace, as well as displaying visible signs of inclusion, such as Pride flags and posters. One company that chose to be anonymous in the interview, recounted the conscious shift to embracing 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion at the corporate level, spurred by 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals at the company with ties to the senior executive team. The company's increased community involvement in began with displaying visible signs of inclusion and evolved over time:

"[There used to be] nothing from a corporate perspective. Our first interaction was [something] no one else has done: we decided to put up LGBTQ pride flags on our job sites...I'm telling you, it was a big deal. There were a lot of folks who weren't sure...what would be the implications, and how clients would interact with it, or how some contractors would interact with it. In the early days, we did have folks across Canada who would rip down the flag, and whether they were people who were passing the site or didn't really get it, didn't really understand it, they would rip down the flag. Then, the very next day, we just kept putting up a new one...In those early days, we certainly had a lot of discussion around LGBTQ2+ [issues] and around religion. What did that actually mean? [There was] a lot of confusion...and some didn't quite understand it. But [over time] they've either quieted themselves or educated themselves, thanks to all our other [efforts] and interactions."

▪ **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and EDI committees** were identified by interviewees as an effective vehicle for change within companies. Although these groups may not necessarily be 2S/LGBTQ+-specific, they were identified as platforms supporting overall inclusion as well as fora to find and build supports and allyship:

> *"At the very least, queer folks can go and be in a community, in a place where there is no community like that. There is so much value, these ERG meetings are transformative. I've tried to educate myself in the different groups I don't identify with. A lot of people who don't understand the queer experience, they just haven't been confronted with it. In terms of corporate processes, we have these career professional processes to go through; to be an inclusive employee or leader, some of the items on there they are requiring people to do are attend an ERG. You don't have to buy it, you just have to dabble. Every single person who goes to those meetings tells us, 'I can't believe how amazing that meeting was.'"*

Finally, the presence of EDI groups within companies could serve to spur and support the development of resources to advance inclusion (e.g., protocols, training) even though such resources specific to 2S/LGBTQ+ issues appear to be currently scarce. In fact, interviewees from the two construction companies we spoke to discussed taking on the role of trailblazers, and making deliberate efforts to share resources they developed with other companies and organizations. However, these efforts appeared to be largely dependent on the initiative of individual companies, and it was unclear what broader forums exist, if any, to support the sharing of tools and resources across the industry.

Social and community networks

Interviewees discussed the role various social groups and community networks play in providing support and 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople across Canada. We heard that Facebook groups, such as the BC Queers in the Trades, provide private online forums for individuals to connect and ask for advice from colleagues about which companies are deemed safe and supportive, and how to deal with any issues that may arise on job sites. As one interviewee explained:

> *"It's nice to see that there are other queers in the trades. [For example], I am part of [name of the group]. Just seeing that there are 80 people [there] and knowing I am not alone, even though I might be alone on this particular job site I am going to."*

We also heard of informal community groups and gatherings, held in different regions, allowing people to meet up and chat with others who share similar experiences and challenges. These groups tend to be volunteer-run, and often depend on the leadership and capacity of out queer and trans tradespeople in various communities. Finally, the Queer Infrastructure Network (QUIN), was identified as one community-driven initiative that aims to provide a safe space for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the Canadian infrastructure sector. Overall, these social and community groups can serve as valuable resources for those in the trades to find support and guidance from peers in a safe and inclusive environment, regardless of their place of work.

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE: SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study also sought to explore the future for 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades, focusing on recommendations and perceived solutions. At an overarching level, all interviewees identified a need for a cultural shift within the sector to promote inclusive environments for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals: *"It's not on the LGBTQ2S+ community to make sure the trades are ready for them. I think it's on our industry to make sure we're inclusive. That is a culture change [that's needed]."* Consequently, we asked participants about the specific actions or interventions they thought might support this higher-order change, with the effect of improving 2S/LGBTQ+ people's experiences and outcomes in the trades. We also probed for practices that might be especially effective in supporting specific subgroups within the community (e.g., non-binary or racialized 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople). Interviewees' recommendations that emerged in our discussions are summarized below, and include actionable steps for a variety of stakeholders, including but not limited to governments, training institutions, unions, and employers.

Challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs through education and training

Training and education were consistently highlighted as critical tool to building 2S/LGBTQ+ competency and fostering a more inclusive culture within the construction sector. Several participants felt that this type of training should be mandatory for employers, unions, training instructors, and *"basically everybody in decision-making roles."* In addition to being mandatory, others expressed the importance of ongoing education: *"They need to keep up on these programs and educate their new employees on what's acceptable and what's not in the workplace."*

We heard about the importance of workplace education and training being accessible and relevant to learners, and delivered in a way that drives people towards change rather than alienating them: *"The truth of the matter is, we're here to change hearts and minds. We're here to meet people where they're at."* Many acknowledged the importance of workplace education initiatives creating space for those who are newer to these topics to ask questions and learn in a safe and non-judgmental way, *"where they can say the wrong thing, use the wrong words, and get corrected respectfully…where they're not under a microscope."* The facilitator also plays an important role in cultivating such an environment. We heard that *"the messenger matters as much as the message,"* with interviewees citing the value of compelling and passionate facilitators with firsthand trades experience, including those who themselves identify as 2S/LGBTQ+.

It is important to note that while education and training were identified as a priority, most interviewees emphasized that these efforts must be supplemented with concrete resources and measures to facilitate meaningful change. Still, interviews revealed the clear need to leverage training as a way to shift attitudes and challenge norms. As one participant shared, *"it's about having understanding, empathy, respect, and education."*

Strengthen and promote inclusive leadership

In addition to supporting training and education across all levels of the sector, interviewees drew specific attention to those in leadership and decision-making roles in the context of recommendations and opportunities for change. Because those in leadership roles typically have the power to initiate and implement concrete actions, ensuring the presence of strong leaders and managers who are committed to advancing 2S/LGBTQ+ equity and inclusion was described as a key step. One interviewee saw leaders as playing an important role in laying the foundation for larger-scale change through more immediate, shorter-term actions: *"I think there are a lot of things that can be really quickly fixed if you have the right leadership on your side…If there is leadership willing to listen, then things could be changed systematically."*

Key informants saw industry leaders within unions, trades organizations, and companies as responsible for establishing and communicating tone and expectations, challenging harm and bias, acting as champions and allies, and overall leading by example:

> *"I think it's everyone's responsibility, but particularly those in leadership. You're supposed to be the guiding force of an industry. If we can look to leaders and see they're creating that space, I think that will catch on. We have a lot of people at the ground level that want to support individuals, but there isn't that culture. They don't speak up because they don't want to put a target on their back. That leadership and that space isn't there to do it."*

Interviewees shared two main mechanisms for developing 2SLGBTQ+-inclusive leadership within construction. The first involves building knowledge and capacity among existing leaders, related to the previous recommendation around education and training. Many of those we spoke with had observed a gap in these competencies within current sector leadership and recommended targeted training opportunities for those in these roles: *"Leaders like myself and other individuals in positions like mine, if we have the knowledge, that's a good first step. Education and awareness trickle down."*

The second relates to increasing 2S/LGBTQ+ representation within leadership roles, which are currently held primarily by those occupying privileged social locations (e.g., white, middle-aged, cisgender, heterosexual, men). Key informants hypothesized that greater visibility at the leadership level would help other 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople feel safer and more comfortable in their roles, as well as support recruitment by presenting the trades as a viable career option for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals. That said, bringing 2S/LGBTQ+ people into leadership roles also requires a commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment where they can succeed in these positions. For some interviewees, this meant working towards establishing a network of 2S/LGBTQ+ construction leaders, along with the appropriate resources to support them:

> *"We need to build a network with other leaders so that you have other people to go to, so you're not the token one. [When you're the token one] you feel that responsibility: if I screw up, it shows to others that others in my identity group shouldn't be there either. We need to arm [2S/LGBTQ+ people] with the tools and resources and the supports they need to be successful, so that when there are bad days and those thoughts are going through their head, they have people they can lean on."*

Support 2S/LGBTQ-specific interventions and initiatives

Building a greater sense of community for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople emerged as another key recommendation by key informants. Interviewees emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining safe, accessible, and inclusive virtual and in-person spaces for 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the sector to connect. Many had observed the benefits of such an approach in the

context of other equity-deserving groups in the trades (e.g., women), and sought similar initiatives for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople:

> *"I want to see the queer intake of a regional program on a regular basis. I want to see support being extended to queers in a way that's extended to women. I want to go to programs and learn things and have people I can talk to, even if it's over Zoom. When you go to these [sector] conferences, they all break into caucuses…I want there to be LGBTQ caucuses where we have brunch and talk. There isn't enough of that community-building for queer people in the trades…That's what I want to see, is that comradery."*

Several ideas for specific interventions and initiatives emerged during interviews, including 2S/LGBTQ+-targeted cohorts within apprenticeship and trades exploration programs, identity-based mentorship opportunities, and workplace or union-specific ERGs or committees. Interviewees also spoke to the potential for coordinated online initiatives (e.g., Facebook group for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople in the country). Virtual spaces were seen as a valuable way to gather a greater number of people to connect and share resources with one another, particularly for those who may not be out at work or lack access to in-person community or supports.

Many of the ideas shared for 2S/LGBTQ+-targeted interventions drew on the perceived successes of similar EDI initiatives within the trades. While looking at what has already been done to support other equity-deserving groups may be a valuable first step, safety and disclosure emerged as essential issues for those developing 2S/LGBTQ+-specific programming to consider. For example, participating in an outwards-facing workplace committee dedicated to 2S/LGBTQ+ representation and inclusion may be extremely beneficial for those who feel comfortable and safe disclosing their identities in their roles. For others, initiatives that rely less on outness and disclosure may have greater uptake and value:

> *"If participating in those activities means outing yourself then you're starting from scratch…I think the model needs to be some sort of anonymous support or through one-on-one mentors that have really built that credibility of being a safe space to go. There needs to be a different approach if the standard model isn't going to work."*

Given these findings, pursuing a combination of approaches may be most effective in reaching the greater number of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople, including some that promote visibility and others that allow participants greater anonymity.

Build sustainable, meaningful, and accountable processes for safety and inclusion

While changing the knowledge and attitudes of those working within the sector is essential, interviewees also emphasized the need to formalize and codify commitments to 2S/LGBTQ+ equity and inclusion. Establishing appropriate and inclusive organizational policies and

procedures can support existing 2S/LGBTQ+ employees as well as signal safety and inclusion to prospective applicants. One interviewee underscored the significance of inclusive and appropriate organizational policy: *"There has to be attention to detail, so that we don't signal a lack of safety through negligence like using binary language in documents or policies that erase entire groups of people."* Compiling and sharing promising practices and useful resources throughout the sector was also recommended as a way to support those who want to enact change, but may lack the practical knowledge or tools to do so.

Key informants highlighted several fundamental considerations for construction employers and unions looking to facilitate more safe and welcoming environments for 2S/LGBTQ+ staff: *"People need to know that there is a way to report, that they are going to be up for promotion or advancement just like everybody else, that they're going to be paid fairly."* Formalizing and codifying things like pay scales, promotion criteria, and reporting mechanisms were seen as key to supporting 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion and equity within the sector. Beyond having these policies in place, enforcement was seen as crucial to maintain employee trust and confidence. This was emphasized particularly in the context of employers following through on complaints of homo/bi/transphobic comments or actions. However, we heard more generally about the importance of sector leaders demonstrating a clear and sincere commitment to 2S/LGBTQ+ issues and employees. In practice, interviewees had seen this demonstrated by employers choosing to let go persistently discriminatory employees as well as clients. One key informant spoke to this subject at length, remarking on the ways in which smaller company-level actions can support a broader shift in culture:

> *"A lot of it comes down to people being held accountable for their actions. Address issues of discrimination and harassment rather than just saying it's just part of the industry. All it takes is a few examples before everybody else kind of falls in line. This isn't accepted here. Create a space for people to feel like they can be more themselves and disclose their identities, or at least walk around a little less fearful. A lot of it comes down to a culture shift of companies having policies and procedures in place, having ways to report things anonymously, which I think is really key. I'd liken it to a safety infraction. You know, someone breaks an ankle, there is a process that follows. I think there needs to be a same process if someone discloses, there are protections for the individual."*

Finally, some key informants were also supportive of introducing more formal policy mechanisms to hold the sector accountable for improving 2S/LGBTQ+ representation and inclusion, for instance through community benefit agreements or other considerations during hiring or procurement:

"[For] our clients and governments who actually award work to general contractors who then award work to subcontractors and trades, there need to be minimum numbers for procurement. We need to pull all levers to make change. That's from a moral standpoint, but it's also from an economic one, from a business case...There's got to be a more intentional push, otherwise you leave it to the goodness of companies to do something...Not everyone cares until they have to care about it."

Address barriers to entry and build 2S/LGBTQ+ representation

Many of those we spoke with underscored the importance of increasing the number of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople within the construction sector. Some proposed strategies to improve the reputation of trades careers among 2S/LGBTQ+ jobseekers, including challenging stereotypes about who "fits" within the trades and facilitating opportunities for trades career exploration among 2S/LGBTQ+ youth. Other tactics focused on addressing some of the barriers to entry affecting this population, for instance reconsidering some of the features of trades jobs that may disproportionately and negatively impact 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals: *"We need to be changing the structures. We can't say you need x number of years in construction, because that automatically disqualifies a bunch of people. [Instead] start saying, 'these are the skills we are looking for.'"* Further, initiatives that support 2S/LGBTQ+ apprentices and tradespeople to find safe and welcoming employment opportunities were cited as a strategy that promotes sustainability and retention. As one interviewee remarked, *"giving people the best foot to start on is going to lend itself to their retention."*

When it comes to bringing 2S/LGBTQ+ people into the trades, targeted recruitment and outreach strategies were widely seen as an important albeit limited strategy. Key informants noted that while *"the recruitment piece [is] exciting...there are reasons people aren't staying in the industry,"* questioning the limits of these initiatives in addressing other persistent issues (e.g., retention). Meanwhile, others critiqued efforts that sought to recruit 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople without pursuing parallel strategies dedicated to addressing the challenges these individuals are likely to face within their roles.

With this in mind, recommendations about increasing the number of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople are closely connected to questions related to visibility, representation, and perception. SRDC heard about the need to recruit 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople to support improvements in sector safety and inclusion; our findings suggest that this also works in reverse. In other words, proactive efforts on the part of employers, unions, or other sector actors to create safe and welcoming environments – including those mentioned subsequently – may help attract more 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals to the trades in the first place. The greater representation resulting from this was thought to have several positive effects. For instance, one interviewee spoke of the *"strength in numbers"* that comes from increased visibility and representation, arguing that more diversity is a key ingredient in shifting culture.

Foster safe, welcoming, and inclusive trades environments

Interviewees shared a wide range of concrete actions that employers, unions, non-profits, and other sector actors could pursue to foster more safe, welcoming, and inclusive trades environments for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople. To begin, a few examples include ensuring the availability of non-gendered washrooms, encouraging visible signs of inclusion on job sites (e.g., Pride flags or hardhat stickers), participating in or supporting Pride or other community events, and creating and sharing materials about 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion and EDI more broadly that align with existing sector practices (e.g., toolbox talks). Several key informants emphasized the importance of a sector-wide commitment to respecting pronouns as well as chosen names, including through facilitating name changes on relevant documents such as tickets. Others highlighted strategies to build social connections between employees (e.g., encouraging open communication, hosting workplace events where partners are invited, etc.) as ways to signal to all employees that they are welcome to bring their whole selves to work, if they choose to do so.

Although small in practice, efforts such as these were seen as valuable in signifying commitment and creating a foundation for longer-term change. For instance, one key informant spoke to how a company initiative to provide appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to 2S/LGBTQ+ staff ended up having much larger implications:

> *"The safety wear initiative is an action that speaks to our commitment. It's a practical way of opening up the conversation and saying, 'we see you and we want you to be included. We want you here. We want you as part of who and what we are, and we value you.' Many of us who have experienced a lifetime of no safety carefully evaluate and check for whether this space is safe…That action signals intent."*

As discussed elsewhere in this report, strong leaders and allies in the workplace is another key feature of safe and inclusive workplaces for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals. In addition to their role in advocating for change within their respective contexts, interviewees also saw value in a more formal process through which 2S/LGBTQ+-affirming colleagues are clearly identified as key contacts 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople can turn to raise concerns, seek out resources, and so forth.

Engage within and across communities

Interviewees universally pointed to the importance of lived experience in informing any programming, policy, and research in this area, resulting in a broader recommendation that also applies to others in this section: 2S/LGBTQ+ people within the construction sector should be actively engaged in any initiative directed at or affecting them. This was discussed in the context of trades programs, research and data collection, and company policy, among others, and thought to be critical for an array of reasons. Some saw engagement with 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople as a way to ensure initiatives are relevant and effective, and to avoid *"throw[ing]*

together programs that make our organization look good but don't have any meaning behind them because we don't know what the lived experience is and what's needed." In the context of research and data collection, others perceived a relationship between community engagement and accuracy of information: as one interviewee put it, *"how are we going to find out how many queer people there are in the trades if you don't ask tradespeople?"* Still, others saw this as a means of ensuring any intervention is responsive and appropriate, and to maximize its uptake by 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople as a result.

Key informants also emphasized the quality of or approach to engagement, proposing ways to ensure this is done meaningfully and ethically. This may include providing opportunities for engagement that are anonymous (i.e., not relying on disclosure), compensated, and actionable. For example, one interviewee described a hypothetical scenario in which an employer wished to seek feedback from an 2S/LGBTQ+-identifying employee about their approach to workplace equity and inclusion:

> *"Please do not put them on the spot when they are trying to [do their job], but on paid time, bring them into the office and ask them. 'Hey, can you come to the office for 2 hours? Come have a meeting and give us some feedback.' And take them seriously. Say, 'we want to make sure you feel comfortable at work. What can we do?' And then actually act on their recommendations."*

In addition to encouraging those in positions of power to engage with the 2S/LGBTQ+ community, key informants also spoke positively of opportunities for allyship and collaboration between various equity-deserving groups within the construction sector. For instance, while we heard about the unique context and challenges faced by 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople – along with the need for population-specific solutions as a result – the value of intersectional approaches was clear in our conversations. Several interviewees felt that different forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, ableism, homo/bi/transphobia) operated through similar mechanisms and with similar effects within the sector. In addition, the challenges encountered by 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople who hold multiple marginalized identities are unlikely to be fully addressed by solutions that consider only one axis of power. As such, efforts to support 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades should ideally be developed and actualized alongside those supporting women, Indigenous people, newcomers, and other equity-deserving communities.

Continue to build knowledge in this area

Interviewees consistently identified the need to build knowledge in this subject area through more research and data collection. As one key informant put it, *"everything starts with collecting the data and making it available...How do you even know it's a problem if you don't have any data?"* Indeed, having more and higher-quality data was frequently cited as critical in supporting

the industry to recognize 2S/LGBTQ+ exclusion and inequity as a problem, respond in a timely and appropriate manner, and measure progress:

> *"I would love to have that data, because it's hard for us to measure as an organization how we're doing or [whether] we have the right supports in place. Maybe we have a larger queer population within our ranks than we thought, and can we better support them that way? Do they have what they need?"*

Those we spoke with saw value in building this knowledge base at multiple levels and contexts, referring to data collected by sector actors (e.g., companies, unions), population-level surveys, and research conducted by academic or non-profit institutions. This is necessarily accompanied by building capacity for safe and inclusive data collection, especially within the construction industry itself. Specifically, interviewees called for research or data efforts related to 2S/LGBTQ+ people in the trades to be transparent about what information is being collected, by whom, and to what ends. Being explicit about how information is *not* going to be used – for instance, *"as a way to discriminate or remove opportunities from folks"* was also seen as valuable. Key informants also pointed to further engagement with the industry as well as 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople to ensure future research and data efforts are both responsive and relevant:

> *"I think that the first step would be to talk to people in the industry to find out what their experiences are and what they think would be helpful. You'd have to talk to people in the industry to find out what they need."*

While many emphasized the need for better quantitative data to discern how many 2S/LGBTQ+ people are in the construction trades, there was simultaneously a desire to move beyond descriptive information to more nuanced and in-depth accounts. As one participant shared, *"[2S/LGBTQ+ people] are everywhere, and we are doing every sort of job…Hopefully in the future we can ask questions such as…where we see more LGBTQ2S+ folks feeling safe to be out at work, and then do a deep dive to discover why."* Some of the specific areas of inquiry proposed by interviewees for future research or data endeavours are summarized below:

- 2S/LGBTQ+ representation within the industry, within leadership roles as well as more generally

  > *"People get stuck on, 'how do we compare to other people, what is the target? What is the number we should be getting to?' So [having that data] or even a comment on how to address this would be helpful. The bar is set so low, so some stats would be helpful."*

- Additional descriptive information about 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople (e.g., where they are located, what trades they are in, etc.)

- Reported reason(s) for choosing a trades career among 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals (i.e., to inform career exploration and outreach activities)

- Training and apprenticeship experiences of 2S/LGBTQ+ people in construction, including perceptions of training quality and how this may differ on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation

- Firsthand accounts of barriers and challenges faced by 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople, the effects thereof, and perceived solutions

- Instances of suspected or reported discrimination, and experiences thereof

- Decisions and experiences related to outness and disclosure among 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople

- Positive experiences of 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople

  "We understand the barriers pretty well, but also, despite those barriers, what keeps you going [and] coming back to work?"

- Knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of non-2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the sector (e.g., prevalence of identity-based stereotypes, perceived barriers to hiring and retention, current competency and awareness levels, etc.)

- Current state of policies and procedures within the sector (e.g., 2S/LGBTQ+-inclusive benefits, washroom availability, etc.)

- Compendium of promising practices, approaches, tools, and resources for trades actors to support and promote 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion in the sector

- Retention (e.g., percentage of 2S/LGBTQ+ people leaving the trades, reasons for job leaving, etc.) and layoffs

  "I would like to see data collection on layoffs and reasons for it. If we see data and the demographics, we start asking questions. There needs to be accountability around that. Data can be biased, but some data just doesn't lie. If people are getting laid off [during] shortages of work, and 90% laid off are women and they make up only 4% [of the trades workforce], then what's going on?"

- Promotion and advancement trends (e.g., access and barriers to promotion and advancement among 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople, factors contributing to these decisions, career effects, etc.)

- Evidence regarding the uptake, effectiveness, and experiences of the limited existing initiatives focused on 2S/LGBTQ+ inclusion in the sector.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This report sought to provide insight into the employment patterns, socio-demographic profiles, and perceived experiences, challenges, and supports for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals working in trades in Canada. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, using data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. According to the survey, only a small proportion of tradespeople identify as 2S/LGBTQ+. Still, the lack of data collection within the sector and reluctance to disclose such information contributes to the difficulty in determining the actual number of 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals working in the trades. Interviews with stakeholders emphasized the need for more data collection to inform effective and equitable policy and program responses.

Interviews explored the experiences and barriers faced by 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals considering trades careers, pursuing training and apprenticeships, and obtaining jobs. A recurring theme is the lack of representation and visibility of 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the trades, which perpetuates stereotypes about the industry and discourages interest among 2S/LGBTQ+ youth. Microaggressions, discriminatory hiring practices, and negative workplace experiences such as bullying, physical violence, and sexual harassment also contribute to negative experiences for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the trades.

The lack of supportive networks and uncertainty around finding safe and fulfilling apprenticeship opportunities pose significant barriers to 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals pursuing trades careers. Furthermore, the efforts of sector-based programs to address the barriers faced by equity-deserving apprentices can exclude 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals through language, eligibility, or disclosure requirements. Such exclusionary practices can cause students to leave trades training prematurely or choose to conceal their 2S/LGBTQ+ identity to protect their safety, wellbeing, or future career prospects.

The study highlights the threat of physical violence and negative workplace experiences contributing to poor physical and mental health outcomes for 2S/LGBTQ+ tradespeople. Sexual minority respondents from the CCHS report poorer physical and mental health compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Potential solutions identified by key informants span a wide variety of areas, and include effective policies, and program responses to create safer, more equitable, and welcoming workplaces for 2S/LGBTQ+ individuals in the trades. The need for further research and data collection in this area was also made apparent, with the exploratory nature of this study limiting the quantity and depth of topics that could meaningfully be explored.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

Name	Preferred title and/or affiliation
Alanna Marklund	National Manager for Youth, Diversity, and Indigenous Relations, United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Canada (UA Canada)
Andrea Durdle	Instructor, Plumbing and Pipe Trades, Camosun College
Anonymous	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW Canada)
Anonymous[a]	Management role in equity, diversity, and inclusion at a large construction services company in Ontario
Anonymous[a]	Specialist role in equity, diversity, and inclusion at a large construction services company in Ontario
Coly Chau[b]	Coordinator, BC Centre for Women in the Trades (BCCWITT)
Jove Nazatul	N/A
Lindsay Amundsen	Director of Workforce Development, Canada's Building Trades Unions (CBTU)
Lindsay Kearns[b]	Coordinator, BC Centre for Women in the Trades (BCCWITT)
Lora McMillan	N/A
Nicolas Wegel	Administrative Director and Vice-President, EAC Construction Inc.

[a] Conducted as part of same interview.

[b] Conducted as part of same interview.

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