

# Central Florida Construction Survey: Workers Benefit from Apprenticeship Industry Challenges Remain



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## Executive Summary

The construction sector offers prospects for raising wealth within communities of color and women-led households. The construction workforce has become more diverse thanks in large part to registered apprenticeship programs, run jointly by unions and contractors, which have recruited women and workers of color and invested billions in training a new generation of construction workers. Yet there is more work to be done. Nationally, **women hold just 3.4 percent of construction jobs, racial minorities are underrepresented in higher paying occupations, and Latino workers are overrepresented in terms of construction fatalities.** Given the importance of the construction sector in Central Florida, we designed a worker survey to understand how these dynamics of training and diversity are playing out locally. With the experience of the **I4 Ultimate Project**, where five workers were killed on the job in close to four years, we also sought to understand safety and health issues.

Throughout late 2019 and 2020, Central Florida Jobs With Justice collected surveys from 308 construction workers, both union and nonunion workers. Canvassers surveyed workers by visiting large non-residential private and public construction projects in Orange County, including the Orlando International Airport terminal, the I4 Ultimate Project, and the University of Central Florida downtown campus. Workers were also surveyed at public transit hubs, community organizations, union meetings and training classes. The Florida Institute on Research and Education designed the survey, which inquired about training, wages and benefits, discrimination, safety, and job-related stress. All surveyors were bilingual and conducted the surveys in English and Spanish. Respondents identified as 56% Latino, 18% Black, 18% White, and 4% Multi-racial. Only six percent of respondents identified as women, despite the effort to oversample. Respondents included 41% immigrants and another 9% Puerto Rican migrants. Union represented workers comprised 20% of survey respondents. We oversampled for union members to better understand the impact of unions on the industry. In the U.S., Florida has the fifth lowest union membership rate in the construction industry.<sup>1</sup> Statewide, demographics for the construction trades includes 32% Latino, 10% Black, 57% White, 4% women, and 29% immigrant workers.<sup>2</sup>



## Key Findings

### 1. Compared to other types of training, workers who graduated from registered apprenticeship programs jointly run by unions and contractors fared better compared to other training graduates in terms of wages, benefits and lower levels of work-related stress.

As the Table 1 indicates, graduates of joint union-contractor apprenticeship programs had higher average wages and were considerably more likely to be in the higher wage scale compared to those who graduated from non-union apprenticeships, technical schools or community colleges, or who only had informal training. After controlling for multiple variables such as years of experience and type of trade, graduating from a union apprenticeship program is associated with a 17% increase in wages and a significantly greater chance of obtaining benefits.

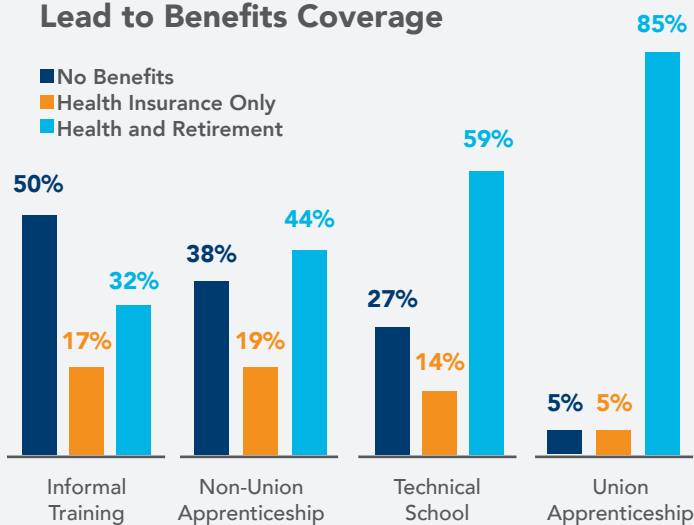
Union apprenticeship graduates were much more likely to have health insurance and retirement benefits. For those who graduated from a non-union apprenticeship program, 38% received no benefits at all, including health insurance, retirement and paid time off, while only 5% of union apprenticeship graduates were without any benefits. Union apprenticeship graduates also fared better than the other types of training programs on several measures of job quality and stress, as the graph indicates.

Graduates of union apprenticeship programs are one third less likely to be classified as an independent contractor compared to graduates of other training programs. This classification denies these workers of the benefits of employee status, including safety and health protections, protection from discrimination and wage and hour violations, and access to unemployment and workers compensation.

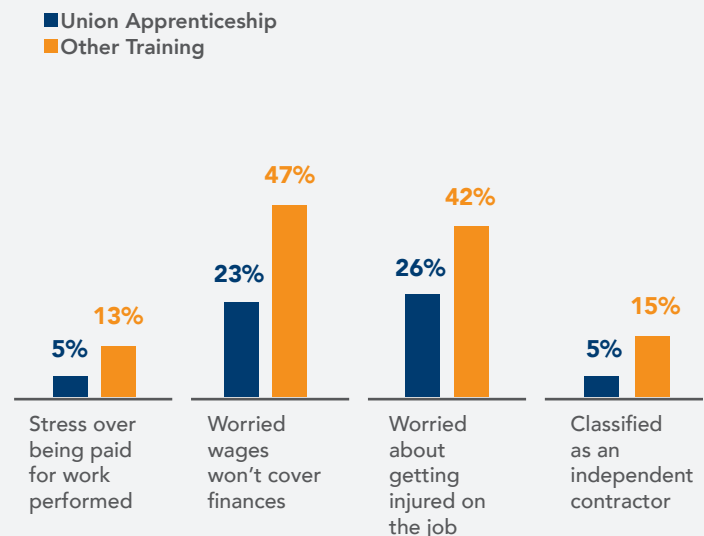
Table 1. Graduates of Union Apprenticeship Programs Earn More

	Union Apprenticeship	Informal Training	Non-union Apprenticeship	Technical School
Median hourly wage	\$20	\$18	\$19.4	\$18
% earning \$15/hour or less	2.7%	32.8%	18.8%	25.8%
% earning \$25/hour or more	27%	6.2%	18.8%	19.4%

### Union Apprenticeships Lead to Benefits Coverage



### Union Apprenticeship Graduates Experience Less Job Stress



**2. Union represented workers fare better than non-union workers in terms of wages and benefits. Women and people of color also benefit from union representation.**

As Table 2 below indicates, not only do union-represented workers average \$2 per hour more, they are also five times more likely to be higher wage earners than non-union workers. After controlling for multiple variables such as years of experience and type of trade, union representation is associated with a 16% increase in wages and a significantly greater chance of obtaining benefits. Several respondents also noted additional benefits from being in a union. One joined the union after the union won a case against a former contractor who was stealing wages. Another felt that where there is a union, “There is a lot of transparency to the worker that doesn’t exist in other working spaces.”

Women and people of color who are covered by a union contract also receive better compensation compared to their non-union counterparts, earning \$2.5/hour more on average, less likely to be on the lower pay scale, and more than twice as likely to receive health and retirement benefits. One woman interviewed tries to be involved in the union given the support she feels that it has provided her as a single mother. These benefits may explain the greater diversity we see in the union sector. Our survey found that union represented respondents and graduates of union registered apprenticeship programs were significantly more likely to be women and/or people of color, after controlling for variables such as type of trade and experience.

**3. There are still serious issues in the industry related to diversity, discrimination, and safety.**

The survey results raised issues related to the recruitment and treatment of women and people of color:

**45%**

of women and people of color respondents and 39% of all respondents believe that women and people of color are treated differently on the job site.

**23%**

women and people of color respondents are sometimes or often worried about being harassed or discriminated against at work.

**61%**

of respondents observed fewer than six women currently working on the job site, and nearly one fifth of respondents **observed zero women** on the job site.



**Table 2. Union Represented Workers Earn More Than Non-Union Workers**

	Union	Non-Union
Median hourly wage	\$20	\$18
% earning \$15/hour or less	5.6%	32.7%
% earning \$25/hour or more	29.6%	6.0%
% with both health & retirement benefits	70%	36.1%

**Table 3. Women and People of Color Benefit From Union Representation**

	Union	Non-Union
Median hourly wage	\$20	\$17.50
% earning \$15/hour or less	7.5%	34.7%
% earning \$25/hour or more	27.5%	4.6%
% with both health & retirement benefits	62.8%	30.3%

After controlling for multiple variables including experience and type of trade, immigrant workers are much less likely to receive benefits compared to U.S. born workers. One respondent shared, “For women, they don’t give them many opportunities for work. For people of color and undocumented workers, they will give them jobs that are more dangerous.” Another noted, “Because of racism, people of color are made to work harder and do worse jobs. Women are treated like they can’t work.”

One electrician who worked on a new mixed-use high-rise project shared that there were no restrooms for women on her floor, and she had to go up and down several floors to use the bathroom. Another worker shared that the barriers in the industry related to diversity existed because industry wide, there was not enough effort put into recruiting women and workers of color into skilled jobs and training.

In addition to discrimination, injuries continue to plague the industry in Central Florida, with workers bearing much of the cost:

**“ People of color are made to work harder and do worse jobs. Women are treated like they can’t work”**

While this survey does not provide a definitive analysis of the industry in Central Florida, it reveals working conditions that are troubling and require public response to set Florida on the right course in developing safe, secure, and fair jobs in this sector. The survey makes clear that not all training programs are effective. The type of training that workers receive has an impact on their wages, benefits and working conditions, with joint labor-management apprenticeship programs associated with much better outcomes. Union apprenticeship programs and representation benefits all workers, including women and people of color, and should be expanded. At the same time, this survey reveals continued discrimination, underrepresentation of women, and safety problems in the industry that must be addressed by policymakers and industry stakeholders.



**24%**

of respondents have been injured on the job at least once.

**Less than half**

of those who have been injured on the job received workers compensation for their injury.

Of those who have been injured on the job, nearly **one quarter had to pay their own out-of-pocket medical expenses.**

#### Acknowledgements

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**Full report forthcoming, June 2021.**

<sup>1</sup> *The Construction Chart Book, 6th Edition. CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training, produced with support from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health grant number OH009762*

<sup>2</sup> *U.S. Census. American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Selected Population Profiles, 2019.*