



# **Building back better:** Utilising women's labour in the Canterbury recovery

*A snapshot of  
the research findings*



**Ministry of Women's Affairs**  
*August 2013*



## ***Building back better: Utilising women's labour in the Canterbury recovery***

**C**anterbury's economic recovery depends on a labour supply that meets demand now and into the future. Better utilising women's labour will help build a prosperous and productive Canterbury.

The Government has made supporting the Canterbury recovery a priority, and is working with industry to develop labour market recovery plans for different industries and sectors.

There is increasing demand for more workers following Canterbury's earthquakes, particularly in construction.

Better utilising women in Canterbury's recovery is a win-win, and will contribute to Canterbury's productivity and future prosperity. Better utilising women in the recovery will mean business, Canterbury's economy, women, and their families all benefit.

### ***"Building back better: Utilising women's labour in the Canterbury recovery"***

In May 2013 the Ministry of Women's Affairs contracted Research First to survey 500 underemployed and unemployed women in Canterbury. The research was commissioned to understand more about Canterbury women's workforce choices and to identify 'hidden' female labour for the Canterbury rebuild.

The research focused on two populations of women:

- women who are unemployed and not receiving a benefit (247 women), and
- women who were working in non-professional occupations and who may be interested in moving between industries or occupations and improving their economic situation (263 women).

This research, the first of its kind in Canterbury, provides the largest and most complete dataset regarding the workforce choices of these women. It is exploratory and illustrative research: its value lies in the richness of the insights and the research makes no claim to being a representative overview of these populations.

### ***Key findings***

The research shows that there is an under-utilised, and 'hidden' female labour force in Canterbury.

### ***Women want to work***

Over a quarter of the women surveyed want to work, and are available to work now.

**“ There is an under-utilised, and ‘hidden’ female labour force in Canterbury that employers can draw on to better resource Canterbury’s economic recovery. ”**

The research also shows that women are more attracted to rebuild positions that reflect their skills and experience (for example, administration/general or professional/ management), than to the construction sector where they have less experience.

*Attracting women to construction jobs will require better information, targeted recruitment, and flexible work*

Over half of the women surveyed were not opposed to rebuild positions, but many had not considered these jobs, or were not sure how to access them.

Women saw construction jobs as ‘jobs for men’. They felt advertising was directed at men, and some women thought that they could not meet the physical demands of some rebuild jobs.

Around four out of ten women surveyed were considering training or retraining. About a fifth of unemployed women surveyed said childcare responsibilities prevented them from training. This is important, particularly for women who might consider construction jobs but need training or retraining.

The research found that the top three factors that would encourage women to consider any job in the rebuild were: flexible hours and environment; good pay; and more information about rebuild opportunities.



### **What the research tells us**

For the construction industry and trainers ‘building back better’ means taking the opportunity to change practice to increase women’s labour force participation. If we are going to build back better then we need to see numbers of women in construction increasing.

Better use of the female labour pool in the construction industry may mean changing employer practice, including recruitment; providing more information about rebuild occupations; and encouraging women to train or retrain.

## Employers

The untapped labour pool represents an opportunity for employers to address skills shortages. With targeted recruitment and the right environment, employers can attract, recruit and retain women in construction and related roles with the rebuild.

## Training institutions

The research shows there is an untapped pool of women who represent an opportunity for training providers to increase student numbers and business returns.

## Women

Women seeking work are encouraged to think about their career opportunities in the region's rebuild. There will be new career opportunities in roles women may not have considered prior to the earthquakes. Women seeking work are encouraged to contact the

Canterbury Skills and Employment Hub ([www.opportunitycanterbury.org.nz](http://www.opportunitycanterbury.org.nz)) to investigate the options available to them.

## The Ministry of Women's Affairs

The Ministry of Women's Affairs will continue to work with employers, training providers, government agencies and other organisations to find ways to help Canterbury women into sustainable and meaningful employment that supports the rebuild.

Together, women, employers and training providers can work to build a productive and prosperous Canterbury.

To access the full research report **Building back better: Utilising women's labour in the Canterbury recovery**, visit [www.mwa.govt.nz](http://www.mwa.govt.nz).

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