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Business  
Data Lab  
Laboratoire de données  
sur les entreprises

# Barely Breaking Ground: The Slow Stride of Progress for Women in Business Leadership and Entrepreneurship

*March 2024*



# Contents

3	<u>Introduction</u>
9	<u>Overall Management</u>
15	<u>Middle Management</u>
20	<u>Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship</u>
23	<u>Senior Management and Boards</u>
28	<u>Case Studies and Success Stories</u>
32	<u>Recommendations</u>
37	<u>Annex</u>





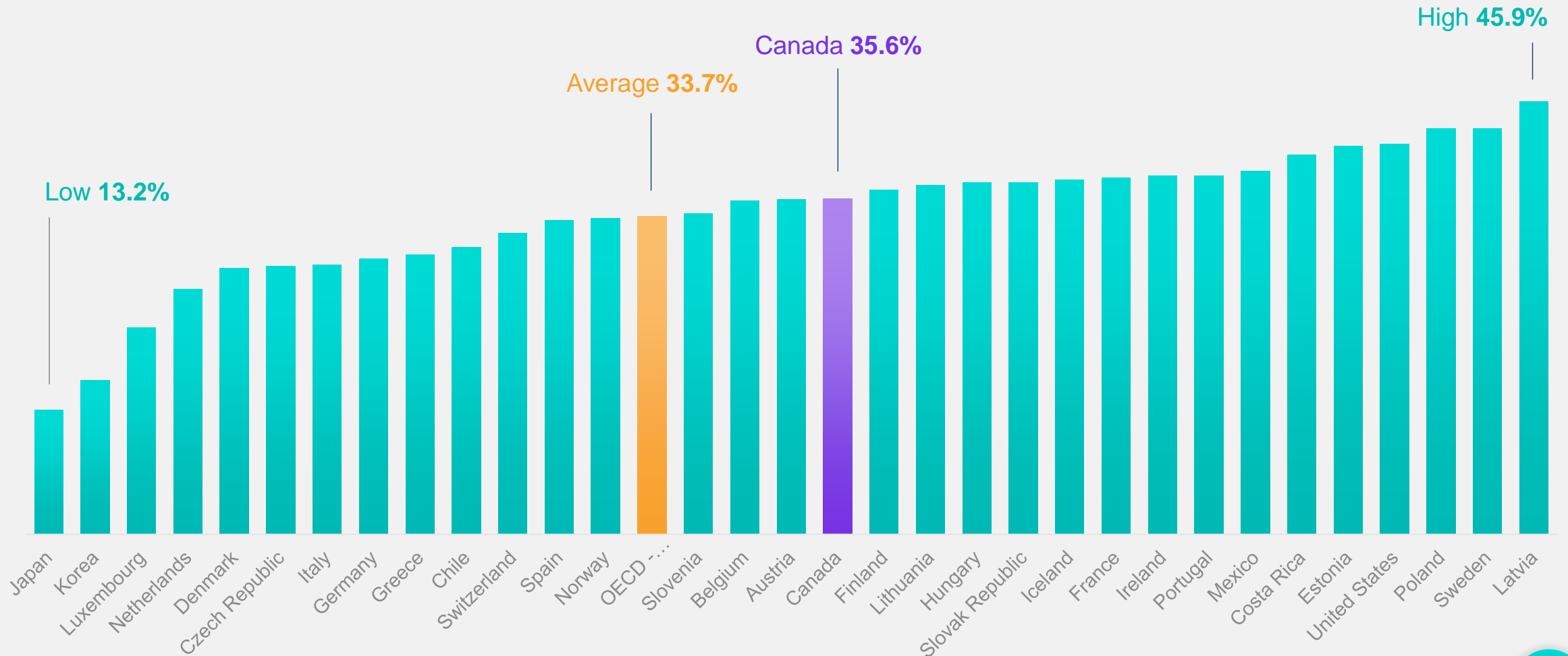
# Introduction



# International Context

Canada's share of women managers is behind almost half of all OECD countries.

Share of women managers (%), 2022



Sources: OECD, Share of female managers, <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=96330>.

In 2024, we still haven't bridged persistent representation and compensation gaps for women in management and leadership positions in corporate Canada.

**Our analysis finds that women in Canada face not one glass ceiling but several; not one broken rung in the promotion ladder but many — all of which hinder their ascent to full equality.**



## Key Findings: Representation

- § **Women have yet to reach parity in employment, especially in management positions.** While women have made substantial gains in overall employment (rising to 48% in 2023), they fare much worse in management occupations, (accounting for only 35% of such jobs).
- § Within management jobs, **the largest representation gains for women have been in specialized middle management** (up +14 percentage points (ppts) from 34% in 1987).
- § **Progress has been particularly disappointing for middle management jobs in trades and transportation** (only +3 ppts from 15% in 1987), as well as retail and wholesale sectors (only +1 ppt from 37% in 1987).
- § **Women in senior management have also seen glacial progress, remaining 20 ppts behind equality.** If current trends persist, national parity will not be achieved within this century.
- § **Boardroom representation is also lagging with the share of women on boards showing little progress** — as of 2020, only 21% of directors and 24% of top officers (chairpersons or presidents) were women.



## Key Findings: Compensation in Management Occupations

- § Despite faster wage growth in recent decades, women still earn less than men — 88 cents to the dollar in **management occupations** in 2023, as compared with 80 cents in 1997.
- § Prince Edward Island is the only province where women’s earnings in **management jobs** exceeded parity.
- § Of the three **middle management groups** analyzed ([see slide 10](#)), the **lowest paying** are **retail and wholesale trade** followed by **trades and transportation** and then **specialized middle management**.
- § Progress in relative earnings of women to men over the past three decades (1997 to 2023) has been disappointing. In 2023, **women’s average hourly wages** relative to men’s **only increased by 6 cents across middle management occupations**. The **largest gap** is in **retail and wholesale trade** where women earn 11 cents less per dollar than men.
- § These patterns persist provincially, with **Western provinces** having the largest pay gaps, while **Central provinces** have the smallest.
- § Women are also paid less than men in **senior management jobs**. In 2023, women in these jobs made 87 cents for every dollar made by men.



## Key Findings: Entrepreneurship

§ A previous BDL [report](#) found that, of traditionally underrepresented groups, **women have the largest representation gap (33 pts) in business ownership relative to their population.**

§ The Women in Management report finds:

- The **industries where women-owned business are more highly concentrated** (such as healthcare, retail trade, etc.) **are the same middle management occupations where women have achieved or exceeded parity and fared better in representation.**
- These **industries are also where a pay parity gap between women and men's median income was on average 10% or higher.**

§ Despite a strong ecosystem of financing options, **entrepreneurs from traditionally underrepresented groups struggle with accessing financing to a greater extent than the average Canadian business.**

§ While **women are faring best among such groups, intersectional women entrepreneurs require further support to access financing on an equal basis.**





# Overall Management



# Occupational Definitions

Management occupations consist of 19 job types that fall into four groups, which distinguish “senior” and “middle management” levels.



	Share of Women	Median Income Women/Men
Legislators and senior management	31%	80%
Natural resources production and fishing	10%	80%
Construction and facility operation and maintenance	16%	85%
Manufacturing and utilities	21%	79%
Agriculture, horticulture and aquaculture	23%	67%
Transportation	25%	85%
Corporate sales	31%	81%
Retail and wholesale trade	38%	73%
Food service and accommodation	46%	88%
Customer and personal service	49%	77%
Public protection services	17%	87%
Communication (except broadcasting)	29%	88%
Engineering, architecture, science and information systems	25%	88%
Public administration	52%	97%
Financial and business services	53%	85%
Art, culture, recreation and sport	53%	89%
Administrative services	56%	86%
Education and social and community services	63%	92%
Healthcare	75%	93%

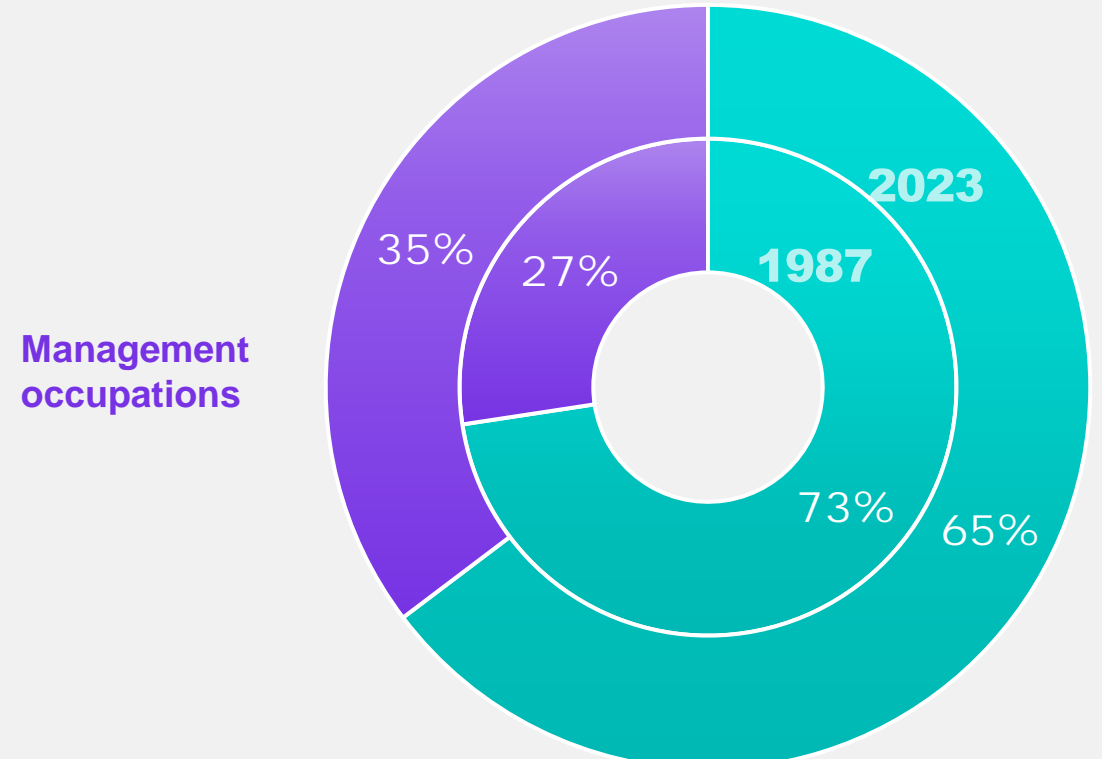
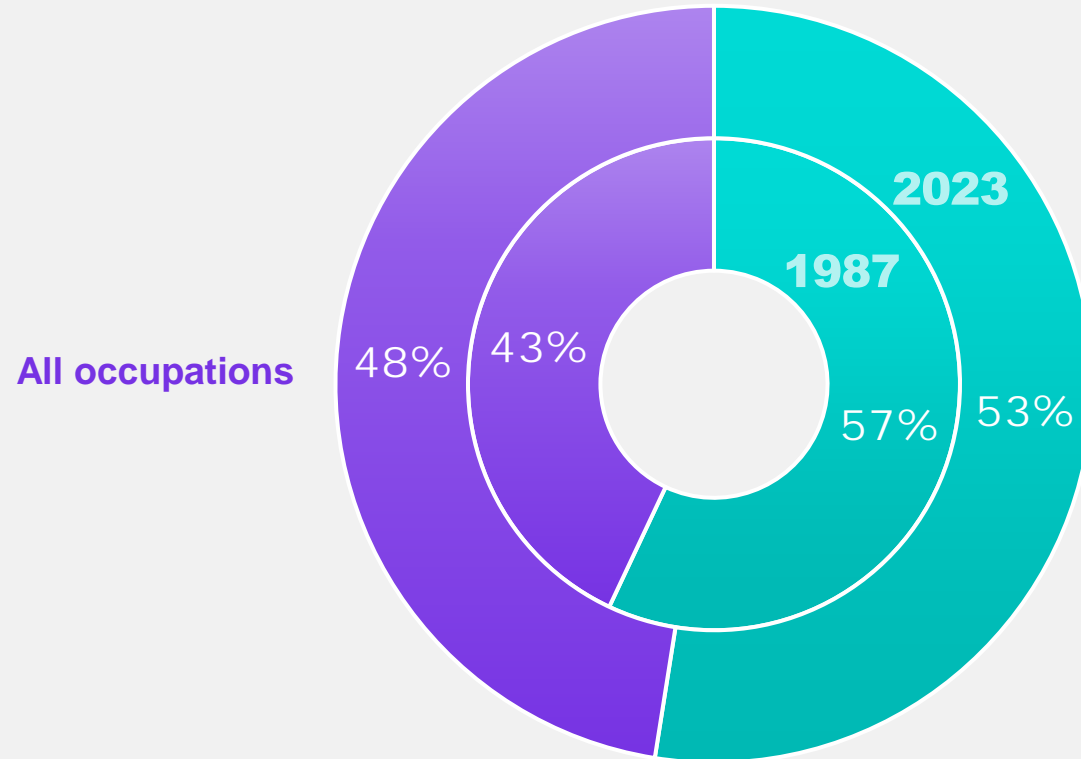
Sources: Full-time full-year reported national data: Statistics Canada, [Census of Population](#), 2021.



# Women still haven't reached parity.

Despite some gains, women in Canada still have not reached parity in overall employment and management occupations — where the share of men is almost double that of women.

Share of employment, men vs. women (%)  
1987 vs. 2023



◆ Women ◆ Men

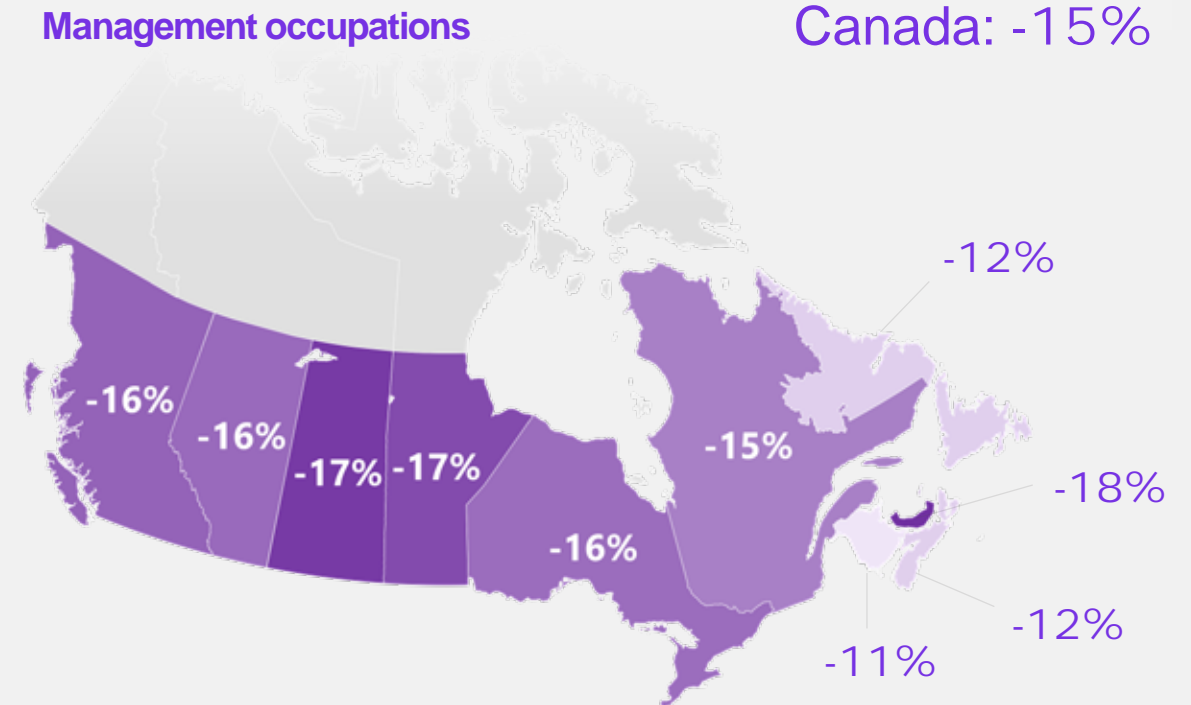
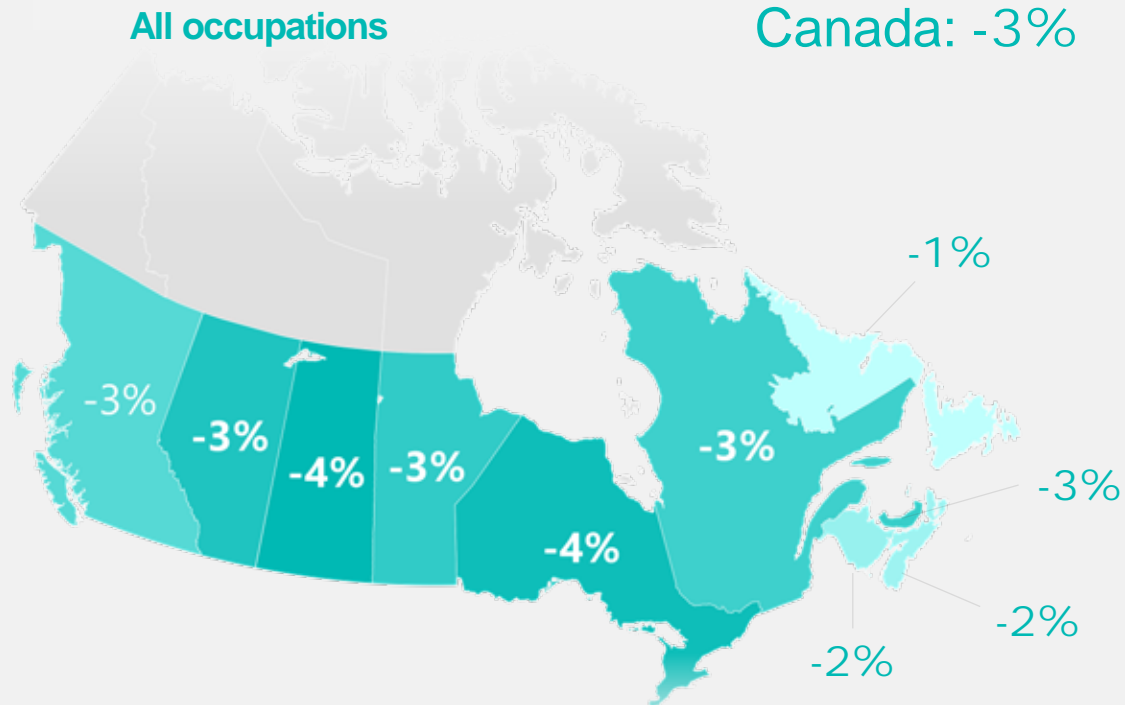
Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0416-03](#). Proportion of women and men employed in management positions, annual.



# Atlantic Canada and Quebec have the smallest representation gaps.

Among management occupations, Atlantic Canada and Quebec have the smallest representation gaps for women. Central and Western Canada have the farthest to go.

Representation gap for women (ppts)  
2023



Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0416-03](#). Proportion of women and men employed in management positions, annual. Data for territories is unavailable. Statistics Canada, [Census of Population](#), 2021. Note: A negative representation gap indicates proportion of women in occupation is less than population share.

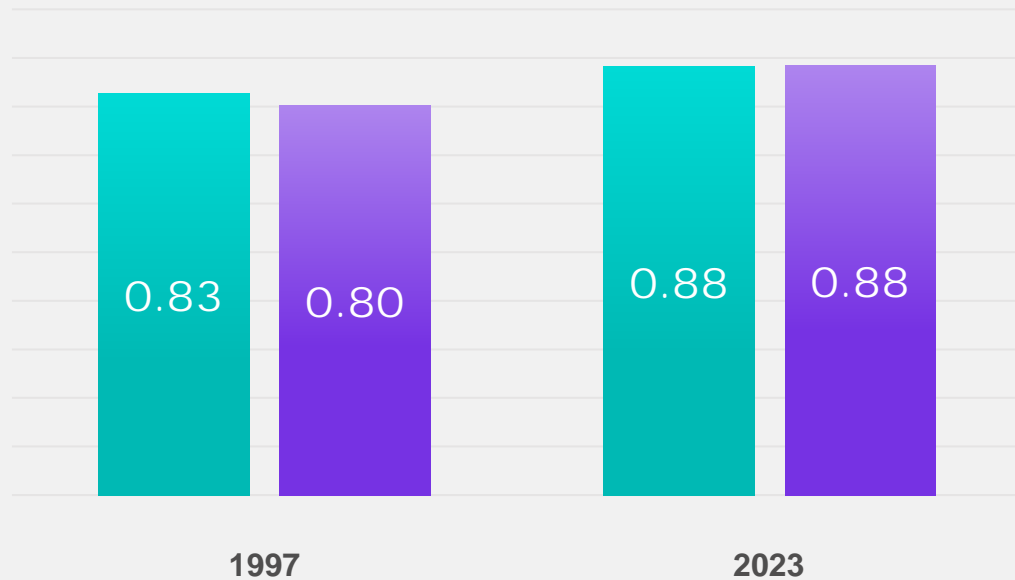


# Women still earn less than men.

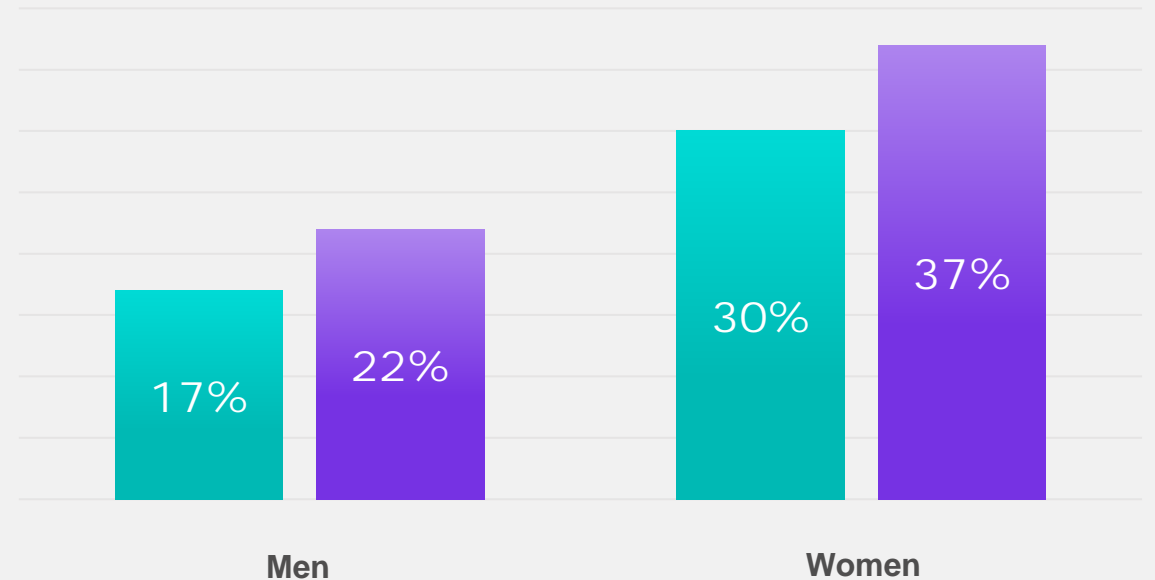
Women still earn less than men (88 cents to the dollar) despite faster wage growth in recent decades.

All occupations and management occupations  
1997 vs. 2023, ages 25-54

### Women to men wage ratio (%)



### Hourly wage growth, adjusted for inflation (%)



◆ All occupations    ◆ Management occupations

Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0417-01](#), Employee wages by occupation, annual; Statistics Canada, [18-10-0005-01](#), Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted.

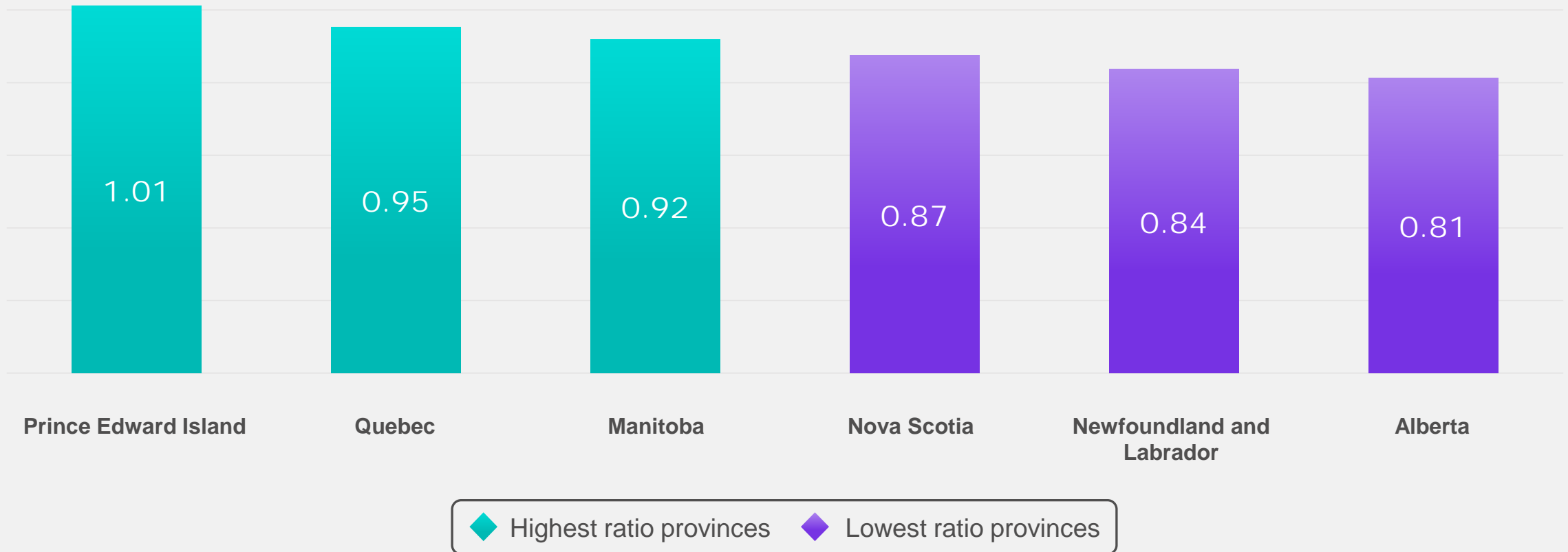


# Women in P.E.I. and Quebec are at or nearing wage parity.

Women in P.E.I. and Quebec are at or nearing wage parity. Whereas women in Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia make 87 cents or less for every dollar a man earns.

Women to men wage ratio, all management occupations (%)

Provincially, 2023, ages 25-54



Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0417-01](#). Employee wages by occupation, annual; Statistics Canada, [18-10-0005-01](#). Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted. Data for territories is unavailable.



# Middle Management



# The biggest gains have been in specialized middle management.

Women have made the biggest representation gains in specialized middle management. Progress in retail and trades has been very slow.

Share of women in middle management positions (%)

1987 vs. 2023



Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0416-03](#). Proportion of women and men employed in management positions, annual.

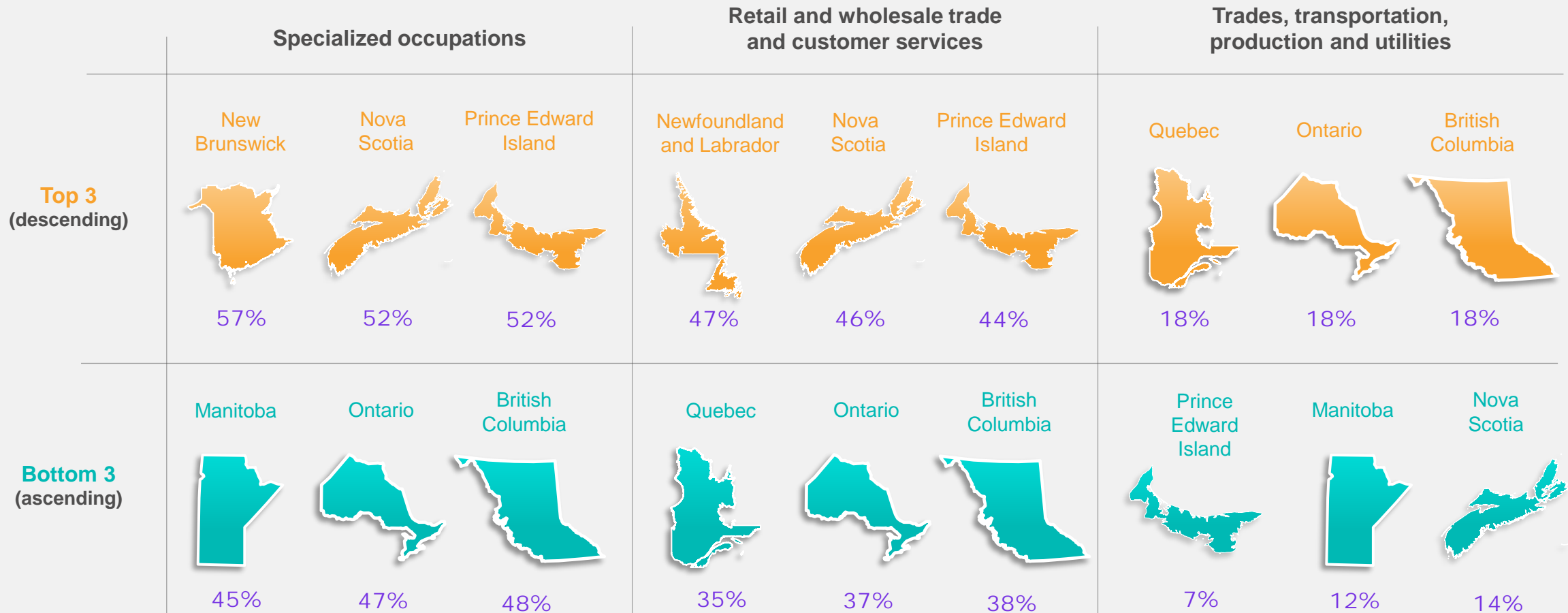
Notes: See [Annex](#) for additional data notes and definitions related to what industries and job categories/classifications are included in middle management occupations.



# ◆ The largest gaps are in trades and transportation.

The largest representation gaps are in middle management occupations in trades and transportation where women are more than 30 pts behind men across all provinces.

Share of women in middle management positions (%)  
2023



Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [Table 14-10-0416-03](#). Proportion of women and men employed in management positions, annual.

# Minimal progress has been made to close the pay gap.

Over the past three decades, women's average hourly wages increased by 6 cents for every dollar earned by men across middle management occupations.

### Average hourly wages (\$)

National, 2023, ages 25-54



### Women to men wage ratio (%)

National, 1997 vs. 2023, ages 25-54



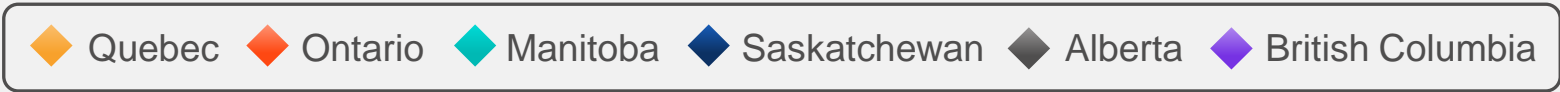
Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0417-01](#). Employee wages by occupation, annual.

# Quebec and Ontario have the smallest wage parity gaps.

Quebec and Ontario have the smallest average hourly wage parity gaps across all middle management occupations while Prairie provinces (particularly Alberta and Saskatchewan) have the largest.

Women to men wage ratio in middle management positions (%)

Provincial, 2023, ages 25-54



Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0417-01](#). Employee wages by occupation, annual.



# Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship

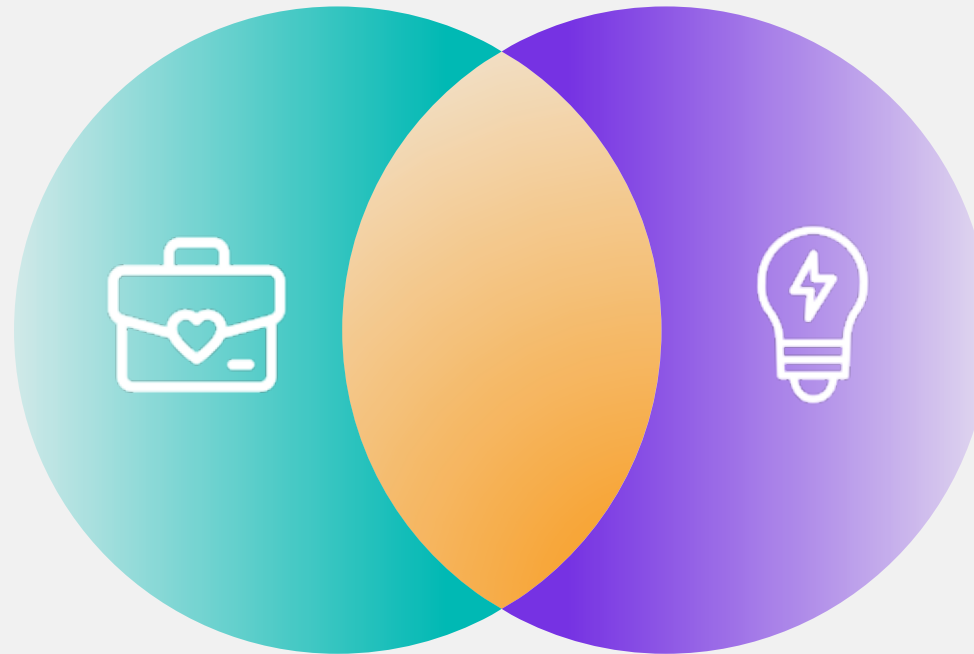
# Multiple barriers prevent women from advancing.

Career progression for women is not a singular path, and all potential paths are riddled with persistent and entrenched obstacles. Barriers to the advancement of women in the traditional workplace and self-employment continue to hinder women's ascent to equity and equality, including towards representation and compensation parity.

## Traditional workplace

**Organizational culture**  
(inflexible work conditions, unequal access to sponsorship, "always available" assumptions, microaggressions, discrimination)

**Organizational support**  
(lack of development, recruitment, retention, and promotion of talented women)



## Self-employment and entrepreneurship

**Access to capital and funding**  
(prohibitive financing and credit requirements)

**Lack of information and resources**  
(capacity and business skills building)

**Limited infrastructure and support**  
(unfavourable business environments, greater fear of failure)

## Both

**Gender stereotypes and biases**  
(micro social, organizational and cultural norms and factors)

**(Lack of) intersectional and data-driven public policies**  
(paid paternity and maternity leave, inclusive work arrangements, affordable child and elder care)

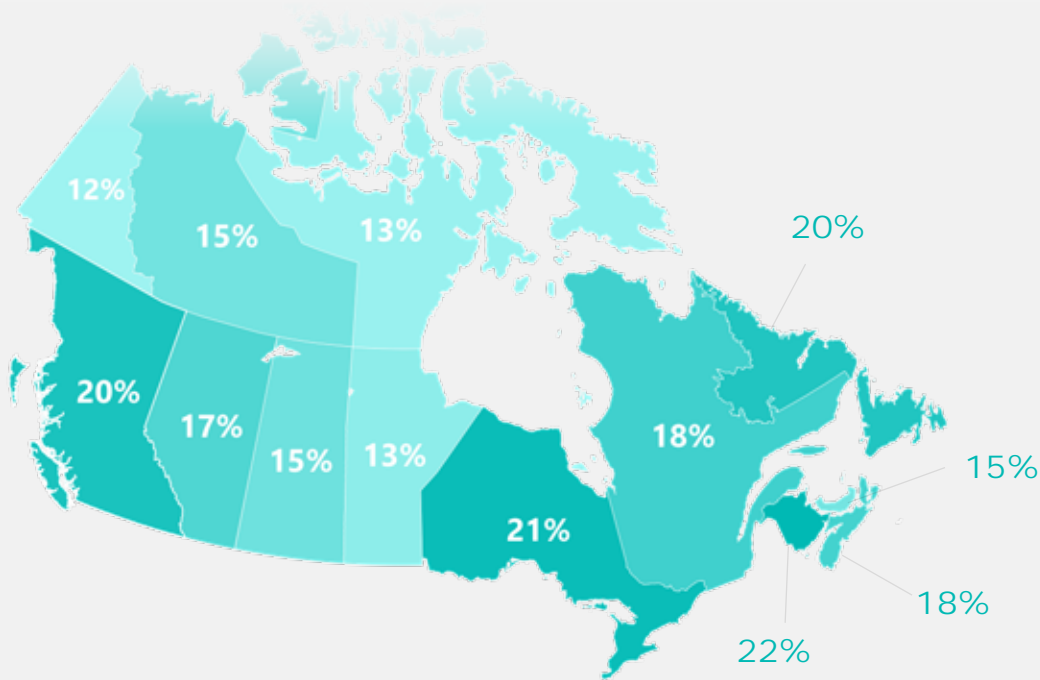
**(Lack of) diverse mentorship, support and networking**  
(sponsorship, training and development)

# Self-employment and entrepreneurship as alternative paths:

Share of total businesses (%)  
Q4 2023

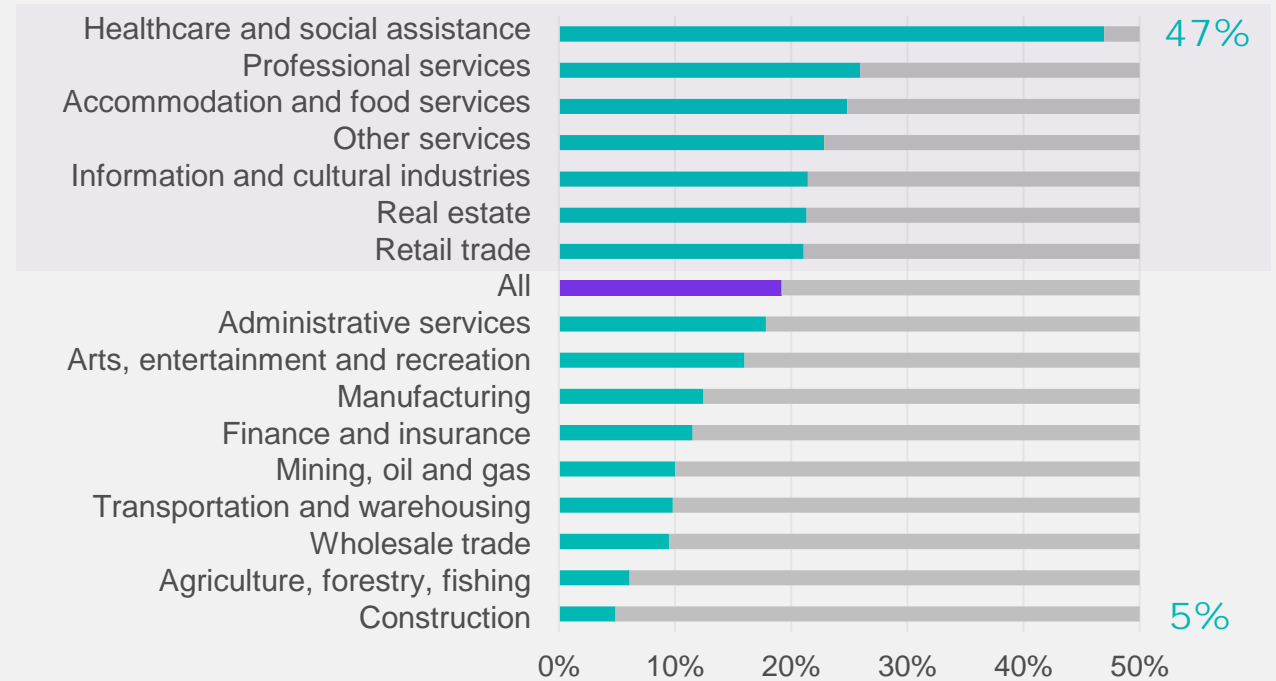
By geography

Canada: 19%



Women-owned private sector businesses are concentrated in industries where women are faring better than men in middle management, but in geographies where the pay parity gap is 10% or more.

By industry and representation gap



◆ Share by industry    ◆ Representation gap

Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Business Conditions; and 2021 Census and additional sources. Note: Business counts as of Q4 2023, population from 2021 census. Representation Gap: Women's population share minus the share of private sector ownership by industry. See Annex for additional data.



# Senior Management and Boards

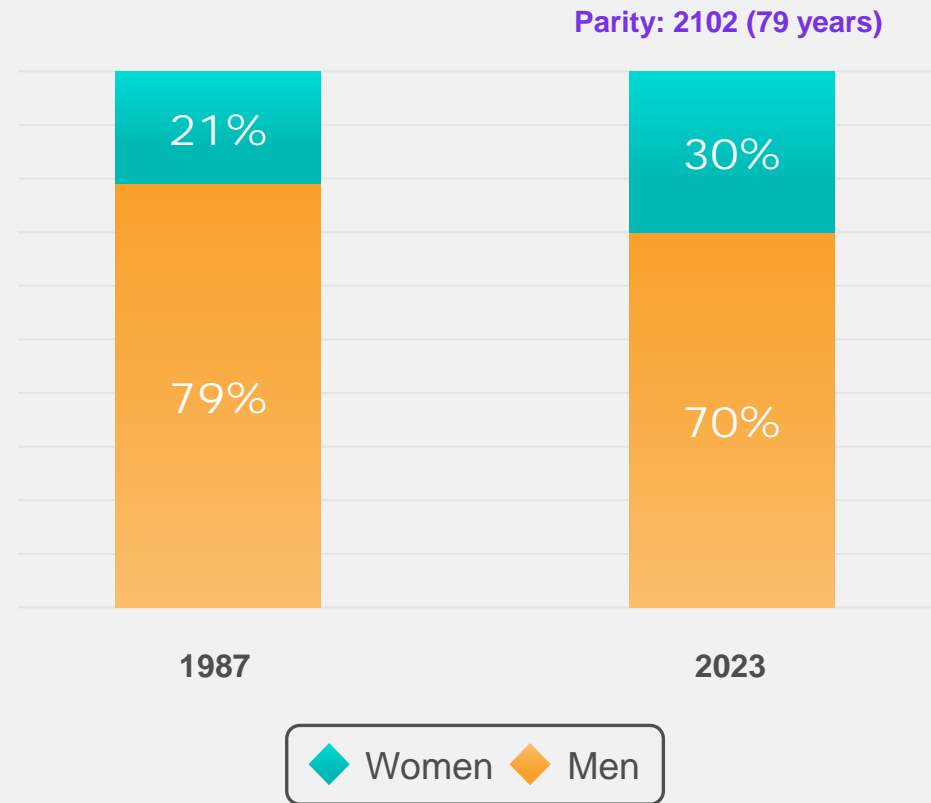


# Women in senior management have seen modest progress.

Representation and pay for women in senior management have shown modest progress over recent decades.

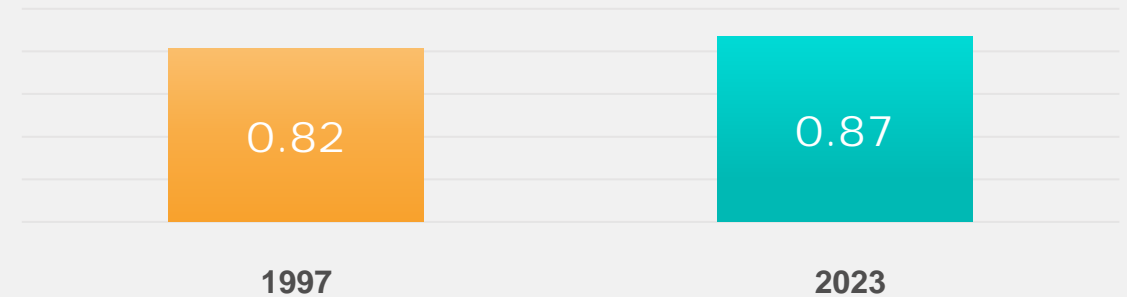
## Proportion of men and women employed in legislative and senior management occupations (%)

1987 vs. 2023



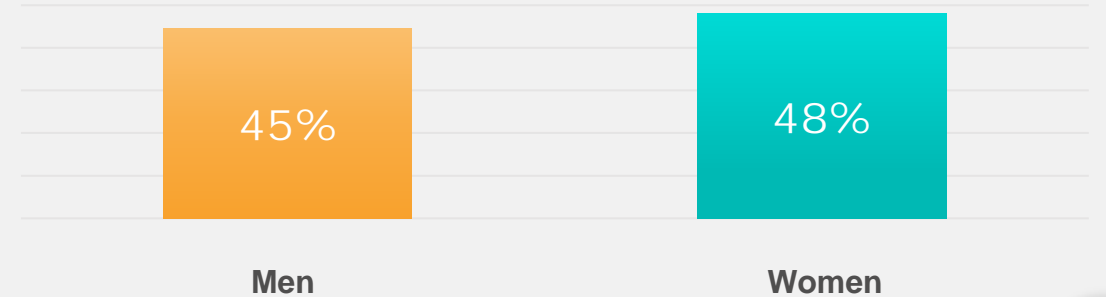
## Women to men hourly wage ratio (%)

1997 vs. 2023, ages 25-54



## Real wage growth (%)

1997 vs. 2023, ages 25-54



Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0416-03](#). Proportion of women and men employed in management positions, annual; Statistics Canada, [14-10-0417-01](#). Employee wages by occupation, annual.

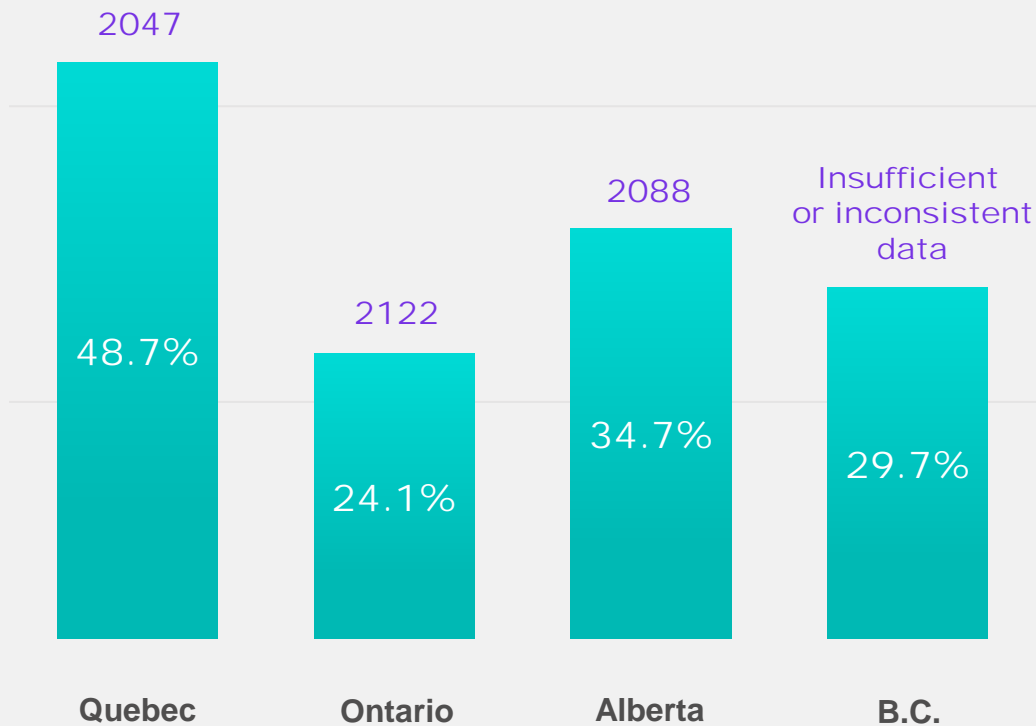




# Women in senior management are closest to parity in Quebec.

## Provinces with the highest proportion of women employed in legislative and senior management occupations (%)

2023 (date of parity)



Women in senior management are closest to parity in Quebec, followed by Alberta, whereas Ontario and British Columbia are far behind. Median income for women in senior management positions in these four provinces remains less than men.

## Median employment income (%)

Age 25-64, 2021 census (% of men's median income)



Legislators		Senior managers (public and private sector)	
Men	Women	Men	Women
\$97K	\$80K (84%)	\$155K	\$126K (81%)
\$105K	\$99K (94%)	\$90K	\$84K (93%)
\$88K	\$67K (76%)	\$136K	\$111K (82%)
\$95K	\$85K (89%)	\$159K	\$116K (73%)

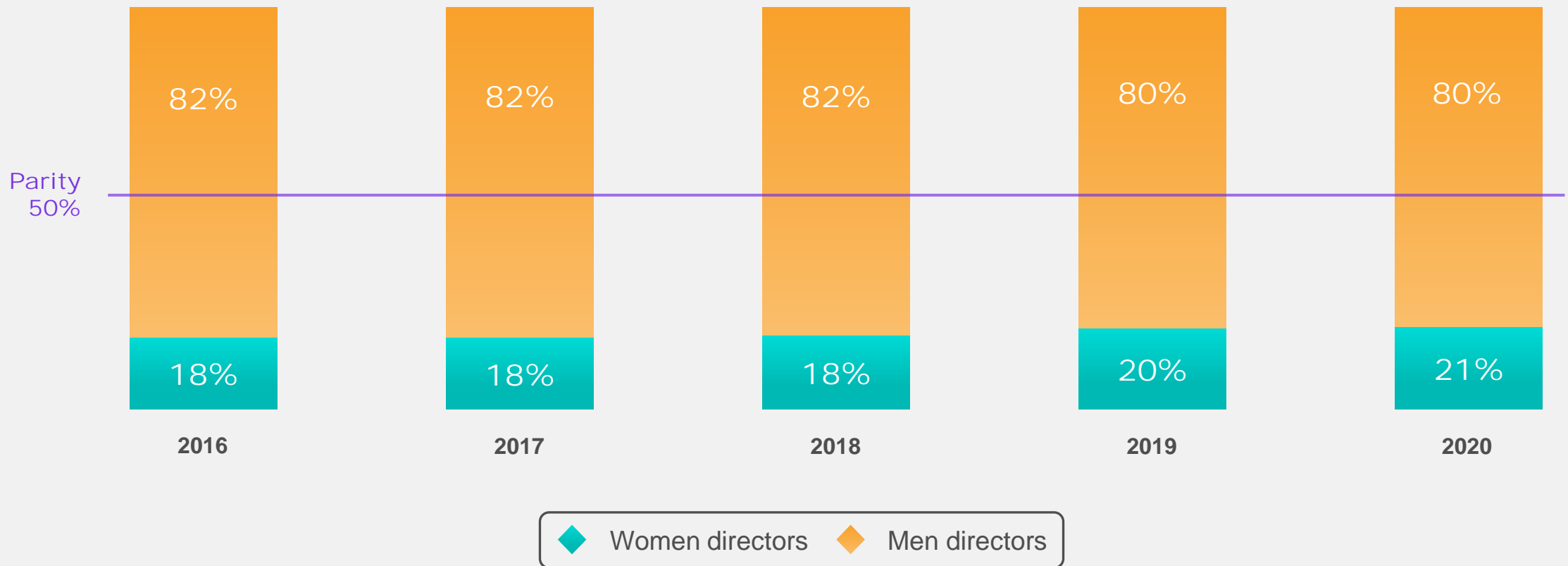
# Little progress achieved in diversifying Canadian boards.



Only 24% of top officer board positions were held by women in 2020.

Share of women vs. men directors in Canada (%)

All industries



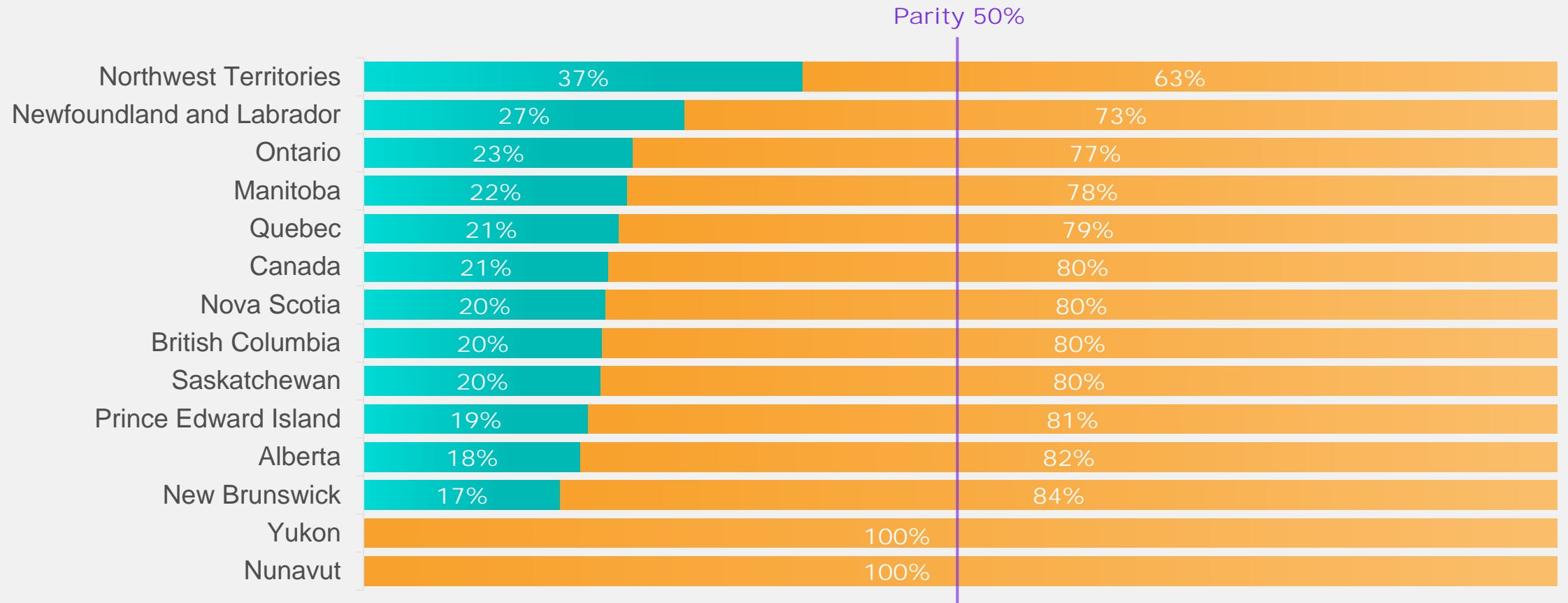
**Sources:** BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [33-10-0501-01](#). **Note:** Directors are individuals responsible for supervising the activities of a corporation and for making decisions for that corporation. Top officers are individuals responsible for leading the day-to-day operations of a corporation (president, executive vice-president or chairperson).

# Considerable variation in the share of women directors across jurisdictions.

Share of women vs. men directors by province and territory (%)

2022, all industries

◆ Women directors    ◆ Men directors



Sources: BDL analysis; Statistics Canada, [33-10-0501-01](#). Note: Directors are individuals responsible for supervising the activities of a corporation and for making decisions for that corporation.



# Case Studies and Success Stories

# Intersectional entrepreneurs struggle with financing.

## Challenge

Despite a strong ecosystem of financing options, entrepreneurs from traditionally underrepresented groups struggle to access financing more than the average Canadian business. While women fare best among such groups, intersectional women entrepreneurs require further support to access financing on an equal basis.

## Facts

- Generally, women-owned businesses experienced a similar degree of difficulty with accessing financing in 2023 as the average Canadian business. However, other traditionally underrepresented entrepreneurs noticeably struggled. An intersectional women entrepreneur could therefore face greater barriers in accessing capital.
- Interestingly, women-owned businesses were consistently less aware of available financing than the average business during the pandemic.

Percentage of Canadian Businesses Expecting Obstacles Obtaining Financing on a Quarterly Basis

Majority Ownership	2023 Average	Difference to All Average
All	13%	-
Women	15%	+2
Immigrant to Canada	19%	+6
Visible minority	19%	+6
Indigenous	24%	+11

## Opportunity

- **Make entrepreneurs aware:** Use Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES) to help increase awareness of available financing.
- **Reach intersectional entrepreneurs:** Alter the lending parameters of the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) to better serve enterprises unable to receive capital from traditional initiatives. Consider increasing BDC's presence in underserved communities.

# Women entrepreneurs struggle with parental leave.

## Challenge

Canadian women entrepreneurs encounter additional obstacles with parental leave. The experiences of entrepreneurs like Marie Chevrier Schwartz, Krystyn Harrison, Ali de Bold, and Erin Bury underscore the complexity of securing benefits and support, as well as balancing day-to-day business and family commitments. Denied parental benefits, Schwartz faced skepticism and curtailed her maternity leave. Harrison sold her business, emphasizing the dilemma of choosing between business and family. De Bold, ineligible initially, sought reimbursement but regretted a shortened leave. Bury navigated system intricacies but highlights the need for robust corporate leave policies for partners and staff. These individuals are advocating for reforms that recognize the unique challenges faced by entrepreneurs, especially women, in sustaining professional growth and family life.

## Facts

- Entrepreneurs face complexities and additional criteria in accessing Employment Insurance (EI) benefits compared with traditional employees. Self-employed individuals must register 12 months prior, reduce business involvement by 40% and meet income thresholds, adding to the challenges.
- While more than half (58%) of Canadian employers provide top-up pay for maternity leave benefits, just 33% offer top-ups for parental leave benefits, according to a 2021 Aon survey.

## Opportunity

- **Help entrepreneurs plan:** Using WES, amplify the tactical timeline created by Willful Co-founder Erin Bury to help entrepreneurs prepare for, and return from, parental leave.
- **Review policies:** Re-examine EI policies; considering the unique challenges entrepreneurs encounter in seeking parental leave.

# Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy

## About

Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES) is a game-changing initiative, emphasizing the importance of women's full participation in the economy. The strategy, backed by nearly \$7 billion in investments, aims to empower women-owned businesses, fostering their growth and facilitating their entry into new markets.

## Programs

- **Inclusive Women Venture Capital Initiative:** Funds projects to create a more inclusive venture capital environment for Canadian women entrepreneurs.
- **Women Entrepreneurship Loan Fund:** Provides loans of up to \$50,000, supporting women in starting up, scaling up and accessing new markets.
- **WES Ecosystem Fund:** Supports women entrepreneurs through a network of organizations across Canada, offering mentorship, support and business growth assistance.
- **Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub:** A comprehensive source of knowledge, data and best practices for women entrepreneurs.

## Impact

- 9,000 loans provided in 2022.
- WES services accessed nearly 72,000 times in 2022.
- Over 860 network and learning events held in 2022.
- In 2023, women-owned businesses experienced a similar degree of difficulty with accessing financing (15%) as the average Canadian business (13%).



# Recommendations





# For Canadian Businesses and Non-Profits

Pursuing an enabling, robust and inclusive framework for advancement.

## Recruit

- § Examine job descriptions to ensure they do not inadvertently discourage women from applying.
- § Expand candidate pools through internal mobility, alternative recruiting channels and remote roles to reduce geographic limitations.
- § Track hiring outcomes to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion within the hiring process.

## Retain

- § Strive for equal pay in the workplace by re-examining job classifications annually.
- § Provide upskilling and mentorship resources to support professional development for women seeking promotions.
- § Unlock the potential of flexible and hybrid work to support workforce mental health and workers with young children.
- § Track retention outcomes to identify and resolve challenges.

## Promote

- § Track promotion outcomes to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion within the promotion process.
- § Recognize and reward women leaders for their achievements.
- § Hold senior leaders accountable for advancing diversity goals by tying metrics to their performance reviews and incentives.



# For Governments and Public Sector Employers

Setting the tone through data driven regulatory and policy change.

## Lead by Example

- § Lead by example on flexible and hybrid work to model parent friendly workplaces for the Canadian private sector.
- § Hold senior leaders accountable for advancing diversity goals by tying metrics to their performance reviews and incentives.

## Address Gaps

- § Address parental leave gaps for women entrepreneurs.
- § Consider altering the Business Development Bank of Canada's (BDC) lending practices to better reach women and other intersectional entrepreneurs in the community.
- § Improve awareness of supportive funding and services available through BDC and WES.

# Acknowledgements

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## **About the Business Data Lab**

In February 2022, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce launched the Business Data Lab (BDL) to help businesses boost their performance with granular insights on rapidly changing business trends. Established in collaboration with Statistics Canada and with financial support from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, the BDL's main objectives are to advance Canadians' understanding of business conditions and to democratize data. To support better decision-making and improve business performance, the BDL shares its insights across the Canadian Chamber of Commerce network, which represents over 200,000 Canadian businesses.

# Acknowledgements

The BDL is made possible through our collaboration with Statistics Canada and financial support from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada.



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**Annex**



# Data Notes and Definitions

§ Statistics Canada data for proportion of women and men employed in management positions (representation) is available from 1987 to 2023 ([Table 14-10-0416-03](#)) whereas annual employee wages by occupation is from 1997 to 2023 ([Table 14-10-0417-01](#)).

§ Census 2021 data ([Census of Population](#)) used focuses on full-time full-year positions for prime-age workers (25 to 54 years). Gender in the data sample includes two categories: “Men+” and “Women+”. The Men+ category encompasses men and boys, as well as some nonbinary persons. The Women+ category encompasses women and girls, as well as some nonbinary persons.

§ **There are three categories of middle management occupations:**

1. Specialized middle management: administrative services managers and managers in financial and business services, communication (except broadcasting), engineering, architecture, science and information systems, healthcare, public administration, education, social and community services, public protection services, art, culture, recreation and sport.
2. Retail and wholesale trade and customer services: corporate sales managers and retail and wholesale trade managers, and managers in restaurant and food service, accommodation service, and customer and personal services, not elsewhere classified.
3. Trades, transportation, production and utilities: managers in construction, facility operation and maintenance, transportation, natural resources production, fishing, agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, manufacturing and utilities.

§ **Women on boards:**

- Director: An individual responsible for supervising the activities of a corporation and for making decisions for that corporation.
- Top officer: An individual responsible for leading the day-to-day operations of a corporation (president, executive vice-president or chairperson).



# Middle management occupations where women are faring relatively better provincially but remain underpaid.

Table I  
Share of full-time full-year positions held by women (Census 2021)

Table II  
Relative median full-time full-year income of women as a share of men (Census 2021)

Specialized middle management

Management Occupation
Managers in healthcare
Managers in social, community and correctional services
Managers in education
Administrative services managers
Managers in art, culture, recreation and sport
Managers in public administration
Managers in financial and business services
Managers in food service and accommodation
Managers in customer and personal services
Retail and wholesale trade managers
Corporate sales managers

	NL	NB	QC	ON	SK	AB	BC
Managers in healthcare	78%	77%	70%	75%	76%	76%	74%
Managers in social, community and correctional services	59%	76%	78%	75%	76%	78%	74%
Managers in education	59%	64%	65%	65%	62%	60%	60%
Administrative services managers	57%	57%	56%	56%	57%	53%	56%
Managers in art, culture, recreation and sport	67%	61%	50%	55%	55%	49%	51%
Managers in public administration	48%	43%	48%	55%	49%	51%	52%
Managers in financial and business services	56%	49%	50%	53%	55%	51%	60%
Managers in food service and accommodation	53%	48%	41%	47%	47%	46%	48%
Managers in customer and personal services	56%	40%	50%	46%	50%	49%	50%
Retail and wholesale trade managers	46%	40%	40%	37%	35%	37%	37%
Corporate sales managers	29%	26%	26%	34%	28%	28%	31%

	NL	NB	QC	ON	SK	AB	BC
Managers in healthcare	98%	91%	91%	92%	103%	94%	94%
Managers in social, community and correctional services	88%	78%	75%	91%	66%	82%	81%
Managers in education	96%	102%	93%	94%	88%	88%	90%
Administrative services managers	78%	90%	86%	87%	77%	81%	85%
Managers in art, culture, recreation and sport	67%	91%	92%	91%	101%	91%	89%
Managers in public administration	102%	95%	97%	97%	89%	91%	91%
Managers in financial and business services	89%	87%	85%	85%	86%	78%	88%
Managers in food service and accommodation	86%	73%	83%	92%	90%	90%	85%
Managers in customer and personal services	74%	82%	75%	80%	94%	92%	76%
Retail and wholesale trade managers	68%	69%	76%	77%	66%	68%	74%
Corporate sales managers	69%	91%	82%	80%	82%	76%	79%

Middle management occupations in retail and wholesale trade

Average parity gap without retail

Average parity gap with retail

Average parity gap without retail	12%	10%	12%	9%	13%	14%	12%
Average parity gap with retail	17%	14%	15%	12%	14%	15%	15%

Lowest share



Highest share

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, [Census of Population](#), 2021. **Table I:** In yellow are management occupations where representation is below parity. **Table II:** In yellow are occupations where the pay gap between women's reported median incomes are 25% or more below that of men's. Parity pay gap is calculated as difference between men's and women's median income as % of men's where a positive gap indicates women's earnings are less than men's.



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