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Analysis in Brief

Analysis on majority women-owned businesses, first quarter of 2026

by Vicky Do, Shivani Sood and Chris Johnston

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Analysis on majority women-owned businesses, first quarter of 2026

by **Vicky Do, Shivani Sood and Chris Johnston**

Businesses in Canada face different obstacles in their day-to-day operations. These obstacles may vary across businesses owned by different populations. This article focuses on majority women-owned businesses.

Majority women-owned businesses accounted for 20.6% of all private sector businesses in Canada in the first quarter of 2026. Employer businesses that are owned by women are most frequently found in [professional, scientific and technical services, and health care and social assistance](#). According to the [Labour Force Survey](#), 80.1% of core-aged women (25 to 54 years old) were employed in Canada in January 2026.

From the beginning of January to early February 2026, Statistics Canada conducted the Canadian Survey on Business Conditions to collect information on the environment in which businesses are currently operating and on their future expectations. This article explores results from the survey for majority women-owned private sector businesses, focusing on their expectations related to labour, the supply chain, outsourced work and debt in the first quarter of 2026. Majority ownership is defined at 51% or more and was self-reported for private sector businesses only.

In the first quarter of 2026, majority women-owned businesses employed greater proportions of women in all positions when compared with all private sector businesses. Additionally, majority women-owned businesses reported lower ability to take on more debt compared with all private sector businesses. In the first quarter of 2026, the proportion of majority women-owned businesses that sought alternative suppliers outside the United States was similar to that of all private sector businesses. Finally, majority women-owned businesses were less likely than all private sector businesses to report a decrease in revenue compared with the previous year.

Employment of women in Canada

In the first quarter of 2026, the average proportion of women in senior management positions within majority women-owned businesses was 74.8%, almost double the proportion within all private sector businesses (38.8%). Senior management may include owners or operators for smaller businesses, and titles such as executive director, chief executive officer, chief financial officer and chief operating officer for larger businesses.

Majority women-owned businesses reported a higher average proportion of women in other management positions (68.1%) compared with all private sector businesses (45.2%). Furthermore, the average proportion of women in all other positions within majority women-owned businesses (68.1%) was higher than that for all private sector businesses (43.7%).

For all three employment categories, the proportion of women employed was significantly higher in majority women-owned businesses compared with all private sector businesses.

Table 1
Average percentage of women in management positions, first quarter of 2026

	Majority women-owned businesses	All private sector businesses
	average percentage of businesses	
Employees that are women in senior management positions	74.8	38.8
Employees that are women in all other management positions	68.1	45.2
Employees that are women in all other positions	68.1	43.7

Source: Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, first quarter of 2026 (Table 33-10-1136-01).

Labour-related obstacles a concern for nearly one-third of majority women-owned businesses

In the first quarter of 2026, 31.5% of majority women-owned businesses anticipate obstacles related to labour, down 1.6% compared with the same quarter a year ago. Comparatively, in the first quarter of 2026, 32.9% of all private sector businesses expect labour-related obstacles which edged down 2.8% from the previous year.

In the first quarter of 2026, the proportions of businesses expecting labour force shortages, recruiting and retaining skilled employees to be obstacles over the next three months were similar for majority women-owned businesses and all private sector businesses (Table 2).

Table 2
Expectations of labour-related obstacles over the next three months, first quarters of 2025 and 2026

	Majority women-owned businesses		All private sector businesses	
	First quarter of 2025	First quarter of 2026	First quarter of 2025	First quarter of 2026
	percent			
Labour-related obstacles	33.1	31.5	35.7	32.9
Shortage of labour force	14.9	12.4	16.2	15.9
Recruiting skilled employees	24.3	25.2	26.0	24.4
Retaining skilled employees	17.9	14.3	17.6	15.6

Note: Respondents were able to select multiple labour-related obstacles over the next three months. This table will not sum to 100%. "Labour-related obstacles" composes of shortage of labour force, recruiting skilled employees and retaining skilled employees.

Source: Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, first quarter of 2025 (Table 33-10-0917-01) and first quarter of 2026 (Table 33-10-1100-01).

Over one-fifth of majority women-owned businesses expect costs of inputs to be an obstacle over the next three months

Compared with all private sector businesses (59.6%), majority women-owned businesses (60.6%) are about as likely to expect cost-related obstacles over the next three months. Cost-related obstacles include costs of inputs and costs in real estate, leasing or property tax and those specific breakdowns differ among majority women-owned businesses compared with all private sector businesses.

While a lower proportion of majority women-owned businesses (23.3%) expect costs of inputs to be an obstacle compared with all private sector businesses (25.0%), majority women-owned businesses are more likely (24.8%) to report costs in real estate, leasing or property tax as an obstacle compared with all private sector businesses (21.9%).

Over 7 in 10 (71.6%) of majority women-owned businesses are optimistic about the future outlook of their business compared with 71.2% of all private sector businesses.

Nearly 1 in 10 majority women-owned businesses plan to expand the business without increasing the physical space over the next 12 months

Majority women-owned businesses (8.4%) are about as likely to plan to expand the business without increasing the physical space over the next 12 months compared with all private sector businesses (8.6%). Similarly, majority women-owned businesses (8.6%) are more likely to plan to restructure the business over the next 12 months compared with all private sector businesses (7.4%). Meanwhile, majority women-owned businesses (5.4%) are slightly less likely to plan to expand the current location of the business over the next 12 months compared with all private sector businesses (6.4%).

Nearly 1 in 10 majority women-owned businesses sought suppliers outside the United States over the last 12 months

Similar proportions of majority women-owned businesses (9.3%) and all private sector businesses (8.8%) sought suppliers outside the United States as a result of any tariffs applied by the United States on imports from Canada over the last 12 months. Additionally, majority women-owned businesses were equally likely to have

increased domestic sourcing (11.8%) or to have raised prices of goods or services (13.4%) compared with all private sector businesses (11.6%, 13.2% respectively).

Majority women-owned businesses (70.8%) are less likely to purchase directly from suppliers in the United States over the last 12 months compared with all private sector businesses (79.3%). Among businesses that purchased goods or services from the United States over the last 12 months, those that are majority women-owned (73.3%) were more likely to have had tariffs imposed by Canada on goods they purchased compared with all private sector businesses (70.3%).

Majority women-owned businesses (22.2%) were less likely to have passed on cost increases to customers over the last 12 months compared with all private sector businesses (27.5%). Additionally two-fifths (40.7%) of majority women-owned businesses do not expect to pass on cost increases due to tariffs onto customers over the next 12 months, compared with 35.5% of all private sector businesses. The proportion of majority women-owned businesses (32.1%) that are likely to pass on cost increases due to tariffs to their customers is smaller compared with all private sector businesses (35.1%).

Table 3
Likelihood of businesses to pass on cost increases due to tariffs to their customers over the next 12 months, first quarter of 2026

	Majority women-owned businesses	All private sector businesses
	percentage of businesses	
Very likely	16.5	19.8
Somewhat likely	15.6	15.3
Somewhat unlikely	3.5	5.2
Very unlikely	11.3	9.1
Business does not expect any cost increases due to tariffs	40.7	35.5
Unknown	12.4	15.0

Source: Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, first quarter of 2026 (Table 33-10-1114-01).

Nearly one-third of majority women-owned businesses purchased from suppliers in another province or territory over the last 12 months

Among majority women-owned businesses, nearly one-third (29.9%) purchased from suppliers in another province or territory over the last 12 months, compared with 30.3% of all private sector businesses. For those who did not conduct any interprovincial trade activities over the last 12 months, majority women-owned businesses (17.1%) were less likely to consider purchasing from suppliers or selling to customers in another province or territory in the future compared with 22.3% of all private sector businesses.

Nearly 1 in 5 majority women-owned businesses changed marketing practices to promote Canadian products

Majority women-owned businesses (17.0%) were about as likely to have changed their marketing practices to promote Canadian products over the last 12 months compared with all private sector businesses (16.6%), and both were equally likely to experience an increase in sales of such products over the last 12 months (13.2%, 12.7%).

Majority women-owned businesses most likely to use debt financing to refinance of existing debt

In the first quarter of 2026, the proportion of majority women-owned businesses (10.4%) that are planning to apply for debt financing over the next three months was similar compared with the proportion of all private sector businesses (10.4%).

Majority women-owned businesses are more likely to use debt financing for refinancing of existing debt (42.8%) and current expenditure (28.0%) while all private sector businesses are more likely to use debt financing for refinancing of existing debt (38.2%) and business expansion (31.0%).

Among businesses that do not plan to apply for debt financing, one-quarter of majority women-owned businesses (25.0%) reported being unable to take on more debt compared with 23.1% of all private sector businesses.

Nearly one-third of majority women-owned business reported their revenues increased in 2025 compared with 2024

A similar proportion of majority women-owned businesses (31.2%) experienced an increase in revenue in 2025 compared with 2024 compared with 31.9% of all private sector businesses. Majority women-owned businesses were more likely (40.6%) to have no change in revenue compared with all private sector businesses (35.9%), while majority women-owned businesses were less likely (28.3%) to have a decrease in revenue compared with 32.2% of all private sector businesses.

Methodology

From January 2 to February 6, 2026, representatives from businesses across Canada were invited to take part in an online questionnaire about business conditions and future business expectations. The Canadian Survey on Business Conditions uses a stratified random sample of business establishments with employees classified by geography, industry sector, and size. Proportions are estimated using calibrated weights to calculate the population totals in the domains of interest. The total sample size for this iteration of the survey is 20,710, and results are based on responses from a total of 8,793 businesses or organizations.

References

Statistics Canada. 2026. Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, first quarter of 2026.

Statistics Canada. 2025. Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, first quarter of 2025.