



# Labour Market Bulletin

British Columbia

October 2020



This Labour Market Bulletin provides an analysis of Labour Force Survey results for the province of British Columbia (B.C.), including the regions of Northern B.C., Vancouver Island and Coast, Lower Mainland, Thompson–Okanagan and the Kootenays.

## OVERVIEW

The province's labour market continues to recover from the impact of the initial outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), as employment increased (+33,500) in October. Between September and October of 2020, the gains in part-time employment (+25,700) surpassed advances made in full-time employment (+7,800).<sup>1</sup> In fact, employment growth was due to a surge in the private sector (+40,500), whereas employment declined in the public sector (-5,000) and among the self-employed (-1,900).<sup>2</sup>

The province's unemployment rate improved slightly, decreasing by 0.4 percentage points to 8.0% over the month, due in part to continuous job growth. Despite the improvement, the province held the second highest monthly unemployment rate across the western provinces, just below Alberta (10.7%).<sup>3</sup> In the short-term, B.C.'s economy will face increasing challenges due in part to the rise of COVID-19 cases. Already, further restrictions are now in effect in the Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health regions until November 23, 2020 to limit the spread of the virus.<sup>4</sup>

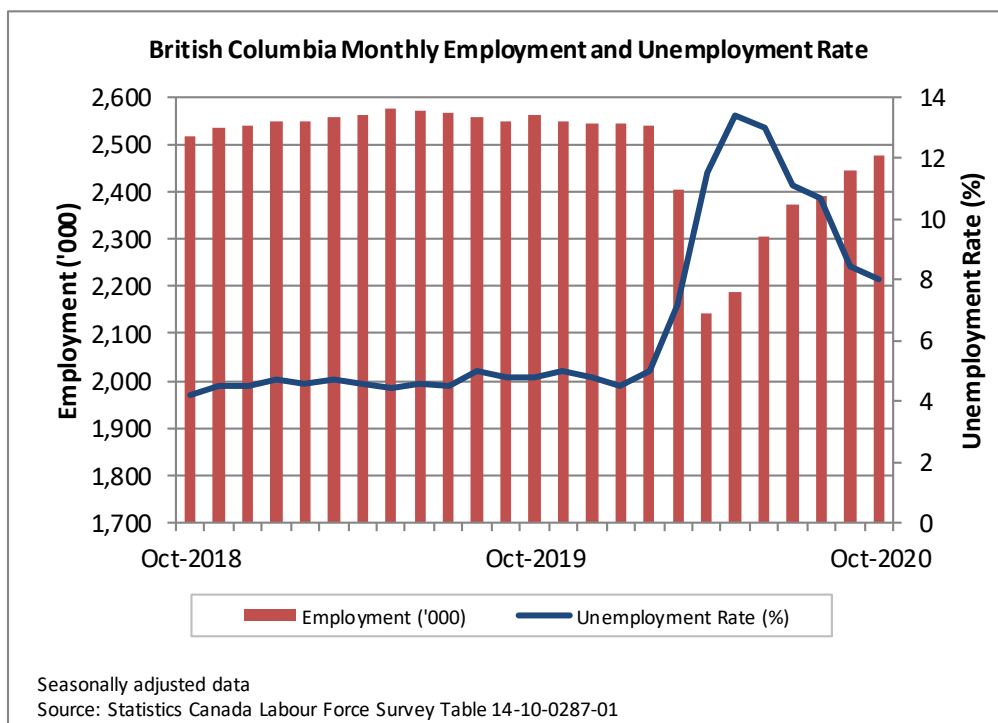
To limit the spread of COVID-19, the Government of Canada first implemented a 30-day restriction on all non-essential travel at the Canada-U.S. border on March 21.<sup>5</sup> The two countries continue to extend the closure of the borders, now until November 21.<sup>6</sup> The border closure continues to affect the province's economic recovery, particularly within the tourism sector.

**British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics**

Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Data	October 2020	September 2020	October 2019	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Population 15 + ('000)</b>	4,189.4	4,185.4	4,123.0	4.0	0.1	66.4	1.6
<b>Labour Force ('000)</b>	2,692.8	2,668.0	2,692.0	24.8	0.9	0.8	0.0
<b>Employment ('000)</b>	2,477.8	2,444.3	2,563.4	33.5	1.4	-85.6	-3.3
Full-Time ('000)	1,895.5	1,887.7	2,014.6	7.8	0.4	-119.1	-5.9
Part-Time ('000)	582.3	556.6	548.8	25.7	4.6	33.5	6.1
<b>Unemployment ('000)</b>	215.0	223.7	128.6	-8.7	-3.9	86.4	67.2
<b>Unemployment Rate (%)</b>	8.0	8.4	4.8	-0.4	-	3.2	-
<b>Participation Rate (%)</b>	64.3	63.7	65.3	0.6	-	-1.0	-
<b>Employment Rate (%)</b>	59.1	58.4	62.2	0.7	-	-3.1	-

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0287, formerly CANSIM 282-0087



The COVID-19 pandemic continued to weigh on employment for B.C. youth (15 to 24 years) in October, though their unemployment rate improved slightly by 0.3 percentage points to 15.6%.<sup>7</sup> Over the month, the number of unemployed youth remained relatively unchanged, whereas those employed increased by 5,000.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, those unemployed aged 25 years and older decreased by 8,600 over the month to reach an unemployment rate of 6.8%.<sup>9</sup>

## British Columbia Monthly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally Adjusted Data	October 2020 (%)	September 2020 (%)	October 2019 (%)	Monthly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>Total</b>	8.0	8.4	4.8	-0.4	3.2
<b>25 years and over</b>	6.8	7.2	4.0	-0.4	2.8
Men - 25 years and over	7.7	7.6	4.0	0.1	3.7
Women - 25 years and over	5.8	6.8	4.1	-1.0	1.7
<b>15 to 24 years</b>	15.6	15.9	9.2	-0.3	6.4
Men - 15 to 24 years	18.0	18.6	11.8	-0.6	6.2
Women - 15 to 24 years	13.1	13.1	6.4	0.0	6.7

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0287, formerly CANSIM 282-0087

## EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

The province's goods producing sector recovered some job losses over October (+11,000), with job growth predominantly in **manufacturing** (+5,900), **forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas** (+3,900), and **agriculture** (+2,800).<sup>10</sup> However, year-over-year, employment in the sector decreased to 470,300 (-1.7%),<sup>11</sup> as job losses in the **construction** industry (-35,000) exceeded job gains in all other goods-producing industries.

While employment across the **construction** sector remains well below last year's level, it still has potential to recover from the impacts of the pandemic over the long-term. Already, work has begun on FortisBC's Inland Gas Upgrades project earlier this summer, with exploratory work to continue across B.C. this fall.<sup>12</sup> The project is scheduled to be complete by 2024. Meanwhile, construction continues to progress on the Coastal GasLink project, as the field workforce exceeded 3,000 people in October.<sup>13</sup> The lingering impacts of the pandemic continue to hamper residential construction across the province, as year-over-year, housing starts are down 22.5%.<sup>14</sup> Yet, based on the most recent data, the total value of building permits increased by 21.6% year-over-year in September,<sup>15</sup> which could mean more housing starts in the near future.

Despite the financial impacts of COVID-19, **agriculture** employment increased compared to the same time last year. Additionally, to help support the agriculture sector, the federal government is investing \$4.9M under the Emergency On-Farm Support Fund to help B.C. farmers better protect the health and safety of their workers.<sup>16</sup>

Year-over-year, B.C.'s **services** sector employment decreased to 2,007,500, largely due in part to significant job losses in **trade** (-26,900) and **accommodation and food services** (-18,500).<sup>17</sup>

Employment in **trade** remained relatively unchanged in October, yet remains well below (-26,900) compared to the same time last year. After steep declines at the height of the pandemic, employment has been steadily recovering since May as many major retailers reopened, albeit slowly under strict restrictions. Moreover, consumer behaviour has been changing as more Canadians are spending more money and time online, leading to an increase in online spending.<sup>18</sup> By August, online and in-store retail trade sales set a new monthly high<sup>19</sup> due in part to a resurgence in consumer confidence and easing of pandemic restrictions. According to most recent

data, retail trade sales have increased by 4.8% in B.C. since April, when most stores were closed due to the pandemic.<sup>20</sup>

The B.C. **tourism** sector continues to struggle as restrictions on non-essential travel remain in place. With preventative guidelines and safety measures, the province's hotel occupancy rate recovered slightly over the third quarter (48.5%), yet remains well below what it was a year ago (83.3%).<sup>21</sup> Communities that rely on tourism activities remain under deep distress, particularly coastal communities, as the ban on large cruise ships in Canadian waters is now extended until the end of February 2021.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, more people in the **food service** industry were able to find work, as bars, restaurants and breweries continued to benefit from the temporary expansion of service areas.<sup>23</sup> In support of the industry, the temporary patio extension across the province is extended until October 31, 2021. In addition, alcohol delivery rules for off-site consumption is extended to March 31, 2021.<sup>24</sup>

### British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally Adjusted Data ('000)	October 2020	September 2020	October 2019	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total employed, all industries</b>	2,477.8	2,444.3	2,563.4	33.5	1.4	-85.6	-3.3
<b>Goods-producing sector</b>	470.3	459.3	478.2	11.0	2.4	-7.9	-1.7
Agriculture	33.0	30.2	27.7	2.8	9.3	5.3	19.1
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	43.0	39.1	41.3	3.9	10.0	1.7	4.1
Utilities	20.5	21.1	11.0	-0.6	-2.8	9.5	86.4
Construction	200.0	200.9	235.0	-0.9	-0.4	-35.0	-14.9
Manufacturing	173.9	168.0	163.1	5.9	3.5	10.8	6.6
<b>Services-producing sector</b>	2,007.5	1,985.0	2,085.2	22.5	1.1	-77.7	-3.7
Trade	370.6	369.9	397.5	0.7	0.2	-26.9	-6.8
Transportation and warehousing	124.1	125.5	140.6	-1.4	-1.1	-16.5	-11.7
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	165.0	162.1	163.6	2.9	1.8	1.4	0.9
Professional, scientific and technical services	229.5	226.4	223.5	3.1	1.4	6.0	2.7
Business, building and other support services	103.1	104.8	105.3	-1.7	-1.6	-2.2	-2.1
Educational services	182.6	180.7	186.5	1.9	1.1	-3.9	-2.1
Health care and social assistance	318.3	309.9	308.2	8.4	2.7	10.1	3.3
Information, culture and recreation	115.7	111.5	123.2	4.2	3.8	-7.5	-6.1
Accommodation and food services	180.6	178.5	199.1	2.1	1.2	-18.5	-9.3
Other services	102.8	103.0	114.5	-0.2	-0.2	-11.7	-10.2
Public administration	115.3	112.8	123.3	2.5	2.2	-8.0	-6.5

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0355, formerly CANSIM 282-0088

## REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is widespread, and employment in almost all the regions continues to be lower than last year on a month-to-month basis. Though employment across the province continues to recover, it remains well below (-67,700) what it was back in February 2020. Only Kootenay region saw employment grow (+4.0%) in October compared to the same time last year. Due to the continuous rise in COVID-19 cases, B.C.'s workforce and businesses remain under pandemic restrictions and key industries have yet to fully recover from previous closures and layoffs.<sup>25</sup>

### British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region

3-Month Moving Averages Seasonally Unadjusted Data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	October 2020 ('000)	October 2019 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	October 2020 (%)	October 2019 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>British Columbia</b>	2,449.4	2,570.8	-4.7	9.0	4.9	4.1
<b>Economic Regions</b>						
Vancouver Island and Coast	385.5	391.8	-1.6	8.3	4.3	4.0
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,563.7	1,664.3	-6.0	9.4	5.0	4.4
Thompson - Okanagan	270.3	281.9	-4.1	8.1	4.6	3.5
Kootenay	72.3	69.5	4.0	7.8	5.6	2.2
Cariboo	79.1	81.0	-2.3	10.5	6.9	3.6
North Coast and Nechako	39.4	42.9	-8.2	7.9	4.4	3.5
Northeast	39.1	39.2	-0.3	5.6	6.2	-0.6

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0293, formerly CANSIM 282-0122

Employment decreased by 1.6% to 385,500 in **Vancouver Island and Coast**, while the unemployment rate increased to 8.3% between October of 2019 and October 2020.<sup>26</sup> Looking forward, the outlook for the region's construction sector is improving, as residential housing and infrastructure projects are underway. Specifically, construction has commenced on The Wedge, a \$50M, 93-unit mixed-use residential tower in Victoria.<sup>27</sup> Construction is also set to start on the \$8.5M renovation of the Port Hardy Aquatic Centre<sup>28</sup> and the new \$7.5M Vancouver Island Regional Library building in Sooke.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, Western Canada Marine Response has signed a deal with the Sc'ianew First Nation to build a spill response base in the First Nation's East Sooke territory, in preparation for the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion. The new base will be operational by fall 2022.<sup>30</sup>

Compared to October 2019, employment in **Lower Mainland - Southwest** decreased by 6.0% to 1,563,700,<sup>31</sup> and is currently experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases. As mentioned above, further restrictions are now in place across the region to limit the outbreak.<sup>32</sup> The region's construction sector will benefit from several infrastructure development projects announced by Vancouver City Council. The City of Vancouver has approved the development of a 17-storey office, alongside a 6-storey entertainment pavilion in downtown Vancouver. The construction project is expected to create approximately 2,000 jobs.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the development of a 55-storey tower at 601 Beach Crescent is expected to include 303 condominiums and 152 social housing units.<sup>34</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a stressor on the region's food services sector. To alleviate the financial impacts, the City of Vancouver has launched an online application for businesses to extend their temporary patios through the winter. Already the city has approved more than 400 temporary patios across Vancouver.<sup>35</sup>

In the past year, employment in **Thompson-Okanagan** decreased by 4.1% to 270,300 and the unemployment rate increased to 8.1%.<sup>36</sup> The region's labour market continues to recover, already as Adams Lake First Nation has a few construction projects underway, including the Watermain Phase III Project and a new housing development. The housing project will be completed mostly by Adams Lake band members.<sup>37</sup>

Employment in **North Coast and Nechako** declined by 8.2% to 39,400 since October of 2019, as the unemployment rate increased to 7.9%. Looking forward, the outlook for the construction sector is improving, as construction has begun on a bulk water and sewage facility in Houston.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the Prince Rupert City Council awarded the CT Northern Construction Alliance with a \$6.4M contract for a landfill expansion project<sup>39</sup>, and the Pacific Empire Minerals Corporation has secured a multi-year exploration permit for its Jean Marie Cu-Au-Ag-Mo mining project in north-central B.C.<sup>40</sup>

As COVID-19 restrictions were eased, Pacific Coastal Air reinstated flights to Haida Gwaii on October 29. Non-stop flight service will operate two days a week between Vancouver and Masset.<sup>41</sup> The region's tourism sector will likely benefit from the reinstated flight services.

Year-over-year, employment within **Northeast** remained relatively unchanged, and the unemployment rate decreased 0.6 percentage points to 5.6%.<sup>42</sup> Following the resumption of construction activities on BC Hydro's Site C hydroelectric project in May, the project has been experiencing construction delays and rising costs. In addition, the combined effects of COVID-19 and legal challenges from the West Moberly First Nations have increased the project's overall costs by an, as of yet, unknown amount.<sup>43</sup> According to most current information, there were more than 4,214 workers on the Site C project in September 2020.<sup>44</sup>

**Note:** In preparing this document, the authors have taken care to provide clients with labour market information that is timely and accurate at the time of publication. Since labour market conditions are dynamic, some of the information presented here may have changed since this document was published. Users are encouraged to also refer to other sources for additional information on the local economy and labour market. Information contained in this document does not necessarily reflect official policies of Employment and Social Development Canada.

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**For information on the Labour Force Survey,** please visit the Statistics Canada Web site at: [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca)

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- <sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months, November 6, 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028701>
- <sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0288-02 Employment by class of worker, monthly, seasonally adjusted (x 1,000), November 6, 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410028802>
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- <sup>13</sup> Construction Update, Coastal GasLink, October 20, 2020 <https://www.coastalgaslink.com/siteassets/pdfs/construction/updates/coastal-gaslink-october-2020-construction-update.pdf>
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- <sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0355-01 Employment by industry, monthly, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, and trend-cycle, last 5 months (x 1,000), November 6, 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410035501>
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- <sup>19</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 20-10-0008-01 Retail trade sales by province and territory (x 1,000) November 6, 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=2010000801>
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<sup>42</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0293-01 Labour force characteristics by economic region, three-month moving average, unadjusted for seasonality, last 5 months, November 6, 2020

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<https://www.vicnews.com/business/site-c-actions-costs-wont-be-known-until-after-b-c-election-horgan-says/>

<sup>44</sup> Site C employment by month: September 2020, BC Hydro Workforce report,

<https://sitecproject.com/sites/default/files/workforce-report-202009.pdf>