



# Labour Market Bulletin

Alberta

December 2020



This Labour Market Bulletin provides an analysis of Labour Force Survey results for the province of Alberta, including the regions of Calgary, Edmonton, Central Alberta and Mountain Parks, Southern Alberta, and Northern Alberta.

## OVERVIEW

After a strong recovery in the third quarter, growth in the labour market slowed in the fourth and final quarter of 2020. Employment in the fourth quarter (October, November, and December) averaged just over 2.2 million, nearly 41,000 (+1.9%) higher than the previous quarter. However, compared to the same time last year, employment was down by almost 127,000 (-5.4%). On a percentage basis, part-time employment led the job growth (+2.9%), while full-time employment growth trailed behind slightly (+1.6%).<sup>1</sup>

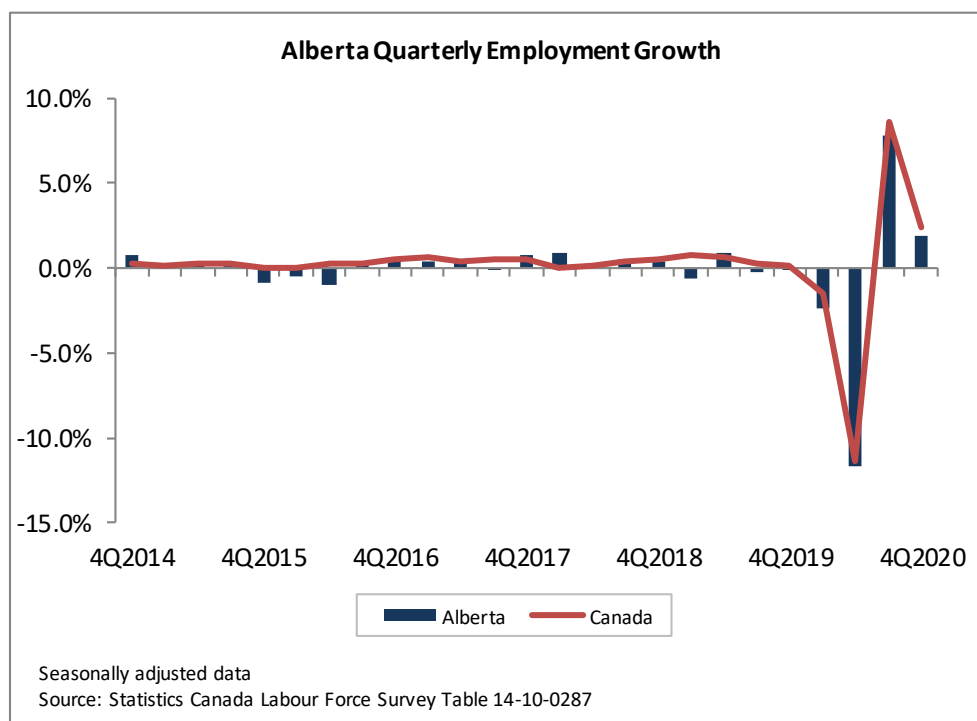
Despite strong quarterly growth, employment fell in November (-10,800) and December (-11,900). The drop coincided with a rapid rise in active COVID-19 cases, which forced the provincial government to put in place new measures to limit the spread. On December 13, 2020, the province imposed new restrictions, closing in-person service at all restaurants and cafes along with many non-essential businesses including gyms and fitness centres, casinos, and hair salons. Retail services were able to continue operating as long as they limited capacity to 15% of the fire code.<sup>2</sup>

## Alberta Quarterly Labour Force Statistics

Seasonally adjusted data	4th Quarter 2020	3rd Quarter 2020	4th Quarter 2019	Quarterly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Population 15 + ('000)</b>	3,588.7	3,580.4	3,550.4	8.3	0.2	38.3	1.1
<b>Labour Force ('000)</b>	2,488.0	2,475.2	2,519.5	12.8	0.5	-31.5	-1.3
<b>Employment ('000)</b>	2,216.2	2,175.3	2,343.1	40.9	1.9	-126.9	-5.4
Full-Time ('000)	1,793.9	1,764.9	1,916.1	29.0	1.6	-122.2	-6.4
Part-Time ('000)	422.3	410.4	426.9	11.9	2.9	-4.6	-1.1
<b>Unemployment ('000)</b>	271.7	299.9	176.4	-28.2	-9.4	95.3	54.0
<b>Unemployment Rate (%)</b>	10.9	12.1	7.0	-1.2	-	3.9	-
<b>Participation Rate (%)</b>	69.3	69.1	71.0	0.2	-	-1.7	-
<b>Employment Rate (%)</b>	61.8	60.8	66.0	1.0	-	-4.2	-

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

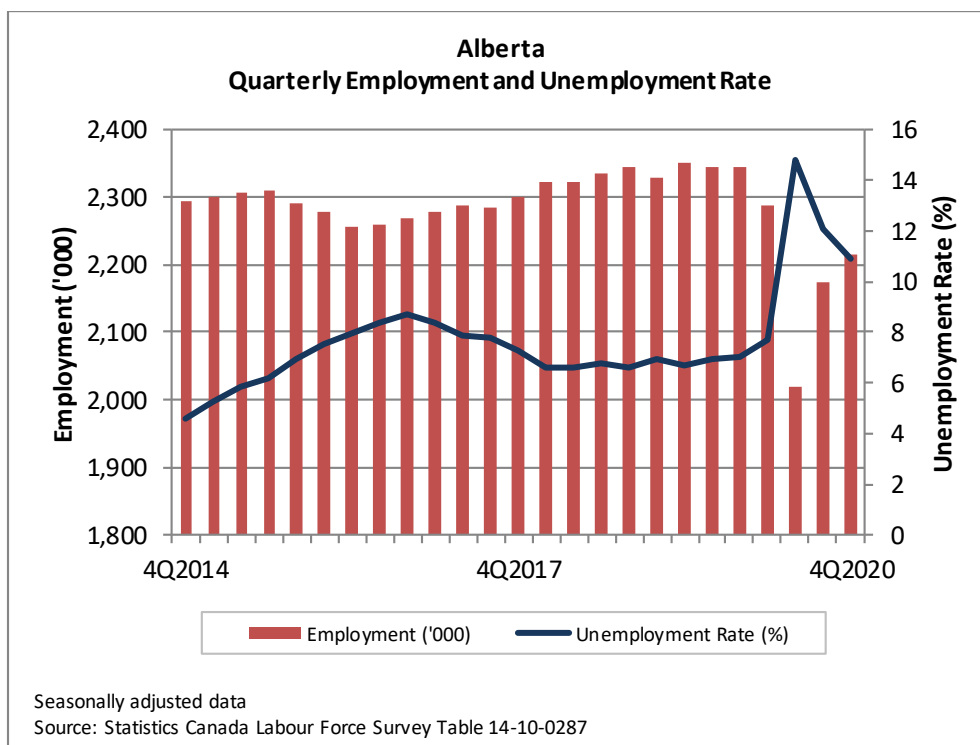


The number of people who were unemployed dropped by 28,200 (-9.4%) during the fourth quarter, while the labour force expanded (+12,800). The combined effect caused the quarterly unemployment rate to fall 1.2 percentage points and average 10.9% over the fourth quarter. While this is a step in the right direction, the provincial unemployment rate remains 3.9 percentage points higher than one year ago, and second highest nationally, behind only Newfoundland and Labrador.

There was a significant difference in unemployment rates among visible minority groups (including Indigenous populations) and their non-visible minority counterparts in the fourth quarter. Visible minorities in Alberta had

an unemployment rate of approximately 12.7% while people who were not Indigenous or a visible minority had a much lower unemployment rate of 8.8%.

Of those employed in the province, there were approximately 173,000 people who had lost all or most of their typical hours worked in the fourth quarter. While this figure has fallen steadily through the year, it is 50% higher than what it was one year ago. The number of people who were not in the labour force also improved dramatically, falling by half from the second quarter. This resulted in Alberta’s labour underutilization rate<sup>3</sup> falling to 20.3% in the fourth quarter. While there has been an improvement in the last three months, the road to a full recovery will be a long one. The Conference Board of Canada predicts that employment levels in the province will not be fully recovered until at least the end of 2021.<sup>4</sup>



**Unemployment by major demographic grouping**

Women under the age of 25 have been among the hardest hit by COVID-19, with employment down nearly 20% in the fourth quarter from one year ago. Meanwhile, core aged women (25 to 54 years) and older women (55 years and over) are closer to their pre-pandemic employment levels one year ago, down 3% and 5.9%, respectively. However, job gains for core aged women have been uneven, with more job growth coming from part-time employment, rather than full-time employment. Since the low point in the second quarter, part-time employment for core aged women grew by 14.8% while full-time employment increased by only 9.5%.

### Alberta Quarterly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally adjusted data	4th Quarter 2020 (%)	3rd Quarter 2020 (%)	4th Quarter 2019 (%)	Quarterly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>Total</b>	10.9	12.1	7.0	-1.2	3.9
<b>25 years and over</b>	9.0	10.0	5.9	-1.0	3.1
Men - 25 years and over	9.8	11.0	6.1	-1.2	3.7
Women - 25 years and over	8.0	8.8	5.6	-0.8	2.4
<b>15 to 24 years</b>	23.8	26.3	14.4	-2.5	9.4
Men - 15 to 24 years	22.9	27.2	18.3	-4.3	4.6
Women - 15 to 24 years	24.8	25.3	10.4	-0.5	14.4

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

On a percentage basis, the goods-producing and services-producing sectors were equally matched in their job growth, expanding by 2% and 1.9%, respectively.

### Alberta Quarterly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally adjusted data ('000)	4th Quarter 2020	3rd Quarter 2020	4th Quarter 2019	Quarterly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total employed, all industries</b>	2,216.2	2,175.3	2,343.1	40.9	1.9	-126.9	-5.4
<b>Goods-producing sector</b>	542.5	532.1	582.4	10.4	2.0	-39.9	-6.9
Agriculture	38.4	41.5	50.5	-3.1	-7.5	-12.1	-24.0
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	136.3	128.3	137.9	8.0	6.2	-1.6	-1.2
Utilities	23.3	22.1	24.5	1.2	5.4	-1.2	-4.9
Construction	220.2	219.8	235.6	0.4	0.2	-15.4	-6.5
Manufacturing	124.3	120.5	133.9	3.8	3.2	-9.6	-7.2
<b>Services-producing sector</b>	1,673.8	1,643.2	1,760.7	30.6	1.9	-86.9	-4.9
Trade	332.3	317.1	336.7	15.2	4.8	-4.4	-1.3
Transportation and warehousing	131.6	122.4	134.4	9.2	7.5	-2.8	-2.1
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	114.9	109.1	107.6	5.8	5.3	7.3	6.8
Professional, scientific and technical services	180.0	178.3	191.9	1.7	1.0	-11.9	-6.2
Business, building and other support services	66.1	73.9	78.6	-7.8	-10.6	-12.5	-15.9
Educational services	152.2	147.4	161.6	4.8	3.3	-9.4	-5.8
Health care and social assistance	310.2	303.5	303.9	6.7	2.2	6.3	2.1
Information, culture and recreation	72.4	78.1	76.1	-5.7	-7.3	-3.7	-4.9
Accommodation and food services	109.3	113.0	152.4	-3.7	-3.3	-43.1	-28.3
Other services	101.8	99.3	108.2	2.5	2.5	-6.4	-5.9
Public administration	102.8	101.2	109.4	1.6	1.6	-6.6	-6.0

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table T14-10-0355, formerly CANSIM 282-0088

## Goods-producing industries

Many industries and businesses in the goods-producing sector were deemed essential and permitted to continue operating through the peak of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, weak economic activity and persistent uncertainty weighed heavily on the sector.

The **resource extraction** industries (forestry, mining, and oil and gas) added 8,000 (+6.2%) jobs in the fourth quarter and were within two percent of employment one year ago. The price of Western Canadian Select rose for the second consecutive quarter and averaged US\$31.50 in the fourth quarter.<sup>6</sup> Total oil production has also been steadily increasing since the low point in May, and in November (the most recent data available) was 2.3% higher than production levels one year ago.<sup>7</sup>

The industry is likely in for a long and winding recovery. Before COVID-19, the projected capital spending was roughly the same as 2019 at approximately \$23.6 billion, which was already significantly below (-39%) the ten-year average. In the final tally for 2020, capital spending for oil and gas extraction in the province is expected to be to \$16.6 billion, down roughly 30% from 2019. A slump in capital spending in oil and gas extraction, which accounted for about half of the total capital spending in the province over the last decade, means the entire provincial economy suffers because of reduced construction and midstream petrochemical projects.<sup>8</sup> While spending plans released for 2021 show improvement, companies have signaled their intent to reduce their already lean workforce. Canadian oil giant, Suncor Energy, announced that they will be cutting as much as 15% of their workforce over the next year and a half,<sup>9</sup> and Cenovus Energy Inc. said they plan to cut 20-25% of its workforce after it acquires Husky Energy Inc. The Cenovus/Husky merger could result in a loss of as many as 2,150 positions, primarily located in Calgary.<sup>10</sup>

Employment held steady in the **construction** industry, at approximately 220,200 in the fourth quarter, up only slightly (+0.2%) from the previous quarter. The jobs gained in the third and fourth quarters account for only about 70% of the jobs lost during the second quarter. The residential market has slowed down significantly in 2020. In the first 11 months of the year, there were just over 20,500 housing starts<sup>11</sup> in Alberta, with the province poised to reach the Conference Board of Canada's forecast of approximately 22,000 for the year. This would represent a 19.5% reduction compared to 2019 – the largest drop among provinces.<sup>12</sup> The sky high unemployment rate and persistent uncertainty in the energy section have surely played a role in muting the residential construction sector.

**Agriculture** accounted for 38,400 jobs in the fourth quarter, down 3,100 (-7.5%) from the third quarter and 12,100 (-24%) on a year-over-year basis. Travel and border restrictions, combined with a mandatory quarantine period, may have contributed to the job losses by delaying or preventing seasonal temporary foreign workers, which play a large role in the fruit and vegetable production and harvesting, from entering the province.<sup>13</sup> However, favourable fall weather allowed for 99% of crops to be harvested by the end of October, well ahead of the five and 10-year averages.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Canada's railroads broke records for grain hauling in October. Both Canadian Pacific Railway and Canadian National Railway shipped over 3 million metric tonnes of grain from Western Canada in October, well above previous single month records. This is welcome news after a string of previous years with poor crops in Alberta. In 2019, an estimated 10% of crops were left unharvested over winter, no thanks to a cold, wet fall.<sup>15</sup>

## Services-producing industries

The services-producing sector includes labour intensive and public-facing industries such as wholesale and retail trade, and food and accommodation. These industries were initially among the most impacted during the height of COVID-19 related closures. In recent months employment has begun to rebound but still remains well below levels one year ago.

Employment in **wholesale and retail trade** increased by 15,200 (+4.8%) in the fourth quarter and was down by only 4,400 jobs compared to the same period one year ago. Retail sales fell significantly in March and April when the government ordered non-essential businesses to close. After re-opening in May, retail sales surged and surpassed the February pre-pandemic levels by July. By October, sales growth slowed down, only increasing by one percent on a monthly basis to just over \$7.1 billion.<sup>16</sup>

**Accommodation and food services** continue to be among the industries most impacted by COVID-19. In the fourth quarter, employment fell by 3,700 (-3.3%) and had the largest year-over-year gap among industries (-28.3%). After being allowed to resume dine-in services in the spring, a rising number of active cases brought about new restrictions on the restaurant industry. The first round came at the end of November that limited people to dine only with their immediate household. The second round came into effect on December 13, mandating an end to dine-in service and allowing restaurants to provide only take-out and delivery. This restriction will be in place until at least January 21, 2021, and it is expected job losses will continue.<sup>17</sup>

## REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The statistics for the economic regions are not seasonally adjusted and should only be compared on a year-over-year basis. Employment is sometimes influenced by seasonal and calendar effects occurring at the same time and with the same magnitude every year, which can bring about changes in the data that make quarterly comparisons difficult.

In the fourth quarter, employment was down in every economic region. Camrose - Drumheller fared the worst with employment falling by 21.4% on a year-over-year basis. Meanwhile, Calgary managed the best, with employment down only 1.6%. Despite the bleak statistics, there are signs of improvement. Compared to the third quarter, the rates of year-over-year declines shrank in five out of the seven economic regions. Camrose - Drumheller and Lethbridge - Medicine Hat were the only two economic regions that experienced larger annual variations in employment.

## Alberta Quarterly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region

Seasonally unadjusted data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	4th Quarter 2020 ('000)	4th Quarter 2019 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	4th Quarter 2020 (%)	4th Quarter 2019 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>Alberta</b>	2,221.8	2,345.2	-5.3	10.1	6.6	3.5
<b>Economic Regions</b>						
Lethbridge - Medicine Hat	133.2	145.3	-8.3	10.5	4.0	6.5
Camrose - Drumheller	77.8	99.0	-21.4	10.1	4.2	5.9
Calgary	903.8	918.1	-1.6	10.1	6.8	3.3
Banff-Jasper-Rocky Mountain House and Athabasca-Grand Prairie-Peace River	170.8	185.2	-7.8	9.5	5.9	3.6
Red Deer	100.7	109.9	-8.4	9.6	6.6	3.0
Edmonton	762.0	808.6	-5.8	10.4	7.4	3.0
Wood Buffalo - Cold Lake	73.6	79.1	-7.0	8.3	4.2	4.1

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

In the fourth quarter, employment in **Lethbridge-Medicine Hat** fell to 133,200 and the unemployment rate jumped to 10.5%. Even though the labour market remained weak, there is expected to be growth in the construction industry with several planned and proposed renewable energy projects. As Enbridge wraps up construction on its first Canadian solar power plant in Forty Mine County<sup>18</sup>, a Canadian subsidiary of German renewable energy company ABO Wind has submitted a proposal to the Alberta Utilities Commission for a large wind farm near Lomond. Pending approval in 2021, construction on the wind farm would begin the following year and be complete in mid-2023. This new wind farm is poised to be the largest in Canada.<sup>19</sup>

Year-over-year employment in **Camrose – Drumheller** fell by approximately 21,200 (-21.4%) in the fourth quarter to 77,800. The unemployment rate was 10.1%. Despite the bleak labour market conditions, there is reason to be optimistic. After receiving regulatory approval, Calgary-based Acceleware Ltd. is moving ahead with its RF XL Marwayne Pilot project, located 44km North West of Lloydminster. Construction is set to begin January 2021. The company is a leading developer of technologies targeting low-cost and clean extraction of heavy oil and bitumen.<sup>20</sup>

**Banff – Jasper – Rocky Mountain House and Athabasca – Grande Prairie – Peace River** was not spared by the impacts of COVID-19 on the labour market. In the fourth quarter, employment fell 7.8% from last year to approximately 170,800. The unemployment rate also jumped to 9.5%. Despite the uncertainty that dominated 2020, there are a number of planned energy projects that are expected to start construction soon. Among them is a large battery storage project near Rycroft. The project incorporates Tesla Megapack Batteries, which will be hooked up to the power grid and help balance the energy and grid frequency. The battery packs will also make potential green power generation projects more viable as there would now be a reserve to store power. The Rycroft project is just the first phase of a three-part project which will result in a total of 60 mW of power storage in the region in 2021 — one will go up in the Grande Prairie area, while the third will be in the Buffalo Creek area.<sup>21</sup>

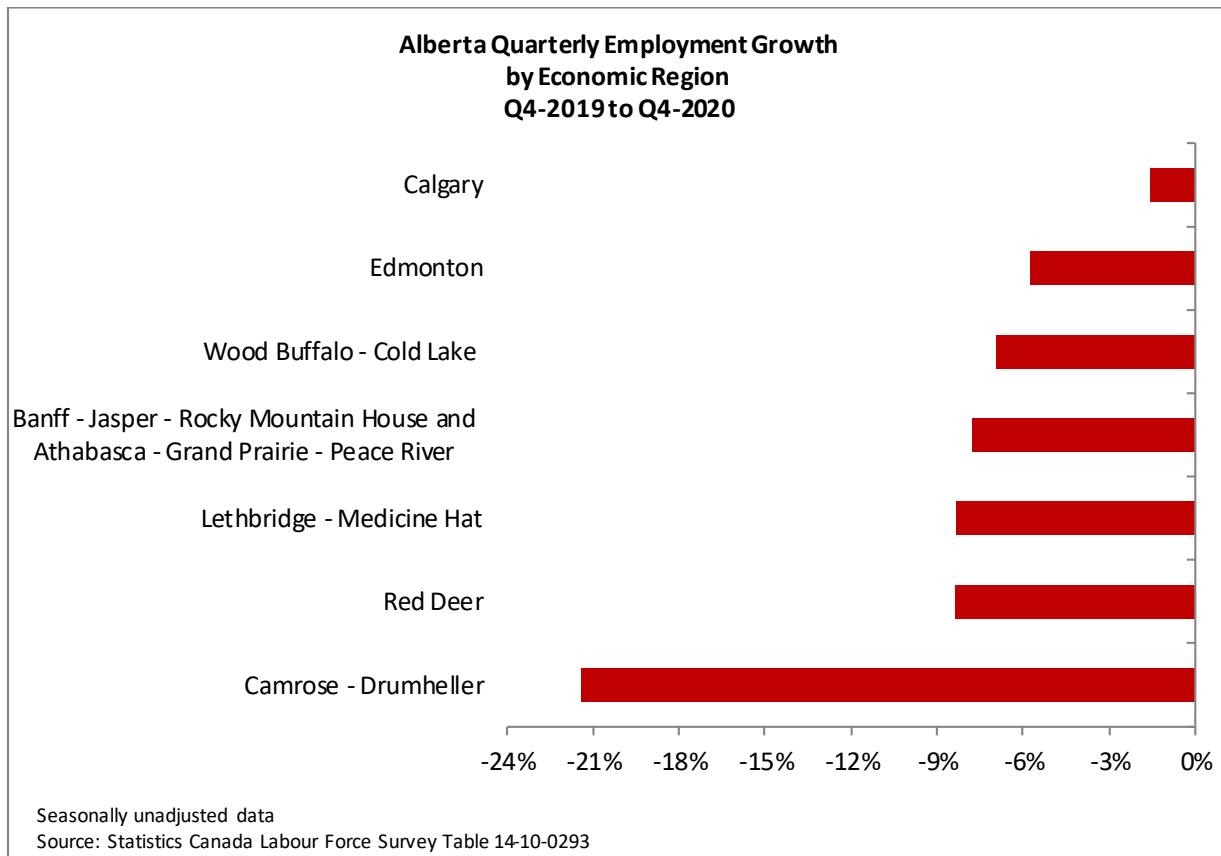
Employment in the **Red Deer** region was approximately 100,700, down 8.4% from one year ago. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate jumped to 9.6%. The unemployment rate would have been even higher, had it not been for the labour force shrinking during the fourth quarter.

To the north-east, employment in **Wood Buffalo – Cold Lake** fell 5,500 (-7%) on a year-over-year basis and the unemployment rate increased to 8.3%. The region is home to the vast majority of the province's oil production, but a new project underway is hoping to increase the renewable energy capacity. Three Nations Energy, a joint venture of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, and the Fort Chipewyan Métis Association, celebrated the opening of its solar farm near Fort Chipewyan. The solar farm will supply the remote community with about 25% of its energy needs, replacing 800,000 litres of diesel a year. The project is also being celebrated as the largest Indigenous-owned solar facility in Canada. Three Nations Energy doesn't plan to stop with the solar farm. The company is looking to add a wood-fuel heating business and sustainable hydroponics food production in the community.<sup>22</sup>

Employment in the **Calgary** region was the closest to the pre-pandemic level one year ago, down by only 1.6%. In the fourth quarter the unemployment rate was 10.1%, up 3.3 percentage points from last year. Grocery store chain, Sobeys announced that a customer fulfilment centre will be coming to Rocky View County in 2023. The fulfilment centre will focus on home delivery in Western Canada and will help meet the growing demand for grocery e-commerce. The county is already home to Amazon, Home Depot, Walmart and a forthcoming Lowes fulfilment centre. It is expected that this recent announcement will add up to 1,500 jobs.<sup>23</sup>

In **Edmonton**, approximately 762,000 people were employed in the fourth quarter, down 5.8% from one year ago. The unemployment rate jumped 3 percentage points year-over-year to 10.4%. TransAlta Corp. announced that they will end operations at its Highvale coal mine west of Edmonton in 2021, four years ahead of schedule. The closure comes as TransAlta moves to switch all of its coal-fired plants to natural gas. The percentage of power in Alberta generated from coal has fallen from more than 80% in the 1980s to less than one-third now.<sup>24</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, Labour force characteristics by province, monthly, seasonally adjusted; August 7, 2020. Accessed August 7, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Government of Alberta, Stronger public health measures; 2020. Accessed January 4, 2021 <https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> The recent underutilization rate is defined as the total of those unemployed, employed but working less than 50% of their regular hours and those not in the labour force but want to be working, expressed as a percentage of the potential labour force.

<sup>4</sup> The Conference Board of Canada, Pandemic and Oil Collapse Lead to Surging Deficits: Alberta's Two-Year Outlook – September 2020; September 29, 2020. Accessed October 12, 2020 <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=10802>

<sup>5</sup> Government of Alberta, Essential Services; 2020. Accessed April 16, 2020 <https://www.alberta.ca/essential-services.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Selected Crude Oil Prices – Monthly, Kent Group Ltd.; 2021. Accessed January 10, 2021 <https://charting.kentgroup.com/>

<sup>7</sup> Alberta Energy Regulator, ST3: Alberta Energy Resource Industries Monthly Statistics; January 4, 2020. Accessed January 10, 2021 <https://www.aer.ca/providing-information/data-and-reports/statistical-reports/st3>

<sup>8</sup> CBC, Capital spending in Alberta's oilpatch expected to fall by 30% this year; August 12, 2020. Accessed September 3, 2020 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/spending-on-oil-extraction-down-nearly-sixty-per-cent-1.5683318>

<sup>9</sup> CBC, Suncor Energy to cut staff by up to 15% over next year and a half; October 2, 2020. Accessed October 7, 2020 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/energy-suncor-layoffs-1.5748212>

<sup>10</sup> Financial Post, Cenovus to cut up to 25% of workforce after merger with Husky; October 27, 2020. Accessed November 5, 2020 <https://financialpost.com/commodities/energy/cenovus-to-cut-up-to-25-of-workforce-after-merger-with-husky>

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, housing starts, under construction and completions in centres 10,000 and over, Canada, provinces, selected census metropolitan areas; January 11, 2021. Accessed January 11, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3410014301>

<sup>12</sup> Conference Board of Canada, Pandemic Leads to Leaner Industries, Fewer Workers: Alberta's Two-Year Outlook – December 2020; January 11, 2021. Accessed January 11, 2021 <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=10960>

<sup>13</sup> Government of Canada, COVID-19 in Western Canada: Industry impact: Agriculture; September 29, 2020. Accessed October 12, 2020 [https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/content\\_pieces-eng.do?cid=12548](https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/content_pieces-eng.do?cid=12548)

<sup>14</sup> Government of Alberta, Alberta Crop Report; October 23, 2020 Accessed January 10, 2021 <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/f84be694-fbec-4428-ba3c-b19b408d157e/resource/f85a4478-2b60-449b-bdf9-fb479d1b4987/download/af-ecb-alberta-crop-report-2020-10-20-final-report-for-2020.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Government of Alberta, Alberta Crop Report – Final Report for 2019; December 3, 2019. Accessed October 8, 2020 <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/af95ff5b-f8cc-4fd9-9bd6-e2642816028e/resource/d0d9166b-444a-4bb5-9a15-e18a3d467869/download/af-crop-report-2019-12-03.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Statistics Canada, Retail trade sales by province and territory (x 1,000); August 21, 2020. Accessed September 4, 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=2010000801>

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<sup>17</sup> Government of Alberta, Stronger public health measures; 2020. Accessed January 10, 2021

<https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> Enbridge, Alberta Solar One Project; 2021. Accessed January 10, 2021 <https://www.enbridge.com/projects-and-infrastructure/projects/alberta-solar-one-project>

<sup>19</sup> Medicine Hat News, Proposed windfarm near Brooks would be the largest in Canada; December 24, 2020. Accessed January 10, 2021 <https://medicinehatnews.com/news/local-news/2020/12/24/proposed-wind-farm-near-brooks-would-be-largest-in-canada/>

<sup>20</sup> Global Newswire, Acceleware announces regulatory approval of Marwayne pilot project; October 16, 2020. Accessed January 10, 2021 <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/10/16/2109971/0/en/Acceleware-Announces-Regulatory-Approval-of-Marwayne-Pilot-Project.html>

<sup>21</sup> The Record, New power storage facility under construction in Central Peace; November 10, 2020. Accessed January 11, 2021 <https://www.footsaskatchewanrecord.com/news/local-news/new-power-storage-facility-under-construction-in-central-peace/wcm/758cc862-05ab-4661-95df-4fdee07907be>

<sup>22</sup> CBC, Indigenous-owned solar farm opens in remote northern Alberta community; November 19, 2020. Accessed December 7, 2020 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/indigenous-owned-solar-farm-fort-chip-1.5807721>

<sup>23</sup> Airdrie Today, Sobeys fulfilment centre coming to Rocky View County; December 26, 2020. Accessed January 11, 2021 <https://www.airdrietoday.com/rocky-view-news/sobeys-fulfilment-centre-coming-to-rocky-view-county-3206575>

<sup>24</sup> CBC, Hundreds of coal mining jobs to end as TransAlta switches to natural gas; November 4, 2020. Accessed November 9, 2020 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/transalta-coal-mine-highvale-1.5789197>