



# Labour Market Bulletin

Alberta

February 2021



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

Job growth in Alberta continued for the second consecutive month. Employment grew by 16,800 in February, bringing the level of employment to within 3% of what it was one year ago, before the pandemic took hold and lock downs occurred. While full-time employment grew more than part-time in February, the number of part-time jobs was closer to its pre-pandemic level.<sup>1</sup>

The province began its cautious reopening plan on February 8, allowing in-person restaurant dining to start again, as well as limited indoor fitness activity. Indoor gatherings outside of immediate household members remains off-limits, as the province tracks and manages a rise in new, more contagious variants of the virus.<sup>2</sup> Since first detected at the end of December, about 457 cases of the U.K. and South African variants were confirmed in the province by the end of February. While these variants were a small percentage of the overall cases reported, the province did have the highest amount per capita at about 10.5 cases per 100,000 people.<sup>3</sup>

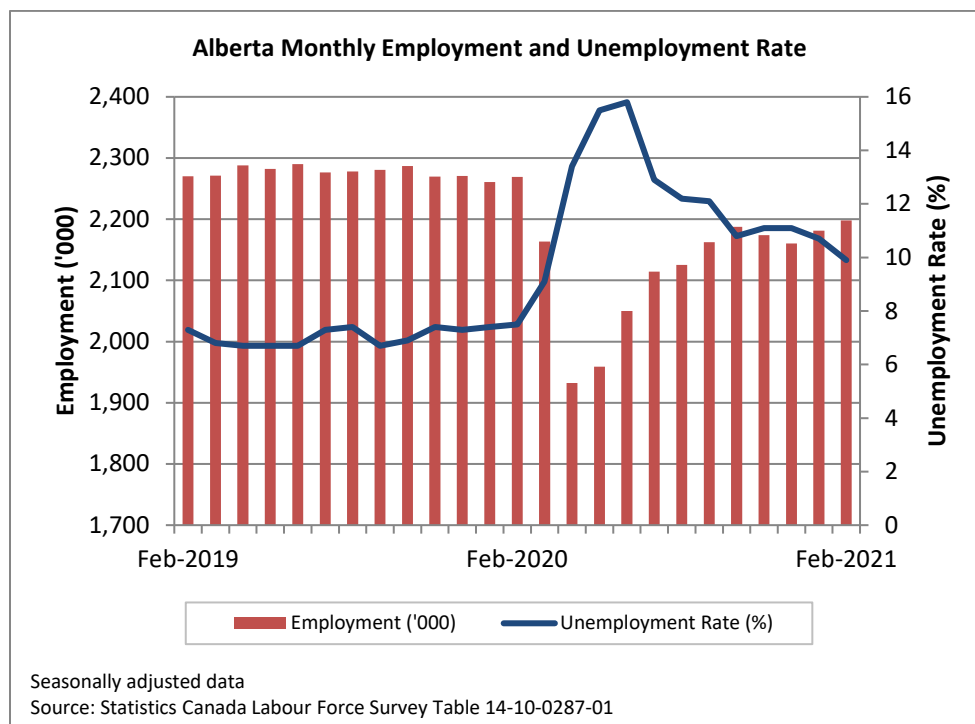
## Alberta Monthly Labour Force Statistics

Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Data	February 2021	January 2021	February 2020	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Population 15 + ('000)</b>	3,531.3	3,527.7	3,491.0	3.6	0.1	40.3	1.2
<b>Labour Force ('000)</b>	2,440.3	2,444.1	2,451.9	-3.8	-0.2	-11.6	-0.5
<b>Employment ('000)</b>	2,198.2	2,181.4	2,269.2	16.8	0.8	-71.0	-3.1
Full-Time ('000)	1,781.0	1,766.7	1,846.8	14.3	0.8	-65.8	-3.6
Part-Time ('000)	417.3	414.7	422.4	2.6	0.6	-5.1	-1.2
<b>Unemployment ('000)</b>	242.1	262.7	182.7	-20.6	-7.8	59.4	32.5
<b>Unemployment Rate (%)</b>	9.9	10.7	7.5	-0.8	-	2.4	-
<b>Participation Rate (%)</b>	69.1	69.3	70.2	-0.2	-	-1.1	-
<b>Employment Rate (%)</b>	62.2	61.8	65.0	0.4	-	-2.8	-

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 fell by 20,600 (-7.8%) in February. This pulled the unemployment rate down for the third consecutive month. However, at 9.9%, the provincial unemployment rate was 2.8 percentage points higher than one year ago, and remained second highest nationally, behind only Newfoundland and Labrador.<sup>4</sup>



After consistently being higher since the summer, the unemployment rate for visible minorities (including Indigenous people) fell to 10.4% in February and was in line with the unemployment rate for those who are not Indigenous or a visible minority (10.3%). Additionally, other key indicators, such as the participation and employment rates, were nearly identical for the two groups. The improvement in February's results suggest that recovery for visible minority and Indigenous groups could be underway.

On a percentage basis, women had stronger job growth in February, partly due to a large rebound in the accommodation and food services industry, where women make up a large proportion of employees. However, when compared to one year ago, women were farther away from their pre-pandemic employment levels, down 3.8%, while employment among men was down 2.5%.

Women under the age of 25 have been among the hardest hit by COVID-19, with employment down nearly 14% from one year ago and an unemployment rate of 18.4% in February. Meanwhile, core-aged women (25 to 54 years) and older women (55 years and over) are closer to or have exceeded their pre-pandemic employment levels one year ago, down 3.9% and up 4%, respectively. However, job gains for core aged women have been uneven, with more job growth from part-time rather than full-time employment. Since the low point in April, the number of part-time jobs for core-aged women grew by 31.8% while full-time employment increased by only 6.4%.

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

Seasonally Adjusted Data	February 2021 (%)	January 2021 (%)	February 2020 (%)	Monthly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>Total</b>	9.9	10.7	7.5	-0.8	2.4
<b>25 years and over</b>	8.5	8.9	6.4	-0.4	2.1
Men - 25 years and over	8.6	8.4	6.6	0.2	2.0
Women - 25 years and over	8.2	9.6	6.2	-1.4	2.0
<b>15 to 24 years</b>	19.5	22.3	14.1	-2.8	5.4
Men - 15 to 24 years	20.5	21.7	16.7	-1.2	3.8
Women - 15 to 24 years	18.4	23.2	11.4	-4.8	7.0

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

Employment gains in the services-producing sector (+27,400) offset the losses in the goods-producing sector (-10,500), which was led by declines in resource extraction industries. Meanwhile, the accommodation and food services industry grew the most, adding 19,200 (+22.5%) jobs as the province allowed dine-in service at restaurants again.

Alberta Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally Adjusted Data ('000)	February 2021	January 2021	February 2020	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total employed, all industries</b>	2,198.2	2,181.4	2,269.2	16.8	0.8	-71.0	-3.1
<b>Goods-producing sector</b>	541.9	552.4	560.6	-10.5	-1.9	-18.7	-3.3
Agriculture	38.5	40.0	49.0	-1.5	-3.8	-10.5	-21.4
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	135.6	139.5	131.3	-3.9	-2.8	4.3	3.3
Utilities	23.8	23.5	23.1	0.3	1.3	0.7	3.0
Construction	224.3	226.5	219.9	-2.2	-1.0	4.4	2.0
Manufacturing	119.7	123.0	137.4	-3.3	-2.7	-17.7	-12.9
<b>Services-producing sector</b>	1,656.3	1,628.9	1,708.6	27.4	1.7	-52.3	-3.1
Trade	336.0	331.3	332.5	4.7	1.4	3.5	1.1
Transportation and warehousing	129.9	130.6	125.2	-0.7	-0.5	4.7	3.8
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	107.6	107.2	98.8	0.4	0.4	8.8	8.9
Professional, scientific and technical services	174.4	176.1	180.0	-1.7	-1.0	-5.6	-3.1
Business, building and other support services	77.0	73.4	71.5	3.6	4.9	5.5	7.7
Educational services	161.4	160.9	155.0	0.5	0.3	6.4	4.1
Health care and social assistance	308.3	305.8	300.8	2.5	0.8	7.5	2.5
Information, culture and recreation	58.2	59.3	81.1	-1.1	-1.9	-22.9	-28.2
Accommodation and food services	104.5	85.3	152.9	19.2	22.5	-48.4	-31.7
Other services	99.5	96.0	106.9	3.5	3.6	-7.4	-6.9
Public administration	99.6	103.2	103.9	-3.6	-3.5	-4.3	-4.1

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

### Goods-producing industries

Since the start of the pandemic, most industries and businesses in the goods-producing sector have been spared by government imposed restrictions and closures aimed to curb the spread of COVID-19. Nevertheless, weak economic activity and persistent uncertainty has weighed heavily on the sector.

The **resource extraction** industries (forestry, mining, and oil and gas) lost 3,900 (-2.8%) jobs between January and February, but employment was still up 3.3% from February 2020. In positive news, the price of Western Canadian Select continued its rally and increased for the fourth consecutive month, averaging \$47.55 in February.<sup>5</sup> Global oil prices are expected to continue their recovery in 2021 as excess supply from last year is used and countries increase their economic output.<sup>6</sup> Total oil production in Alberta has also been steadily

increasing since the low point in May, and in January (the most recent data available) it was 6.9% higher than production levels one year ago.<sup>7</sup>

Employment in **construction** fell by 2,000 (-1%), erasing some of the gains made in January. Nonetheless, year-over-year employment remained up by 4,400. Construction spending is a central element to the provincial and federal economic recovery plans. Alberta alone is planning on spending nearly \$21 billion over the next three years on capital projects, expected to support 90,000 workers.

### **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 are among the most impacted by COVID-19 and the related restrictions. As active cases and hospitalizations related to COVID-19 fell in January and February, the government eased restrictions, allowing for a strong rebound for the services-producing sector in February.

Employment in **wholesale and retail trade** increased by 4,700 (+1.4%) in February and was up 3,500 jobs compared to the same period one year ago. Retail stores were allowed to increase their customer capacity from 15% to 25% on March 8.<sup>8</sup> This move should help boost sales that have in fact been fairly resilient through the pandemic. In 2020, total retail sales came in at just over \$79 billion, down only 2.5% from the previous year.<sup>9</sup> The Conference Board of Canada forecasts that retail sales will grow by 2% this year, bringing it close to the pre-pandemic level.<sup>10</sup>

**Accommodation and food services** had a strong rebound in February. After being allowed to resume dine-in service at restaurants on February 8, employment grew by 19,200 (+22.5%). However, the industry has the largest gap from the pre-pandemic employment level, with employment down 31.7% from one year ago. However, it has not been business as usual. Tables can sit up to six people, as long as they are all from the same household, or close contacts who live alone. In addition, restaurants and bars must end liquor sales by 10 p.m. and close one hour later.<sup>11</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 monthly comparisons difficult.

In February, employment was down in every economic region. Camrose - Drumheller fared the worst with employment falling by 18.2% on a year-over-year basis. Meanwhile, Red Deer managed the best, with employment down only 1.8%.

**Alberta Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region**

3-Month Moving Averages Seasonally Unadjusted Data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	February 2021 ('000)	February 2020 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	February 2021 (%)	February 2020 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>Alberta</b>	2,159.3	2,247.4	-3.9	10.7	7.3	3.4
<b>Economic Regions</b>						
Lethbridge - Medicine Hat	130.1	144.0	-9.7	11.1	4.6	6.5
Camrose - Drumheller	82.8	101.2	-18.2	9.5	6.5	3.0
Calgary	843.8	861.1	-2.0	10.5	7.3	3.2
Banff - Jasper - Rocky Mountain House and Athabasca - Grand Prairie - Peace River	174.3	182.2	-4.3	9.8	6.9	2.9
Red Deer	103.2	105.1	-1.8	9.9	9.2	0.7
Edmonton	756.1	780.2	-3.1	11.5	7.9	3.6
Wood Buffalo - Cold Lake	69.0	73.5	-6.1	9.4	5.8	3.6

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0387, formerly CANSIM 282-0122

In February, employment in **Lethbridge-Medicine Hat** was 130,100 and the unemployment rate came in at 11.1%, up 6.5 percentage points from last year. In positive news, Suncor will restart work in April 2021 on the Forty Mile Wind project after pausing last year. The region will see additional investment and construction on wind farms coming this season, as substantial work is scheduled for two other sites in Forty Mile, which together will cost \$1.3 billion and be able to supply Medicine Hat's top power demand three times over. Two additional wind projects in the area will continue construction in 2021 and two more are awaiting final regulatory approval.<sup>12</sup>

Year-over-year employment in **Camrose – Drumheller** fell by approximately 18,400 in February to 82,800. The unemployment rate was 9.5% and would have been higher if it wasn't for the nearly 18,000 people that left that labour force.

In February, employment in **Banff – Jasper – Rocky Mountain House and Athabasca – Grande Prairie – Peace River** was 4.3% lower than last year, at approximately 174,300. The unemployment rate also jumped to 9.8%. In a piece of good news, FutEra Power is planning to start construction of its geothermal and natural gas hybrid power project in Swan Hills in the spring with plans to deliver power to the grid by first quarter of 2022.<sup>13</sup>

Employment in the **Red Deer** region was approximately 103,100 in February, down only 1.8% from one year ago. The unemployment rate was 9.9%, only slightly higher than what it was one year ago. Looking ahead, there should be a new agricultural supply depot located in Red Deer, after the county approved a developer permit put forth by Cervus. The new business would provide sales and service for agricultural equipment and will be located on a 13-acre site once home to a seed cleaning plant.<sup>14</sup>

To the north-east, employment in **Wood Buffalo – Cold Lake** dropped 4,500 (-6.1%) on a year-over-year basis to 69,000. The unemployment rate increased to 9.4%. Alberta Health Services has started operational commissioning of the \$102 million, 108 bed Willow Square Continuing Care Centre in Fort McMurray as it moves towards opening for residents.<sup>15</sup>

Year-over-year employment in the **Calgary** region was down by only 2%, to 843,800 in February. The unemployment rate was 10.5%, up 3.3 percentage points from last year. Just north of the city, in Airdrie, construction is set to start on the \$83 million highway interchange. It is expected that the project will generate upwards of 300 jobs and be complete in 2023.<sup>16</sup>

In **Edmonton**, approximately 756,100 people were employed in February, down 3.1% from one year ago. The region also boasted the highest unemployment rate in the province, at 11.5%. In an additional blow to the region, the John Deere facility in Nisku will be closing by November as the company consolidates its operations. Approximately 180 jobs will be lost.<sup>17</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.*

**Prepared by:** Labour Market Information (LMI) Directorate, Service Canada, Alberta

**For further information,** please contact the LMI team at: [http://www.esdc.gc.ca/cqi-bin/contact/edsc-esdc/eng/contact\\_us.aspx?section=lmi](http://www.esdc.gc.ca/cqi-bin/contact/edsc-esdc/eng/contact_us.aspx?section=lmi)

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

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada as represented by Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021, all rights reserved

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0287-03 Labour force characteristics by province, monthly, seasonally adjusted; March 12, 2021. Accessed March 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410028703>
- <sup>2</sup> Government of Alberta, Stronger public health measures; 2021. Accessed March 10, 2021 <https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx#jumplinks-0>
- <sup>3</sup> CTV News, Tracking variants of the novel coronavirus in Canada; March 10, 2021. Accessed March 10, 2021 <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/tracking-variants-of-the-novel-coronavirus-in-canada-1.5296141>
- <sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0287-03 Labour force characteristics by province, monthly, seasonally adjusted; February 5, 2021. Accessed February 5, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410028703>
- <sup>5</sup> Selected Crude Oil Prices – Monthly, Kent Group Ltd.; 2021. Accessed February 1, 2021 <https://charting.kentgrouppltd.com/>
- <sup>6</sup> Oil Price, Tighter oil market send oil prices higher; February 1, 2021. Accessed February 1, 2021 <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Oil-Prices/Tighter-Oil-Markets-Send-Oil-Prices-Higher.html>
- <sup>7</sup> Government of Alberta, Oil production; March 12, 2021. Accessed March 13, 2021 <https://economicdashboard.alberta.ca/OilProduction>
- <sup>8</sup> Government of Alberta, Stronger public health measures; 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 <https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx>
- <sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada, Table 20-10-0008-01 Retail trade sales by province and territory (x 1,000), February 19, 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=2010000801>
- <sup>10</sup> The Conference Board of Canada, Pandemic leads to leaner industries, fewer workers; January 11, 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 [https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/52ab4aab-8fe6-4556-b71e-f0113022f15d/10960\\_alberta\\_2-year-outlook\\_dec2020.pdf](https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/52ab4aab-8fe6-4556-b71e-f0113022f15d/10960_alberta_2-year-outlook_dec2020.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> Government of Alberta, Stronger public health measures; 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 <https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx>
- <sup>12</sup> Medicine Hat News; SE Alberta’s renewable energy surge renewed; February 6, 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 <https://medicinehatnews.com/news/local-news/2021/02/06/se-albertas-renewable-energy-surge-renewed/>
- <sup>13</sup> Global Newswire, Razor Energy Corp. Announces 2020 year-end reserves and operational outlook; February 25, 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2021/02/26/2183055/0/en/Razor-Energy-Corp-Announces-2020-Year-End-Reserves-and-Operational-Outlook.html>
- <sup>14</sup> Red Deer Advocate, Cervus Equipment eyeing new Red Deer County location; January 26, 2021. Accessed February 4, 2021 <https://www.reddeeradvocate.com/news/cervus-equipment-eyeing-new-red-deer-county-location/>
- <sup>15</sup> Government of Alberta, Construction complete at continuing care centre; January 18, 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=76083E77C6955-B4CD-3972-1CEF031BF125760D>
- <sup>16</sup> Discover Airdrie, Construction contract awarded as long awaited interchange project set to start this spring; March 8, 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 <https://www.discoverairdrie.com/local/construction-contract-awarded-as-long-awaited-interchange-project-set-to-start-this-spring>
- <sup>17</sup> Global News, 180 John Deere employees losing jobs as Edmonton remanufacturing plant set to close; March 3, 2021. Accessed March 15, 2021 <https://globalnews.ca/news/7675901/john-deere-edmonton-remanufacturing-plant-closure/>