



Labour Market Bulletin

British Columbia

November 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

Employment in British Columbia (B.C.) increased by 23,900 jobs between October and November even as the province's labour market continued to struggle under public health measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Though B.C. was the only western province to add jobs in November, employment remains well below (-37,800) what it was back in February 2020.¹ Over the month, employment grew in the private sector (+38,000), but declined in the public sector (-2,000) and among the self-employed (-12,100).² These gains were in full-time employment (42,100) which offset part-time losses (-18,200).³

The province's unemployment rate improved to 7.1% in November, down from 8% in October.⁴ In comparison, the national unemployment rate declined 0.4 percentage points to 8.5% over the same period. The economy continues to face challenges as the second wave of COVID-19 cases has brought further public health restrictions, now in effect until January 8, 2021.⁵

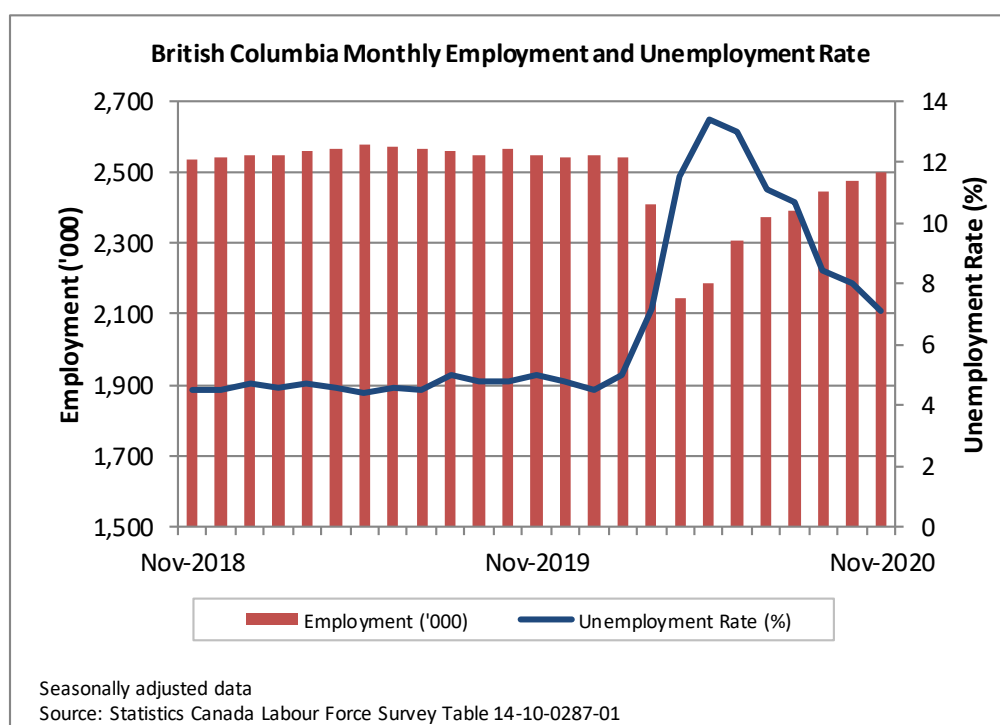
In addition, the federal government has extended the 30-day restriction on all non-essential travel at the Canada-U.S. border until December 21, 2020.⁶ The border closure is particularly detrimental to B.C.'s tourism sector.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics

Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Data	November 2020	October 2020	November 2019	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Population 15 + ('000)	4,193.4	4,189.4	4,129.3	4.0	0.1	64.1	1.6
Labour Force ('000)	2,694.1	2,692.8	2,683.1	1.3	0.0	11.0	0.4
Employment ('000)	2,501.7	2,477.8	2,548.5	23.9	1.0	-46.8	-1.8
Full-Time ('000)	1,937.6	1,895.5	1,997.4	42.1	2.2	-59.8	-3.0
Part-Time ('000)	564.1	582.3	551.1	-18.2	-3.1	13.0	2.4
Unemployment ('000)	192.4	215.0	134.5	-22.6	-10.5	57.9	43.0
Unemployment Rate (%)	7.1	8.0	5.0	-0.9	-	2.1	-
Participation Rate (%)	64.2	64.3	65.0	-0.1	-	-0.8	-
Employment Rate (%)	59.7	59.1	61.7	0.6	-	-2.0	-

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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



The unemployment rate for B.C. youth (15 to 24 years) fell from 15.6% to 14.1% in November.⁷ While the number of unemployed youth remained relatively unchanged over the month, the number of employed youth increased by 5,300.⁸ Though the province's youth continue to struggle in finding employment during the pandemic, their unemployment rate has improved by 15.0 percentage points since reaching a high of 29.1% in June 2020.⁹ Looking forward, the unemployment rate for youth will likely remain in the double-digits, as occupations where youth are typically employed remain at risk due to the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the number of unemployed aged 25 years and older decreased by 17,000 over the month to reach an unemployment rate of 6.1%.¹⁰

Despite of the province's unemployment rate decreasing to 7.1%, the pandemic continues put up barriers for some women, particularly for those employed part-time in the service sector or are primary childcare providers. Though the unemployment rate for women in B.C. (6.3%) has improved from a high of 14.4% in May, it remains well above the rate prior to the pandemic (4.8%).¹¹

British Columbia Monthly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally Adjusted Data	November 2020 (%)	October 2020 (%)	November 2019 (%)	Monthly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
Total	7.1	8.0	5.0	-0.9	2.1
25 years and over	6.1	6.8	4.3	-0.7	1.8
Men - 25 years and over	6.5	7.7	4.4	-1.2	2.1
Women - 25 years and over	5.6	5.8	4.1	-0.2	1.5
15 to 24 years	14.1	15.6	9.5	-1.5	4.6
Men - 15 to 24 years	16.8	18.0	8.4	-1.2	8.4
Women - 15 to 24 years	11.1	13.1	10.6	-2.0	0.5

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 1,600 jobs in November primarily due to job growth in **construction** (+5,700), and **forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas** (+4,500) offsetting losses in other goods producing industries.¹² Overall, employment in the goods sector remained relatively unchanged, only -2,400 fewer workers from a year ago.¹³

However, on a year-over-year basis, employment in the **construction** industry declined (-27,100).¹⁴ Based on the most recent October data, housing starts in B.C. were down 14% in 2020 compared to 2019.¹⁵ The value of building permits fell to about \$1.1B year-over-year in October, primarily because the value of multiple dwelling building permits decreased by roughly \$261M.¹⁶

While **construction** employment numbers remain well below that of November 2019, there is potential to recover from the impacts of the pandemic over the long-term with several non-residential construction projects. Already, work has begun in preparation for the construction of the \$1.72B Broadway Subway Project in Vancouver.¹⁷ Meanwhile, progress continues on several construction megaprojects, including the LNG Canada terminal in Kitimat, and a new Coast Guard facility in Port Hardy.¹⁸

Looking ahead, a provincial-federal partnership will make nearly \$136M in new infrastructure funding available to local governments, Indigenous communities and not-for-profit organizations by early 2021. Under the new COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream, there will be support for retrofit, rehabilitation and upgrade projects, and COVID-19 response infrastructure.¹⁹

The **forestry** sector continues to adapt to ongoing challenges, including U.S. trade tariffs and a shrinking timber supply. However, and despite a sharp decline in the fall, 2020 softwood lumber prices remain at a historical high,

still above the previous peak set in June 2018. Demand continues to exceed supply, and these trends are expected to continue in 2021, driven by U.S. housing projects, including home renovations.

Already, Paper Excellence has resumed some operations at its facility in Crofton, with about 58 papermakers having returned to work.²⁰ In addition, Peak Renewables recently announced plans to build a new wood pellet production plant in Fort Nelson, with a targeted start date of early 2022. The new plant is expected to support around 450 jobs in the area.²¹

Unfortunately, Norbord Inc. permanently closed its oriented strand board plant in 100 Mile House, after initially suspending operations there in August 2019. The company stated the ongoing wood supply shortage in the region makes the reopening of the mill uneconomic, as the location is its highest cost operation.²²

Compared to the same time last year, employment in **agriculture** increased to 30,700 (+3,200). To support B.C. farmers, the provincial government announced two new COVID-19 recovery programs, the Small Farm Business Acceleration Pilot Program and the Raspberry Replant Program. The programs support job growth and help ensure food security.²³

Year-over-year, B.C.'s **services** sector employment decreased by 44,500 jobs. The decline was largely due to significant losses in **wholesale and retail trade** (-26,900) and **other services** (-11,600), both which employ people in predominantly face-to-face occupations that have been the most affected by public health measures to contain the pandemic.²⁴

On a monthly basis, **wholesale and retail trade** continues to recover, as employment increased by 6,200 in November. Retailers are now operating under strict restrictions, including the requirement that masks be worn in all indoor retail spaces. According to most recent data, retail trade sales have increased by 35.6% in B.C. since April, when most stores were closed due to the pandemic.²⁵ However, consumers are spending more time and money online, leading to some bricks and mortar stores to close permanently.²⁶ As a result, job growth in retail trade will likely remain sluggish.

The short-term outlook for B.C. **tourism** sector remains uncertain, as newly implemented interprovincial travel bans have restricted non-essential travel.²⁷ Prior to the new restrictions, travel by ferry had already declined. BC Ferries reported a 29% drop in passengers during its second quarter compared to the same time last year.²⁸ With fewer people traveling between Vancouver Island the Lower Mainland, coastal communities that rely on tourism are facing a grim future.²⁹ According to recent media reports, the provincial government will be issuing around \$300M in aid to small businesses and tourism soon.³⁰

However, one bright spot for tourism is in the area of winter recreation, where recreation sites are selling out as people turn to outdoor activities during pandemic.³¹ Ski resorts have opened across the province with COVID-19 safety protocols in place.

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 to patios.³² However, the future of many restaurants remain uncertain in the short-term, as colder weather may dissuade guests from eating out on patios and under

current COVID-19 restrictions. Even with continued take-out and delivery options, restaurants are in dire straights.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally Adjusted Data ('000)	November 2020	October 2020	November 2019	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Total employed, all industries	2,501.7	2,477.8	2,548.5	23.9	1.0	-46.8	-1.8
Goods-producing sector	471.9	470.3	474.3	1.6	0.3	-2.4	-0.5
Agriculture	30.7	33.0	27.5	-2.3	-7.0	3.2	11.6
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	47.5	43.0	41.3	4.5	10.5	6.2	15.0
Utilities	18.8	20.5	11.8	-1.7	-8.3	7.0	59.3
Construction	205.7	200.0	232.8	5.7	2.8	-27.1	-11.6
Manufacturing	169.2	173.9	160.9	-4.7	-2.7	8.3	5.2
Services-producing sector	2,029.8	2,007.5	2,074.3	22.3	1.1	-44.5	-2.1
Trade	376.8	370.6	393.3	6.2	1.7	-16.5	-4.2
Transportation and warehousing	130.4	124.1	138.1	6.3	5.1	-7.7	-5.6
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	163.0	165.0	169.8	-2.0	-1.2	-6.8	-4.0
Professional, scientific and technical services	233.8	229.5	223.5	4.3	1.9	10.3	4.6
Business, building and other support services	103.9	103.1	107.0	0.8	0.8	-3.1	-2.9
Educational services	184.1	182.6	185.3	1.5	0.8	-1.2	-0.6
Health care and social assistance	316.6	318.3	305.3	-1.7	-0.5	11.3	3.7
Information, culture and recreation	111.3	115.7	121.1	-4.4	-3.8	-9.8	-8.1
Accommodation and food services	187.9	180.6	194.2	7.3	4.0	-6.3	-3.2
Other services	103.0	102.8	114.6	0.2	0.2	-11.6	-10.1
Public administration	119.1	115.3	122.1	3.8	3.3	-3.0	-2.5

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. Only the Kootenay region saw employment grow (+2.2%) in November compared to the same time last year.³³

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region

3-Month Moving Averages Seasonally Unadjusted Data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	November 2020 ('000)	November 2019 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	November 2020 (%)	November 2019 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
British Columbia	2,479.3	2,558.2	-3.1	7.6	4.8	2.8
Economic Regions						
Vancouver Island and Coast	383.8	384.1	-0.1	7.3	4.3	3.0
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,597.4	1,666.3	-4.1	7.8	4.8	3.0
Thompson - Okanagan	270.0	276.9	-2.5	7.4	4.7	2.7
Kootenay	71.2	69.7	2.2	6.2	4.8	1.4
Cariboo	78.2	79.7	-1.9	9.8	6.8	3.0
North Coast and Nechako	39.2	42.3	-7.3	6.0	4.1	1.9
Northeast	39.5	39.0	1.3	4.8	6.0	-1.2

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

Year-over-year, employment remained relatively unchanged in **Vancouver Island and Coast**. The unemployment rate is 7.3% up from 4.3% in 2019.³⁴ Looking forward, the outlook for the region is improving with residential housing and infrastructure projects underway. A new 245-unit mass timber condominium-building project in Victoria will be the largest mass timber structure in the region.³⁵

However, the region's tourism industry continues to struggle amid pandemic travel restrictions.³⁶ With fewer passengers on BC Ferries traveling between Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, the Greater Victoria's tourism sector is reeling from the loss of tourists.³⁷ Even hotels around Tofino, usually now busy with storm-watchers, temporarily laid off staff as they closed up for a few weeks in November.³⁸

Employment in **Lower Mainland - Southwest** decreased by 4.1% compared to November 2019.³⁹ The region's construction industry is expected to benefit from several projects, including a \$30.5M renovation of the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology,⁴⁰ and the Royal Columbian Hospital redevelopment project.⁴¹

Manufacturing in the region is showing signs of a recovery. For example, Eternity Medical Equipment in Surrey expects to employ 17 people, with plans to hire 38 more as they begin producing medical masks in December.⁴² In addition, the Very Good Food Company will be opening a new production hub in Vancouver by early 2021.⁴³

Employment in **Thompson-Okanagan** decreased by 2.5% over the past year. The unemployment rate is 7.4% up from 4.7% in 2019.⁴⁴ Construction on the Royal Inland Hospital⁴⁵ and the Trans Mountain pipeline in Kamloops

are helping to lift the region's labour market.⁴⁶ Looking forward, the region's recovery will benefit from the \$440.6M final phase of the Kicking Horse Canyon construction project with completion around 2024.⁴⁷

Employment in **North Coast and Nechako** declined by 7.3% since November of 2019. The unemployment rate in November was 6.0%, up from 1.9% in 2019. Despite a growing number of COVID-19 cases associated with LNG Canada construction,⁴⁸ the project continues to make progress. In November, Gitga'at Waiward Industrial in Kitimat was awarded a stick steel supply contract to the LNG Canada Project. The company is expected to deliver steel in early 2021 until the end of 2022.⁴⁹

The region's forestry industry is adapting to the new allowable annual cut (AAC) levels on Haida Gawaii. The new AAC will protect habitat and use of cedar by Indigenous peoples.⁵⁰

Employment in **Northeast** remained relatively unchanged year-over-year. The unemployment rate is 4.8% down from 6.0% in 2019, the lowest in B.C.⁵¹ Various construction projects have helped the region's labour market this year, including construction on the new RCMP detachment in Fort St. John.⁵² Construction also continues on BC Hydro's Site C hydroelectric project even though the project is facing several ongoing hurdles, including construction delays, legal challenges, and rising costs. In addition, COVID-19 has had an impact on the workforce.⁵³

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

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- ⁴⁸ Lindsay Newman, Two more cases confirmed in association with LNG Canada Project outbreak, My Bulkley Lakes Now online, December 4, 2020 <https://www.mybulkleylakesnow.com/44044/two-more-cases-confirmed-in-association-with-lng-canada-project-outbreak/>
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- ⁵¹ Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0293-01 Labour force characteristics by economic region, three-month moving average, unadjusted for seasonality, last 5 months, December 6, 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410029301>
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