



Labour Market Bulletin

British Columbia

December 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 continued to struggle under public health measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic; however, employment in British Columbia (B.C.) still grew by 92,300 jobs between the third and fourth quarter. These gains were mostly in full-time employment (+74,000), outpacing improvement in part-time employment (+18,300).¹ Apart from Alberta, B.C. was the only other western province to add jobs in the fourth quarter, yet employment still remains well below (-36,700) what it was a year ago.²

Over the quarter, unemployment declined by 25.2%, as the number of unemployed declined by 67,600 to 200,400. As such, the province's unemployment rate improved to 7.4% over the fourth quarter, down from 10.0% in the third quarter.³ The province held the second lowest monthly unemployment rate across the western provinces, just above Saskatchewan (7.0%). In spite of improved testing capacity, and greater use of personal protection equipment by the public, the labour market continues to face challenges with the rise of COVID-19 cases. Further restrictions from the provincial public health office are now in effect until February 5, 2021.⁴

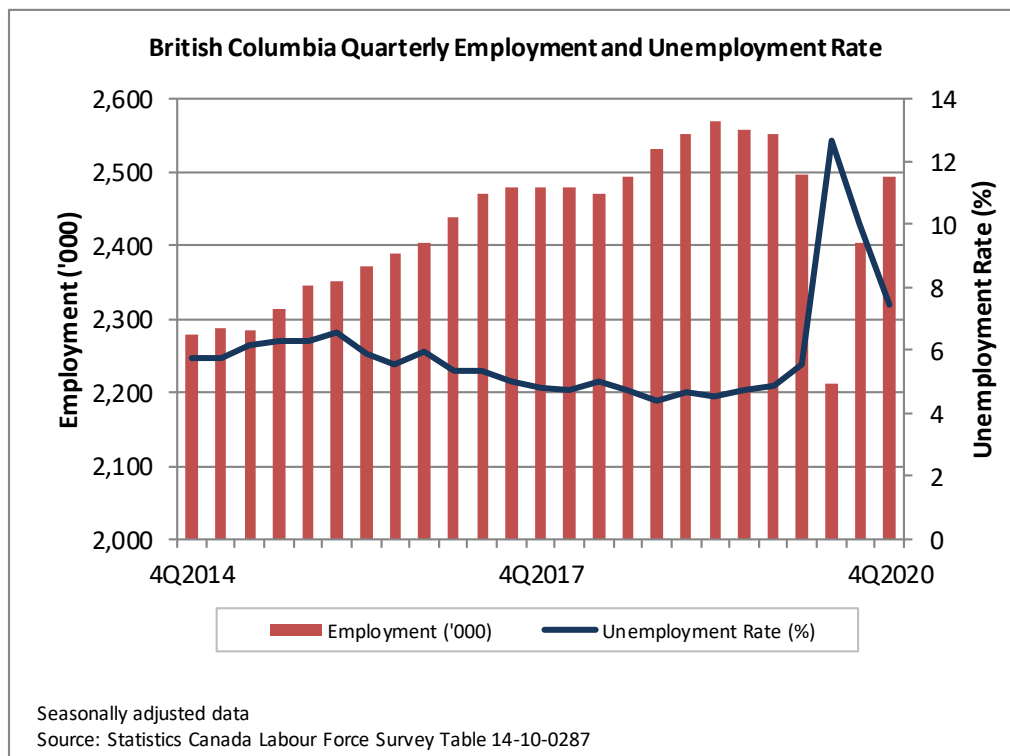
In addition, effective January 7, 2021 travellers are required to provide negative COVID-19 tests before flying into Canada.⁵ The restriction on all non-essential travel at the Canada-U.S. border is in place until January 21.⁶ The decline in visitors remains detrimental to B.C.'s tourism sector.⁷

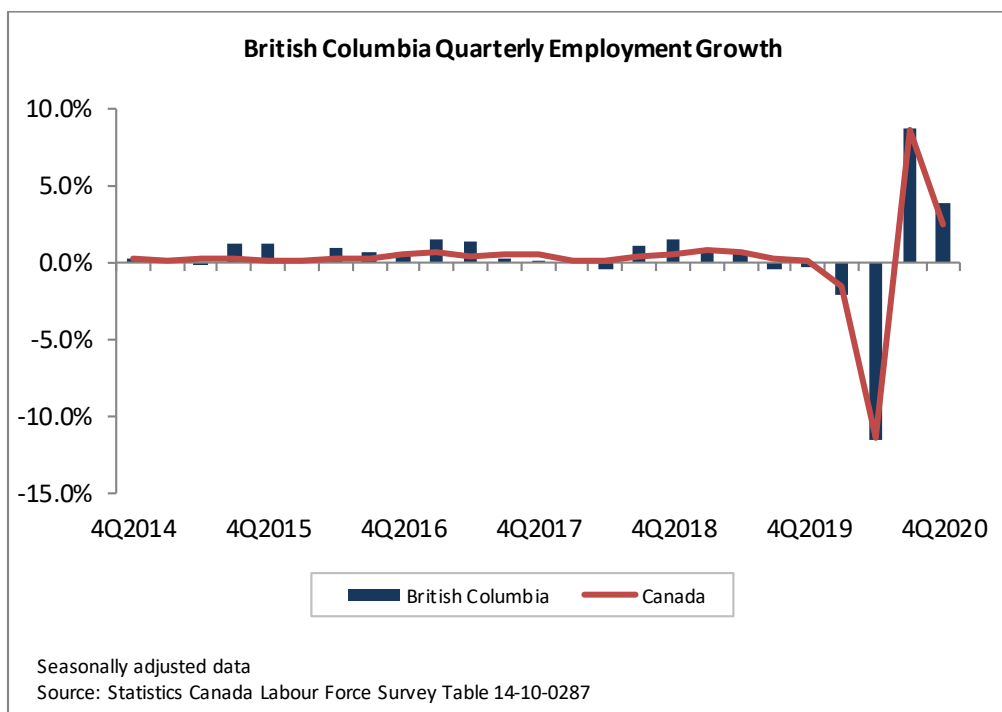
British Columbia Quarterly Labour Force Statistics

Seasonally adjusted data	4th Quarter 2020	3rd Quarter 2020	4th Quarter 2019	Quarterly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Population 15 + ('000)	4,193.2	4,180.3	4,129.0	12.9	0.3	64.2	1.6
Labour Force ('000)	2,695.4	2,670.6	2,681.8	24.8	0.9	13.6	0.5
Employment ('000)	2,495.0	2,402.7	2,551.4	92.3	3.8	-56.4	-2.2
Full-Time ('000)	1,931.6	1,857.6	2,003.1	74.0	4.0	-71.5	-3.6
Part-Time ('000)	563.4	545.1	548.3	18.3	3.4	15.1	2.8
Unemployment ('000)	200.4	268.0	130.4	-67.6	-25.2	70.0	53.7
Unemployment Rate (%)	7.4	10.0	4.9	-2.6	-	2.5	-
Participation Rate (%)	64.3	63.9	65.0	0.4	-	-0.7	-
Employment Rate (%)	59.5	57.5	61.8	2.0	-	-2.3	-

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 21.0% to 14.5% in the fourth quarter.⁸ Youth continue to struggle in finding work, as youth employment in the service sector was greatly impacted by the pandemic. Their unemployment rate remains 5.4 percentage points above what it was a year ago.⁹ Looking forward, the unemployment rate for youth will likely remain in the double-digits until the COVID-19 outbreak in Canada is under control.

Meanwhile, the number of unemployed aged 25 years and older decreased by 40,800 over the quarter, and dipped to an unemployment rate of 6.3%.¹⁰

The unemployment rate for women (15 years+) in B.C. (6.8%) has since improved from a high of 13.3% in the second quarter, yet remains well above the rate one a year ago (4.8%).¹¹ Indeed, the pandemic has been particularly hard for some women employed in the service sector and/or who are primary childcare providers.¹²

British Columbia 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)
Total	7.4	10.0	4.9	-2.6	2.5
25 years and over	6.3	8.2	4.2	-1.9	2.1
Men - 25 years and over	6.7	8.5	4.2	-1.8	2.5
Women - 25 years and over	5.9	7.9	4.1	-2.0	1.8
15 to 24 years	14.5	21.0	9.1	-6.5	5.4
Men - 15 to 24 years	16.4	22.1	9.8	-5.7	6.6
Women - 15 to 24 years	12.4	19.8	8.5	-7.4	3.9

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 15,000 jobs in the fourth quarter primarily due to job growth in **manufacturing** (+10,400), and **forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas** (+6,500), offsetting losses in other goods producing industries.¹³ Overall employment in the goods sector continues to recover, only 3,000 fewer workers from a year ago. Though employment in most industries have grown, a few industries are still worse off this quarter due to the pandemic.¹⁴

The **construction** sector remains well below last year's level (-30,000) as the pandemic continues to affect the sector. On December 29, 2020 B.C.'s public health officer ordered five major industrial projects in the northern part of the province to reduce their workforces in an attempt to ensure that the Northern Health authority is not overwhelmed with active COVID-19 cases. The order applies to the Site C hydro project (near Fort St. John), LNG Canada project (Kitimat), Coastal GasLink pipeline (Dawson Creek to Kitimat), Rio Tinto's aluminum smelter tunnel project (Kitimat) and Trans Mountain project (Edmonton, AB to Burnaby, B.C.).¹⁵ The number of workers onsite can only increase as set by the schedule in the health order.

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.¹⁶

In addition, the Government of Canada is providing over \$5.3M through its Green Municipal Fund to seven communities across the province. The funding will support sustainable infrastructure projects aimed at reducing pollution.¹⁷

The **forestry** sector continues to adapt to ongoing challenges, including U.S. trade tariffs and a shrinking timber supply. However, softwood lumber prices remain at a historical high, still above the previous peak set in June 2018, in spite of a price decline in this fall of 2020. Current demand from the U.S. is uncharacteristically strong for this time of the year, a result of a shortage of pre-owned homes on the market, in addition to pandemic-related demand for home renovation and new single-family homes. This trend is expected to continue through 2021. The U.S. is one of B.C.'s largest customers for dimensional lumber used in home framing construction.

The provincial government expects about 175 companies to apply for its \$9.3M share of the Forest Sector Safety Measures Fund. The Government of Canada launched the \$30M fund in September to help small- and medium-sized forestry companies offset the costs of implementing COVID-19 health and safety measures.¹⁸

Already, Paper Excellence has resumed some operations at its facility in Crofton, with about 58 papermakers having returned to work.¹⁹ The company also plans to invest over \$13M to upgrade its paper mill in Port Alberni. The project will support the mill diversifying into the production of food grade papers used by restaurants and food preparation enterprises. The upgrades are expected to be complete by the end of 2021.²⁰ 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 this November 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 was its highest cost operation.²²

Despite the financial impacts of COVID-19, **agriculture** employment increased by 2,700 to 31,100 over the quarter, surpassing employment one year ago (27,200). To support the sector's recovery, the province launched the new \$3M Agritech grant, which will improve farming and food production through technology.²³

Additionally, the federal government announced in October that it would support the agriculture sector with a \$4.9M investment under the Emergency On-Farm Support Fund. The funding will help B.C. farmers protect the health and safety of their workers.²⁴

Compared to the fourth quarter of 2019, B.C.'s **services** sector employment decreased by 53,400 jobs. The decline was largely due to significant losses in **wholesale and retail trade** (-18,600) and **accommodation and food services** (-13,900), both which employ people in predominantly face-to-face occupations that have been the most affected by public health measures to contain the pandemic.²⁵

On a quarterly basis, **wholesale and retail trade** continues to struggle, as employment remained relatively unchanged (+1,900). Retailers continue to operate under strict restrictions, including the requirement that masks be worn in all indoor retail spaces. According to most recent data, retail trade sales continued to increase as the fourth quarter started with \$8B in retail sales this October, well above the \$5.7B in April, when most stores were closed due to the pandemic.²⁶ However, the pandemic has driven consumers to spend more time and money online, leading to some bricks and mortar stores to close permanently.²⁷ Already, retailers such as Swimco and le Chateau had closed their stores across Canada during the quarter.²⁸

The short-term outlook for B.C.'s **tourism** sector does not look good, as non-essential travel restrictions remain in effect across the province.²⁹ Prior to the new restrictions, travel by ferry had already declined. BC Ferries reported in November a 29% drop in passengers during its second quarter compared to the same time last year.³⁰ With fewer people traveling between Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, coastal communities that rely on tourism are facing a grim 2021.³¹

In addition, foreign and domestic air travel remains challenging for the **transportation** industry. WestJet announced further layoffs and flight reductions due to new federal rules requiring COVID-19 testing before flying into Canada. Roughly 1,000 employees across Canada with WestJet and its subsidiary Swoop, will be either furloughed, temporarily laid off, put on unpaid leave, or have their hours cut.³²

The tourism sector will be receiving support from the provincial government. The Government of British Columbia is committing \$100M to the tourism sector, as well as an additional \$5M to Indigenous Tourism BC. The relief funding will support people and businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be delivered through the Small and Medium-Sized Business Recovery Grant program.³³

British Columbia 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	%
Total employed, all industries	2,495.0	2,402.7	2,551.4	92.3	3.8	-56.4	-2.2
Goods-producing sector	474.1	459.1	477.1	15.0	3.3	-3.0	-0.6
Agriculture	31.3	28.6	27.2	2.7	9.4	4.1	15.1
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	45.7	39.2	41.2	6.5	16.6	4.5	10.9
Utilities	19.2	20.5	11.5	-1.3	-6.3	7.7	67.0
Construction	206.0	209.3	236.0	-3.3	-1.6	-30.0	-12.7
Manufacturing	171.9	161.5	161.1	10.4	6.4	10.8	6.7
Services-producing sector	2,020.9	1,943.6	2,074.3	77.3	4.0	-53.4	-2.6
Trade	374.9	373.0	393.5	1.9	0.5	-18.6	-4.7
Transportation and warehousing	128.6	125.7	138.8	2.9	2.3	-10.2	-7.3
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	161.8	157.1	165.5	4.7	3.0	-3.7	-2.2
Professional, scientific and technical services	233.3	227.2	222.8	6.1	2.7	10.5	4.7
Business, building and other support services	104.2	93.2	106.6	11.0	11.8	-2.4	-2.3
Educational services	183.9	170.1	184.7	13.8	8.1	-0.8	-0.4
Health care and social assistance	318.0	305.6	308.0	12.4	4.1	10.0	3.2
Information, culture and recreation	112.3	101.2	121.7	11.1	11.0	-9.4	-7.7
Accommodation and food services	183.0	177.8	196.9	5.2	2.9	-13.9	-7.1
Other services	102.4	100.5	114.4	1.9	1.9	-12.0	-10.5
Public administration	118.7	112.2	121.4	6.5	5.8	-2.7	-2.2

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

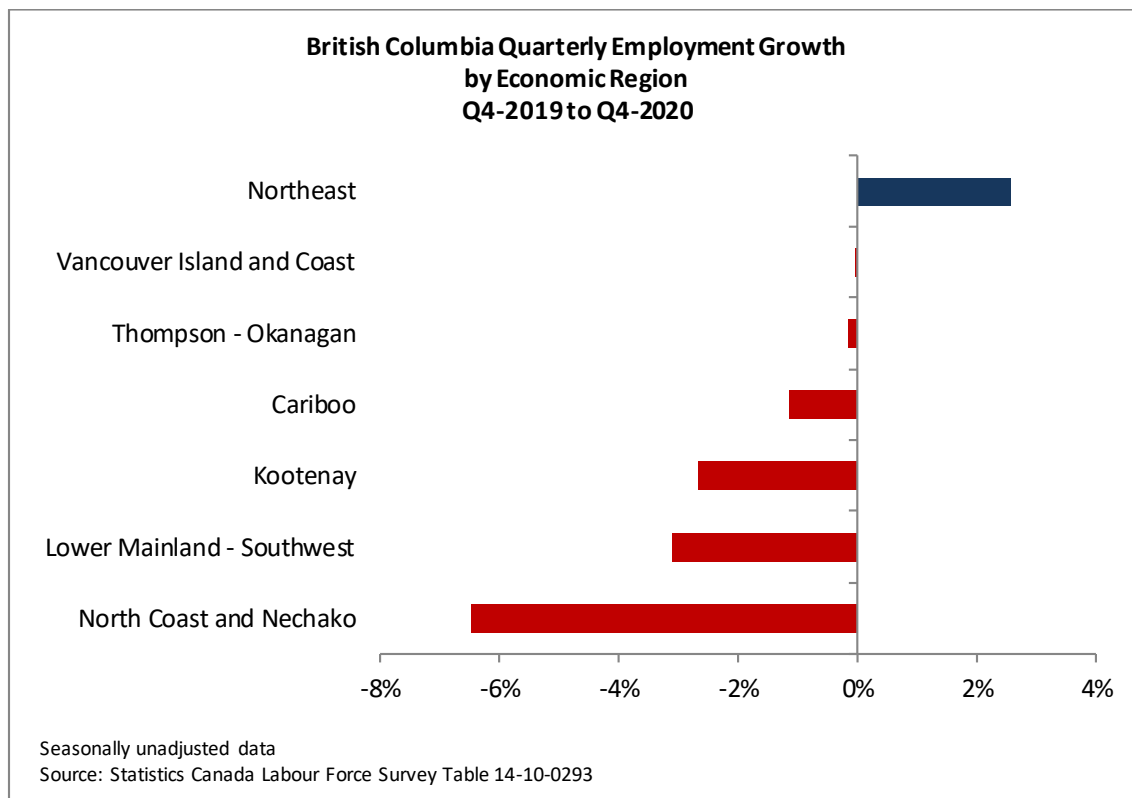
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is widespread, and employment in almost all the regions continues to be lower than last year. Only Northeast region saw employment grow (+2.6%) compared to the fourth quarter of 2019.³⁴

British Columbia 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)
British Columbia	2,493.5	2,550.2	-2.2	7.2	4.7	2.5
Economic Regions						
Vancouver Island and Coast	378.2	378.3	0.0	7.3	4.6	2.7
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,618.6	1,670.5	-3.1	7.1	4.5	2.6
Thompson - Okanagan	270.5	270.9	-0.1	7.7	5.0	2.7
Kootenay	69.3	71.2	-2.7	6.6	4.2	2.4
Cariboo	77.8	78.7	-1.1	9.3	6.8	2.5
North Coast and Nechako	39.0	41.7	-6.5	5.6	3.9	1.7
Northeast	40.0	39.0	2.6	4.3	5.1	-0.8

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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



Vancouver Island and Coast's economic recovery from the pandemic is ongoing, as employment is comparable to what it was a year ago, yet the unemployment rate is 7.3%, up from 4.6% over the same period.³⁵ Looking forward, the outlook for the region should continue to improve once additional infrastructure projects begin, including construction of the new Nanaimo Correctional Centre³⁶, and a \$1.3M multi-use sports box in Sooke.³⁷ In addition, the now vacant Oak Bay Lodge in Victoria is set to be demolished. The \$10M demolition and redevelopment project is expected to begin in early 2021.³⁸

Employment in **Lower Mainland - Southwest** decreased by 3.1% compared to the fourth quarter of 2019.³⁹ The region's construction industry is expected to benefit from several projects, including the construction of affordable rental homes.⁴⁰ In addition, the provincial government is investing \$8.9M towards seismic upgrades at Shortreed elementary in Aldergrove. Construction will begin in September 2021.⁴¹

Thompson-Okanagan continues to recover, as employment is comparable to one year ago, yet the unemployment rate increased to 7.7%.⁴² Construction on the Royal Inland Hospital⁴³ and the Trans Mountain pipeline in Kamloops are helping to lift the region's labour market.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Penticton Regional Hospital has opened its new emergency room, with phased renovations for the hospital's emergency department to continue.⁴⁵ Additionally, work continues to progress on the Chase Creek Road to Chase West project⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Kelowna's tourism industry has reportedly faced significant losses due to the cancellation of major events due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁷

Employment in **Cariboo** declined by 1.1% over the year, as the unemployment rate in the fourth quarter was 6.6%, up from 2.4% in 2019. Over the year, construction was strong in Prince George, as the city issued a total of

532 construction permits⁴⁸, and work on the new \$17M fire hall is already nearing completion.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the provincial government is looking towards rebuilding the washed-out sections of West Fraser Road, near Quesnel.⁵⁰

Employment within the **Kootenay** region decreased by 2.7% over the year, and the unemployment rate increased to 9.3% over the same period.⁵¹ Compared to the fourth quarter of 2019, the pandemic has greatly affected the region's construction (-2,700) and accommodation and food services industries (-900).⁵² On a more positive note, construction has begun on BC Housing's new affordable rental housing project in Cranbrook and is expected to be ready for occupancy by early 2022.⁵³

Over the year, employment in **North Coast and Nechako** declined by 6.5%, as the unemployment rate increased to 5.6%.⁵⁴ The LNG Canada construction project continues to make progress, despite the COVID-19 public health order limiting the workforce onsite.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, construction of Rio Tinto Alcan's water tunnel twinning project, near Kitimat, was also subject to the public health order temporarily limiting the active workforce.⁵⁶

Compared to a year ago, employment within **Northeast** increased by 2.6% to 40,000, and the unemployment rate decreased to 4.3%⁵⁷, as employment grew in the services sector.⁵⁸ Though the number of workers at BC Hydro's Site C hydroelectric worksite have increased since the aforementioned public health order was issued, the future of the project is uncertain. As of writing this report, it is under provincial cabinet review due to growing concerns over the project's costs and schedule.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the provincial government continues to invest in improving highways and bridges across northern B.C.⁶⁰

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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