



Labour Market Bulletin

British Columbia

October 2021



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 remained resilient during the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, as employment increased by +0.4% (+10,400) in October. The gains were exclusively in full-time employment (+1.9% or +38,400), offsetting significant losses in part-time employment (-4.6% or -28,000). The province's unemployment rate was down 0.3 percentage points from September to 5.6% for October, still well below the national rate of 6.7%.¹

Year-over-year, employment increased by 4.5% (+125,000) across the province, and remains well above (+1.9%) the pre-pandemic level of February 2020.² This success is due in part to increased vaccinations and the unique approaches British Columbia continues to take in response to the pandemic, most recently the implementation of a new provincial vaccine passport. The temporary passport is intended to help stem the rise of COVID-19 cases and support the province's economic recovery. However, COVID-19 outbreaks remain a concern in some parts of B.C., and additional restrictions remain in effect in the Interior Health, Northern Health, and east Fraser Health Authority regions.³ For now, the province remains at Step 3 of its Restart plan.⁴

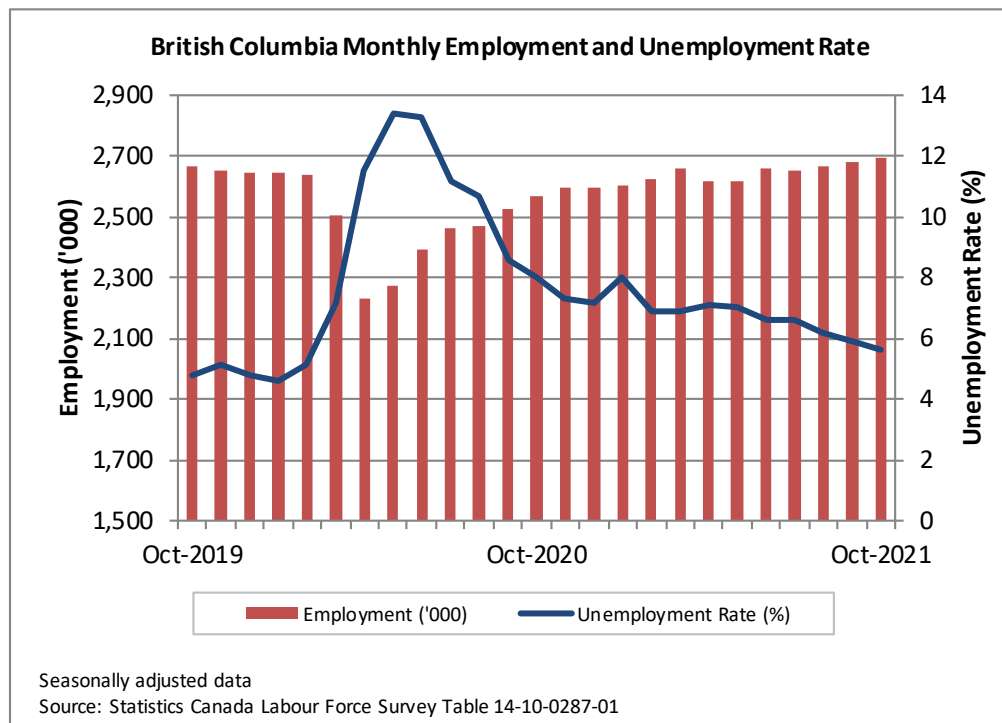
To ensure safe and healthy workplaces, a growing number of employers are following provincial and federal guidance, and are moving forward with their own vaccine mandates. However, workers who have refused to adhere to their employer's mandates either have, or are at risk of being, placed on unpaid leave and possibly even losing their jobs. This has led to some industries to raise concerns of a worsening labour shortage in the coming weeks.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics

Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Data	October 2021	September 2021	October 2020	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Population 15 + ('000)	4,375.7	4,367.1	4,314.6	8.6	0.2	61.1	1.4
Labour Force ('000)	2,852.3	2,850.5	2,791.3	1.8	0.1	61.0	2.2
Employment ('000)	2,692.3	2,681.9	2,566.8	10.4	0.4	125.5	4.9
Full-Time ('000)	2,109.9	2,071.5	1,970.1	38.4	1.9	139.8	7.1
Part-Time ('000)	582.4	610.4	596.7	-28.0	-4.6	-14.3	-2.4
Unemployment ('000)	160.0	168.6	224.5	-8.6	-5.1	-64.5	-28.7
Unemployment Rate (%)	5.6	5.9	8.0	-0.3	-	-2.4	-
Participation Rate (%)	65.2	65.3	64.7	-0.1	-	0.5	-
Employment Rate (%)	61.5	61.4	59.5	0.1	-	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 in B.C. declined to its lowest level of the year (5.6%) and second lowest in the west behind only Manitoba (5.3%). Despite the overall decline in the province’s unemployment rate, the youth (15 to 24 years) unemployment rate increased by 0.9 percentage points to 11.4%. Over the month, slightly fewer youth were in the labour force (-1,800), and more youth became unemployed (+3,300).⁵

However, employment for youth remained above pre-pandemic levels, up 1.7% (+6,100) from February 2020.⁶ In comparison, employment for workers 25 years and older increased by roughly 2.0% (+44,900) since February 2020.

The lingering impacts of the pandemic continues to affect some older workers (55 years and over), as their unemployment rate was up 1.6 percentage points to 6.8% from February 2020. The number of older workers in the labour force remained relatively unchanged (+3.0%), and unemployment increased by 33.6% (+11,100) over the same period.⁷

British Columbia Monthly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally Adjusted Data	October 2021 (%)	September 2021 (%)	October 2020 (%)	Monthly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
Total	5.6	5.9	8.0	-0.3	-2.4
25 years and over	4.7	5.2	6.8	-0.5	-2.1
Men - 25 years and over	4.9	5.0	7.8	-0.1	-2.9
Women - 25 years and over	4.4	5.3	5.8	-0.9	-1.4
15 to 24 years	11.4	10.5	15.9	0.9	-4.5
Men - 15 to 24 years	13.4	11.2	18.0	2.2	-4.6
Women - 15 to 24 years	9.2	9.8	13.5	-0.6	-4.3

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

Though employment remained relatively unchanged (+0.4%) between September and October, year-over-year employment growth was strong (+4.9%), particularly in the services sector (+6.0%). Overall employment in the goods sector was resilient with employment relatively unchanged (+0.1%) compared to a year ago.

Employment in the province's goods producing sector increased 0.7% between September and October. However, **forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas** experienced significant job losses (-7.0%), and employment in **utilities** remained relatively unchanged. The job losses were offset by gains in the remaining industries, particularly **agriculture** (+13.1%), **manufacturing** (+1.1%), and **construction** (+1.1%).⁸

The **forestry** sector continued to adapt to ongoing challenges, including wildfires, trade tariffs from the United States (U.S.) and a shrinking timber supply. On a positive note, benchmark lumber prices continued to rise in October due to increased demand from the U.S., and prices may continue to rise in the short-term due to ongoing supply chain issues.

Looking forward, uncertainty is clouding the outlook for the province's forestry sector, as the Government of British Columbia announced that it would be consulting dozens of First Nations on potentially deferring the logging of old growth forests. If implemented, the deferrals would affect harvesting within an estimated 2.6 million hectares of the most at-risk old growth forests. Reactions to the announcement from industry stakeholders have been mixed. Employers across the sector have warned that permanent deferrals could have significant job impacts.⁹

The province's **mining** sector is also facing an uncertain future, as the Gitxaala First Nation filed a B.C. Supreme Court challenge on how mineral rights are granted in the province. The First Nation is arguing that the current

process does not require the provincial government to consult with First Nations and that claims are granted automatically to applicants. The First Nation is also asking the court to cancel seven claims on Banks Island and to suspend claim staking within their territory.¹⁰

Meanwhile, the Government of BC has amended permits for the expansion of the Bonanza Ledge mine near Wells. The mine's lifespan is expected to last 18 months, while supporting 127 jobs.¹¹

The **construction** sector remained resilient during the fourth wave of the pandemic, as employment increased slightly (+1.1%) for the month of October, staying well above last year's employment level (+5.5%).¹² The relatively flat employment growth over the past month may be due in part to a sharp drop in housing starts in September (-25.3%).¹³ Yet the sector's outlook remains positive as housing demand remains relatively strong across the province, and is not showing signs of cooling off, as a lack of housing supply continues to drive up prices.

Meanwhile, construction continues on several major projects across the province, including the Broadway SkyTrain extension in Vancouver, the Fairview container terminal expansion at the Port of Prince Rupert, and the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project across the province.

The province's **services** sector continued to gain traction, as employment increased by 0.3% (+6,900) to more than 2.2M workers. The growth was largely due to significant gains in **trade** (+5.0%), **public administration** (+2.9%), and **health care and social assistance** (+2.0). However, most of the sector's gains were offset by job losses in **business, building and other support services** (-5.3%), **professional, scientific and technical services** (-5.0%), and **accommodation and food services** (-4.4%).¹⁴

However, the demand for workers in the **accommodation and food services** industry remains strong despite the decline in employment. Fewer people are returning to the industry due to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and some are finding alternative employment. According to most recent data, there were 18,190 vacancies in the industry for the second quarter of 2021.¹⁵

In response to the extraordinary labour shortage, some employers are improving working conditions and increasing wages in the hope to attract and retain workers. In addition, the government of Canada is proposing financial support specifically targeted at businesses, such as restaurants, that continue to face pandemic-related challenges. Looking forward, the outlook may also improve due to the implementation of the province's vaccine passports and with the lifting of capacity limits at some organized events and gatherings¹⁶, necessitating the hiring of more staff.

Despite employment being relatively flat over the month, the demand for labour across the **transportation and warehousing** sector is likely to remain strong, as the global supply chain crisis is expected to continue well into 2022. In addition, a shortage of shipping containers is also contributing to escalating shipping costs. Looking forward, the Port of Vancouver and the Port of Prince Rupert will likely experience a steady rise in container ship traffic in the coming months as global port congestion slowly eases. Indeed, B.C.'s economy is showing signs of a strong recovery as B.C.'s global exports (January to September) increased by 36.5% compared to the same period in 2020¹⁷ Whereas B.C.'s global imports (January to September) increased by 21% when compared to the same period in 2020.¹⁸

While the number of workers increased 2.0% over the month (+7,200), and the number of COVID-19 cases is declining, working conditions remain challenging for **healthcare and social assistance** workers in the fourth wave of the pandemic. Indeed, demands on workers may increase further as roughly 3,300 health care workers across the province are now on unpaid leave for not being fully vaccinated.¹⁹

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally Adjusted Data ('000)	October 2021	September 2021	October 2020	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Total employed, all industries	2,692.3	2,681.9	2,566.8	10.4	0.4	125.5	4.9
Goods-producing sector	489.1	485.6	488.6	3.5	0.7	0.5	0.1
Agriculture	23.3	20.6	34.9	2.7	13.1	-11.6	-33.2
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	48.0	51.6	47.1	-3.6	-7.0	0.9	1.9
Utilities	14.7	14.8	20.6	-0.1	-0.7	-5.9	-28.6
Construction	218.6	216.3	207.2	2.3	1.1	11.4	5.5
Manufacturing	184.4	182.4	178.8	2.0	1.1	5.6	3.1
Services-producing sector	2,203.2	2,196.3	2,078.2	6.9	0.3	125.0	6.0
Trade	420.2	400.2	378.9	20.0	5.0	41.3	10.9
Transportation and warehousing	140.0	139.8	129.2	0.2	0.1	10.8	8.4
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	169.7	171.4	167.7	-1.7	-1.0	2.0	1.2
Professional, scientific and technical services	242.6	255.4	234.0	-12.8	-5.0	8.6	3.7
Business, building and other support services	104.1	109.9	104.5	-5.8	-5.3	-0.4	-0.4
Educational services	194.5	194.3	187.0	0.2	0.1	7.5	4.0
Health care and social assistance	369.6	362.4	338.3	7.2	2.0	31.3	9.3
Information, culture and recreation	132.2	128.8	125.0	3.4	2.6	7.2	5.8
Accommodation and food services	174.6	182.6	183.1	-8.0	-4.4	-8.5	-4.6
Other services	109.0	109.1	105.0	-0.1	-0.1	4.0	3.8
Public administration	146.6	142.4	125.4	4.2	2.9	21.2	16.9

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

Compared to October 2020, the unemployment rate declined in all but two regions, **North Coast and Nechako** (+0.2 percentage points) and **Northeast** (+0.3 percentage points). Employment numbers also rose across most of the province, with the exception of **Kootenays** (-3.7%) and **Northeast** (-8.6%). Though pandemic-related restrictions eased across most of the province and the province's outlook remains positive, the health and financial risks for many workers remain.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region

3-Month Moving Averages Seasonally Unadjusted Data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	October 2021 ('000)	October 2020 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	October 2021 (%)	October 2020 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
British Columbia	2,697.7	2,534.2	6.5	6.1	9.1	-3.0
Economic Regions						
Vancouver Island and Coast	424.9	407.2	4.3	5.0	8.4	-3.4
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,723.3	1,585.2	8.7	6.5	9.6	-3.1
Thompson - Okanagan	307.6	293.8	4.7	4.5	8.1	-3.6
Kootenay	77.9	80.9	-3.7	6.0	8.1	-2.1
Cariboo	86.2	86.0	0.2	6.7	10.6	-3.9
North Coast and Nechako	41.8	41.7	0.2	7.9	7.7	0.2
Northeast	36.0	39.4	-8.6	5.8	5.5	0.3

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

Vancouver Island and Coast's employment increased by 4.3%, and the unemployment rate improved to 5.0%, down from an 8.4% unemployment rate a year ago.²⁰ Emotions are high following the BC Court of Appeals granting a temporary injunction to Teal Jones this past October. The injunction allows access to the Fairy Creek logging site where protesters have set up blockades. Previously, a yearlong injunction was in place and the RCMP had arrested more than 1,000 protestors. Teal Jones had sought the temporary injunction while their appeal is considered against the decision to end the original injunction. Under the temporary injunction, re-instated blockades will be removed and the company will winterize roads, harvest \$1.27 million of previously felled timber, and harvest additional timber.²¹

Looking forward, Victoria's construction sector will be busier, as the province has begun the procurement process for a new Royal BC Museum facility in Colwood. The project is expected to create 950 jobs with work slated to begin in summer of 2022.²² Meanwhile, construction started on a new housing and daycare facility in Victoria. The building will provide 150 new homes and 36 childcare spaces. Work is expected to be completed by 2023.²³

Year-over-year, the **Lower Mainland – Southwest** continues to lead the province's recovery, as employment increased by 8.7%.²⁴ Despite the upcoming winter ski season, the short-term outlook for the region's tourism sector is unlikely to improve due to several challenges, including COVID-19 requirements for international travelers, a worker shortage in the food and accommodations sector, and ongoing barriers to attracting foreign seasonal workers.

Construction activity will remain robust across Metro Vancouver for the next few years, particularly as several high-rise housing projects are either now approved or under construction near several SkyTrain stations. Despite the long-term need for skilled and experienced workers, construction of the \$1B North Shore Wastewater Treatment Plant has come to a halt, as Metro Vancouver announced its intent to terminate its contract with Acciona Wastewater Solutions LP citing their failure to meet their contractual obligation. Metro Vancouver stated that it would now move forward looking for a new contractor to finish the project.²⁵

Employment in **Thompson-Okanagan** improved by 4.7% over the year, and the unemployment rate decreased 3.6 percentage points to 4.8%.²⁶ The outlook for the region's winter ski season is unlikely to improve in the coming weeks due a shortage of international workers²⁷ and ongoing risks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, conditions within the region's health care and social services industry are likely to worsen in the short-term as some health care workers fail to follow the provincial vaccination mandate. According to a media report, more than 900 health care workers remain unvaccinated.²⁸ Indeed, health care services are already showing further signs of stress, as some remote Emergency Rooms were closed temporarily due to staffing shortages.²⁹

Year-over-year, employment in **Cariboo** remained relatively unchanged (+0.2%), and the unemployment rate fell to 6.7%.³⁰ After a challenging wildfire season, the region's forestry sector will benefit from the Canfor Corporation's recent announcement that it would be investing in a new biofuel plant in Prince George. The plant, being built by Arbios Biotech, will convert sawmill residue into renewable biocrude.³¹

Compared to a year ago, employment within **Northeast** decreased by 8.6%, and the unemployment rate increased slightly to 5.8%.³² Looking forward, the Site C construction project may encounter a labour shortage in the coming months as BC Hydro announced a requirement for consultants and employees of contractors and sub-contractors to be fully vaccinated by January 10, 2022. Whereas, more than 6,000 BC Hydro employees throughout B.C. are required to be fully vaccinated by November 22, 2021.³³ According to the most recent employment data, there were more than 4,900 workers on the Site C construction site.³⁴ At the time of writing this report, the Northeast region has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the province.³⁵

The Province of British Columbia and Blueberry River First Nations have reached an initial multi-million dollar agreement following a B.C. Supreme Court ruling this past June. The Province agreed to compensate the First Nations for failure to consult on natural resource extraction projects. This agreement will have a significant impact on natural resource extraction activity within the region.³⁶ As part of the agreement, nearly 200 forestry and oil and gas projects will continue, whereas twenty currently approved projects will not proceed without further negotiation and agreement from Blueberry River First Nations.³⁷

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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