



Labour Market Bulletin

British Columbia

April 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

After nearly a year of continuous employment growth, the province's ongoing recovery came to an abrupt end, as it sharply lost more than 43,000 jobs in April as tighter COVID-19 restrictions were implemented during the third wave. The job losses were largely in part-time employment (-6.1%), with slight losses in full-time employment (-0.3%).¹ The province's monthly unemployment rate increased slightly to 7.1% (+0.2 percentage points), but still well below the national rate of 8.1%. However, when compared to last year, most industries have recovered, at least by measure of employment, from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

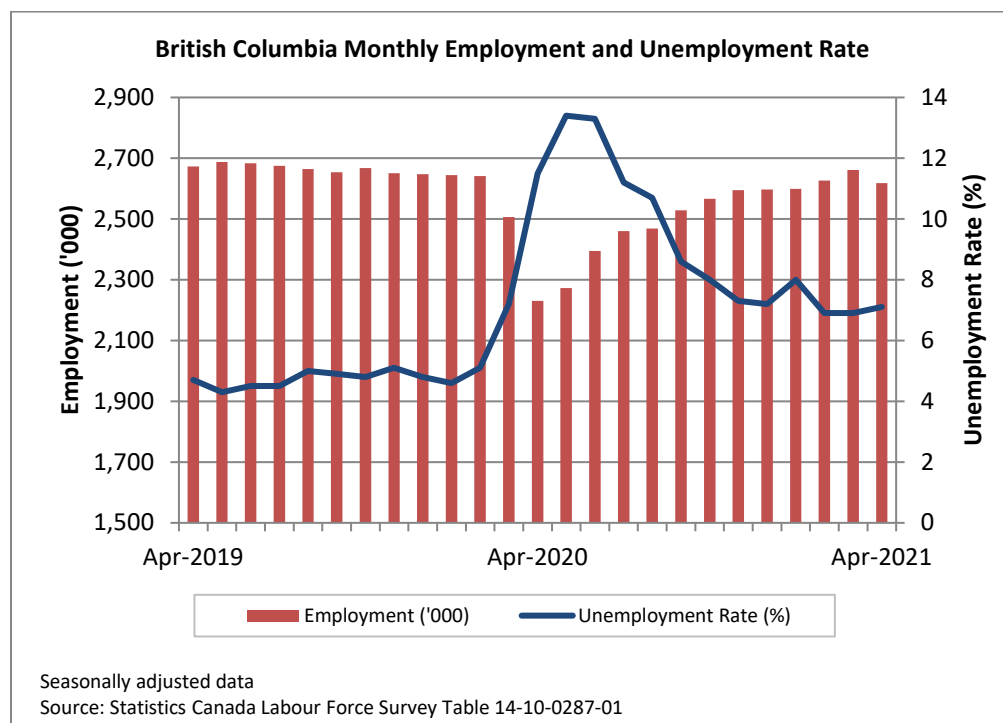
Though employment is above what it was a year ago (+17.4%),² the province's labour market remains under stress due to pandemic measures in place to reduce cases and take pressure off the health system. The provincial health officer's new restrictions, including non-essential travel across regions in the province until May 25, 2021.³ At this time, the province is accelerating its vaccination program, and is inviting people 40 years old and older to book their vaccination appointment in early May. As of May 6, the province reported that 43% of B.C.'s eligible population received their first vaccination shot.⁴ Continued vaccinations will help bend the pandemic curve and is expected to benefit the province's recovery in the long-term.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics

Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Data	April 2021	March 2021	April 2020	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Population 15 + ('000)	4,329.2	4,325.8	4,288.8	3.4	0.1	40.4	0.9
Labour Force ('000)	2,817.0	2,859.3	2,521.6	-42.3	-1.5	295.4	11.7
Employment ('000)	2,618.1	2,661.2	2,230.7	-43.1	-1.6	387.4	17.4
Full-Time ('000)	2,041.9	2,047.6	1,819.1	-5.7	-0.3	222.8	12.2
Part-Time ('000)	576.2	613.6	411.6	-37.4	-6.1	164.6	40.0
Unemployment ('000)	198.9	198.1	290.9	0.8	0.4	-92.0	-31.6
Unemployment Rate (%)	7.1	6.9	11.5	0.2	-	-4.4	-
Participation Rate (%)	65.1	66.1	58.8	-1.0	-	6.3	-
Employment Rate (%)	60.5	61.5	52.0	-1.0	-	8.5	-

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) improved slightly to 11.6% in April, a decrease of 0.5 percentage points from the month prior.⁵ The youth unemployment rate has dropped 13.5 percentage points below what it was a year ago, as more young people joined the labour force (+83,900) and were able to find work (+114,200 employed).⁶ Some young people continue to struggle finding work as employment in service sector industries, including accommodations and food services, remain vulnerable to pandemic restrictions.

Landed immigrants are a large part of B.C.'s workforce, representing roughly a third of provincial employment in April. However, employment only increased by 0.2% as fewer newcomers (immigrants who have been in Canada for less than 5 years) joined the labour force (-4,500) and were working (-3,200).⁷

British Columbia Monthly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally Adjusted Data	April 2021 (%)	March 2021 (%)	April 2020 (%)	Monthly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
Total	7.1	6.9	11.5	0.2	-4.4
25 years and over	6.3	6.0	9.7	0.3	-3.4
Men - 25 years and over	6.8	5.8	9.5	1.0	-2.7
Women - 25 years and over	5.8	6.3	10.0	-0.5	-4.2
15 to 24 years	11.6	12.1	25.1	-0.5	-13.5
Men - 15 to 24 years	10.9	11.5	21.6	-0.6	-10.7
Women - 15 to 24 years	12.3	12.9	29.0	-0.6	-16.7

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

EMPLOYMENT IN INDUSTRY

The province's goods producing sector increased slightly (+0.6%) between March and April as job gains in **manufacturing** (+2.8%) and **forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas** (+5.2%) offset losses in **construction** (-1.9%).⁸ Overall employment in the goods sector continues to recover, already 49,500 more workers are employed than a year ago. Though employment in most industries have improved over the past 12-months, only **agriculture** (-8.0%) is worse off due to the pandemic.⁹

The forestry sector continues to adapt to ongoing challenges, including trade tariffs from the United States (U.S.) and a shrinking timber supply. However, lumber prices continue to rise, and have far surpassed 2020's record price. The U.S. is Western Canada's largest customer for dimensional lumber used in home framing construction, and demand in America is very strong as a result of fewer pre-owned homes on the market and increased residential improvement projects. This trend is expected to continue through the year.

In April, Paper Excellence announced that it is permanently closing its Mackenzie Pulp Mill in Mackenzie, B.C. The mill has not been operational since June 2020 due to the impact the pandemic had on the pulp market, the mill's small production capacity, and a lack of local fibre. Around 260 employees worked at the mill.

Meanwhile, West Fraser is planning a 2-week shutdown of its pulp and paper mill in Quesnel this May. The company anticipates that they'll need hundreds of contractors to complete the required maintenance work. Most of the contractors will be hired locally, with the exception of specialists from the United States.

The **construction** sector's employment growth is ongoing, and is now above last year's level (+14,700), with nearly all subsectors in the industry having recovered jobs, most notably among residential building construction, and some trade contractors. For instance, according to March 2021 data, housing starts in B.C. was up a staggering 120% when compared to March 2020.¹⁰ Housing demand remains high across the province and is

expected to drive up sales and prices through the year. The ongoing surge is the result of a number of related factors, including new housing projects outside of metro areas for buyers looking for more living space, low interest rates, and work progressing on planned communities along Greater Vancouver's SkyTrain lines. Meanwhile, the rise of lumber prices are also driving up housing prices and causing construction delays as supply is unable to meet demand.

Year-over-year, B.C.'s **services** sector recovery has been strong, as employment increased by 19% to over 2.1M jobs. Job growth was largely due to significant gains in industries that have adapted to the ongoing health restrictions; particularly, **accommodation and food services** (+64,900) and **wholesale and retail trade** (+64,800). However, as these sectors employ people in predominantly face-to-face occupations, they remain the most vulnerable to public health measures to contain the pandemic.¹¹ Meanwhile, sectors focused on curtailing the COVID-19 pandemic, such as **health care and social assistance** (+46,400) and **professional, scientific and technical services** (+37,800) have also grown.

Over the month, **accommodation and food services** accounted for most of the employment losses in the province, with nearly 22,000 jobs lost due in part to the provincial public health order restricting restaurants, pubs, bars and food courts from hosting indoor dining.¹² In addition, a new provincial order restricts non-essential travel between certain regions of the province. These new travel restrictions will negatively affect hotel revenue and employment in B.C.

Despite the employment growth over the year, demand for these services remains low due to fewer international travelers, cancellation of the cruise season until February 2022, and with the continued travel restrictions at the Canada-U.S. border.

Information, culture and recreation also lost a significant number of jobs in April (-17,000). The job losses were likely due in part to several ski resorts across the province having closed early in late March due to the pandemic. Looking forward, the sector is likely to benefit from a good number of films and movies set to begin filming in May, including 16 in Vancouver.¹³

Though **wholesale and retail trade** has improved over the year, the industry still lost 4,600 jobs in the past month. Retailers continue to operate under strict restrictions, including the requirement that masks be worn in all indoor retail spaces. Over the past few months, a shortage of shipping containers has led to logistical complications for warehouses and wholesale distributors, creating supply chain bottlenecks and threatening employment in this sector.

According to most recent data, monthly retail trade sales increased to over \$8.2B, well above the \$5.6B in April 2020 when many stores closed due to the pandemic.¹⁴ With the "stay home" pandemic orders, retail businesses continue to restructure in response to changes in consumer behaviour. Many retailers continue to expand their online e-commerce presence as they compensate for sales shifting away from storefronts.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally Adjusted Data ('000)	April 2021	March 2021	April 2020	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Total employed, all industries	2,618.1	2,661.2	2,230.7	-43.1	-1.6	387.4	17.4
Goods-producing sector	497.6	494.7	448.1	2.9	0.6	49.5	11.0
Agriculture	22.9	24.7	24.9	-1.8	-7.3	-2.0	-8.0
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	55.1	52.4	41.8	2.7	5.2	13.3	31.8
Utilities	20.4	19.2	18.5	1.2	6.3	1.9	10.3
Construction	218.6	222.8	203.9	-4.2	-1.9	14.7	7.2
Manufacturing	180.5	175.6	159.0	4.9	2.8	21.5	13.5
Services-producing sector	2,120.5	2,166.5	1,782.6	-46.0	-2.1	337.9	19.0
Trade	397.4	402.0	332.6	-4.6	-1.1	64.8	19.5
Transportation and warehousing	137.4	140.0	128.5	-2.6	-1.9	8.9	6.9
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	167.3	166.2	159.3	1.1	0.7	8.0	5.0
Professional, scientific and technical services	261.2	254.4	223.4	6.8	2.7	37.8	16.9
Business, building and other support services	109.4	109.3	86.9	0.1	0.1	22.5	25.9
Educational services	186.6	191.4	164.2	-4.8	-2.5	22.4	13.6
Health care and social assistance	351.1	352.5	304.7	-1.4	-0.4	46.4	15.2
Information, culture and recreation	115.1	132.0	89.9	-16.9	-12.8	25.2	28.0
Accommodation and food services	155.8	177.7	90.9	-21.9	-12.3	64.9	71.4
Other services	108.0	110.0	89.4	-2.0	-1.8	18.6	20.8
Public administration	131.2	131.2	112.8	0.0	0.0	18.4	16.3

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 remains, yet employment in all the regions has increased over the last year.¹⁵ This success likely reflects the different approaches British Columbia has taken in response to the pandemic in comparison to the other provinces across western Canada. Already the province has begun to bend the curve since implementing the recent round of provincial restrictions.¹⁶

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region

3-Month Moving Averages Seasonally Unadjusted Data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	April 2021 ('000)	April 2020 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	April 2021 (%)	April 2020 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
British Columbia	2,608.6	2,433.7	7.2	7.2	8.0	-0.8
Economic Regions						
Vancouver Island and Coast	401.3	382.8	4.8	7.2	8.4	-1.2
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,676.3	1,550.8	8.1	7.2	7.5	-0.3
Thompson - Okanagan	278.1	274.0	1.5	8.1	9.1	-1.0
Kootenay	83.1	71.5	16.2	6.2	11.2	-5.0
Cariboo	86.1	77.6	11.0	6.1	9.9	-3.8
North Coast and Nechako	44.5	40.2	10.7	8.1	8.8	-0.7
Northeast	39.2	36.7	6.8	4.9	7.1	-2.2

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 has increased by 4.8% to what it was a year ago, and the unemployment rate has improved to 7.2%, down from 8.4%.¹⁷ Yet, with the provincial travel restrictions now in place, the tourism sector will likely be negatively impacted in the short-term by the decline in people visiting the region during the peak tourist season. Current BC Ferries restrictions prohibit non-essential travel between the different regions.¹⁸

Year-over-year, employment increased in the **Lower Mainland – Southwest** by 8.1%.¹⁹ The outlook for the region's construction industry is looking up. The region is benefiting from several community residential development projects along the SkyTrain lines, including the \$7B City of Lougheed and the \$2.5B Amazing Brentwood. Looking forward, further condominium development projects are anticipated along SkyTrain stations in the cities of Surrey and Coquitlam.

Meanwhile, the province's investments in several infrastructure projects across the region are progressing. Work continues in preparation for construction of the \$2.8B Broadway SkyTrain extension.²⁰ Looking forward, the region will also benefit from several improvement projects to Metro Vancouver's water infrastructure, including the Capilano Watershed Infrastructure Upgrades and the Annacis Water Main South.²¹

Employment in **Thompson-Okanagan** is comparable to one year ago (+1.5%), and the unemployment rate decreased to 8.1%.²² The outlook for the region's summer tourism season remains at risk, as it is unclear if the provincial order restricting non-essential travel between regions will be extended beyond the May 25th end date.

Despite the current travel restrictions, Big White Ski Resort announced that they will be reopening July 1, 2021, including its RV campground. The campground was closed last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.²³

The region's mining industry will soon benefit from Gold Mountain Mining beginning construction on the Elk Gold project located near Merrit. Construction will bring the mine back up to operational status by year's end.²⁴ Meanwhile construction on the Trans Mountain Expansion Project near Kamloops is ongoing, with pipeline construction expected to continue over the summer months.²⁵

Over the year, employment in **North Coast and Nechako** increased by 10.7%, and the unemployment rate decreased to 8.1%.²⁶ The region's employment outlook is expected to improve over the coming months, as the LNG Canada project reached a construction milestone this April²⁷, and Coastal GasLink's fields workforce will ramp up following revisions to B.C.'s Provincial Health Officer's on workforce limits.²⁸

Aside from the ongoing mega-projects, the region is also benefiting from a variety of small-scale projects, including the construction of a new \$14.8M community building in the Kaska Dena community of Lower Post²⁹, and \$11M in upgrades to the Dease Lake Airport.³⁰

Compared to a year ago, employment within **Northeast** increased slightly (+3.6%), and the unemployment rate decreased by 2.2 percentage points to 4.9%.³¹ Despite reports of COVID-19 cases, work continues on the Site C Hydroelectric project.³² According to most recent employment data, there were more than 4,300 workers on the Site C project in March 2021.³³

The region's utilities sector will also benefit the Zonnebeke Energy Project, which has four new wind turbines located near Chetwynd, now being operational. The project will power approximately 5,800 homes and have an output capacity of 15MW.³⁴

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, British Columbia

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

For information on the Labour Force Survey, please visit the Statistics Canada Web site at: www.statcan.gc.ca

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