



# Labour Market Bulletin

## British Columbia

June 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 provincial labour market proved resilient to the ongoing pressures of the pandemic, as most industries recovered, at least by measure of employment, from the impacts of COVID-19. Employment in British Columbia (B.C.) remained relatively unchanged (+0.1%), as full-time employment increased slightly between April and June.<sup>1</sup> Over the quarter, employment growth in June (+1.6%) nearly offset the combined job losses for the months of April and May.<sup>2</sup>

The province's unemployment rate improved to 6.9% (-0.4%) from the previous quarter. The provincial employment recovery for June has now surpassed (+1%) the pre-pandemic level of February 2020.

Compared to a year ago, more people have found work (+14.4% or +331,400)<sup>3</sup>, due in part to the long-term success the pandemic measures had on the province's labour market. In addition, increased vaccinations have helped reduce the number of COVID-19 cases in the province.

With such success and sacrifice in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, B.C. moved forward into Step 3 of its Restart plan on July 1, 2021. The mandatory mask mandate order was lifted, travel restrictions within the province were removed, and limits on indoor and outdoor dining were eased.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, things are looking up, for as more British Columbians receive their second vaccination dose, the province's recovery should continue to accelerate over the summer.

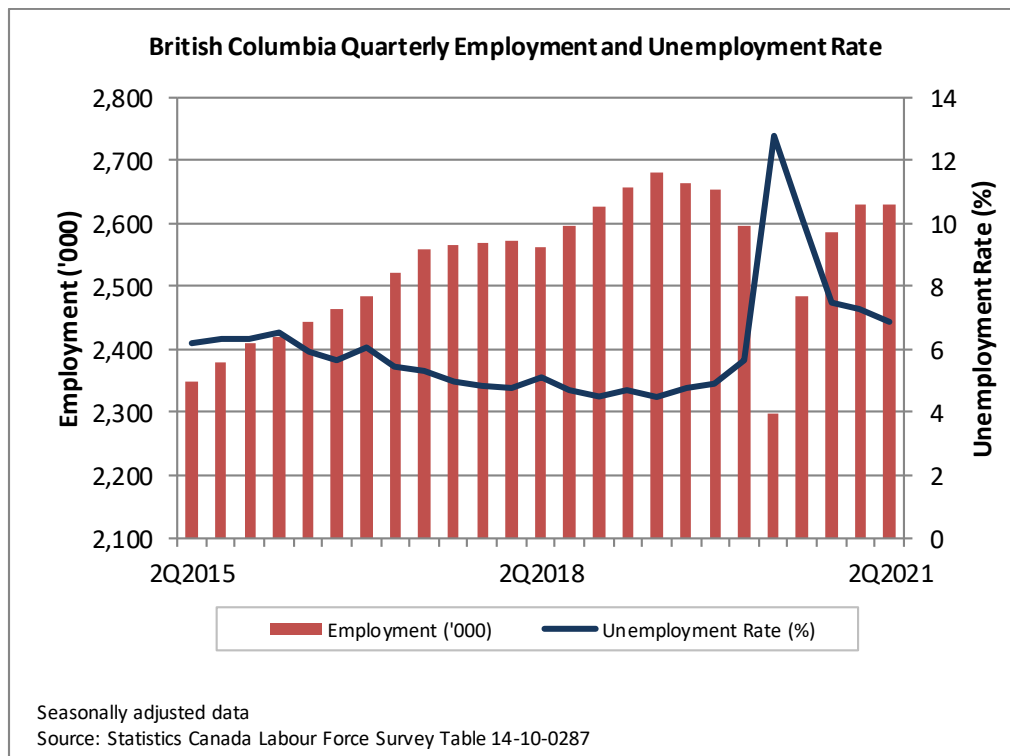
However, parts of the province may not receive the summer they have been waiting a year and a half for. Following a recent heatwave and dry spring in some regions, B.C.'s wildfire season is well on its way. At the time of writing, more than 300 wildfires are active across the province. Sadly, roughly 1,000 residents had to quickly flee an out of control wildfire in June, as the Village of Lytton and the surrounding area was destroyed.

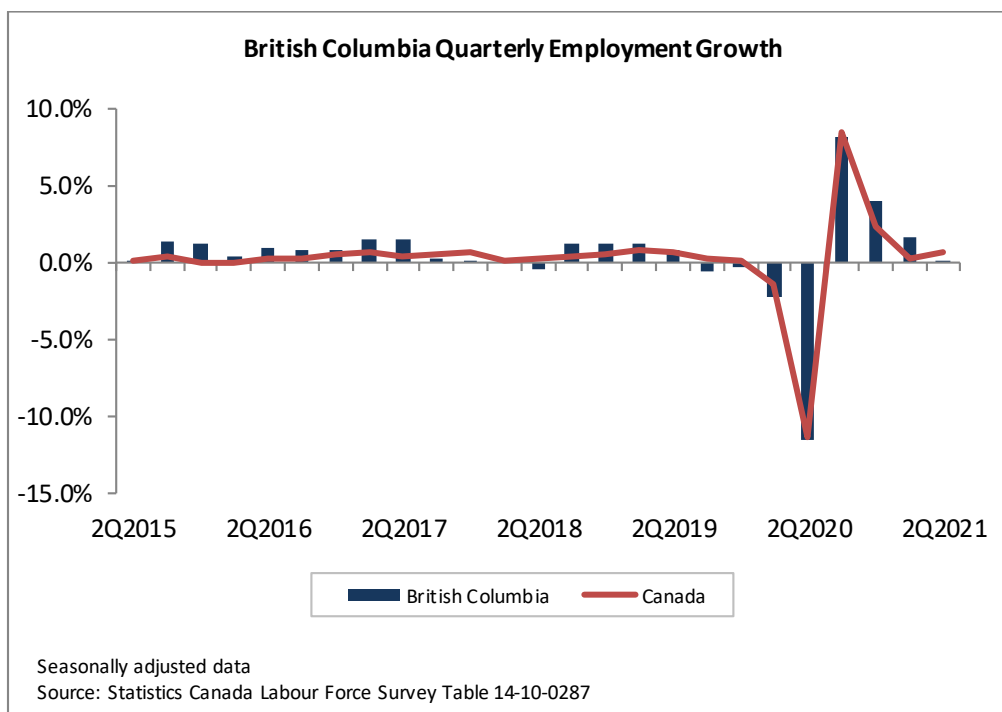
**British Columbia Quarterly Labour Force Statistics**

Seasonally adjusted data	2nd Quarter 2021	1st Quarter 2021	2nd Quarter 2020	Quarterly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Population 15 + ('000)</b>	4,334.7	4,323.2	4,292.6	11.5	0.3	42.1	1.0
<b>Labour Force ('000)</b>	2,825.2	2,835.7	2,636.7	-10.5	-0.4	188.5	7.1
<b>Employment ('000)</b>	2,630.9	2,629.0	2,299.5	1.9	0.1	331.4	14.4
Full-Time ('000)	2,053.2	2,050.8	1,861.9	2.4	0.1	191.3	10.3
Part-Time ('000)	577.7	578.2	437.6	-0.5	-0.1	140.1	32.0
<b>Unemployment ('000)</b>	194.3	206.7	337.2	-12.4	-6.0	-142.9	-42.4
<b>Unemployment Rate (%)</b>	6.9	7.3	12.8	-0.4	-	-5.9	-
<b>Participation Rate (%)</b>	65.2	65.6	61.4	-0.4	-	3.8	-
<b>Employment Rate (%)</b>	60.7	60.8	53.6	-0.1	-	7.1	-

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. improved greatly over the year (-5.9 percentage points), as significantly less people were unemployed (-142,900). Over the year, the recovery has been predominantly among those who are 25 years and over, as their employment increased by roughly 11.3% (+231,800).<sup>5</sup>

The unemployment rate for B.C.'s youth (15 to 24 years) was 11.8% in the second quarter of 2021, a slight improvement (-2.8%) from the previous quarter.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, some young people continued to struggle finding a place in the labour market, as the number youth in the labour force decreased by 2.8% (-11,400) over the quarter. Yet, compared to a year ago, the youth unemployment rate has dropped 16.0 percentage points, as young people have been able to find work as the pandemic subsided (+99,700 employed).<sup>7</sup>

#### British Columbia Quarterly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally adjusted data	2nd Quarter 2021 (%)	1st Quarter 2021 (%)	2nd Quarter 2020 (%)	Quarterly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>Total</b>	6.9	7.3	12.8	-0.4	-5.9
<b>25 years and over</b>	6.1	6.1	10.6	0.0	-4.5
Men - 25 years and over	6.3	5.9	9.9	0.4	-3.6
Women - 25 years and over	5.8	6.3	11.4	-0.5	-5.6
<b>15 to 24 years</b>	11.8	14.6	27.8	-2.8	-16.0
Men - 15 to 24 years	10.5	12.4	27.9	-1.9	-17.4
Women - 15 to 24 years	13.3	16.9	27.6	-3.6	-14.3

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 overall goods producing sector was stable over the second quarter of 2021. However, **agriculture** experienced significant job losses (-11.6%), and employment in construction (-2.3%) eased slightly. The job losses were offset by gains in the remaining industries, particularly manufacturing (+2.2%).<sup>8</sup> Overall employment in the goods sector has recovered somewhat, with 31,200 more workers than a year ago. Though employment in most goods producing industries have grown over the year, only agriculture is still worse off due to the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>

The **construction** sector's employment has improved compared to a year ago (+3.0%); however, employment across the industry declined over the second quarter of 2021. The employment losses over the quarter may be due in part to a sharp drop in housing starts in April (-47.3%), followed by a modest recovery in May (+20.1%).<sup>10</sup> Housing demand across the province appears to be easing, as high home prices continue to discourage many first-time homebuyers from entering the housing market. In addition, the pandemic-related demand, which drove up recent housing sales and prices, may be sated.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the sudden spike in building permits earlier this year has since eased, and year-over-year, the value of building permits remained relatively unchanged (+1.%) in May. Over the 12-month period, the value of multiple dwelling building permits (e.g. condominiums) declined sharply (-34.8%); whereas, total non-residential building permits nearly doubled (+89.5%).<sup>12</sup>

At this time, work is continues on several major industrial projects across B.C., including the \$6.6B Coastal GasLink pipeline, and the \$12.6B TransMountain pipeline. Meanwhile, the Province announced several multi-million dollar school upgrades and affordable housing projects across the province. Looking ahead, the Metro Vancouver area will benefit from two major public transportation projects, the ongoing \$2.8B Broadway Sky Train extension, and the recently announced \$3.8B Surrey-Langley Sky Train extension.

The **forestry** sector continues to adapt to ongoing challenges, including wildfires, trade tariffs from the United States (U.S.) and a shrinking timber supply. After several months of historically high lumber prices, they dropped sharply in the month of June, as supplies increased and demand eased. The U.S. is Western Canada's largest customer for dimensional lumber used in home framing construction, and demand in America remains strong as a result of fewer pre-owned homes on the market.

In the short-term, logging activities may need curtailing in the coming weeks due to the risk of wildfires. For now, most facilities are stocking up on fibre, in order to ensure uninterrupted operations over the next few months.<sup>13</sup>

Following the escalation of old-growth logging protests on Vancouver Island, the Provincial government is honouring the request by the Pacheedaht, Huu-ay-aht and Ditidaht First Nations to defer logging in the Fairy Creek Watershed and the Central Walbran Valley for two years. The Province aims to ensure sustainability and competition across the sector, including participation with local communities.<sup>14</sup> More old growth protections are to be announced this summer after consulting with local Indigenous nations.

Just recently, the City of Port Alberni served Western Forest Products with a notice of expropriation for the Somass Sawmill lands in late June. The mill has remained idle since July 2017, when operations were curtailed indefinitely.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, the San Group announced it is considering expansion of its operations in Terrace, including a sawmill to process wood.<sup>16</sup> The company also recently announced it plans to invest \$100M in its Port Alberni operations, including up to \$60 million to improve the company's ability to ship lumber by container ships from Port Alberni's deep sea port.<sup>17</sup>

Year-over-year, B.C.'s **services** sector employment increased by 16.3% to over 2.1M jobs. Job growth was largely due to significant gains in industries that have adapted to the ongoing health restrictions; particularly, in **accommodation and food services** (+37.1%), **information, culture and recreation** (+35.9%), and **wholesale and retail trade** (+15.5%). Meanwhile, industries such as **business, building and other support services** (+28.7%) and **other services** (+24.5%) have also grown.<sup>18</sup>

On a quarterly basis, **accommodation and food services** employment declined sharply (-7.1%) as a provincial public health order issued in May, restricted restaurants, pubs, bars and food courts from hosting indoor dining.<sup>19</sup> Despite the short-term hardship for workers in this industry, employment should quickly recover as the province is now in Stage 3 of its Restart Plan. Meanwhile, provincial hotel occupancy remains low for the province, at 31.9% for May 2021<sup>20</sup>, due to fewer international travelers, cancellation of the cruise season until February 2022, and continued travel restrictions at the Canada-U.S. border. Of note, the long-term outlook for coastal communities that rely on the cruise industry remains uncertain, as the U.S. government passed legislation allowing cruise ships to bypass Canadian destinations between Alaska and Washington State.<sup>21</sup> However, in the near-term, local tourism activities should improve over the summer as province-wide travel restrictions have been lifted.

Employment in **transportation** remained relatively flat over the quarter. However, the wildfires currently raging across the province have caused significant damages to railroads and delays in the delivery of goods. For now, some communities will see an increase in rail traffic as cargo is diverted to alternative routes. Further destruction of rail lines may negatively affect BC's shipping capacity, forcing cargo vessels to redirect to either the Port of Vancouver or Port of Prince Rupert to receive or deliver cargo.

Employment in **education** declined by roughly 3,900 jobs (-2.1%) over the quarter. Across the province, some school divisions are facing budget shortfalls<sup>22</sup>, particularly in the Lower Mainland, where some school districts have lost revenue from fewer enrolled international students during the pandemic. As a result, some teachers and other support staff were laid off in order to balance budgets.<sup>23</sup> Looking forward, it is unclear at this time if international students will be returning for the new school year next fall.

## British Columbia Quarterly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally adjusted data ('000)	2nd Quarter 2021	1st Quarter 2021	2nd Quarter 2020	Quarterly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total employed, all industries</b>	2,630.9	2,629.0	2,299.5	1.9	0.1	331.4	14.4
<b>Goods-producing sector</b>	488.2	488.4	457.0	-0.2	0.0	31.2	6.8
Agriculture	22.1	25.0	27.2	-2.9	-11.6	-5.1	-18.8
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	53.1	50.7	42.8	2.4	4.7	10.3	24.1
Utilities	21.3	19.8	19.5	1.5	7.6	1.8	9.2
Construction	214.4	219.5	208.1	-5.1	-2.3	6.3	3.0
Manufacturing	177.3	173.4	159.5	3.9	2.2	17.8	11.2
<b>Services-producing sector</b>	2,142.7	2,140.6	1,842.6	2.1	0.1	300.1	16.3
Trade	396.9	394.3	343.5	2.6	0.7	53.4	15.5
Transportation and warehousing	138.2	139.2	125.6	-1.0	-0.7	12.6	10.0
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	169.0	163.2	160.5	5.8	3.6	8.5	5.3
Professional, scientific and technical services	261.9	254.2	228.7	7.7	3.0	33.2	14.5
Business, building and other support services	107.5	107.3	83.5	0.2	0.2	24.0	28.7
Educational services	184.9	188.8	172.7	-3.9	-2.1	12.2	7.1
Health care and social assistance	352.6	345.0	311.5	7.6	2.2	41.1	13.2
Information, culture and recreation	125.7	127.7	92.5	-2.0	-1.6	33.2	35.9
Accommodation and food services	163.3	175.7	119.1	-12.4	-7.1	44.2	37.1
Other services	111.3	110.2	89.4	1.1	1.0	21.9	24.5
Public administration	131.6	134.9	115.4	-3.3	-2.4	16.2	14.0

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

## REGIONAL ANALYSIS

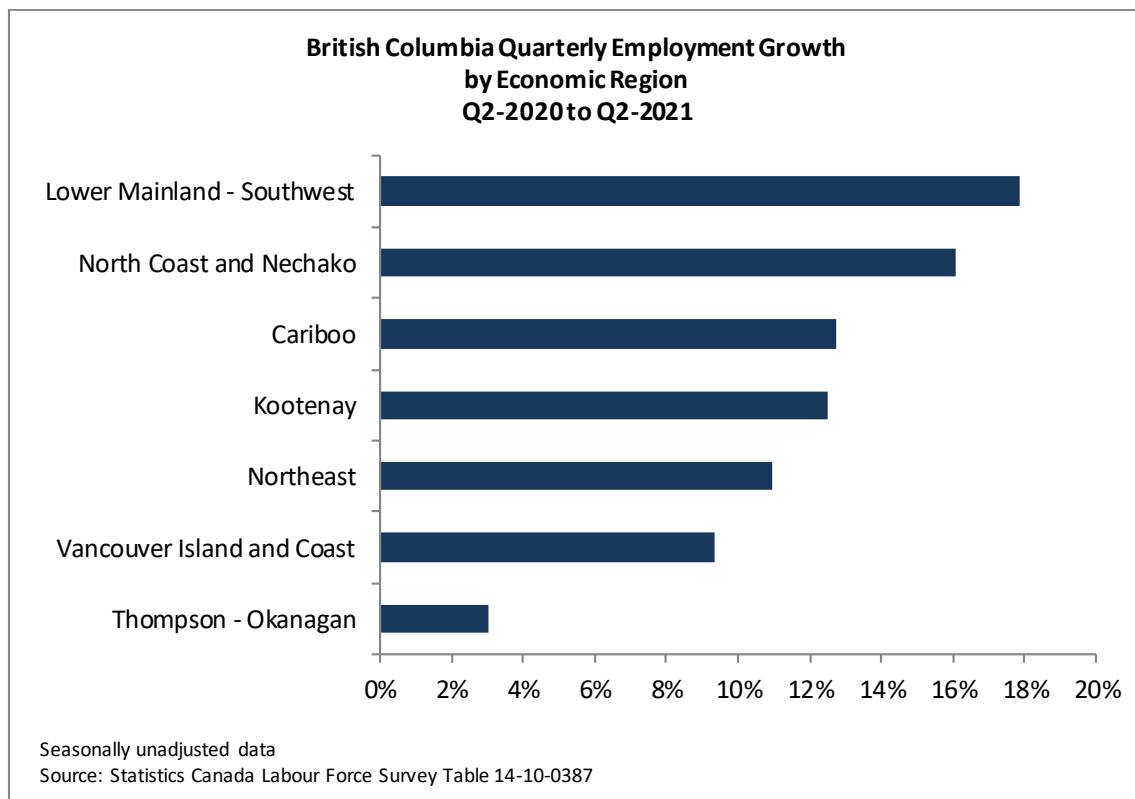
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is beginning to lessen, as employment in all the regions have increased over the last year. Indeed, the recovery in the labour force helped unemployment rates to decline in all the regions, with Kootenay's declining the most (-10.2 percentage points).<sup>24</sup> 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. Indeed, the province's outlook is bright, as more restrictions are expected to be lifted later this summer.

## British Columbia Quarterly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region

Seasonally unadjusted data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	2nd Quarter 2021 ('000)	2nd Quarter 2020 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	2nd Quarter 2021 (%)	2nd Quarter 2020 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>British Columbia</b>	2,639.5	2,310.3	14.2	6.8	12.4	-5.6
<b>Economic Regions</b>						
Vancouver Island and Coast	410.9	375.7	9.4	5.6	11.8	-6.2
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,694.5	1,437.9	17.8	7.2	12.9	-5.7
Thompson - Okanagan	280.6	272.4	3.0	6.5	10.3	-3.8
Kootenay	83.7	74.4	12.5	5.6	15.8	-10.2
Cariboo	88.3	78.3	12.8	6.1	10.9	-4.8
North Coast and Nechako	44.0	37.9	16.1	7.6	14.6	-7.0
Northeast	37.5	33.8	10.9	3.9	10.8	-6.9

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** economic recovery from the pandemic is ongoing. Employment improved by 9.4% compared to what it was a year ago, and the unemployment rate is 5.6%, down from 11.8%.<sup>25</sup> The outlook for the region's tourism sector is looking up, as the travel ban between regions in the province was lifted on June 15<sup>th</sup>. Already BC Ferries has added more sailings to meet increased travel demand.<sup>26</sup> For most of the second quarter, the provincial non-essential travel restrictions negatively affected the region's tourism sector, as the restrictions did not allow most people to move between health regions in order to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the region's construction industry will be busy, as the Province announced several multi-million dollar school upgrades and affordable housing projects across the region, including a \$3M upgrade on the Dover Secondary School in Nanaimo<sup>27</sup>, and a 170-unit affordable housing project in Sooke<sup>28</sup>.

The province's recovery rests largely in the **Lower Mainland – Southwest**. Year-over-year, the region led the province in job growth, adding 256,600 jobs (+17.8%).<sup>29</sup> The outlook for the region's construction industry is looking up. The region will benefit not only from the Province investing in several multi-million dollar school upgrade projects, but also from the new \$106.6M aquatics and community centre in New Westminster<sup>30</sup>. In addition, the Vancouver CMA's housing market has been quite active, as over the past 12-months housing starts increased by 22.7% in May 2021.<sup>31</sup>

Looking forward, the region's tech sector is ramping up, as Amazon announced it would be hiring 1,800 employees this year, with the majority of the positions located in Vancouver.<sup>32</sup> In addition, YVR and the British Columbia Institute of Technology have opened a new innovation hub at the Vancouver International Airport. Students will learn about new technology in the airline industry.<sup>33</sup>

Employment in **Thompson-Okanagan** increased by 3.0% over the year and the unemployment rate decreased by 3.8 percentage points to 6.5%.<sup>34</sup> The region's construction sector is beginning to show more activity, particularly in regards to road works. The Province announced it is investing \$2.2M for safety improvements along the Coquihalla highway near Merritt. The project is expected to last until the fall.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the region will benefit from the next phase of the Trans-Canada Highway four-laning project near Chase. The Province announced the project would begin this spring and be completed in fall 2023.

The outlook for the region's summer tourism season is precarious. At the time of writing, several wildfires of note are threatening communities in the Okanagan Valley, and near Kamloops, including Sun Peaks. The region's tourism sector already experienced significant job losses over the past year due to the pandemic.

The summer tourism sector and construction industry may suffer regardless of the immediate effects of the wildfires, as smoke from the wildfire exacerbates health issues and negatively impacts outdoor activities.

Employment within the **Kootenay** region surged by 12.5% over the year, and the unemployment rate dropped significantly by 10.2 percentage points to 5.6%, as more people found work (+9,300).<sup>36</sup> The region's job growth is likely due in part a resurgence in construction activity across the region. For instance, several road and infrastructure improvements are now underway, including construction of a \$6.2M replacement bridge spanning the Kaslo River along Highway 31. Construction on the bridge is to be finished by the end of the year.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, construction has begun on the \$10M installation of 120km of fibre optic infrastructure between Playmor Junction to north of Nakusp. Work on the project is expected to last until spring of 2023.<sup>38</sup>



The outlook for the Castlegar’s forestry sector is improving. Already, Interfor announced a \$35-million project to improve productivity at its mill. The company will be rebuilding and replacing their planer mill, and work is expected to be complete by July 2022.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the Federal government will be funding \$4.5M in equipment upgrades to improve fibre processing at the Mercer Celgar Pulp Mill. Once complete, the upgrades will help address regional fibre supply issues.<sup>40</sup>

At the time of writing this report, there are several active wildfires of note across region. Should the situation worsen, employment in rail transportation, forestry, and tourism related activities would be negatively impacted.

Over the year, employment in **North Coast and Nechako** increased by 16.1% (+6,100) to 44,000 workers, and the unemployment rate was reduced by nearly half to 7.0% as more people found work and entered the labour force (+3,200).<sup>41</sup> The region’s employment improved due in part to work ramping up on the LNG Canada and Coastal GasLink mega-projects. The outlook for the region’s construction and transportation industries appears bright, as the Pembina Pipeline Corporation has partnered with the Haisla Nation for the proposed Cedar LNG Project in Kitimat. If approved, the project is expected to create 500 temporary jobs during construction. A final investment decision is set for 2023.<sup>42</sup>

For now, the region is also benefitting from several other small-scale projects, including construction on a number of buildings at Coast Mountain College in Terrace. The \$35M project includes new student housing, as well as renovations to the library, and academic and registration hub.<sup>43</sup>

Compared to a year ago, employment within **Northeast** improved by 10.9% to 37,500, and the unemployment rate decreased 6.9 percentage points to 3.9%.<sup>44</sup> The Site C Hydroelectric project continues to ramp up its onsite workforce. According to most recent employment data, there were more than 4,800 workers on the Site C project in May 2021.<sup>45</sup>

Several smaller construction projects are also underway across the region, including a new \$28M bridge in Dawson Creek. The project is expected to be complete in 2023.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the North Peace Regional Airport, located in Fort St. John, has received \$8.2M in federal funding towards runway rehabilitation work. Construction is expected to take three months to complete and will begin this July.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, the province’s natural gas sector is making headways, as Cryopeak LNG Solutions opened its new natural gas production facility in Fort Nelson. The facility will provide natural gas to remote northern communities and industrial customers, such as mining operations.<sup>48</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.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months, July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028701>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months, July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028701>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months, July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028701>

<sup>4</sup> We are in Step 3, BC's Restart: A plan to bring us back together, Government of British Columbia, July 2, 2021 <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/info/restart#step-three>

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months, July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028701>

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months, July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028701>

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0355-01 Employment by industry, monthly, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, and trend-cycle, last 5 months (x 1,000), July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410035501>

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0355-01 Employment by industry, monthly, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, and trend-cycle, last 5 months (x 1,000), July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410035501>

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 34-10-0156-01 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, housing starts in all centres 10,000 and over, Canada, provinces, and census metropolitan areas, seasonally adjusted at annual rates, monthly (x 1,000), July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3410015601>

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- <sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 34-10-0066-01 Building permits, by type of structure and type of work (x 1,000), July 12, 2021 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3410006601>
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