



Labour Market Bulletin

British Columbia

November 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 overcame a challenging month of extensive rains, flooding, and landslides, as employment increased by +0.2 (+4,600) in November. The gains were exclusively in part-time employment (+1.6% or +9,600), offsetting modest losses in full-time employment (-0.2% or 5,000). The province's unemployment rate was unchanged for November, still well below the national rate of 6.0%.¹

Year-over-year, employment increased by 3.9% (+101,500) across the province, and remains well above (+2.1%) the pre-pandemic level of February 2020.² The ongoing success is due in part to the unique approaches British Columbia has taken in response to the pandemic, particularly the recent vaccination passport and industry-specific vaccine mandates. However, devastation and flooding from severe rains, protests against natural resource extraction, and the new Omicron COVID-19 variant and COVID-19 outbreaks remain concerns to B.C.'s economic growth.

Recent flooding across most of southwestern B.C. forced thousands of British Columbians to evacuate and many communities are still reeling from the devastating environmental destruction. At the time of writing, evacuation orders and alerts are still active across some of the affected areas. Sadly, roughly 7,000 residents in the City of Merritt had to flee, as most of city was quickly under water. In total, almost 15,000 people were displaced by the flooding.³

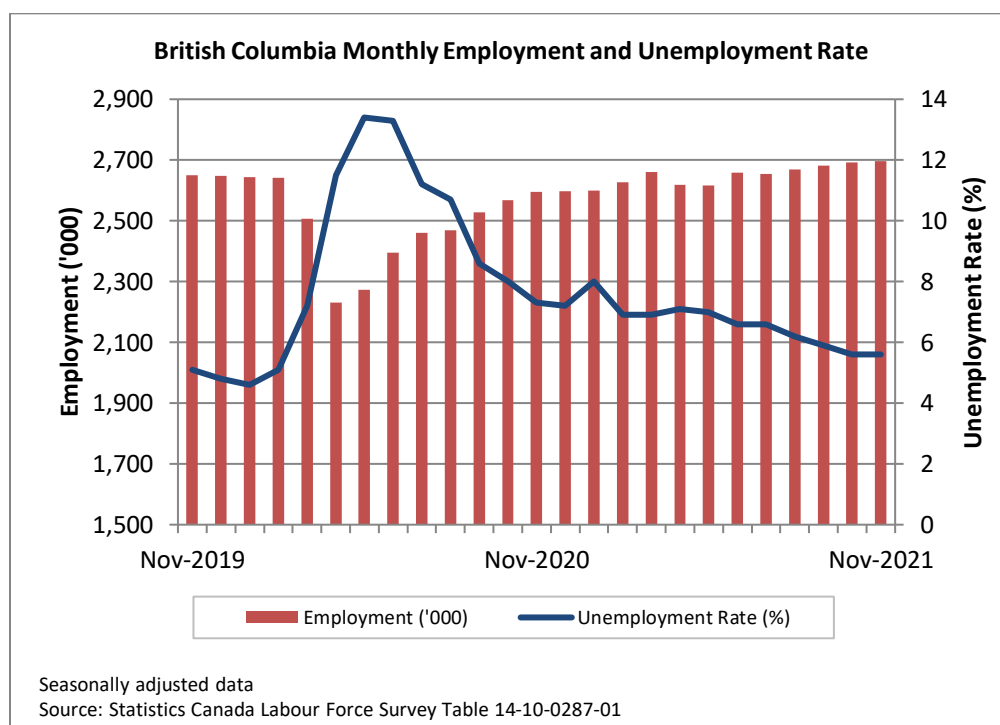
The B.C. government declared a provincial state of emergency on November 17 to support response and recovery efforts. The state of emergency is in effect until December 14th.⁴ Members of the Canadian Armed Forces were also providing emergency assistance and support recovery to those affected.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics

Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Data	November 2021	October 2021	November 2020	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Population 15 + ('000)	4,383.8	4,375.7	4,317.5	8.1	0.2	66.3	1.5
Labour Force ('000)	2,855.4	2,852.3	2,798.9	3.1	0.1	56.5	2.0
Employment ('000)	2,696.9	2,692.3	2,595.4	4.6	0.2	101.5	3.9
Full-Time ('000)	2,104.9	2,109.9	2,024.7	-5.0	-0.2	80.2	4.0
Part-Time ('000)	592.0	582.4	570.7	9.6	1.6	21.3	3.7
Unemployment ('000)	158.5	160.0	203.5	-1.5	-0.9	-45.0	-22.1
Unemployment Rate (%)	5.6	5.6	7.3	0.0	-	-1.7	-
Participation Rate (%)	65.1	65.2	64.8	-0.1	-	0.3	-
Employment Rate (%)	61.5	61.5	60.1	0.0	-	1.4	-

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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



While the unemployment rate in B.C. remained unchanged over the month, it was still the third lowest in the west, behind only Manitoba (5.1%) and Saskatchewan (5.3%). Unfortunately, B.C.'s youth (15 to 24 years) unemployment rate increased by 1.3 percentage points to 12.7%. Over the month, slightly more youth entered the labour force (+6,700), and nearly as many youth became unemployed (+6,200).⁵

However, employment for youth remained above pre-pandemic levels, up 1.9% (+6,600) from February 2020.⁶ In comparison, employment for workers 25 years and older increased by roughly 2.1% (+49,000) since February 2020.

The lingering impacts of the pandemic continue to affect some older workers (55 years and over), as their unemployment rate remained at 6.8% for the second month in a row, up 1.6 percentage points from February 2020. The number of older workers in the labour force remained relatively unchanged (+2.1%), and unemployment increased by 32.4% (+10,700) over the same period.⁷

British Columbia Monthly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally Adjusted Data	November 2021 (%)	October 2021 (%)	November 2020 (%)	Monthly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
Total	5.6	5.6	7.3	0.0	-1.7
25 years and over	4.4	4.7	6.2	-0.3	-1.8
Men - 25 years and over	4.5	4.9	6.7	-0.4	-2.2
Women - 25 years and over	4.2	4.4	5.7	-0.2	-1.5
15 to 24 years	12.7	11.4	14.3	1.3	-1.6
Men - 15 to 24 years	17.6	13.4	16.8	4.2	0.8
Women - 15 to 24 years	7.5	9.2	11.5	-1.7	-4.0

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 between October and November, year-over-year employment growth was strong, particularly in the services sector (+5.1%). Overall employment in the goods sector was resilient, yet employment eased slightly (-1.2%) compared to a year ago. Looking forward, employment growth across the province may be impeded in the coming months due to the lingering impacts of the recent flooding and landslides.

Employment in the province's goods producing sector decreased 1.0% between October and November. However, **manufacturing** experienced modest job growth (+4.8%). The job gains were offset by losses in the other industries, particularly **agriculture** (-8.2%), **construction** (-4.3%), and **forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas** (-4.7%).⁸

Most of the province's **agriculture** sector, particularly in the Fraser Valley, was devastated by the recent rains and flooding. The recent flooding will likely hamper crop production in the short to medium term; fields will need to be tested for contamination and, if needed, remediated before being replanted. Due to the contaminated floodwaters, perennials, such as flower bulbs, rhubarb and greenhouse crops, could take longer than annuals to re-establish themselves.

Meanwhile, many dairy, poultry, and hog farms also suffered, as some farmers were unable to save all, if any, of their livestock. Despite receding water levels, the staggering livestock death toll (roughly 640,000 animals) may continue to rise and remain a health risk to communities.⁹ Indeed, it will take time and financial assistance for the sector to recover.

Forestry remains a key economic driver in many B.C. interior, coastal, and northern communities. Recent flooding has affected lumber deliveries across most of southwestern B.C., and reduced production at some mills.

Already West Fraser¹⁰ and Canfor Pulp¹¹ have temporary curtailed several operations across the province due to supply chain issues worsened by the recent rains. Fortunately, supply chain issues should improve over the coming months, once rail and road repairs are complete. Looking ahead, the demand for lumber may spike over the coming months, possibly driving up local prices, as flooded communities rebuild.

Meanwhile, uncertainty looms over the sector as the U.S. roughly doubled its combined anti-dumping and countervailing duties on Canadian softwood to 17.9%. In response, the government of Canada will continue to pursue legal action against the U.S.¹² The U.S. is Western Canada's largest customer for dimensional lumber used in home framing construction.

Employment in the **construction** sector declined sharply (-4.3%) for the month of November, and remains below last year's employment level (-2.3%).¹³ Yet the sector's outlook remains positive in the long-term, as over the month, housing starts increased slightly (+3.0%)¹⁴, and housing demand remains relatively strong across the province. Indeed, the market is not showing any signs of cooling off, as a lack of housing supply continues to drive up prices.

Significant infrastructure repairs and additional flood mitigation projects will continue across southwestern B.C. over the coming months. However, some repairs and emergency work may be hindered as the weather gets colder. Looking forward, there will be a demand for skilled and experienced workers to help rebuild the flooded communities. The job market for construction workers will likely be competitive in the short and medium terms, especially when factoring in the continuing need for workers at major energy projects across the province.

The province's **services** sector continued to gain traction in November, as employment increased by 0.4% (+9,600). The growth was largely due to significant gains in **professional, scientific and technical services** (+3.3%), **accommodation and food services** (+3.2%), and **transportation and warehousing** (+2.2). However, some of the sector's gains were offset by job losses in **public administration** (-4.4%) and **other services** (-3.3%).¹⁵

The demand for workers in the **accommodation and food services** industry remains strong. Despite the increase over the month, fewer people have returned to the industry, as employment declined 5.4% when compared to a year ago. The decline is due in part to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and some people finding alternative employment. According to most recent data, there were 18,190 vacancies in the industry for the second quarter of 2021.¹⁶ The labour shortage is already having an impact on the province's ski resorts, particularly with hiring international seasonal workers, as the pandemic has made it more challenging for workers to enter Canada.

Despite employment increasing slightly over the month, the demand for labour across the **transportation and warehousing** sector is likely to remain strong, especially now as the supply chain crisis has worsened. The recent rains, floods, and landslides damaged essential transportation corridors across the province. Already, there are food and supply shortages¹⁷ and the province has implemented a temporary order to limit non-essential gas consumption in southwestern B.C.¹⁸

Rail routes to the Port of Vancouver are now running with limited capacity, yet remain at risk. Fortunately, the Port of Prince Rupert has provided partial relief to alleviate some of the growing backlog of goods. However, the extensive damage to B.C.'s highways may lead to a higher demand for truckers over the coming months to address the growing backlog across western Canada.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally Adjusted Data ('000)	November 2021	October 2021	November 2020	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Total employed, all industries	2,696.9	2,692.3	2,595.4	4.6	0.2	101.5	3.9
Goods-producing sector	484.1	489.1	490.2	-5.0	-1.0	-6.1	-1.2
Agriculture	21.4	23.3	32.1	-1.9	-8.2	-10.7	-33.3
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	46.2	48.0	52.0	-1.8	-3.7	-5.8	-11.2
Utilities	14.2	14.7	18.9	-0.5	-3.4	-4.7	-24.9
Construction	209.1	218.6	214.0	-9.5	-4.3	-4.9	-2.3
Manufacturing	193.3	184.4	173.2	8.9	4.8	20.1	11.6
Services-producing sector	2,212.8	2,203.2	2,105.2	9.6	0.4	107.6	5.1
Trade	419.6	420.2	389.5	-0.6	-0.1	30.1	7.7
Transportation and warehousing	143.4	140.0	138.5	3.4	2.4	4.9	3.5
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	167.0	169.7	164.5	-2.7	-1.6	2.5	1.5
Professional, scientific and technical services	250.5	242.6	237.2	7.9	3.3	13.3	5.6
Business, building and other support services	103.5	104.1	107.7	-0.6	-0.6	-4.2	-3.9
Educational services	193.2	194.5	189.3	-1.3	-0.7	3.9	2.1
Health care and social assistance	377.9	369.6	335.7	8.3	2.2	42.2	12.6
Information, culture and recreation	132.0	132.2	119.7	-0.2	-0.2	12.3	10.3
Accommodation and food services	180.2	174.6	190.4	5.6	3.2	-10.2	-5.4
Other services	105.4	109.0	105.6	-3.6	-3.3	-0.2	-0.2
Public administration	140.1	146.6	127.3	-6.5	-4.4	12.8	10.1

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 November 2020, the unemployment rate declined in all but one region, **North Coast and Nechako** (+1.4 percentage points). Employment numbers also rose across most of the province, with the exception of **Kootenays** (-4.1%) and **Northeast** (-6.5%). Though extensive flooding and devastation has occurred across most of southwestern B.C., the province's outlook remains positive in the medium to long-term.

Please be aware that the statistics for the economic regions are not seasonally adjusted and should only be compared on a year-over-year basis. Employment is sometimes influenced by seasonal and calendar effects occurring at the same time and with the same magnitude every year, which can bring about changes in the data that make monthly comparisons difficult.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region

3-Month Moving Averages Seasonally Unadjusted Data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	November 2021 ('000)	November 2020 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	November 2021 (%)	November 2020 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
British Columbia	2,698.1	2,568.6	5.0	5.4	7.7	-2.3
Economic Regions						
Vancouver Island and Coast	429.9	406.8	5.7	4.4	7.4	-3.0
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,717.3	1,620.9	5.9	5.9	7.9	-2.0
Thompson - Okanagan	309.0	294.3	5.0	4.3	7.4	-3.1
Kootenay	76.5	79.8	-4.1	5.3	6.3	-1.0
Cariboo	86.3	85.5	0.9	5.5	9.8	-4.3
North Coast and Nechako	42.0	41.5	1.2	7.1	5.7	1.4
Northeast	37.3	39.9	-6.5	4.1	4.8	-0.7

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 5.7%, and the unemployment rate improved to 4.4%, down from a 7.4% unemployment rate a year ago.¹⁹ However, the outlook for the region's forestry sector is precarious. At the time of writing, protests continue at the Fairy Creek logging site²⁰ and the provincial deadline for First Nations to decide whether they support the newly proposed old-growth forest logging-deferrals has passed²¹. In addition, Paper Excellence announced the indefinite curtailment of its tiskwat mill in Power River, B.C. effective December 1, 2021. The company plans to offer the affected workers relocation or secondment opportunities to other facilities across B.C. where job vacancies exist.²²

Looking forward, the region's tourism sector is expected to improve greatly by next spring. According to the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority's draft 2022 cruise schedule, roughly 350 cruise ships are expected to return during the 2022 cruise season.²³

Year-over-year, the **Lower Mainland – Southwest** continues to lead the province's recovery, as employment increased by 5.9%.²⁴ As mentioned above, the region, particularly in the Fraser Valley, is recovering from extensive flooding. Road and rail repairs are ongoing, and it will take time for communities, businesses, and farmers to rebuild. On a positive note, after a three-week shutdown, the Trans Mountain pipeline restarted and will likely help alleviate any gas shortages.²⁵

Metro Vancouver's labour force will benefit in the medium to long term from the current expansion of Electronic Arts Burnaby offices,²⁶ and the City of Coquitlam's \$35M scheduled rebuild of their main public works operations centre.²⁷ In addition, the expansion of the Annacis Auto Terminal in Delta is set to begin later next year²⁸.

Employment in **Thompson-Okanagan** improved by 5.0% over the year, and the unemployment rate decreased 3.1 percentage points to 4.3%.²⁹ Overshadowing the region's recovery, the November rains hit the region hard, and flooding destroyed much of the city of Merritt and surrounding area. Evacuees can now return home; however, the city deemed 366 homes unliveable, and a boil water advisory remains in effect.³⁰ In addition, the rains damaged sections of some major highways and they remain closed. Multi-million dollar highway reconstruction projects should begin soon.³¹

The heavy rains also affected the region's dairy farmers, as they had to dump milk due to transportation disruptions between the Okanagan and the Lower Mainland. Much of the province's milk processing facilities are located in the Lower Mainland.³²

Year-over-year, employment in **Cariboo** remained relatively unchanged (+0.9%), and the unemployment rate fell to 5.5%.³³ The region's forestry sector is also facing another challenging period due to the flooding in southwestern B.C. Already, West Fraser has reduced operations at its Quesnel River Pulp, Cariboo Pulp and Paper, and Williams Lake Plywood facilities.³⁴ Operations should resume once transportation and logistics issues are resolved.

Compared to a year ago, employment within **North Coast and Nechako** increased by 1.2%, and the unemployment rate increased slightly to 7.1%.³⁵ Construction of Coastal GasLink's natural gas pipeline has resumed after the RCMP enforced the removal of illegal blockades and protestors from the right of way around the Morice River.³⁶ The temporary blockade stranded more than 500 pipeline workers at two remote work camps.³⁷ The pipeline has provincial approval, and 20 First Nations have signed agreements in support of the project.

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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