



Labour Market Bulletin

British Columbia

April 2022



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 months of positive employment growth, British Columbia's employment stagnated in April, as 7,200 individuals entered the labour market and 9,200 became unemployed. The province's employment was unchanged (-0.1% or -2,000 positions) over the month, but remained up 4.4% (+114,800) over the year. Gains in part-time employment (0.9% or +5,600 positions) were offset by losses in full-time employment (-0.3% or -6,900 positions). Meanwhile, the province's unemployment rate increased 0.3 percentage points over the month to 5.4%, still the country's third-lowest unemployment rate in April. Despite this performance, however, the province's unemployment decline over the past year and an increase in job vacancies may point toward a labour shortage in certain industries.

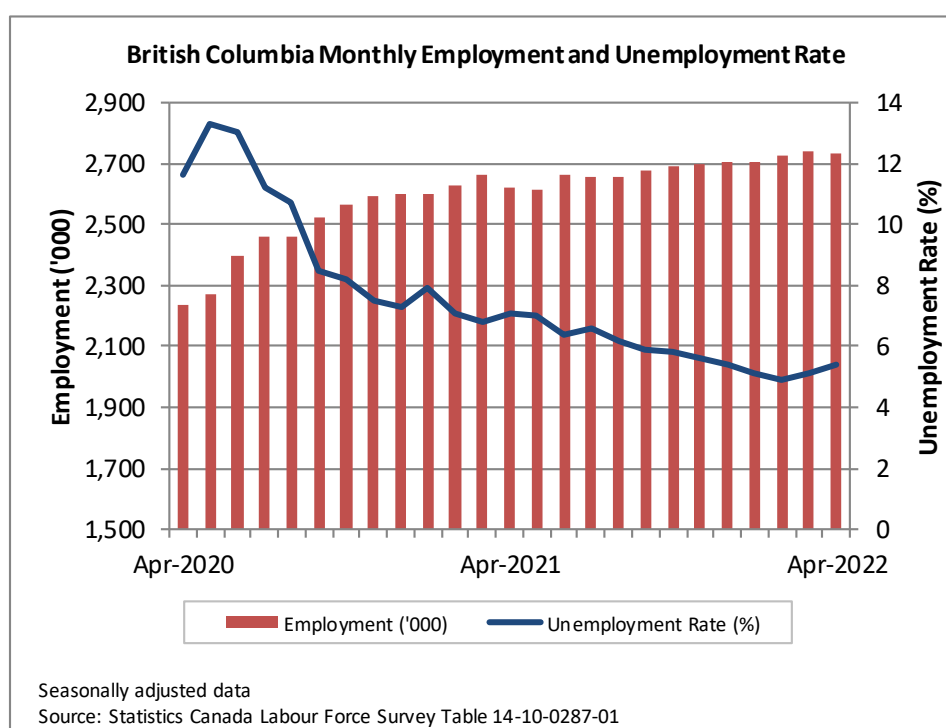
Job instability stemming from the pandemic prompted many individuals to leave the workforce or switch industries. Coupled with an aging workforce, labour scarcity has been the result. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 59% of small businesses in B.C. were experiencing a labour shortage, while 90% of small business members reported difficulties recruiting staff.¹ Looking forwards, economic growth may be constrained as the low unemployment rate suggests the pool of available workers is small compared with the number of anticipated job vacancies necessary to support growth.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics

Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Data	April 2022	March 2022	April 2021	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Population 15 + ('000)	4,415.2	4,409.8	4,329.2	5.4	0.1	86.0	2.0
Labour Force ('000)	2,891.4	2,884.2	2,821.4	7.2	0.2	70.0	2.5
Employment ('000)	2,735.8	2,737.8	2,621.0	-2.0	-0.1	114.8	4.4
Full-Time ('000)	2,144.2	2,151.1	2,044.2	-6.9	-0.3	100.0	4.9
Part-Time ('000)	591.6	586.6	576.8	5.0	0.9	14.8	2.6
Unemployment ('000)	155.6	146.4	200.4	9.2	6.3	-44.8	-22.4
Unemployment Rate (%)	5.4	5.1	7.1	0.3	-	-1.7	-
Participation Rate (%)	65.5	65.4	65.2	0.1	-	0.3	-
Employment Rate (%)	62.0	62.1	60.5	-0.1	-	1.5	-

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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



While the youth unemployment rate increased 1.2 percentage points in April, it remained down 1.6 percentage points from this time last year. Among women, the greatest decline in the annual unemployment rate from April 2021 was in the 15-24 demographic (-5.5 percentage points). Women in this age group had been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health restrictions. With the implementation of lockdowns and stay-at-home orders, household responsibilities such as childcare fell heaviest on women, thereby limiting their ability to participate in the labour market. Women were also overrepresented in the industries that experienced the largest disruptions from the pandemic, such as hospitality, food service, retail, education, and manufacturing². As such, employment among young women has quickly recovered along with the recovery of these industries

British Columbia Monthly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally Adjusted Data	April 2022 (%)	March 2022 (%)	April 2021 (%)	Monthly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
Total	5.4	5.1	7.1	0.3	-1.7
25 years and over	4.5	4.4	6.3	0.1	-1.8
Men - 25 years and over	4.7	4.5	6.8	0.2	-2.1
Women - 25 years and over	4.3	4.2	5.7	0.1	-1.4
15 to 24 years	10.7	9.5	12.3	1.2	-1.6
Men - 15 to 24 years	13.6	12.0	11.5	1.6	2.1
Women - 15 to 24 years	7.7	7.1	13.2	0.6	-5.5

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 was relatively unchanged over the month (-0.1%), year-over-year employment growth was strong (4.4%). Significant annual employment gains in the **services-producing** (6.0% or +127,200) sector made up for losses in the **goods-producing** (-2.5% or -12,400) sector.

British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally Adjusted Data ('000)	April 2022	March 2022	April 2021	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
Total employed, all industries	2,735.8	2,737.8	2,621.0	-2.0	-0.1	114.8	4.4
Goods-producing sector	483.0	488.7	495.4	-5.7	-1.2	-12.4	-2.5
Agriculture	25.1	26.0	22.5	-0.9	-3.5	2.6	11.6
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	43.6	44.8	55.0	-1.2	-2.7	-11.4	-20.7
Utilities	14.8	14.1	20.1	0.7	5.0	-5.3	-26.4
Construction	214.7	216.9	218.1	-2.2	-1.0	-3.4	-1.6
Manufacturing	184.8	187.0	179.7	-2.2	-1.2	5.1	2.8
Services-producing sector	2,252.8	2,249.1	2,125.6	3.7	0.2	127.2	6.0
Trade	430.7	428.9	396.9	1.8	0.4	33.8	8.5
Transportation and warehousing	151.8	156.8	137.3	-5.0	-3.2	14.5	10.6
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	167.5	164.4	169.7	3.1	1.9	-2.2	-1.3
Professional, scientific and technical services	261.2	259.1	261.3	2.1	0.8	-0.1	0.0
Business, building and other support services	97.3	91.5	111.4	5.8	6.3	-14.1	-12.7
Educational services	200.7	199.4	186.1	1.3	0.7	14.6	7.8
Health care and social assistance	380.3	385.1	350.2	-4.8	-1.2	30.1	8.6
Information, culture and recreation	134.8	133.5	115.7	1.3	1.0	19.1	16.5
Accommodation and food services	175.4	179.1	155.5	-3.7	-2.1	19.9	12.8
Other services	113.8	112.4	108.6	1.4	1.2	5.2	4.8
Public administration	139.3	138.8	132.9	0.5	0.4	6.4	4.8

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

Employment in the province's **goods-producing sector** fell slightly in April (-1.2%). Despite the sector's overall decline, employment was up substantially in the **utilities** industry (+5.0%) over the month. Unfortunately, there were losses in the sector's remaining industries, including **manufacturing** (-1.2% or -2,200), **construction** (-1.0% or -2,200), **forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas** (-2.7% or -1,200) and **agriculture** (-3.5% or -900).

Forestry is a key economic driver in many B.C. interior, coastal, and northern communities. Employment in **forestry and logging and support activities for forestry** declined slightly over the month while dropping by approximately a third from this time last year. The province's forestry sector continued to adapt to the ongoing challenges of a shrinking timber supply as a result of clearcutting, wildfires, and measures to protect old-growth forest areas. Mosaic Forest Management, British Columbia's largest private landowner, announced plans to defer logging of 100,000 acres of old-growth on Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii for the next 25 years. The company planned to allocate the emissions reductions created by the deferment to carbon credits that it would sell through its BigCoast Forest Climate Initiative.³

The provincial government announced \$19 million over three years to increase the carbon stored in B.C.'s forests and develop innovative, low-carbon forest-based products. This investment includes more than \$15 million to increase the amount of carbon stored in B.C.'s forests and enhance forest management.⁴

A decline in the log supply and availability of fiber has created challenges for many of the province's forestry operations. Sinclair Group Forest Products announced the temporary switch to a four-day workweek at their facilities in Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, and Prince George. The company cited uncertainties over fiber supply and challenges moving products to market as reasons for the reduction.⁵

The **mining** subsector continued its recovery from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as employment increased 11.2% (+1,300) in April. However, the number of people employed in the sector remained slightly below the level of the year prior to the pandemic. Employment within the sector is expected to continue rising, however, supported by increasing activity in the sector's operations, the recall of workers let go as a result of the pandemic, and multiple upcoming large-scale projects. For instance, the Mount Polley Mining Corporation was looking to ramp up production at the company's gold and copper mine located northeast of Williams Lake. The mine will initially look to fill 130 roles in pit operations but will require 355 employees to become fully staffed once mill operations are restarted. The company hopes to return to normal production by the end of spring of 2022.⁶

Employment in the **construction** industry was relatively stable (-1.0%) in April. However, the industry employs fewer people now than at the same time last year. Similarly, housing activity in the province has slowed recently with the number of new housing starts down 57.3% in March 2022, compared to March 2021, and down 7.7% from the previous month.⁷ In keeping with seasonal trends, construction activity may be expected to ramp up in the near future as the number of building permits issued increased by 28.8% from March 2022 to the month prior.⁸

Employment in the province's **services-producing sector** was unchanged over the month (+3,700 positions or +0.2%), but was still up significantly over the year (+127,200 or +6.0%). There were positive gains within the sector, driven by monthly employment boosts in **business, building, and other support services** (+6.3%), **finance, insurance, real estate and leasing** (+1.9%), and **other services** (1.2%). However, employment gains in these

sectors were offset by losses in others including **transportation and warehousing** (-3.2%) and **health care and social assistance** (-1.2%).

Employment in **professional, scientific, and technical services** increased slightly in April (+0.8% or 2,100 positions). Employment in the industry may be boosted by government commitments to the province's growing clean technology industry. The federal government announced over \$13.4 million in funding for local clean technology companies with the goal of millions of dollars in increased revenue and the creation of 159 jobs.⁹

The province's employment in **health care and social assistance** fell slightly in April (-1.2% or 14,800 positions). On a positive note, the industry now employs over 30,000 (+8.6%) more people now than at the same time a year ago. The industry's employment has been supported by investments made since the launch of ChildCareBC in 2018. Since the program's implementation, British Columbia families have benefitted from the creation of approximately 35,000 new licensed childcare spaces, through provincial and federal support. The number of new licensed child care spaces created is expected to rise to approximately 70,000 by March 2028.¹⁰

On the healthcare front, the Government of B.C. is providing \$12M in funding to help nurses educated abroad to receive the proper assessments required to practice in the province. This investment will provide up to \$16K in funding to each applicant.¹¹

Employment in **transportation and warehousing** fell 3.2% (-5,000 positions) in April while remaining 10.6% (+14,500) above April 2021. The transportation subsector has not been immune to the province's labour strain. For instance, a shortage of drivers has forced B.C. Transit to reduce service across the region. B.C. Transit is actively recruiting transit operators in a number of systems across the province.¹²

A relaxation of public health restrictions on air travel has resulted in an increase in airline activity. Passenger traffic at Kelowna's airport is rebounding faster than anticipated after slowdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³ Many airlines are resuming routes initially postponed at the advent of the pandemic. For example, Air Canada plans to resume its Vancouver to Brisbane, Australia route on July 1st.¹⁴ Air Canada is also expanding its services between Vancouver and the Comox Valley Airport. The airline is adding an additional daily flight and returning to service levels similar to those before the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The province's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic remains ongoing in all economic regions. Compared to April 2021, the unemployment rate declined in all of the province's economic regions. The largest improvements were reported in the **Vancouver Island and Coast** (-2.2 percentage points), **Lower Mainland and Southwest** (-2.1), **North Coast and Nechako** (-2.0) and **Thompson – Okanagan** (-2.0) economic regions.

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		
	April 2022 ('000)	April 2021 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	April 2022 (%)	April 2021 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
British Columbia	2,707.7	2,608.6	3.8	5.2	7.2	-2.0
Economic Regions						
Vancouver Island and Coast	425.4	401.3	6.0	5.0	7.2	-2.2
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,740.7	1,676.3	3.8	5.1	7.2	-2.1
Thompson - Okanagan	295.1	278.1	6.1	6.1	8.1	-2.0
Kootenay	80.7	83.1	-2.9	4.9	6.2	-1.3
Cariboo	90.5	86.1	5.1	4.5	6.1	-1.6
North Coast and Nechako	39.7	44.5	-10.8	6.1	8.1	-2.0
Northeast	35.5	39.2	-9.4	4.8	4.9	-0.1

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

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

The **Vancouver Island and Coast** economic region continued its recovery from challenges posed by the pandemic. The region recorded the province's second-highest employment increase over the year (+6.0%) and the unemployment rate declined 2.2 percentage points from April 2021. Employment in the region's construction industry may receive a boost in the near future from multiple large-scale construction projects in various stages of development. For instance, The Town of View Royal has approved the construction of a 234-unit rental building. The \$110M project is expected to begin construction in July, be completed in two years, and employ 80-120 workers.¹⁶ Additionally, construction has begun on the expansion of the Salt Spring Island Hospital. The \$12.8M expansion will add a new 4,500 sq. ft. wing to grow the hospital's emergency department. Work is expected to be completed in late 2023.¹⁷

The outlook for the region's tourism sector improved with the resumption in service of the Victoria Clipper V, a passenger ferry that connects Victoria to Seattle, following a suspension due to low passenger numbers.¹⁸ Thanks to \$711,000 in funding, the City of Nanaimo is creating The Tourism Nanaimo Society to attract visitors and events to the city.¹⁹

Employment in the **Lower Mainland – Southwest** region continued on an upward trajectory. Year over year, more than 64,400 jobs (+3.8%) were added this quarter. Meanwhile, the region's unemployment rate improved 2.2 percentage points to 5.1%. The opening of Walmart Canada's new \$175M 300,000 sq. ft. distribution facility in Surrey may support employment in the region's transportation and warehousing industry. The facility will allow the company to supply 45 stores in the province more efficiently and may result in around 250 new jobs.²⁰

Meanwhile, a number of large-scale projects may provide a boost to the region's employment. Capilano University in North Vancouver is planning a new 362-bed student housing complex. The \$58.2M project is expected to begin construction in early 2023 with completion in 2024.²¹ In Richmond, construction on a new \$44.25M interchange along Highway 99 is set to begin this spring. Work on the project is expected to last until 2025 in preparation for the replacement of the Massey Tunnel linking Richmond to Delta.²²

The province's largest annual employment increase occurred in the **Thompson – Okanagan** economic region. Employment increased 6.0% over the month, while the unemployment rate improved by 2.0 percentage points.

Several upcoming developments will support construction activity in the region. Construction has begun on the 90-unit expansion of the Chartwell Retirement Residences in Kamloops. The \$35.4M project is expected to create 300 jobs for the community and be completed in early 2023.²³ Housing starts are also up in the region. For example, there were 100 housing starts in Vernon in March 2022, compared to 32 housing starts in March 2021.²⁴

Employment in the **North Coast and Nechako** region dropped 10.8% compared to April 2021, while the unemployment rate fell by 2.0 percentage points over the same period. According to Northern Development's 2021 State of the North Economic Report, northern BC is facing a significant labour shortage with employers facing difficulties recruiting enough workers. Compared to 2019, job vacancies were up 75% in Q3 2021.²⁵

On a positive note, construction activity in the region remains robust. Construction began on the next phase of the \$9.2M 100 Street rebuild in Fort St. John. Work consists of water and sewer infrastructure replacement and roadwork and is expected to be completed this fall.²⁶ A new \$32.4M commercial vehicle inspection station will be constructed east of Terrace. The facility will include new modern technologies to improve inspection efficiency. Work is slated to begin this spring with completion in late 2024.²⁷

Employment fell 9.4% in the **Northeast** economic region while the region's unemployment rate declined modestly by 0.1 percentage points to 4.8%. Work is continuing on the Site C hydroelectric dam on the Peace River, southeast of Fort St. John. Four contracts on the project valued at \$181.5M were awarded by BC Hydro for architectural, fire detection and protection systems, heating and cooling systems, and a fishway for local species.²⁸ According to the most recent update, the project employed 4,430 workers in March 2022.²⁹

In response to concerns over Site C's impact on local ecosystems, the Site C Peace Agricultural Compensation Fund committed to \$400,000 for nineteen agricultural projects in northeastern British Columbia. The goal of the funding is to offset the impacts of the Site C Dam Project on farming in the region.³⁰

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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