

Job vacancies, first quarter 2021

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At the beginning of the first quarter of 2021, the second wave of COVID-19 was receding in many parts of Canada. As a result, public health restrictions were eased in early to mid-February in a number of provinces, including Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta. Although the third wave of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations began before the end of the quarter, the tightening of public health measures—and associated labour market impacts—occurred in early April in most jurisdictions.

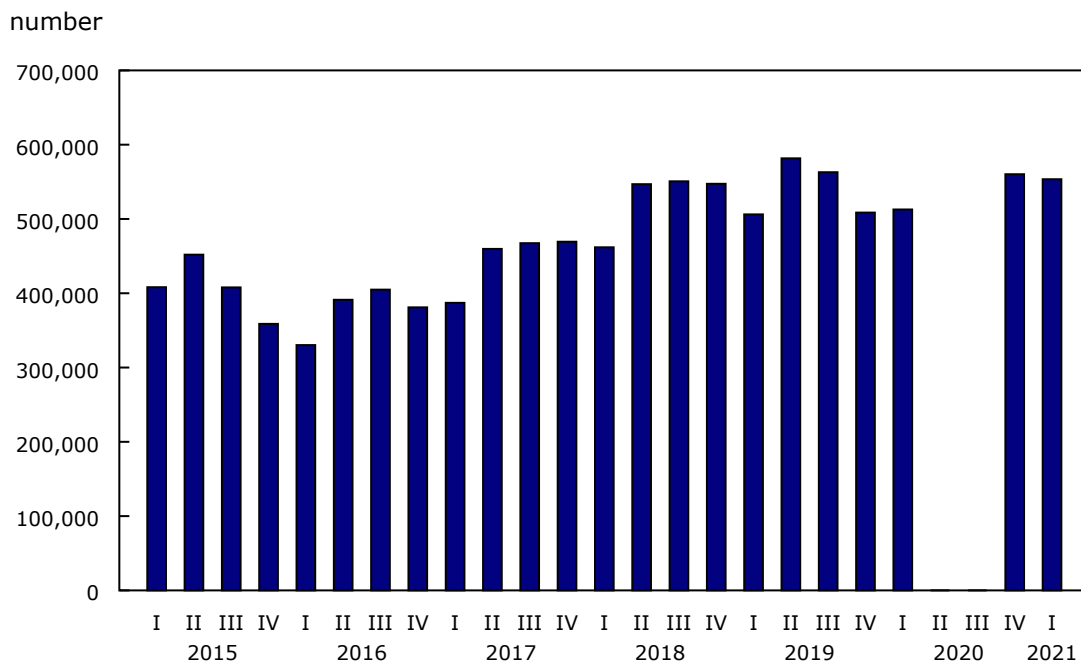
Job vacancies and job vacancy rate continue to increase

There were 553,500 job vacancies in the first quarter of 2021, up by 40,700 (+7.9%) from the same quarter one year earlier and by 47,300 (+9.4%) compared with two years earlier.

The job vacancy rate—which represents vacant positions as a proportion of all positions (vacant and occupied)—increased 0.5 percentage points to 3.6% in the first quarter of 2021, the highest rate since comparable data became available in 2015. The increase was the result of both an increase in vacancies and a decline (-1,122,300; -6.9%) in payroll employment.

While job vacancies increased from the first quarter of 2020 to the same quarter in 2021, unemployment increased dramatically (+427,000, according to Labour Force Survey data) over the same period, a direct result of the COVID-19 public health restrictions. As a result, the ratio of unemployed people per job vacancy increased from 2.6 to 3.2 year over year.

Chart 1
Job vacancies increase year over year in the first quarter of 2021



.. not available for a specific reference period

Note(s): Job Vacancy and Wage Survey data collection was suspended from March to September 2020; therefore, data for the second and third quarters of 2020 are not available. Data are not seasonally adjusted.

Source(s): Job Vacancy and Wage Survey (5217), table 14-10-0325-01.



Nearly one in five job vacancies is in health care and social assistance

In the first quarter of 2021, the health care and social assistance sector experienced a larger year-over-year increase in job vacancies than all other sectors. Total vacancies in the sector rose by 27,700 (+39.0%) to 98,700, with the increase spread across all subsectors, led by hospitals and by nursing and residential care facilities.

The three occupations with the largest year-over-year increase in vacancies in the first quarter of 2021 were related to the health care and social assistance sector: registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses (+7,200); nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates (+5,400); and licensed practical nurses (+4,000). Of all vacancies for registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses, almost one-half (49.4%) of positions had been vacant for 90 days or more. In general, many factors can affect the duration of job vacancies, including the characteristics of the position, the offered wage, the skills required, recruitment processes and the conditions of the local labour market.

Following the initial COVID-19 economic shutdown, payroll employment in health care and social assistance reached a recent low in May 2020 (Survey of Employment, Payrolls and Hours, monthly seasonally adjusted data). Since then, employment in this sector has increased; it was among the first to surpass its pre-COVID-19 level. In March 2021, employment in this sector was 1.8% above its February 2020 level. The high level of vacancies indicates that, despite this increase in employment, employers in health care and social assistance continued to face staffing challenges in the first quarter as they addressed the COVID-19 pandemic.

Job vacancies in construction reach all-time high

Vacancies in the construction sector rose by 11,500 (+33.1%) to 46,400 in the first quarter of 2021, the highest number of vacancies for this sector since comparable data became available in 2015. Almost two-thirds of the increase was in the specialty trade contractors (+7,500; +34.1%) subsector—which comprises establishments primarily engaged in trade activities such as masonry, painting or electrical work—while vacancies in the construction of buildings subsector rose by 3,500 (+36.8%).

By occupation, a large portion of the increase in vacancies in the construction sector during this period was for carpenters (+2,300) and construction trades helpers and labourers (+2,000). Both of these occupations were among the 10 with the largest year-over-year increases in vacancies. According to the [Canadian Survey on Business Conditions](#), in the first quarter of 2021, just over one-third (33.8%) of businesses in construction reported recruiting and retaining skilled employees as an obstacle to their business, the highest proportion of all sectors.

Compared with the first quarter of 2020, Quebec was the largest contributor to the increase in vacancies in construction (+3,700). From the first quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2021, the number of [building permits](#) issued in Canada rose 37.3%, with an increase of 63.7% in Quebec.

Record number of job vacancies in professional, scientific and technical services

In professional, scientific and technical services, the number of vacancies reached a record high (47,800) in the first quarter of 2021, up 5,200 (+12.3%) from one year earlier. Vacancies for computer and information systems professionals—many of whom are typically in the professional, scientific and technical services sector—increased by 2,100 (+11.1%).

Notable job vacancy declines in accommodation and food services

In the accommodation and food services sector, the number of job vacancies fell by 11,500 (-19.1%) year over year in the first quarter of 2021, with notable declines in both the food services and drinking places (-7,800) and the accommodation services (-3,700) subsectors. The sector as a whole was among those where public health restrictions had the greatest impact on both employment and job vacancies during the first quarter.

Vacancies in the accommodation and food services sector are likely to increase from the first to the second quarter of 2021, consistent with normal seasonal patterns. In addition, the easing of public health restrictions affecting bars and restaurants may be reflected in an increase in unmet labour demand. Based on second-quarter results from the

[Canadian Survey on Business Conditions](#), this expectation was shared by employers interviewed between April 1 and May 6, with more than one in three businesses (36.4%) expecting to face a shortage of labour in the next three months, a higher proportion than in all other sectors.

Largest increase in job vacancies in Quebec

Quebec had the largest year-over-year increase in job vacancies, up 18,500 (+14.4%) in the first quarter of 2021, driven by health care and social assistance (+5,900), manufacturing (+5,100), and construction (+3,700). The job vacancy rate in the province rose 0.8 percentage points to 4.2% in the first quarter of 2021, the result of the increase in vacancies and a decline in employment. Côte-Nord/Nord-du-Québec had the highest job vacancy rate of all regions in Quebec, at 6.1%, followed by Capitale-Nationale (4.8%), Laurentides (4.7%) and Outaouais (4.6%).

As there were increases in both the number of vacancies (+14.4%) and the number of unemployed (+21.0%) over the same period, the unemployed-to-job vacancy ratio in Quebec was little changed, at 2.4. This was the second-lowest ratio among the provinces. In contrast, Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest job vacancy rate in Canada (2.0%) in the first quarter of 2021, and 10.0 unemployed per vacancy.

Looking ahead

As Canada transitions out of the third wave of the pandemic over the summer, monthly data from the Job Vacancy and Wage Survey will provide insights into the challenges faced by employers seeking to fully resume their operations. At the same time, data from the Labour Force Survey will provide insights on changing employment by occupation and industry, as well as other factors that are important to the balance between labour supply and demand, including wages and other aspects of quality of employment.

Note to readers

The Job Vacancy and Wage Survey (JVWS) provides comprehensive data on job vacancies and wages by industrial sector and detailed occupation for Canada and the provinces, territories and economic regions. Job vacancy and offered wage data are released quarterly.

Estimates by sector are based on the North American Industry Classification System 2017 Version 3.0. Estimates by geographical area are based on the Standard Geographical Classification 2016. Estimates by occupation reflect the National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2016 Version 1.3. The NOC is a four-tiered hierarchical structure of occupational groups with successive levels of disaggregation. The structure is as follows: (1) 10 broad occupational categories, also referred to as one-digit NOC; (2) 40 major groups, also referred to as two-digit NOC; (3) 140 minor groups, also referred to as three-digit NOC; and (4) 500 unit groups, also referred to as four-digit NOC.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection for the JVWS was suspended for the second and third quarters of 2020.

In January 2020, a new electronic questionnaire was introduced. Minor changes to the content are documented in the most recent Guide to the Job Vacancy and Wage Survey (75-514-G).

Beginning with the reference period of October 2020, preliminary monthly estimates from the JVWS are released on a monthly basis alongside the Survey of Employment, Payrolls and Hours releases. These estimates provide more timely information on the number of job vacancies and the job vacancy rate by province and by industrial sector.

The target population of the survey includes all business locations in Canada, excluding those involved primarily in religious organizations and private households. Federal, provincial and territorial, as well as international and other extra-territorial public administrations are also excluded from the survey.

JVWS data are not seasonally adjusted. Therefore, quarter-to-quarter comparisons should be interpreted with caution as they may reflect seasonal movements.

This analysis focuses on differences between estimates that are statistically significant at the 68% confidence level.

Labour Force Survey data used in this Daily release are non-seasonally adjusted three-month moving averages from March 2021 (unless otherwise specified).

Next release

Job vacancy data from the JVWS for the second quarter of 2021 will be released on September 21.

Table 1
The 10 occupations with the largest year-over-year increases in job vacancies, first quarter of 2021

	Year-over-year change	
	level	%
Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses	7,230	56.2
Nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates	5,395	45.4
Licensed practical nurses	4,005	94.0
Material handlers	3,525	50.1
Store shelf stockers, clerks and order fillers	2,845	39.8
Carpenters	2,290	51.7
Home support workers, housekeepers and related occupations	2,270	35.4
Social and community service workers	2,220	38.1
Landscaping and grounds maintenance labourers	2,000	48.7
Construction trades helpers and labourers	1,995	22.0

Source(s): Job Vacancy and Wage Survey (5217), table 14-10-0356-01.

Table 2
The ten occupations with the largest year-over-year declines in job vacancies, first quarter of 2021

	Year-over-year change	
	level	%
Food and beverage servers	-2,240	-26.5
Cooks	-2,045	-17.6
Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers and related support occupations	-1,960	-7.2
Light duty cleaners	-1,845	-21.9
Retail salespersons	-1,520	-7.2
Other customer and information services representatives	-1,465	-13.1
Program leaders and instructors in recreation, sport and fitness	-1,455	-28.5
Hairstylists and barbers	-1,435	-36.1
Specialized cleaners	-1,235	-44.3
Technical sales specialists – wholesale trade	-1,090	-26.0

Source(s): Job Vacancy and Wage Survey (5217), table 14-10-0356-01.

Available tables: [14-10-0325-01](#), [14-10-0326-01](#), [14-10-0328-01](#) and [14-10-0356-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5217](#).

More information about the concepts and use of data from the Job Vacancy and Wage Survey is available online in the *Guide to the Job Vacancy and Wage Survey* ([75-514-G](#)).

The product "[Labour Market Indicators, by province, territory and economic region, unadjusted for seasonality](#)" ([71-607-X](#)) is also available. This dynamic web application provides access to Statistics Canada's labour market indicators for Canada, by province, territory and economic region, and allows users to view a snapshot of key labour market indicators, observe geographical rankings for each indicator using an interactive map and table, and easily copy data into other programs.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).