

# Canadian Labour Demand Update



## Labour Market Insights

from the Diversity Institute

Analysis of Job  
Postings for the  
Fourth Quarter of 2020



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## Labour Market Insights

from the Diversity Institute

### Labour Market Insights from the Diversity Institute

This series from the Diversity Institute, in its role as a research lead for the Future Skills Centre, aims to provide timely analysis on current patterns of labour demand across Canadian regions, industries, and occupations. In the rapidly changing world of work, job seekers, policy makers, educators, and other stakeholders require labour market information that is up-to-date, granular, and relevant. The need has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the labour market has experienced the largest shock in recent history.

Reports in the *Labour Market Insights from the Diversity Institute* series cover a variety of topics relevant to the study of labour markets and are based on analyses of collated data from online job postings across Canada, as well as other traditional and innovative data sources. This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre.

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# Introduction

The labour market impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt throughout the entirety of 2020. While the number of Canadian workers who were affected by the COVID-19 economic shutdown declined from a high of five million in April 2020 to 1.1 million by December 2020, the trend in the final months of the year signalled a reversal of this mid-year recovery. In December 2020, both the participation rate and employment numbers declined across Canada.<sup>1</sup>

The first report in this series — *Labour Demand Trends During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, published in December 2020 — showed that labour demand sharply declined in the spring of 2020 following the pandemic-induced economic shutdown.<sup>2</sup> The number of job postings in April 2020 was 58% lower than the same period in 2019; however, labour demand started recovering over the summer and autumn, which caused this gap to shrink to only 7% by September 2020.

In this report, we provide an update of labour demand trends for the period of October to December 2020. As in our first report, the data has been sourced from the Vicinity



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Jobs Hiring Demand Analytics Suite,<sup>3</sup> which collates data on online job postings across Canada. The first part of the report discusses labour demand in Canada, while briefly highlighting the changes relative to the same period in 2019. We identify the sectors that are leading in job postings, as well as the top occupations and in-demand skills. The second part presents detailed labour demand trends for Alberta and Ontario. We focus on these two provinces because their labour markets have been the most severely affected by the pandemic-induced economic slowdown in Canada.

# Labour Demand in Canada from October to December 2020

## Monthly Job Postings

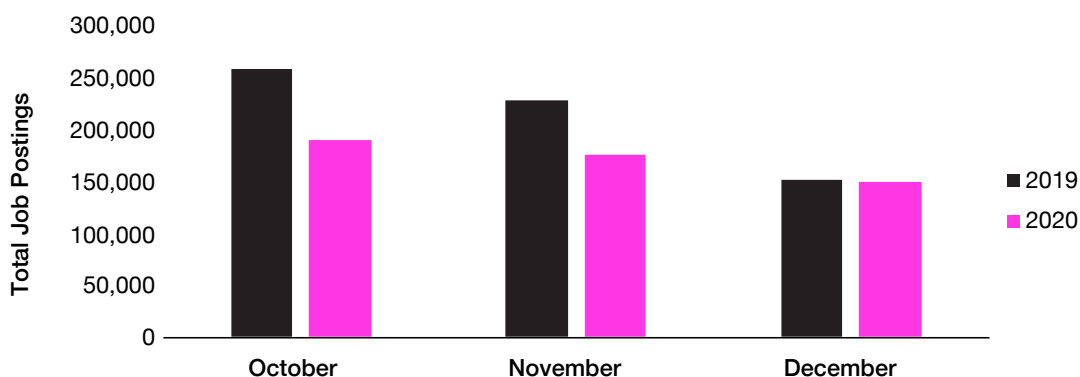
There were 517,780 jobs posted across Canada in the last three months of 2020, representing a 19% decline from the same period in 2019. Given that the gap between the number of job postings in 2019 and 2020 narrowed over the summer of 2020, this year-end decline in job postings (relative to pre-pandemic levels) reflects the labour market impact of the surge in COVID-19 infections and the associated health measures that occurred in the autumn of 2020. Note that the impacts of the lockdown in Ontario and other restrictive public health

measures enacted in other parts of Canada in December 2020 are not fully reflected in the December job postings and will likely manifest as lower labour demand in subsequent months.

The total number of job postings in Canada for December 2020 is only slightly lower than the number for December 2019. The reason the December numbers are close seems to be the result of a particularly low level of job postings registered for December 2019, which was 10% lower than for December 2018 — even though total job postings in 2019 as a whole were 6% higher than in 2018.

**FIGURE 1**

**Total Job Postings in Canada, October to December 2019 vs. 2020**



## Top Sectors by Hiring Demand

All sectors, with the exception of Agriculture, experienced a decline in labour demand in 2020. Table 1 shows the five sectors with the highest labour demand from October to December 2020. Together, these sectors account for two-thirds of job postings in Canada in both 2019 and 2020. In 2020, the Health Care and Social Assistance sector led in labour demand, accounting for one-fifth of all job postings. In 2019, the top spot was occupied by the Retail Trade sector.

**TABLE 1**  
**Sectors with the Most Job Postings, October–December 2020**

Sector	Share of Total Job Postings <sup>a</sup>	
	2019	2020
Health Care and Social Assistance	14%	20%
Retail Trade	18%	15%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	13%	11%
Manufacturing	10%	10%
Finance and Insurance	11%	9%

- a Note that some job postings were not successfully matched with their sector. Calculations of sector shares here and in subsequent discussions excludes job postings for which the employer's industry could not be identified.
- b Note that job postings for which occupation is reported as unidentified have been excluded in computing these shares.



*In 2020, the **Health Care and Social Assistance** sector led in **labour demand**, accounting for one-fifth of all job postings.*

## Top Occupations by Hiring Demand

More than a quarter of job postings in 2020 were in sales and service occupations, which represents a reduction by 2 percentage points from the 2019 level. This is unsurprising given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on retail trade in 2020, especially during periods of restrictive public health measures. Recent media reports indicate that many brick-and-mortar retail stores are closing permanently, as the pandemic hastens the migration of retail trade to online stores.<sup>4</sup>

**TABLE 2**  
**Occupations with the Most Job Postings, October–December 2020**

Occupations	Share of Total Job Postings <sup>b</sup>	
	2019	2020
Sales and service occupations	30%	28%
Business, finance, and administration occupations	17%	19%
Trades, transport, and equipment operators and related occupations	11%	14%
Management occupations	13%	11%
Health occupations	8%	9%



We have seen earlier (Table 1) that a fifth of job postings are in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector; however, in terms of occupation, health occupations account for only 9% of job postings (Table 2). In Table 3, we show the top jobs in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector. Job postings for registered nurses account for approximately one-fifth of all postings in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector, by far the top in-demand job in this sector. The next two most in-demand health-related occupations together account for 13% of labour demand in the sector. Two of the top five jobs in this sector are for various types of support services that are not health occupations and together account for 7% of the job postings.

**TABLE 3**  
**Top Jobs in Health Care and Social Assistance Sector, October–December 2020**

Top Five Jobs	Number of Job Postings	Proportion of Jobs in the Sector
Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses	6,409	18%
Nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates	2,340	7%
Licensed practical nurses	1,995	6%
Home support workers, housekeepers, and related occupations	1,500	4%
General office support workers	1,227	3%



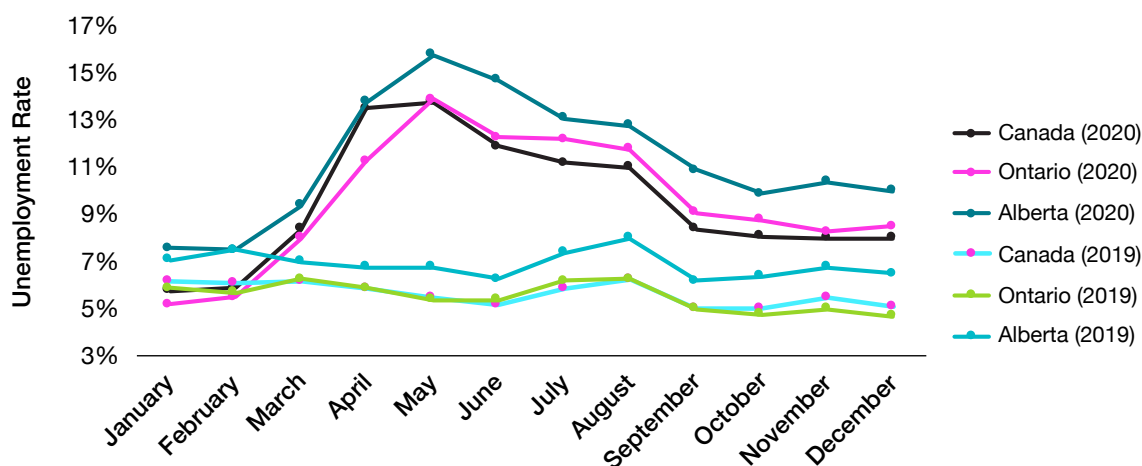
# Provincial Labour Demand Updates: Alberta and Ontario

The pandemic has affected the economies of all provinces in Canada, resulting in higher unemployment, lower participation, and lower employment rates in 2020 compared to 2019.<sup>5</sup> However, these effects have not been uniformly felt across the country. Alberta and Ontario experienced the largest year-over-year increase in the provincial unemployment rate during much of 2020, with 2020 unemployment levels approximately 4 percentage points higher than those

recorded in 2019.<sup>6</sup> British Columbia also experienced higher unemployment growth in Canada—in fact higher on average for the year than Ontario. Since the summer, however, unemployment has declined faster in British Columbia than in Ontario and Alberta. Figure 2 shows the unadjusted monthly unemployment rate in 2020 relative to 2019.

**FIGURE 2**

Trends in Unemployment Rates in Canada, 2019 vs. 2020



Source: Statistics Canada. (2021). Table 14-10-0022-01 - Labour force characteristics by industry, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410002201>



Overall, the Canadian unemployment rate prior to March 2020 was either equal to, or lower than, the corresponding rate in 2019. However, with the onset of the pandemic, a significant gap emerged in March and expanded dramatically in April and May.

Unemployment in Alberta was already higher than the Canadian average in 2019, and the impact of the pandemic did not change this relationship, even as both rates increased significantly. For Ontario, unemployment was virtually indistinguishable from the Canadian average in 2019 and was even slightly lower than the Canadian average in early 2020 (prior to the pandemic). Starting from May 2020, however, Ontario maintained a higher unemployment level than the Canadian average — although still significantly lower than Alberta. In the following section we discuss the labour market trends in Alberta and Ontario in detail.



***Unemployment in Alberta was already higher than the Canadian average in 2019, and the impact of the pandemic did not change this relationship, even as both rates increased significantly.***

# Alberta

## Total Job Postings in Alberta in the Fourth Quarter of 2020

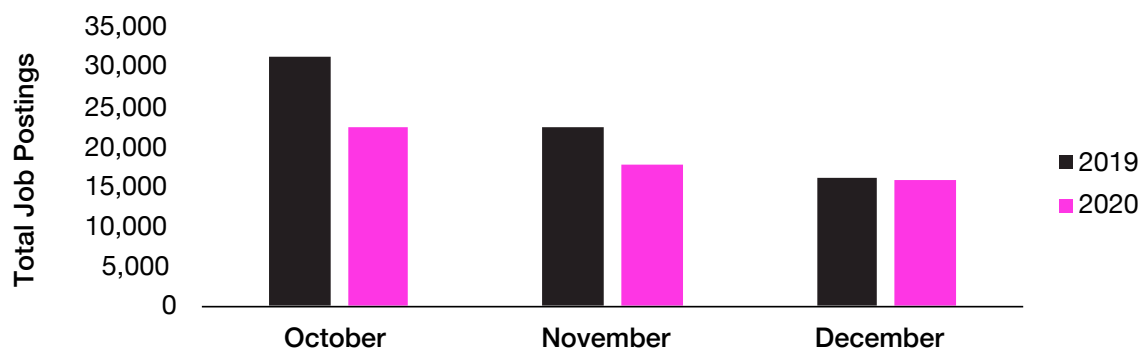
There were 56,063 job postings in Alberta in the period from October to December 2020. The number of job postings was lower than in the preceding quarter, as well as relative to the number in this quarter in 2019 (by 20%). Job postings in October and November 2020 declined by 29% and 20% respectively, compared to same months in 2019.

In combination with the recent labour force survey results, which showed a drop in employment levels in December,<sup>7</sup> the trend in job postings in the final quarter of 2020 indicates weak labour demand in Alberta.

Table 4 shows job postings by economic region within Alberta, highlighting the top ten regions. A third of Alberta's labour demand was in Calgary and more than a quarter was in Edmonton. All of the top regions experienced a decline in job postings in 2020, relative to 2019.

**FIGURE 3**

Job Postings in Alberta, October–December 2019 vs. 2020



**The sectors with the most job postings in Alberta are:**



**35%** Health Care & Social Assistance



**12%** Retail Trade



**10%** Accommodation & Food Services

## Job Postings by Sector

The sectors with the most job postings in Alberta are Health Care and Social Assistance (35%), Retail Trade (12%), and Accommodation and Food Services (10%). These three sectors are also among the largest employers in Alberta, employing 32% of the labour force in 2019.<sup>8</sup>

With three notable exceptions (Public Administration; Health Care and Social Assistance; and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting), all sectors experienced a decline in job postings in 2020, relative to 2019. Figure 4 shows changes in job postings in 2020 for sectors that had an employment share of at least 5% in 2019. The Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction sector experienced the largest decline in labour demand (-63%),<sup>c</sup> followed by Manufacturing (-54%) and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (-49%). On the other hand, the Health Care and Social Assistance sector and the Public Administration sector experienced large increases in job postings, growing by 69% and 119%, respectively.

**TABLE 4**

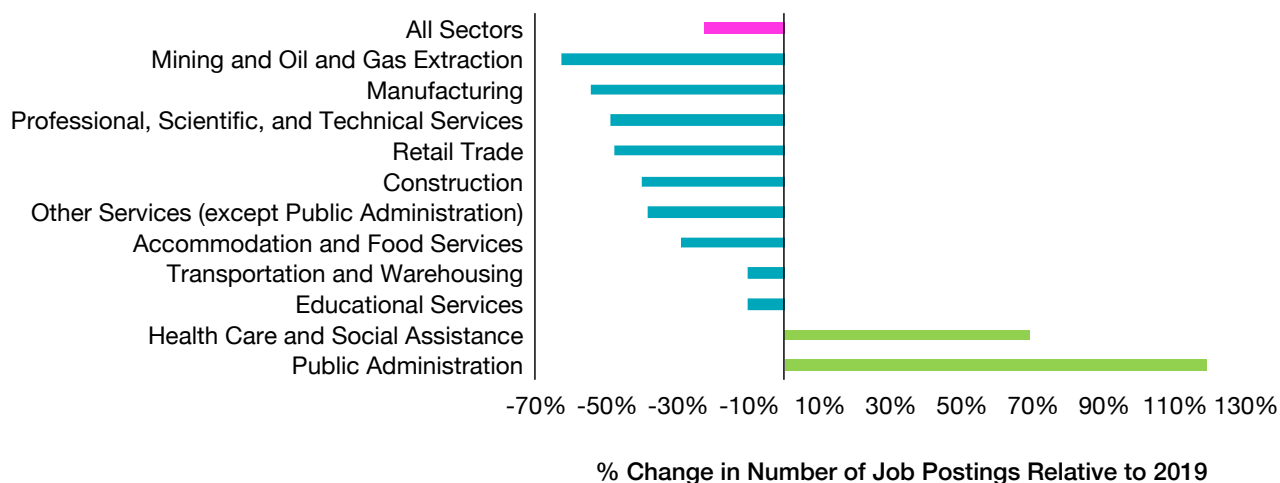
**Job Postings by Economic Region in Alberta, October–December 2020**

	Number of Job Postings	% Change from 2019
Calgary	17,031	-31%
Edmonton	14,779	-24%
Red Deer County	1,975	-11%
Grande Prairie County No. 1	1,611	-28%
Lethbridge County	1,550	-3%
Regional Municipality Wood Buffalo	1,297	-39%
Strathcona County	1,047	-17%
Cypress County, Medicine Hat, and Redcliff	839	-13%
Rocky View County	809	-6%
Sturgeon County	722	-9%

c A decrease in oil prices — which was partly caused by a decrease in world crude oil demand following pandemic-related travel restrictions and the resulting economic downturn — affected labour demand in the sector. Oil price wars between major oil-producing countries also negatively affected the sector.

**FIGURE 4**

**Job Postings from October to December 2020 (% Change Relative to 2019)**



## Most In-Demand Jobs in Alberta

Table 5 lists the top ten jobs with the highest job posting numbers in Alberta from October to December 2020. Not surprisingly, two of the three top jobs are in health occupations. While fewer jobs were posted for retail-related occupations in 2020 relative to 2019, the opposite is true for health-related occupations. “Cook” is the second most sought-after position in Alberta, even though job postings for cooks in 2020 were 28% lower than the same period in 2019. The other jobs that increased in demand are delivery and courier service drivers and material handlers. This is likely due to the rise of e-commerce during the pandemic.

**TABLE 5**

**Most In-Demand Jobs in Alberta, October–December 2020**

Occupation	Number of Job Postings	% Change from 2019
Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses	2,307	37.20%
Cooks	1,374	-27.70%
Nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates	1,274	35.70%
Retail salespersons	1,226	-53.00%
Food service supervisors	1,122	-7.30%
Delivery and courier service drivers	1,004	35.90%
Administrative assistants	928	-4.20%
Retail and wholesale trade managers	760	-50.70%
Licensed practical nurses	729	24.20%
Material handlers	722	10.20%



## Most In-Demand Skills in Alberta

Table 6 shows the most in-demand skills in Alberta from October to December 2020. Vicinity Jobs categorizes the skills and competencies identified by employers into four groups, using Employment and Social Development Canada’s (ESDC) Skills and Competencies Taxonomy. Below, we list

the top five skills and competencies in each group based on the number of postings that list these skills. The overwhelming majority of job postings (95%) listed at least one type of general/soft skill as a requirement for the position. On the other hand, a significantly smaller share of job postings listed any kind of specialized skills (48%), technologies (32%), or tools and equipment use (10%) as a requirement.

**TABLE 6**  
Most In-Demand Skills in Alberta, October–December 2020

General/Soft Skills	Specialized Skills	Technologies	Tools and Equipment
Communication skills	Occupational health and safety	Microsoft Office applications	Forklifts
Teamwork	Project management	Customer relationship management (CRM) software	Power tools
Customer service	Sales	SAP	Scaffolding
Leadership	Budgeting	Point of sale (POS) systems	Computer terminals
English language	Analytical skills	Microsoft Windows	Boilers

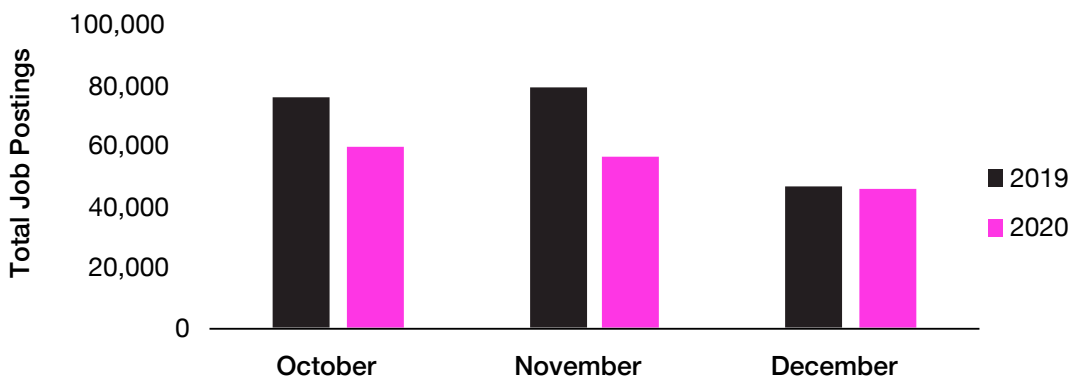
# Ontario

## Total Job Postings in Ontario in the Fourth Quarter of 2020

There were more than 161,000 online job postings in Ontario in the last quarter of 2020. While this represents nearly one-third of all online job postings in Canada, the figure is 20% lower than it was in the same period in 2019.

Within Ontario, a significant share of job postings were for employment in Toronto. Labour demand in Toronto accounts for one-fourth of job postings in Ontario, followed by Peel (10%), York (7%), and Ottawa-Carleton (7%). Table 7 shows the total number of job postings in 2020, as well as the percentage change from 2019 levels. Labour demand declined in all regions of Ontario, with the largest declines in Toronto, Ottawa-Carleton, and Durham. In each of these regions, job postings declined by more than 30%.

**FIGURE 5**  
Job Postings in Ontario, October–December 2019 vs. 2020



**TABLE 7**

**Job Postings by Economic Region in Ontario, October–December 2020**

	<b>Number of Job Postings</b>	<b>% Change from 2019</b>
Toronto Metropolitan Municipality	38,031	-37%
Peel Regional Municipality	15,852	-18%
York Regional Municipality	11,811	-31%
Ottawa-Carleton Regional Municipality	11,632	-36%
Waterloo Regional Municipality	6,466	-22%
Halton Regional Municipality	6,172	-27%
Middlesex County	5,288	-10%
Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Municipality	4,938	-13%
Simcoe County	4,193	-7%
Durham Regional Municipality	3,500	-34%



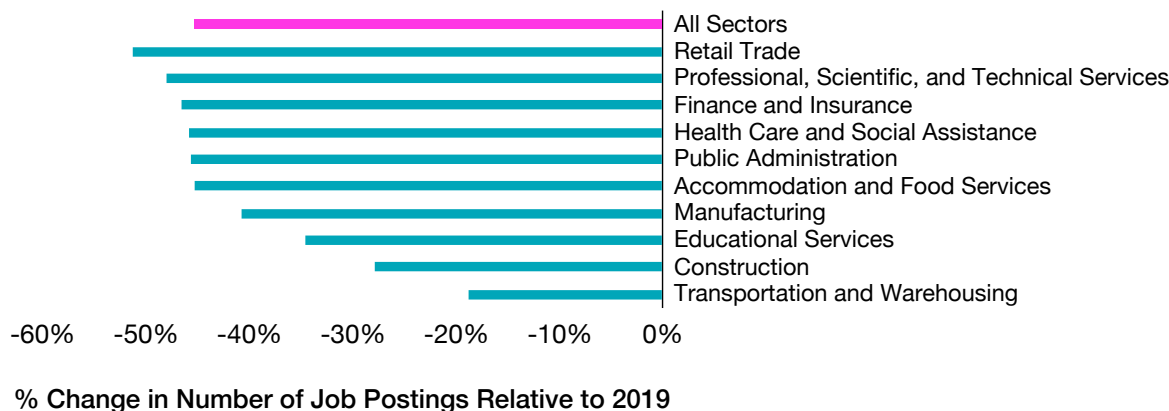
*The Retail Trade sector and the Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector show the largest reduction in job postings.*

**Job Postings by Sector**

The three sectors with the most job postings in Ontario are Retail Trade (16%), Health Care and Social Assistance (14%), and Finance and Insurance (12%). The top two sectors by jobs posted are also the leading employers in Ontario, employing almost a quarter of the total labour force in the province.<sup>9</sup> Figure 6 shows changes in job postings in 2020 for sectors that have an employment share of at least 5%. The Retail Trade sector and the Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector show the largest reduction in job postings.

**FIGURE 6**

**Job Postings from October to December 2020 (% Change Relative to 2019)**







## Most In-Demand Jobs in Ontario

In Table 8, we list the top ten jobs in Ontario in terms of job postings from October to December 2020. The list of top jobs in Ontario is different from that of Alberta, where three of the ten top jobs were in health occupations. In Ontario, jobs in social service, trade, and transport occupations dominate the most in-demand positions. Similar to Alberta, there were fewer retail jobs in Ontario in 2020 relative to 2019, and more jobs for delivery and courier service drivers. Similarly, job postings for material handlers increased significantly in 2020.

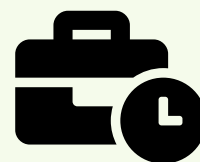
**TABLE 8**  
Most In-Demand Jobs in Ontario,  
October–December 2020

Occupation	Number of Job Postings	% Change from 2019
Home support workers, housekeepers, and related occupations	4,593	29%
Retail salespersons	3,504	-42%
Material handlers	2,902	69%
Other customer and information services representatives	2,881	-20%
Delivery and courier service drivers	2,640	85%
Administrative assistants	2,631	2%
Administrative officers	2,485	-6%
Receptionists	2,250	13%
Cooks	2,171	-31%
Retail and wholesale trade managers	2,088	-46%

## Most In-Demand Skills in Ontario

Table 9 shows the most in-demand skills in Ontario from October to December 2020. The in-demand skills are mostly similar to those in Alberta, with some differences in ranking. Flexibility and the ability to work in a fast-paced setting are more important in Ontario than in Alberta, where leadership and English-language skills were more highly sought-after. Overall, the top five skills in Alberta are among the top ten skills in Ontario, with several matching the top five skills.

As may be expected, general/soft skills are listed as requirements by most employers across industries. For example, “communication skills” was listed by half of the job postings in Ontario, whereas the top specialized skill – occupational health and safety – was mentioned in only 9% of the job postings.



***Flexibility and the ability to work in a fast-paced setting are more important in Ontario than in Alberta, where leadership and English-language skills were more highly sought-after.***

The overwhelming majority of job postings (96%) listed at least one type of general/soft skills as a requirement for the position. On the other hand, a significantly smaller share of job postings listed any kind of specialized skills (56%), technologies (38%), or tools and equipment use (11%) as a requirement.

**TABLE 9**

**Most In-Demand Skills in Ontario, October–December 2020**

General/Soft Skills	Specialized Skills	Technologies	Tools and Equipment
Communication skills	Occupational health and safety	Microsoft Office applications	Forklifts
Teamwork	Project management	Customer relationship management (CRM) software	Power tools
Customer service	Analytical skills	SQL (Structured query language)	Computer terminals
Flexibility	Budgeting	Microsoft Windows	Scaffolding
Fast-paced setting	Sales	Cloud computing	Face masks

# Conclusion

The Canadian economy continues to suffer from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health measures adopted to fight it. After a historic level of unemployment in the spring of 2020, the economy showed signs of recovery in the summer and autumn of 2020, with job posting numbers approaching pre-pandemic levels. This report provides an update of labour demand trends in the fourth quarter of 2020.

Analysis of job postings from October to December 2020 shows that the recovery in labour demand observed in the summer was short lived. Total job postings in the last three months of 2020 declined by 19%, compared to the same period in 2019. This is likely due to the resurgence of COVID-19 infections in the last quarter of 2020. All sectors of the economy, except Agriculture, experienced a decline in labour demand. Although the list of the top five sectors by job postings remained the same, their relative rankings changed. The Health Care and Social Assistance sector leads in job postings in 2020, whereas Retail Trade was

the top sector in the same period in 2019.

Among the provinces, we focused on Ontario and Alberta. These two provinces experienced the most significant employment impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, with the largest increases in unemployment rates in 2020 relative to their respective rates in 2019. Our analysis shows that the number of job postings in both provinces declined by 20% in the last quarter of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. In Alberta the sector that experienced the largest decline in job postings was Mining and Oil and Gas Extraction (-63%), while in Ontario it was the Retail sector (-51%). Among sectors that employ at least 5% of the work force, all sectors experienced declines in labour demand in Ontario, while in Alberta, the Health Care and Social Assistance and Public Administration sectors had more job postings in fourth quarter of 2020 relative to the same period in 2019. Overall, trends in Alberta and Ontario are similar, with some differences that reflect the importance of specific industries and occupations in each province's economy.

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