

The Chief Statistician's Top Ten 2020

2020: an unprecedented year of impact on Canadians

1

Unemployment rate soars

The unemployment rate increased by 2.2 percentage points to 7.8 percent in March, and then reached a high of 13.7% in May, the highest level recorded since comparable data became available in 1976. A number of Canadians also experienced reduced work hours, even after businesses reopened. Temporary workers in particular were hard hit, with their hours cut by 20% from August 2019 to August 2020. Statistics Canada's interviewers worked entirely remotely to collect this information from over 56,000 households for the Labour Force Survey each month, foregoing face-to-face interviews to ensure everyone remained safe, while providing high quality statistics on the impacts of COVID-19 on the labour market system.

Source: [Labour Force Survey, March 2020](#)

2

Canada's economy sees unprecedented ups and downs

At the height of the nationwide economic shutdown, more than 62,600 businesses closed, shedding employees and payroll in the process. Subsequent waves of lockdowns and physical distancing measures continued to impact businesses over the traditionally busy holiday period, putting the viability of many businesses in question. Business closures, in combination with other factors such as government transfers and border closures, led to shifts in GDP, disposable income and savings.

Statistics Canada continued to track the impact of COVID-19 on the levels of economic activity across the country using new sources of data and world-leading statistical techniques. Between February and April, GDP declined by 17.7%, before bouncing back. In October, GDP was about 4% below pre-pandemic levels. By the summer, increases in government transfers to households more than offset declines in employment income, resulting in an overall increase in disposable income. While this disposable income dropped somewhat in the next few months, it remained higher than pre-pandemic levels. Savings rates also went up over this period.

Source: [Economic impacts and recovery related to the pandemic](#)

3

Slowing inflation rate affects Canadian pocketbooks differently

The pandemic has led Canadians to spend differently as they adapted to staying home, travelling less and buying more of certain items and less of others. Prices of consumer goods and services—which grew at a slower pace than expected in 2020, with prices declining year-over-year in April and May for the first time since 2009—had varying effects on Canadians' pocketbooks. Canadian drivers saw cost savings from gasoline prices, which fell a record 39.3% in April and remained well below 2019 levels thereafter. Prices for air transportation and traveller accommodation plummeted as Canadians were urged to stay close to home and maintain physical distancing to limit the spread of COVID-19. While these price declines weighed down the headline CPI throughout 2020, prices for food and shelter continued to rise. Prices for staple foods rose in response to higher demand early on in the pandemic, while meat prices rose following supply issues as major processing plants temporarily closed or reduced production to protect workers from COVID-19. As the year wore on, historically low interest rates and shifting buyer preferences fueled demand in the housing market, which resulted in higher replacement costs for homeowners. In light of these changes, Statistics Canada released the new [Personal Inflation Calculator](#) to help Canadians see just how inflation affects their household.

Sources: [Economic impacts and recovery related to the pandemic](#), [Consumer Price Index, November 2020](#), [Gross Domestic Product, Income and Expenditure, Third Quarter 2020](#)

4

Canada's housing market on the rise

Canadians spent more time than usual working, studying, shopping and staying at home, fuelling strong demand for more space. This coincided with low mortgage rates and more disposable income – and perhaps not surprisingly, increased demand for newly constructed houses. In fact, prices for new houses increasing by 3.1% nationally since the beginning of the pandemic, versus a 0.1% gain over the same period in 2019. Residential property prices rose by 3.7% in the six largest CMAs. For both condos and houses, resale prices rose more quickly than new units or properties. Condo prices also rose more quickly than house prices. In contrast, the price of rented accommodation has been more stable, rising in November 2020 by 1.0% from the previous year.

Sources: [Residential Property Price Index](#), [The resilience and strength of the new housing market during the pandemic](#), [New Housing Price Index, October 2020](#), [Building Construction Price Indexes, Third Quarter 2020](#)

5

"You're on mute..."

Physical distancing measures have resulted in a large portion of the population working, studying, interacting and shopping from home: 34% of Canadians spent more on their home and mobile Internet connections, and 44% of Canadians spent more online on computers, laptops, tablets and accessories. About 12% of the population – 4.6 million Canadians – worked from home in November 2020. This was an increase of approximately 250,000 from October and included 2.5 million who do not usually work from home. But risks and opportunities are unevenly distributed. Workers at the bottom of the earnings distribution may be more vulnerable to job automation and have less opportunity for telework. Moreover, in 2018, 94% of Canadians reported having home Internet access. Among those who did not have access, reasons included the cost of Internet service (28%) and equipment (19%), as well as the unavailability of Internet service (8%).

Sources: [Canadian Internet Use Survey 2018](#), [Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 5, Running the economy remotely: Potential for working from home during and after COVID-19](#), [Economic impacts and recovery related to the pandemic](#)

6

Canada's population growth goes from record high to record low

International migration is the main driver of population growth in Canada, accounting for 81.9% of growth in 2019/2020. While last year's top 10 list cited record growth levels, growth in 2020 has come to a grinding halt. International border restrictions that reduced immigration levels and the entry of temporary workers and students – combined with both a declining fertility rate and a heightened mortality rate due to COVID-19 – led to record-low population growth between April and October, at just 0.1%. Nevertheless, Canada's population recently surpassed the 38 million mark.

Source: [Canada's population estimates: Age and sex, July 1, 2020](#)

7

Roaming: Off

Stay-at-home measures and border restrictions had fewer Canadians travelling within and outside Canada in 2020. Disruptions to the Canadian airline industry were unprecedented, reaching a 97% drop in passengers in April 2020, versus a 26% drop both after September 11, 2001, and at the height of the SARS outbreak in 2003.

In April, US residents made 51,000 trips to Canada, down 97% from April 2019; this was the lowest monthly total since record keeping began in 1972. It remained low throughout the year as, in October, US arrivals was 94% lower from a year earlier. In April, 152,000 Canadian residents returned home from trips to the US, down 96% from April 2019. In October, Canadian arrivals remained 92% lower from a year earlier.

Source: [Economic impacts and recovery related to the pandemic](#), [Travel between Canada and other countries, April 2020](#), [Travel between Canada and other countries, October 2020](#)

8

Prioritizing Canadians' health

In order to respond to the urgent need for data on COVID-19 and its impact on the health of Canadians, Statistics Canada undertook numerous new innovative initiatives. New surveys and crowdsourcing initiatives have shed light on the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of Canadians generally and health care workers specifically. In addition, Statistics Canada created an [online platform for COVID-19 confirmed case data](#) with new updates every two weeks. The agency also provided urgent support to provinces and territories. It worked with Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada as well as with Public Services and Procurement Canada, with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada and with the private sector to manage inventories of personal protective equipment, and deployed interviewers across the country to help with contact tracing. These included the launch of the [Canadian COVID-19 Antibody Health Survey](#) to understand the prevalence of COVID-19 antibodies, increasing the publication of death statistics from every 11 months to every 5 weeks, and delivering new insights every month regarding excess mortality during the pandemic.

9

Uneven socio-economic impacts

Statistics Canada's [Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion](#) stepped up to the plate and published a series of various statistical products based on disaggregated data to better understand the unique experiences of diverse population groups in Canada during the COVID-19 crisis. Statistics Canada's [Centre for Indigenous Statistics and Partnerships](#) also monitored and regularly reported on the disproportionate health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic on Indigenous people. Using innovative collection methods and adding survey modules to the Labour Force Survey, the agency was able to provide the extent to which higher rates of unemployment, underemployment and precarious employment impacted population groups designated as visible minorities, Indigenous people, and other groups as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, including more self-reported financial stress and economic insecurity.

Sources: [Impacts on Immigrants and People Designated as Visible Minorities](#), [Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people: March to August 2020](#), [Indigenous people and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), [COVID-19 in Canada: A Six-month Update on Social and Economic Impacts](#), [Labour Force Survey](#)

10

Ingenuity and Trust

The pandemic fuelled an extraordinary demand for data, and we pivoted our operations, with employees stepping up their ingenuity and demonstrating their commitment to deliver on the trust of Canadians.

Thanks to our web-panel and crowdsourcing initiatives, Canadians have been able to tell us how COVID-19 is affecting their mental health, finances, domestic situation, and even their ability to finish school. We delivered new tools, like the [Canadian Economic Dashboard and COVID-19](#) and the [Canadian Statistical Geospatial Explorer](#). We released the 2021 Census of Population questionnaire, which will better reflect Canada's evolving demographics and capture the sheer scale of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadians. Partnering with the business community, we helped bring a more detailed and integrated picture of the economic impact, and held hackathons with various sectors to bring greater clarity on the issues faced. We made our data in Research Data Centres more accessible to researchers across the country. And we provided new analysis, like the [StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada](#) article series, which focuses on the socioeconomic landscape. Through our role as Canada's trusted data steward, we will help Canadians not only survive this crisis, but also thrive once we move past it.