

Highlights:

- Retail sales moved up by 0.8 per cent in March to sit 1.7 per cent above last year's pace in the first quarter of 2019
- Employment insurance claims increased slightly by 0.4 per cent in March

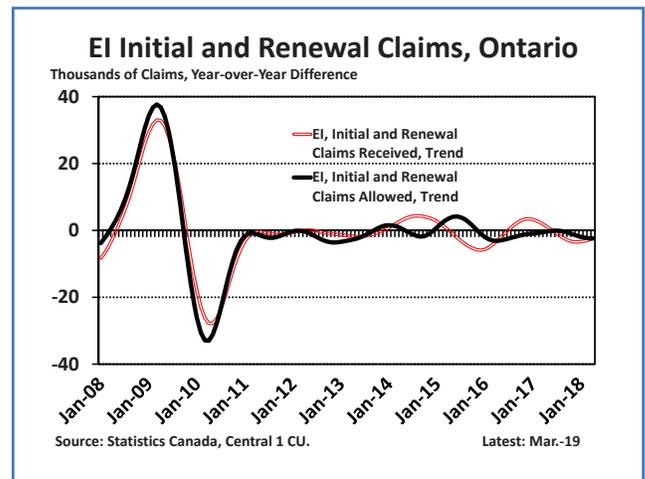
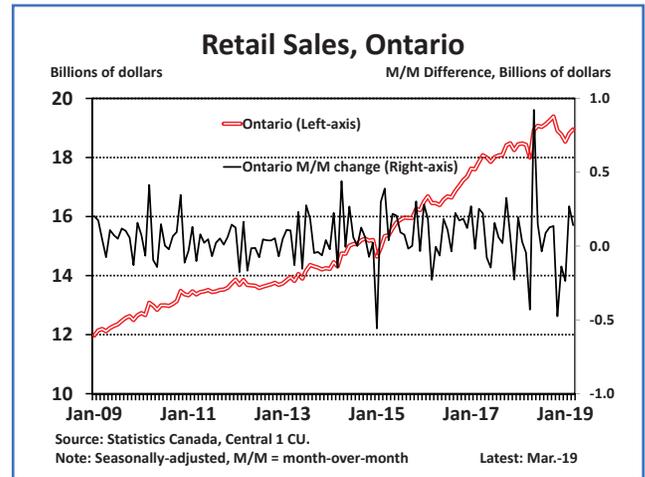
Strong retail sales growth in Toronto helped lift total sales volumes in Ontario

Retail sales in Ontario continued to expand in March but by a slower rate than February. Retail sales increased a further 0.8 per cent to \$19.0 billion (all figures seasonally adjusted) building on last month's growth of 1.5 per cent. Sales in the Toronto metro area were robust up 2.5 per cent to \$8.0 billion while sales for the rest of the province contracted by 0.5 per cent to \$11.0 billion.

Retail sales in Canada increased a further 1.1 per cent in March adding to the previous month's gains of 1.0 per cent. Among Canada's two other large cities, retail sales increased by 1.5 per cent in Vancouver and by 0.4 per cent in Montreal.

Over the first quarter of 2019, Ontario's retail sales remained 1.7 per cent above last year's pace while Toronto's sales remained 3.7 per cent above last year's pace. Sales outside of Toronto remained flat at only 0.4 per cent above pace. Strong sales growth over the last two months in Toronto has helped propel the province's total.

By specific segment gasoline station sales increased significantly in March due to higher prices at the pumps per litre, despite gasoline production remaining the same as the previous month. Food and beverage sales declined slightly given increased food prices especially for fruits and vegetables. Other areas such as clothing, health-related products and electronics and appliances posted higher sales volumes in March.



Increased employment insurance claims in Ontario's metro areas lifted Ontario totals in March

Employment insurance (EI) beneficiaries continued to increase in March moving up an additional 0.4 per cent or 460 net new recipients. The net gains this month were due to increased recipients in Ontario's census metropolitan areas (CMAs), which posted 1.2 per cent more recipients or 980 net new recipients. Meanwhile, in areas outside of Ontario's metro areas EI beneficiaries declined by 530 net new recipients or 0.9 per cent (120 fewer net recipients) in census agglomerations and by 2.2 per cent (410 net recipients) in rural areas.

By CMA, nearly all markets posted increased beneficiaries in March with three exceptions: Greater Sudbury (2.1 per cent lower or 40 net beneficiaries), Kingston (0.7 per cent fewer or 10 net beneficiaries) and Ottawa-Gatineau (3.8 per cent lower or 200 net beneficiaries).

During March, strong jumps in beneficiaries in a few sectors helped lift overall numbers. For example, occupations in manufacturing and utilities posted a 290 net increase in beneficiaries while occupations in education, law, social, community and government services posted a 610 net increase in beneficiaries. Gains were offset by unclassified occupations, which posted 110 net fewer beneficiaries and sales and services occupations, which posted 370 net fewer beneficiaries.

By age group, net gains in beneficiaries were from the most represented groups in the province's labour markets—people 25 to 54 years of age (290 net new beneficiaries) and people 55 years of age or above (120 net new beneficiaries).

Finally, seasonally adjusted initial and renewal EI claims increased by 1.8 per cent to 76,690 total claims in March. March's numbers marked the third consecutive month-over-month increase in Ontario.

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