

Provisional statistics of retail sales for January 2020

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (March 2).

The value of total retail sales in January 2020, provisionally estimated at \$37.8 billion, decreased by 21.4% compared with the same month in 2019. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in December 2019 decreased by 19.4% compared with a year earlier.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in January 2020 decreased by 23.0% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in December 2019 decreased by 21.1% compared with a year earlier.

In interpreting the figures for January, it should be noted that retail sales tend to show greater volatility in the first two months of a year due to the timing of the Lunar New Year. Local consumer spending normally attains a seasonal high before the festival. As the Lunar New Year fell on January 25 this year but on February 5 last year, the year-on-year comparison of the figures for January 2020 with those for January 2019 might have been affected by this factor to a certain extent.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing January 2020 with January 2019, and also bearing in mind the effect due to the difference in the timing of the Lunar New Year as mentioned above, the value of sales of jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts decreased by 41.6%. This was followed by sales of food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (-6.8% in value); other consumer goods, not elsewhere classified (-12.1%); medicines and cosmetics (-32.3%); wearing apparel (-28.9%); commodities in department stores (-27.0%); electrical goods and other consumer durable goods, not elsewhere classified (-20.4%); motor vehicles and parts (-20.2%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (-21.6%); furniture and fixtures (-22.0%); Chinese drugs and herbs (-16.2%); books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (-25.9%); and optical shops (-23.9%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets increased by 10.2% in January 2020 over a year earlier. This was followed by sales of fuels (+12.3% in value).

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales decreased by 2.7% in the three months ending January 2020 compared with the preceding three-month period, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales decreased by 2.5%.

These retail sales statistics measure the sales receipts in respect of

goods sold by local retail establishments and are primarily intended for gauging the short-term business performance of the local retail sector. Data on retail sales are collected from local retail establishments through the Monthly Survey of Retail Sales (MRS). Local retail establishments with and without physical shops are covered in MRS and their sales, both through conventional shops and online channels, are included in the retail sales statistics.

The retail sales statistics cover consumer spending on goods but not on services (such as those on housing, catering, medical care and health services, transport and communication, financial services, education and entertainment) which account for over 50% of the overall consumer spending. Moreover, they include spending on goods in Hong Kong by visitors but exclude spending outside Hong Kong by Hong Kong residents. Hence they should not be regarded as indicators for measuring overall consumer spending.

Users interested in the trend of overall consumer spending should refer to the data series of private consumption expenditure (PCE), which is a major component of the Gross Domestic Product published at quarterly intervals. Compiled from a wide range of data sources, PCE covers consumer spending on both goods (including goods purchased from all channels) and services by Hong Kong residents whether locally or abroad. Please refer to the C&SD publication "Gross Domestic Product (Quarterly)" for more details.

Commentary

A government spokesman said that retail sales continued to record a sharp fall in January 2020 notwithstanding the possible boost from the Lunar New Year, which fell in late January this year but early February last year.

The spokesman further pointed out that the business environment of retail trade has turned even more austere lately, as the threat of COVID-19 has brought inbound tourism almost to a standstill and caused severe disruptions to consumption-related activities. The Government will closely monitor the situation and its repercussion on the overall economy and the employment market.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures on value index and value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for December 2019 as well as the provisional figures for January 2020.

Table 2 presents the revised figures on volume index of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for December 2019 as well as the provisional figures for January 2020.

Table 3 shows the movements of the value and volume of total retail sales in terms of the year-on-year rate of change for a month compared with the same month in the preceding year based on the original series, and in terms of the rate of change for a three-month period compared with the preceding three-month period based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The classification of retail establishments follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey of Retail Sales". Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=B1080003). Alternatively, the historical series of retail sales statistics can be downloaded in the form of a statistical table at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=D5600089).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of C&SD (Tel: 3903 7400; email: mrs@censtatd.gov.hk).