

CSSA caseload for March 2024

The overall Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) caseload in March showed a drop of 457 cases, representing a decrease of 0.2 per cent compared with that of February, according to the latest CSSA caseload statistics released by the Social Welfare Department today (April 18).

The total CSSA caseload at the end of March stood at 199 205 (see attached table), with a total of 271 440 recipients.

Analysed by case nature, low-earnings cases registered a month-to-month decrease of 1.0 per cent to 1 530 cases. Unemployment cases decreased by 0.6 per cent to 16 943 cases. Single parent cases were down by 0.5 per cent to 20 192 cases. Both old age cases and permanent disability cases dropped by 0.2 per cent to 111 633 cases and 17 104 cases respectively.

Ill-health cases remained steady at 27 855 cases.

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on April 17 to noon today (April 18), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 109 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category.

No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan"

(www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 50 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24 to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 43 708 samples of food imported from Japan (including 28 745 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 11 782 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

HK SAR Government welcomes holding of HSITP Partnership Launching Ceremony by HSITP Limited (with photos)

The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park Limited (HSITPL) today (April 18) held the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park (HSITP) Partnership Launching Ceremony and signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with some 60 partners from nine economies.

Witnessed by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee; the Acting Financial Secretary, Mr Michael Wong; and the Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Professor Sun Dong, representatives of some 60 enterprises signed the MOUs with the Chief Executive Officer of the HSITPL, Mr Vincent Ma, at the launching ceremony to officially become partners with the HSITP, marking a significant milestone of the Park entering the operational phase.

"With its strategic location, the Park will form part of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone to become a key area of I&T (innovation and technology) development that transcends beyond our boundary with the Mainland. With the Park fast approaching the operational phase, it will integrate with and help drive our national

development. Hong Kong will continue to join hands with Shenzhen to work out various innovative and cross-boundary facilitation measures for the benefit of our partners in the Park and beyond," said Mr Lee.

"Under the unique 'one country, two systems' principle, Hong Kong enjoys the rule of law, a free and enterprising business environment, world-class infrastructure, a robust financial system, as well as established R&D (research and development) capabilities with our world-renowned institutions. Hong Kong has all it takes to create new quality productive forces."

Professor Sun said, "Among the I&T companies which will be signing MOUs on their partnership with the HSITPL today, about a quarter of them are from overseas, and 24 companies are new to set foot or expand business in Hong Kong. The diverse portfolio of partnership enterprises highlights Hong Kong's unique advantage as an international city, casting a big vote of confidence in the development of the HSITP, as well as the I&T industry in Hong Kong."

"To realise the goal of becoming an international I&T centre, fostering collaborative efforts among the Government, industry, academic, research, and investment sectors is of utmost importance. The ceremony today signifies the collective efforts towards achieving our shared vision."

The Co-operation Zone, which consists of the 87-hectare Hong Kong Park (i.e. HSITP) and the 300-hectare Shenzhen Park, is one of the major co-operation platforms among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao under the 14th Five-Year Plan. The HSITP will be developed in two phases from west to east. The Chief Executive in his Policy Address in 2022 put forward the suggestion to explore the expedited development of the HSITP and enhance its function. With the completion of the planning stage, the first phase of the HSITP has a total floor area of up to 1 million square metres and contains various clusters to establish a diverse I&T ecosystem with different industry themes, including life and health technology, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and industry, academic and research sectors. The first three buildings of the first batch will be completed gradually from the end of 2024. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government will continue to support the construction of the HSITP, as well as the HSITPL's efforts in taking forward the relevant leasing and investment promotion work, with a view to promoting jointly with Shenzhen the advantages of "one zone, two parks" under the "one country, two systems" principle in the Co-operation Zone.



Volume and Price Statistics of External Merchandise Trade in February 2024

Further to the external merchandise trade statistics in value terms for February 2024 released earlier on, the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (April 18) the volume and price statistics of external merchandise trade for that month.

As the trade flows tend to show greater volatilities in the first two months of a year due to the timing of the Lunar New Year, it is more appropriate to analyse the trade figures for January and February taken together in making year-on-year comparison.

Comparing the first two months of 2024 with the same period in 2023, the volume of Hong Kong's total exports of goods and imports of goods increased by 11.3% and 4.7% respectively.

In February 2024, the volume of Hong Kong's total exports of goods and imports of goods decreased by 6.2% and 6.8% respectively over February 2023.

Comparing the three-month period ending February 2024 with the preceding three months on a seasonally adjusted basis, the volume of total exports of goods increased by 4.5%, while the volume of imports of goods remained virtually unchanged.

Changes in volume of external merchandise trade are derived from changes in external merchandise trade value with the effect of price changes discounted.

As regards price changes in the first two months of 2024 over the same period in 2023, the prices of total exports of goods and imports of goods both increased by 4.7%.

Comparing February 2024 with February 2023, the prices of total exports of goods and imports of goods increased by 5.8% and 5.5% respectively.

Price changes in external merchandise trade are reflected by changes in unit value indices of external merchandise trade, which are compiled based on average unit values or, for certain commodities, specific price data.

The terms of trade index is derived from the ratio of price index of total exports of goods to that of imports of goods. Compared with the same periods in 2023, the index increased by 0.2% in February 2024, whereas it remained virtually unchanged in the first two months of 2024.

Changes in the unit value and volume of total exports of goods by main destination are shown in Table 1.

Comparing February 2024 with February 2023, declines were recorded for the total export volume to Taiwan (-23.3%), Vietnam (-22.6%) and the mainland of China (the Mainland) (-8.2%). On the other hand, the total export volume to the USA (6.6%) and India (11.9%) increased.

Over the same period of comparison, the total export prices to all main destinations increased: the Mainland (8.2%), India (5.3%), the USA (5.3%), Vietnam (4.7%) and Taiwan (3.9%).

Changes in the unit value and volume of imports of goods by main supplier are shown in Table 2.

Comparing February 2024 with February 2023, declines were recorded for the import volume from Taiwan (-15.7%) and the Mainland (-15.5%). On the other hand, the import volume from the USA (6.9%), Singapore (18.1%) and Korea (79.0%) increased.

Over the same period of comparison, the import prices from Singapore (9.8%), Taiwan (8.6%), the Mainland (6.4%) and Korea (5.8%) increased. On the other hand, the import prices from the USA decreased by 0.8%.

Further information

Details of the above statistics are published in the February 2024 issue of "Hong Kong Merchandise Trade Index Numbers". Users can browse and download the report at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1020006&scode=230).

Enquiries on merchandise trade indices may be directed to the Trade Analysis Section of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 4918).

Unemployment and Underemployment Statistics for January – March 2024

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for January – March 2024) released today (April 18) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased from 2.9% in December 2023 – February 2024 to 3.0% in January – March 2024. The underemployment rate also increased from 1.0% in December 2023 – February 2024 to 1.1% in January – March 2024.

Comparing January – March 2024 with December 2023 – February 2024, the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) increased across almost all the major economic sectors, with more distinct increases observed in the foundation and superstructure sector; retail, accommodation and food services sector; and professional and business services (excl. cleaning and similar activities) sector. As to the underemployment rate, an increase was mainly seen in the retail sector.

Total employment decreased by around 6 300 from 3 694 700 in December 2023 – February 2024 to 3 688 400 in January – March 2024. Over the same period, the labour force increased by around 3 100 from 3 797 000 to 3 800 100.

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) increased by around 9 400 from 102 300 in December 2023 – February 2024 to 111 700 in January – March 2024. Over the same period, the number of underemployed persons also increased by around 2 400 from 37 600 to 40 000.

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, said, "The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was still at a low level of 3.0% in January – March 2024, though edging up by 0.1 percentage point from December 2023 – February 2024. The underemployment

rate also went up slightly by 0.1 percentage point to 1.1%. The labour force bounced back by 3 100 to 3 800 100, whereas total employment decreased by 6 300 to 3 688 400. The number of unemployed persons increased by 9 400 to a still low level of 111 700."

The unemployment rates of most sectors increased in January – March 2024 compared with the preceding three-month period, but stayed low in general.

Looking ahead, Mr Sun said, "As the economy continues to grow, the labour market will likely remain tight in the near term."

In January 2024 – March 2024, the Labour Department (LD) recorded a monthly average of 77 488 vacancies from the private sector, representing a year-on-year decrease of 24.1% and an increase of 1.3% over the average figure in December 2023 – February 2024. Job-seekers may make use of the LD's online platforms, such as the Interactive Employment Service website, for obtaining such vacancy information.

Further Information

The unemployment and underemployment statistics were compiled from the findings of the continuous General Household Survey.

In the survey, the definitions used in measuring unemployment and underemployment follow closely those recommended by the International Labour Organization. The employed population covers all employers, self-employed persons, employees (including full-time, part-time, casual workers, etc.) and unpaid family workers. Unemployed persons by industry (or occupation) are classified according to their previous industry (or occupation).

The survey for January – March 2024 covered a sample of some 26 000 households or 69 000 persons, selected in accordance with a scientifically designed sampling scheme to represent the population of Hong Kong. Labour force statistics compiled from this sample represented the situation in the moving three-month period of January to March 2024.

Data on labour force characteristics were obtained from the survey by interviewing each member aged 15 or over in the sampled households.

Statistical tables on the latest labour force statistics can be downloaded at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/scode200.html). More detailed analysis of the labour force characteristics is given in the "Quarterly Report on General Household Survey" which is published four times a year. The latest issue of the report contains statistics for the quarter October – December 2023 while the next issue covering the quarter January – March 2024 will be available by end May 2024. Users can also browse and download this publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1050001&scode=200).

For enquiries about labour force statistics, please contact the General Household Survey Section (3) of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 5508 or email:

ghs@censtatd.gov.hk).