

Services of New Territories South Animal Management Centre of AFCD to resume as normal

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (March 19) announced that services of the New Territories South Animal Management Centre (NTSAMC) will resume as normal from March 22 (Monday).

A spokesman for the AFCD said, "In light of the latest developments of COVID-19, only a few pet animals are under quarantine or veterinary monitoring with the AFCD at present. Therefore, all animals previously transferred to other Animal Management Centres will be transferred back to the NTSAMC for follow-up."

The animal keeping facility at the Hong Kong Port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge will still be used for quarantine and veterinary monitoring for animals that test positive for the COVID-19 virus in future.

The AFCD spokesman reminded pet owners to adopt good hygiene practices (including hand washing before and after being around or handling animals, their food or supplies, as well as avoiding kissing them) and to maintain a clean and hygienic household environment. People who are sick should restrict contact with animals. If any changes in the health condition of pets are spotted, advice from a veterinarian should be sought as soon as possible.

The spokesman emphasised that currently there is no evidence that pets are playing a role in the spread of human infection with COVID-19. Pet owners should always maintain good hygiene practices and under no circumstances should they abandon their pets.

Fourteen persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations (with photos)

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Twilight" on March 15, 17 and 18. A total of 10 suspected illegal workers, three suspected employers and a suspected aider and abettor were arrested.

During the "Twilight" operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided 25

target locations including a commercial building, an office, a fish stall, a massage parlour, restaurants, retail shops, a tailor shop, vegetable stalls and a warehouse. The suspected illegal workers comprised four men and six women, aged 23 to 54. Among them, two men and a woman were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. In addition, a man and two women were suspected of using and being in possession of forged Hong Kong identity cards. Meanwhile, a man and two women, aged 43 to 68, were suspected of employing the illegal workers. Also, an aider and abettor was arrested.

"Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties," an ImmD spokesman said.

The spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases. It is an offence to use or possess a forged Hong Kong identity card or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person. Offenders are liable to prosecution and a maximum penalty of a \$100,000 fine and up to 10 years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in

the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.



[Statistics of Payment Cards Issued in Hong Kong for Fourth Quarter 2020](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (March 19) statistics of payment cards issued in Hong Kong for the fourth quarter of 2020.

The payment card statistics (see Annex) include quarterly data on credit and debit cards issued in Hong Kong under the credit and/or debit card schemes of the eight payment card scheme operators (Note 1). The HKMA began to publish the payment card statistics on a quarterly basis in June 2010 to enhance transparency of the payment card industry in Hong Kong, in line with international practice.

According to the quarterly statistics, the total number of credit cards in circulation (Note 2) was 19.37 million by the end of Q4/2020. The figure represents a 0.1 per cent increase from the previous quarter and a 1.7 per cent decrease from the previous year. The number and value of credit card transactions (including retail sales and cash advances) (Note 3) are susceptible to seasonal factors and the general economic environment, making

the trends more prone to fluctuation. The total number of credit card transactions was 222.24 million for Q4/2020, representing a 6.4 per cent increase from the previous quarter and a 3.6 per cent increase from the same period in 2019. The total value of credit card transactions was HK\$169.4 billion for Q4/2020, representing a 13.7 per cent increase from the previous quarter and a 11.7 per cent decrease from the same period in 2019. Of the total transaction value, HK\$140.8 billion (83.1 per cent) was related to retail spending in Hong Kong, HK\$18.6 billion (11.0 per cent) in retail spending overseas and HK\$10.0 billion (5.9 per cent) in cash advances.

The total number of debit cards in circulation is not available due to overlapping of debit card brands in a single card. Like the number and value of credit card transactions, the number and value of debit card transactions in relation to retail sales and bills payments (Note 4) are also affected by seasonal factors. On a quarterly basis, the total number of debit card transactions in relation to retail sales and bills payments increased 7.4 per cent to 38.89 million while the total value increased by 7.0 per cent to HK\$78.3 billion in Q4/2020. When compared to the same period in 2019, the total number decreased by 16.0 per cent and the total value dropped by 7.6 per cent in Q4/2020.

Notes:

(Note 1) The payment card statistics are compiled from data on credit and debit cards issued in Hong Kong by both authorised institutions (AIs) and non-authorised institutions (non-AIs) under the credit and/or debit card schemes of the eight payment card scheme operators (the card operators). The card operators, in alphabetical order, are American Express International, Inc., Discover Financial Services (Hong Kong) Limited, EPS Company (Hong Kong) Limited (EPSCO), JCB International (Asia) Ltd, Joint Electronic Teller Services Ltd. (JETCO), MasterCard Asia/Pacific Pte. Ltd., UnionPay International Co. Ltd and Visa Worldwide Pte. Limited.

(Note 2) A credit card issued in Hong Kong only carries one credit card brand. The total number of credit cards in circulation refers to the total number of credit cards (i.e. cards with a credit function) issued in Hong Kong under the credit card schemes of card operators (but excluding EPSCO and JETCO, which do not operate a credit card scheme). Some of these credit cards carry debit card functions, i.e. the credit card can be used for making purchases/payments or cash withdrawal at ATMs through directly debiting cardholders' bank accounts.

(Note 3) The total number/value of credit card transactions refer to the total number/value of transactions made via credit card accounts of credit cards issued in Hong Kong under the credit card schemes of card operators (excluding EPSCO and JETCO). Starting from March 2015, a Hong Kong/overseas spending breakdown of credit card retail sales transactions is provided.

(Note 4) The total number/value of debit card transactions in relation to retail sales/bill payments refers to the total number/value of those transactions made via debiting cardholders' bank accounts. Some of the eight

card operators do not operate a debit card scheme. Care should be exercised in combining the credit card retail sales figures and the debit card retail sales/bills payment figures because of the possibility of double counting.

Statistics of Stored Value Facilities Schemes issued by SVF licensees

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (March 19) statistics on SVF schemes issued by SVF licensees for the fourth quarter of 2020.

The SVF scheme statistics (see Annex) include quarterly data on SVF schemes issued by the eighteen SVF licensees (Note 1).

According to the quarterly statistics, the total number of SVF accounts in use (Note 2) was 63.91 million by the end of Q4/2020, representing a 0.1 per cent decrease from the previous quarter. The total number of SVF transactions (Note 3) was around 1.5 billion for Q4/2020, or 16.9 per cent higher than the previous quarter. The total value of SVF transactions was HK\$60.7 billion for Q4/2020, representing a 7.8 per cent increase from the previous quarter. Of the total transaction value, HK\$24.0 billion was related to point-of-sale spending payment, HK\$26.7 billion in online spending payment and HK\$10.0 billion in P2P funds transfer. The total float and SVF deposit (Note 4) was HK\$13.6 billion for Q4/2020, 1.2 per cent higher than the previous quarter.

As compared with the end of Q4/2019, the total number of SVF accounts in use at the end of Q4/2020 was up by 1.2 per cent, and the total float and SVF deposit was up by 17.4 per cent. The total number and value of SVF transactions during Q4/2020 were down by 2.4 per cent and up by 14.9 per cent respectively year-on-year.

Notes:

Note 1: The SVF scheme statistics are compiled from data on SVF schemes issued by the eighteen SVF licensees. The SVF licensees, in alphabetical order, are 33 Financial Services Limited, Alipay Financial Services (HK) Limited, Autotoll Limited, Bank of Communications (Hong Kong) Limited, Dah Sing Bank, Limited, ePaylinks Technology Co., Limited, Geoswift Cards Services Limited, HKT Payment Limited, Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (The), K & R International Limited, Octopus Cards Limited, Optal Asia Limited, PayPal Hong Kong Limited, TNG (Asia) Limited, Transforex (Hong Kong) Investment Consulting Co., Limited, UniCard Solution

Limited, WeChat Pay Hong Kong Limited, and Yintran Group Holdings Limited.

Note 2: "Total number of SVF accounts in use" refers to the total number of SVF accounts that can be used as at the end of the reporting period.

Note 3: SVF transactions include point-of-sale spending payment, online spending payment and P2P funds transfer.

Note 4: The following terms follow their definitions in the Payment Systems and Stored Value Facilities Ordinance:

- "Float" means the stored value remaining on the facility but does not include any SVF deposit;
- "SVF deposit" means a deposit placed with the licensee, or another person on behalf of the licensee, for enabling the facility to be used.

Employment and vacancies statistics for December 2020

According to the figures released today (March 19) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), total employment in the private sector surveyed decreased by 4.7% or 132 100 persons in December 2020 compared with a year earlier. The total number of vacancies was 35 060, representing a decrease of 36% or 19 370 over the preceding year.

Employment statistics

In December 2020, the selected industries as a whole employed 2 687 900 persons. The import and export trade engaged 388 300 persons, followed by professional and business services (excluding cleaning and similar services) engaging 306 600 persons, retail trade 250 300 persons, financing and insurance 238 700 persons, education 204 800 persons, and food and beverage services 202 700 persons.

Employment decreased in many surveyed industries compared with a year earlier. Decreases in employment were mainly recorded in the industries of accommodation services (covering hotels, guesthouses, boarding houses and other establishments providing short term accommodation) (-19.1% or -7 900 persons); food and beverage services (-13.6% or -31 800 persons); import and export trade (-11.6% or -50 800 persons); wholesale (-10.1% or -5 600 persons); and transportation, storage, postal and courier services (-7.5% or -13 400 persons). On the other hand, employment increased mainly in the industries of human health services (3.4% or 4 700 persons), cleaning and similar services (1.2% or 1 000 persons), and real estate (1.2% or 1 700 persons). Employment figures for selected major industries are shown in

Table 1.

Vacancies statistics

Among the 35 060 private sector vacancies, 4 730 were from the industry of financing and insurance, 3 800 from education, 3 600 from residential care and social work services, 3 570 from professional and business services (excluding cleaning and similar services), and 2 910 from retail trade.

Vacancies decreased in all the selected industries in December 2020 over a year earlier. Decreases were more notable in the industries of professional and business services (excluding cleaning and similar services) (-2 540 or -42%); arts, entertainment, recreation and other services (-2 180 or -67%); food and beverage services (-2 040 or -52%); retail trade (-1 960 or -40%); and import and export trade (-1 570 or -39%). Job vacancies figures for selected major industries are shown in Table 2.

Analysed by major occupation category, private sector vacancies were observed mainly in the categories of associate professionals (9 120 vacancies), service and sales workers (7 580 vacancies), and elementary occupations (6 270 vacancies). Job vacancies figures by major occupation category are shown in Table 3.

Seasonally adjusted statistics

For discerning the latest trend in employment and vacancies in the private sector, it is useful to look at changes over a three-month period in the respective seasonally adjusted figures. Compared with September 2020, the seasonally adjusted total employment and total vacancies in the surveyed industries decreased by 0.9% and 8.9% respectively in December 2020. The changes over three-month periods in the seasonally adjusted series of employment and vacancies are shown in Table 4.

Other information

The above employment and vacancies statistics were obtained from the Quarterly Survey of Employment and Vacancies and the Quarterly Employment Survey of Construction Sites conducted by the C&SD. In the former survey, some economic activities (e.g. those dominated by self-employment, including taxi operators and hawkers) are not covered. Therefore, the respective employment and vacancies figures relate only to those selected industries included in the survey. In the latter survey on construction sites, employment and vacancies figures relate to manual workers only.

A detailed breakdown of the above statistics is published in the following reports:

"Quarterly Report of Employment and Vacancies Statistics, December 2020"
(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp452.jsp?productCode=B1050003)

"Quarterly Report of Employment and Vacancies at Construction Sites, December 2020"
(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp452.jsp?productCode=B1050004)

Users can download these publications at the website of the C&SD.

Enquiries on more detailed employment and vacancies statistics can be directed to the Employment Statistics and Central Register of Establishments Section, the C&SD (Tel: 2582 5076; fax: 2827 2296; email: employment@censtatd.gov.hk).