

Unemployment and underemployment statistics for November 2019 – January 2020

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for November 2019 – January 2020) released today (February 18) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased from 3.3% in October – December 2019 to 3.4% in November 2019 – January 2020. The underemployment rate remained unchanged at 1.2% in the two periods.

Comparing November 2019 – January 2020 with October – December 2019, movements in the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) in different industry sectors varied. A relatively notable increase was observed in the import/export trade and wholesale sector. Movements in the underemployment rates in different industry sectors also varied, but were generally small in magnitude.

Total employment decreased by around 14 600 from 3 817 800 in October – December 2019 to 3 803 200 in November 2019 – January 2020. Over the same period, the labour force also decreased by around 16 300 from 3 941 800 to 3 925 500.

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) decreased by 1 700 from 124 000 in October – December 2019 to 122 300 in November 2019 – January 2020. The number of underemployed persons in November 2019 – January 2020 was 47 300, about the same as that in October – December 2019 (47 400).

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong said, "The labour market slackened further as economic conditions stayed weak. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased by another 0.1 percentage point to 3.4% in November 2019 – January 2020, the highest in more than three years. Meanwhile, the underemployment rate remained unchanged at 1.2%. The year-on-year decline in total employment widened noticeably further to 1.8%, the largest since the third quarter of 2003. The sharp fall in employment combined with a modest increase in unemployment rate suggested that some people may have chosen to leave the labour force when losing their jobs."

"The employment situation of the consumption- and tourism-related sectors (viz. retail, accommodation and food services sectors) remained difficult. The unemployment rate of these sectors combined stayed at 5.2%, the highest in more than three years, and employment continued to fall sharply on a year-on-year basis. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of the construction sector increased further to 5.7%, the highest level in close to

six years, and that of the import/export trade and wholesale sector deteriorated visibly."

Looking ahead, Dr Law said, "The labour market will be subject to even more pressure in the near term, as the threat of the novel coronavirus infection has already caused severe disruptions to a wide range of economic activities lately, particularly the consumption- and tourism-related sectors. The Government will monitor the developments closely."

"In view of the recent development of epidemic situation, the Chief Executive has announced on February 14 a range of measures to assist the affected sectors in order to minimise any negative impact on the labour market due to company closure, as well as to provide assistance for low-income families," Dr Law added.

He noted that the Labour Department (LD) continues to receive and release information on vacancies from various industries for job-seekers with different educational background and working experience. Job-seekers may continue to make use of the LD's online platforms such as the Interactive Employment Service website for obtaining employment information.

Further information

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

The survey for November 2019 – January 2020 covered a sample of some 26 000 households or 74 000 persons, selected in accordance with a scientifically designed sampling scheme to represent the population of Hong Kong.

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

In the survey, the definitions used in measuring unemployment and underemployment follow closely those recommended by the International Labour Organization.

Detailed analysis of 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 publication contains statistics for the quarter July – September 2019 while the next issue covering the quarter October – December 2019 is expected to be available by end February 2020. Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=B1050001).

For enquiries about labour force statistics, please contact the Household Statistics Analysis Section of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 5508 or email: ghs@censtatd.gov.hk).