

Unemployment and underemployment statistics for November 2020 – January 2021

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for November 2020 – January 2021) released today (February 18) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased from 6.6% in October – December 2020 to 7.0% in November 2020 – January 2021. The underemployment rate also increased from 3.4% in October – December 2020 to 3.8% in November 2020 – January 2021.

Comparing November 2020 – January 2021 with October – December 2020, both the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) and underemployment rate increased across almost all major economic sectors, with more distinct increases observed in the retail, accommodation and food services sector; education sector; and arts, entertainment and recreation sector.

Total employment decreased by around 17 100 from 3 647 700 in October – December 2020 to 3 630 600 in November 2020 – January 2021. Over the same period, the labour force also decreased by around 9 400 from 3 893 400 to 3 884 000.

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) increased by around 7 500 from 245 800 in October – December 2020 to 253 300 in November 2020 – January 2021. Over the same period, the number of underemployed persons also increased by around 14 400 from 133 800 to 148 200.

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong said, "The labour market was under notable pressure in November 2020 – January 2021 due to the fourth wave of local epidemic. The unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) rose by 0.2 percentage point over October – December 2020 to 6.5% in November 2020 – January 2021, and after seasonal adjustment it rose by 0.4 percentage point to 7.0%. The latter is the highest in close to 17 years. The underemployment rate also increased by 0.4 percentage point to 3.8%. Meanwhile, total employment fell by 0.5% from the preceding three-month period to 3 630 600, and the number of unemployed persons increased by 3.1% to 253 300."

"Analysed by sector, the unemployment rate of the consumption- and tourism-related sectors (viz. retail, accommodation and food services sectors) combined increased by 0.7 percentage point over October – December 2020 to 11.3% in November 2020 – January 2021, and the underemployment rate rose by 0.9 percentage point to a record high of 6.6%. Among these sectors, the unemployment rate and underemployment rate for food and beverage service activities increased visibly to 14.7% and 10.0% respectively. Labour market

conditions in most other sectors also deteriorated, particularly in education and arts, entertainment and recreation."

Looking ahead, Dr Law said, "Although the fourth wave of local epidemic has shown signs of easing lately, the labour market will remain under pressure in the near term as it will take time for economic activities to return to normal. Keeping the epidemic under control the soonest possible with the concerted efforts of the whole community is of pivotal importance to economic recovery and improvement of the labour market. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely."

He noted that the Labour Department (LD) has all along provided comprehensive and free employment services through its job centres, industry-based recruitment centres, on-line platforms, etc, to offer employment support for job-seekers. The LD also raised the ceiling of on-the-job training (OJT) allowance payable to employers under the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged, the Youth Employment and Training Programme and the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme in September 2020, with a view to further encouraging employers to hire the elderly and middle-aged, young people and persons with disabilities and provide them with OJT. Moreover, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) has launched Phase 3 of the Love Upgrading Special Scheme in January 2021 with a doubled quota for 20 000 trainees. The ERB will also continue to assist the unemployed and underemployed by providing around 140 000 places yearly through its regular training courses.

Meanwhile, the LD continues to receive and release information on vacancies from various industries for job-seekers with different educational background and working experience. In January 2021, the LD recorded a total of 43 139 vacancies from the private sector, an increase of 1.6% over the figure in December 2020. 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.

The survey for November 2020 – January 2021 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. Labour force statistics compiled from this sample represented the situation in the moving 3-month period of November 2020 to January 2021.

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.

Statistical tables on the latest labour force statistics can be downloaded at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=D5250021). 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 publication contains statistics for the quarter July – September 2020 while the next issue covering the quarter October – December 2020 will be available by end February 2021. Users can also download this publication 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).