

Statistics of payment cards issued in Hong Kong for fourth quarter 2018

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (March 22) statistics of payment cards issued in Hong Kong for the fourth quarter of 2018.

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 19.46 million by the end of Q4/2018. The figure represents a 0.7 per cent increase from the previous quarter and a 3.1 per cent increase 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 196.62 million for Q4/2018, representing a 5.9 per cent increase from the previous quarter and a 18.7 per cent increase from the same period in 2017. The total value of credit card transactions was HK\$196.9 billion for Q4/2018, representing a 10.0 per cent increase from the previous quarter and a 7.9 per cent increase from the same period in 2017. Of the total transaction value, HK\$141.6 billion (71.9 per cent) was related to retail spending in Hong Kong, HK\$23.9 billion (12.1 per cent) in retail spending overseas and HK\$12.8 billion (6.5 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 6.9 per cent to 35.80 million while the total value increased by 8.7 per cent to HK\$86.3 billion in Q4/2018. When compared to the same period in 2017, the total number increased by 1.6 per cent and the total value rose by 6.2 per cent in Q4/2018.

Notes:

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.

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.

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.

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 (SVF) 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 22) statistics on Stored Value Facilities (SVF) schemes issued by SVF licensees for the fourth quarter of 2018.

The SVF scheme statistics (see Annex) include quarterly data on SVF schemes issued by the sixteen SVF licensees (Note 1). The HKMA began to publish the SVF scheme statistics on a quarterly basis in March 2017 to enhance transparency of the SVF industry in Hong Kong.

According to the quarterly statistics, the total number of SVF accounts in use (Note 2) was 56.10 million by the end of Q4/2018, representing a 3.7

per cent increase from the previous quarter. The total number of SVF transactions (Note 3) was around 1.6 billion for Q4/2018, or 7.7 per cent higher than the previous quarter. The total value of SVF transactions was HK\$48.1 billion for Q4/2018, up 7.5 per cent from the previous quarter. Of the total transaction value, HK\$23.2 billion was related to point-of-sale spending payment, HK\$18.0 billion in online spending payment and HK\$6.9 billion in P2P funds transfer. The total float and SVF deposit (Note 4) was HK\$9.7 billion for Q4/2018, 1.9 per cent higher than the previous quarter.

As compared with the end of Q4/2017, the total number of SVF accounts in use at the end of Q4/2018 was up by 20.1 per cent, and the total float and SVF deposit was up by 22.1 per cent. The total number and value of SVF transactions during Q4/2018 were up by 9.7 per cent and 24.4 per cent respectively year-on-year.

Notes:

1. The SVF scheme statistics are compiled from data on SVF schemes issued by the sixteen 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, 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 and WeChat Pay Hong Kong Limited.

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.

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

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.

[Tentative issuance schedule for HKSAR Government Bonds under the](#)

Institutional Bond Issuance Programme

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), as representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSAR Government), published today (March 22) a tentative issuance schedule for Government Bonds (GBs) offered under the Institutional Bond Issuance Programme for the next six-month period from April to September 2019 (Annex). The schedule contains information on, among others, the tentative tenors, tender dates, issue sizes, issue dates and method of issuance of individual GB issues. Further details on the methods of issuance are set out in the Information Memorandum available on the Government Bond Programme's website (www.hkgb.gov.hk).

The issuance schedule is normally published on a half-yearly basis. It should be noted that the tenors, tender dates, issue sizes, issue dates and methods of issuance in the issuance schedule are tentative. The HKMA may make adjustments in the light of prevailing market conditions. A revised issuance schedule may be issued where appropriate. Other details of individual issues are to be confirmed and announced at least four business days prior to the scheduled tender dates.

Nineteen immigration offenders arrested

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a series of territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations, including one codenamed "Twilight" and joint operations with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Champion" and "Powerplayer", from March 18 to 20. A total of 17 illegal workers, one suspected employer and one overstayer were arrested.

During operation "Twilight", ImmD Task Force officers raided 18 target locations including commercial buildings, a construction site, a market, massage parlours, restaurants and a shopping mall. Six illegal workers and one employer were arrested. The illegal workers comprised two men and four women, aged 24 to 46. Among them, one man and one woman were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. Meanwhile, one woman, aged 32, was suspected of employing the illegal workers.

In addition, during operation "Champion", enforcement officers raided eight target locations in Mong Kok and Tsing Yi including a car park, a restaurant and warehouses. Three illegal workers were arrested. The illegal workers comprised two men and one woman, aged 34 to 55. Among them, one man was a holder of a recognisance form, which prohibits him from taking any

employment. One male overstayer, aged 37, was also arrested.

Furthermore, during operation "Powerplayer", enforcement officers raided nine target locations in Tin Shui Wai and Yuen Long districts including factories, recycling sites and scrap yards. Eight illegal workers were arrested. The illegal workers comprised eight men, aged 32 to 41. All of them were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment.

"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.

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 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 threat 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 interference, medical

services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

Red tides sighted

Two red tides have been sighted, an inter-departmental red tide working group reported today (March 22).

Staff of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department spotted a red tide at Stanley Main Beach on Hong Kong Island on March 19. A red flag was hoisted at the beach immediately. Another red tide was spotted by members of the public at Kau Sai Fish Culture Zone on the same day.

Both red tides have dissipated and no associated death of fish has been reported so far.

A spokesman for the working group said, "Two red tides were formed by *Noctiluca scintillans*, which is commonly found in Hong Kong waters and non-toxic."

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) urged mariculturists at Lo Tik Wan, Sok Kwu Wan, Po Toi, Ma Nam Wat, Kau Sai, Kai Lung Wan, Tai Tau Chau and Leung Shuen Wan fish culture zones to monitor the situation closely and increase aeration where necessary.

Red tide is a natural phenomenon. The AFCD's proactive phytoplankton monitoring programme will continue monitoring red tide occurrences to minimise the impact on the mariculture industry and the public.