

External merchandise trade statistics for December 2019

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (January 30) the external merchandise trade statistics for December 2019. In December 2019, the value of Hong Kong's total exports of goods increased by 3.3%, whereas the value of imports of goods decreased by 1.9% over a year earlier.

In December 2019, the value of total exports of goods increased by 3.3% over a year earlier to \$351.3 billion, after a year-on-year decrease of 1.4% in November 2019. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods decreased by 1.9% over a year earlier to \$383.8 billion in December 2019, after a year-on-year decrease of 5.8% in November 2019. A visible trade deficit of \$32.5 billion, equivalent to 8.5% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in December 2019.

For 2019 as a whole, the value of total exports of goods dropped by 4.1% over 2018. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods decreased by 6.5%. A visible trade deficit of \$426.8 billion, equivalent to 9.7% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in 2019.

Comparing the fourth quarter of 2019 with the preceding quarter on a seasonally adjusted basis, the value of total exports of goods increased by 0.5%. Meanwhile, the value of imports of goods decreased by 1.6%.

Analysis by country/territory

Comparing December 2019 with December 2018, total exports to Asia as a whole grew by 10.2%. In this region, increases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations, in particular the mainland of China (the Mainland) (+15.7%), Taiwan (+7.8%), Malaysia (+7.0%) and India (+6.8%). On the other hand, decreases were recorded in the values of total exports to Thailand (-18.2%), Korea (-16.5%), Japan (-13.9%) and Singapore (-13.3%).

Apart from destinations in Asia, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations in other regions, in particular the USA (-22.5%), Germany (-12.1%) and the United Kingdom (-2.0%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports from some major suppliers, in particular the USA (-21.6%), Malaysia (-11.4%), India (-10.9%) and the Mainland (-4.9%). Concurrently, increases were recorded in the values of imports from Vietnam (+55.9%), Taiwan (+21.1%) and Singapore (+6.8%).

For 2019 as a whole, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports to most major destinations, in particular the USA

(-14.8%), India (-12.0%), Germany (-8.9%), Japan (-6.4%) and the Netherlands (-4.4%). The value of total exports to the Mainland also decreased by 3.3%. However, year-on-year increases were registered in the values of total exports to Singapore (+4.1%) and Taiwan (+2.4%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports from most major suppliers, in particular Korea (-20.9%), India (-19.0%), Malaysia (-14.3%), the USA (-7.9%) and Singapore (-7.5%). The value of imports from the Mainland also decreased by 5.9%. On the other hand, the value of imports from Vietnam increased by 18.5%.

Analysis by major commodity

Comparing December 2019 with December 2018, increases were registered in the values of total exports of some principal commodity divisions, in particular "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$23.5 billion or 19.4%) and "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$3.9 billion or 64.1%). However, decreases were registered in the values of total exports of "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$9.4 billion or -13.3%) and "articles of apparel and clothing accessories" (by \$1.5 billion or -16.6%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$6.9 billion or -17.6%), "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$3.7 billion or -5.7%) and "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$2.5 billion or -17.4%). However, an increase was registered in the value of imports of "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$15.3 billion or 11.4%).

For 2019 as a whole, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$48.0 billion or -10.7%), "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$41.2 billion or -5.3%) and "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$18.1 billion or -10.4%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of total exports of "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$22.8 billion or 39.5%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$86.1 billion or -4.9%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$68.2 billion or -16.1%) and "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$51.5 billion or -6.9%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of imports of "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$18.0 billion or 23.5%).

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that the value of merchandise exports resumed a modest year-on-year growth of 3.3% in December 2019, mainly due to a visible increase in exports to the Mainland upon a low base of comparison. Exports to the major advanced economies remained weak, whereas those to other major Asian markets were mixed. For 2019 as a whole, the value of merchandise exports fell by 4.1%, the largest annual decline since 2009.

Looking ahead, Hong Kong's export performance is still subject to high uncertainties in the near term. While global economic conditions showed some signs of stabilisation in the latter part of last year, partly helped by reduced trade tensions between the US and the Mainland, external uncertainties are still high including those associated with lingering trade disputes among major economies, elevated geopolitical tensions and the development of Brexit. Particular attention should also be paid to the development of the novel coronavirus infection as it may weigh on economic performance of some Asian economies and disrupt economic activities in Hong Kong. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Further information

Table 1 at the annex presents the analysis of external merchandise trade statistics for December 2019. Table 2 presents the original monthly trade statistics from January 2016 to December 2019, and Table 3 gives the seasonally adjusted series for the same period.

The values of total exports of goods to 10 main destinations for December 2019 are shown in Table 4, whereas the values of imports of goods from 10 main suppliers are given in Table 5.

Tables 6 and 7 show the values of total exports and imports of 10 principal commodity divisions for December 2019.

All the merchandise trade statistics described here are measured at current prices and no account has been taken of changes in prices between the periods of comparison. A separate analysis of the volume and price movements of external merchandise trade for December 2019 will be released in mid-February 2020.

The December 2019 issue of "Hong Kong External Merchandise Trade" contains detailed analysis on the performance of Hong Kong's external merchandise trade in December 2019 and will be available in mid-February 2020. Users can download the publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp230.jsp).

Enquiries on merchandise trade statistics may be directed to the Trade Analysis Section (2) of the C&SD (Tel.: 2582 5042).