

External Merchandise Trade Statistics for January 2020

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (February 25) the external merchandise trade statistics for January 2020. In January 2020, the values of Hong Kong's total exports and imports of goods both recorded year-on-year decreases, at 22.7% and 16.4% respectively.

In January 2020, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 22.7% over a year earlier to \$269.4 billion, after a year-on-year increase of 3.3% in December 2019. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods decreased by 16.4% over a year earlier to \$300.0 billion in January 2020, after a year-on-year decrease of 1.9% in December 2019. A visible trade deficit of \$30.6 billion, equivalent to 10.2% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in January 2020.

Comparing the three-month period ending January 2020 with the preceding three months on a seasonally adjusted basis, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 4.4%. Meanwhile, the value of imports of goods decreased by 2.2%.

Analysis by country/territory

Comparing January 2020 with January 2019, total exports to Asia as a whole went down by 21.0%. In this region, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to most major destinations, in particular Japan (-28.2%), Malaysia (-23.6%), the mainland of China (the Mainland) (-21.4%), Taiwan (-21.3%), Thailand (-19.8%), Vietnam (-19.7%) and Singapore (-18.8%).

Apart from destinations in Asia, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations in other regions, in particular the United Kingdom (-37.4%), the USA (-33.0%) and Germany (-19.4%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports from some major suppliers, in particular the Mainland (-25.1%), the USA (-16.6%), Malaysia (-15.1%) and Japan (-4.9%). Concurrently, increases were recorded in the values of imports from Vietnam (+20.5%) and the United Kingdom (+14.9%).

Comparing the three months ending January 2020 with the three months ending January 2019, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports to most major destinations, in particular the USA (-26.1%), Japan (-19.4%), Thailand (-17.3%), Germany (-16.1%), Vietnam (-8.7%) and Singapore (-8.0%). The value of total exports to the Mainland also decreased by 0.2%.

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports from some major suppliers, in particular the USA (-16.8%), Malaysia (-15.0%), the Mainland (-12.3%), Singapore (-1.1%)

and the United Kingdom (-0.6%). On the other hand, the value of imports from Vietnam increased by 46.5%.

Analysis by major commodity

Comparing January 2020 with January 2019, decreases were registered in the values of total exports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$19.8 billion or -15.4%), "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$15.4 billion or -24.2%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$8.7 billion or -24.1%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$5.1 billion or -24.7%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$13.2 billion or -22.1%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$9.6 billion or -31.0%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$6.1 billion or -27.3%). However, an increase was registered in the value of imports of "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$3.5 billion or 52.0%).

Comparing the three months ending January 2020 with the three months ending January 2019, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$29.4 billion or -13.8%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$10.0 billion or -8.9%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$7.5 billion or -13.2%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of total exports of "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$14.3 billion or 3.7%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$20.4 billion or -19.6%), "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$18.5 billion or -9.5%) and "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$9.8 billion or -22.6%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of imports of "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$12.3 billion or 3.0%).

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that merchandise exports registered a visible year-on-year decline in January 2020, partly distorted by the difference in timing of the Lunar New Year, which fell in late January this year but in early February last year. It would thus be more meaningful to analyse the trade figures for January and February combined, when available,

for a clearer picture of the underlying situation, particularly the impact of the coronavirus infection in the region on external trade performance.

Looking ahead, despite some easing in US-Mainland trade tensions lately, the global economic recovery is still fragile and fraught with uncertainties. Of particular concern is the threat of the novel coronavirus infection, which will heavily weigh on regional production and trading activities. Hong Kong's merchandise exports will face a very austere external trading environment in the coming few months. 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 January 2020. Table 2 presents the original monthly trade statistics from January 2017 to January 2020, and Table 3 gives the seasonally adjusted series for the same period.

The values of total exports of goods to 10 main destinations for January 2020 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 January 2020.

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 January 2020 will be released in mid-March 2020.

The January 2020 issue of "Hong Kong External Merchandise Trade" contains detailed analysis on the performance of Hong Kong's external merchandise trade in January 2020 and will be available in mid-March 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).