

Provisional statistics of retail sales for April 2019

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (May 31).

The value of total retail sales in April 2019, provisionally estimated at \$37.7 billion, decreased by 4.5% compared with the same month in 2018. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in March 2019 edged down by 0.2% compared with a year earlier. For the first four months of 2019 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total retail sales decreased by 2.0% compared with the same period in 2018.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in April 2019 decreased by 5.0% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in March 2019 decreased by 0.8% compared with a year earlier. For the first four months of 2019 taken together, the provisional estimate of the total retail sales decreased by 2.3% in volume compared with the same period in 2018.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing April 2019 with April 2018, the value of sales of jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts decreased by 11.4%. This was followed by sales of wearing apparel (-2.2% in value); medicines and cosmetics (-6.0%); commodities in department stores (-4.3%); electrical goods and other consumer durable goods, not elsewhere classified (-13.7%); motor vehicles and parts (-6.3%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (-5.4%); furniture and fixtures (-0.4%); books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (-7.5%); Chinese drugs and herbs (-5.7%); and optical shops (-7.8%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets increased by 1.1% in April 2019 over a year earlier. This was followed by sales of other consumer goods, not elsewhere classified (+4.5% in value); food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (+0.8%); and fuels (+3.3%).

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales increased by 1.4% in the three months ending April 2019 over the preceding three-month period, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales increased by 0.9%.

These retail sales statistics measure the sales receipts in respect of goods sold by local retail establishments and are primarily intended for gauging the short-term business performance of the local retail sector. They cover consumer spending on goods but not on services (such as those on housing, catering, medical care and health services, transport and communication, financial services, education and entertainment) which account for over 50% of the overall consumer spending. Moreover, they include

spending on goods in Hong Kong by visitors but exclude spending outside Hong Kong by Hong Kong residents. Hence they should not be regarded as indicators for measuring overall consumer spending.

Users interested in the trend of overall consumer spending should refer to the data series of private consumption expenditure (PCE), which is a major component of the Gross Domestic Product published at quarterly intervals. Compiled from a wide range of data sources, PCE covers consumer spending on both goods (including goods purchased from all channels) and services by Hong Kong residents whether locally or abroad. Please refer to the C&SD publication "Gross Domestic Product (Quarterly)" for more details.

Commentary

A government spokesman said that retail sales remained weak in April. The larger year-on-year decrease recorded in April reflected the still-cautious consumption sentiment amid external uncertainties, but was also partly due to the late arrival of the Labour Day holidays in the Mainland (which fell in early May this year but straddled between April and May last year), which has led to a notable deceleration in the growth rate of visitor arrivals.

The spokesman pointed out further that, in the near term, consumption sentiment will continue to be affected by various external uncertainties, though the sustained expansion in inbound tourism and the largely stable local labour market should provide support to retail sales business. The Government will closely monitor the situation.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures on value index and value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for March 2019 as well as the provisional figures for April 2019. The provisional figures on the value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet as well as the corresponding year-on-year changes for the first four months of 2019 taken together are also shown.

Table 2 presents the revised figures on volume index of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for March 2019 as well as the provisional figures for April 2019. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first four months of 2019 taken together are also shown.

Table 3 shows the movements of the value and volume of total retail sales in terms of the year-on-year rate of change for a month compared with the same month in the preceding year based on the original series, and in terms of the rate of change for a three-month period compared with the preceding three-month period based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The classification of retail establishments follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different

industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey of Retail Sales". Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=B1080003).

Alternatively, the historical series of retail sales statistics can be downloaded in the form of a statistical table at the website of the C&SD

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=D5600089).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7400; email: mrs@censtatd.gov.hk).