

Provisional statistics of retail sales for April 2021

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (June 1).

The value of total retail sales in April 2021, provisionally estimated at \$27.0 billion, increased by 12.1% compared with the same month in 2020. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in March 2021 increased by 20.2% compared with a year earlier. For the first four months of 2021 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total retail sales increased by 8.5% compared with the same period in 2020.

Of the total retail sales value in April 2021, online sales accounted for 6.8%. The value of online retail sales in that month, provisionally estimated at \$1.8 billion, increased by 27.2% compared with the same month in 2020. The revised estimate of online retail sales in March 2021 increased by 44.0% compared with a year earlier. For the first four months of 2021 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of online retail sales increased by 53.1% compared with the same period in 2020.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in April 2021 increased by 10.9% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in March 2021 increased by 19.9% compared with a year earlier. For the first four months of 2021 taken together, the provisional estimate of the total retail sales increased by 8.1% in volume compared with the same period in 2020.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing April 2021 with April 2020, the value of sales of other consumer goods, not elsewhere classified increased by 29.1%. This was followed by sales of electrical goods and other consumer durable goods, not elsewhere classified (+10.2% in value); wearing apparel (+64.7%); jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts (+93.2%); medicines and cosmetics (+16.4%); motor vehicles and parts (+22.8%); fuels (+26.7%); furniture and fixtures (+6.8%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (+36.0%); books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (+10.4%); Chinese drugs and herbs (+15.9%); and optical shops (+34.6%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets decreased by 12.7% in April 2021 over a year earlier. This was followed by sales of food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (-3.7% in value); and commodities in department stores (-22.2%).

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales decreased by 2.8% in the three months ending April 2021 compared with the preceding three-month period, while the

provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales decreased by 3.0%.

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. Data on retail sales are collected from local retail establishments through the Monthly Survey of Retail Sales (MRS). Local retail establishments with and without physical shops are covered in MRS and their sales, both through conventional shops and online channels, are included in the retail sales statistics. Starting from January 2020, data on online retail sales have been collected in MRS. The relevant results were first published in the January 2021 issue of the "Report on Monthly Survey of Retail Sales".

The retail sales statistics 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 continued to grow visibly on a year-on-year basis in April due to a low base of comparison. Yet, retail sales volume was still far below its pre-pandemic level as inbound tourism remained frozen.

Looking ahead, the spokesman pointed out that as inbound tourism will likely take time to recover amid the evolving global pandemic, the near-term outlook for the retail trade is still challenging. It is essential for the community to actively participate in the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme so as to create favourable conditions for a more visible revival of the retail trade and other consumer-facing activities.

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 2021 as well as the provisional figures for April 2021. 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 2021 taken together are also shown.

Table 2 presents the revised figures on value of online retail sales for March 2021 as well as the provisional figures for April 2021. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first four months of 2021 taken together are also shown.

Table 3 presents the revised figures on volume index of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for March 2021 as well as the provisional figures for April 2021. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first four months of 2021 taken together are also shown.

Table 4 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 at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?PCODE=B1080003&SCODE=530). 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/en/EIndexbySubject.html?PCODE=D5600089&SCODE=530).

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