

Provisional statistics of retail sales for August 2019

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (October 2).

The value of total retail sales in August 2019, provisionally estimated at \$29.4 billion, decreased by 23.0% compared with the same month in 2018. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in July 2019 decreased by 11.5% compared with a year earlier. For the first eight months of 2019 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total retail sales decreased by 6.0% 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 August 2019 decreased by 25.3% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in July 2019 decreased by 13.1% compared with a year earlier. For the first eight months of 2019 taken together, the provisional estimate of the total retail sales decreased by 6.9% 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 August 2019 with August 2018, the value of sales of jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts decreased by 47.4%. This was followed by sales of food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (-0.3% in value); commodities in department stores (-29.9%); medicines and cosmetics (-30.0%); electrical goods and other consumer durable goods, not elsewhere classified (-15.4%); wearing apparel (-33.4%); other consumer goods, not elsewhere classified (-20.1%); motor vehicles and parts (-15.6%); books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (-2.5%); furniture and fixtures (-7.4%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (-26.0%); Chinese drugs and herbs (-25.5%); and optical shops (-26.0%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets increased by 1.9% in August 2019 over a year earlier. This was followed by sales of fuels (+0.4% in value).

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales decreased by 12.4% in the three months ending August 2019 compared with the preceding three-month period, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales decreased by 13.9%.

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. 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.

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 showed further sharp deterioration in August and registered the steepest year-on-year decline for a single month on record, even worse than that recorded in September 1998 during the Asian Financial Crisis. Apart from the weak consumer sentiment amid subdued economic conditions, the plunge in August mainly reflected the severe disruptions to inbound tourism and consumption-related activities caused by the local social incidents.

The spokesman further pointed out that retail sales will likely remain in the doldrums in the near term, as the worsened economic outlook and local protests involving violence continue to weigh on consumer sentiment and inbound tourism. The Government will closely monitor the situation and the implications for the labour market and the economy.

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 July 2019 as well as the provisional figures for August 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 eight 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 July 2019 as well as the provisional figures for August 2019. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first eight 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 C&SD (Tel: 3903 7400; email: mrs@censtatd.gov.hk).