

Provisional statistics of retail sales for August 2020

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (September 30).

The value of total retail sales in August 2020, provisionally estimated at \$25.6 billion, decreased by 13.1% compared with the same month in 2019. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in July 2020 decreased by 23.1% compared with a year earlier. For the first eight months of 2020 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total retail sales decreased by 30.2% compared with the same period in 2019.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in August 2020 decreased by 13.4% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in July 2020 decreased by 23.8% compared with a year earlier. For the first eight months of 2020 taken together, the provisional estimate of the total retail sales decreased by 31.6% in volume compared with the same period in 2019.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing August 2020 with August 2019, the value of sales of food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco decreased by 15.7%. This was followed by sales of commodities in department stores (-9.2% in value); jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts (-37.8%); wearing apparel (-29.6%); medicines and cosmetics (-39.8%); fuels (-4.2%); books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (-36.3%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (-42.9%); Chinese drugs and herbs (-24.9%); and optical shops (-35.2%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets increased by 10.8% in August 2020 over a year earlier. This was followed by sales of electrical goods and other consumer durable goods, not elsewhere classified (+10.1% in value); other consumer goods, not elsewhere classified (+5.9%); motor vehicles and parts (+4.2%); and furniture and fixtures (+8.0%).

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales increased by 12.2% in the three months ending August 2020 compared with the preceding three-month period, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales increased by 12.3%.

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 remained weak in August amid the third wave of the local epidemic. While the year-on-year decline narrowed visibly, it was mainly attributable to a very low base of comparison.

Looking ahead, the spokesman further pointed out that as economic conditions remain under pressure and inbound tourism is unlikely to show any swift recovery in the near term, the business environment of the retail trade will remain difficult. Nonetheless, local consumption sentiment may further improve if the recent stabilisation of the local epidemic situation sustains. The Government will monitor the developments closely.

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 2020 as well as the provisional figures for August 2020. 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 2020 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 2020 as well as the provisional figures for August 2020. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first eight months of 2020 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).