

Unemployment and underemployment statistics for January – March 2021

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for January – March 2021) released today (April 22) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased from 7.2% in December 2020 – February 2021 to 6.8% in January – March 2021. The underemployment rate also decreased from 4.0% in December 2020 – February 2021 to 3.8% in January – March 2021.

Comparing January – March 2021 with December 2020 – February 2021, the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) decreased in many major economic sectors, with more distinct decreases observed in the retail, accommodation and food services sector; and human health activities sector. As to the underemployment rate, decreases were mainly seen in the decoration, repair and maintenance for buildings sector; food and beverage service activities sector; and arts, entertainment and recreation sector.

Total employment increased by around 4 000 from 3 610 100 in December 2020 – February 2021 to 3 614 100 in January – March 2021. Over the same period, the labour force also increased by around 2 200 from 3 871 700 to 3 873 900.

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) decreased by around 1 800 from 261 600 in December 2020 – February 2021 to 259 800 in January – March 2021. Over the same period, the number of underemployed persons also decreased by around 6 200 from 154 600 to 148 400.

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong said, "The labour market was under notable pressure in the first quarter of 2021, but the situation stabilised in the latter part of the quarter as the fourth wave of the local epidemic receded. The unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) edged down by 0.1 percentage point from December 2020 – February 2021 to 6.7% in January – March 2021, and after seasonal adjustment it fell by 0.4 percentage point to 6.8%. The underemployment rate decreased by 0.2 percentage point to 3.8%. Meanwhile, total employment went up slightly by 4 000 over the preceding three-month period to 3 614 100, and the number of unemployed persons decreased slightly by 1 800 to 259 800."

Analysed by sector, the unemployment rate of the consumption- and tourism-related sectors (viz. retail, accommodation and food services sectors) combined fell by 0.4 percentage point from the preceding three-month period to 10.7% in January – March 2021. Among these sectors, the unemployment rate for food and beverage service activities declined from 14.1% to 13.3%. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of the human health

activities sector decreased notably. Movements of unemployment rates in other sectors varied, but were generally small in magnitude.

Looking ahead, Dr Law said, "As the pace of recovery is uneven across sectors and inbound tourism remains in the doldrums, the labour market may still face challenges in the near term. Nevertheless, if the local epidemic situation continues to be contained, the operating environment for consumer-facing economic sectors may improve and this should help ease the pressure on the labour market. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely."

He pointed out that in order to enhance job-matching, the Labour Department (LD) will strengthen its liaison with employers with recruitment needs, and organise more thematic job fairs for different sectors (including the property management sector and elderly care services sector etc.) to help job-seekers secure employment. Furthermore, the LD launched the Racial Diversity Employment Programme in November 2020, commissioning non-governmental organisations to strengthen employment support for ethnic minority job-seekers.

Meanwhile, the LD continues to receive and release information on vacancies from various industries for job-seekers with different educational background and working experience. In March 2021, the LD recorded a total of 84 421 vacancies from the private sector, representing an increase of 50.1% over both figures in February 2021 and March 2020. Job-seekers may make use of the LD's online platforms such as the Interactive Employment Service website for obtaining such vacancy information.

Further Information

The unemployment and underemployment statistics were compiled from the findings of the continuous General Household Survey.

The survey for January – March 2021 covered a sample of some 26 000 households or 73 000 persons, selected in accordance with a scientifically designed sampling scheme to represent the population of Hong Kong. Labour force statistics compiled from this sample represented the situation in the moving 3-month period of January to March 2021.

Data on labour force characteristics were obtained from the survey by interviewing each member aged 15 or over in the sampled households.

In the survey, the definitions used in measuring unemployment and underemployment follow closely those recommended by the International Labour Organization.

Statistical tables on the latest labour force statistics can be downloaded at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=D5250021). More detailed analysis of the labour force characteristics is given in the "Quarterly Report on General Household Survey" which is published four times

a year. The latest issue of the publication contains statistics for the quarter October – December 2020 while the next issue covering the quarter January – March 2021 will be available by end May 2021. Users can also download this publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=B1050001).

For enquiries about labour force statistics, please contact the Household Statistics Analysis Section of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 5508 or email: ghs@censtatd.gov.hk).