

Unemployment and underemployment statistics for May – July 2020

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for May – July 2020) released today (August 19) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased from 6.2% in April – June 2020 to 6.1% in May – July 2020. The underemployment rate also decreased from 3.7% in April – June 2020 to 3.5% in May – July 2020.

Comparing May – July 2020 with April – June 2020, decreases in the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) were mainly seen in the information and communication sector; professional and business services (excluding cleaning and similar activities) sector; and education sector. As to the underemployment rate, a decrease was mainly seen in the retail, accommodation and food services sector.

Total employment increased by around 16 600 from 3 620 400 in April – June 2020 to 3 637 000 in May – July 2020. Over the same period, the labour force also increased by around 18 400 from 3 861 100 to 3 879 500.

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) increased by around 1 800 from 240 700 in April – June 2020 to 242 500 in May – July 2020. Over the same period, the number of underemployed persons decreased by around 6 900 from 142 900 to 136 000.

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong said, "The labour market remained austere in May – July 2020, but showed some improvement over April – June as the local epidemic situation was largely under control in May and June. The launch of the Employment Support Scheme has also provided support. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate edged down by 0.1 percentage point from April – June to 6.1% in May – July 2020, ending the continuous increase for nine moving three-month periods. The underemployment rate also went down by 0.2 percentage point to 3.5%. Meanwhile, the year-on-year rates of decline in total employment and labour force narrowed to 5.7% and 2.4% respectively.

"Analysed by sector, the unemployment rate of the consumption- and tourism-related sectors (viz. retail, accommodation and food services sectors) combined edged up to 10.8% in May – July 2020, the highest since the onslaught of SARS, but the underemployment rate eased further. Among these sectors, the unemployment rate for food and beverage service activities stayed near the post-SARS high, at 14.6%. The unemployment rate of the construction sector edged up to 11.3%, the highest since the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Meanwhile, the unemployment situation improved in some sectors, notably in information and communications, professional and

business services (excluding cleaning and similar activities), and education."

Looking ahead, Dr Law said, "The labour market will remain under significant pressure in the near term. The recent surges in infected cases both worldwide and locally have further clouded Hong Kong's economic outlook for the rest of the year. To preserve the vitality of the economy, the Government has rolled out relief measures of unprecedented scale, including a series of measures on job retention and job creation, which help keep workers in employment. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely."

He noted that the Labour Department (LD) has organised the "Opening Up a New Terrain Online Job Fair" on August 18 and 19. A total of 34 organisations have participated in the job fair, offering over 1 200 vacancies from various industries which are available for online applications. The LD will organise other large-scale job fairs and recruitment activities to help job seekers and the unemployed when the local epidemic situation has stabilised.

Meanwhile, the LD continues to receive and release information on vacancies from various industries for job-seekers with different educational background and working experience. Job-seekers may make use of the LD's online platforms such as the Interactive Employment Service website for obtaining employment information.

Further information

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

The survey for May – July 2020 covered a sample of some 26 000 households or 74 000 persons, selected in accordance with a scientifically designed sampling scheme to represent the population of Hong Kong.

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 free of charge 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 January – March 2020 while the next issue covering the quarter April – June 2020 will be available by end August 2020. Users can also download this publication free of charge 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).