

Unemployment and underemployment statistics for October – December 2019

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for October – December 2019) released today (January 20) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased from 3.2% in September – November 2019 to 3.3% in October – December 2019. The underemployment rate remained unchanged at 1.2% in the two periods.

Comparing October – December 2019 with September – November 2019, movements in the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) in different industry sectors varied. Increase in the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) was mainly seen in the decoration, repair and maintenance for buildings sector. As to the underemployment rate, a decrease was mainly seen in the manufacturing sector while an increase was mainly observed in the food and beverage service activities sector.

Total employment decreased by around 12 800 from 3 830 600 in September – November 2019 to 3 817 800 in October – December 2019. Over the same period, the labour force also decreased by around 14 200 from 3 956 000 to 3 941 800.

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) decreased by 1 400 from 125 400 in September – November 2019 to 124 000 in October – December 2019. The number of underemployed persons in October – December 2019 was 47 400, about the same as that in September – November 2019 (46 900).

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong said, "The labour market slackened further as economic conditions stayed weak. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased by 0.1 percentage point to 3.3% in October – December 2019, while the underemployment rate remained unchanged at 1.2%. The year-on-year decline in total employment widened further."

"Business of the consumption- and tourism-related sectors (viz. retail, accommodation and food services sectors) remained in the doldrums. The unemployment rate of these sectors combined stayed at a three-year high of 5.2%; and the underemployment rate rose visibly when compared to the preceding period, particularly for those working in food and beverage service activities. Employment in these sectors continued to record a sharp fall on a year-on-year basis. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of the construction sector, particularly of those involved in decoration, repair and maintenance for buildings, deteriorated visibly when compared to the preceding period."

Looking ahead, Dr Law said, "The labour market will be subject to even more pressure in the near term if the overall economy stays weak. The

Government will monitor the developments closely."

He noted that the Labour Department (LD) will continue to provide comprehensive and free employment services through its job centres, industry-based recruitment centres and on-line platforms etc., and implement special employment programmes for job-seekers who have special needs or difficulties in employment (such as the youth, mature persons and persons with disabilities) to enhance their employability. On the other hand, the Employees Retraining Board has been implementing the "Love Upgrading Special Scheme" to support those recently unemployed or under-employed for skills enhancement.

On large-scale job fairs, the LD will organise the Tuen Mun Job Fair on March 3 and 4 at the Tuen Mun Town Hall, and about 40 employers will participate. LD will also stage the "Job Expo for Elderly and Rehabilitation Services" on March 18 and 19 at the MacPherson Stadium. In addition, industry-based or district-based job fairs are regularly organised at the LD's industry-based recruitment centres and job centres located across the territory.

Further information

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

The survey for October – December 2019 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.

Detailed analysis of 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 July – September 2019 while the next issue covering the quarter October – December 2019 will be available by end February 2020. Users can 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).