

Wage and payroll statistics for September 2019

Overall wage and payroll statistics

According to the figures released today (December 27) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the average wage rate for all the selected industry sections surveyed, as measured by the wage index, increased by 3.4% in nominal terms in September 2019 over a year earlier.

About 62% of the companies reported increase in average wage rates in September 2019 compared with a year ago. 36% of the companies recorded decrease in average wage rates over the same period. The remaining 2% reported virtually no change in average wage rates.

After discounting the changes in consumer prices as measured by the Consumer Price Index (A), the overall average wage rate for all the selected industry sections surveyed remained virtually unchanged when compared with that in September 2018.

As for payroll, the index of payroll per person engaged for all the industry sections surveyed increased by 3.0% in nominal terms in the third quarter of 2019 over a year earlier.

After discounting the changes in consumer prices as measured by the Composite Consumer Price Index, the average payroll per person engaged decreased by 0.3% in real terms in the third quarter of 2019 compared with a year earlier.

The wage rate includes basic wages and other regular and guaranteed allowances and bonuses. Payroll includes elements covered by wage rate as well as other irregular payments to workers such as discretionary bonuses and overtime allowances. The payroll statistics therefore tend to show relatively larger quarter-to-quarter changes, affected by the number of hours actually worked and the timing of payment of bonuses and back-pay.

Sectoral changes

For the nominal wage indices, year-on-year increases were recorded in all selected industry sections in September 2019, ranging from 2.3% to 4.1%.

For the real wage indices, year-on-year increases were recorded in all selected industry sections in September 2019, ranging from 0.1% to 0.6%, except the manufacturing section and import/export, wholesale and retail trades section where year-on-year decreases of 0.1% and 1.1% were recorded respectively.

The year-on-year changes in the nominal and real wage indices for the selected industry sections from September 2018 to September 2019 are shown in Table 1.

As for the nominal indices of payroll per person engaged, year-on-year increases were recorded in all selected industry sections in the third quarter of 2019, ranging from 0.1% to 4.9%.

For the real payroll indices, year-on-year increases were recorded in most of the selected industry sections in the third quarter of 2019, ranging from 0.1% to 1.5%. Yet, year-on-year decreases ranging from 0.3% to 3.1% were recorded in the import/export and wholesale trades section, retail trade section, financial and insurance activities section and social and personal services section.

The year-on-year changes in the nominal and real indices of payroll per person engaged for selected industry sections from the third quarter of 2018 to the third quarter of 2019 are shown in Table 2. The quarterly changes in the seasonally adjusted nominal and real indices of payroll per person engaged between the third quarter of 2018 and the third quarter of 2019 are shown in Table 3.

Commentary

A Government spokesman noted that overall nominal wages continued to increase in September 2019 over a year earlier, but at a somewhat decelerated pace as economic conditions worsened further. After discounting for inflation which has been driven up by elevated pork prices, overall real wages remained unchanged from a year earlier.

Payroll per person engaged, which also covers discretionary bonuses and other irregular payments, likewise registered a decelerated year-on-year increase in nominal terms in the third quarter of 2019. Almost all major sectors saw decelerated growth in payroll. In addition to the economic slowdown, the delay in pay adjustment in some subvented organisations, which makes reference to that in civil service pay, has also contributed to the deceleration in overall payroll growth.

The spokesman added that the earnings situation will be subject to even more downward pressure in the near term if the overall economy remains weak. The Government will monitor the developments closely.

Other information

Both wage indices and payroll indices are compiled quarterly based on the results of the Labour Earnings Survey (LES) conducted by the C&SD.

Wage statistics are conceptually different from the payroll statistics. Firstly, wage rate for an employee refers to the sum earned for his normal hours of work. It covers basic wages and other regular and guaranteed allowances and bonuses, but excludes earnings from overtime work and discretionary bonuses, which are however included in payroll per person engaged. Secondly, the payroll index of an industry is an indicator of the simple average payroll received per person engaged in the industry. Its movement is therefore affected by changes in wage rates, number of hours of work and occupational composition in the industry. In contrast, the wage

index of an industry is devised to reflect the pure changes in wage rate, with the occupational composition between two successive statistical periods being kept unchanged. In other words, the wage index reflects the change in the price of labour. Thirdly, wage index only covers employees up to the supervisory level (i.e. not including managerial and professional employees), whereas payroll index covers employees at all levels and proprietors actively engaged in the work of the establishment. Because of these conceptual and enumeration differences between payroll and wage statistics, the movements in payroll indices and in wage indices do not necessarily match closely with each other.

It should also be noted that different consumer price indices are used for compiling the real indices of wage and payroll to take into account the differences in their respective occupation coverage. Specifically, the Composite Consumer Price Index, being an indicator of overall consumer prices, is taken as the price deflator for payroll of workers at all levels of the occupational hierarchy. The Consumer Price Index (A), being an indicator of consumer prices for the relatively low expenditure group, is taken as the price deflator for wages in respect of employees engaged in occupations up to the supervisory level.

Detailed breakdowns of the payroll and wage statistics are published in the "Quarterly Report of Wage and Payroll Statistics, September 2019". Users can download this publication free of charge from the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp210.jsp?productCode=B1050009).

For enquiries on wage and payroll statistics, please contact the Wages and Labour Costs Statistics Section (1) of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 5550 or email: wage@censtatd.gov.hk).