



Manpower Research and Statistics Department

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LABOUR MARKET ADVANCE RELEASE 2019

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Notations

- : nil or negligible -
- Ρ : Preliminary
- Q : Quarter
- : March Μ
- : June J
- : September
- S D : December

Abbreviations

- FDW : Foreign Domestic Workers
- GDP : Gross Domestic Product
- MOM : Ministry of Manpower
- MTI : Ministry of Trade and Industry
- SSIC : Singapore Standard Industrial Classification
- : Excluding excl

Labour Market Advance Release 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

- Based on preliminary estimates, total employment (excl. FDW¹) continued to grow in 2019, contributed by locals (mainly in *Services* industries with a higher-skilled workforce) and foreigners (mainly in *Construction*). The number of retrenchments in 2019 stayed similar to 2018. As quarterly unemployment rates in 2019 were consistently higher than in 2018, the annual average unemployment rates in 2019 were higher than 2018.
- Total employment grew by 16,600 in 4Q 2019, lower than 3Q 2019 (21,700) but higher than a year ago (14,700). With employment growing steadily each quarter, total employment (excl. FDW) grew by 55,200 for the whole of 2019.
- As with previous years, local employment continued to grow in tandem with total employment. Local employment growth in 2019 (26,500) was similar to 2018 (27,400). In 2019, local employment grew in *Services* industries with a higher-skilled workforce (such as *community, social & personal services, professional services* and *information & communications*), but the increases were balanced by declines in industries (such as *Manufacturing* and *wholesale trade*) which were affected by the softer economic conditions.
- About half of the 28,700 foreign employment growth (excl. FDW) in 2019 was attributed to work permit holders in *Construction*. If employment growth from *Construction* was excluded, foreign employment growth (excl. FDW) in 2019 (14,900) would be lower than local employment growth (27,500), and also lower than foreign employment growth (excl. FDW) in 2018 (16,300).
- The seasonally adjusted unemployment rates held steady in December 2019 (overall: 2.3%; resident: 3.2%; citizen: 3.3%), after trending up in previous quarters. As quarterly unemployment rates in 2019 were consistently higher than in 2018, the annual average¹ unemployment rates in 2019 were higher than in 2018.
- There were slightly more retrenchments in 4Q 2019 (2,700), compared to 3Q 2019 (2,470) and the same period a year ago (2,510). For the full year, retrenchments in 2019 (10,700) was similar to 2018 (10,730).

¹ 'excl FDW' refers to excluding foreign domestic workers.

² Annual figures are the simple averages of the non-seasonally adjusted unemployment figures obtained at quarterly intervals.

Overview

Based on preliminary estimates, total employment (excl. FDW) continued to grow in 2019, contributed by locals (mainly in *Services* industries with a higher-skilled workforce) and foreigners (mainly in *Construction*). The number of retrenchments in 2019 stayed similar to 2018. As quarterly unemployment rates in 2019 were consistently higher than in 2018, the annual average unemployment rates in 2019 were higher than 2018.

Employment^P

Total employment growth in 4Q 2019 lower than 3Q 2019 but higher than 4Q 2018 Total employment (excl. FDW) grew by 16,600 in 4Q 2019, lower than 3Q 2019 (21,700) but higher than a year ago (14,700). In 4Q 2019, employment change slowed across all three broad sectors over the quarter, particularly in *Services*. Although *Services* still formed the bulk of the growth, most *Services* industries saw lower employment growth over the quarter, even while festive hiring boosted growth in food & beverage services & retail trade. *Transportation* & storage had also grown by more.





By Sector

Source: Administrative Records and Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

P: Preliminary

- (1) Data are primarily from administrative records, with the self-employed component estimated from the Labour Force Survey.
- (2) Data for the three major sectors do not add up to the total as the latter includes agriculture, fishing, quarrying, utilities and sewerage & waste management.
- (3) The industries are classified based on SSIC 2015.
- (4) Employment change is the difference in the employment level at the end of the reference period compared with the end of the preceding period.

Total employment continued to grow in 2019 With employment growing steadily each quarter, total employment (excl. FDW) grew by 55,200 for the whole of 2019, higher than in 2018 (38,300). Employment growth in *Construction* picked up, after cuts in the preceding three years. Growth in *Services* was similar to the previous year, while *Manufacturing* continued to see cutbacks for the sixth consecutive year, reflecting declines in *Manufacturing* GDP³.



³ Manufacturing GDP contracted by 1.5% in 2019. Source: MTI's Advance Estimates of GDP, 2 January 2020.



Source: Administrative Records and Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

P: Preliminary

- (1) Data are primarily from administrative records, with the self-employed component estimated from the Labour Force Survey.
- Data for the three major sectors do not add up to the total as the latter includes agriculture, fishing, (2) quarrying, utilities and sewerage & waste management.
- (3) The industries are classified based on SSIC 2015.
- (4) Employment change is the difference in the employment level at the end of the reference period compared with the end of the preceding period.

Local growth in 2019 similar to 2018, while foreign growth was faster, mainly due to Construction As with previous years, local employment continued to grow in tandem with total employment. In fact, local employment grew in every year of the last two decades, even in years when total employment shrank as businesses shed foreign workers.⁴

Local employment growth in 2019 (26,500) was similar to 2018 (27,400). In 2019, local employment grew in *Services* industries with a higher-skilled workforce (such as *community, social & personal services, professional services* and *information & communications*), but the increases were balanced by declines in industries (such as *Manufacturing* and *wholesale trade*) which were affected by the softer economic conditions.

Foreign employment (excl. FDW; 28,700) also grew, and at a faster pace than locals. About half of the 28,700 increase in foreign employment (excl. FDW) in 2019 was attributed to work permit holders in *Construction*. If employment growth from *Construction* was excluded, foreign employment growth (excl. FDW) in 2019 (14,900) would be lower than local employment growth (27,500), and also lower than foreign employment growth (excl. FDW) in 2018 (16,300).

In December 2019, the total number of employed persons (excl. FDW) was 3,516,200, with 2,355,300 locals and 1,160,900 foreigners. Among the employed, two-thirds were locals (67.0%), while the remaining were foreigners (33.0%).



⁴ Labour Market Third Quarter 2019 Technical Note: Employment Change, Unemployment and Retrenchment, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM.



Source: Administrative Records and Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

P: Preliminary

- Notes: (1) Data are primarily from administrative records, with the self-employed component estimated from the Labour Force Survey.
- (2) Locals also known as residents refer to Singapore citizens and permanent residents.
- 'excl. FDW' refers to excluding foreign domestic workers. (3)
- (4) Data may not add up to total due to rounding.

Unemployment^P

Unemployment rates held steady in December 2019 The seasonally adjusted unemployment rates held steady in December 2019 (overall: 2.3%; resident: 3.2%; citizen: 3.3%), after trending up in previous quarters.

An estimated 72,800 residents were unemployed in December 2019, slightly lower than in September 2019 (74,200). The same was observed for citizens (from 64,600 to 62,100).⁵



Source: Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

P: Preliminary

⁵ Based on seasonally adjusted data on number of unemployed persons.

Annual average unemployment rates were higher in 2019 As quarterly unemployment rates in 2019 were consistently higher than in 2018, the annual average unemployment rates in 2019 (average of four quarters) were higher than in 2018 (overall: from 2.1% to 2.3%; resident: from 2.9% to 3.2%; citizen: from 3.0% to 3.3%).



P: Preliminary

Note:

Annual figures are the simple averages of the non-seasonally adjusted unemployment figures obtained at quarterly intervals.

Retrenchments^P

Slight increase in retrenchments over the quarter There were slightly more retrenchments in 4Q 2019 (2,700), compared to 3Q 2019 (2,470⁶) and the same period a year ago (2,510). Over the quarter, retrenchments rose across all three broad sectors.



⁶ There is a revision to the 3Q 2019 figures due to inclusion of responses from late returns.



Source: Labour Market Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

P: Preliminary

- Data pertain to private sector establishments (each with at least 25 employees) and the public sector.
- (2) The industries are classified based on SSIC 2015.
- (3) Data for the three major sectors do not add up to the total as the latter includes Agriculture, Fishing, Quarrying, Utilities and Sewerage & Waste Management.
- (4) Data are rounded to the nearest 10. Hence, they may not add up due to rounding.

Retrenchments in 2019 remained similar to a year ago For the full year, retrenchments in 2019 (10,700) remained similar to 2018 (10,730). Trends were mixed across sectors, with retrenchments rising in *Manufacturing* and *Services*, but declining in *Construction*. *Services* (66%) continued to form the bulk of retrenchments in 2019, followed by *Manufacturing* (26%) and *Construction* (7.5%).







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Source: Labour Market Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

P: Preliminary

- Data pertain to private sector establishments (each with at least 25 employees) and the public sector.
- (2) The industries are classified based on SSIC 2015.
- (3) Data for the three major sectors do not add up to the total as the latter includes Agriculture, Fishing, Quarrying, Utilities and Sewerage & Waste Management.
- (4) Data are rounded to the nearest 10. Hence, they may not add up due to rounding.

Income from Work

Real median income continued to grow in the recent five years Compared to a year ago, real median income growth for Singaporeans was 3.0% in June 2019, similar to that in June 2018 (2.9%). Singaporeans also continued to earn higher incomes in the recent five years. The real median income (including employer CPF contributions) of full-time employed Singaporeans increased by 3.9% per annum (p.a.) from 2014 to 2019, significantly higher than the 2.1% p.a. in the previous five years.

Chart 8 Median Gross Monthly Income From Work (Including Employer CPF Contributions) Of Full-Time Employed Singapore Citizens, June



Source: Comprehensive Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

- (1) Income from work includes employer CPF contributions for employees.
- (2) Data exclude full-time National Servicemen.
- (3) Deflated by Consumer Price Index (CPI) for all items at 2014 prices (2014 =100)
- (4) As data are captured from a sample survey, year-on-year income changes are prone to fluctuations and hence should always be interpreted with caution. Income growth studied over longer periods (e.g. 5 or 10 years) smooths out these fluctuations and hence provides a more direct indication of income growth.

Income growth at the 20th percentile faster than at the median Over the last five years from 2014 to 2019, the real income growth at the 20th percentile⁷ for full-time employed Singaporeans rose by 4.6% p.a., higher than the 3.9% p.a. at the median. This was helped by initiatives to raise the income of low-wage workers in recent years⁸. As a result, their income gap with the median worker⁹ narrowed.

Real income growth at both the median and 20th percentile were significantly faster than the growth in the preceding five years (i.e. 2009 to 2014).

Chart 9 Annualised Change In Real* Gross Monthly Income From Work (Including Employer CPF Contributions) Of Full-Time Employed Singapore Citizens



Source: Comprehensive Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research & Statistics Department, MOM

- (1) Data exclude full-time National Servicemen.
- (2) * Deflated by Consumer Price Index for all items at 2014 prices (2014=100).

⁷ The 20th percentile income of full-time employed Singaporeans was \$2,340 (including employer CPF contributions) and \$2,058 (excluding employer CPF contributions) in June 2019.

⁸ This includes the National Wages Council's quantitative wage recommendations for low-wage workers and Progressive Wage Model for the cleaning, security and landscape sectors.

⁹ Refers to the ratio of the median income to the 20th percentile income of full-time employed Singaporeans.

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TABLE 1 GROSS MONTHLY INCOME FROM WORK (INCLUDING EMPLOYER CPF) OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYED SINGAPORE CITIZENS, 2009 - 2019 (June)

Year/ Period	Median (50th Percentile)	20th Percentile	
	Level (Dollars)		
2009	2,748	1,468	
2010	2,887	1,500	
2011	3,070	1,617	
2012	3,248	1,647	
2013	3,480	1,800	
2014	3,566	1,856	
2015	3,798	1,965	
2016	3,823	2,021	
2017	4,050	2,095	
2018	4,183	2,239	
2019	4,333	2,340	
	Nominal Change (Per Cent Per Annum)		
2009 - 2019	4.7	4.8	
2009 - 2014	5.3	4.8	
2014 - 2019	4.0	4.7	
	Real* Change (Per Cent Per Annum)		
2009 - 2019	3.0	3.1	
2009 - 2014	2.1	1.5	
2014 - 2019	3.9	4.6	

Source : Comprehensive Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research and Statistics Department, MOM

Notes :

1. Data exclude full-time National Servicemen.

2. As data are captured from a sample survey, year-on-year income changes are prone to fluctuations and hence should always be interpreted with caution. Income growth studied over longer periods (e.g. 5 or 10 years) smooths out these fluctuations and hence provides a more direct indication of income growth.

3. * - Deflated by Consumer Price Index for all items at 2014 prices (2014 = 100).

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TABLE 2 GROSS MONTHLY INCOME FROM WORK (EXCLUDING EMPLOYER CPF) OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYED SINGAPORE CITIZENS, 2009 - 2019 (June)

Year/ Period	Median (50th Percentile)	20th Percentile
	Level (Dollars)	
2009	2,500	1,300
2010	2,588	1,400
2011	2,708	1,500
2012	2,925	1,500
2013	3,052	1,613
2014	3,179	1,639
2015	3,250	1,733
2016	3,375	1,836
2017	3,500	1,900
2018	3,683	2,000
2019	3,792	2,058
	Nominal Change (Per Cent Per Annum)	
2009 - 2019	4.3	4.7
2009 - 2014	4.9	4.7
2014 - 2019	3.6	4.7
	Real* Change (Per Cent Per Annum)	
2009 - 2019	2.6	3.0
2009 - 2014	1.7	1.5
2014 - 2019	3.5	4.6

Source : Comprehensive Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research and Statistics Department, MOM

Notes :

1. Data exclude full-time National Servicemen.

2. As data are captured from a sample survey, year-on-year income changes are prone to fluctuations and hence should always be interpreted with caution. Income growth studied over longer periods (e.g. 5 or 10 years) smooths out these fluctuations and hence provides a more direct indication of income growth.

3. * - Deflated by Consumer Price Index for all items at 2014 prices (2014 = 100).

Explanatory Notes

Unemployment

Source

Labour Force Survey

Coverage

The survey covers private households in Singapore. It excludes workers living in construction worksites, dormitories and workers' quarters at the workplace and persons commuting from abroad to work in Singapore. Estimates of the total labour force are derived by combining data on residents (also known as locals) obtained from the survey with foreign employment data compiled from administrative records.¹

Concepts and Definitions

Unemployed persons refer to persons aged 15 years and over who did not work but were actively looking and available for work during the reference period. They include persons who were not working but were taking steps to start their own business or taking up a new job after the reference period.

Unemployment rate is defined as the percentage of unemployed persons to the labour force (i.e. employed and unemployed persons) aged 15 years and over.

Uses and Limitations

The unemployment rate is probably the best-known measure of the labour market. It measures unutilised labour supply and is useful in the study of the economic cycle as it is closely related to economic fluctuations.

Unemployment can have frictional, cyclical and structural elements. As it takes time for job seekers and employers to find a match, there is always a certain level of frictional unemployment due to people changing jobs and from new entrants looking for work for the first time. Unemployment can also be structural e.g. arising from a mismatch between the job seekers and the job openings available. With structural unemployment, even if job vacancies and job seekers coexist in the labour market, they may not be matched over a long period of time. Finally, unemployment can be cyclical. This occurs when there is a general decline in demand for manpower as aggregate demand for goods and services fall in the event of a cyclical downturn. Unlike structural and frictional unemployment where the problem is in matching job openings with job seekers, cyclical unemployment occurs when there are not enough jobs to go around.

Unemployment can vary due to changes in demand or supply of manpower. It can decline if more people succeed in securing employment or when the unemployed persons stop looking for a job and leave the labour force either temporarily (e.g. to take up training) or permanently (e.g. to retire). Conversely, unemployment may rise due to increase in labour supply from new entrants or re-entrants to the labour market. It will also rise if more people quit their jobs to look for alternative employment or if there is an increase in layoffs.

¹ Population figures for each quarter will be finalised in the next quarter. Unemployment data are therefore subject to the latest available population estimates.

Employment

Source

Primarily from administrative records. The self-employed component is estimated from the Labour Force Survey.

Coverage

Employment data comprise all persons in employment i.e. employees and the self-employed. However, it excludes men who are serving their 2-year full-time national service liability in the Singapore Armed Forces, Police and Civil Defence Forces.

Data on the number of local (also known as resident) employees are compiled from the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Board's administrative records of active contributors, defined as local employees who have at least one CPF contribution paid for him/her. A local employee is a Singapore citizen or Permanent Resident who is employed by an employer under a contract of service or other agreement entered into in Singapore. Every local employee and his/her employer are required to make monthly contributions to the CPF. The CPF is a compulsory savings scheme that provides workers financial security in old age and helps meet the needs of healthcare, home-ownership, family protection and asset enhancement.

Data on foreigners working in Singapore are compiled from administrative records of foreigners on valid work passes issued by the Ministry of Manpower. Foreigners can work in Singapore only if they have valid work passes issued by the Ministry of Manpower.

The number of self-employed residents is estimated from the Labour Force Survey. The self-employed comprises persons aged 15 years and over who are own account workers, employers or contributing family workers.

Concepts and Definitions

Employment change refers to the change in the number of persons who are in employment, derived by taking the difference in the employment level (i.e. number of employed persons) at the end of the reference period compared with the end of the preceding period. A positive change refers to the additional number of persons who are in employment, while a negative change refers to the decline in number of persons in employment.

Uses and Limitations

Analysis of employment change over time helps in understanding the impact of cyclical and structural changes in the economy on the demand for workers. In particular, the breakdown of employment by industry helps identify sectors where employment is growing or falling.

Conceptually, the change in employment over the reference period is the difference between people entering and exiting employment during the period. Users should not mistake an increase in employment as gross job creation i.e. the increase in employment in expanding establishments only.

Retrenchment

Source

Labour Market Survey

Coverage

Before 2006, the survey covers private establishments with at least 25 employees. From 2006 onwards, the survey also includes the public sector comprising government ministries, organs of state and statutory boards.

Concepts and Definitions

Retrenchment refers to

i) termination of permanent employees due to redundancy; and
 ii) early termination of term contract employees due to redundancy.
 In the public sector, it includes those who left service under the Special Resignation Scheme².

Uses and Limitations

Data on retrenchment are useful in the analysis of re-structuring or ailing industries.

The number of retrenched persons (flow) should not be confused with persons unemployed (stock). Not all retrenched persons will be unemployed as some will re-enter into employment or decide to leave the labour force. If the persons have not found a new job and are actively looking and available for work, they join the pool of unemployed.

Income from Work

Source

Comprehensive Labour Force Survey

Coverage

The survey covers private households in Singapore. It excludes workers living in construction worksites, dormitories and workers' quarters at the workplace and persons commuting from abroad to work in Singapore.

Concepts and Definitions

Gross monthly income from work refers to income earned from employment. For employees, it refers to the gross monthly wages or salaries before deduction of employee CPF contributions and personal income tax. It comprises basic wages, overtime pay, commissions, tips, other allowances and one-twelfth of annual bonuses. For self-employed persons, gross monthly income refers to the average monthly profits from their business, trade or profession (i.e. total receipts less business expenses incurred) before deduction of income tax.

² The Special Resignation Scheme (introduced in April 1988) allows redundant non-deployable Civil Service or Statutory Board employees to leave their organisations with compensation.

Median (or 50th percentile) income refers to the income level at the middle of the income distribution which divides the bottom half of income earners from the upper half.

20th percentile income refers to the income level which divides the bottom 20% of income earners from the rest.

Uses and Limitations

Data on income from work are useful in understanding the living standards of workers. The data are useful in economic planning and social development.

As the Comprehensive Labour Force Survey covers a representative sample of households in Singapore, the income data can be used to study the income trends of the employed persons covering both employees and the self-employed.

When analysing how workers' income has changed over time, it is more meaningful to focus on workers in full-time employment. This will avoid clouding the income trends with the changing mix of full-timers and part-timers among employed persons, as part-time work involves shorter working hours and correspondingly lower income. Moreover, full-timers form the bulk of workers in Singapore. As data are captured from a sample survey, year-on-year income changes are prone to fluctuations and hence should always be interpreted with caution. Income growth studied over longer periods (e.g. 5 or 10 years) smooths out these fluctuations and hence provides a more direct indication of income growth.

Data on the real change in income from work enables users to study the trends in income growth after adjusting for inflation, as changes in the price of consumer goods and services over time affect the purchasing power of individuals. To adjust for inflation, we use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for all items.

OTHER RELEASES





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PAST

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