
FACT SHEET

Employment statistics in the construction industry

1. Background

1.1 With various major infrastructure projects and other major and minor works projects scheduled to come on stream, there has been concern about the supply of manpower in construction-related disciplines to meet the rising demand in the next few years. According to the Construction Industry Council and some industry stakeholders, the local construction industry is facing the problems of an aging workforce and a shortage of young skilled workers in some trades.¹ In this fact sheet, relevant labour statistics are provided to give an overview of the employment situation of the construction sector in Hong Kong.

2. Supply of construction workers in Hong Kong

2.1 According to the Construction Workers Registration Authority, there were a total of 266 987 valid registered construction workers as at 30 September 2010 (refer to **Table 1**). The number of skilful workers (comprising skilled workers, provisional skilled workers, semi-skilled workers and provisional semi-skilled workers) and general workers² accounted for 39.5% and 60.5% respectively. Almost two-thirds (66.5%) of the registered construction workers were aged 40 or above and 6.4% were below 25. Among those workers aged 40 or above, up to 42.5% were skilful workers, whereas only 16.5% of those aged below 25 were skilful workers.

¹ Construction Industry Council (2010) and Toh (2010).

² Under the *Construction Workers Registration Ordinance*, registered construction workers are divided into five types, namely skilled workers, provisional skilled workers, semi-skilled workers, provisional semi-skilled workers and general workers.

Table 1 – Number of registered construction workers in Hong Kong (as at 30 September 2010)

| Age | Skilful workers | | | | Sub-total | Registered general workers | Total |
|--------------|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Registered skilled worker | Registered skilled worker (provisional) | Registered semi-skilled worker | Registered semi-skilled worker (provisional) | | | |
| Below 20 | 10 | 0 | 573 | 0 | 583 (0.2%) | 1 770 (0.7%) | 2 353 (0.9%) |
| 20-24 | 369 | 0 | 1 817 | 27 | 2 213 (0.8%) | 12 341 (4.6%) | 14 554 (5.5%) |
| 25-29 | 3 683 | 136 | 1 801 | 144 | 5 764 (2.2%) | 13 352 (5.0%) | 19 116 (7.2%) |
| 30-34 | 8 196 | 366 | 1 044 | 92 | 9 698 (3.6%) | 14 719 (5.5%) | 24 417 (9.1%) |
| 35-39 | 10 107 | 503 | 1 074 | 84 | 11 768 (4.4%) | 17 121 (6.4%) | 28 889 (10.8%) |
| 40-44 | 10 571 | 536 | 1 196 | 77 | 12 380 (4.6%) | 19 172 (7.2%) | 31 552 (11.8%) |
| 45-49 | 15 635 | 867 | 1 568 | 104 | 18 174 (6.8%) | 24 101 (9.0%) | 42 275 (15.8%) |
| 50-54 | 19 502 | 1 251 | 2 122 | 126 | 23 001 (8.6%) | 28 064 (10.5%) | 51 065 (19.1%) |
| 55-59 | 11 611 | 861 | 1 383 | 81 | 13 936 (5.2%) | 18 317 (6.9%) | 32 253 (12.1%) |
| 60 or above | 6 715 | 543 | 694 | 50 | 8 002 (3.0%) | 12 511 (4.7%) | 20 513 (7.7%) |
| Total | 86 399 (32.4%) | 5 063 (1.9%) | 13 272 (5.0%) | 785 (0.3%) | 105 519 (39.5%) | 161 468 (60.5%) | 266 987 (100.0%) |

Source: Construction Workers Registration Authority (2010).

3. Employment situation in the construction sector in Hong Kong

3.1 Amidst the global financial crisis, the unemployment rate of the construction sector³ soared to 11.2% in the first quarter of 2009 from 6.1% in the previous quarter, with the unemployed population up 90% to 33 400. After reaching a peak of 12.0% in the second quarter of 2009 (refer to **Table 2**), the sector's unemployment rate subsequently dropped to 7.4% in the last quarter of 2009 and increased slightly during the first half of 2010. In any event, the unemployment rate of the construction sector has remained consistently higher than the overall unemployment rate in Hong Kong over the past 30 months.

3.2 The overall employment population in the construction sector rose from the lowest level of 254 900 since the start of the global financial crisis to over 270 000 between the last quarter of 2009 and the second quarter of 2010. Meanwhile, the underemployment rate in the sector declined for four consecutive quarters from a peak of 13.3% in the second quarter of 2009 to 9.6% in the second quarter of 2010, with the number of underemployed persons down from around 38 500 to below 30 000.

3.3 On average, people aged 40 or over constituted more than 70% and 60% of the unemployed and employed population in the construction sector respectively (refer to **Table 3**). Between the last quarter of 2009 and the second quarter of 2010, while the total employment in the sector remained relatively stable (i.e. consistently above 270 000), the number of employees aged below 40 fell to 89 000, the lowest level in 30 months. On the contrary, there was a steady increase in the number of employees aged 40 or over from 161 200 in the second quarter of 2009 to 181 800 in the corresponding period of 2010, which was higher than the level before the outbreak of the global financial crisis.

³ The construction sector includes building construction, civil engineering, demolition and site preparation, building services installation and maintenance, and decoration and repair.

Table 2 – Employment statistics in the construction sector in Hong Kong, with reference made to the overall employment situation in Hong Kong⁽¹⁾

| (Thousands) | 2008 | | | | 2009 | | | | 2010 | |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun | Jul-Sep | Oct-Dec | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun | Jul-Sep | Oct-Dec | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun |
| Employment in Hong Kong | | | | | | | | | | |
| Labour force | 3 653.5 | 3 638.2 | 3 657.4 | 3 661.9 | 3 694.9 | 3 688.6 | 3 704.7 | 3 669.9 | 3 657.3 | 3 664.0 |
| Participation rate | 61.1% | 60.7% | 60.9% | 60.9% | 61.3% | 61.1% | 61.0% | 60.3% | 60.0% | 59.9% |
| Unemployed persons | 119.0 | 121.1 | 133.6 | 141.2 | 187.2 | 202.9 | 209.1 | 172.8 | 160.6 | 171.8 |
| Unemployment rate (seasonally adjusted) | 3.4% | 3.3% | 3.4% | 4.1% | 5.2% | 5.3% | 5.3% | 4.9% | 4.4% | 4.6% |
| Job seekers | 111.7 | 112.3 | 123.9 | 134.9 | 178.0 | 194.6 | 198.7 | 164.2 | 151.9 | 161.8 |
| Employed persons | 3 534.5 | 3 517.1 | 3 523.7 | 3 520.7 | 3 507.6 | 3 485.7 | 3 495.5 | 3 497.1 | 3 496.7 | 3 492.1 |
| Underemployed persons | 70.5 | 67.9 | 66.3 | 69.0 | 79.2 | 84.0 | 89.9 | 84.5 | 80.0 | 73.7 |
| Underemployment rate | 1.9% | 1.9% | 1.8% | 1.9% | 2.1% | 2.3% | 2.4% | 2.3% | 2.2% | 2.0% |
| Employment in the construction industry of Hong Kong | | | | | | | | | | |
| Unemployed persons | 21.3 | 21.3 | 15.8 | 17.5 | 33.4 | 34.7 | 27.0 | 22.1 | 23.9 | 22.3 |
| Unemployment rate | 7.5% | 7.6% | 5.5% | 6.1% | 11.2% | 12.0% | 9.4% | 7.4% | 8.0% | 7.6% |
| Job seekers | 15.7 | 16.0 | 12.2 | 14.3 | 26.9 | 28.7 | 22.7 | 17.3 | 19.1 | 16.3 |
| Employed persons | 264.1 | 259.3 | 271.8 | 270.6 | 265.1 | 254.9 | 260.8 | 275.9 | 273.4 | 271.1 |
| Underemployed persons | 31.0 | 29.1 | 29.8 | 31.6 | 31.3 | 38.5 | 35.4 | 36.1 | 32.1 | 28.0 |
| Underemployment rate | 10.9% | 10.4% | 10.4% | 11.0% | 10.5% | 13.3% | 12.3% | 12.1% | 10.8% | 9.6% |

Note: (1) Definitions of the various terms used in the table are given below:

- labour force refers to the land-based non-institutional population aged 15 and over who satisfy the criteria for being classified as employed population or unemployed population;
- unemployed persons refer to those persons aged 15 or over who: (i) have not had a job; (ii) have not performed any work for pay or profit; (iii) have been available for work during the seven days before enumeration; and (iv) have sought work during the 30 days before enumeration;
- unemployment rate refers to the proportion of unemployed persons in the labour force;
- employed persons comprise those persons aged 15 and over who have been at work for pay or profit during the seven days before enumeration or have had formal job attachment;
- job seekers belong to the unemployed category and include first-time job seekers;
- underemployed persons are a group of employed persons who have involuntarily worked less than 35 hours during the seven days before enumeration and have sought additional work during the 30 days before enumeration, or have not sought additional work but have been available for additional work during the seven days before enumeration; and
- underemployment rate refers to the proportion of underemployed persons in the labour force.

Sources: Census and Statistics Department (2008-2010).

Table 3 – Employment statistics in the construction industry of Hong Kong by age⁽¹⁾

| (Thousands) | 2008 | | | | 2009 | | | | 2010 | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun | Jul-Sep | Oct-Dec | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun | Jul-Sep | Oct-Dec | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun |
| Unemployed persons | 21.3 (100.0%) | 21.3 (100.0%) | 15.8 (100.0%) | 17.5 (100.0%) | 33.4 (100.0%) | 34.7 (100.0%) | 27.0 (100.0%) | 22.1 (100.0%) | 23.9 (100.0%) | 22.3 (100.0%) |
| 15-39 | 5.0 (23.5%) | 5.6 (26.3%) | 4.3 (27.2%) | 4.9 (28.0%) | 8.1 (24.3%) | 9.8 (28.2%) | 7.2 (26.7%) | 5.7 (25.8%) | 6.7 (28.0%) | 6.0 (26.9%) |
| 40 or above | 16.3 (76.5%) | 15.7 (73.7%) | 11.4 (72.2%) | 12.6 (72.0%) | 25.3 (75.7%) | 24.9 (71.8%) | 19.8 (73.3%) | 16.3 (73.8%) | 17.2 (72.0%) | 16.3 (73.1%) |
| Employed persons | 264.1 (100.0%) | 259.3 (100.0%) | 271.8 (100.0%) | 270.6 (100.0%) | 265.1 (100.0%) | 254.9 (100.0%) | 260.8 (100.0%) | 275.9 (100.0%) | 273.4 (100.0%) | 271.1 (100.0%) |
| 15-39 | 104.2 (39.5%) | 101.1 (39.0%) | 95.8 (35.2%) | 94.2 (34.8%) | 100.0 (37.7%) | 93.7 (36.8%) | 96.7 (37.1%) | 100.5 (36.4%) | 95.8 (35.0%) | 89.3 (32.9%) |
| 40 or above | 160.0 (60.6%) | 158.2 (61.0%) | 176.0 (64.8%) | 176.3 (65.2%) | 165.1 (62.3%) | 161.2 (63.2%) | 164.2 (63.0%) | 175.4 (63.6%) | 177.6 (65.0%) | 181.8 (67.1%) |
| Underemployed persons | 31.0 (100.0%) | 29.1 (100.0%) | 29.8 (100.0%) | 31.6 (100.0%) | 31.3 (100.0%) | 38.5 (100.0%) | 35.4 (100.0%) | 36.1 (100.0%) | 32.1 (100.0%) | 28.0 (100.0%) |
| 15-39 | 8.1 (26.1%) | 8.3 (28.5%) | 6.9 (23.2%) | 8.6 (27.2%) | 9.6 (30.7%) | 9.9 (25.7%) | 10.9 (30.8%) | 10.0 (27.7%) | 8.1 (25.2%) | 7.2 (25.7%) |
| 40 or above | 22.8 (73.5%) | 20.9 (71.8%) | 22.9 (76.8%) | 23.0 (72.8%) | 21.7 (69.3%) | 28.6 (74.3%) | 24.5 (69.2%) | 26.1 (72.3%) | 24.0 (74.8%) | 20.9 (74.6%) |

Note: (1) Owing to rounding, there may be a slight discrepancy between the sum of individual items and the total as shown in the table.

Sources: Census and Statistics Department (2008-2010).

References

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