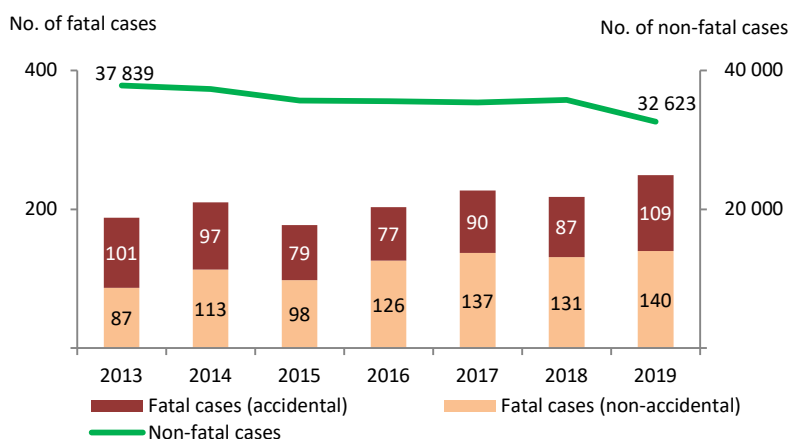




Occupational injuries in the construction sector

Figure 1 – Trends of occupational injuries⁽¹⁾ and deaths⁽²⁾

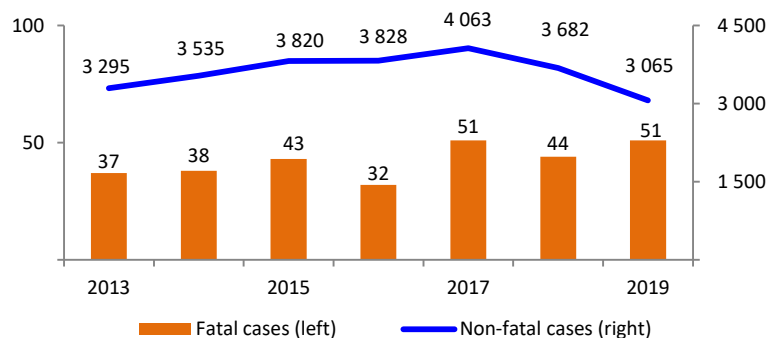


Notes: (1) Occupational injuries are injuries at workplaces reported under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, resulting in death or incapacity for work for more than three days.
(2) Occupational deaths could be segregated into accident-related and others. Classification for 2019 is provisional.

Figure 2 – Occupational injuries by major sector in 2019

Sector	Non-fatal cases	% in total	Fatal cases	% in total
Catering	4 911	15.1%	10	4.0%
Transport	3 816	11.7%	43	17.3%
Construction	3 065	9.4%	51	20.5%
Real estate	2 222	6.8%	18	7.2%
Cleaning services	2 157	6.6%	15	6.0%
Others	16 452	50.4%	112	45.0%
Total	32 623	100.0%	249	100.0%

Figure 3 – Occupational injuries in the construction sector



Highlights

- During 2013-2019, the total number of occupational injuries in Hong Kong declined by 14%, possibly because of enhanced awareness of occupational safety in the community (Figure 1). On the other hand, occupational deaths bucked the trend and surged by 32% in six years to 249 in 2019. While more than half of the fatal cases were not caused by accidents in recent years, there have been concerns that these deaths could still be work-related (e.g. overexertion in discharge of duties). In October 2017, the Government commissioned the Occupational Safety and Health Council to conduct a study on causes of such non-accidental deaths, and findings are expected to be available at around end-2020.
- As the construction sector is prone to accidents amidst more risky working environment, the sector registered 51 fatal cases in 2019 (Figure 2). It accounts for 21% of overall occupational deaths, the highest across major sectors. For non-fatal injuries, the construction sector recorded 3 065 cases in 2019, taking up 9% of the total and being the third highest in the economy. As such, this piece focuses on occupational injuries and deaths in construction.
- The number of non-fatal injuries in construction hit a peak of 4 063 in 2017, but decreased by 25% to 3 065 cases in 2019 (Figure 3). To a certain extent, this decrease could be attributable to a 14% drop in construction workforce in recent years, upon winding down of a few major construction projects. Yet the number of fatal cases in the sector stayed high at 51 cases in 2019, with "falling from height" remaining a dominant cause of accidental deaths. In response, the Government launched an online platform in March 2019 for construction workers to report unsafe working conditions.

Occupational injuries in the construction sector (cont'd)

Figure 4 – Convictions of occupational safety offences in the construction sector

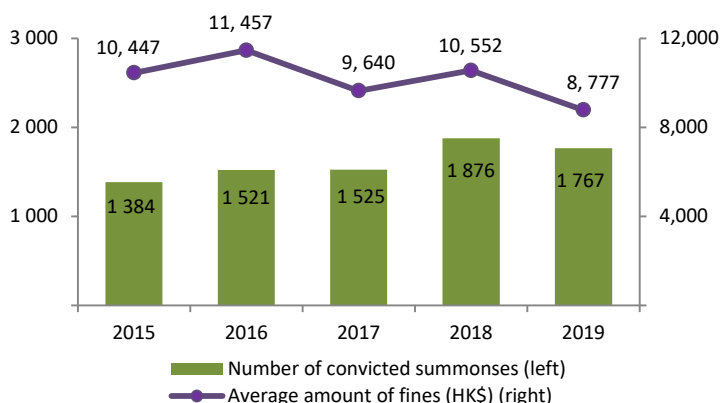
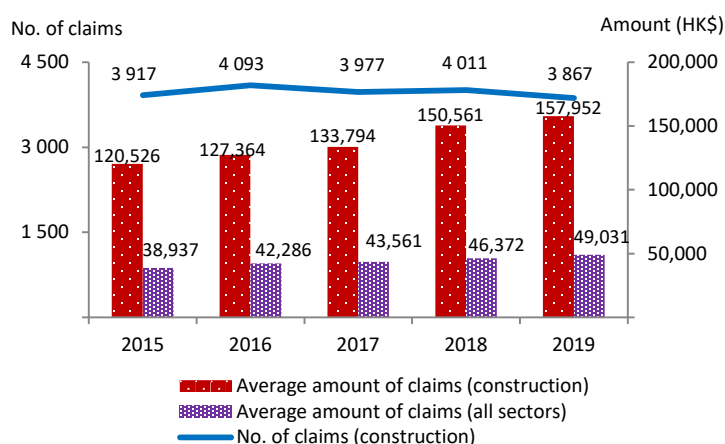
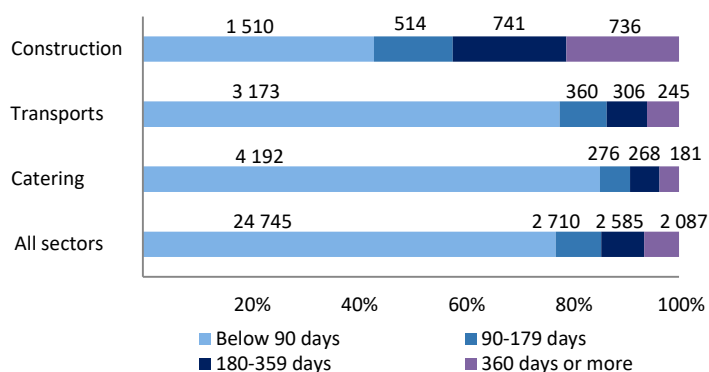


Figure 5 – Compensation claims⁽¹⁾ by injured construction workers



Note: (1) Including only settled cases involving death or incapacitation of employees for more than three days.

Figure 6 – Lost working days of injured workers by sector in 2019



Highlights

- However, there are concerns that the existing penalties under the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance (Cap. 59) and the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509) are too light to pre-empt construction accidents. During 2015-2019, although convictions for breaching occupational safety rules in construction increased by 28% to 1,767 cases amidst enhanced inspections, the average amount of fines was low, falling from HK\$10,400 to HK\$8,800 (Figure 4). Even for fatal industrial accidents, fines for the construction sector averaged at only HK\$27,000 in 2018. After consultation with the Labour Advisory Board, the Government is aiming to amend the legislation by mid-2022, increasing the maximum fines for such offences noticeably (e.g. from HK\$ 0.5 million to HK\$6 million or 10% of business turnover of the enterprise). Response to this proposal is mixed, with some employers expressing "serious reservations" over the penalty.
- Turning to compensation to injured construction workers under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (Cap. 282), the annual number of claims ranged between 3,800-4,100 during 2015-2019 (Figure 5). Reflecting the severity of construction injuries, the amount of compensation in construction averaged at HK\$158,000 in 2019, three times the economy-wide figure. In spite of the 31% increase in the average amount of compensation over the past five years, there are concerns that it is still inadequate to support the injured workers.
- As injured construction workers require much longer time to recover, 57% of claimants in the sector registered loss of 90 working days or more in 2019 (Figure 6). This was far above the economy-wide figure of 23%. Apart from the severity of injuries, the daily compensation ceiling (HK\$300) for out-patient treatment restrains the rehabilitation options available to injured construction workers and lengthens their recovery periods. Against this backdrop, a new initiative was announced in the Policy Address 2019, aiming to provide rehabilitation services in the private sector for those construction workers who cannot return to work six weeks after injuries. This three-year pilot programme is scheduled to start in 2022.

Data sources: Latest figures from Census and Statistical Department and Labour Department.

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