

POLICY REVIEW



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Cabinet steps up relief for small firms

Government to remove temporary controls imposed on businesses

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The State Council has ratcheted up relief measures for small, medium-sized and micro-sized businesses — including steps to cut red tape and cultivate new growth drivers — to shelter them from the impact of the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic.

At its executive meeting on March 17, the Cabinet decided to streamline administration and bolster services and compliance oversight so that government aid can deliver tangible benefits to SMEs and micro-sized businesses, which are the primary creators of jobs.

The government will remove temporary control measures that are no longer necessary as well as arbitrary certification requirements and fees and move more administrative procedures online to reduce corporate burdens, the Cabinet said in a statement.

The authorities will also subsidize property owners and platform companies who forgo profits to aid such businesses.

Small businesses unable to pay their power or water bills during the outbreak will not have supplies cut off or face fines for overdue payments, the Cabinet said.

It also pledged greater support for Internet Plus business models, the platform economy and new business models in the digital economy to create more jobs and new professions.

The government will focus on aged care, infant day care and domestic services and other sectors with huge potential to create jobs to spur the growth of life service industries and support the development of platforms promoting job security and the sharing of employees, the Cabinet said.

The outbreak has affected China's job market, with the surveyed urban unemployment rate reaching 6.2

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percent in February, up by 1 percentage point from January. Many officials and experts have warned that SMEs, which contribute over 60 percent of the country's GDP and over 80 percent of urban employment, could be hit the hardest by the pandemic.

Premier Li Keqiang said during an inspection trip in Beijing on Friday that the government's fiscal, tax

and financial policies must prioritize support to small, medium-sized, micro-sized and household businesses.

“We must adopt all-out measures to ensure their survival,” he said.

To stabilize the job market and bolster support to SMEs and micro-sized businesses, the General Office of the State Council unveiled a raft of measures in a guideline published on Friday.

SMEs and micro-sized businesses can enjoy, at maximum, a full return of their unemployment insurance fees if they avoid or reduce the number of workers being laid off, the guideline said.

Other measures include more help for migrant workers and college graduates to find jobs and reinforced support to ensure the basic living standards of the unemployed are maintained.

Ma Liang, a professor of public management at Renmin University of China, said it is imperative that the government focuses its various reform measures on benefiting hard-hit small, micro-sized and household businesses.

Authorities must avoid making temporary restrictive measures they have imposed during the epidemic long-term practices so as not to shackle socio-economic development, he said. Otherwise the hard-won results of the government's administrative reform over the years would be in vain, Ma warned.

Wu Ge, chief economist with Changjiang Securities, said the impact of the escalating global pandemic is set to intensify, which will pose more severe challenges to Chinese exporters and the economy as a whole.

The outbreak had hit SMEs particularly hard, he said, and public investment must lead the way for the economic rebound.

“The economic slowdown will have a lagged effect on the job market in the future,” Ma said. “It will be even more urgent to shore up growth as a bottom line for stable employment.”

He added that countercyclical policies seeking to drive expansion will be the center of the government's structural policies.

POLICY RESPONSE

Provinces told to resume vaccination services

By **WANG QINGYUN**
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A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for health, national development and reform, and agriculture and rural affairs, have responded recently to public concerns.

Local clinics to offer vaccination services

Provinces other than Hubei should resume full vaccination services that have been halted due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, the National Health Commission said.

In a statement issued on its website on March 17, the commission

said provincial health authorities should guide their vaccination clinics in making and implementing plans to prevent the transmission of novel coronavirus infections when resuming services.

Local centers for disease control and prevention should help the clinics offer vaccine appointments online or over the phone.

Priority should be given to vaccinations required by the national immunization program but interrupted by the outbreak, as well as overdue booster shots of other vaccines.

The clinics should set a daily cap on the number of people who get vaccinated and reduce the time they wait in clinics.

They should also avoid people gathering in the clinics for observation after vaccination.

In Hubei, the provincial Health Commission should adjust the province's vaccination work plan according to the development of the novel coronavirus epidemic, the commission said.

Healthcare institutions in the province should prioritize the administering of the first dose of

hepatitis B and tuberculosis vaccines for newborns, while implementing strict local policies to contain the novel coronavirus.

Every county and district in Hubei must also make sure there are clinics that offer rabies vaccinations.

Items subject to price restrictions slashed

China has cut the number of items subject to price restrictions by nearly 30 percent in a revised government pricing catalog released on March 16, the country's top economic planner said.

The new list, to be implemented from May 1, removes items no longer subject to price controls, such as some railway and air travel tickets, compared with the previous version released in 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission said in a statement.

The initial offer and final sales prices of electricity and natural gas are also removed, opening them up to market forces, but midstream transmission and distribution pri-

ces are still listed, allowing government supervision.

The list now features 16 items divided into seven categories, including goods and services in public utilities, public welfare services and network-based natural monopolies, the statement said.

The revision will help promote market-oriented reform, streamline government administration and create a fair and competitive market environment, said Li Shuguang, a law professor at China University of Political Science and Law.

Crackdown on banned drugs in aquaculture

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said it will carry out a campaign to assess veterinary drug residue in aquatic products from all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities.

From April to September, local agricultural affairs authorities will each sample at least 4,000 batches of aquatic products at random.

Quality inspection institutions will test the samples to see if they have excessive residual amounts



of banned veterinary drugs such as nitrofurans and ofloxacin. The ministry will publicize the test results.

Local authorities should monitor and regulate the use of veterinary drugs on aquatic products, build a long-term mechanism to control drug residues and crack down more harshly on the illegal use of such drugs, the ministry said.

The ministry also said it will continue its nationwide campaign to encourage farmers to use less veterinary drugs on aquatic products and use them the right way.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Policy digest

Resumption of normal medical services urged

All provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities should speed up efforts to resume normal medical services to meet the public's needs, according to a notice issued on Friday by the State Council's joint prevention and control mechanism to cope with novel coronavirus pneumonia.

Since the novel coronavirus pneumonia broke out, China has invested a large amount of medical resources in tackling the disease, which led to limited medical services for some other patients, the mechanism said, adding that it was imperative to resume medical services for them quickly.

Different regions should resume medical services according to their own conditions, the mechanism said.

Those with a low level of risk of the novel coronavirus spreading should resume full services as soon as possible, including outpatient services, emergency care, hospitalization, surgery and examinations.

Regions with a high level of risk should focus on containing the epidemic while ensuring treatment for the critically ill.

Every hospital should make a detailed plan for resuming medical services, use information technology to estimate the number of patients each department will have, and adjust the distribution of resources accordingly.

Hospitals should also guide patients in making appointments online and seeking treatment at different hours, and offer more telehealth services.

All regions should make sure emergency care is available 24 hours a day, and work to provide sufficient medical services to people with chronic diseases who need regular medication, pregnant women, women who have recently given birth, the elderly and the mentally ill.

People with chronic diseases but who are in stable condition should be able to get prescriptions lasting for up to 12 weeks.

Hospitals should prevent novel coronavirus infection in a scientific way, avoiding both insufficient and excessive control, the mechanism said.

Counseling for people affected by outbreak

All provinces should work to strengthen counseling services and other psychological interventions for key groups affected by the novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic, the State Council's joint prevention and control mechanism to cope with the disease said.

People who should get special attention include patients and their family members, the relatives of patients who have died, and those who have been working on the front line during the outbreak, such as doctors, police officers and community workers.

Hospitals should follow the mental health condition of patients with novel coronavirus infections and have therapists and social workers provide counseling, the mechanism said in a plan issued on Wednesday.

Regions that have been hit hard by the virus, such as Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, should organize teams of mental health experts to provide counseling for people who have recovered but are still in quarantine, and intervene when they suffer from anxiety, depression, insomnia and post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Community workers should help prevent discrimination by guiding their neighborhoods in ensuring the fair treatment of patients' family members and people who have recovered and returned home.

Civil affairs authorities and other public institutions should enhance their care for people whose family members have died from novel coronavirus pneumonia and help them get through their grief.

For underprivileged groups such as the impoverished and homeless, the authorities should encourage charity groups and social service institutions to provide care.