

Cabinet doubles renovation target

State Council plans to upgrade 39,000 aging urban communities, benefiting 7 million households

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China plans to renovate twice as many old residential communities this year to improve living conditions, spur investment and shore up economic growth.

The State Council said after its executive meeting on April 14 that the country plans to renovate 39,000 aging urban residential communities this year — double last year's target — to benefit 7 million households.

The renovation projects will prioritize communities built before 2000, focus on improving supporting facilities and civic infrastructure, and improve the level of public services in communities such as aged care, infant day care and healthcare, the Cabinet said.

It said funding for the renovations will be shared by the authorities, residents and private capital. The central government will offer subsidies. Funds raised by local governments through the issuance of special bonds will give priority to the projects, and private capital will be given incentives to play a role.

There were 170,000 old residential communities across the nation that were home to over 100 million people in May last year, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development said. The country renovated 19,000 aging communities last year, improving living conditions for 3.52 million people.

The Cabinet's decision followed a 6.8 percent contraction in economic activity in the first quarter due to the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic.

Fixed-asset investment, a key driver of growth that includes infrastructure and real estate investment, declined by 16.1 percent year-on-year during the first quarter, the National Bureau of Statistics said. In the first two months of the year it plunged 24.5 percent.

A meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee on Friday pinpointed the renovation of old residential communities as a way to bolster investment.

At the Cabinet meeting, Premier Li Keqiang said scaling up the renovation of old urban communities has immense potential for fueling domestic demand.

"There are various kinds of demand for residents living in communities, such as aged care, day care for infants, healthcare and domestic services," he said. "A large number of jobs can be created if we increase the supply of such services, which can also boost effective investment and improve the living quality of residents."

Huang Yan, vice-minister of housing and urban-rural development, told a news briefing on Thursday that residents' involvement is a prerequisite for the renovation projects.

"It's more like a window to mobilize residents and step up govern-



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“The renovation of old residential communities can replenish the lost jobs.”

Qiu Baoxing, president of the Chinese Society for Urban Studies

ance at the primary level, rather than a construction project in the traditional sense," she said.

The renovations would cover a range of aspects, from public utilities such as tap water, electricity, gas and roads to buildings, the environment and public services, she said, adding that the establishment of long-term operation and management mechanisms was also important.

Huang said building a consensus with residents would take a lot of time and effort by primary-level

authorities, but good prototypes could serve as springboards for communities nearby to follow suit.

Government funding will cover basic services, she said, with residents to be encouraged to pay for the retrofitting of elevators, parking facilities and introduction of property management services.

Qiu Baoxing, former vice-minister of housing and urban-rural development and president of the Chinese Society for Urban Studies, said the renovation of aging residential communities could spur invest-

ment of 10 trillion yuan (\$1.41 trillion) in the next five years.

The society estimates there are 10,000 square kilometers of old urban communities in China.

The investment plan could be laid out immediately and hedge against the decline in investment activities, Qiu said.

"The job market in the service sector has been among the hardest hit areas in the novel coronavirus outbreak, and the renovation of old residential communities can replenish the lost jobs," he said.

Policy digest

Jiangxi open economy pilot zone approved

The State Council has approved the establishment of an open economy pilot zone in eastern China's Jiangxi province, according to a circular released on Monday.

The general construction plan will be issued by the National Development and Reform Commission.

The circular said construction of the pilot zone should adhere to new development concepts, promote high-quality development and focus on supply-side structural reform.

It should also actively integrate with the Belt and Road Initiative, participate in the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, and coordinate with the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta.

The pilot zone should tap into regional cooperation potential, promote the free and efficient flow of resources, accelerate the construction of an open market, and explore a new development path that advances reform, development and innovation through opening-up, it said.

It urged the Jiangxi provincial government to reinforce leadership during the construction of the pilot zone, improve work mechanisms and work out detailed plans for implementation.

State Council departments will strengthen guidance and support for the construction and development of the pilot zone. The NDRC should enhance coordination and supervision, and present timely reports on major issues to the State Council, the circular said.

More government support for job creation

The State Council decided at an executive meeting on April 14 to lend more support to companies and make more efforts to create jobs.

The number of graduates from China's colleges will reach a record high this year, and their job opportunities have been affected by the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic, the meeting was told.

The Cabinet decided the authorities should step up guaranteed loan support for startup companies and encourage people to start their own businesses.

Employers should develop more job vacancies for science research assistants so that more people can work as teachers and medical workers at the grassroots level.

Graduates will also be encouraged to start their own businesses or find jobs in neighborhood services. The authorities should work on policies to extend payment terms for student loans and give special support to graduates from universities in Hubei province, the part of China hit hardest by the pandemic.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

WANG QINGYUN

POLICY RESPONSE

Foreigners without medical insurance face coronavirus bills

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A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for health, foreign affairs, agricultural and rural affairs, and emergency management, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

Uninsured foreigners pay for COVID-19 treatment

Foreigners diagnosed with or suspected of contracting novel coronavirus pneumonia — dubbed COVID-19 by the World Health Organization —



should pay for treatment in China if they haven't joined the country's basic medical insurance program, four ministries said in a joint notice.

Hospitals should not charge them before treating them, according to the notice, which was issued by the National Healthcare Security Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the National Health Commission.

If they have bought commercial health insurance, insurance companies should pay for their treatment in time according to their contracts, the notice, posted online on Wednesday, said.

For those who have joined China's basic medical insurance program, the program will provide reimbursement according to regulations, and the patients will pay the rest of the charges.

The notice also said that, in principle, foreigners subjected to concentrated quarantine should pay for the quarantine.



Ministry sends inspectors to monitor pig farming

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said it recently dispatched inspectors to a number of provinces, including Jiangsu and Zhejiang, to monitor their implementation of pig farming and African swine fever prevention policies.

Following comprehensive investigations, the inspectors urged the provinces to speed up the restoration of pig production. Provinces that are lagging behind should enhance their efforts to complete their tasks on time, they said.

The provinces should also manage

the production of poultry, cattle and sheep well and ensure the supply of meat at stable prices, the inspectors said, requiring them to prevent African swine fever effectively and crack down on the illegal transport of pigs, which raises infection risks.

The inspectors also investigated how the provinces have vaccinated poultry, livestock and other animals.

Jiangsu is on track to restoring pig production, with the African swine fever situation in the province stable, the ministry said.

100 million yuan in drought aid for Yunnan

The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Emergency Management granted 100 million yuan (\$14.1 million) to southwestern China's Yunnan province on Friday to help it tackle drought.

The ongoing drought in the province has led to severe water shortages in the central and southern parts of Yunnan, the Ministry of Emergency Management said in a statement.

Some people in rural areas are having a hard time accessing adequate drinking water, and there is a shortage of water for spring farming, it said.

The State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters and the ministry have dispatched working groups to drought-hit areas to help them cope with the disaster and ensure that people have enough drinking water, the ministry said.

Also on Friday, the ministry and the Ministry of Finance granted 30 million yuan to the Inner Mongolia autonomous region for dealing with ice jams on rivers.

Interest subsidies for loans to small businesses

The central government has decided to enhance support for startups and individually owned businesses through guaranteed loans backed by interest subsidies.

The loans will cover more businesses to tide them over the novel coronavirus pneumonia pandemic,

according to a notice issued by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and the People's Bank of China.

Sole proprietors of businesses hit hard by the virus, such as retailers, hotels, caterers, and logistics and tourism operators, can apply for the loans until the end of the year, the notice said.

Full-time taxi drivers who have bought their taxis with down payments are also eligible for the loans.

The amount of loans a person can apply for has been raised to 200,000 yuan — a 50,000 yuan increase — and banks can allow loan payment extensions for owners of small and micro-sized businesses facing temporary liquidity shortages.

Banks should moderately lower the interest rates on new loans, the notice said.

Borrowers and the government will share the interest payments on loans to individuals and small and micro-sized businesses next year.