

# Reforms bolstered to sustain growth

State Council prioritizes key measures to boost jobs, remove barriers and ease access to markets

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The State Council has scaled up reform measures to bolster job creation, promote consumer spending and foster new market players as part of broader efforts to improve the overall business environment and sustain growth.

The measures will be key to maintaining China's recovery from COVID-19 and ensure priorities and stability in six areas, analysts said. The areas consist of the job market, the financial sector, foreign investment, foreign trade, overall investment and market expectations.

The measures were unveiled in a General Office of the State Council policy document on April 15, which aims to further transform government functions, streamline administration and improve government oversight and services.

Key steps include relaxing market access for micro and small e-commerce businesses, promoting the elimination of hidden barriers that hinder the development of new businesses and industries, easing the burden for market players and optimizing the business environment for foreign investors.

To facilitate more job creation, the document pledged to further lower the threshold for employment, with measures to reduce the number of job requirements and ease market access for small and micro e-commerce businesses.

To help laborers improve their professional skills, the government will offer more training to individuals involved in sectors such as aged care and domestic services and encourage associations and training centers to provide more apprenticeships.

"The improvement in labor skills has played a key role in solving structural employment problems. It also serves as an important underpinning for the high-quality development of the economy," said Wu Liduo, an official with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

Over the past three years, China has allocated 100 billion yuan (\$15.4 billion) to train at least 50 million workers to boost their professional skills, Wu said.

This year, the government will offer tailored training to high-caliber professionals and occupations that are faced with severe shortages. Steps will also be put in place to enhance professional training for workers who have recently been lifted out of poverty, he added.

China's urban registered unemployment rate stood at 5.4 percent last month, with some indicators suggesting a lingering softness in the labor market, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Zhang Yi, an official with the NBS, said in a statement this month that the stability of youth employment remained weak, and young people faced a longer period to find jobs. The unemployment rate for migrant workers was up by 0.1 percentage points.

Zhang Chenggang, a job market researcher at the Capital University



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of Economics and Business, said the State Council document has prioritized lowering the threshold for job entries. The document has also boosted training for in-demand professions that have a shortage of qualified workers.

"With China's growing aging society, the increase in the supply of aged care professionals will greatly help lift the quality of life for families and seniors," he said.

He noted that the government has sought to amplify the role of the digital economy, a key engine for

growth, to create jobs. The government has also pledged to improve social insurance benefits for workers on flexible payrolls.

The policy document also prioritized measures to unleash the potential for consumer spending with pledges to break industrial monopolies and local protectionism, facilitate the resale of second-hand vehicles and widen market access for operators of homestays in the tourism sector.

The government will streamline procedures for setting national

standards to enable the quicker commercialization of new products that are urgently needed in the market, the document said.

China's retail sales grew by 34.2 percent year-on-year last month, up 0.4 percentage points from the first two months of the year, indicating an improving recovery from the fallout of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics at Oxford Economics, a think tank based in the United Kingdom, said in a research note

that he expects Chinese consumers to become more comfortable about health conditions and their economic situation in the coming months.

"But a full recovery in household spending growth hinges on a convincing vaccination drive and further improvements in labor market conditions," he said, adding that meaningful progress on both fronts is important for both the overall growth outlook and the rotation to growth drivers that will support a sustained recovery.

## Policy Digest

### Stable supply of 100 'small' drugs achieved

China achieved the centralized production and stable supply of 100 small varieties of drugs by the end of last year, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said.

Small varieties of drugs refer to those clinically required but used in small amounts. Such drugs are usually in short supply as there is unstable demand and a lack of interest from businesses due to the limited market.

The 100 small varieties of drugs were produced by production bases led by six pharmaceutical firms, Xinhua News Agency reported on Friday.

In 2018, the ministry organized the construction of production bases for such drugs, which allowed upstream and downstream firms to centralize their resources to guarantee the supply of drugs.

According to Xinhua, the ministry will be informed in a timely manner of the production and stock of small varieties through a collaborative platform.

### New guideline to regulate e-commerce



Authorities have rolled out a trial guideline, set to take effect on May 25, to try and regulate livestreaming in the booming e-commerce sector.

Jointly released on Friday by the Cyberspace Administration of China and six other government departments, the guideline aims to protect the rights and interests of consumers and minors and prevent risks including false advertising and selling counterfeit and substandard goods.

The guideline requires a blacklist to be established to ban people, including account holders and livestreamers, who seriously violate regulations and laws.

Peddling fake products, falsifying viewer numbers, promoting pyramid schemes and engaging in gambling and fraud will also be banned, it said.

The guideline sets the minimum age for livestreaming operators and salespersons at 16. Minors above 16 will need consent from a guardian to enter the industry.

Livestreaming platforms will be required to handle complaints from consumers in a timely manner and provide necessary evidence when disputes occur, it said.

### Training boost for digital technologies

Vocational education and training in digital technologies will be stepped up, with focuses on artificial intelligence, big data and cloud computing, according to a work plan.

The plan, issued on April 19 by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, noted that digital technologies are playing an increasingly important role in people's lives and work at a time when the digital economy is flourishing.

While colleges across the country are being encouraged to develop wider digital technologies curricula, local authorities should compile textbooks on digital skills training for the labor force, the plan said.

China's digital economy has rapidly grown in recent years, reaching 35.8 trillion yuan (\$5.52 trillion) in 2019, or 36.2 percent of GDP, according to the Cyberspace Administration of China.

A report released by the China Employment Training Technical Instruction Center last year predicted that nearly 10 million people with digital skills — such as cloud computing engineers, drone pilots and cyber athletes — will be required over the next five years.

# Online sales of prescription drugs 'will expand patient choices'

By XU WEI

China's decision to greenlight the online sales of prescription drugs will give patients more options and make it easier for the public to access healthcare services, experts said.

The decision was announced in a policy document released by the General Office of the State Council on April 15 as part of a host of new measures to boost the supply in aged care and healthcare services. Prescription drugs refer to medicines that patients can purchase only with a medical practitioner's authorization, a policy that previously limited sales to hospitals and pharmacies.

The document said the online sales of prescription drugs, except for those placed under special management, will be allowed under the condition of ensuring the authenticity and reliability of electronic prescriptions.

Administrative approvals will be

canceled during the launch of new clinics and practitioners will only need to file their application for record, it said.

Earlier this month, the Hainan Free Trade Port became the first area to give the nod to the online sales of prescription drugs under a guideline jointly issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Commerce.

The National Medical Products Administration unveiled a draft policy to solicit public opinion in November, which highlighted the need for online pharmacies to ensure the authenticity of electronic prescriptions before the drug sales proceeded.

Online platforms that do not have qualifications for drug sales are forbidden to sell drugs to individuals, the draft said.

Shi Lichen, founder of the Beijing Dingchen Consultancy, which specializes in research on the pharma-

ceutical sector, said the decision is monumental in that it has confirmed the legitimacy of electronic prescriptions, a precursor to the large-scale sales of prescription drugs online.

"The release of the official document will give consumers many more choices rather than being limited to pharmacies, clinics or hospitals. We expect a spike in the sales of prescription drugs online under the latest policy," he said.

He highlighted the need for authorities to bolster compliance oversight to prevent unlicensed operations, exaggerated advertisements, sales of counterfeit products and use of fake electronic prescriptions.

In the meantime, he said the decision could usher in tremendous changes in the pharmaceutical sector that could alter the management, operations and sales structure of the sector, which registered total sales of 2.35 trillion yuan (\$362 billion) last year.



A saleswoman stacks prescription drugs at a pharmacy in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wang Hang, founder and CEO of Haodf, one of China's largest online healthcare companies, said the central government's decision will make it easier for the public to access healthcare services.

"It is a realistic demand for patients

to obtain medicine in a more convenient manner. But the sector must explore how to deliver the expectation of patients in a safe and standardized manner," he said, adding that it is important for the industry and regulators to further standardize practices.