

POLICY REVIEW

Social assistance guideline launched

Blueprint sets out measures to improve welfare network's ability to cope with emergencies

By XU WEI
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China has rolled out a guideline to reform and refine its social aid system, pledging to bolster assistance for low-income families in the event of public emergencies, such as major pandemics, and widen the coverage of welfare programs.

The latest reform measures take into account the challenges to the country's social welfare programs brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and make it easier for low-income groups to apply for benefits, experts said.

The guideline, issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council on Aug 25, said the country aims to develop a tiered social welfare network in the next two years so that the social aid system is governed by a sound legal framework and needy families from urban and rural areas can obtain help quickly.

In developing a tiered welfare network, the guideline called for measures to refine methods to determine which families require regular minimum subsistence allowances and identify those among the elderly, disabled and minors who require aid packages for the extremely poor.

There will also be more assistance for other low-income families, who will be offered special help in healthcare, housing, education and employment.

It vowed to offer special social assistance to families and individuals whose lives have become difficult due to emergencies, accidents, major diseases and epidemics.

By the end of last year, China had included 43.17 million people in the network for minimum subsistence allowances, helped 4.69 million extremely poor people cover basic expenses such as food, housing and healthcare, and offered care and protection to 242,000 orphans, the Ministry of Civil Affairs said.

The government extended 1.29 million aid packages to homeless people last year and offered 9.17 million temporary subsidies, the ministry said. It said the government had added another 3.4 million people to social welfare programs by the end of June and had issued a temporary subsidy totaling 14.6 billion yuan (\$2.13 billion) for low-income groups.

In an instruction issued on Aug 27, Premier Li Keqiang said it is even more important for the government to step up aid measures to help low-income groups amid the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and floods in South China.

He urged authorities to pool strengths and ensure the basic living standards of needy families.

Lin Mingang, deputy head of the China Association of Social Security and a social policy professor at Nanjing University, said the guideline drew upon experience from the temporary relief measures implemented during the efforts to contain COVID-19 and made it easier for individuals to apply for relief.

He said it canceled previous

requirements that individuals had to file for relief benefits in the area where their household registration or permanent residence was based, stipulating instead that eligible beneficiaries only need to apply in areas where they meet temporary difficulties.

He added that another highlight of the document is that it called for the use of modern information technologies, such as the internet, big data and artificial intelligence, in helping

and enable more targeted aid measures for low-income groups.

The guideline underlined the need to explore the purchasing of social services to enable the elderly, minors and the disabled to obtain care and visits from caregivers.

Authorities must include clear relief measures for vulnerable groups in their contingency plans for public emergencies and clearly state the procedures for rolling them out, the guideline said.

In the event of a major epidemic or

other emergencies, authorities must raise subsidies offered to those living on subsistence allowances and special aid packages, and include those who fall into difficulties in relief networks, it added.

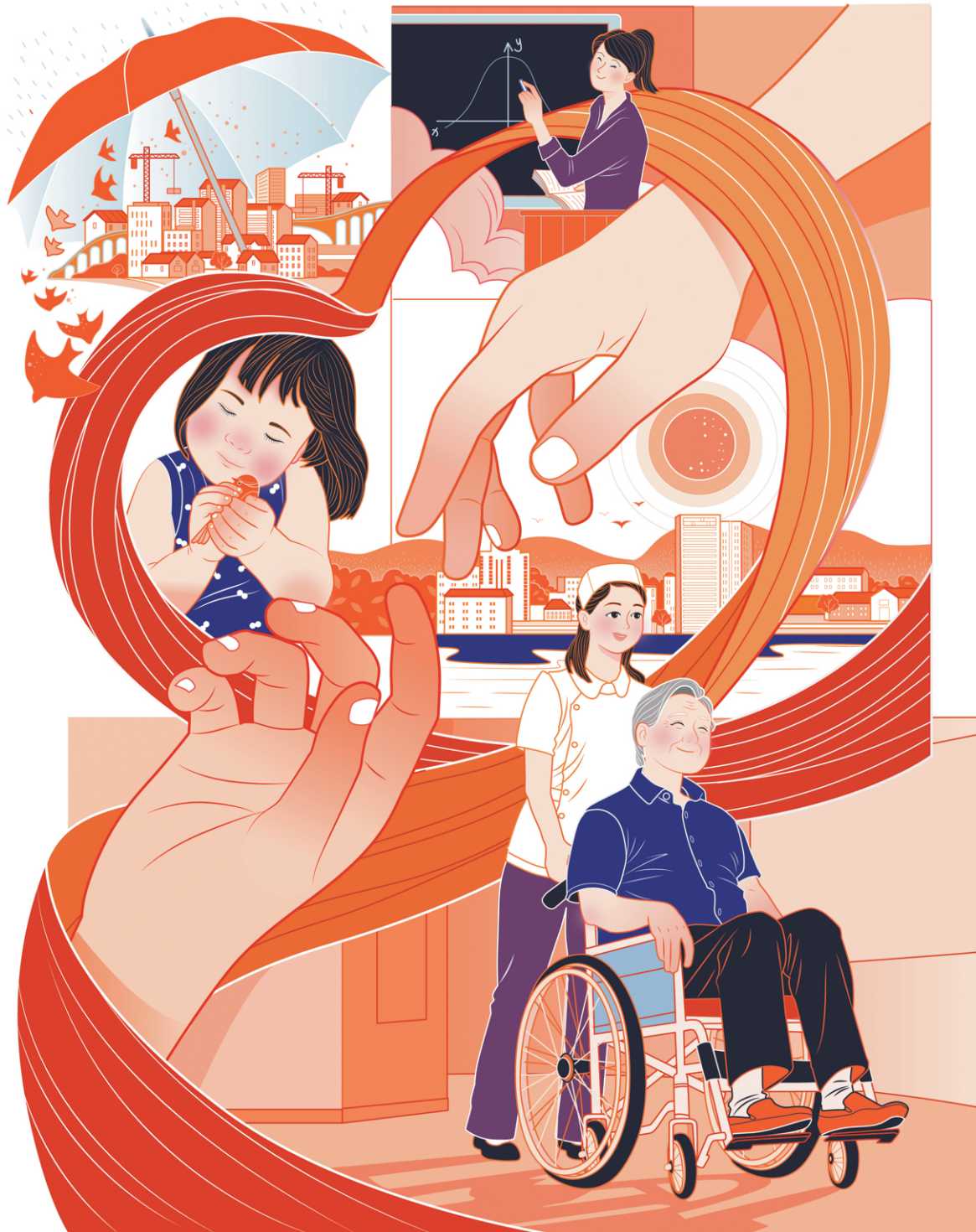
Yao Jianping, an associate professor at North China Electric Power University in Beijing who focuses on social policy, said the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in temporary job losses for a large number of low-income individuals and heightened the risk of them falling into poverty,

which required adjustments to the social aid system.

"The pandemic has further amplified the important role of social aid in helping to stabilize society," Yao said.

"The vulnerable groups are even more vulnerable during the pandemic."

With the country set to lift all rural people out of absolute poverty by the end of this year, the latest measures show the government is shifting the emphasis to establishing a long-term mechanism to reduce relative poverty, he said.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

POLICY RESPONSE

Children's safety in spotlight online and on roads

By WANG QINGYUN
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A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for education, housing and urban-rural development, and public security, have responded to matters of public concern.

Internet safeguards for minors to be strengthened

The Ministry of Education, the National Press and Publication Administration and four other departments are set to launch a campaign to overhaul the online environment for minors.

In a notice released on Aug 26, the six departments noted outstanding issues such as addiction to online games, saying such addiction and related issues have seriously undermined the physical and mental health of minors.

The targets of the campaign will include online game companies and platforms that have failed to intro-

duce real-name registration for users or systems to control how long children can spend playing games.

The campaign will also target game providers who have lax management of paid services.

The notice said local authorities should strengthen efforts to rectify "unhealthy behavior online" involving minors, including "fan circles", consisting of specialized platoons of enthusiasts, and the use of foul language, and investigate cases of bullying, blackmail and people illegally obtaining private information.

The campaign also aims to address the dissemination of inappropriate information, strengthen supervision of internet companies and further educate minors on how to protect themselves online.

Authorities urged to improve communities

The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and 12 other government departments have issued a guideline urging local



authorities to improve conditions in residential communities.

The notice, which was released on Aug 26, set a goal that by 2025, existing residential communities will have their weaknesses addressed and newly built ones will be equipped with a range of essential facilities.

Among the key tasks, local authorities should design communities so facilities such as kindergartens and centers that provide services for seniors should be situated just a 5- or 10-minute walk from residents' homes, according to the guideline.

The document also suggested that

each community should accommodate 5,000 to 12,000 people at the most.

Authorities should address weaknesses in residential communities in light of local conditions, the guideline said.

They should also prioritize the construction of drainage systems and renovate those that do not separate rainwater from sewage.

Authorities should also make full use of underutilized open spaces and demolish illegally built constructions to provide more space for activities, and raise the number of service facilities.

The guideline also called for increased construction of barrier-free environments.

Efforts boosted to prevent school bus accidents

As schools begin the new semester, the Traffic Management Bureau at the Ministry of Public Security has ordered traffic police departments nationwide to assist efforts to pre-

vent accidents involving school buses in China.

According to a news release posted on the bureau's official WeChat account on Aug 27, the notice required local traffic police departments to strengthen communication with education authorities and schools.

They should also issue timely traffic alerts.

The notice also ordered authorities to urge schools and school bus manufacturers to improve maintenance of such vehicles and prohibit unsafe buses from taking to the roads.

They should also keep track of the mental and physical health of employees and stop those with mental or physical problems from driving school buses, and detect and address any risks on routes used by school buses.

The notice also called for teachers, parental volunteers and police officers to work together to regulate traffic around schools during peak hours, and ordered strict investigations of illegality, such as overloaded buses and driving faster than the speed limit.

Policy digest

More support offered for flooding victims

China needs to keep up efforts to handle floods and typhoons this year, an Aug 26 State Council executive meeting presided over by Premier Li Keqiang was told.

Serious floods have hit the Yangtze and Huaihe rivers this year, affecting a large area and inflicting great economic losses, it heard, but the government had responded in a scientific manner to keep casualty numbers low, a statement released after the meeting said.

The authorities should make sure people hit by the floods get resettled, that epidemics don't occur in disaster-hit areas and that students can start their new semesters as planned, the State Council said.

It called on local authorities to start post-disaster reconstruction promptly.

It also specified that the central government will increase subsidies for people whose houses have been damaged by floods in seriously hit provinces to 25,000 yuan (\$3,640) per household.

The government should also support the restoration of farmland, greenhouses and pens for poultry and livestock that have been damaged by floods, guarantee the supply of crop seeds, and plant crops on damaged farmland promptly to ensure a good harvest in autumn, the State Council said.

It also called for timely reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and medium-sized and small water facilities, construction of drainage systems in cities and the hiring of more migrant workers for such projects.

It was decided at the meeting that the central government will allocate another 16 billion yuan in subsidies this year and next to support the development of high-standard farmland, and areas hit by floods will be given priority in obtaining them.

It was also decided that the central government will allocate 10 billion yuan in subsidies this year for reconstruction work in disaster-hit provinces, and another 10 billion yuan from vehicle purchase taxes to support road construction in provinces that were seriously hit by floods.

Plan for capital's core area wins approval

The Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council have approved a detailed plan for the core area of Beijing for the period up to 2035 that stresses the capital's function of serving central administrative organs and the firm and orderly relocation of its noncapital roles.

"The core area is where Beijing's functions as the nation's political, cultural and international exchange center are mostly located, as well as a key area for preservation of historical sites," the authorities said in a statement issued on Thursday.

In the statement, the top leadership instructed city authorities to promote the organic integration of government and urban functions, while highlighting the core area's role in serving Beijing's function as the national political center.

The functional reorganization of the core area should be steadily advanced to create more space to support central government activities, the statement said.

It also emphasized firm and orderly steps in winding back noncapital functions in the core area, including gradually relocating some administrative agencies, along with education, research and medical services institutions, while reducing the area's population and building density.

The central authorities also demanded stronger protection of the city's cultural and historical heritage, improvement of people's livelihoods, enhancement of the public health system and the maintenance of security in the core area.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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