

New measures to bolster job market

State Council looks to ensure employment for nation's youth

By XU WEI
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With a historic number of college graduates and mounting economic pressure, China is scaling up job creation measures this year, creating more government-sponsored internships and extending support to workers on flexible payrolls.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, has outlined a host of measures to stabilize the job market, pledging to create at least 11 million new jobs this year and keep the urban unemployment rate around 5.5 percent.

The government will prioritize expanding employment, strive to stabilize the job market by increasing support for companies and abolish unreasonable barriers that hinder people from finding jobs and starting businesses, the State Council said in a statement that laid out the division of work for key tasks in the 2022 Government Work Report.

China will devote 100 billion yuan (\$15.7 billion) from the national unemployment insurance fund to help businesses maintain stable payrolls and provide training programs.

The country is set to embrace a record 10.76 million new college graduates this year, 1.67 million more than last year. Meanwhile, some economists have highlighted the headwinds the economy is facing due to recent COVID-19 outbreaks and possible disruptions to global trade caused by the Ukraine crisis.

Zeng Xiangquan, director of the China Institute for Employment Research at Renmin University of China in Beijing, said steady economic growth is key to stabilizing the job market.

"The creation of new jobs hinges on economic growth, which is spurred by more investment, consumer spending and foreign trade. It is important for governments at various levels to implement an employment-first policy and carefully evaluate the influence of other policies on the job market before rolling them out," he said.

He noted that an ongoing survey conducted by his institution from late 2021 has found sustained pressure on the job market, adding that it would require intensified measures from the government this year to meet national job creation goals.

According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, China created a total of 1.63 million new urban jobs in January and February. The surveyed unemployment rate for rural migrant workers was 5.6 percent, while the rate for people age 16 to 24 stood at 15.3 percent.

In a news conference earlier this month, Premier Li Keqiang said that a record 16 million people, including college graduates and military veterans, are expected to look for jobs in urban areas this year.

The government will provide more training opportunities and encourage more individuals to commit themselves to entrepreneurship and innovation to foster new growth engines, he said.

To build up the capacity of college graduates in the job market, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, along with nine other central government departments, jointly unveiled a plan to create at least 1 million internships for young people, especially graduates.

The plan is expected to cover



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employers who are willing to hire graduates and unemployed youth. The primary beneficiaries of the program will be graduates who haven't found jobs within two years of leaving school and jobless youth aged 16 to 24.

The government will offer incentives, including subsidies for employers who create internships. Subsidies will be even higher if interns are hired. Tax incentives, including deductions to corporate taxes, will also be rolled out.

Zeng said the plan marked the latest government effort to resolve the mismatch between the skills of young people and employer demands, a major cause of the high youth unemployment rate.

"While many young people are unable to find satisfactory jobs, a large number of employers, especially those in the manufacturing sector, are faced with labor shortages," he said.

He said the plan to create 1 million internships could help mitigate the problem as it could help employers find their ideal candidates.

"For many employers, there are qualities that are more important than educational background, such as a sense of responsibility and a spirit of teamwork," he said.

Wang Ting, a professor who has conducted research on youth employment at China University of Political Science and Law, said creating more internships will give students a better understanding of the workplace and moderate expectations during the job hunting process.

It is also important for college students to consider developing skills that would better serve emerging sectors, such as artificial intelligence and the ongoing national green transitioning, to broaden their prospects in the job market, he said.

He highlighted the need for col-

leges to adjust majors in line with actual employment needs to help graduates excel in the job market.

He Shanshan, a postgraduate student at University of Science and Technology Beijing, said finding a job was not difficult for most of her peers, but landing an ideal offer is by no means easy.

He, who is majoring in mechanical engineering and graduates in June, said she has only obtained one offer from a foreign company so far, and was not sure if she would find a better one.

"I wish I had spent more time on job hunting last year," she said. "The fact is, the more time you spend on it, the greater odds you have in landing a satisfactory offer."

She explained that a sizable number of her fellow students have decided to find jobs at internet companies, which generally pay higher salaries, while few decided to follow their educational background to the

manufacturing sector, where payment is lower.

The importance of increasing social security measures for workers on flexible payrolls, such as ride-hail drivers and food delivery workers, was also underscored by officials and experts.

For these workers, who number over 200 million, the State Council will improve benefits by enhancing social security coverage and implementing occupational injury insurance, among other things, to better protect them.

Zeng said the promotion of this kind of insurance is a pressing matter, as the risk of injury in traffic accidents is higher for flexible workers.

"Over the longer term, it is equally important to ensure that all these workers are covered by social security to ensure their jobs are stable and guarantee them a brighter future," he said.

Policy Digest

Authorities urged to offer antigen test kits

The National Healthcare Security Administration asked provincial level healthcare security authorities to temporarily include COVID-19 antigen test kits in the catalog of medical services covered by basic healthcare.

In a notice released on its website on March 21, the administration said authorities should, however, do so while taking into account their existing control and prevention needs and their ability to pay for the tests. They should also improve their policies while ensuring all risks remain controllable.

The administration also asked authorities to strictly adhere to the suggestions on which drugs to use outlined in the ninth edition of the Diagnosis and Treatment Protocol of COVID-19.

They should buy drugs newly included in the ninth edition and stop purchasing those that have been removed from it.

Additionally, authorities should support the operations of hospitals in regions seriously affected by the epidemic, and are permitted to use funds to pay in advance for the treatment of COVID-19 cases.

In particular, authorities are required to cover vaccination costs, the administration added.

Ministry updates cold chain import regulations

The Ministry of Transport issued the fourth edition of a guideline to help workers prevent and control COVID-19 while handling cold chain food imported via land and water.

Issued on Friday, the update requires newly recruited employees at cold chain logistics companies to provide proof of vaccination, a negative nucleic acid test result taken within 48 hours of arrival at work and green health and travel codes.

In addition, workers engaged in high risk jobs at ports — such as those who load, unload and haul away cold chain food products — should complete COVID-19 vaccinations and booster shots as soon as possible.

According to the guideline, stevedores should be vaccinated and work at fixed positions to avoid cross-infection. They should also wear disposable medical masks and gloves while at work.

Protective face shields, latex gloves and protective suits are also recommended.

The guideline states that goods will not be unloaded until vessels are granted inspection and quarantine certificates by customs, and until vessel companies promise that all crew members are healthy.

Stevedores should wear face masks at all times while unloading food imported from regions where there are COVID-19 cases, and they should also avoid touching their faces while handling goods, the guideline said.

Crew members are not allowed to disembark. When cooperation is needed, crew should wear masks and gloves and avoid direct contact with stevedores.

Workers transporting imported cold chain food must not open packages without permission.

Drivers transporting products should keep their hands clean, the guideline added, requiring drivers to carry hand sanitizers and use them regularly.

Logistics companies delivering cold chain food should keep a record of the health conditions of their workers, as well as the places they have visited during the past 14 days.

WANG QINGYUN

Central government aims to standardize administrative services

By XU WEI

The central government has pledged to make greater strides in improving China's business climate this year as it rolled out a host of measures to make administrative services more standardized and easily accessible.

The measures, outlined in a guideline released by the State Council this month, will target the lack of unified standards, inadequacies in the sharing of data and the imbalance of government services

between urban and rural areas.

By the end of this year, the government will significantly boost the capacity and quality of existing administrative services and take steps to develop an integrated national system.

By 2025, all the most frequently accessed public services will follow a unified standard, with frequently used electronic certificates recognized nationwide and more one-stop services online.

Administrative services will cover approvals, rulings, awards and

record filings, in sectors like public education, employment, social insurance, healthcare and housing security.

Ma Liang, a professor of public administration at Renmin University of China, said that despite the progress China has made in improving the business climate, there is still plenty of room to enhance administrative services, particularly interprovincial services.

Efforts also should be made to better integrate online and offline services.

There are now about 100 million people living outside of their home provinces in China — including migrant workers, elderly persons and students — who must travel back to their home areas to access some government services, Premier Li Keqiang said in a news conference earlier this month.

The government will issue electronic ID card services for greater public convenience, he said.

To standardize government approval services, authorities will be required to adhere to unified

guidelines, and will not be allowed to require additional procedures or materials during processing.

Governments at the county, township, village and community levels are required to provide a majority of their services via a unified administrative service center to provide one-stop service and more administrative services will be offered through streamlined online procedures.

To improve accessibility, the government has pledged to bring services, including education,

employment, social security, healthcare, elder care and social services, closer to neighborhoods, and will promote 24-hour self-service systems.

The government will also move forward with the integration of electronic ID cards, social security cards, driver's licenses and business licenses at online government service platforms and applications and promote their daily use, the guideline said.

Ma said that enabling more government services to go online will enhance public satisfaction and help narrow the gap between urban and rural areas in administrative services.