POLICY REVIEW

Measures to aid low-income people

Documents call for expanding social security, making services better

By XU WEI
xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

China's latest push to further dynamically monitor the living conditions of low-income groups while providing critical assistance for vulnerable families and individuals will offer fresh impetus to the nation's common prosperity drive, officials and analysts have said.

At an executive meeting last month, the State Council, China's Cabinet, adopted a guideline to widen the social security net for vulnerable groups, along with another policy document that will provide meal services for seniors.

Key steps include further optimizing a national information platform that keeps track of low-income groups, improving a database for vulnerable individuals and beefing up social security programs so that they can offer tailored social assistance to struggling families.

Tang Chengpei, vice-minister of civil affairs, told a news briefing after the release of the guideline that the latest measures spoke volumes about the emphasis the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council have placed on the well-being of low-income groups.

He explained that one of the first major steps the guideline urges is to identify families that require social assistance.

"In addition to channels that encourage low-income families to apply for social assistance, we need to give play to the role of big data shared between different departments and dispatch more grassroots workers to households to find those in need," he said.

According to the ministry, the national platform for the dynamic monitoring of low-income people has so far collected the basic information of over 66 million individuals, or about 4.7 percent of the Chinese population.

Of those 66 million-plus people, nearly 40 million receive living allowances, while more than 4.6 million have no source of income and rely on the government for their basic needs, including care services, the ministry said.

The platform is also monitoring the living conditions of about 16 million other people as part of the national drive to prevent the recurrence of poverty, it added.

Role of social aid

Guan Xinping, a professor of social security and social policies at Nankai University in Tianjin, said China's social assistance system has played a pivotal role in guaranteeing public well-being over the past several decades.

The measures come over two years after China announced its success in its fight against absolute poverty, a campaign that lifted 98.99 million rural residents out of poverty between 2012 and 2020.

The nation has since continued its push to resolve unbalanced and inadequate development and narrow the income gap between urban and rural areas to advance its goal of common prosperity.

Guan said the newly released policy document, which provides a sound policy framework for improving the social assistance system, will guide local authorities to better improve the lives of vulnerable families and individuals.

Tang, the vice-minister, said putting in place a tiered social assistance system is essential, given that the level and nature of difficulties faced by low-income people vary widely.

"Some families struggle to meet their basic living needs, while others face challenges related to healthcare, housing, children's education and employment," he said. "It is important to deepen reforms and ensure that the social aid programs can offer more tailored aid packages."

One of the highlights of the latest policy measures, he said, is to categorize low-income families based on the challenges they are facing before offering them targeted assistance measures.

"The objective is to ensure that those who meet the criteria for the living allowance can access various policies, and for those who do not qualify for the living allowances but still face significant difficulties, they will not be excluded from receiving assistance," he continued.

According to the Ministry of Finance, the nation allocated 1.07 trillion yuan ($146.8 billion) between 2018 and 2022 for financial support for low-income families, with the central government contributing 68 percent of the total aid.

The average amount of financial aid to low-income families in rural areas was raised from 227 yuan to 345 yuan a month from 2018 to 2022, while aid for low-income families in urban areas was raised from 402 yuan per month to 545 yuan, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Yang Lixiong, a professor of social security studies at Renmin University of China, said the measures will help guarantee public living standards despite the downward pressure facing the world's second-largest economy.

"Such policy measures will help consolidate the nation's hard-won poverty alleviation results while laying the foundation for the drive to attain common prosperity for all," he said.

Helping seniors, disabled

Yang said one of the major highlights of the latest guideline is that it has prioritized support for families who are almost on the breadline, including disabled people and seniors who are unable to take care of themselves.

The guideline has also stressed the need to employ digital technology in social assistance programs, including the use of big data in monitoring the living conditions of low-income groups, he added.

Guan, the professor, said a key measure mentioned in the guideline is to allow vulnerable families and individuals to apply for emergency assistance without restrictions from their household registration, or *hukou*.

While the guideline pledged to bolster aid programs in healthcare, education, housing and employment, it also called for local authorities to purchase caregiving services from private entities for seniors and the disabled.

Non-governmental organizations will be offered incentives to take part in social assistance programs, and the government will encourage individuals, enterprises and organizations to engage in charitable activities through property donations, charitable projects and the establishment of service institutions.

Zhang Shouying, Party chief of Hongniya village in Wulian county, Shandong province, said for the government, the purchasing of care services is the most effective way to improve the lives of seniors.

In Hongniya, close to half its residents are age 60 or older, and there are 136 residents age 75 or older. Many of these seniors have money but are unable to care for themselves.

Zhang, who has piloted a program to offer catering and laundry services to seniors in recent years, said she is worried that the need for elder care in rural areas will only increase in the future.

"Going forward, we will need more professional service providers to help seniors in rural areas meet their basic needs," she said.

State Council highlights need to boost IPR protection

By XU WEI

The State Council, China's Cabinet, highlighted the need to build up China's intellectual property rights competitiveness during two sessions last week centering on better protecting and applying IPR.

Premier Li Qiang presided over a themed study session of the cabinet on Oct 31 focusing on the implementation of the strategy to build the nation into a leader in IPR.

The State Council executive meeting on Friday also reviewed an amendment to the rules on the implementation of the Patent Law as part of broader steps to enhance IPR protection.

During the study session on Oct 31, Li underscored the significance of the strategy in strengthening China's core competitiveness and advancing its high-level opening-up.

To support comprehensive innovation, the nation must accelerate the establishment of legal, management, and policy systems and create rules compatible with new technologies to lay a solid foundation for opening up new paths in industrial development, Li said.

Chu Xiang, deputy dean of the Institute of Intellectual Property Rights at the East China University of Political Science and Law in Shanghai, said the fact that the State Council has twice highlighted IPR protection in its meetings is proof of its essential role in the nation's high-quality development efforts.

"It also showed a sound legal and policy framework serves as the institutional guarantee for catalyzing the development of industries and bolstering innovation," he said.

During the study session, the premier urged steps to accelerate the commercial application of IPR with the use of marketing methods, saying that targeted actions must be taken to facilitate the development of industries in which IP plays a strong role, and improve the efficiency of IP transformation and application.

Li laid out requirements to improve mechanisms in IPR examination and authorization, administrative enforcement, judicial protection, arbitration and mediation, and industry self-discipline to bolster IPR protection across the board.

He also said it was important to put in place a punitive compensation mechanism for IP infringement, improve and enhance interdepartmental and cross-regional law enforcement coordination and response mechanisms to make IPR protection more professional, modern and intelligent.

The premier also called on authorities to improve the use of big data and artificial intelligence, optimize the IPR public services system and proactively accelerate international exchanges and cooperation in this regard.

Chu said the use of big data and artificial intelligence will present key opportunities for stronger IPR protection efforts, as it will help predict and identify infringement actions and enable IPR holders to come up with an effective chain of evidence more quickly.

"However, it is also important to prioritize the protection of data privacy and ensure all protection efforts are in compliance with laws and regulations," he said.

Policy Digest

Plan hastens replacing plastics with bamboo

The National Development and Reform Commission and three other government agencies have issued a three-year action plan to speed up substituting plastic with bamboo.

The plan, which was released on the commission's website last week, sets a goal for the country to establish an industrial system to produce bamboo substitutes for plastic by 2025.

The plan lays out a series of key actions, including a campaign to boost innovation and overcome technological challenges.

The country also plans to build five to 10 bases in regions that are rich in bamboo resources and have a sound bamboo industry to promote the use of it as a substitute for plastic.

China and the International Bamboo and Rattan Organization proposed the "Bamboo as a Substitute for Plastic Initiative" in 2022 to reduce pollution and carbon emissions.

Major agricultural fair set to start in Qingdao

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Shandong provincial government will co-host the 20th China International Agricultural Trade Fair from Thursday to Sunday in Qingdao.

The trade fair will take up 120,000 square meters and have 11 exhibition areas to showcase the products and services of nearly 3,000 companies. The goods include grain, oil, fruit, vegetables, livestock, poultry and aquatic products, according to ministry official Tang Ke.

Nearly 20,000 purchasers and professionals will visit the trade fair, the largest and influential comprehensive agricultural fair in China, Tang said at a news conference on Friday.

HIV/AIDS at low level in China, official says

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is at a low level of prevalence in China, a National Health Commission senior official said.

China has basically stopped the transmission of HIV/AIDS through blood transfusions and blood products, Wang Hesheng, vice-minister of the commission, said at a news conference this month.

The country has also effectively contained mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission and transmission through injecting drugs, said Wang, who is also director of the National Administration of Disease Prevention and Control.

The commission will continue to improve the country's strategies to prevent and control major infectious diseases and innovate disease prevention and control technologies to further reduce the threat of major infectious diseases, Wang said.

Guideline safeguards children's mental health

The Ministry of Civil Affairs and four other central organizations have issued a guideline for local authorities to better care for the mental health of children living in difficult circumstances.

Some children in rural areas who are separated from parents who work in other places, as well as those who move with migrant worker parents, are more prone to mental health issues and are in urgent need of strengthened care, the guideline says.

Local education and civil affairs authorities should come up with measures to deal with the mental health issues of children living in difficult circumstances, and schools should encourage children in need of mental health assessments to take assessments, according to the guideline.

Local civil affairs and education authorities should help these children's parents master mental health education skills, while teachers, social workers and volunteers should provide psychological counseling to children in need.

WANG QINGYUN