

POLICY REVIEW

Access to urban residency made easier

More aid for rural migrants moving to cities as six-year plan to boost urbanization rate enters final year

By XU WEI
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China will continue to offer rural migrants easier access to urban residency this year and expand the availability of basic public services for city residents, the country's top economic planner said.

The moves are part of a broader plan to help 100 million rural migrant workers obtain household registration, also known as *hukou*. This year marks the last year of a six-year plan to boost the country's urbanization rate that was rolled out in 2014.

Meng Wei, a spokeswoman for the National Development and Reform Commission, told a news briefing on Jan 19 that China will make it easier for rural migrant workers to obtain urban residency this year and enable more people to move to cities.

To further improve the urbanization rate, Meng said the authorities will move forward with the development of city clusters, including the Chengdu-Chongqing economic circle.

"The priority is to improve the level of connectivity and transport infrastructure between key city clusters and standardize the development of townships with special characteristics," she said.

The government will also work to improve cities' sustainable development capacity and the efficiency of their allocation of public resources, and upgrade urban governance, Meng said.

In China, *hukou* ties residents' access to basic public services such as education and subsidized health services to the place where their household is registered.

Last year, 60.6 percent of China's population lived in urban areas, up 1.02 percentage points year-on-year, figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show.

The NDRC scrapped residency restrictions in cities with populations of between 1 million and 3 million last year and relaxed them in cities — including many provincial capitals — with populations of between 3 million and 5 million.

A number of major cities, including Xi'an, Changsha and Nanjing, offered *hukou* status to college graduates last year, among other policies designed to attract high-caliber talent.

The NDRC said that at the end of 2018, there were 226 million rural migrant workers permanently resident in urban areas — 65 percent of them in major cities — who had not obtained *hukou* status.

"It would take measures beyond relaxing the residency curbs in small cities and townships to solve the problem. It requires scrapping the restrictions in large, small and medium-sized cities," said Chen Yajun, head of the



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NDRC's Department of Development Planning.

Chen told a news briefing in May that helping rural migrant workers settle down in cities was a primary issue to be addressed if China was to advance its urbanization drive.

It would also help promote the free flow of labor between rural and urban areas, improve social productivity, boost the incomes of migrant workers and expand the

domestic market, he said.

Chen said cities must open them-

selves up to all types of people, ranging from college graduates to migrant workers, adding that relaxing residency restrictions was not aimed at shoring up home prices.

Yu Bo, an analyst with Haitong Securities, said the essential part of China's household registration

reform is to transform migrant workers into urban residents, which would spur domestic demand by expanding investment and consumption.

"As the country continues its new urbanization drive, the population will continue to flow to major cities and city clusters," he said. "The further growth in population density will definitely improve productivity and usher in new demand for housing, education and healthcare."

He said the opening up of urban residency to key groups such as migrant workers, college graduates and veterans would help residents of city clusters rein in their debt levels by stabilizing home prices.

"This will be more than enough to shore up real estate sales and prevent a major collapse in the market," Yu said. "In the meantime, it will also provide a pillar for the stable growth of consumption."

POLICY RESPONSE

Authorities take action to deal with epidemic

By MO JINGXI
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Several ministry-level departments, including those responsible for railway ticket sales, agriculture and rural affairs, and public security, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

Passengers need to provide phone numbers

Railway authorities are now requiring train passengers to provide their cellphone numbers when buying tickets online, with the move implemented since Saturday.

A notice released by China Railway's 12306 online ticket-booking platform on Jan 31 said the move was aimed at ensuring passengers can be contacted without delay when needed in light of the ongoing pneumonia outbreak caused by a novel coronavirus.

For passengers needing special attention, such as juveniles and the elderly, and those without a cellphone number, the number of a guardian or family member must be provided, it said.

Passengers from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan or foreign

travelers can provide an email address instead.

The railway authorities will protect passengers' information in accordance with the law, the notice said, while adding that the authenticity of the cellphone numbers provided will be checked when necessary.

Cellphone numbers that fail to pass verification will result in the booking being rejected, it said.

Vegetable supplies, stable prices a priority

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has told agricultural authorities at all levels of government around the country to ensure the sufficient supply and stable prices of winter and spring vegetables to meet people's needs as the nation fights to control the novel coronavirus outbreak.



In a notice released on Jan 29, the ministry said local governments should get a clear picture of their local demand for vegetables, their ability to transfer vegetables to other areas, and whether they needed to purchase vegetables from outside.

The main vegetable-consuming areas and those severely stricken by the epidemic should include the supply of vegetables in their contingency plans for epidemic prevention, it said.

The ministry stressed the importance of strengthened quality supervision and ensuring the safety of vegetables, adding that urgent market need was no excuse for neglecting quality management.

It also required efforts to strengthen communication and coordination between main vegetable producing areas and priority cities and regions to organize supplies in a timely manner, coordinate allocation and guarantee supply.

Crackdown on unapproved road blocks

People who set up check posts without approval or break up roads to stop traffic — along with other acts designed to disrupt the flow of vehicles amid the ongoing epidemic — will face prosecution, the Ministry



of Public Security said on Jan 28.

It said in a video conference with its bureaus across the nation that ensuring the passage of ambulances and vehicles for epidemic prevention or those carrying medical personnel, drugs and devices and daily necessities should be the priority at this time.

Rumormongering and slanderous attacks will be cracked down on in accordance with the law, and rumors or fake news about the epidemic situation will be dealt with promptly, the ministry said.

It required police to be deployed in transport stations to keep order and help with quarantining people, vehicles and goods entering or leaving areas under control to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Crimes that disturb social order, including using the epidemic as an excuse to push up prices, hoarding

and speculation, will be severely punished, the ministry said.

Measures to maintain growth of SOEs

A series of pragmatic measures will be adopted to ensure the stable growth of State-owned enterprises this year amid a complex economic situation at home and abroad, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission said.

Administration spokesman Peng Huagang said the measures mainly involve five aspects: revenue increase and expenditure reduction; science and technology innovation; supply-side structural reform; reform of SOEs; and defending and removing major risks.

Peng said this year's priority areas in SOE reform include establishing and improving a market-oriented management mechanism and advancing mixed-ownership reform.

A group of reform pioneers will be fostered to lead and set an example for the nationwide reform of SOEs, Peng said.

Every effort will be made to maintain the smooth operation of SOEs this year due to their key roles in economic and social development, he added.

Policy digest

Rules for government information projects

The General Office of the State Council has released measures designed to regulate the construction of projects related to information-oriented government administration.

The measures range from planning and approval to construction and capital management and supervision, a notice published on Jan 21 said.

They are part of the government's efforts to promote interconnectivity and information sharing among different departments' information systems at different levels.

According to the document, the measures mainly apply to information systems such as national unified e-government network platforms whose implementation is the responsibility of State Council departments and units, national information resource libraries and national information security infrastructure.

The National Development and Reform Commission will take the lead in compiling the plan for national information-oriented government administration, before submitting it to the State Council for approval.

In principle, a project should have a proposal, feasibility study report and initial design scheme. If a project has already been included in the plan for national information-oriented government administration, a feasibility study report may be compiled and submitted directly.

As for information sharing projects jointly constructed by different departments, a collective framework plan should be created and submitted to the NDRC.

The unit constructing the project should designate its implementing agency and person in charge, strengthen coordination throughout the whole construction process, and strictly abide by regulations related to bidding, government procurement, engineering supervision and contract management, the document said.

Supervision of the projects will include whether they comply with the country's requirements for administrative information sharing, with the General Office of the State Council, the NDRC, the Ministry of Finance and the Cyberspace Administration of China to assume their respective functions in that regard.

Auditing organs stringently examine the national government administration information system and ensure that special funds are used for their intended purposes.

The measures took effect on Saturday, replacing interim measures released in 2007.

Poverty alleviation efforts strengthened

China will strengthen poverty alleviation efforts this year, aiming to lift the country's remaining poor counties and impoverished people out of poverty, the State Council announced after an executive meeting on Jan 20.

The meeting urged efforts to win the battle against poverty and secure the basic living conditions of people in straitened circumstances, mapping out major poverty alleviation tasks for 2020.

China will focus on the fight against poverty in deeply impoverished areas in Tibet autonomous region, Xinjiang autonomous region, and the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan.

It will implement measures to stimulate the local economic momentum of poverty-stricken areas by promoting industrial development and creating job opportunities.

Strict assessment of the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs was also underscored at the meeting.

It stressed the need to maintain existing poverty alleviation policies for counties, villages and people that have shaken off poverty and to provide timely assistance to newly impoverished people and those returning to poverty.

To consolidate the achievement of poverty eradication, the meeting called for the setting up of long-term mechanisms to target relative poverty.

Xinhua contributed to this story.