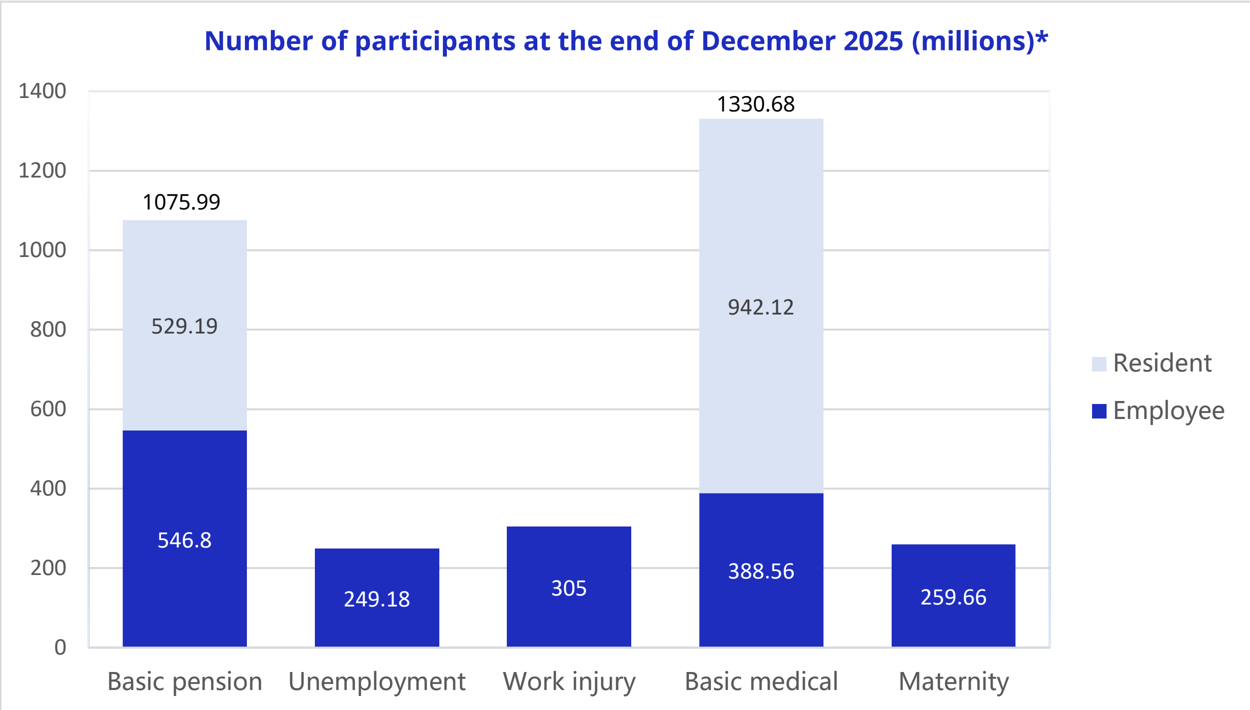
Quarterly Social Security Policy Monitor

Issue 24, January - March 2026

China social security barometer



Latest data available from National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2026

China social security policies

China approves 2026-2030 blueprint

On 12 March 2026, China's national lawmakers approved the outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan for national economic and social development (in Chinese), a development blueprint for the 2026-2030 period. The outline sets a slew of goals, with high-quality development high on the agenda. Many of the indicators focus on people's livelihoods, sending a clear signal that development is ultimately meant to benefit the people. Read more.

The Outline proposes that during the period of the 15th Five-Year Plan, the social security system should become more optimized and more sustainable. It emphasizes stronger social security as a key foundation for boosting consumption, reducing disparities across regions and schemes, improving protection for key groups, and ultimately establishing a multi-tiered social security system that covers the entire population, integrates urban and rural areas, is fair and unified, secure and well-regulated, and sustainable.

China to establish nationwide long-term care insurance system

On 25 March 2026, China issued a set of guidelines (in Chinese) to accelerate the establishment of a nationwide long-term care insurance system, with the aim of addressing the basic care needs of people who have difficulty in taking care of themselves. The initiative builds on pilot programs launched in 2016 and aims for nationwide rollout by 2028, with funding shared among employers, individuals, government, and social sources. Read more.

To promote the effective implementation of the long-term care insurance system, eight departments including the National Healthcare Security Administration jointly issued an implementation plan (in Chinese), which provides more detailed arrangements regarding financing, benefits, and management services. At the national level, a benchmark contribution rate framework for long-term care insurance has been established, with benefit standards differentiated between employed and non-employed persons based on their contribution levels.

China continues efforts to reduce workplace injury accidents

In March 2026, nine departments including the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) issued a five-year action plan 2026-2030 (in Chinese). The Plan calls for a continued decline in work-related injury accidents during the 15th Five-Year Plan period, with a targeted reduction of about 10 percent in key industries and over 10 percent in major platform enterprises over five years, alongside gradual decreases among workers in new forms of employment. The Plan prioritizes prevention in high-risk sectors, promotes the use of AI in injury prevention, strengthens monitoring, employer accountability, and inter-departmental coordination, and supports ongoing improvements in workplace conditions. Read more (in Chinese).

China promotes collective consultations over platform labour rules and algorithms

In March 2026, four departments in China jointly issued trial guidelines (in Chinese), aim to regulate collective consultations between platform workers and platform enterprises and their labour-service partner companies on labour rules and algorithmic management, and to safeguard the rights and interests of workers in new forms of employment, such as food delivery riders, couriers, and ride-hailing drivers.

The Guidelines specify that key areas for consultation include order allocation, income and commission rates, working hours and rest periods, time estimation, and route planning, and they introduce principles such as “algorithmic median selection.” They also standardize consultation representative selection and procedures, require public disclosure of consultation outcomes, and strengthen supervision over their implementation. In 2025, 15 platform enterprises conducted consultations on algorithms and labour rules and signed special collective agreements, covering over 20 million workers in new forms of employment. Read more (in Chinese).

China expands enterprise annuity access to more workers

China released *the Opinions on Further Improving Work on Enterprise Annuities (in Chinese)* to make its enterprise annuity system more "inclusive, flexible and convenient," thereby broadening access to more workers. The guidelines, jointly issued by MOHRSS and the Ministry of Finance, allow all types of enterprises, social organizations, foundations, private non-enterprise institutions and other eligible employers to establish enterprise annuities with their employees. Read more.

China to introduce new labour protection policies

According to MOHRSS, China will formulate the *Measures for Safeguarding the Basic Rights and Interests of Workers* *in New Forms of Employment*, which will further clarify labour standards for new forms of employment and define enterprises' responsibilities for labour protection. It will also introduce the *Interim Provisions on Safeguarding the Basic Rights and Interests of Older Workers* and promote revisions to the *Regulation on Paid Annual Leave for Employees* to ensure that employers effectively implement the paid annual leave system. Read more (in Chinese).

China aims to rein in fraud in healthcare insurance funds

China will implement detailed rules (in Chinese) for supervising healthcare insurance funds, pledging a tougher crackdown on fraudulent activities such as fabricating medical records and illegally reselling medicines.

The rules, which take effect on 1 April 2026, expand on the existing regulations for supervising and administering healthcare security funds released in 2021. They provide a clearer list of fraudulent activities that have emerged in recent years. Read more.

China to tilt medical insurance funds toward primary-level healthcare

China will channel more medical insurance resources toward primary-level healthcare institutions to make medical services more accessible and affordable for residents, according to a new policy guideline (in Chinese). Under the policy, newly added annual medical insurance funds will be appropriately tilted toward primary healthcare institutions. This move is expected to broaden access to nearby medical services, ensuring that more residents receive insured healthcare close to home. Read more.

China completes rollout of direct maternity allowance payments nationwide

China has completed the nationwide rollout of direct maternity benefit payments, as part of the country's broader efforts to foster a more birth-friendly society. The funds were previously channelled through employers, but are now paid directly into mothers' personal accounts. Read more.

China issues guideline to advance child-friendly development

China has rolled out a guideline (in Chinese) to advance child-friendly development across society, aiming to better protect minors' lawful rights and interests and promote children's healthy, all-round growth. The guideline draws on experience from pilot child-friendly city programs and calls for the full-scale advancement of child-friendly development, with coordinated measures covering social policy, public services, rights protection, growth spaces and development environments. Read more.

China to formulate laws on childcare services and other social sectors this year

Chinese lawmakers are set to formulate a law on childcare services this year aiming to channel more resources into people's livelihood sectors and boost consumption. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the national legislature, will also enact laws on social assistance and medical insurance. Read more.

Local policies and practices in China

Shanxi: Flexible workers allowed to prepay pension insurance contributions

To further encourage and support flexible workers and workers in new forms of employment to participate in the basic pension insurance scheme for enterprise employees, flexible workers in Shanxi Province have been allowed to prepay pension insurance contributions starting from 1 March 2026. Shanxi has fully removed household registration restrictions for flexible workers participating in employee pension insurance. Eligible individuals may enrol near their place of household registration or employment and choose to make contributions on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis. Read more (in Chinese).

Shijiazhuang: First supplementary work-related injury insurance measures in Hebei Province

Shijiazhuang City introduced supplementary work-related injury insurance measures effective 1 January 2026, the first such policy in Hebei Province. The measures address coverage gaps, reduce compensation pressure on small and micro enterprises, and extend protection to flexible and older workers. The scheme includes basic supplementary work injury insurance and occupational injury insurance and operates as a government-guided, employer-purchased commercial insurance, complementing the national work-related injury insurance system. Read more (in Chinese).

Zhejiang: "Maternity service package" promotes zero out-of-pocket maternity expenses

Zhejiang Province has launched a comprehensive maternity service package covering the entire maternity cycle, from prenatal care to childbirth and postnatal rooming-in services. The policy applies to both employees and urban and rural residents, promoting equity and regional integration in maternity benefits. Preliminary estimates indicate an average reduction in financial burden of over RMB 5,000 per insured pregnant or postpartum woman. Read more (in Chinese).

EU and Member States social security policies

Public consultation on European Social Security Pass (ESSPASS) launched

In February 2026, the European Commission launched a public consultation to prepare a proposal for a European Social Security Pass (ESSPASS), part of the Fair Labour Mobility Package to be adopted in autumn 2026. ESSPASS aims to help individuals moving or working in different EU countries exercising their social security rights more easily. It produces a digital solution for the secure and rapid verification of social security documents, cutting down on cumbersome procedures for individuals, businesses, and national authorities, while also reducing the risk of fraud. The public consultation is open until 16 April 2026. Read more.

Commission proposes Industrial Accelerator Act to strengthen industry and create jobs in Europe

In March 2026, the European Commission adopted a legislative proposal to increase demand for low-carbon, European-made technologies and products. The Industrial Accelerator Act (IAA) will boost manufacturing, grow businesses and create jobs in the EU, while supporting industry's adoption of cleaner, future-ready technologies. Read more.

EU-wide communication campaign launched to promote declared work

In February 2026, the European Labour Authority launched a new EU-wide communication campaign "declared work benefits all". The initiative marks 10 years of the European Platform tackling undeclared work and reinforces the joint commitment of Member States to advance towards fair and transparent labour practices across Europe. It addresses both workers and employers. Read more. For workers, it ensured access to labour rights, social protection and safer working conditions. For employers, it supports fair competition, legal certainty and sustainable business development. For societies, it strengthens public revenues and contributes to more resilient social protection systems. Read more.

MISSOC releases new update of its database on national social protection systems

In January 2026, MISSOC (Mutual Information System on Social Protection) released its latest update (as of July 2025) of the information on social protection systems in all EU countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. MISSOC is an indispensable online information source offering timely and comparable insights into the social protection systems of European countries. Access is free and open to all.

EU framework for monitoring implementation of the European Child Guarantee updated

Through statistical indicators, the EU-level monitoring framework tracks the progress of Member States in delivering on the European Child Guarantee. The latest update of the framework endorsed by the Indicators' Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee was published in January 2026. It features more recent data for 15 indicators. Read more.

France promulgates Social Security Financing Act for 2026

France's Social Security Financing Act for 2026 (Act No. 2025-1403), promulgated on 30 December 2025, introduces wide-ranging adjustments to social security contributions and benefits, many of which take effect from 1 January 2026. Key measures include higher employer contributions on mutually agreed terminations and compulsory retirements, making such departures more costly for companies; extended overtime contribution deductions for large companies (250 employees or more); revised calculation rules for the general employer contribution reduction; and a new "penalty" on employer old-age and survivors' insurance contributions for companies with at least 300 employees that fail to negotiate on senior worker retention. Increased contribution rates will also apply in cases of undeclared work from June 2026. On the benefits side, the law temporarily suspends parts of the 2023 "Borne" pension reform for the 1964–1968 cohorts (postponement of the increase in the statutory retirement age), and creates a new birth leave for parents after existing parental related leaves are used, with degressive daily social security benefits. Read more.

Italy's Budget Law 2026 expands support for working parents

On 1 January 2026, the annual budget law for 2026-2028 took effect in Italy. The law strengthens the income support for working mothers with at least two children, from €40 to €60 per month (subject to a €40,000 annual income cap). Private employers hiring mothers with at least three minor children and who have been unemployed for at least six months may benefit from an exemption from employer social security contributions, subject to legally defined ceilings. The law extends parental leave for two additional years, until the child's 14th birthday. It doubles the number of days of sick leave parents can take for each child from five to 10, until the child is 14 years old, instead of the previous age of eight. Read more.

Belgium tightens unemployment benefits and boosts flexi-job incentives

Belgium's unemployment benefits system is undergoing a major reform, with entitlement to full benefits capped at 24 months and unlimited benefits for the long-term unemployed phased out through a staged transition beginning from March 2026. At the same time, the annual tax-free allowance for flexi-jobs has been raised from €12,000 to €18,000, applied retroactively from 2025. A flexi-job contract is a contract under which a worker undertakes to perform additional work for an employer, provided that the worker is already employed by one or more employers for at least 4/5 of a full-time job. Read more.

Finland revamps unemployment benefits

Finland is streamlining its unemployment benefits system amid worst unemployment rate in EU by replacing the labour market subsidy and basic unemployment allowance with a single, means-tested "social security benefit for unemployed jobseekers" from 1 May 2026. The benefit will adjust to earned income and require long-term recipients to participate in an "activation period" including meetings at the office of their local employment authority. The new system will be rolled out in two phases with the aim to create a general social security benefit that includes a basic allowance for living costs, an allowance for housing costs and a discretionary allowance as last-resort social security. Read more.

Luxembourg proposes a new bill for transposing Platform Work Directive

On 10 February 2026, the Luxembourg government introduced Bill No. 8699 to transpose the EU Platform Work Directive into national law. The bill establishes a presumption of employment when a platform controls workers' pay or how tasks are performed. It applies both to individuals contracting directly with a platform and to those engaged through intermediaries, who will share joint liability. The formal classification of the contract (employed or self-employed) is not determinative; what matters is the actual working relationship. Thirteen criteria determine the presumption of employment, and meeting at least three makes the presumption irrebuttable. Unlike the Directive, the bill allows retroactive application to avoid unequal treatment based on when the work began. Read more.

Ireland implements a new auto-enrolment pension scheme

Since 1 January 2026, Ireland has implemented a new automatic enrolment pension scheme called "MyFutureFund". Any employee aged 23–60 who does not pay into a payroll pension and earns at least €20,000 per year across all employments or more than €5,000 over a 13-week period will be automatically enrolled in MyFutureFund. Read more.

Germany to increase statutory pension payments

In March 2026, the German government has announced that statutory pension payments will increase by 4.24% from 1 July 2026. The increase will benefit around 21 million pensioners in Germany. Read more.

Malta 2026 Budget strengthens support for families, pensioners and carers

The 2026 Budget strengthens support for families through reduced tax burdens and increased benefits for children, increases pensions for pensioners, and boosts aid for carers through increased grants and improved home-care support. It also advances healthcare and social welfare by widening access to free medicines for eligible elderly people, adding new cancer treatments to the Government Formulary, and expanding mental health care services. Read more.

Czechia introduces major changes to statutory health insurance

As of 1 January 2026, Czechia's Act No. 289/2025 Coll. introduces significant changes to statutory health insurance, including state-covered contributions for adults personally caring for a child under seven, and removal of limits on caregivers' income or children's preschool attendance for eligibility. The amendment also tightens eligibility for exemptions from the minimum assessment base for health insurance contributions on the grounds of childcare and significantly reduces employers' reporting duties, as health insurers will obtain most information from administrative databases. Read more.

Latvia adopts Social Economy Plan for 2026-2029

The Ministry of Welfare of Lativa has developed the Social Economy Plan for 2026-2029, which focuses on strengthening the country's social economy sector. Priorities include establishing unified definitions of social economy, social innovation and social impact, assessing social economy entities, creating a cooperation platform for public bodies and NGOs, and promoting employment opportunities for groups at risk of social exclusion within social enterprises and other social economy entities. Read more.

Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg sign treaty to combat social fraud more efficiently

On 9 March 2026, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed a treaty to strengthen the fight against cross-border social fraud by enabling joint inspections, faster information exchange, and closer cooperation in recovering unduly paid social-security contributions or benefits. The treaty will enter into force once the three Benelux countries have ratified it and other countries may join. Read more.

Social security policies in other countries

Japan rolls out major family support reforms for 2026

Starting in 2026, Japan is rolling out major new family-support measures, including making standard childbirth effectively free, introducing a Child and Child-rearing Support Contribution as a small new addition to health insurance premiums (funded monthly by both employers and employees), and launching a nationwide "Childcare for All Children" program that allows children aged six months to two years to access up to 10 hours of flexible daycare per month regardless of their parents' employment status. Read more.

Sri Lanka ride-hailing platform partners with Social Security Board to launch pension scheme for taxi drivers

In March 2026, HelaGo, Sri Lanka's emerging ride-hailing platform entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Sri Lanka Social Security Board to introduce a government-backed pension scheme for taxi drivers, marking a significant step toward improving the long-term financial security of gig economy workers in the country. Read more.

Tanzania strengthens social protection for the informal sector

On 9 February 2026, the Prime Minister's Office – Labour, Employment and Persons with Disabilities officially launched the National Social Protection Policy 2023, extending social security coverage to self-employed citizens and workers in the informal sector, who have long been excluded from formal safety nets. The policy, unveiled alongside the National Informal Sector Scheme (NISS), aims to strengthen income security and ensure inclusive social protection for all Tanzanians. Read more.

Chinese academic insights

Zheng Gongcheng[1]: Multiple proposals on elderly care and pensions submitted during the Two Sessions

Increasing pension benefits for farmers. Pension benefit increases for farmers should be implemented on a tiered, age-based basis, with priority given to elderly rural residents, especially those aged 80 and above, and the introduction of a "historical contribution pension" for those over 70. Read more (in Chinese). Higher pensions for older rural residents help clarify intergenerational responsibilities and encourage broader participation in the pension system among younger populations. Read more (in Chinese).

Establishing a "mother's pension" scheme. It is proposed that women who give birth be exempt from pension insurance contributions during a defined child-rearing period (e.g. two years), with contributions deemed paid to protect pension entitlements. The policy should cover all mothers to ensure fairness and continuity of contribution records. Read more (in Chinese).

Accelerating the formulation of a law on elderly care services. China should accelerate the enactment of a national law on elderly care services to regulate service provision, protect older persons' rights, and address gaps in rural elderly care. With existing legal frameworks and local practices already in place, conditions are favourable for legislation. Parallel efforts should focus on strengthening the caregiving workforce, increasing public investment, promoting public-private provision and chain-based institutions, and raising overall service quality. Read more (in Chinese).

Cai Fang[2]: Social security in the age of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence boosts productivity but also disrupts employment and may intensify labour market tensions and income inequality. To address these challenges, social security systems must shift toward a more inclusive, institutionalized, and system-based model covering a broader population. This requires greater public investment in people through universal pensions, employment support, and guarantee of basic needs, while applying principles of intergenerational balance to ensure that the benefits of technological progress are shared across generations. A stronger social security system will be essential for protecting well-being and stimulating domestic demand in the AI era. Read more (in Chinese).

Li Ling[3]: "Healthy China" initiative and its potential contributions to global health

China's healthcare reform has delivered tangible results, with health expenditure falling to 6.7 percent of GDP. Under the *Healthy China* strategy, policy focus is shifting from treatment toward prevention and health promotion

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[1] Member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and President of the China Association of Social Security

[2] Former Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Membership of CASS and Chief Expert of a national high-end think tank

[3] Professor at the National School of Development of Peking University and Director of the Peking University Center for Healthy Development

through improved lifestyles, a better environment, and deeper system reforms. Initiatives such as the Sanming model integrate medical insurance funding within "health communities," aligning incentives with population health outcomes. The expansion of "health+" and the application of artificial intelligence are expected to drive new health-industry development and shape a distinctive Chinese model of health governance with global relevance. Read more (in Chinese).

QING Lianbin[4]: Mechanisms for promoting active engagement of older people in an ageing society

The proportion of younger older persons aged 60–69 accounts for more than half of the total elderly population. Healthy younger seniors constitute an important human resource for promoting economic and social development. At present, active engagement among older persons is constrained by institutional barriers, social perceptions, and capability limitations. To address these challenges, measures are needed to remove restrictive policies, improve re-employment conditions, strengthen social awareness, and refine incentive mechanisms, thereby enabling older people to better participate in social activities and family life. Read more (in Chinese).

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