

# *Challenges and Solutions for China's Resumption of Work and Production against COVID-19*

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on analyzing the multiple challenges faced by the Chinese government in the process of promoting the resumption of work and production since the COVID-19 epidemic, and summarizes the overall thinking and work priorities in the process of smoothly promoting the resumption of work and production.

## 1. Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020 almost put China's economic development on hold. Local governments also took strict prevention and control measures such as travel restrictions, city and road lockdown, production suspension and stay-at-home orders. While major progress was achieved in epidemic prevention and control, the national economy and people's livelihoods were inevitably affected. Work suspension should not be the norm, and quick resumption of work and production is the key to safeguarding the national economy and people's lives.

The recovery after a major epidemic is faced with challenges in all aspects. It is urgent to clarify the overall thinking of the work and clarify the focus of work, so as to provide reference for the better introduction of relevant policies. This paper addresses the challenges, priorities and countermeasures of work resumption in the post-pandemic period, It aims to point out the specific challenges faced by China in resuming work and production after a major epidemic, as well as the focus of future work, with a view to providing reference and suggestions for national decision-making.

## 2. Challenges of Work Resumption in the Post-Pandemic Period

### 2.1. Risk of Possible Resurgence of COVID-19

Since the major epidemic situation has not been fully curbed, large-scale work resumption may lead to a cluster of cross-infections and possibly the resurgence of COVID-19. Quarantine containment is the most straightforward and effective way to contain the spread of the virus while unprepared work resumption with more contact, movement and gathering of people poses a direct

and potential threat to the overall situation[1]. Thanks to the prompt and effective response, China has decisively contained the spread of COVID-19 throughout the country and gained periodical achievements[2]. According to the research of clinical medicine and virology experts, however, the virus has not disappeared and repeatedly occurred in a scattered manner. As time goes by, the COVID-19 virus continues its mutation. In the course of spread, its pathogenicity and infectivity may be either weakened or enhanced, resulting in the risk of resurgence.

## **2.2. Economic Fundamentals Affected by COVID-19**

A pandemic is a war without gun smoke and is highly destructive. The rigid prevention and control measures against the pandemic adversely affect economic development and its fundamentals, resulting in direct economic loss and potential loss of market opportunities. Owing to economic pains like reduced investment, restricted exports and withered consumption plus more laid-off workers and rising prices, some enterprises (especially medium-, small- and micro-sized private enterprises) struggle in dilemma under the impact. In the context of severely affected fundamentals of economic growth and order, all walks of society are facing more serious challenges like survival and financing of enterprises, employment, raw material supply, production, product transportation, sales and export[3].

## **2.3. Prominent Labor and Employment Troubles**

The interrupted production and travel caused by the pandemic make the labor and employment troubles more prominent. On the one hand, the interrupted production of most enterprises during the pandemic period affects financing, production, sales and other links that significantly lowered the revenue of enterprises, in which case salaries are not paid on time while employees are laid off[4]. On the other hand, employees are kept away from their posts due to the restrictive measures and are concerned about their jobs and salaries. The decision of retaining or dismissing employees and the payroll during the pandemic period becomes a thorny issue. In addition, the lockdown policy makes it hard for employers to recruit new or unemployed workers.

## **3. General Principle and Priorities of Steady Work Resumption after the Pandemic**

### **3.1. General Principles and Basic Policies for Nationwide Work Resumption Coordinated and Determined by the Central Government**

First of all, China's central government made general planning and coordination to create favorable conditions for work resumption in light of local and temporal conditions and ensured unimpeded industrial, market and socioeconomic circulations[5]. It developed the general principle of work resumption as well as policies and legal guidelines to guarantee the step-by-step resumption in a legal, orderly and stable way. On February 21, under the State Council's Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of Response to COVID-19, the Notice on Publishing Guides to Enterprises and Government-sponsored Institutions on Epidemic Prevention and Control Measures for Work Resumption was released, which for the first time proposed the arrangement of work resumption of these organizations in the post-pandemic period. On March 4, the General Office of the State Council officially issued the Notice of the General Office of State Council on Further Streamlining Approval Procedures, Optimizing Services and Promoting Enterprises' Work Resumption Accurately and steadily that clarified the notice matters, decisions and deployments of work resumption in the course of epidemic prevention and control[6]. On April 7, the Communist Party of China Central Committee Leading Group on Novel Coronavirus Prevention and Control issued

the Guiding Opinions on Effective Epidemic Prevention and Control and Positive and Orderly Work Resumption Simultaneously that proposed the general strategy and specific measures of work resumption.

Second, based on the evidence-based judgment and prediction of epidemic development trends made by the public health and epidemic prevention and control authority and its expert panel, the central government developed rough timelines for work resumption of different sectors in different provinces and cities that served as the guidelines for practice. In addition, the authority strengthened information disclosure mechanism to release the most updated information about the epidemic situation that systematically and orderly guided the local work consumption efforts (Table 1). The local governments executed the accountability system to implement the documents and arrange work resumption of different sectors in an orderly way at all levels. These documents included the Notice on Releasing Guides on Work Resumption of Housing and Municipal Engineering Projects issued by the General Office of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-rural Development, the Notice on Further Optimization of Review and Approval Service to Accelerate Work Resumption of Agricultural Enterprises issued by the General Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Guiding Opinions on Promoting Orderly Work Resumption of Industry and Communication Enterprises issued by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Notice on Securing Scientific Epidemic Prevention and Control in State-level High and New Technology Areas to Promote Orderly Work Resumption of Enterprises issued by the General Office of the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Notice on Accurate and Orderly Recovery of Transportation Service to Promote Work Resumption issued by the Ministry of Transport, etc. All these policies released by the central ministries and departments in different sectors well guaranteed the sound and orderly progress of work resumption.

Table 1: Statistics of central units that issued policies.

Name	Number of policies
Ministry of Housing and Urban-rural Development	8
General Office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs	6
Ministry of Industry and Information Technology	7
Ministry of Transport	11
Ministry of Science and Technology	9

### 3.2. Guarding Against Imported Cases and Preventing a Resurgence of the Outbreak at Home

On the one hand, China strengthened the mechanism of risk pre-alerting, testing and quarantine mechanism for people from abroad: first, the Chinese embassies and consulates abroad notified the entry persons from abroad of the relevant Chinese laws and measures of epidemic prevention and control such as quarantine control, and their obligation of observing and cooperating local governments in epidemic prevention and control. Second, China strengthened the testing of the entry persons and fully evaluated the health and safety risks of imported cases[7]. The Chinese embassies and consulates abroad are required to thoroughly verify the record of travel in high-risk areas or contact with high-risk persons. Third, China improved the medical quarantine measures to prevent imported cases and possible cross-infection during the quarantine period. The infected entry persons were subject to classified diagnosis and treatment. More treatment methods were available such as remote treatment and reservation via special channels to minimize the contact and cross-infection risks.

On the other hand, persisting in the domestic regular epidemic prevention and control mechanism and accelerating the R&D, clinical tests and uptake of special medicine and vaccine

against COVID-19: first, China continued the epidemic prevention and control measures, always kept alert of personal safety protection in work resumption, encouraged online work and communication, and reduced unnecessary group contact. Second, the enterprises of work resumption must provide necessary protective facilities to the gathering activities like meetings and meals, and enhance the routine physical examination of employees. The qualified employers with a large number of employees were allowed to temporarily hire medical personnel in charge of physical examination of employees and treatment of sudden medical events during the pandemic period. Third, the R&D of the vaccine was intensified[8]. Through expanding public diplomatic channels, establishing academic platforms, convening international workshops and strengthening international collaboration, China explored the direction and progress of anti-virus medications and vaccines, and studied all possibly effective medications and vaccines through labor division and cooperation from different perspectives so as to save the time of trial and error and develop the vaccine that thoroughly conquers the pandemic.

### **3.3. Advancing Local Work Resumption in Different Sectors in a Classified and Staggered Way**

In the process of advancing work resumption, local governments implemented scientific and precise policies relating to the Law of the PRC on Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases, and pushed forward work resumption in an orderly and staggered way by sector, region and urgency.

Work resumption was carried out by sector and its urgency. In the first batch, it is the work resumption of enterprises and government-sponsored institutions engaged in the production of protective equipment, medicine and medical equipment provided sufficient medical supplies for epidemic prevention and control that curbed the spread of the virus. In the second batch, it is the work resumption of enterprises and institutions of survival food such as grain and oil, meat and vegetable as well as those energy-related ones like urban water, electricity, coal, petroleum and gas maintained and improved people's livelihood and guaranteed the supply of grain and key agricultural products[9]. In the third batch, it is the work resumption of enterprises and institutions engaged in the wholesale, retail, warehousing and transportation of daily necessities and those engaged in communication, traffic and transportation and other businesses were realized step by step. Finally, the shopping malls and marketplaces were allowed to reopen that recovered life services to the normal, expanded consumption scale of residents, and sped up the construction of investment projects, thus reaching a good supply-demand balance[10].

At the regional level, local governments all released the policies targeted to work resumption in light of the regional epidemic prevention and control situation (Table 2). For example, on May 30, 2020, the General Office of the Heilongjiang Provincial People's Government issued the Notice on Several Measures for Coordinated Advancement of Epidemic Prevention and Control and Stabilization of Employment, the General Office of the Jilin provincial government issued the Notice on Shared Duties to Implement the Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Response to COVID-19 Impact and Enhancement of Employment Stabilizing Measures, Shanxi provincial development and reform commission issued the Notice on Establishing of Financing Matchmaking Mechanism for Bolstering Weak Links, Stabilizing Investment and Supporting Work Resumption, Guangdong province issued the Notice on Several Policies for Response to COVID-19 Pandemic and Supporting Work Resumption of Enterprises, the General Office of Hebei provincial government issued the Notice on Several Measures for Accelerating Work Resumption of Enterprises, and the General Office of Zhejiang provincial government issued the Opinions on Supporting Work Resumption of Enterprises and Guaranteeing Services for Stabilizing Enterprises,

Economy and Development[11]. In a few regions less affected by COVID-19 like Qinghai and Tibet, the restrictive measures were promptly relaxed as the situation got better which took a lead in promoting work resumption by lifting traffic restrictions and simplifying the handling formalities of paperwork certification to the workers returning to their posts. Megacities like Beijing and Shanghai continued to attach great importance to both relaxations of epidemic prevention measures and acceleration of work resumption, which only scaled up after the general situation became stabilized. The border port areas with a high risk of imported cases like Heilongjiang mobilized more human, supply and capital resources to the quarantine control and test by the customs to prevent the resurgence of COVID-19, and strived for work resumption in an all-round manner by reducing the pressure of imported cases to the greatest extent[12].

Table 2: Statistics of local units that issued policies.

Name	Number of policies
Jilin Province	12
Shanxi Province	14
Guangdong Province	21
Zhejiang Province	19
Qinghai Province	9
Beijing City	11
Shanghai City	8

### 3.4. Implementing the General Principle of “Epidemic Prevention and Control Measures Not Affecting Production and Life”

As the epidemic prevention and control situation got better, China implemented policies legally and precisely and gradually reduced the "one-size-fits-all" approach to avoid disputes caused by simple and rude measures that hampered the progress and effect of work resumption, and ensured the normal work, life and study not impeded by epidemic prevention and control. First, as the epidemic situation was basically under control, China started to steadily lift the restrictive measures against free movement step by step to support recovery and resumption of production, life, routine activities and schools. Such practice of relaxed policies was of exemplary significance to nationwide epidemic prevention and control, and rehabilitated people's confidence in returning work and life to normal[13]. Second, China gave the role of smart city technology in epidemic prevention and control and made use of big data technology to connect and integrate the urban systems and services, improve the efficiency of utilizing medical resources, optimize the urban medical management and epidemic monitoring services, and precisely test, identify and treat patients so that the normal life of other people was not affected by epidemic prevention and control as far as possible[14]. Third, attention was paid to the people over 65 years old, with underlying diseases, and with a record of living or traveling in the countries/regions with major risk[15]. The prevention and control were strengthened in people gathering places such as detention houses, lockups, drug rehabilitation centers, compulsory medical centers, nursing homes, orphanages, welfare institutions and psychiatric hospitals. Fourth, China enhanced the basic living guarantee to the disadvantaged groups by granting temporary subsidies, and expanded coverage of unemployment insurance to maintain the basic living standards of the unemployed[16]. Fifth, China made an overall arrangement to postpone the open time of primary, secondary and college schools and the end time for college graduates, and advance the opening of primary, secondary and college schools by region and group so that the college graduates could timely and smoothly graduate to find jobs[17].

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