

CHINESE SOCIETY 2024/2025: COPING WITH RISING STRESS LEVELS

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China's sluggish post-COVID recovery persisted in 2024. High youth unemployment, slow income growth and weak consumer confidence deepened frustrations and uncertainties. Signs of strain were evident, including rising mental health issues, unpaid wages sparking worker protests and alarming "social revenge" incidents. Millions of rural households ceased paying medical insurance, while many young people opted out of the pension system, further straining China's healthcare and pension systems. Shifting perceptions of inequality fuelled growing pessimism, raising concerns about public confidence. Acknowledging these unresolved challenges, policymakers in late 2024 pledged a more proactive strategy for 2025. Success will hinge on the new measures' ability to instill hope and deliver tangible progress despite the obstacles ahead.

(Click on the link to read the above in [Chinese](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#))

Chinese:

中国社会 2024/2025：应对不断上升的压力水平

2024 年，中国在新冠疫情后的复苏依然缓慢。青年失业率高、收入增长缓慢、消费者信心疲软，社会的挫败感和对未来的不确定性在上升。社会压力的迹象显而易见，包括广受关注的心理健康问题、拖欠工资引发的工人抗议以及令人震惊的“社会报复”事件。大量农村家庭停止缴纳医疗保险，许多年轻人选择退出养老金制度，这进一步加剧了中国医疗和养老金体系的压力。社会对不平等的看法在发生变化，悲观情绪不断上涨，引发了对公众信心的担忧。政策制定者承认这些尚未解决的挑战，并于 2024 年末承诺在 2025 年采取更加积极主动的措施。成功与否将取决于新举措能否在面临障碍的情况下注入希望并取得切实进展。

French:

LA SOCIÉTÉ CHINOISE EN 2024/2025: FAIRE FACE À LA HAUSSE DES NIVEAUX DE TENSION

La lente reprise post-Covid de la Chine a persisté en 2024. Le chômage élevé des jeunes, la lente croissance des revenus et la faible confiance des consommateurs ont aggravé les frustrations et les incertitudes. Les signes de tension sont apparus au grand jour, notamment la hausse des problèmes de santé mentale, des cas de salaires impayés à l'origine des protestations des travailleurs, ainsi que des incidents alarmants de « vengeance sociale ». Des millions de ménages ruraux ont cessé de payer une assurance maladie, tandis que de nombreux jeunes se sont retirés du système de retraite, mettant encore à plus rude épreuve les systèmes de santé et de retraite chinois. L'évolution des perceptions des inégalités a alimenté un pessimisme croissant, suscitant des inquiétudes quant à la confiance des citoyens. Reconnaissant ces défis en suspens, les décideurs politiques ont promis fin 2024 une stratégie plus proactive pour 2025. Le succès dépendra de la capacité des nouvelles mesures à susciter l'espoir et à générer des progrès tangibles malgré les obstacles à venir.

Spanish:

SOCIEDAD CHINA 2024/2025: ENFRENTAR EL CRECIMIENTO DE LOS NIVELES DE ESTRÉS

La lenta recuperación de China posterior a la COVID persistió en 2024. El alto desempleo juvenil, el lento crecimiento de los ingresos y la débil confianza de los consumidores profundizaron las frustraciones y las incertidumbres. Los signos de tensión eran evidentes, incluidos crecientes problemas de salud mental, salarios impagos que provocaron protestas de los trabajadores e incidentes alarmantes de “venganza social”. Millones de hogares rurales dejaron de pagar el seguro médico, mientras que muchos jóvenes optaron por no participar en el sistema de pensiones, lo que presionó aún más los sistemas de salud y

pensiones de China. Las cambiantes percepciones sobre la desigualdad alimentaron un pesimismo creciente, lo que generó preocupaciones sobre la confianza pública. Al reconocer estos desafíos no resueltos, a fines de 2024 los formuladores de políticas prometieron una estrategia más proactiva para 2025. El éxito dependerá de la capacidad de las nuevas medidas para infundir esperanza y lograr avances tangibles a pesar de los obstáculos que se avecinan.

Executive Summary

1. After a sluggish and underwhelming post-COVID recovery in 2023, China faced persistent social and economic pressures in 2024 as existing social policies remained largely unchanged, leaving critical societal challenges unaddressed.
2. The year 2024 was marked by high youth unemployment, sluggish income growth and weak consumer confidence. For millions of citizens, it was yet another year of unmet expectations, deepening frustrations and growing uncertainty over their personal prospects and the nation's economic trajectory.
3. As the year progressed, signs of strain became clearer. Youth unemployment among individuals aged 16 to 24 peaked at 18.8% in August and remained high throughout the rest of 2024, reflecting deep structural challenges in the labour market.
4. The mounting stress within Chinese society had manifested in diverse and troubling ways. Mental health concerns garnered increased attention, particularly impacting school-aged children and adults employed in precarious jobs. Meanwhile, unpaid wages in the construction and manufacturing sectors fuelled widespread worker protests.
5. Millions of rural households are forgoing medical insurance due to rising costs, while many young Chinese reportedly opt out of pension contributions. These trends increase pressure on the nation's overburdened healthcare and pension systems, raising concerns over their sustainability and affordability.
6. In a country renowned for low crime rates, 2024 witnessed a disturbing rise in "social revenge" incidents. Perpetrators targeted strangers to vent personal grievances, causing sudden and devastating consequences. These acts of violence shocked society, bringing to the surface the growing undercurrents of frustration and despair.

7. Recent research underscores a significant shift in Chinese perceptions of inequality. Individuals increasingly attribute inequality to systemic factors over individual shortcomings, and growing pessimism has replaced the previously prevalent optimism. These evolving views raise critical questions about their potential impact on regime legitimacy and public support for the government.
8. By late September, China's leadership recognised the pressing need for a major policy shift. The December Central Economic Work Conference marked a clear departure from the previous year's approach, signalling a commitment to a more proactive strategy for 2025. Reflecting this shift, the government announced the first significant pay increase for public-sector employees in years.
9. While significant hurdles undoubtedly remain, the direction and effectiveness of 2025 policies will be paramount. Their ability to instil hope within the population and demonstrate tangible progress on the ground will be crucial. This will be key to bolstering public confidence and fostering positive future expectations.