

# *Research on the Government's Responsibility in China's Social Security under the Background of the COVID-19*

Tingting Yin, Keying Wu, Xiaoli Xie, Mengtong Wei, Xinjie Zheng

*Tianjin University of Science and Technology, Tianjin, China*

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Social security; Government responsibility

**Abstract:** In the face of the sudden COVID-19, social security has made a significant contribution to winning the war on epidemic prevention and control, playing an irreplaceable role in helping epidemic prevention and control and stabilizing economic and social development order, and the effective play of social security role depends on the performance of government responsibilities, so it is of great practical significance to study the government responsibility in China's social security in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic. This paper starts from the theoretical level, and analyzes the theoretical basis and practical needs of the government to undertake social security responsibilities. Secondly, it specifically analyzes the responsibility of the government in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic from three aspects: ensuring employment, stabilizing the economy and improving services. On this basis, it further analyzes the practical dilemma in the implementation of the government's responsibility. Finally, the paper puts forward measures to improve government responsibility.

## **1. Introduction**

The COVID-19 is a major public health disaster. It not only involves the medical and health field, but also affects social security, production and supply, justice, public security and other systems, posing a serious threat to the lives and property safety of the people, and also affecting the social stability and economic development of the country. Since the COVID-19, the relevant government departments have issued a series of new policies to enable the social security work to operate normally and resolve various practical problems in a timely manner in a special period. However, in the process of concrete implementation, the government still has deficiencies and shortcomings in fulfilling its responsibilities, which makes the role of social security not fully play, cannot fully meet people's needs and fully protect people's interests. Therefore, the government should act actively and conscientiously perform its duties. The state should attach importance to the construction of the social security system, improve the status of the social security system in the modernization process of the national governance system and governance capacity, and better play the positive role of social security in promoting economic and social development.

Based on the background of the COVID-19, this paper collected and reviewed some social security measures taken by countries in the process of epidemic prevention and control, analyzed the government's responsibility and role in social security, and further explored how to improve the government's responsibility in social security to better respond to such emergencies, ensure and

improve people's livelihood, and promote economic and social development on the basis of studying the practical difficulties faced by the government in performing its duties.

## **2. Theoretical basis for government involvement in social security**

### **2.1 Determined by the purpose of the government**

In China, the government is the executive organ of the organs of state power and the administrative organ of the state. It upholds the principle of serving the people and being responsible for the people. The starting point and end point of its work are to serve the people, and the ultimate goal is to realize the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. China's social security is based on the government as the main body of responsibility. Through the redistribution of national income, the government provides material assistance to those who temporarily or permanently lose their ability to work and have difficulties in living for various reasons to ensure their basic life. Therefore, the government's responsibility for social security is fundamentally determined by its purpose. Serving the people covers a wide range, not only in material aspects, but also in spiritual and cultural aspects. The minimum requirement of social security is that the government should meet the basic material needs of the people, especially those with difficulties, namely social assistance. At the same time, it is also necessary for the government to strengthen the construction of infrastructure such as culture, education and medical treatment, provide basic public services to all members of society, and meet their spiritual and cultural needs.

### **2.2 Relationship between government and market**

The relationship between the government and the market is both a historical issue and a practical one. In western countries, the relationship between government and market has undergone the evolution of mercantilism - classical liberalism - Keynesianism - new liberalism - new Keynesianism. In China, this relationship has also developed with the changes of the times. From the early government-led relationship to the gradual advancement of the marketization process, the combination of strengthening the government's macro-control and giving play to the leading role of the market in the allocation of resources has been formed. The "visible hand" and "invisible hand" should be followed together. As mentioned earlier, China's social security takes the government as the subject of responsibility, and in addition to the government as the subject of responsibility, there are also market subjects, such as enterprises, social organizations, etc. China's social insurance has the nature of sharing the responsibilities of the state, enterprises and individuals. The government undertakes social security responsibility precisely because the relationship between the government and the market is often disharmonious to some extent. For example, the market failure requires the government to regulate and strengthen the supervision, so that the two will present a relatively harmonious state. Therefore, the exertion of government responsibility in social security can maximize the protection of people's rights and interests by regulating the behavior of market subjects.

## **3. The realistic need for the government to undertake social security responsibilities**

### **3.1 Adjusting the system and regulations**

The government is the maker of social security policies and the legislative participant of relevant laws and regulations of social security. The content of social security will change with the development of society. On the one hand, some old content in the past is no longer suitable for the current reality. On the other hand, the emergence of new problems in the field of social security

requires new systems to regulate to solve problems. This requires the government to play a role in adjusting the system and regulations according to the changes of the times and the actual needs. At the same time, the government can also inject the vitality of the times into the social security system by analyzing and judging the national conditions and predicting the future. The system is always the basis. Only if the system is sound can social security be legalized and institutionalized, and the implementation of the social security system can be legally based, so that it can fully play its role to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the people.

### **3.2 Provide financial support**

The government is the main body of social security responsibility, and one of the most basic and extensive responsibilities undertaken by the government is financial responsibility. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the total expenditure of the three social insurance funds of basic endowment insurance, unemployment insurance and work-related injury insurance in 2021 will be 6268.7 billion yuan, the total expenditure of the national basic medical insurance (including maternity insurance) fund will be 2404.310 billion yuan, and the expenditure of medical aid will be 61.990 billion yuan. A total of 2.68 billion yuan of basic endowment insurance premiums for urban and rural residents will be paid for 23.54 million people in need. At the same time, the national finance also effectively promotes the development of science, education, culture and health, and contributes to the realization of social welfare. The sound operation of a country's social security system needs a certain economic foundation. For a country with a large population, China's huge financial expenditure in social security must also rely on the government's financial revenue, and give full play to the supporting role of government finance to ensure the operation of the social security system.

### **3.3 Implement effective supervision**

The development process of social security systems in various countries around the world shows that the establishment of a sound regulatory mechanism will promote the healthy development of society, while the lack of effective regulation will inevitably lead to the deviation of social security from the scheduled track <sup>[7]</sup>. China's social security projects are numerous and complex, and the regulatory content is diverse. It is not only necessary to supervise the implementation of social security policies, the collection and payment of social security funds, but also to supervise and manage the market participants in social security. At present, China's social security supervision system is not perfect, and effective supervision mechanism has not yet been established. The government needs to assume the responsibility of supervision and management, constantly improve the social security supervision system, establish the social security supervision mechanism, and promote the healthy development of the social security system.

## **4. Government responsibility in social security under the COVID-19 epidemic**

In the face of the sudden COVID-19 epidemic, social security has made a significant contribution to winning the war on epidemic prevention and control, playing an irreplaceable role in helping to prevent and control the epidemic and stabilizing the order of economic and social development <sup>[1]</sup>. The role of social security depends on the fulfillment of government responsibilities. During the epidemic, in order to ensure the safety and basic interests of all people's lives, the Chinese government has always adhered to the people-centered principle and rapidly formulated and implemented a series of practical policy tool combinations, including social security policies. The Chinese society took the lead in effectively controlling the epidemic in the international community and restoring the order of

production and life <sup>[6]</sup>. The government has played a very important and positive role in ensuring employment, stabilizing the economy and optimizing services.

## **4.1 Role of government responsibility**

### **4.1.1 Guarantee employment**

In 2020, the COVID-19 broke out. From February to March, the central and local governments took a series of social security system measures such as "reducing, reducing, exempting, delaying and returning". According to the impact of the epidemic and the affordability of the fund, the provinces reduced and remitted pension insurance, medical insurance, work-related injury insurance and other contributions in stages, giving full play to the function of unemployment insurance to stabilize employment. After March 2020, the epidemic prevention and control has gradually entered the normalization. At this stage, the social security policy is mainly to provide special support for stabilizing and expanding posts, and to protect the social security rights and interests of migrant workers, self-employed businesses and all kinds of flexible employment. In 2021, with the improvement of the national economic situation and the overall stability of the employment of enterprises, the implementation of the return policy of stable posts for enterprises in difficulties will be stopped, and the policy will be adjusted to optimize the preferential return policy of stable posts. In 2022, the risk of multi-point epidemic still exists. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security will further adjust and optimize the return policy of stable posts and increase the return rate of stable posts of enterprises.

### **4.1.2 Stabilize the economy**

Economic society is a dynamic circulatory system. During the epidemic, how to balance the relationship between epidemic prevention and control and economic development is a major practical issue. On the premise of ensuring that the epidemic prevention and control are in place, it is an important task to orderly promote the resumption of work and production of enterprises and restore the vitality of economic development. In February 2020, the government comprehensively strengthened the measures to stabilize employment, and made every effort to promote the implementation of policies such as the phased reduction of enterprise social security premiums, the return of unemployment insurance and the employment subsidy. In April 2022, the executive meeting of the State Council proposed to continue the implementation of the unemployment insurance return policy, and to return a certain proportion of the unemployment insurance premium to the insured enterprises that do not lay off workers but reduce the number of layoffs. At the same time, it also decided to extend the policy of delaying the payment of pension, unemployment and work-related injury insurance premiums by stages from five extremely poor industries to all small and medium-sized enterprises and self-employed businesses affected by the epidemic. We will raise the proportion of stable return of unemployment insurance for small and medium-sized enterprises and individual businesses to 90%. It can be seen that in order to promote enterprises to resume work and production under the condition of good epidemic prevention and control, the government has continuously introduced and improved policies and measures to smooth economic circulation and stabilize economic operation and development.

### **4.1.3 Excellent service**

During the epidemic, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security issued a notice requiring all localities to do a good job in the handling of social insurance during the prevention and control of new pneumonia, stressing that "no meeting" services should be provided as much as

possible, reducing the flow of on-site personnel in the handling hall from the source, reducing the risk of cross-infection, and accelerating the transformation and upgrading of the handling service model in combination with the construction of a unified national social insurance public service platform, We will take online service as the dominant service mode, popularize the "handheld social security" service, and facilitate people to handle business at home <sup>[4]</sup>. According to this notice, the Tianjin Social Security Center used WeChat and other channels to push the "work-related injury insurance clear paper" to more than 1100 medical institutions in the city, publicize the contact information, and realize the "declaration, acceptance and confirmation on the same day". It paid 4.041 million yuan of work-related injury insurance benefits to 100 work-related injury employees in total, and timely protected the work-related injury insurance rights and interests of front-line personnel of epidemic prevention. In March 2022, at the critical juncture of epidemic prevention and control, in order to avoid the delay of pension payment due to epidemic control, the Shanghai Human Resources and Social Security Department set up a war epidemic volunteer service team, stationed in the unit for closed management, day and night, and worked overtime to calculate the amount of various benefits in advance, complete the pension summary of retired employees of enterprises and institutions, and prepare for the timely payment of pension.

## **4.2 Lack of government responsibility**

### **4.2.1 Inadequate coverage of social security objects**

Due to the complex characteristics of the outbreak and the current level of economic development in China, this epidemic has highlighted the institutional gap of inadequate coverage of China's social security projects in a short time, and there are "leakage groups" <sup>[3]</sup>. From the perspective of the emergency measures taken by the social security department for the COVID-19, they basically cover the contents of social assistance, social insurance and social welfare. In terms of social assistance, targeted social assistance and assistance are provided to groups such as people with special difficulties, outsiders in temporary difficulties, isolated elderly people and unaccompanied minors. In terms of social insurance, it is stipulated that unemployment insurance benefits and unemployment subsidies will be issued to the insured unemployed. However, those who are affected by the epidemic <sup>[2]</sup> and those who are not insured cannot enjoy these benefits, and the local government has not included these groups in the scope of social assistance and other projects<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **4.2.2 Unbalanced income and expenditure of social insurance fund**

After the outbreak of the epidemic, the government has implemented a series of policy measures to actively respond to the adverse effects of the epidemic. Some relevant policies have exacerbated the contradiction between the income and expenditure of the social insurance fund, causing serious imbalance between the income and expenditure of the social insurance fund. On the one hand, the government expanded social insurance expenditure, and social assistance, endowment insurance and unemployment insurance expenditure increased continuously during the epidemic. On the other hand, the government has implemented a series of phased social security policies to promote the return of enterprises to work and production, reducing the income of social insurance funds. In 2020, the total income of the three social insurance funds, including basic endowment insurance, unemployment insurance and work-related injury insurance, was 5066.6 billion yuan, a year-on-year decrease of 14.3%; The total fund expenditure was 5758 billion yuan, up 5.7% year on year. The expenditure was far greater than the income.

### **4.2.3 Incomplete social security emergency mechanism**

In the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic, social security emergency has played a positive role. In terms of social assistance system, temporary assistance for the elderly and children; In terms of social insurance, patients with COVID-19 are included in social medical insurance. This not only ensures the basic living needs of the people under the epidemic crisis, but also reduces the overall social risk caused by the epidemic, and condenses the strong joint force of the whole society to deal with the epidemic<sup>[4]</sup>. However, there are also problems in social security emergency response. First, the social security emergency mechanism is characterized by fragmentation, emergency and temporary; Second, the institutionalized social security emergency mechanism has not been established. Third, the main body of the social security emergency mechanism is single, with the government as the leading factor, and the market participants are insufficient. To solve these problems, the government should give full play to its initiative and make efforts in relevant policy formulation.

## **4.3 Optimization of government responsibility**

### **4.3.1 Legislative responsibility: improve the construction of social security system**

At present, China's basic medical insurance covers 1.36 billion people, and basic old-age insurance covers nearly 1 billion people. The largest social security system in the world has been built. However, the development of social security is still unbalanced and inadequate, which cannot meet the diverse and personalized needs of different groups of people for social security. In the future development, we should base on the national conditions, actively explore, boldly innovate, and build a social security system with Chinese characteristics. The government departments should also improve relevant laws and regulations to include the "leaked groups" in social security, further improve the coverage of social security, promote social equity, and promote the continuous progress of China's social security cause.

### **4.3.2 Financial responsibility: strengthen the management of social security funds**

The government is the main provider of social security funds, and the government finance is the main source of social security funds, which makes the financing and management of funds become the core issue in the social security system. The government should raise funds from various channels and use scientific methods to manage the funds, in order to deal with the problem of unbalanced income and expenditure of social security funds. In addition, due to the large differences in the economic conditions of various regions in China, the social security level in some economically backward regions is relatively low, and the government finance directly affects the level of social security. Therefore, the government departments can provide financial subsidies to the region, improve the level of social security in the backward regions, and narrow the regional gap in China's social security.

### **4.3.3 System design responsibility: improve social security emergency mechanism**

At present, we are in a risk society full of various uncertainties. There are also many risks and uncertainties in the field of social security related to the national economy and people's livelihood. As a safety net for people's livelihood security, social security will play an important role in dealing with individual and collective crises caused by social problems. This requires us to establish and improve the social security emergency mechanism to prevent and resolve social risks. Specifically, the government should start with system construction, prepare emergency management plans for social security at all levels, formulate emergency management rules and regulations, improve

emergency management network and operation mechanism, improve actual combat ability and emergency response level in emergency situations, and strive to build a long-term mechanism for emergency management of social security. <sup>[1]</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

As the safety net of people's lives, the booster of economic development, the regulator of social contradictions and the stabilizer of social politics, social security not only guarantees the basic living needs of the people, but also plays an important role in the overall socio-economic and political development. In addition, social security also promotes the development of social culture and the construction of spiritual civilization. As the responsible subject of social security, the government should take the initiative to assume the responsibility of social security, so as to maximize the functions of social security and promote social progress and development.

## References

- [1] Zhang Miao. *Social security emergency response to the sudden COVID-19* [J]. *China Social Security*, 2022, (06): 16-19
- [2] Qin Jingyi, Shahra Razavi, Christina Behrendt, Mira Bierbaum, Ian Orton, Lou Tessier *Global response of social security to the COVID-19* [J]. *China Social Security*, 2021, (04): 30-31
- [3] Xi Heng. *China's social security under the triple challenges of global COVID-19, super aging and new employment* [J]. *Social Security Review*, 2022,6 (01): 35-46
- [4] Wang Lijian, Dai Xiuliang. *Social security emergency mechanism in major public crisis events* [J]. *Journal of Xi'an Jiaotong University (Social Science Edition)*, 2020,40 (04): 23-32
- [5] Sun Guangde, Dong Keyong. *Introduction to Social Security* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2016.94-95
- [6] Huang Bidan. *Analysis of government responsibility in China's social security* [J]. *World of Labor Security (theoretical edition)*, 2013, (06): 129-130
- [7] Chen Bing. *On the Government's Responsibility in Social Security* [J]. *World of Labor Security (theoretical edition)*, 2012, (11): 4-8