

China GDP upgrade

Stronger footing, stronger policy support

- ◆ We upgrade our forecast for China's GDP growth to 4.8% y-o-y in 2025 (from 4.5%) and 4.5% in 2026 (from 4.4%)...
- ◆ ...based on more decisive policy support to revive domestic consumption and stronger footing from recent data
- ◆ But it's still worth watching out for trade tensions and housing market development, the two main downside risks

We turn more constructive on growth

The government's increased resolve to support growth, stronger and more urgent policy response to bolster domestic consumption and better-than-expected activity data are the key reasons we are more constructive on growth. Policy follow-through and further rollout of plans to boost private sector confidence and support technology and innovation will help to round out growth. Thus, we raise our GDP growth forecast to 4.8% for 2025 and 4.5% for 2026, putting us on track to reach this year's government growth forecast of "around 5%".

Consumption gets the spotlight

The government announced a 30-point plan to boost consumption on 16 March. Departments and local governments are rolling out new measures day by day. The emphasis on structural support, such as boosting incomes and encouraging better coverage of social safety nets, as opposed to only centering on near-term measures, is key. This should help China move onto a more sustainable consumption path.

Headwinds remain on the horizon

Despite the rosier outlook, we acknowledge that the downside risks to growth have also grown. On the one hand, the drag from global demand is likely to increase as China faces more tariff risks, both from the US as well as from other trading partners, though negotiations could help to blunt the impact. On the other hand, the property sector showed renewed signs of pressure in the recent activity data. But we think the government still has cards to play if needed, both at the local government level and the central government level, as it aims to stabilise the sector.

Economics China

NEW GDP FORECASTS

▲ 4.8% 2025, 4.5% 2026

GDP growth forecast revised up from 4.5% for 2025 and 4.4% for 2026.

Summary of our key forecasts

% y-o-y	2024	2025f	2026f
Real GDP	5.0	4.8	4.5
Real GDP breakdown by expenditure			
Private consumption	4.5	6.0	5.2
Government consumption	4.0	4.5	5.0
Gross fixed capital formation	3.5	5.8	5.1
Net exports, contribution ppt	1.5	-0.5	-0.4
Major economic indicators			
Retail sales*	3.5	5.8	6.1
Fixed asset investment*	3.2	4.8	4.3
Industrial production**	5.8	5.3	4.8

Source: HSBC estimates; *Denotes growth in nominal terms; **Denotes growth in real terms

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Risks have increased, but so has resolve

While external headwinds persist and may continue to strengthen, we are turning more constructive on China's growth outlook for this year on a few key factors:

Solid footing: Data showed a solid start in Jan-Feb activity across-the-board for key categories (see [China activity](#), 17 March), following the strong Q4 data (see [China GDP](#), 17 January).

More resolve: Policymakers have shown increased resolve to support demand by keeping the GDP growth target at "around 5%" and stepped up fiscal policy support (see [China NPC Budget](#), 11 March).

External uncertainties as a catalyst: Unlike in the previous couple of years, on top of a strong start, Beijing is redoubling its policy efforts. On 16 March, it announced a comprehensive consumption revival plan for sustainable growth, with departments and local governments announcing new measures day by day (see [China consumption plan](#), 17 March).

We still expect more policy follow-through, not only on consumption-related measures, but also emphasis on supporting the private sector and enhancing technology and innovation (see [NPC wrap-up](#), 12 March).

That said, we acknowledge that external risks remain and pressures on the property sector have increased again. Nonetheless, the swifter policy moves and stronger data put us on better footing to reach this year's GDP growth forecast: We see growth reaching 4.8% in 2025 (up from 4.5%), while growth may moderate a touch to 4.5% in 2026 (up from 4.4%).

Table 1. HSBC China GDP forecast changes

	Q1 2025f	Q2 2025f	Q3 2025f	Q4 2025f	Q1 2026f	Q2 2026f	Q3 2026f	Q4 2026f	2024	2025f	2026f
GDP, % y-o-y, new	5.2	5.0	4.7	4.3	4.4	4.6	4.6	4.5	5.0	4.8	4.5
GDP, % q-o-q, new	1.4	0.9	0.7	1.0	1.3	1.0	0.9	1.1	n/a	n/a	n/a
GDP, % y-o-y, old	4.9	4.8	4.5	4.1	4.1	4.4	4.5	4.5	5.0	4.5	4.4
GDP, % q-o-q, old	1.4	0.8	0.7	0.7	1.1	1.2	0.9	0.9	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note: n/a = not applicable
Source: HSBC forecasts

Consumption gets a well-rounded plan

The NPC set the tone and policymakers have been swift to answer the call. The 30-point plan to boost consumption (Gov.cn, 16 March, see table 3 in Appendix) highlights boosting incomes as the first priority. This is most needed for sustained consumption improvement. While near-term cyclical measures like expanded consumer goods trade-ins will help, the emphasis on using structural measures to improve consumption demand is the real upside surprise and should help China move more solidly on its transition growth path. Through expansion of services consumption capacity and increasing coverage of social safety nets for migrant workers and gig workers, this will help unlock household savings to be channelled towards consumption.

Local governments have swiftly been rolling out concrete measures. Hohhot, Inner Mongolia announced childcare subsidies ranging from RMB10k to RMB100k (depending on the number of children) (Wind, 13 March). Shanghai issued a plan to expand services with additional services consumption subsidies (a prior round was announced in February), as well as more support for technology and AI development (Wind, 17 March). We expect more local governments to follow suit and announce plans to support consumption.

We raise our expectations for consumption growth for this year to 6% (from 5% previously), while we expect retail sales may improve to 5.8% (from 4.8% previously) on the back of direct government support and accelerated structural reforms.

Table 2. Key targets for 2025 Fiscal spending

	2025 target	HSBC forecast for 2025 targets	2024 Actual
Fiscal deficit, % of GDP	Around 4.0%	4.0%	3.0%
Special local government bond issuance	RMB4.4trn	RMB4.2trn	RMB4.0trn
Special central government bond issuance	RMB1.8trn	RMB2.5trn (inclusive of bank recap)	RMB1.0trn
Ultra-long dated special central govt bonds	RMB1.3trn	RMB1.5trn (excluding bank recap)	RMB1.0trn
Trade-in programs 两新	RMB500bn	RMB750bn	RMB300bn
Consumer goods trade-ins	RMB300bn	-	RMB150bn
Equipment upgrading	RMB200bn	-	RMB150bn
"Two importances" 两重 (construction and large projects)	RMB800bn	RMB750bn	RMB700bn
Special sovereign bonds for big banks	RMB500bn	RMB1.0trn	-

Source: NPC 2025, Xinhua, Gov.cn, HSBC

Investment still has a large role to play

While much of the excitement has centred around boosting consumption, this doesn't mean that investment support fades. In fact, if we consider the emphasis on boosting high-quality consumption through structural reforms, this means that investment has a large role to play. Urbanisation goals and increased services capacity in new technology fields like digitalisation, AI applications and robotics will all need corresponding infrastructure development. Thus, the direct fiscal support for investment continues to increase (see table 2).

A revival in private sector confidence will also be important, both for investment activity, but also for the related boost to the labour market via jobs and incomes. The recent signalling around the private sector has been encouraging, ranging from the private sector symposium (see [China macro tracker](#), 19 Feb) to the recent breakthroughs in AI (e.g. DeepSeek). The rally in related Chinese technology companies' equity shares may also help to promote more confidence and investment.

There's still more policy support to come. A fast-tracked Private Economy Promotion law, likely soon to be ratified, as well as commitments by the government to settle arrears and forbid 'long-range jurisdiction' as highlighted in the NPC, should help to provide a lift for the private sector and improve confidence.

With more direct policy support and improved confidence, we expect fixed asset investment to pick up to 4.8% this year (from 4.3% previously).

What to watch out for next

Despite the more constructive view, we do note downside risks, depending on how trade tensions evolve and Beijing's next step on stabilising the housing market.

Trade tensions: The Trump Administration has imposed a 20% additional tariff on goods imported from China since Trump's inauguration. According to our assessment, this may reduce China's GDP by 0.6ppt ([China's tariff response](#), 7 February). However, the extra 20% is about fentanyl, not trade imbalances. As the clock is ticking towards 1 April, the deadline of the US reviews under "America First Trade Policy", there is a high probability of further tariff escalation ([Trump's trade agenda](#), 21 January). That said, we believe the US and China still have room for negotiations, and likely are continuing their dialogues. According to WSJ, Trump has said a new trade deal with China is still possible (20 February). HSBC Chief Asia Economist Frederic Neumann looked at lessons from Japan's experience and predicted elevated trade risks could be a blessing in disguise ([US-China trade tensions](#), 4 February). Indeed, we have seen the recent acceleration on [fiscal reforms](#) (10 February) as well as a decisive shift of policy focus towards boosting domestic consumption.

It's also worth mentioning that the risk of a [tariff cascade](#) (25 February) with non-US trading partners likely imposing tariffs on China may also present a severe challenge. However, there is increasingly more outbound investment from Chinese enterprises, who aim to build factories closer to end consumers ([China exports and ODI](#), 10 December 2024). China is also encouraging more FDI, via elimination of entry barriers and provision of level playing fields to foreign companies to stay integrated.

Property sector:

Another risk factor is the housing market. There is a decisive change of policy tone, and for the first time, 'stabilising the housing market' becomes one of the overall requirements of central government work in 2025 ([China NPC 2025](#), 5 March). There have been rollouts of various policies including increased white-list project funding support, redoubled efforts on old home renovations, and permission for local governments to acquire homes with special bonds. Yet, the housing market still missed expectations: in January and February, property investment declined 10% y-o-y, residential floor sales fell back to contraction (-3.4% y-o-y, following positive growth in Nov and Dec), while new floor starts were down 29% y-o-y.

More cards to deal? Certainly, we think central government still has a magic card. If Beijing is willing to intervene with its own balance sheet, say, establishing designated asset management companies to segregate troubled assets from banks and disposing them in an orderly way with a diversified method, then it would move faster towards stabilisation ([Stabilising the property market](#), 17 May 2024).

Appendix:

Table 3. 30-point Plan to Boost Consumption

Action	Key measures
1. Promote income growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Strengthen employment support ◆ Initiate specialised skills training ◆ Strengthen strategic reserves and build mechanisms to stabilise the equity market ◆ Facilitate inflows of long-term capital into the equity market ◆ Improve income protection mechanisms for grain farmers and land value appreciation distribution mechanism ◆ Promote income growth for rural low-income population ◆ Settle arrears owed to enterprises
2. Support for consumption capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Consider establishing a childcare subsidy system and expand childbirth insurance coverage ◆ Expand nighttime paediatric outpatient services ◆ Increase the supply of educational resources in urban areas with net inflows of school-age populations ◆ Raise financial aid standards for eligible students and broaden policy coverage ◆ Increase financial subsidies for the basic pension and basic medical insurance, and appropriately increase the basic pension for retirees ◆ Fully implement the private pension system (Pillar 3) ◆ Strengthen dynamic monitoring and assistance for low-income populations ◆ Provide relief funds or one-time living subsidies to vulnerable groups
3. Promote service consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Promote elderly-friendly renovations and silver consumption ◆ Improve community childcare services and related support systems ◆ Support scenario innovation, business integration of service consumption ◆ Encourage tourist attractions to expand service offerings ◆ Enrich ice-and-snow venues and expand supply of related consumer products ◆ Provide more high-quality inbound tourism routes and services ◆ Expand pilot opening-up programs in telecommunications, healthcare, and education ◆ Promote the inclusion of more service consumption items in the encouraged foreign investment catalogue
4. Consumption updates and upgrades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Support local governments to expand consumer goods trade-in programs ◆ Stabilise the property market ◆ Expand the scope of housing provident fund use ◆ Launch pilot reforms in automobile circulation and consumption
5. Improve consumption quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Expand markets for domestic brands domestically and internationally ◆ Support the development of new consumption, including digital consumption, "AI+" consumption, healthy consumption, and low-altitude economy ◆ Facilitate convergence of trade certification standards (domestic sales and exports), with a view to increasing quality supply for domestic consumption
6. Improve consumption environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Strictly implement the paid annual leave system ◆ Prohibit the unlawful extension of working hours ◆ Encourage local governments to pilot spring and autumn breaks for primary and secondary schools ◆ Implement a three-year action plan to optimise the consumption environment ◆ Improve urban and rural consumption facilities, including store renovation and logistics construction
7. Clear restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Timely lift unreasonable restrictions on consumption ◆ Ensure equal participation of all types of business entities in social group procurement ◆ Break down internal market access barriers ◆ Enhance the efficiency of regulatory inspections through inter-departmental collaboration
8. Improve support policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Strengthen the coordination of consumption promotion policies ◆ Enhance investment to support for consumption ◆ Encourage financial institutions to extend consumer loans with proper risk controls ◆ Enhance the full-scope framework for consumption statistics

Source: Xinhua, HSBC

Disclosure appendix

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