

“If the Government Tells You to Go, You Have to Go”

Uyghur Foced Labor 101

contact@uyghurrightsmonitor.org

Executive Summary

The [White Paper](#) published by the State Council Information Office in July 2021 stated that “**rural labor transfers in the Uyghur Region averaged over 2.82 million times yearly from 2017 until 2020**, with 61.44% in the south.” In his more recent address in January 2023, Erkin Tuniyaz, the Chairman of the Uyghur Region, [reported](#) there were **3.03 million times of transfers of rural laborers in 2022**. This indicates that state-imposed labor transfers are continuing at a larger scale. In its [work report](#) for 2021, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) administration proudly noted that **rural surplus labor placement reached 14.33 million times between 2016 and 2021** (Some people may have been transferred more than once.) The Chinese government mobilized all state apparatus, existing or prepared facilities, private and state-owned companies, and the local cadres to systematically transfer such a vast number of workers inside and outside the Uyghur Region. This report briefly outlines key takeaways on Uyghur forced labor, summarizing existing research on the matter.

Forced Labor in the Uyghur Region 101

Where

does it take place?

- › Production plant within or near the detention facilities
- › Production plants elsewhere in the Uyghur region
- › Production plants outside the Uyghur region

How

is it portrayed?

- › Poverty Alleviation
- › Employment of surplus labor
- › Transforming farmers into modern workers

What

happens if someone says no?

- › Considered as signs of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism
- › High risk of detention or imprisonment

Why

is it implemented?

- › Eradication of Uyghur culture and identity as part of genocidal policies
- › Material profit from low or unpaid Uyghur workers
- › Labor crisis in other parts of China

Forced Labor in the Uyghur Region

State-imposed labor transfers in the Uyghur Region “not only reduces the Uyghur population density in Xinjiang but is also an important method to influence, integrate, and assimilate Uyghur minorities,” according to a [report](#) published by Nankai University. Along with other programs such as “poverty alleviation,” “Xinjiang aid,” and “pairing up and becoming the family,” the Chinese government carries out social engineering and surveillance of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other local Turkic people in the region. This is not only to make material profit from the forced labor of Uyghurs but also to eradicate Uyghur identity as part of its genocidal policies in the Uyghur Region. These forced labor schemes run parallel to the full-scale operation of regionwide “re-education camps” and the state-planned expansion of various industries, including solar, raw materials, and textile, to name a few, in the Uyghur Region, aligning with the objectives in the “[Made in China 2025](#)” strategy.

The Chinese government unveiled the “[Outline of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region](#)” in May 2016, which called for deepening the reform of state-owned enterprises and enhancing the vitality, control, and influence of the state-owned economy. It describes the [labor transfer programs](#) as part of the “poverty alleviation” efforts of the regional government, where Uyghurs are the primary target. The plan details also show how the government-granted state-owned and private enterprises play a pivotal role in the labor transfer program. The four prefectures in southern Xinjiang, for instance, actively implement [poverty alleviation models](#), such as “satellite factories,” “poverty alleviation workshops,” and “township factories,” attracting numerous [state-owned and private enterprises](#) to move their production plants to the Uyghur Region under the name of “Xinjiang Aid” to exploit land, labor, and resources in the Uyghur Region. The intention behind these programs is parallel to the “[population optimization](#)” in the Uyghur Region, which is meant to dilute Uyghur populations and forcibly integrate them into Han society.

Existing reports and research on Uyghur forced labor outline the following pattern: enterprises operating in the Uyghur Region, state-owned or private, are at very high risk of exposure to Uyghur forced labor. This is not only because they make [material profit](#) from low or unpaid workers, but also because of their “[social responsibility commitments](#)” to the state to show their loyalty to the Communist Party. In a report from August 2022, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery [concluded](#) that there is reasonable evidence to support the occurrence of forced labor in the Region, where the situation involves the exploitation of indigenous people, denying them their freedom to choose and subjecting them to harsh working conditions.

Where Does Forced Labor Take Place?

People held in prisons or labor camps often [work for state-owned and private enterprises](#). However, this only constitutes a small portion of state-imposed forced labor in the Uyghur Region. State-imposed labor transfers occur within prefectures, cross-prefectures, and beyond the Uyghur region in mainland China. Forced labor transfers within the prefecture will likely be in production plants or industrial parks near an individual’s home. The domestic supply of laborers to these factories is highly likely from detention facilities, such as “re-education camps” or prisons. The “surplus labor” has two destinations: production plants and industrial parks located in other prefectures in the Uyghur Region or other provinces in China. Overall, forced labor can be:

- 1) ***Within or near the detention facilities*** (camps and prisons): Uyghurs who are detained in camps or prisons work in factories, farms, and mines built inside or near the detention facilities. At least 135 re-education camps that are [close to or coexist with factories](#) have been identified by reporters.
- 2) ***Within the Uyghur Region***: Uyghurs are transferred to production plants or industrial parks in the Uyghur Region, in their own hometown, or other cities in the region. Uyghurs living in rural areas are [transferred to other](#)

[cities](#) systematically to work in a wide range of industries. A [White Paper](#) from 2020 revealed that the regional government transferred 221,000 individuals from their hometowns to other parts of the Uyghur Region as rural surplus labor between 2018 and June 2020.

3) ***Receiving production plants in other provinces of China:*** Uyghurs are also transferred to production plants outside the Uyghur Region, located in various industrialized cities across the mainland. For example, [official records](#) show that 4,710 Uyghurs were “relocated” to Shandong province between 2017 and 2018. Between 2017 and 2019, a total of 80,000 Uyghur laborers were [transferred](#) to factories across the mainland.

What Happens If Someone Refuses to Participate in State-imposed Labor Transfer Programs?

Uyghur and other local people have no right to refuse state-imposed labor transfers. In such cases, they are [persuaded or coerced](#) to participate in the labor transfer programs. “[If the government tells you to go, you have to go.](#)” Anyone who rejects or objects to labor transfers may be perceived as defying state law, failing to adapt to state policies, having an extremist ideology, and would face severe consequences as below:

1) It is considered a sign of terrorism, separatism, radicalism, and religious extremism.

Forced labor programs are rooted in the idea of using labor as an anti-terrorism strategy. Uyghur individuals who oppose state-imposed initiatives that claim to promote vocational skills and poverty reduction are viewed as [aligning themselves with the "three evils,"](#) which are terrorism, extremism, and separatism. These “three evils” serve as the [justification](#) for the CCP’s crackdown and criminalization in the Uyghur region, including the camp system.

2) Risk of detainment or imprisonment

In the Uyghur Region, labor transfer initiatives involve forcibly relocating Uyghur workers to factories in the region or mainland China. Individuals are coerced into working in specific industries or locations against their will. [Testimonies](#) from Uyghur workers reveal a persistent fear that those who resist or attempt to leave their assigned jobs face the ominous prospect of internment or imprisonment, underscoring the pervasive threat that accompanies these programs.

What are the conditions that transferred laborers encounter?

Forced labor facilities expose workers to [extremely alarming circumstances](#) that violate their fundamental human rights. These facilities hosting transferred Uyghur workers typically restrict their freedom of movement and prevent them from returning home whenever they want. Workers cannot leave their jobs and risk punishment if they voice any problems. The residential areas are segregated and constantly monitored with cutting-edge technology. Strict regulations are enforced by specialized security personnel, simulating a military setting. The workers frequently have open-ended contracts that are negotiated between businesses and state agencies rather than directly with the workers themselves. This causes issues like unauthorized wage deductions and earnings that are far below the minimum wage set by the government. In addition, workers are forced to work [without proper protection equipment](#).