

End Uyghur Forced Labour

Family Separation and Labour Mobilisation in the Uyghur Region

*Thematic submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, submitted in
advance of the Committee's 103rd Pre-Sessional Working Group*

(29 September – 2 October 2026)

Treaty: Convention on the Rights of the Child

State party under review: People's Republic of China

Submitting organization: Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region

Public submission | August 2026

I. Introduction

1. The Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region is a global network of civil society organisations, researchers, trade unions and investors working to end state-imposed forced labour affecting Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China (“Uyghur Region”).¹

2. The labour-transfer system affecting Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples in China, documented as a form of state-imposed forced labour, operates through Chinese state policies and administrative practices, while restrictions on access and independent monitoring severely constrain verification of the absence of forced labour.² This submission does not seek to establish the forced labour character of the system itself, but examines a distinct and underexamined consequence of it.³ Forced labour plays a central, enabling role within the broader pattern of human rights violations in the Uyghur Region: the threat of arbitrary detention

¹ Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region, <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/>.

² International Labour Organization, “ILO Indicators of Forced Labour: 2025 Revised Edition,” November 2025, <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/ILO%20Indicators%20of%20Forced%20Labour%202025.pdf>. Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region, “Testimonies for CECC Hearing on Social Audits,” April 30, 2024, <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/testimonies-for-cecc-hearing-on-social-audits/>; Scott Nova, “Testimony before the Congressional Executive Commission on China,” Worker Rights Consortium, April 30, 2024, https://www.cecc.gov/sites/evo-subsites/cecc.house.gov/files/documents/hearings/Testimony%20by%20Scott%20Nova%20for%20CECC%20Hearing%20on%204-30-2024_1.pdf; Adrian Zenz, “State-Imposed Forced Labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region: Current State, Latest Evidence, Impossibility of Credible Social Audits, and Ongoing Western Complicity and Audit-Washing,” Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, April 30, 2024, [https://www.cecc.gov/sites/evo-subsites/cecc.house.gov/files/documents/hearings/2024-04%20Written%20Testimony%20CECC%20Zenz%20\(submitted\)_0.pdf](https://www.cecc.gov/sites/evo-subsites/cecc.house.gov/files/documents/hearings/2024-04%20Written%20Testimony%20CECC%20Zenz%20(submitted)_0.pdf); and Jim Wormington, “Testimony for Hearing: ‘Factories and Fraud in the PRC: How Human Rights Violations Make Reliable Audits Impossible’,” Human Rights Watch, April 30, 2024, <https://www.cecc.gov/sites/evo-subsites/cecc.house.gov/files/documents/hearings/JimWormingtonWrittenTestimonyFactoriesandFraudinthePRC04302024.pdf>.

³ For Coalition submissions to the UN treaty body system addressing the forced labour system more broadly, please see: Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region, “Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” January 2023, https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/44/EUFL-Coalition-CESCR-Submission_2023-01-16.pdf; and Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region, “Joint Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of China,” July 2023, <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=12522&file=EnglishTranslation>.

removes any real option to resist a labour-transfer posting; as a result, working-age adults are removed from their communities, leading to the institutionalisation of children and elderly relatives — who are in turn cut off from their culture — while the land and villages left behind by coerced workers are appropriated or demolished by the government. This submission focuses on one link in that chain: state policies that replace or displace family caregiving responsibilities in order to facilitate labour transfers.

3. It primarily relates to Cluster 5 (“Family Environment and Alternative Care”), while also engaging the Committee’s General Principles and relevant Special Protection Measures. In the context of a labour-transfer system implemented through quotas, household monitoring, ideological pressure and penalties for refusal, any resulting separation of children from their parents should be presumed to be involuntary.

II. Cluster 5: Family Environment and Alternative Care

4. The evidence presented in this section indicates that Chinese authorities have treated Uyghur parents’ caregiving responsibilities not as a matter warranting protection, but as an administrative obstacle to labour mobilisation — one to be identified, measured, and systematically overridden through state-managed alternatives to family care.

Family responsibilities as perceived barriers to labour mobilisation

5. Chinese government documents indicate that labour transfer programmes identified responsibility for caring for children and maintaining close ties to their home communities as barriers to labour mobilisation among rural Uyghur households. The clearest articulation of this approach appears in the *Work Report on Poverty Alleviation Work of Uyghur Labor Force Transfer in Hotan, Xinjiang*, prepared by researchers from Nankai University.⁴ The report explains that many individuals were unwilling to participate in labour transfers because they remained responsible for “children or elderly relatives.”⁵ To overcome these barriers, it recommends centralised childcare, elder-care, and land or livestock trusteeship arrangements among its labour-export practices, stating that such measures had “greatly facilitated the progress of labour export work” and were intended to “eliminate the exported labourers’ concerns back home.”⁶

6. Independent analysis of additional government documents indicates that repeated refusal of state-arranged employment could expose individuals to serious adverse consequences, raising questions about whether parents freely accepted labour transfers and associated childcare

⁴ China Institute of Wealth and Economics, “Work Report on Poverty Alleviation Work of Uyghur Labor Force Transfer in Hotan, Xinjiang,” Nankai University, December 2019, translated in Adrian Zenz, “Coercive Labor and Forced Displacement in Xinjiang’s Cross-Regional Labor Transfers: A Process-Oriented Evaluation,” The Jamestown Foundation, March 2021 (updated December 2021), <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Coercive-Labor-and-Forced-Displacement-in-Xinjiangs-Cross-Regional-Labor-Transfers-A-Process-Oriented-Evaluation.pdf>. Appendix C lists, among eleven labour-export practices, the arrangement of nurseries, elder care, and land or livestock trusteeship described as intended “to eliminate the exported laborers’ concerns back home,” a purpose the report reiterates in its concluding recommendations.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

arrangements.⁷ Official reporting also promoted what authorities described as the “nurseries plus satellite factory” model, under which village factories were established alongside childcare facilities for children 0 to 4 to enable parents, particularly women, to enter wage labour.⁸ Government reports described women caring for young children as being “bound to the home” and presented institutional childcare as the means of releasing labour for production.⁹

7. Government statistical reporting has attributed rural Uyghur women’s non-participation in labour transfers to caregiving duties for children and elderly relatives and to their perceived reluctance to travel far from home, framing these as obstacles for local cadres to overcome rather than legitimate grounds for declining a labour placement. A 2023 academic analysis corroborates this with township-level data: in one Kashgar Prefecture township, 43.6 percent of the rural surplus labour force remained unemployed as of 2017, of whom 63 percent were women citing caregiving reasons.¹⁰ Consistent with this pattern, authorities did not treat caregiving responsibilities as legitimate grounds for non-participation but instituted centralised childcare and elder-care programmes specifically to remove them as obstacles to labour mobilisation.¹¹

8. These arrangements operate through a registration system indifferent to the cause of parental absence. Under mandates of 2016–2017, every “left-behind child” (留守儿童), a category defined nationally by parental absence for work, was to be registered and placed in care, and local rosters record children of parents absent for work alongside children of detained parents, with placements in educational institutions, nurseries and “Kindness” preschools. A Kashgar Prefecture directive describes the boarding school system as designed to solve the living and study problems of the children of those who “work outside their home regions” (外出务工).¹²

⁷ Adrian Zenz, “Beyond the Camps: Beijing’s Long-Term Scheme of Coercive Labor, Poverty Alleviation and Social Control in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk*, vol. 7, no. 12, sec. 7.3, December 2019, <https://www.jpolrisk.com/beyond-the-camps-beijings-long-term-scheme-of-coercive-labor-poverty-alleviation-and-social-control-in-xinjiang/>; and Adrian Zenz, “The Conceptual Evolution of Poverty Alleviation Through Labour Transfer in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2023: 649–673, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02634937.2023.2227225>.

⁸ Official Hotan-area government report describing the “nurseries plus satellite factory” model, cited and translated in Adrian Zenz, “Beyond the Camps: Beijing’s Long-Term Scheme of Coercive Labor, Poverty Alleviation and Social Control in Xinjiang,” n. 86. See also Laura T. Murphy and Nyrola Elimä, *In Broad Daylight: Uyghur Forced Labour and Global Solar Supply Chains*, Sheffield Hallam University, Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, May 2021, 11, <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/44/Murphy-InBroadDaylightVoR.pdf>, independently reporting that authorities built nurseries and elder-care facilities “to relieve migrant labourers of their worries.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Adrian Zenz, “The Conceptual Evolution of Poverty Alleviation Through Labour Transfer in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” *Central Asian Survey* 42, no. 4, 2023: 649–673, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02634937.2023.2227225>.

¹¹ Zenz, “The Conceptual Evolution of Poverty Alleviation Through Labour Transfer in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” 664, citing AiSan Gulisitan, “A Study on the Employment of Rural Surplus Labor in Yecheng County,” Master’s thesis, Xinjiang University, 2019: 22; Zenz, “Coercive Labor and Forced Displacement in Xinjiang’s Cross-Regional Labor Transfers: A Process-Oriented Evaluation,” sec. 3.4, discussing state-instituted centralised childcare and elder-care schemes as a response to caregiving-related non-participation in labour transfer; and Laura T. Murphy, Nyrola Elimä, and David Tobin, “*Until nothing is left*”: China’s Settler Corporation and its Human Rights Violations in the Uyghur Region, 2022: 44–45, <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/44/Murphy-Elima-Tobin-Until-Nothing-is-Left-1.pdf>, citing National Bureau of Statistics findings on causes of Uyghur non-participation in labour transfers, including caregiving responsibilities for children and elderly relatives and reluctance among rural minority women to travel far from home for work.

¹² Adrian Zenz, “Break Their Roots: Evidence for China’s Parent-Child Separation Campaign in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk*, vol. 7, no. 7, July 2019, sec. 3.3, n. 107, <https://www.jpolrisk.com/break-their-roots-evidence-for-chinas-parent-child-separation-campaign-in-xinjiang/> <https://www.jpolrisk.com/break-their-roots-evidence-for-chinas-parent-child-separation-campaign-in-xinjiang/>.

9. The same dynamic can be observed in individual cases and corporate practice. One state media account describes a married couple transferred to work at a silicon-processing facility over 50 kilometres from home after a cadre pressured them to give up their landholding, “leaving behind their children and ill parents.”¹³ Companies participating in these transfer programmes have themselves acknowledged the resulting gap in family care. That a major employer “had to build an elder care facility” is itself evidence of the disruption these transfer programmes caused: elderly relatives were left without care precisely because the family members who would otherwise have provided it had been recruited into the state-sponsored surplus labour programmes.¹⁴

10. Research published in 2025 finds that the state’s labour-transfer system necessitates “severe disruptions of family structures, landholding patterns, and communities,” as working-age farmers are forced to leave home to live in factory compounds. As a result, Uyghur families have been compelled to send their children to residential schools and orphanages, and elderly family members to state-managed nursing homes — cutting community and cultural ties.¹⁵ Both systems have expanded rapidly: the residential school system, through substantial construction of new schools and dormitories across the region, and nursing home capacity, through comparable expansion.¹⁶

11. Primary-source documentation shows this infrastructure was purpose-built at unprecedented speed. From early 2017, authorities constructed thousands of new preschools concentrated in rural Uyghur-majority areas, in Hotan County specifically, enrolment growth exceeded the national average more than twelvefold and individual facilities admitted children only a few months old; 2018 directives rendered boarding effectively compulsory from the fourth grade (“all who should board must board”, 应寄尽寄). The centralisation of child and elder care specifically was mandated as early as October 2016, when the regional government mandated the concentration of all elderly and orphan care in centralised state institutions by 2020.¹⁷ This expansion cannot be explained by pre-existing demand: as of 2017, 62.1 percent of the roughly 27,000 existing nursing-home places in the region were unoccupied, yet the government subsequently launched a construction programme aiming to nearly triple capacity to 80,000 places by 2025, under the explicit planning designation known as “double concentration” (双集中).¹⁸

12. Childcare or alternative care services are not, in themselves, inconsistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their significance lies in the purpose attributed to them by the authorities themselves: caregiving responsibilities are identified as impediments to labour

¹³ Murphy and Elimä, *In Broad Daylight*, 21–22, describing a Xinjiang Hoshine Silicon Industry Co. recruitment case.

¹⁴ Murphy and Elimä, *In Broad Daylight*, 32, describing TBEA Co.’s construction of an elder-care facility for family members left behind in the company’s “adopted” villages in Hotan Prefecture, where residents had been recruited into state-sponsored surplus labour transfer programmes.

¹⁵ Rian Thum, *Eight Years On, China’s Repression of the Uyghurs Remains Dire: How China’s Policies in the Uyghur Region Have and Have Not Changed*, Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2025, section V, https://vault.ushmm.org/adaptivemedia/render/id_f36afdaa9fbc0c6c7443b2a5c71025f8b51f459d..

¹⁶ Thum, *Eight Years On*, 9, 16–17; and UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, and UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, “China: Xinjiang’s Forced Separations and Language Policies for Uyghur Children Carry Risk of Forced Assimilation, Say UN Experts,” OHCHR, September 26, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/09/china-xinjiangs-forced-separations-and-language-policies-uyghur-children>.

¹⁷ Zenz, “Break Their Roots,” sec. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 4, n. 107.

¹⁸ Thum, *Eight Years On*, 16–17.

mobilisation, and state-managed care arrangements are presented as mechanisms for overcoming those impediments. Any resulting family separation should therefore be presumed involuntary.

III. Child Rights Implications

13. This presumption of involuntariness follows from three considerations. First, when the state builds institutional childcare or eldercare specifically to remove caregiving as a reason for declining a labour placement, it cannot then treat the resulting separation as freely chosen. Second, given the restrictions on independent access and monitoring described in the Introduction, the voluntariness of any such separation cannot be independently verified. Third, as set out below, the underlying labour transfer itself is often not voluntary.

14. The Convention recognises the family as the fundamental environment for the growth and well-being of the child and places primary responsibility for a child's upbringing on parents or legal guardians.¹⁹ Separation from parents must therefore be individually justified, necessary, and guided by the child's best interests rather than by broader administrative or economic objectives.²⁰ Turning to the third consideration above: where a parent's participation in a labour transfer is not itself freely chosen, these conditions cannot be met, and any resulting separation is a consequence of coercion directed at the parent rather than an individually justified decision.²¹ As described above, refusal of a labour placement can expose individuals to detention, loss of benefits, or other adverse consequences, and household-level quotas have been applied even where families resisted a transfer.

15. Documented cases indicate that the risk of detention for refusing a state-arranged labour placement extends to parents whose refusal is motivated by caregiving responsibilities. In one documented case, a woman responsible for two young children, a husband working full-time in a factory, and elderly in-laws was detained after declining a factory placement arranged by local authorities.²² Where parents cannot freely decline labour transfers or associated childcare arrangements because of this risk, any resulting separation between parents and children should likewise be presumed involuntary.²³

16. Official education policy describes residential schools as reducing the influence of children's religious family environment while promoting Mandarin Chinese and broader assimilation objectives.²⁴ The documented character of the care settings reinforces these concerns: school implementation plans from 2017 required exclusively Mandarin-language campuses, penalising

¹⁹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, preamble; arts. 5 and 18.

²⁰ Convention on the Rights of the Child, arts. 3 and 9; Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 14, 2013, on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, paras. 53–57.

²¹ Zenz, “Coercive Labor and Forced Displacement,” Appendix C; and China Institute of Wealth and Economics, “Work Report on Poverty Alleviation.”

²² Zenz, “The Conceptual Evolution of Poverty Alleviation,” 665, describing the account of “Gulzia” (pseudonym), a Uyghur woman detained in a Vocational Skills Education and Training Centre in southern Xinjiang between late 2017 and early 2019, whose cellmate had been detained for refusing a factory placement arranged by local authorities while responsible for two young children and elderly in-laws; a second cellmate was told by camp staff that her own detention resulted from “non-cooperation with [government] arrangements” regarding a similar work assignment.

²³ Zenz, “The Conceptual Evolution of Poverty Alleviation”; and Murphy and Elimä, *In Broad Daylight*, 10–11, 21, 30, 32, discussing coercive recruitment, household quotas, repeated mobilisation efforts, surveillance, land trusteeship, and documented instances of family separation resulting from labour transfers.

²⁴ Thum, *Eight Years On*, section V.

any use of the Uyghur language, while “full care” (全托) preschools retain children through the working week, in some cases from infancy, in facilities subject to region-wide securitisation requirements.²⁵ When considered alongside labour-transfer policies that explicitly seek to reduce family caregiving responsibilities, these practices raise concerns regarding children’s rights to preserve their identity, maintain family relations, enjoy their own language and culture, and receive care guided by their best interests.²⁶

17. The Committee has previously expressed concern regarding family separation, institutionalisation, discrimination affecting minority children, and restrictions on children’s language, culture, religion, and family life in China.²⁷ This concern has also been raised independently by other UN mechanisms: in September 2023, the Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, cultural rights, and education jointly expressed grave concern that children, including those whose parents are detained, are being placed in residential boarding schools and treated as ‘orphans’ by state authorities.²⁸ The evidence presented in this submission suggests that these issues should also be examined within the broader framework of state-directed labour transfer policies. Assessing family separation and institutional care in this context may assist the Committee in determining whether such measures were implemented primarily in the best interests of individual children or instead in furtherance of state labour mobilisation objectives.

IV. Suggested Questions for the State Party and Recommendations

1. How many participants in labour-transfer programmes have dependent children, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, township, prefecture, and age?
2. How many children have been placed in nurseries, boarding schools, residential institutions, or other state-managed care because a parent was detained, transferred, or assigned to employment?
3. Please describe the procedure by which parents may decline a labour placement on the basis of childcare or other family responsibilities, including what safeguards exist to ensure that such refusals do not result in detention, loss of benefits, political sanction, compulsory ideological education, or other adverse consequences.
4. What procedures ensure that any separation associated with labour transfers is necessary, proportionate, time-limited, and determined according to the individual child’s best interests and views?
5. What access do parents have to their children during cross-regional or cross-provincial transfers, and what independent complaint, review, and reunification mechanisms are available?
6. Will the State party publish all national, regional, prefectural, and county policies linking labour transfers with nurseries, boarding arrangements, elder care, land trusteeship, or worker-retention measures?

²⁵ Zenz, “Break Their Roots,” sec. 3.3–3.5, n. 107.

²⁶ Convention on the Rights of the Child, arts. 3, 8, 29, and 30; and Thum, *Eight Years On*, section V.

²⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China*, 2013, CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4; *Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of China*, 2022, CRC/C/CHN/CO/5-6.

²⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, and UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, “China: Xinjiang’s Forced Separations and Language Policies for Uyghur Children Carry Risk of Forced Assimilation, Say UN Experts.”

Recommendations

The Committee should recommend that the State Party:

1. Ensure that any employment programmes are implemented in a manner consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including by ensuring that economic or labour policy objectives do not result in unnecessary separation of children from their parents or primary caregivers.
2. Adopt, in its assessment of family separation linked to labour-transfer programmes, a presumption that such separation is involuntary where state-managed care arrangements were instituted specifically to remove caregiving responsibilities as an obstacle to labour mobilisation, unless the State party can demonstrate an individualised, best-interests-based justification for the specific separation at issue.
3. Ensure that any childcare, boarding, or alternative care arrangements associated with labour transfer programmes comply with the principles of the best interests of the child, necessity, proportionality, and regular review, and are not used to facilitate coercive labour mobilisation.
4. Guarantee that family reunification occurs as soon as circumstances permit.
5. Publish transparent information and disaggregated data concerning children affected by labour transfer programmes, including placements in boarding schools, childcare institutions, and other forms of alternative care.
6. Ensure that Uyghur and other Turkic and Muslim-majority children can preserve their language, culture, religion, and identity in accordance with the Convention, including in educational and care settings associated with labour transfer programmes.
7. Facilitate field visits by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to monitor the implementation of these recommendations, and cooperate with relevant United Nations mechanisms to that end.