



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

China: Modern slavery

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Executive summary

The criminal code criminalises some forms of sex and labour trafficking but does not correspond with international law.

Modern slavery affects men, women and girls who are trafficked, within and outside China, for forced labour and sexual exploitation. Victims are typically lured by promises of a better life and higher wages but forced into labour, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, or criminal exploitation. Victims who pay a smuggling or recruitment fee can be forced into debt bondage by criminal gangs. Trafficking is perpetrated by a wide range of actors, including organised criminal groups, triad networks and local gangs operating both within and outside China.

Victims of modern slavery from China form a particular social group (PSG).

Victims of modern slavery are unlikely to face persecution or serious harm from non-state actors. Victims of modern slavery, particularly those who have been victims of sex trafficking, may experience discrimination or social stigma on return. However, in general, this is not sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition to reach the high threshold of persecution and/or serious harm.

In general, victims of trafficking are unlikely to be at risk of re-trafficking from non-state actors. However, factors that elevate a person's vulnerability to re-trafficking include being homeless, having a disability(ies), mental illness, age, lack of education and residing in a rural area. The onus is on the person to demonstrate that they will be at risk of persecution or serious harm.

Forced labour is also perpetrated by the government, primarily against Uyghurs, members of Muslim minority groups and Tibetans. Where a claim involves these groups decision makers should refer to the country policy and information notes on [China: Muslims \(including Uyghurs in Xinjiang\)](#) and [China: Opposition to the state](#).

A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a rogue state actor and/or a non-state actor is generally able to obtain protection from the state.

In general, a person with a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state or rogue state actor is likely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk. China is a very large country with around 1.4 billion people and many large cities such as (but not limited to) Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, where victims of modern slavery are likely to be able to safely travel to and evade or escape non-state actors.

Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Each case must be considered on its individual facts. The onus is on the person to demonstrate they face persecution or serious harm.

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Assessment

Section updated: 25 August 2026

About the assessment

This section considers relevant evidence – including [country information](#), refugee and human rights law and policy, and case law – to assess **whether, in general**:

- a person faces a real risk of persecution or serious harm by state and/or non-state actors because they are a victim of modern slavery
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution or serious harm
- if refused, a claim is likely or not to be certified as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Each case must be considered on its individual facts.

This note is about mainland China and does not cover Hong Kong or Macao.

For details on how CPIT makes its assessments, gathers and presents country information, its research methodology and disclaimers and explainers on coverage, source selection, maps, translations and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in developing CPIT products, see [About country policy and information notes](#).

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1. Material facts, credibility and other checks

1.1.1 Decision makers must:

- assess credibility (see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#)).
- check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the Asylum Instruction on [Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- consider making an international biometric data-sharing check, when one has not already been undertaken (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).
- consider language analysis testing, where available, in cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin (see the Asylum Instruction on [Language Analysis](#)).

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1.2 Modern slavery

1.2.1 Decision makers must note that guidance for competent authority staff in any part of the UK who make decisions on whether or not a person is a potential victim/victim of modern slavery for the purpose of the National Referral Mechanism is set out in the Modern Slavery: Statutory Guidance for England and Wales (under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015) and non-statutory guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland. The guidance is also aimed at staff within public authorities who may encounter potential victims of modern

slavery; and/or who are involved in supporting victims

- 1.2.2 Decision makers also must note that if a person has a 'positive conclusive grounds' decision, a grant of permission to stay as a victim of human trafficking or slavery by the competent authorities may be considered.
- 1.2.3 For further information, see [Temporary permission to stay for victims of human trafficking or slavery](#).

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1.3 Assessing weight of 'reasonable or conclusive grounds' decisions

- 1.3.1 The reported case of [DC \(trafficking: protection/human rights appeals\) Albania \[2019\] UKUT 00351 \(IAC\)](#), heard 7 June 2019 and promulgated on 3 September 2019, referencing [Secretary of State for the Home Department v MS \(Pakistan\) \[2018\] EWCA Civ 594](#), provides guidance on the weight to attach to a conclusive grounds decision made by a competent authority in an asylum or human rights case, and the order in which the Tribunal would consider overlapping asylum and MS claims.

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2. Exclusion

- 2.1.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons to apply one (or more) of the exclusion clauses. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 2.1.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection, which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status.
- 2.1.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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3. Convention reason(s)

- 3.1.1 Actual or imputed particular social group (PSG).
- 3.1.2 Victims of modern slavery in China form a PSG within the meaning of the Refugee Convention because they share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed (their past experience of being a victim of modern slavery), or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it **and** have a distinct identity in China because the group is perceived as being different by the surrounding society
- 3.1.3 Although victims of modern slavery form a PSG, establishing such membership is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their membership of such a group.
- 3.1.4 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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4. Risk

4.1 Risk from the state

- 4.1.1 Forced labour is perpetrated by the government, primarily against Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, ethnic Kyrgyz, members of other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang and Tibetans. Where a case involves state treatment of these groups, decision makers should refer to the Country Policy and Information Notes [China: Muslims \(including Uyghurs in Xinjiang\)](#) and [China: Opposition to the state](#).

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4.2 Risk from non-state actors

- 4.2.1 Victims of modern slavery are unlikely to face persecution or serious harm from non-state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 4.2.2 In general, victims of trafficking are unlikely to be at risk of re-trafficking from non-state actors. However, factors that elevate a person's vulnerability to re-trafficking include being homeless, having a disability(ies), mental illness, age, lack of education and residing in a rural area. The onus is on the person to demonstrate that they will be at risk of persecution or serious harm.
- 4.2.3 In the country guidance case of [HC & RC \(Trafficked women\) China CG \[2009\] UKAIT 00027](#) promulgated on 18 July 2009, heard on 11 November 2008, considering the position of trafficked women only on return, the Upper Tribunal held that: 'Women and girls in China do not in general face a real risk of serious harm from traffickers ...' (paragraph 82 [2]).
- 4.2.4 The country guidance case [HL \(Risk –Return - Snakeheads\) China CG \[2002\] UKIAT 03683](#), promulgated on 13 August 2002, heard on 14 May 2002 in which the UT found that failed asylum seekers being returned to China who owed debts to 'snakeheads' were not likely to face a real risk of hostile action. The Upper Tribunal noted:

'The principal reason for our conclusion that the Appellant would not be at risk on return is the lack of any country information to indicate that she would

be at risk. Nevertheless, logic also supports this conclusion. The snakeheads and loan sharks are violent and unscrupulous, but they are running what is likely to be a highly profitable business and would prefer to avoid actions which might damage that business. Violent or other persecutory action against those who are returned to China would be unlikely to result in the recovery of much money, but would be likely to discourage future customers. (paragraph 15)

‘... We can find no evidence that indebted returning failed asylum seekers have body parts removed and sold as a means of recovering the money they owe. We can find no evidence that individuals in this position are forced into prostitution, drug trafficking or other crime. There is speculation, but no evidence that indebted returning failed asylum seekers may make further efforts to travel to remain in a western country. There is insufficient evidence to establish a reasonable likelihood that snakeheads or loan sharks would force such a person to try again.’ (paragraph 16)

- 4.2.5 The country guidance case of [ZC & Others \(Risk - illegal exit – loan sharks\) China CG \[2009\] UKAIT 00028](#) promulgated on 20 July 2009, heard on 27 February 2009 in which the Upper Tribunal reported that: ‘The evidence does not establish that failed asylum seekers indebted to loan sharks will come to harm on return to China; the information on loan sharks in [HL \(Risk – Return – Snakeheads\) China CG \[2002\] UKIAT 03683](#) is still applicable.’ (Headnote 2)
- 4.2.6 Similarly, in the reported case of [TT \(Risk, Return, Snakeheads\) \[2002\] UKIAT4937](#) the Tribunal found that: ‘We have found no evidence that indebted returning failed asylum-seekers have body parts removed or that debtors are in such circumstances forced into activities such as prostitution and drug trafficking. We have been unable to find sufficient evidence to establish a reasonable likelihood that such persons would be forced by the Snakeheads or loan sharks to leave China once again in order to repay the debts owed.’ (paragraph 53)
- 4.2.7 Sources do not indicate that those subject to modern slavery, including victims of trafficking, to or in the UK are re-trafficked or face other abuses on return to China. Therefore, there are not ‘very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence’ to justify a departure from the findings in [HC & RC](#), [HL](#) and [ZC & Others](#) (see [Treatment on return](#) and [Risk of re-trafficking](#)).
- 4.2.8 Men, women and girls are trafficked within China and from China to the UK. They are commonly recruited under false pretences, including offers of well-paid employment, vocational training, or improved living conditions. Upon arrival or recruitment, some are subjected to labour exploitation, domestic servitude and sexual or criminal exploitation. Victims may experience debt bondage and be subjected to non-payment of wages, restrictions on movement, confiscation of identity documents, and physical abuse (see [Profiles of victims and traffickers](#)).
- 4.2.9 During 2025, there were 355 Chinese potential victims of modern slavery referred to the UK Home Office’s National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Most referrals were related to labour or sexual exploitation. During the first quarter of 2026, 100 Chinese potential victims of modern slavery were referred to the NRM, with most referrals related to sexual exploitation (see [Chinese nationals in the UK](#)).

- 4.2.10 There is limited information on the number of victims of modern slavery within China. The Walk Free Foundation, an Australian research organisation which produces the Global Slavery Index (GSI), estimated there to be 5.8 million victims in 2021, although the figure is not broken down by perpetrator or type. The US State Department, in their 2025 trafficking in persons report, noted that, as in previous years, the government did not report how many victims were identified between April 2024 and March 2025. In 2026, the government reported a decline of 77.95% in the number of human trafficking crimes in 2025 compared to 2012, and stated that these crimes had effectively been curbed, although CPIT could find no information or statistic to support this statement and its limited definition of trafficking means that not all victims are identified (see Prevalence- [Within China](#) and [Identification of victims](#)).
- 4.2.11 Traffickers force Chinese men, women and girls to work in a variety of sectors including restaurants, shops, agricultural operations, and factories in overseas Chinese diaspora communities. Internal migrant workers of both sexes, who move from rural areas in search of employment, are also vulnerable to exploitation. Women and girls are recruited from China's rural areas with the promise of jobs but trafficked to urban centres within the country where they end up in situations of debt bondage and are forced to engage in the commercial sex trade. Women with physical disabilities and/or intellectual or psychosocial disabilities are particularly vulnerable to being exploited. Evidence suggests that some Chinese nationals working outside the country at Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, owned by China based companies, Chinese nationals or the government, have been subjected to conditions indicative of forced labour (see [Profiles of victims and traffickers](#)).
- 4.2.12 Trafficking is perpetrated by a wide range of actors, including organised criminal groups, triad networks and local gangs operating both within and outside of China. These networks are typically well organised and use coercion, exploitation and debt bondage to control victims. Chinese trafficking operations have been associated with entertainment venues, sham businesses and casinos abroad (see [Profiles of victims and traffickers](#)).
- 4.2.13 There is some evidence to suggest that victims of modern slavery, particularly those who have been victims of sex trafficking, may experience discrimination or social stigma on return. However, in general, this is not sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition to reach the high threshold of persecution and/or serious harm (see [Government and NGO assistance](#)).
- 4.2.14 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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5. Protection

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection.
- 5.1.2 A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a rogue state actor and/or a non-state actor is generally able to obtain protection from the state.
- 5.1.3 In general, China takes reasonable steps to provide protection by operating

an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting trafficking and a person is generally able to access the protection. This general sufficiency of protection will not be effective in every case, and a person's particular circumstances must be considered.

- 5.1.4 In the country guidance case of [HC & RC \(Trafficked women\) China CG \[2009\] UKAIT 00027](#) heard on 11 November 2008 and promulgated on 18 July 2009, considering the position of trafficked women only, the Upper Tribunal held that:

‘Although the Chinese authorities are intent upon rescuing and rehabilitating women and girls trafficked for the purposes of prostitution, there are deficiencies in the measures they have taken to combat the problem of trafficking. The principal deficiencies are the lack of a determined effort to deal with the complicity of corrupt law enforcement officers and state officials and the failure to penalise as trafficking acts of forced labour, debt bondage, coercion, involuntary servitude or offences committed against male victims (paragraph 82 [1]) ... the issue of whether she will be able to receive effective protection from the authorities will need careful consideration in the light of background evidence highlighting significant deficiencies in the system of protection for victims of trafficking. But each case, however, must be judged on its own facts.’ (para 82 [2]).

- 5.1.5 The Tribunal also noted that: ‘It is not inevitable that a returned trafficked woman would be punished for having left China illegally. Punishment is unlikely for those who seek and obtain the assistance of the All-China Women's Federation and for those able to give information to the authorities about snakeheads.’ (paragraph 82 [6]).
- 5.1.6 China is a signatory to various UN protocols and conventions to combat human trafficking and forced labour. However, according to the US State Department's 2025 trafficking report, the government does not meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so (see [Legal status](#) and [Prevention](#))
- 5.1.7 The criminal code criminalises some forms of sex and labour trafficking and prohibits forced and compulsory labour, with sentences ranging from a fine to imprisonment and in limited cases the death penalty. Article 240 of the criminal law criminalises the abduction or sale of women and children, however this does not explicitly link these acts to a purpose of exploitation and fails to include certain types of non-physical coercion and offences against male victims (see [Criminal law](#)).
- 5.1.8 The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) maintained an Office of Counter Trafficking that was exclusively dedicated to investigating trafficking crimes. MPS did not report the number of trafficking cases where investigations were initiated, and authorities were more likely to prioritize the identification of women and girls involved in sex trafficking than those involved in forced labour. Prosecutions of traffickers occurred but the government did not publish any data on the number of convictions or sentences. In 2026, the Supreme People's Court (SPC) reported that there was a 77.95% drop in trafficking cases in 2025 compared to 2012 and that trafficking cases have effectively been curbed, although CPIT could find no further evidence of this in the sources consulted (see [Identification of victims](#), [Prosecution of traffickers](#) and Prevalence- [Within China](#)).

- 5.1.9 Although the government has attempted to identify and assist victims of modern slavery, its limited definition of trafficking means that not all victims are identified and there is no standardised referral mechanism for victim identification. Some victims are arrested for crimes committed whilst subject to modern slavery. Men and boys older than 14 are not screened for signs of exploitation in sex trafficking or forced labour and members of religious and ethnic minorities are less likely to be identified as trafficking victims. For the past 8 years (as of March 2025), the government have not reported on the number of victims screened, identified or referred to protection services (see [Identification of victims](#)).
- 5.1.10 According to the US State Department's Trafficking in Persons report, the government did not report providing support to victims who assisted in investigations or prosecutions in 2024. Victims are not required to testify in prosecutions, and some free legal assistance was available to trafficking victims, but some victims faced difficulties accessing these services and had to pay for their own representation. Victims are also entitled to restitution, but the government did not report any victims who benefitted from this provision. Some forced marriage cases were mediated at village level and rarely culminated in a guilty verdict, meaning restitution was unavailable to the victims (see [Victim support and restitution](#)).
- 5.1.11 Medical care, counselling and legal aid is available to victims of trafficking through the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the All-China Women's Federation, and services operated by affiliates at provincial and municipal levels. The latest US State Department Trafficking in Persons report noted that the government did not provide any data on victim service provisions in 2024. Previous information indicated that the government maintained at least 10 shelters specifically for Chinese victims of trafficking and at least 1,567 other multipurpose shelters, but there was no updated information on these shelters. Male victims of trafficking are less likely to receive assistance and stigma against sex trafficking victims may discourage them from seeking protection services (see [Government and NGO assistance](#)).
- 5.1.12 Corruption is a significant problem and whilst the authorities have taken steps to eradicate it, some corrupt officials are complicit in trafficking. The government did not provide any statistics into investigations or prosecution of officials for their involvement in trafficking (see [Corruption](#)).
- 5.1.13 As such, the state is both willing and able to offer sufficient protection to persons fearing non-state, including 'rogue' state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 5.1.14 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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6. Internal relocation

- 6.1.1 In general, a person with a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state is unlikely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk.
- 6.1.2 In general, a person with a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state or rogue state actor is likely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk.

- 6.1.3 China is a very large country with around 1.4 billion people and many large cities such as (but not limited to) Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, where victims of modern slavery are likely to be able to safely travel to and evade or escape non-state actors.
- 6.1.4 The Upper Tribunal in [HC & RC](#) held that: ‘China is a vast country and it may be, for example, that in a particular part of China the efforts to eliminate trafficking are determined and the level of complicity between state officials and traffickers is low. If an appellant comes from such an area, or if she can relocate to such an area, there may be no real risk to her (paragraph 82 [2]). Whilst [HC & RC](#) relates to women and girls, the principle regarding the availability of internal relocation is also applicable to men.
- 6.1.5 The Tribunal also noted that: ‘The Chinese state has an obligation to house the homeless and will not allow their citizens to starve. Therefore, a returned trafficked woman without family support will not be allowed by the authorities to fall into a state of destitution.’ (paragraph 82 [3]).
- 6.1.6 The Tribunal also held ‘Due to reforms of the Chinese household registration system known as the "hukou" system it is unlikely that a returned trafficked woman would be obliged to return to the place where she is registered. The reforms have made it relatively easy for ordinary migrant workers to get legal, albeit temporary, urban registration and there is no reason why this should not extend to returned trafficked women.’ (paragraph 82 [4])
- 6.1.7 Whilst reform of the hukou system has taken place as mentioned in the country guidance case of [HC & RC](#), there remain some limitations on the ability of migrant workers, rural inhabitants and minority groups to change their workplace/residence and the hukou system is reported to exacerbate migrants’ vulnerability to trafficking for the purpose of forced labour. Not being registered in a hukou area limits access to public services. Nonetheless, more than 300 million people live outside of their household registration area and migration to cities in the eastern provinces is common (see [Hukou registration](#), [Internal migration](#)).
- 6.1.8 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to consider, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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7. Certification

- 7.1.1 Where a claim based on a fear of non-state actors or rogue-state actors is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 7.1.2 Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 7.1.3 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

About the country information

The COI provides the basis for the assessment and the executive summary. Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

The cut-off date for COI included in this note is **24 August 2026**.

For details on how CPIT gathers and presents country information, its research methodology and disclaimers and explainers on coverage, source selection, maps, translations and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in developing CPIT products, see [About country policy and information notes](#).

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8. Legal status

8.1 International legislation

8.1.1 China is signatory to, and has ratified, the following UN conventions:

- Convention against Torture and Other Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OP-SC)¹.

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8.2 Criminal law

8.2.1 Articles 240 and 241 of the Criminal Code relate to trafficking offences. Article 240 states:

‘Whoever abducts and traffics [sic] in a woman or child shall be sentenced to fixed term imprisonment of not less than five years but not more than 10 years and shall also be fined; if he falls under any of the following categories, he shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than 10 years or life imprisonment and shall also be fined or sentenced to confiscation of property; if the circumstances are especially serious, he shall be sentenced to death and also to confiscation of property:

- 1) being a ringleader of a gang engaged in abducting and trafficking in women and children;
- 2) abducting and trafficking in three or more women and/or children;
- 3) raping the woman who is abducted and trafficked in;
- 4) enticing or forcing the woman who is abducted and trafficked in to engage in prostitution, or selling such woman to any other person who would force her to engage in prostitution;
- 5) kidnapping a woman or child by means of violence, coercion or

¹ OHCHR, [Ratification Status for China](#), no date

anaesthesia for the purpose of selling the victim;

- 6) stealing a baby or an infant for the purpose of selling the victim;
- 7) causing serious injury or death to the woman or child who is abducted and trafficked in or to her or his relatives or any other serious consequences; or
- 8) selling a woman or a child out of the territory of China.

‘By abducting and trafficking in a woman or child is meant any of the following acts: abducting, kidnapping, buying, trafficking in, fetching, sending, or transferring a woman or child, for the purpose of selling the victim.’²

8.2.2 Article 241 of the Criminal Code states:

‘Whoever buys an abducted woman or child shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than three years, criminal detention or public surveillance.

‘Whoever buys an abducted woman and forces her to have sexual intercourse with him shall be convicted and punished in accordance with the provisions of Article 236 of this Law.

‘Whoever buys an abducted woman or child and illegally deprives the victim of his or her personal freedom or restricts his or her personal freedom, or commits any criminal acts such as harming and humiliating the victim, shall be convicted and punished in accordance with the relevant provisions of this Law.

‘Whoever buys an abducted woman or child and commits the criminal act as specified in the second or third paragraph of this Article shall be punished in accordance with the provisions on combined punishment for several crimes.

‘Whoever buys an abducted woman or child and sells the victim afterwards shall be convicted and punished in accordance with the provisions of Article 240 of this Law.

‘Whoever buys an abducted woman or child but does not obstruct the woman from returning to her original place of residence as she wishes or does not maltreat the child nor obstruct his or her rescue may be exempted from being investigated for criminal responsibility.’³

8.2.3 Articles 358 and 359 of the Criminal Code relate to forced prostitution offences. Article 358 states:

‘Whoever organizes or forces any other person or persons to engage in prostitution shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than five years and not more than ten years, and concurrently be sentenced to a fine. Whoever commits any of the following acts shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than ten years or life imprisonment, and concurrently be sentenced to a fine or confiscation of property:

- 1) making arrangements for another person to engage in prostitution and the circumstances being serious;

² The People’s Republic of China, [Criminal Law of the Peoples Republic of China](#) (Article 240), 1997

³ The People’s Republic of China, [Criminal Law of the Peoples Republic of China](#) (Article 241), 1997

- 2) forcing a girl under the age of 14 to engage in prostitution;
- 3) forcing a number of persons to engage in prostitution or repeatedly forcing another person to engage in prostitution;
- 4) forcing the victim to engage in prostitution after raping her; or
- 5) causing serious injury, death or other serious consequences to the person who is forced to engage in prostitution.

‘Whoever falls under any of the categories mentioned in the preceding paragraph, if the circumstances are especially serious, shall be sentenced to life imprisonment or death and shall also be sentenced to confiscation of property.

‘Whoever assists in arranging for another person to engage in prostitution shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than five years and shall also be fined; if the circumstances are serious, he shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than five years but not more than 10 years and shall also be fined.’⁴

8.2.4 Article 359 of the Criminal Code states:

‘Whoever lures other persons into or shelters prostitution or procures other persons to engage in prostitution shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than five years, criminal detention or public surveillance and shall also be fined; if the circumstances are serious, he shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than five years and shall also be fined.

‘Whoever lures a girl under the age of 14 to engage in prostitution shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than five years and shall also be fined.’⁵

8.2.5 The Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC), chaired by US politicians and established by US Congress in 2000 to monitor China's compliance with international human rights standards⁶, noted in its 2025 annual report, covering the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, that: ‘The Chinese government is obligated to combat human trafficking and enact legislation criminalizing human trafficking as a State Party to the U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol) ...’⁷

8.2.6 The Government of China's ‘Combined 5th and 6th periodic reports submitted under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2019’, published by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 5 January 2026 (UN CRC January 2026 report), noted:

‘Legislation has been adopted to prevent the abduction, sale and trafficking of children. On the basis of existing legal provisions, the Law on the Protection of Minors stipulates that large public venues must set up security alarm systems to search for lost children and that accommodation operators must verify children’s identities; it also establishes a mandatory reporting

⁴ The People’s Republic of China, [Criminal Law of the Peoples Republic of China](#) (Article 358), 1997

⁵ The People’s Republic of China, [Criminal Law of the Peoples Republic of China](#) (Article 359), 1997

⁶ CECC, [Frequently Asked Questions](#), no date

⁷ CECC, [2025 Annual Report](#) (page 153), 12 December 2025

system.

‘... The Supreme People’s Court issued the Interpretation on Several Issues concerning the Application of Law in the Trial of Criminal Cases involving the Abduction and Trafficking of Women and Children, whereby it raised the minimum sentence for abducting and trafficking a child under the age of 6 by means such as stealing, abduction or deception from 5 years’ imprisonment to 10 years’ imprisonment.’⁸

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8.3 Labour law

8.3.1 Article 244 of the Criminal Code, relating to forced labour offences, states: ‘Where an employer, in violation of the laws and regulations on labour administration, compels its employees to work by restricting their personal freedom, if the circumstances are serious, the persons who are directly responsible for the offence shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than three years or criminal detention and shall also, or shall only, be fined.’⁹

8.3.2 The CECC 2025 Annual Report noted that the Chinese government: ‘... has also committed to obligations to combat forced labor under the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Forced Labour Convention of 1930 and Abolition of Forced Labour Convention of 1957. In 2024, the ILO released an updated framework to identify forced labor of adults, specifying conditions of involuntary work and coercion. While there is no set list of indicators that guarantee the existence of either condition, according to the ILO, several practices could point to the use of involuntary and/or coerced work. The revised ILO guidelines strengthen methodologies for identifying non-internment forms of state-imposed forced labor, allowing researchers to more accurately capture the complexities of systemic coercion in regions such as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).’¹⁰

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8.4 Policies, programmes and projects

8.4.1 The US State Department 2025 Trafficking in Persons report (the USSD 2025 TiP report), covering the period April 2024 to March 2025, noted: ‘Authorities engaged in anti-trafficking law enforcement cooperation with Southeast Asian governments to investigate cases and receive Chinese nationals from other countries suspected of human trafficking abroad. The government maintained anti-trafficking agreements with the five other Lower Mekong countries to jointly address trafficking via the forced and fraudulent marriage of their citizens to China-based individuals; some provincial governments maintained their own similar agreements with counterpart entities in bordering countries. Authorities previously reported maintaining coordinated anti-trafficking mechanisms with law enforcement and interior ministry counterparts in 34 countries, and these mechanisms were likely still in place. Some foreign law enforcement personnel continued to report their Chinese law enforcement counterparts were unresponsive to requests for

⁸ UN CRC, [Combined 5th and 6th periodic reports ...](#) (paragraph 132 & 135), 5 January 2026

⁹ The People’s Republic of China, [Criminal Law of the Peoples Republic of China](#) (Article 244), 1997

¹⁰ CECC, [2025 Annual Report](#) (page 153), 12 December 2025

bilateral cooperation on cross-border trafficking cases, while others reported China's cumbersome law enforcement bureaucracy hindered joint operations. Observers reported the lack of comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation in China negatively affected Macau authorities' ability to conduct joint anti-trafficking operations with mainland Chinese counterparts. Some foreign officials noted jurisdictional challenges when attempting to pursue trafficking investigations, including into online scam operations, inside of special economic zones (SEZ) in Lower Mekong countries, and worksites in the Pacific operated by Chinese national-owned companies.

'... The government maintained an Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons (2021-2030), which called for authorities to research the need and feasibility of developing a human trafficking law but largely focused on preventing fraudulent adoption, combating cyber-facilitated sex trafficking crimes, and improving labor recruitment procedures, with an emphasis on women and girls; it contained no explicit mention of men or boys and few mentions of forced labor. Observers assessed the government devoted significant resources towards the implementation of the action plan primarily through law enforcement and media campaigns, but the government did not provide data on implementation.'¹¹

- 8.4.2 The UN CRC January 2026 report noted: 'The National Action Plans to Combat Human Trafficking for 2013–2020 and 2021–2030 have been issued and implemented. A State Council system of interministerial joint meetings on efforts to combat human trafficking has been established, led by the Ministry of Public Security and comprising 32 members. It forms a long-term mechanism against human trafficking that integrates prevention, suppression, assistance and rehabilitation.'¹²
- 8.4.3 The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) is an independent civil society organisation whose members include 'prominent law enforcement, governance and development practitioners'¹³. The Global Organized Crime Index, compiled by GI-TOC, 'is a multi-dimensional tool that assesses the level of criminality and resilience to organized crime for 193 countries'¹⁴. Its 2025 iteration (Organized Crime Index 2025), covering 2024, noted: 'As part of its efforts to combat human trafficking, the Chinese government introduced a 2021–2030 action plan against human trafficking, which aims to establish a long-term mechanism that integrates prevention, law enforcement, victim rescue, resettlement and rehabilitation. While the government has adopted action plans and legislation targeting various forms of trafficking, China continues to fall short of international standards.'¹⁵

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9. Prevalence

9.1 Within China

- 9.1.1 The Walk Free Foundation, an Australian research organisation which produces the Global Slavery Index (GSI) estimated in their GSI 2023 findings on China, that : '...5.8 million people were living in modern slavery in

¹¹ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#), 29 September 2025

¹² UN CRC, [Combined 5th and 6th periodic reports ...](#) (paragraph 133), 5 January 2026

¹³ GI-TOC, [Our Story](#), no date

¹⁴ Global Organized Crime Index, [About the Index](#), no date

¹⁵ GI-TOC, [The Organized Crime Index- China](#) (Civil society and social protection), 2025

China on any given day in 2021. This equates to four in every thousand people in the country, which places China at 19 out of 27 countries in the region [where one is the most prevalent and 27 is the least].¹⁶

9.1.2 There were no updates to the GSI 2023 findings and the GSI 2023 did not provide a breakdown by type of modern slavery, or information on the profile or number of actors involved.

9.1.3 Freedom House noted in their Freedom in the World 2026 report, covering events of 2025, that:

‘While workers in China are afforded important protections under existing laws, violations of labor and employment regulations are widespread. Exploitative employment practices such as wage theft, excessive overtime, student labor, and unsafe working conditions are pervasive in many industries. Forced labor and human trafficking are common, affecting internal migrants as well as Chinese nationals who are trafficked abroad. Forced labor is the norm in prisons and other detention facilities.’¹⁷

9.1.4 The People’s Republic of China’s State Council Information Office noted on 2 April 2026 that: ‘The number of children and women abductions and human trafficking crimes in China has shown a significant decline, with a 77.95 percent drop in 2025 compared to the peak in 2012, the Supreme People’s Court (SPC) said on Thursday [2 April 2026]. This indicates that such crimes have been effectively curbed, the court said.’¹⁸ In the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)), CPIT could not find any other statistics on the number of trafficking cases, nor any other information to support the statement that such cases have been curbed.

9.1.5 China Daily, an English language state-run newspaper,¹⁹ reported that: ‘...while traditional methods of trafficking, such as abductions, have declined, there has been a rise in cases where the internet and fraudulent relationships are being used to facilitate trafficking.

For instance, the use of coded language to post information and conduct transactions online transcends geographical boundaries and is highly covert, posing challenges to investigations and judicial processes, the nation’s highest court said.

‘...In one case...an individual surnamed Qiu was sentenced to life imprisonment for exploiting six women with mental illnesses or intellectual disabilities under the guise of arranging marriages from 2018 to March 2021. He sold them as wives for a profit of 190,000 yuan (\$27,600) and raped two of them.

In another case, a woman surnamed Chen received a seven-year prison sentence and a 100,000 yuan fine for obtaining children’s information online and deceiving others by claiming she was infertile and eager to adopt. She used these pretenses to acquire and sell three infants, illegally profiting over 130,000 yuan.’²⁰

¹⁶ Walk Free, [Modern slavery in China](#), 2023

¹⁷ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2026](#) (G4), 2026

¹⁸ The State Council Information Office, [China effectively curbs trafficking of children...](#), 2 April 2026

¹⁹ China Daily, [About China Daily Group](#), no date

²⁰ China Daily, [Crackdown on human trafficking tightened](#), 3 April 2026

9.2 Chinese nationals in the UK

- 9.2.1 The UK Home Office's National Referral Mechanism (NRM) statistics for 2025 stated there were a total of 355 Chinese potential victims of modern slavery referred to the NRM. At the time of referral, 344 were adults and 11 were children. Of the 355 referrals, 158 were related to labour exploitation, 154 were related to sexual exploitation, 25 were unspecified/unknown, 14 were related to criminal exploitation and 3 were related to domestic exploitation²¹.
- 9.2.2 UK Home Office NRM statistics for the first quarter of 2026 recorded 100 Chinese potential victims of modern slavery. Of these, 98 were adults and 2 were children at the time of the referral. Of the 100 potential victims, 53 were related to sexual exploitation, 34 related to labour exploitation, 9 were unspecified or unknown, 3 were related to domestic exploitation and 1 was related to criminal exploitation²².

10. Profiles of victims and perpetrators

10.1 Modern slavery victims trafficked abroad

- 10.1.1 In January 2025, Europol reported on a Chinese human trafficking ring in Spain and Croatia. Regarding the victims involved, the report noted: 'Victims were lured into prostitution in Europe under the promise of earning high income within a short timeframe. However, upon arrival, they were subjected to severe debt bondage and trapped in a cycle of exploitation they were unable to escape due to their vulnerabilities and dependence on the traffickers.'²³

- 10.1.2 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

'Chinese nationals in several countries are subjected to conditions indicative of forced labor at [Belt and Road Initiative²⁴] BRI worksites owned, managed, and/or operated with partial or full investment by China-based companies, Chinese nationals, or the Chinese government ...

'... Traffickers, including those working for Chinese national-run crime syndicates and with facilitation from Chinese national-owned businesses, subject Chinese men, women, and children to forced labor and sex trafficking in more than 80 other countries. They force Chinese men, women, and girls to work in restaurants, shops, agricultural operations, and factories in overseas Chinese diaspora communities. Traffickers fraudulently recruit some Chinese nationals ... for high-paying technical jobs abroad and then force them to engage in online gambling, internet, and telephone scams, primarily in casinos and commercial compounds in Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. Traffickers also reportedly subject some Chinese nationals to forced criminality in cryptocurrency mining and in the cultivation, processing, and distribution of recreational drugs. Chinese men in Africa, Europe, maritime

²¹ UK Home Office, [Modern Slavery: NRM and DtN statistics, end of year ... 2025](#), 19 February 2026

²² UK Home Office, [Modern Slavery: NRM and DtN statistics, January to March 2026](#), 14 May 2026

²³ Europol, [30 arrested in crackdown on Chinese human trafficking ring in Spain ...](#), 27 January 2025

²⁴ Chatham House, [What is China's Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)?](#), updated 19 December 2022

Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and South America experience conditions indicative of forced labor in factories, construction sites, and logging and mining operations; these conditions include non-payment of wages, restrictions on movement, withholding of passports, and physical abuse. Traffickers subject Chinese women and girls to sex trafficking throughout the world, including in major cities, construction sites, remote mining and logging camps, and areas with high concentrations of Chinese migrant workers. ...

‘... Chinese national traffickers operating abroad subject Chinese nationals, local populations, and third country nationals to sex trafficking and forced labor in sham businesses and entertainment establishments, including Chinese national-owned casinos constructed in close proximity to large-scale Chinese government- and company-affiliated infrastructure and investment projects – at times under the auspices of the BRI – and in special economic zones with limited local government oversight in countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America.’²⁵

- 10.1.3 GI-TOC’s Organized Crime Index 2025 noted that: ‘A prominent trend involves Chinese nationals trafficked into forced labour, such as cannabis cultivation, in countries including the United States, Chile and Spain, with victims subjected to debt bondage and coercion by networks like the Bang group. Human trafficking is also closely tied to online scams in South East Asia. Compounds in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos exploit Chinese nationals by means of deceptive recruitment tactics and forcing them to conduct online scams under the threat of extreme violence, including torture and even death for non-compliance.’²⁶

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10.2 Modern slavery victims in China

10.2.1 The GSI 2023 stated that:

‘Sex work is criminalised in China, yet Chinese and foreign women and children are reportedly trafficked for sexual exploitation within the sex industry.

‘Internal migrant workers are also particularly vulnerable to exploitation in China. Unable to find work in their hometowns, rural populations migrate to urban areas such as Guangdong and Shanghai to take up low-paid jobs, becoming part of China’s “floating population” of around 376 million. Compared to urban residents, internal migrants typically lack equal access to social benefits under the hukou (household registration) system, which restricts the provision of social benefits to citizens’ registered residence.

‘...A flow-on effect of the large-scale migration of rural Chinese is the “left-behind” children, defined as those under 16 years of age whose parents are both migrant workers. These children face barriers to education, increased risk of poverty, and psychological stress due to family separation. Reports suggest these children may be at higher risk of trafficking for forced labour, forced begging, and CSEC.’²⁷ (see also [Household registration \(hukou\)](#))

10.2.2 Fight For Her Group (FFHG), a civil society group, in their report “Leaving

²⁵ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Trafficking Profile), 29 September 2025

²⁶ GI-TOC, [The Organized Crime Index- China](#) (People), 2025

²⁷ Walk Free, [Modern slavery in China](#), 2023

No Sister with Disabilities Behind” - Regarding the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in China’, published in January 2023 and submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (FFHG January 2023 report), noted:

‘An analysis of 616 judicial case files involving trafficking in women from 2017 to 2020 shows that 20% of the 1,252 women trafficked in China had disabilities, and most intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. And more than 60% of the women with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities were abducted by strangers passing by in outdoor locations such as roadsides, stations, and fields. Another study of 1,038 first-instance judgments involving the crime of trafficking in women and children from January 2000 to July 2017 shows that 26.7% of the victims suffered from varying degrees of mental illness. Among the identifiable origins and destinations, rural areas dominate with 71.7% and 91.5% respectively.’²⁸

- 10.2.3 The Australian Government’s Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)’s Country Report 2024, based on a range of public and non-publicly available sources, noted that:

‘Gender imbalance was a factor primarily responsible for the creation of a market for bride trafficking, particularly in rural areas. ... In-country sources told DFAT in 2023 that women and girls from the southern border regions in Yunnan, Guangdong and Guangxi had been trafficked by force or collusion to central provinces like Anhui, Hebei and Hunan for the purpose of forced marriages.

‘The practice of bride trafficking was highlighted in 2022, after a TikTok video went viral of a woman who had been trafficked to a rural village in Jiangsu Province was seen chained to the wall by her neck.’²⁹

- 10.2.4 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted: ‘... Traffickers target adults and children with developmental disabilities and children whose parents have left them with relatives to migrate to the cities – estimated at 6.4 million – and subject them to forced labor and forced begging domestically and abroad.’³⁰
- 10.2.5 Asylos, an international network of over 60 volunteers in 25 countries who provide Country of Origin Information (COI) research³¹, noted in its September 2025 report ‘China: Loan shark activities, police protection and corruption, and support, including mental health, to female returnee victims of trafficking’: ‘Given the clandestine nature of trafficking and the challenges that can exist in identifying victims of trafficking, there are no reliable or comprehensive statistics on the prevalence of human trafficking of women and girls in China.’³²
- 10.2.6 For information on the situation of Muslims in China, including Uyghurs, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [China: Muslims \(including Uyghurs in Xinjiang\)](#).

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²⁸ FFHG, [“Leaving No Sister with Disabilities Behind” ...](#) (page 2), January 2023

²⁹ DFAT, [China Country Information Report](#) (paragraph 3.198- 3.199), 27 December 2024

³⁰ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Trafficking Profile), 29 September 2025

³¹ Asylos, [About us](#), no date

³² Asylos, [China: Loan shark activities, police protection and corruption ...](#) (page 20), September 2025

10.3 Perpetrators

10.3.1 In its January 2025 report, Europol noted, regarding the traffickers involved in the criminal network:

‘The criminal organisation, composed primarily of Chinese nationals, profited significantly from the sexual exploitation of vulnerable women. To maximise profits, the group engaged in additional criminal activities, including document fraud, money laundering, and the facilitation of illegal immigration.

‘... The organisation operated in two interconnected cells:

- **Recruitment and smuggling cell:** Victims were recruited in China through “travel agencies” where they disguised the exploitation by presenting prostitution opportunities as legitimate employment abroad. Using the Western Balkan corridor, the smuggling cell coordinated with local facilitators and drivers to illegally transport victims into the EU. Safe houses were maintained along the route, with logistics managed through instant messaging apps.
- **Exploitation cell:** Once in Europe, victims were initially exploited in entry-point countries. Later, they were transferred to Spain and other Member States, where they were forced to work in brothels or short-stay facilities. Victims were rotated between cities and across borders to evade detection and meet the growing demand for sexual services. The organisation maintained strict control over every aspect of the victims’ lives, taking 50% of their earnings even after their debts were repaid.’³³

10.3.2 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

‘...Highly organized criminal syndicates and local gangs subject Chinese national women and girls to sex trafficking within China and abroad. Traffickers typically recruit them from rural areas and take them to urban centers, using a combination of fraudulent job offers and coercion by imposing large travel fees, confiscating passports, confining victims, or physically and financially threatening victims to compel their engagement in commercial sex.

‘...Crime syndicates headed by Chinese nationals reportedly assist traffickers in Southeast Asian countries in the production of counterfeit travel documents to facilitate trans-border trafficking.

‘... Chinese national-operated crime syndicates also subject Chinese nationals and foreign victims to forced criminality in online scam operations in Burma, Cambodia, and Laos.’³⁴

10.3.3 GI-TOC’s Organized Crime Index 2025 noted that:

‘A wide spectrum of actors, including mafia-style groups such as triads, criminal networks, state-embedded actors and foreign criminal actors, are involved in the [human trafficking] trade. Chinese criminal organizations exploit victims domestically and abroad, frequently engaging in forced labour, sexual exploitation and trafficking for criminality.

‘... Smuggling is facilitated by complex criminal structures that intersect with

³³ Europol, [30 arrested in crackdown on Chinese human trafficking ring in Spain ...](#), 27 January 2025

³⁴ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Trafficking Profile), 29 September 2025

trafficking operations.

‘... Criminal networks in China are typically loose and decentralized, yet highly adaptable and influential across a range of illicit economies. ... Their financial sophistication is notable, particularly in money laundering through front companies, casinos and real estate ventures. These criminal networks are often transnational, focusing on specific areas within the country and collaborating with foreign actors or forming part of larger international networks. They also extend their reach beyond China’s borders, operating in regions such as South East Asia, Latin America and Africa.’³⁵

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10.4 State sponsored forced labour

10.4.1 The GSI 2023 stated that:

‘Forced labour is exacted under the guise of vocational training and poverty alleviation – a scheme promulgated by the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] to raise living standards in “ethnic areas.” It is primarily facilitated through the transfer of rural populations to work in farms and factories, and the involuntary placement of detainees and ex-detainees in factories located inside or near “re-education camps” in the Uyghur Region and factories across China. Several global supply chains are tainted by this exploitation, including cotton, garments, electronics, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), solar-grade polysilicon (used in solar panels), and personal protective equipment (PPE). Similar patterns of abuse are evident in the Tibet Autonomous Region, with reports of labour transfers occurring in construction, textiles, security, and agriculture both as a means of religious discrimination and political indoctrination of Tibetans.

10.4.2 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted: ‘State bodies reportedly subjected members of predominantly Muslim minority groups and Tibetans to forced labor as part of arbitrary mass detention, political indoctrination, and labor transfer schemes. ... State-sponsored forced labor is prevalent in China.’³⁶

10.4.3 GI-TOC’s Organized Crime Index 2025 noted that: ‘Domestically, there are also concerning reports pertaining to state-imposed forced labour. State-affiliated enterprises and authorities are accused of subjecting Uyghur, Tibetan and other minority groups to forced labour as part of mass detention and labour transfer schemes.’³⁷

10.4.4 For further information see the Country Policy and Information Note on [China: Muslims \(including Uyghurs in Xinjiang\)](#)

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11. Action to combat modern slavery

11.1 Prevention

11.1.1 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

‘The Government of the People’s Republic of China does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making

³⁵ GI-TOC, [The Organized Crime Index- China](#) (People), 2025

³⁶ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Trafficking Profile), 29 September 2025

³⁷ GI-TOC, [The Organized Crime Index- China](#) (People), 2025

significant efforts to do so.

‘... The government maintained insufficient efforts to prevent trafficking and abetted or perpetrated trafficking.

‘... Chinese national-owned and affiliated companies continued to employ Chinese and foreign nationals at BRI project worksites abroad; the government did not exercise adequate oversight of recruitment procedures, which often featured worker-paid fees driving indebtedness to unregistered brokers and were prohibited by law, nor did it take steps to ensure worker contracts were free of abusive contract provisions. Many Chinese nationals employed at BRI worksites abroad initially entered destination countries on tourist visas and were forced to work without contracts. In recognition of this insufficiency, authorities maintained policies and regulatory standards issued in 2017 barring the collection of recruitment fees or security deposits from job applicants, banning the use of tourist visas for travel to work in BRI destination countries, and instructing companies on safeguarding labor rights. However, these were largely nonbinding, and the government did not report efforts to enforce them. International visibility into BRI recruitment processes, labor contracts, and working conditions was constrained in part due to the Chinese government’s failure to establish a single governing entity for the program or to publish a list of worldwide BRI projects, bilateral negotiations for which were kept secret. In recent years, NGOs reported the Chinese government ignored abusive and potentially illegal contract stipulations, including fees, passport retention, and provisions requiring immediate repatriation for pregnancies or illnesses, which placed some Chinese workers at higher risk of debt or punitive deportation as coercive measures to retain their labor; the government did not take steps to address these vulnerabilities.

‘... For the eighth consecutive year, the government did not report its funding for anti-trafficking activities in furtherance of the action plan (compared with more than 55 million renminbi (\$7.54 million) [£6 million³⁸] in 2016). The All-China Women’s Federation, which was designated to lead or support dozens of work-streams in the national action plan, maintained provincial chapters.

‘... Academics and experts noted the sex imbalance created by the previous One-Child Policy continued to contribute to potential trafficking crimes in China. ...The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government did not report investigating or prosecuting any Chinese citizens for extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse, despite widespread reports of the crime.’³⁹

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11.2 Identification of victims

11.2.1 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

‘The government publicized recovering 2,505 abducted women and children – an unknown number of whom were exploited in trafficking – and resolving 109 “trafficking cases,” but it did not provide data on the total number of cases of “forced prostitution” or forced labor it concluded in 2024 (compared

³⁸ Xe.com, [Exchange Rate 1.00 CNY = 0.109 GBP](#), 7 July 2026

³⁹ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Prevention), 29 September 2025

with 683 abducted women and children recovered in 2023).

‘... As a result of pervasive, state-sponsored labor trafficking, the government was less likely to identify members of religious and ethnic minorities – including Uyghurs, Tibetans, ethnic Kazakhs, ethnic Kyrgyz, and members of other Turkic and/or Muslim minority groups – as trafficking victims.

‘... For the eighth consecutive year, the government did not report how many victims it screened, identified, or referred to protection services, although media reports indicated authorities continued to remove some victims from exploitative situations. NGOs in neighboring countries reported Chinese security and law enforcement officials working with foreign authorities encouraged those authorities to eschew standard victim screening procedures. The government did not report any cooperation between police and social workers, women’s shelters, or NGOs to identify victims during the reporting period. Local Public Security Bureaus (PSBs) were responsible for investigating suspicious cases involving women, children, individuals experiencing homelessness, and individuals with disabilities, and were required to establish local public reporting mechanisms; the purpose of the reporting mechanisms was unclear. The government required PSBs to collect DNA samples and biometric information as part of the investigation of these cases, which may have included trafficking victims, contributing to the government’s country-wide system of mass surveillance, which has been utilized to control, harass, and abuse minority populations and political dissidents. Based on media and NGO reports, authorities continued to prioritize the identification of women and girls in sex trafficking to the near total exclusion of efforts to identify forced labor victims. The overly narrow definitions inherent to China’s anti-trafficking statutes significantly limited the scope of victim identification among key demographics; in practice, authorities did not screen men or boys older than the age of 14 for any signs of exploitation in sex trafficking or forced labor.

‘China lacked a standardized national referral mechanism, but [Ministry of Public Security] MPS maintained written instructions for law enforcement officers throughout the country aiming to clarify procedures for identifying trafficking victims among individuals in commercial sex and forced or fraudulent marriage. ... MPS officials reportedly maintained a procedure to screen for trafficking indicators among individuals arrested on suspicion of “prostitution” crimes, but did not implement this procedure in practice. A 2016 policy limiting the detention of individuals arrested for alleged criminal sex to 72 hours remained in place.’⁴⁰

- 11.2.2 CGTN noted in March 2026 that: ‘In China, a national DNA database established in 2009 by public security authorities to locate trafficked and missing children has played a critical role in reconnecting families separated for years. Through matches in this database, thousands of children abducted years ago have been identified and reunited with their biological parents.’⁴¹

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11.3 Investigations

⁴⁰ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Prosecution, Protection), 29 September 2025

⁴¹ CGTN, [20-year manhunt shows rise of tech-driven anti-trafficking in China](#), 22 March 2026

11.3.1 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

‘For the eighth consecutive year, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) did not report the number of investigations initiated of possible trafficking cases (1,004 in 2016), but publicly claimed in May 2024 that human trafficking cases had declined by two thirds over the previous five years without providing any evidence of this decline.

‘... MPS maintained an Office of Counter Trafficking that was exclusively dedicated to investigating trafficking crimes; however many of the cases it investigated were missing persons cases, most of which likely did not involve trafficking as defined by international law. The government did not have dedicated anti-trafficking components within the Supreme People’s Procuratorate or the court system.’⁴²

11.3.2 The UN CRC 2026 report noted:

‘The Ministry of Public Security has organized special operations to combat child trafficking and focus on resolving long-standing cases. Through the national DNA database for combating trafficking, more than 7,500 abducted and missing children have been located, including over 780 children in the first half of 2021. Special campaigns have been carried out against street-based organized child begging and the coercion of children with hearing or speech impairments into criminal activities. In cases where guardians cannot be immediately located, DNA information is collected and children are escorted to assistance and protection centres. Furthermore, the Ministry has overseen the investigation of major cross-border cases, taking rigorous action against these offences.’⁴³

11.3.3 China Global Television Network (CGTN), a state-run international media organisation headquartered in Beijing⁴⁴, noted in March 2026 that:

‘For human trafficking cases, investigators usually first turn to facial recognition systems to scan surveillance footage across high-traffic locations, including railway stations, airports, bus terminals, as well as shopping malls, schools and hospitals. Some transport hubs are equipped with systems capable of processing thousands of faces per second, automatically flagging individuals whose features match known trafficking suspects. Images of missing children are also continuously compared against live feeds.

‘But identifying a match is only the beginning. The technical challenge lies in the fragmented nature of visual data. Footage from different sources varies widely in quality, angle and lighting. Once potential leads are generated, they must be cross-checked against existing suspect databases. This stage still relies heavily on human investigators, as matching accuracy remains constrained by algorithm performance and computing power.

‘In recent years, additional tools have been introduced. Gait recognition, which identifies individuals based on body movement patterns, has been deployed in criminal investigations to supplement facial analysis when images are unclear or incomplete.

⁴² USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Prosecution), 29 September 2025

⁴³ UN CRC, [Combined 5th and 6th periodic reports ...](#) (paragraph 134), 5 January 2026

⁴⁴ CGTN, [About Us](#), no date

'More advanced still is cross-age facial recognition. By simulating how a face evolves over time, AI models can estimate what a suspect might look like decades later. However, challenges still remain, particularly around genetic variability and the unpredictability of aging.'⁴⁵

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11.4 Raising awareness

11.4.1 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

'National and local authorities conducted media outreach campaigns on some forms of trafficking, primarily focused on child abduction and forced and fraudulent marriage, but also fraudulent recruitment into scams, including community outreach, holding press conferences about MPS activities targeting scam compounds, and publicizing stories of Chinese nationals exploited in forced labor in online scam operations in Southeast Asia.'⁴⁶

11.4.2 The UN CRC January 2026 report noted: 'The Ministry of Public Security has widely carried out awareness-raising and education activities to enhance public awareness, especially among children, with a view to preventing trafficking in persons. In response to the features of the "Internet Plus" era, online platforms have been developed and utilized for the purposes of anti-trafficking awareness and trafficking prevention.'⁴⁷

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11.5 Police training

11.5.1 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

'The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training for law enforcement. Observers previously reported the need for training of officials on the criminal code.

'... The government did not report conducting any training on victim identification or assistance for its diplomatic services abroad. Chinese consular officials often did not take steps to proactively identify, respond to, or assist Chinese nationals subjected to forced labor under the auspices of BRI projects overseas, including when victims reported abuses to local Chinese diplomatic missions.

'... The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers.'⁴⁸

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11.6 Protection

11.6.1 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

'The government made insufficient anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts, including by continuing to allocate extensive law enforcement and paramilitary resources toward the mass detention and forced labor of

⁴⁵ CGTN, [20-year manhunt shows rise of tech-driven anti-trafficking in China](#), 22 March 2026

⁴⁶ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Prevention), 29 September 2025

⁴⁷ UN CRC, [Combined 5th and 6th periodic reports ...](#) (paragraph 136), 5 January 2026

⁴⁸ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#), 29 September 2025

members of ethnic and religious minority groups.

‘... The government maintained insufficient efforts to protect victims, including by continuing to facilitate the forced labor of its citizens domestically, and by failing to identify or provide services to Chinese citizens subjected to forced labor abroad.

‘... Chinese fishermen subjected to forced labor generally could not report abuses to local authorities or access protection services when returning to China.’⁴⁹

- 11.6.2 GI-TOC’s Organized Crime Index 2025 noted that: ‘The treatment of trafficking victims remains inadequate, especially for non-citizens, who risk deportation and even the possibility of capital punishment upon return to their home countries. Complaints about law enforcement’s handling of victims suggest insufficient sensitivity and responsiveness.’⁵⁰

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11.7 Prosecution of traffickers

- 11.7.1 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

‘Although the central government continued to prosecute and convict Chinese nationals for trafficking crimes, authorities did not collect or report comprehensive law enforcement data. Partial public records of anti-trafficking enforcement continued to feature crimes outside the definition of trafficking according to international law (including migrant smuggling, abduction of women and children, custody disputes, and fraudulent adoption without the purpose of exploitation), making it difficult to assess progress. The government continued to handle most cases with indicators of forced labor as administrative issues through the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and seldom initiated prosecutions of such cases under anti-trafficking statutes; observers noted authorities were more likely to persecute human rights advocates and organizations drawing attention to forced labor than to enforce labor laws. Some courts likely continued to prosecute trafficking crimes under laws pertaining to domestic violence, labor contract violations, and child abuse, all of which prescribed lesser penalties.

‘...The government initiated prosecutions of at least three traffickers turned over to Chinese law enforcement by foreign law enforcement counterparts (compared with 86 cases prosecuted in 2021).

‘... In prior years, the government published limited data on convictions in human trafficking cases on a public judicial database; however, it did not publish any convictions for human trafficking crimes during the reporting period [2024]. Reports suggested the government also systematically removed previously published information about trafficking cases from previous years.

‘...For the third year, the government did not report convicting or sentencing any traffickers (compared with nine convictions in 2021; unreported in 2020; 2,355 convictions in 2019).’⁵¹

- 11.7.2 The People’s Republic of China’s State Council Information Office noted on

⁴⁹ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#), 29 September 2025

⁵⁰ GI-TOC, [The Organized Crime Index- China](#) (Civil society and social protection), 2025

⁵¹ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Prosecution), 29 September 2025

2 April 2026 that:

‘Over the years, Chinese courts have implemented strict measures against trafficking, the [Supreme People’s Court] SPC noted. In addition to cracking down on the offenders directly involved in trafficking, courts also punish those who "purchase" trafficked women and children, aiming to curb the demand that drives these crimes.

‘Those who, after "purchasing" the victims, commit additional crimes such as rape, intentional injury, illegal detention, or abuse, also face relevant penalties under the law.

‘Authorities have also focused on addressing illegal activities related to the falsification or unlawful issuance of birth certificates, marriage certificates, household registration documents, and other materials tied to human trafficking or "transactions," the SPC added.

‘The court also on Thursday [2 April 2026] published four typical cases of relevant crimes Chinese courts have handled, among which one of the convicts was sentenced to death and executed for children abduction. In another case, the convict was sentenced to life in prison for raping and trafficking of women.

‘Abduction and human trafficking have long been among the most reviled crimes in Chinese society.

‘In a high-profile case, Yu Huaying, a woman convicted of abducting and trafficking 17 children over two decades ago, was sentenced to death in 2024 and executed in 2025.’⁵²

- 11.7.3 GI-TOC’s Organized Crime Index 2025 noted that: ‘Certain forms of trafficking, especially those involving forced labour and women, are frequently prosecuted under less severe legal provisions, such as labour contract violations or domestic abuse statutes, resulting in comparatively lenient sentences.’⁵³

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11.8 Prosecution of victims

- 11.8.1 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted: ‘Due to a lack of formal identification procedures, observers reported authorities detained, arrested and penalized unidentified trafficking victims, including for commercial sex and immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked, and among the Chinese nationals arrested and returned from online scam compounds in Southeast Asia.’⁵⁴

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11.9 Corruption

- 11.9.1 Transparency International, ‘a global movement working in over 100 countries to end the injustice of corruption’⁵⁵, noted in September 2024 that:
- ‘China ... has made headlines with its aggressive anti-corruption

⁵² The State Council Information Office, [China effectively curbs trafficking of children...](#), 2 April 2026

⁵³ GI-TOC, [The Organized Crime Index- China](#) (Leadership and governance), 2025

⁵⁴ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Protection), 29 September 2025

⁵⁵ Transparency International, [About](#), no date

crackdown, punishing over 3.7 million public officials for corruption over the last decade. A closer study of the cases with guilty verdicts found that public officials often use corruption as a way to drive up their income. However, the country's heavy reliance on punishment rather than institutional checks on power raises doubts over the long-term effectiveness of such anti-corruption measures.⁵⁶

11.9.2 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

'Despite continued reports of officials benefiting from, permitting, or directly facilitating sex trafficking and forced labor, the government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, convictions, or administrative fines or demotions of complicit government employees. Officials at multiple levels, including central party-state officials, were also complicit in state-sponsored forced labor by directing the Chinese government's mass detention, political indoctrination, and labor dispatch campaign against members of Turkic and/or Muslim minority groups, and some officials reportedly profited directly from this system.'⁵⁷

11.9.3 See also [State sponsored forced labour](#).

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12. Government and NGO assistance

12.1 Victim support and restitution

12.1.1 The International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s 'Directory of Services for Vulnerable Individuals Returning to China', published in March 2025 (IOM 2025 directory), noted:

'Legal support can be accessed through a centralised national hotline that connects individuals to law firms specialising in providing free legal assistance to vulnerable groups. Individuals can seek legal support if the traffickers or perpetrators are in China and/or if the exploitation occurred within China. In general, consultation services are free, while a minimum fee may be charged for facilitating a legal case. Legal assistance primarily focuses on helping Individuals pursue prosecution against traffickers and seek financial compensation for the harm they have suffered.'⁵⁸

12.1.2 For further information on law firms with experience of handling cases involving human trafficking, labour exploitation, and sexual exploitation across China, see the [IOM Directory of services for vulnerable individuals returning to China](#).

12.1.3 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

'The government did not report providing support to victims who assisted with investigations or prosecutions of trafficking cases in 2024. Authorities did not condition access to victim care on cooperation with law enforcement, but they did require victims to provide information to police and did not provide alternatives to speaking with law enforcement during investigations. The law entitled victims to obtain restitution during criminal prosecutions and claim compensation through civil lawsuits against traffickers; however, the government did not report whether any victims benefited from this provision

⁵⁶ Transparency International, [CPI 2023 for Asia Pacific: Regional stagnation ...](#), 30 January 2024

⁵⁷ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Prosecution), 29 September 2025

⁵⁸ IOM, [Directory of services for vulnerable individuals returning to China](#) (page 9), March 2025

in 2024 and observers assessed authorities likely did not apply this benefit equitably across all cases. Some forced marriage cases, many of which continued to demonstrate corollary indicators of sex trafficking and forced labor, were mediated at the village level; these proceedings rarely culminated in a guilty verdict through which to grant restitution to the victims. In prior years, MOJ officials reportedly provided some free legal assistance to trafficking victims, but government-affiliated NGO observers noted some victims faced difficulties accessing these services or had to pay for their own representation. China's legal aid provisions provided legal assistance only for criminal defendants; authorities did not provide this assistance to victims involved in cases as witnesses or plaintiffs. The judicial system did not require victims to testify against traffickers in court and allowed prosecutors to submit previously recorded statements as evidence ...⁵⁹

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12.2 Shelters and services

12.2.1 The IOM 2025 directory noted:

'Shelters in China are primarily supervised by the All-China Women's Federation and the Ministry of Civil Affairs at the national level, and operated by their respective affiliates at the provincial and municipal levels. The admission criteria for these shelters may vary. Therefore, Individuals in need of shelter are advised to first approach local community centres, the local Women's Federation, or local Civil Affairs bureaus to inquire about shelter availability. Shelters can be recommended by other social support organisations or accessed through direct individual application. These shelters can be categorized into three types:

'1. Women's Homes: Operated by the Women's Federation at the provincial and municipal levels, these facilities provide assistance to victims of domestic violence and other forms of sexual exploitation. Every city in China has at least one such facility to support women in need.

'2. Youth Protection Centres: These centres, jointly managed by the Bureau of Civil Affairs and the Women's Federation at the provincial and municipal levels, aim to protect and enhance the well-being of children under the age of 18. They offer services such as emergency shelter, counselling, legal assistance, rehabilitation programs, and family tracing and reunification. These centres are available to children whose legal guardians are missing or unable to provide care.

'3. Shelters for individuals facing significant challenges: Managed by the Bureau of Civil Affairs, these shelters are primarily designed for the homeless population. Vulnerable individuals of all genders are theoretically eligible to apply for these shelters if they can provide documentation that proves they come from low-income families or suffer from significant challenges such as disabilities.'⁶⁰

12.2.2 For further information on shelters and psychological and social support services available across China, see the [IOM Directory of services for vulnerable individuals returning to China](#).

⁵⁹ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Protection), 29 September 2025

⁶⁰ IOM, [Directory of services for vulnerable individuals returning to China](#) (page 7), March 2025

12.2.3 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

‘The government did not provide data on victim service provision in 2024. The government previously reported maintaining at least 10 shelters specifically dedicated to care for Chinese national trafficking victims, as well as eight shelters for foreign trafficking victims and at least 1,567 multipurpose shelters nationwide that could accommodate trafficking victims; it did not provide any information on these shelters for the sixth consecutive year. The Ministry of Civil Affairs, the All-China Women’s Federation, and community-based NGOs could provide victims with shelter, medical care, counseling, legal aid, and social services, as well as rehabilitation services in some cases; the government did not report providing these services to any victims. Access to specialized care depended on victims’ location and sex; experts noted there were ad hoc referral procedures and an acute lack of protection services in the south, and male victims were far less likely to receive care nationwide.

‘... Widespread stigma against sex trafficking victims likely continued to discourage many from accessing protection services. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Service (MOHRSS) reportedly could provide compensation and some protection services to labor trafficking victims, but authorities did not report information on the number of victims MPS referred for these services.

‘... MOHRSS operated and publicized three 24-hour hotlines that could benefit potential trafficking victims – one for labor issues, one for child protection, and one for violence against women and girls – but authorities did not provide statistics on their use.’⁶¹

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12.3 Provision of mental healthcare

12.3.1 The IOM 2025 directory noted:

‘Each province in China operates dedicated hotlines offering free mental health support. These hotlines are typically managed by provincial government authorities in collaboration with local hospitals and health commissions. While long-term, in-person treatment is available when necessary, service fees may apply depending on the provider.

‘... Most of the hotline services are available 24/7, free of charge and accessible for everyone. Upon calling, individuals will be immediately connected to a therapist. However, this service is intended as a short-term solution. For cases requiring long-term intervention, individuals can request a referral to the nearest mental health support clinic. The costs for such services vary depending on the specific circumstances of each case.’⁶²

12.3.2 For further information on services available across China see the [IOM Directory of services for vulnerable individuals returning to China](#).

12.3.3 For general information about mental healthcare see the Country Information Note [China: Medical treatment and healthcare](#).

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⁶¹ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Protection, Prevention), 29 September 2025

⁶² IOM, [Directory of services for vulnerable individuals returning to China](#) (pages 5, 11), March 2025

13. Freedom of movement

13.1 Internal migration

13.1.1 The population of China is around 1.41 billion based on 2025 estimates⁶³, and it covers an area of 9,706,961 sq km⁶⁴ which is 40 times larger than the UK⁶⁵. There are many large cities, including Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Shenzhen, Suzhou, and Hangzhou⁶⁶.

13.1.2 The DFAT Country Report 2024 noted:

‘Internal migration has been a key feature of China’s economic and social life for decades, with migration to cities in the wealthy eastern provinces particularly prevalent. ... In 2023 there were no legal impediments to relocation, but the hukou system sometimes may have limited freedom of movement in practice.

‘As Mandarin is spoken throughout China, DFAT assesses Han Chinese face little difficulty in resettling to different parts of the country. It may be more difficult for ethnic minorities, especially those who natively speak different dialects or languages, as well as people with disabilities to resettle to other areas of China.’⁶⁷

13.1.3 In the sources consulted, CPIT could not find information about the ability of victims of modern slavery to relocate (see [Bibliography](#)).

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13.2 Household registration (hukou)

13.2.1 The DFAT Country Report 2024 noted:

‘Hukou is a household registration system that clarifies an individual’s place of residence and defines eligibility for social welfare and government services such as education or health services in a local government area. It often reflects an individual’s place of birth, or even their parents’ place of birth, rather than their current place of residence. The modern hukou system is an electronic record held by local police.

‘Hukou policies were decentralised in the 1990s, with local governments allowed to set their own rules about registering new citizens. Practical hukou reform remains at an early stage. In-country sources told DFAT in 2023 that some local governments had begun issuing ‘temporary hukou’ to allow migrant workers similar entitlements to locals, including subsidised health insurance and access to local hospitals for treatment. More restrictive points systems to obtain hukou in some cities of over 5 million people still exist, where good employment records, education and housing may be an advantage.

‘In August 2023, the Ministry of Public Security announced plans to lower the bar for obtaining an urban hukou, encouraging local governments in cities of 3-5 million people to relax requirements and those in cities of below 3 million people to eliminate all requirements entirely. Jiangsu Province’s government

⁶³ World Bank Group, [China | Data](#), no date

⁶⁴ Worldometer, [Largest Countries in the World by Area](#), no date

⁶⁵ UN Data, [United Kingdom](#), no date

⁶⁶ Worldometer, [Largest Cities by Population in China](#), no date

⁶⁷ DFAT, [China Country Information Report](#) (paragraph 5.25 and 5.26), 27 December 2024

responded by scrapping all limits on non-residents applying for hukou in 11 of its 13 cities. Zhejiang Province also lifted restrictions for obtaining hukou for all of its cities except Hangzhou. Larger cities like Shanghai and Chengdu have eased the process of obtaining hukou for certain groups, like recent graduates. Improvements to its points-based policy were also announced as part of hukou reform in cities like Beijing. The outcomes document of the July 2024 Third Plenum of the CCP Central Committee (a significant meeting guiding national economic strategy) foreshadowed further, gradual relaxations to the hukou system.

‘Migration away from cities to regional areas also occurs, although much less commonly. The very high cost of living in some large cities and demanding working culture in corporate China has forced some young people to return to their family and home regions. From 2021, some former emigrants were being enticed back by improved infrastructure and services in rural areas that had accompanied China’s rapid development.

‘The Government of China regards all children born to a Chinese citizen parent as Chinese citizens, regardless of the country where the child was physically born (Jus sanguinis or citizenship by descent). These children are linked to or inherit their parents’ hukou registration and can obtain travel documents from China’s embassies overseas. Individuals born to non-Chinese citizen parents do not inherit hukou. Foreigners or non-Chinese citizens are not eligible for hukou and cannot be added to a spouse’s or their family’s hukou.

‘The Government of China can legally cancel hukou registration when an individual has been abroad for more than a year, if they have not applied for specific approval. In practice, cancelation rarely occurs due to a lack of coordination between local police and border officials. The vast majority of China’s citizens residing overseas, even for extended periods of time, still have their hukou intact.’⁶⁸

13.2.2 The USSD 2025 TiP report noted:

‘The government hukou (household registration) system continued to contribute to trafficking risks of internal migrants by reducing access to social services, particularly for Chinese victims returning from exploitation abroad, and by driving hundreds of millions of individuals to live and work illegally outside the jurisdiction of their household registration. The government continued to address some of these vulnerabilities by requiring local governments to provide a mechanism for migrant workers to obtain residency permits. However, authorities disproportionately made these residency permits unavailable to rural ethnic Han migrants and members of ethnic minority groups, exacerbating their constrained access to employment and social services.

‘... The hukou system continues to restrict rural inhabitants’ freedom to legally change their residence, placing China’s internal migrant population – estimated to exceed 169 million people – at high risk of forced labor.’⁶⁹

13.2.3 Synergy: The Journal of Contemporary Asian Studies, an ‘academic journal with a regional focus on East, Southeast, and South Asia founded at the

⁶⁸ DFAT, [China Country Information Report](#) (paragraph 2.22 – 2.27), 27 December 2024

⁶⁹ USSD, [2025 Trafficking in persons Report: China](#) (Prevention, ...Profile), 29 September 2025

Asian Institute of University of Toronto'⁷⁰, noted in an April 2025 article that:

'The hukou system links individuals' access to education, health care, and employment opportunities to their place of birth, thereby exacerbating economic and social inequality, especially for rural migrants working in urban centers. Although these migrants have made significant contributions to China's economic growth, they remain excluded from key public services, limiting their social mobility and deepening the urban-rural gap. While recent policy reforms have aimed to relax these restrictions, these reforms remain selective and disproportionately benefit high-skilled migrants, failing to address structural inequality.

'... The hukou system also affects the labor market, meaning that rural residents face persistent wage gaps once they find a job. Studies consistently find that rural migrants earn less than urban hukou holders, even after accounting for education and experience. This wage gap reveals potential employer discrimination, as rural workers are seen as "outsiders" due to their hukou status often used as a criterion for determining wages and career advancement.

'More importantly, rural migrants are overrepresented in informal and low-wage sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and domestic work, with higher competition and weakened labor protection. Meanwhile, without urban hukou, these workers are unable to enjoy social security programs such as pensions, unemployment benefits, and medical insurance. Therefore, they are more vulnerable to economic downturns than urban population.'⁷¹

13.2.4 Reuters, a global news site⁷², reported in May 2026 that:

'China issued guidelines on Friday [22 May 2026] to expand coverage of basic public services to people who don't have household registration in the cities where they work, a move that could help more migrant workers access urban public services.

'... The guidelines call on government agencies and local authorities to provide public services, including education and basic medical care, based on people's regular residence rather than their household registration, which is mainly determined by their place of birth.

'...The guidelines call on local governments to assist more migrant children - those who move to cities with their parents - to attend public schools and let eligible ones take school entrance exams in their place of residence.

'More cities should expand public rental housing programmes to cover households with stable employment but no local hukou, and employees should be able to participate in the social insurance scheme in their places of work, the guidelines say.

'The guidelines also call for relaxing hukou restrictions in sectors such as child care, elderly care and disability support, and encourage provincial-level governments to expand fiscal support for areas with population inflows to pay for public services.'⁷³

⁷⁰ Synergy, [About – Synergy: The Journal of Contemporary Asian Studies](#), no date

⁷¹ Synergy, [From Socialism to Stratification: The Unfinished Reform of China's Hukou ...](#), 9 April 2025

⁷² Reuters, [About Us](#), no date

⁷³ Reuters, [China to expand public service access for migrant workers](#), 22 May 2026

13.2.5 China Daily noted in August 2024 that there were around 300 million rural migrant workers who work in cities, without a city hukou or permanent residence. Although around 165 million migrants have settled in cities and obtained permanent residency⁷⁴.

13.2.6 See also the Country Information Note: China, available on request.

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14. Return of modern slavery victims

14.1 Treatment on return

14.1.1 The DFAT Country Report 2024 noted:

‘In-country sources told DFAT in 2023 that failed asylum seekers returned to China were not specifically targeted by authorities and did not face official discrimination merely for having sought asylum overseas. China’s authorities may be aware of the behaviour of asylum seekers while they were outside of China and know that applicants applied for asylum.

‘Individuals wanted for outstanding warrants may still be charged upon their return to China. The general statute of limitations for crimes is five years (for a crime where the maximum penalty is up to five years in prison), 10 years (where the maximum penalty for a crime is five to 10 years in prison), 15 years (where the penalty for a crime is not less than 10 years in prison) and 20 years (where the maximum penalty is life in prison or death). In practice, a person who fled from prosecution and then returned to China is likely to be arrested.’⁷⁵

14.1.2 In the sources consulted, CPIT could not find information about the treatment of victims of trafficking or modern slavery on return (see [Bibliography](#)).

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14.2 Risk of re-trafficking

14.2.1 The FFHG January 2023 report noted: ‘We studied 221 criminal judgments in cases of trafficking of females with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities from 2017-2021. The cases involved 469 times of trafficking, while nearly 30% of the victims were trafficked multiple times, mainly because the sellers concealed the intellectual or psychosocial disabilities of the trafficked women, leading the buyers to request “returns” upon discovering their conditions.’⁷⁶

14.2.2 In the sources consulted, CPIT could not find information about victims of trafficking being re-trafficked or facing other abuses on return to China (see [Bibliography](#)).

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⁷⁴ China Daily, [Reform makes it easier for migrants to gain city hukou](#), 3 August 2024

⁷⁵ DFAT, [China Country Information Report](#) (paragraph 5.27 and 5.28), 27 December 2024

⁷⁶ FFHG, [“Leaving No Sister with Disabilities Behind” Regarding the ...](#) (page 2), January 2023

Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' are the main topics and issues relevant to the scope of this note and provides the framework for the country information. In this note, they were:

- Legal status
 - International legislation
 - Criminal law
 - Labour law
 - Policies, programmes and projects
- Prevalence
 - Within China
 - Chinese nationals in the UK
- Profiles of victims and traffickers
 - Modern slavery victims trafficked abroad
 - Modern slavery victims in China
 - Traffickers
- Action to combat modern slavery
 - Prevention
 - Identification of victims
 - Investigations
 - Raising awareness
 - Police training
 - Protection
 - Prosecution of traffickers and victims
 - Corruption
 - Victim support and restitution
- Government and NGO services
 - Shelters and services
 - Provision of mental healthcare
- Freedom of movement
 - Internal migration
 - Hukou registration
- Return of modern slavery victims
 - Treatment on return
 - Risk of re-trafficking

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

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The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

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Changes from last version of this note

Update to country information

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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