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# 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: China

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### CHINA, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF (Tier 3)

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 significant efforts to do so. China remained on Tier 3. During the reporting period, there was a government policy or pattern of widespread forced labor in government-affiliated sectors, including through the continued mass arbitrary detention and imprisonment of Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, ethnic Kyrgyz, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) under the guise of “vocational training” and “deradicalization.” The government also reportedly continued to place ethnic Tibetans, Uyghurs, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in vocational training and manufacturing jobs as part of an ostensible “poverty alleviation” and “labor dispatch program” that featured overt coercive elements. Authorities continued to implement the policy or pattern of widespread forced labor in other provinces and targeted other religious minorities under their auspices; the government also sought to coerce the repatriation and internment of religious and ethnic minority groups living abroad through an intensifying campaign of transnational repression, including through acts of surveillance, harassment, threats against individuals and their family members, and requests for individuals' forcible return, increasing their vulnerability to the government's policy or pattern of widespread forced labor. Despite this, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including to raise Chinese citizens' awareness of human trafficking – including the risk of forced labor in online scam operations in Southeast Asia – and cooperating with foreign law enforcement to repatriate Chinese nationals suspected of human trafficking abroad. However, Chinese nationals were reportedly subjected to forced

labor in several countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, South America and Europe working on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects or other Chinese government- or company-affiliated infrastructure projects, through which Chinese authorities exercised insufficient oversight of relevant recruitment channels, contracts, and labor conditions, and Chinese diplomatic services routinely failed to identify or assist those exploited. For the eighth consecutive year, the government did not report complete law enforcement data, nor did it report identifying any trafficking victims or referring them to protection services. The government did not investigate Chinese criminal organizations operating many of the online scam operations in the region.

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## PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Abolish the arbitrary detention and forced labor of persons in internment camps, detention centers, and prisons and affiliated manufacturing or agricultural sites in Xinjiang and other provinces and immediately release and pay restitution to the individuals detained therein.

End forced labor in government facilities, in nongovernmental facilities converted to government detention centers, and by government officials outside of the penal process.

Cease all coercive labor transfer and compulsory vocational training programs, as well as discriminatory hiring and targeted urban resettlement displacement policies, that place Uyghurs, Tibetans, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups at risk of trafficking.

Cease the practice of transnational repression, including harassment, threats, and discriminatory immigration policies as measures to coerce the return to Xinjiang and subsequent forced labor and persecution of members of Chinese ethnic and religious minority groups living abroad.

In conjunction with receiving countries, increase oversight of recruitment, contracts, and working conditions associated with BRI project worksites; enforce bans on the imposition of worker-paid recruitment fees and security deposits; and train consular services to identify and assist Chinese national victims of forced labor abroad, including in BRI projects.

Increase law enforcement efforts consistent with international law against Chinese national-affiliated entities complicit in online scam operations and associated trafficking

crimes.

Amend legislation to criminalize all forms of sex trafficking and labor trafficking as defined under international law and, respecting due process, vigorously investigate, prosecute, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, including complicit government officials, which should involve significant prison terms.

Institute and systematize proactive, formal procedures to screen, identify, and refer to protection services trafficking victims throughout the country – including male victims, labor trafficking victims, Chinese victims returning from abroad, and victims among vulnerable groups, such as migrant workers, Chinese national and foreign fishermen, foreign women, individuals arrested for involvement in online scam operations, North Korean workers, Cuban regime-affiliated workers, and Chinese national women and children arrested on “prostitution” charges – and train front-line officers on their implementation.

Increase transparency and oversight of seafarer labor conditions in China’s fishing industry, including by banning illegal and unregistered recruitment agencies; mandating international vessel registration; collecting and publishing information on vessel licensure, registered operating areas, and crew manifests; conducting random onboard inspections; and working with port country authorities to investigate and criminally prosecute distant water fleet (DWF) forced labor crimes.

Ensure trafficking victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including potential victims repatriated from or arrested for involvement in online scam operations.

Expand victim protection services, including comprehensive counseling and medical, reintegration, and other rehabilitative assistance for male and female victims of sex and labor trafficking.

Provide legal alternatives to foreign victims’ removal to countries where they would face mistreatment or retribution – particularly the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), consistent with obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2397.

Increase the transparency of government efforts to combat trafficking and provide disaggregated data on investigations and prosecutions, victim identification, and service provision, including by continuing to share relevant data with international partners.

Apply the 2000 UN TIP Protocol to Hong Kong.

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# PROSECUTION

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 members of ethnic and religious minority groups.

The criminal code criminalized some forms of sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Various provisions of the criminal code could be used to prosecute sex trafficking offenses. Article 240 of the Criminal Law criminalized “the abduction and sale of women or children,” which included abduction by deceit, kidnapping, purchasing, selling, sending, receiving, and transferring for the purpose of sale. However, unlike the definition of trafficking in persons under international law, Article 240 did not explicitly link these acts to a purpose of exploitation. Article 240 prescribed penalties of five to 10 years’ imprisonment and fines for the abduction and sale of women and children. If an abducted woman was then forced into “prostitution,” the penalties increased to 10 years’ to life imprisonment, fines, and confiscation of property. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and commensurate with the penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Article 241 of the Criminal Law criminalized the purchase of abducted women or children and prescribed a maximum penalty of three years’ imprisonment, short-term detention, or controlled release. Like Article 240, it did not require the purchase be for the purpose of exploitation. Penalties under this provision were not alone sufficiently stringent; however, Article 241 stipulated that if an individual purchased an abducted woman or child and then subjected them to “forcible sexual relations,” they would face additional penalties under the criminal code’s rape provisions. Article 358 of the Criminal Law criminalized forced prostitution and prescribed penalties of five to 10 years’ imprisonment; if the offense involved a child younger than the age of 14, the penalties increased to 10 years to life imprisonment in addition to fines or confiscation of property. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and commensurate with the penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Article 359 of the Criminal Law criminalized harboring prostitution or luring or introducing others into prostitution, and it prescribed a maximum of five years’ imprisonment and a fine; if the offense involved a girl younger than the age of 14, it prescribed a minimum of five years’ imprisonment and a fine. These penalties were sufficiently stringent; however, the penalties prescribed for offenses involving girls 14 to 17 years of age were not commensurate with the penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Labor trafficking offenses could be prosecuted under Article 244, which criminalized forcing a person “to work by violence, threat, or restriction of personal freedom”

and recruiting, transporting, or otherwise assisting in forcing others to labor, and prescribed three to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine. These penalties were sufficiently stringent.

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.

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. 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). Ongoing law enforcement activities between Chinese, Burmese, Cambodian, Laotian, Philippine and Thai officials, as well as with local ethnic armed organizations in Burma resulted in Chinese officials arresting and returning thousands of "suspects" from online scam operations during the reporting period. Most of those arrested and returned were Chinese nationals, but also included Burmese citizens and individuals from Taiwan, according to media reports. While some of those arrested were known members of transnational organized crime groups, or included traffickers or other criminals complicit in the scam operations, the government did not screen any of these individuals for trafficking indicators, and observers reported the government almost always viewed those arrested as criminals and subjected them to extensive investigation by law enforcement; that questioning sometimes resulted in victims being identified as "coerced accomplices" whom the government pardoned or gave lighter sentences. Authorities also publicized prosecuting some of these Chinese and Burmese nationals, charging some for crimes that may have amounted to human trafficking, including illegal detention and organizing "prostitution," but also for non-trafficking crimes, including homicide, telecom fraud, intentional injury, operating casinos, and drug trafficking. 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. Reports suggested the government also systematically removed previously published information about trafficking cases from previous years. 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 with 683 abducted women and children recovered in 2023). 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).

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 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.

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. 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. 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. Authorities reportedly subjected Tibetans and members of other ethnic and religious groups to similar abuses. Xinjiang officials continued to obstruct meaningful access for international observers to sites across the region that would otherwise facilitate investigations into credible allegations of forced labor.

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## PROTECTION

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.

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 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. 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. 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. Despite the existence of these procedures, law enforcement officials arrested and detained foreign women on suspicion of “prostitution” crimes without screening them for indicators of sex trafficking – sometimes for as long as eight months in prior years – before deporting them for immigration violations.

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. The law entitled foreign victims to the same benefits as Chinese nationals, but this likely varied significantly in practice. As in previous years, officials received reports involving the sex trafficking and forced labor of some foreign women and girls via forced and fraudulent marriage to Chinese men, and rural border officials provided them with temporary shelter and helped to fund and facilitate their repatriation. However, this assistance was reportedly ad hoc, often heavily bureaucratic, and less prevalent among front-line officers working farther inland, where some foreign victims escaped, reported these abusive circumstances to the authorities, and were summarily arrested and forcibly returned to their Chinese “husbands” – sometimes in exchange for bribes from the



men's families. Authorities were less likely to identify these women as sex or labor trafficking victims, and reportedly detained victims who sought help for up to eight months for immigration violations; authorities reportedly also gave victims the "choice" to return to their Chinese "husbands" or be repatriated to their country of origin. If victims chose repatriation, authorities did not allow them to take their children with them. 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. Implementation of a law placing foreign NGOs in China under MPS supervision continued to impose burdensome requirements and restrictions on the activities of civil society organizations, including those able to provide services for trafficking victims and communities vulnerable to the crime.

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 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; however, in prior years, authorities required some foreign victims to stay in China to assist in police investigations until their conclusion.

The government did not report data on victim repatriation in 2024. Chinese officials operating in other countries may have facilitated both the sex trafficking of Chinese nationals abroad through lax visa and immigration procedures and the labor trafficking of Chinese nationals

abroad in BRI projects. Chinese authorities reportedly surveilled, harassed, threatened, attempted to discredit, and sought the extradition of Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other forced-labor survivors seeking asylum abroad in retaliation for their contact with foreign media outlets.

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. The government did not report any measures to screen for, or identify, forced labor indicators among the thousands of vulnerable migrant seafarers employed on Chinese national-owned DWF vessels, nor within its extensive coastal offshore fishing fleet, and publicly denied allegations of forced labor in its DWF. Chinese fishermen subjected to forced labor generally could not report abuses to local authorities or access protection services when returning to China. 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 undertake efforts to identify or refer to care trafficking victims within China’s highly vulnerable North Korean migrant population, nor did it provide suspected North Korean trafficking victims with legal alternatives to repatriation. Authorities continued to detain North Korean asylum-seekers and forcibly return some to the DPRK, where they were reportedly vulnerable to harsh punishments including torture, forced abortions, forced labor, and execution; the government did not report screening these individuals for trafficking indicators, and North Korean victims sought to evade capture by Chinese authorities rather than seek assistance. Through a law enforcement cooperation treaty with the DPRK under which Chinese authorities extradited North Koreans suspected of criminal acts under DPRK law, observers reported authorities extradited unidentified trafficking victims to the DPRK where they were subjected to forced labor in prison camps. Police were reported to have coordinated with business owners employing North Korean overseas workers to discreetly apprehend and return workers who escaped from worksites. The government continued to restrict access of UN agencies attempting to monitor and assist refugees near China’s border with the DPRK.

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## PREVENTION

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

Chinese authorities continued to perpetrate trafficking crimes in the country and abroad, in accordance with policies of mass detention and political indoctrination against more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, ethnic Kyrgyz, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups, which has occurred in Xinjiang since 2017. Government actions included committing genocide and other crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and using emerging technologies to carry out discriminatory surveillance and ethno-racial profiling measures designed to subjugate and exploit members of minority populations in forced labor in internment camps and “poverty alleviation” campaigns under the pretext of combating alleged violent extremism and other “social ills.” The government denied verifiable accounts and took steps to ban discussion of trafficking-related human rights violations and state-sponsored forced labor. The government continued to transfer thousands of detainees – including those formerly held in internment camps – into forced labor at external manufacturing sites near the camps or in dozens of other provinces, according to NGO estimates and media reports. According to researchers, information available about court records in Xinjiang suggested the government was in the process of phasing out the use of internment camps, instead largely channeling detainees into the formal prison system, where they were subject to systematic human rights abuses and forced labor. Reports indicate authorities partially staffed internment camp facilities using forced labor, including among vocational and language instructors. The government continued to coerce minority communities designated arbitrarily as “rural surplus labor” to participate in labor transfers to other areas within Xinjiang and to other provinces as part of a “poverty alleviation” program and exploit them in forced labor. Authorities also used the threat of internment to coerce members of some Muslim communities directly into forced labor in manufacturing and agriculture. National policies officially imposed “de-radicalization” duties on Xinjiang-based commercial entities and trade unions, further cementing their role in state-sponsored forced labor under the guise of public security measures. Local governments and businesses received tax breaks and financial subsidies for establishing new manufacturing sites and accepting or transferring detainees for these purposes, and officials reportedly received promotions and other benefits for their role in the process. According to Chinese government documents, local governments, at times, arrested Muslims arbitrarily or based on spurious criminal charges and administrative violations – including violation of birth restrictions.

The government continued to subject Xinjiang’s ethnic minority communities and Tibetans to severe travel restrictions, including through prohibitions on access to passports, which

compounded their vulnerability to arbitrary detention and state-sponsored forced labor. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to confiscate, cancel, or refuse to renew the Chinese passports of Uyghurs and individuals from other mostly Muslim ethnic minority groups living abroad, including those with legal permanent resident status or citizenship in other countries, as a coercive measure to lure them back to Xinjiang and likely detain them. There were also reports that authorities, employing acts of transnational repression, threatened, detained, and forcibly hospitalized these individuals' family members in Xinjiang in an attempt to silence them and/or coerce their return. The government continued to seek the extradition of ethnic and religious minority group members who sought asylum abroad after fleeing exploitation in forced labor, among other human rights abuses, in Xinjiang. In February 2025, Thai authorities, reportedly under pressure from Chinese authorities, extradited to China 40 Uyghurs from Thailand who were held in immigration detention for 10 years. Nationwide, some school districts continued to compel ethnic Han students to participate in internship programs featuring forced labor indicators, including compulsory factory labor. ✓

Authorities reportedly continued to increasingly place thousands of rural Tibetan herders and farmers in "military-style" vocational training and manufacturing jobs around the country under the auspices of a quota-based "surplus labor" transfer program ostensibly intended as a "poverty alleviation" measure. Authorities publicized that the labor transfer of 648,000 individuals took place in the Tibet Autonomous Region in 2024. Although the program did not feature overt arrests or enforced disappearances, observers noted the system was similar to coercive poverty alleviation labor transfer programs used in Xinjiang, and was likely highly coercive, given the government's use of organized household monitoring that involved village-based work teams conducting door-to-door inspections and individuals' relative inability to refuse participation amid the central government's pervasive system of social control in Tibetan areas. Some of these Tibetans were subsequently subjected to forced labor in manufacturing. Authorities also exacerbated Tibetans' vulnerability to trafficking by systematically dismantling the Tibetan rural economy through mass enforced relocations, and by forcing those who sought work in the state sector to renounce all ties to the Dalai Lama as a condition of employment.

Despite responsibilities under UN Security Council resolutions and national laws restricting the employment of North Korean workers, local police and government officials were complicit in sustaining North Korean overseas worker industry in China, including through ineffective labor and law enforcement inspections and subsequent non-enforcement of laws when North Korean overseas workers were identified.

The government did not report implementing or expanding pilot programs initiated in prior years to reduce trafficking vulnerabilities among foreign seafarers hired informally or illegally to work onboard vessels in China's global fishing fleet. 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. The government's exertion of political pressure and operating restrictions on NGOs in Hong Kong had a negative impact on anti-trafficking coordination with the local authorities there.

The government did not report holding an inter-ministerial meeting to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts during the reporting period. 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. 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) 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. 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. 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. 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.

Authorities did not take any steps to change policies in response to longstanding public concern over human rights abuses in Xinjiang and the contamination of international supply chains with goods produced by state-sponsored forced labor there in 2024. To the contrary, the government and affiliated commercial entities restricted access to sites across Xinjiang to prevent independent investigations into allegations of forced labor and continued to engage in a concerted campaign to dispel these accusations through vehement denial in public messaging; state-ordered politically motivated academic research; falsified cotton production and harvest mechanization data; localized propaganda campaigns targeting consumers in trade partner countries; the establishment of false supply chain policy initiatives as alternatives to preexisting international monitoring and compliance programs; sanctions on foreign government officials critical of the Chinese Communist Party's abuses; and pressure on international companies.

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 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 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. While the government included Macau in its succession to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol in 2010, it stated the protocol “shall not apply” to Hong Kong.

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## TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in China, and they exploit victims from China abroad. Traffickers also use China as a transit point to subject foreign individuals to trafficking in other countries throughout Asia and in international maritime industries. 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. 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. Chinese nationals in several countries are subjected to conditions indicative of forced labor at BRI worksites owned, managed, and/or operated with partial or full investment by China-based companies, Chinese nationals, or the Chinese government. Chinese national-operated crime syndicates also subject Chinese nationals and foreign victims to forced criminality in online scam operations in Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. African and Asian men reportedly experience conditions indicative of forced labor aboard China-flagged and Chinese national-owned, foreign-flagged fishing vessels operating worldwide in China's DWF; men from other regions may be in forced labor aboard these vessels as well. Women and girls from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and several countries in Africa experience forced labor in domestic service, forced concubinage leading to forced childbearing, and sex trafficking via forced and fraudulent marriage to Chinese men. 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. 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. Cuban regime-affiliated workers in China may have been forced to work by the Cuban regime.

State-sponsored forced labor is prevalent in China. In 2013, the National People's Congress ratified a decision to abolish "Re-education through labor" (RTL), a punitive system that subjected individuals to extra-judicial detention involving forced labor, from which the government reportedly profited. The government closed most RTL facilities by October 2015; however, the government reportedly converted some RTL facilities into state-sponsored drug rehabilitation facilities or administrative detention centers where, according to civil society and media reports, forced labor continues. State-sponsored forced labor persisted under the government's mass detention and political indoctrination campaign, which channeled more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Hui, ethnic Kazakhs, ethnic Kyrgyz, ethnic Tajiks, and ethnic Uzbeks between 2017 and 2019 into as many as 1,200 "Vocational Skills Education and Training Centers" – internment camps designed to erase ethnic and religious identities under the pretext of "deradicalization." Camp authorities reportedly forced some individuals to work in staff positions within the camps, including in sewing and Mandarin language instruction. During detention within – and following "graduation" from – these facilities, government authorities and/or authorized commercial entities subjected many of these individuals to forced labor in adjacent or off-site factories producing garments, automotive components, footwear, carpets, yarn, food products, seafood processing, construction materials, holiday decorations, building materials, solar power equipment polysilicon and other renewable energy components, consumer electronics, bedding, hair products, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment face masks, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and other goods for domestic and international distribution. Despite phasing out of the internment camp system, forced labor in these industries continues under the auspices of the ongoing labor transfer program, as well as likely through former detainees who were transferred out of detention into forced labor at existing manufacturing facilities. Coercive conditions reportedly included threats of physical violence, confiscation of travel and identity documents, forcible drug intake and non-consensual pharmaceutical drug testing, physical and sexual abuse, and torture, among others. Local governments reportedly used the threat of internment to coerce some members of these communities directly into forced labor. A small number of ethnic Han individuals and members of religious minority groups were also reportedly in detention within this system. Authorities offered tax breaks and other financial subsidies incentivizing Chinese national-owned companies to open factories near the internment camps and to receive transferred detainees at satellite manufacturing sites in other provinces, and local governments received additional funds for each inmate forced to work in these sites at a fraction of minimum wage or without compensation. Observers estimate the government continues to subject several hundred thousand former detainees to forced labor through this system, including through subjecting former detainees to forced labor in industrial parks, government efforts to transport thousands of these individuals to other provinces for forced



labor under the guise of poverty alleviation and industrial aid programs, and authorities formally convicting many more, reportedly hundreds of thousands, under spurious criminal charges and transferred them to more than 100 urban prisons throughout the country, where they suffer additional forced labor conditions. In addition to those potentially still detained in internment camps or other forms of arbitrary detention, NGOs estimate that one out of every 26 Uyghur and other ethnic minority individuals in Xinjiang is imprisoned under the jurisdiction of the MOJ, making up 33.7 percent of China's total formal prison population. Authorities utilize discriminatory surveillance technologies, including facial recognition and DNA sequencing technology, and arbitrary administrative and criminal provisions to detain predominantly Muslim Turkic minorities in Xinjiang, and international observers reported authorities use similar surveillance technologies to collect DNA from ethnic Tibetans across Tibet as part of a "crime detection" program. The government holds newly detained ethnic minorities in an expanding network of pre-trial detention centers and prisons in Xinjiang, where they are subjected to "re-education" and has also increased coercive mobilization of predominantly ethnic minority workers into the state-sponsored "labor transfer of rural surplus laborers" initiative in Xinjiang. The government reported 3.34 million transfers within the "labor transfer of rural surplus laborers" initiative in the Xinjiang region during 2024, which placed laborers in agricultural and manufacturing jobs within Xinjiang and across the country and featured overt forced labor indicators. This number details the number of transfers rather than the number of impacted laborers, and some laborers were transferred multiple times. While this number includes the transfer of ethnically Han workers, due to the demographic makeup of the Xinjiang region, a significant majority of transfers likely involved members of minority communities.

Authorities in some localities also subject the families of men arbitrarily detained in Xinjiang to forced labor in their absence. Internment of these communities in false vocational training centers and prisons excludes them from genuine educational and vocational training and opportunities, thereby exacerbating survivors' poverty and subsequent vulnerability to trafficking. Contacts report families separated by this system are also more likely to fall below the poverty line and are therefore at higher risk of sex trafficking and forced labor. Authorities place the young children of interned individuals in Xinjiang in state-run boarding schools, orphanages, and "child welfare guidance centers," and force them to participate in political indoctrination activities and report on their families' religious activities. Authorities reportedly place older children among these groups in vocational schools, where some may be victims of forced labor. NGOs report incidents of ethnic Han men forcing Uyghur and other women from minority communities into marriages under the government's discriminatory ethnic assimilation policies, placing them at higher risk of forced labor in domestic service and other

forms of exploitation. Members of these predominantly Muslim minority groups attempting to seek asylum abroad are vulnerable to immigration-related administrative and criminal charges in destination countries, as well as to extradition and refoulement to China.

Despite a 2017 notice by Xinjiang authorities abolishing rural obligatory labor under the hashar system, similar forms of state-sponsored forced labor continue in Xinjiang, including under the auspices of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (Bingtuan) – an economic and paramilitary organization of approximately 2.8 million personnel with administrative control over several areas in the region. According to NGO reports, Bingtuan regiments manage at least 36 agricultural prison farms throughout Xinjiang; unlike the aforementioned mass detention campaign, this system primarily subjects ethnic Han inmates – many of whom may be victims of arbitrary detention – to forced labor. Bingtuan authorities also force inmates to build new prison facilities in several areas of the region and may subject inmates to forced labor in coal, uranium, and asbestos mining, as well as in lead and zinc smelting and fertilizer production. Bingtuan and other Xinjiang authorities also subject some Xinjiang residents to forced labor – often through ostensible poverty alleviation labor transfer programs – in mineral mining and production, including gold mining; quartz/silica mining and processing for use in solar components, aluminum alloy, and silicone; and lithium mining and extraction. The Bingtuan reportedly forces half a million Uyghur adults and children to pick and process cotton, tomatoes, chili peppers, marigolds, sugar beets, and possibly apples and peanuts. The impact of formal discriminatory employment policies barring Uyghurs from jobs in many sectors reportedly drives thousands of Uyghur farmers out of their communities in search of alternative work, placing them at higher risk of forced labor. The same is true of the government’s targeted forced-displacement programs, including the Bingtuan’s construction of new settlements designated for ethnic Han internal migrants, as well as its seizure of land from small-scale and subsistence farmers in Uyghur communities. This calculated land expropriation makes Uyghur farmers more likely to fall victim to coercive recruitment into the labor transfer program; some are even subjected to forced labor on the land they previously occupied. In some instances, the government reportedly relocates entire Uyghur farming communities to areas without agricultural prospects and near factories to facilitate their forced labor in textile production. Observers note many Uyghur communities remain vulnerable to trafficking in other, ostensibly voluntary labor transfer situations, given the government’s comprehensive control over nearly all aspects of life in Xinjiang.

The government subjects some Tibetans to arbitrary detention featuring similar political indoctrination and forced prison labor practices in Tibet and in neighboring provinces. Authorities have placed thousands of rural Tibetans in “military-style” vocational training and

manufacturing jobs around the country under the auspices of a quota-based “surplus labor” transfer program ostensibly intended as a poverty alleviation measure. Although the program does not feature arrests or enforced disappearances, observers note the system is similar to coercive poverty alleviation labor transfer programs utilized in Xinjiang, and likely highly coercive, given the government’s use of organized household monitoring that involved village-based work teams conducting door-to-door inspections, and individuals’ relative inability to refuse participation amid the central government’s pervasive system of social control in Tibetan areas. Reports indicate companies subject some of these Tibetans to forced labor in factories. The government’s forced urban resettlement programs require Tibetans to bear a large portion of resettlement costs, placing many of them in debt and consequently at higher risk of forced labor. Elsewhere, religious and political activists held in legal education facilities continue to report forced labor occurring in pretrial detention and outside of penal sentences. Law enforcement officials detain some Chinese and foreign women on “prostitution” charges without due process in “custody and education” centers, where they are subjected to forced labor. Authorities force children in some government-supported work-study programs to work in factories. Although information is limited, Chinese nationals may experience conditions indicative of forced labor at large-scale rare earth mining operations within China, and rural communities displaced by these activities and by concomitant environmental contamination may themselves be vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking.

Some third country and Chinese nationals employed at large-scale BRI and other Chinese government and company-affiliated construction projects, mining operations, and factories in African, European, Middle Eastern, Asian and Pacific, and Latin American and Caribbean countries experience conditions indicative of forced labor. These include deceptive recruitment into debt bondage; arbitrary wage garnishing or withholding; contract irregularities, including absence of contracts; confiscation of travel and identity documentation; forced overtime; resignation penalties; false promises of payment for return flights, which traffickers then use as collateral to retain their labor beyond the length of the original contracts; intimidation and threats; physical violence; denial of access to urgent medical care; poor working and living conditions; restricted freedom of movement and external communication; and retaliatory firings, including after refusing to have sexual relations with employers and reporting sexual abuse. Some Chinese nationals reportedly recruit local children from the communities in which BRI projects are underway and subject them to forced labor in hazardous work.

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 as well as men, women, and children from countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and South America, 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 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. Media reports that Chinese national-led organized crime syndicates offering migrant smuggling services into the United States from the southwest border subject some illegal migrants from China to sex and labor trafficking in the United States. Companies operating under the auspices of the Japanese government's "Technical Intern Training Program" have subjected Chinese nationals to forced labor, often through debt bondage. Traffickers also subject Chinese seafarers to forced labor on board fishing vessels in Taiwan's highly vulnerable DWF, in Papua New Guinea's exclusive economic zone and surrounding maritime territories, and on foreign-flagged cargo vessels operating in the Pacific Ocean.

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. 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-owned companies operating under the auspices of the BRI also subject Southeast Asian migrant workers to forced labor at manufacturing facilities throughout the Balkan region. Congolese men and boys experience conditions indicative of forced labor in Chinese national-owned mining operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Many men from countries in Africa, Asia (especially Indonesia, the Philippines, and China), and other regions employed on many of the Chinese national-owned or flagged DWF fishing vessels operating worldwide experience contract discrepancies, excessive working hours, degrading living conditions, severe verbal and physical abuse, sexual abuse, denial of access to healthcare, restricted communication, document retention, arbitrary garnishing or non-payment of wages, and other forced labor indicators, often while being forced to remain at sea for months or years at a time. While the government estimates there are 2,700 vessels in its DWF, other estimates indicate the number of Chinese national-owned and/or Chinese-flagged vessels may be as high as 6,500 vessels worldwide. Many DWF crewmembers are recruited through unlicensed or poorly regulated informal brokerage networks within China and abroad, exacerbating their risk of indebtedness through the imposition of unregulated hiring fees, commissions, and other expenses. Chinese fishing operators in turn require DWF crewmembers to pay “guarantee money” that places them at further risk of debt-based coercion. Some DWF senior vessel crew members also subject these fishermen to forced criminality in IUU fishing and smuggling – including in areas under the jurisdiction of other coastal states – making them vulnerable to unjust civil and criminal liabilities in port countries. Some Chinese national-owned fishing vessels reportedly operate in violation of UN sanctions off the coast of the DPRK and in the Indian Ocean; the crew members aboard these ships are also vulnerable to forced labor in IUU fishing. Uyghur and other Muslim ethnic minority workers coerced into participation in labor transfer programs, and North Korean overseas workers, are subject to conditions of forced labor in the seafood processing industry. Chinese DWF vessels also employ North Korean men as fishers, intentionally concealing their presence by transferring them between vessels prior to port visits, resulting in many North Korean workers not setting foot on land for multiple years.

Traffickers subject women and children from neighboring Asian countries, Africa, and the Americas to forced labor and sex trafficking within China. Traffickers promise African and South American women legitimate jobs in China and force them into commercial sex upon arrival. The One-Child Policy and a cultural preference for sons over daughters created a skewed sex ratio of 105 boys to 100 girls in China, which observers assert continues to drive the demand for commercial sex and for foreign women to enter or be deceived into brokered marriages with Chinese national men – both of which may be procured and retained by force or coercion. Traffickers kidnap or recruit women and girls through marriage brokers and transport them to China, where some are subjected to sex trafficking or forced labor. Illicit brokers increasingly facilitate the forced and fraudulent marriage of South Asian, Southeast Asian, Northeast Asian, and African women and girls to Chinese national men for fees of up to \$30,000. The men – sometimes in partnership with their parents – often incur large debts to

cover these fees, which they attempt to recover by subjecting the women and girls to forced labor or sex trafficking. Some Chinese national men reportedly circumvent this brokerage system by traveling to Southeast Asian capitals and entering into legal marriages with local women and girls, then return to China and compel them into commercial sex. There are also reports of Chinese national men and their parents deceiving local and Southeast Asian women and girls into fraudulent marriages in China, then confining them in forced concubinage involving rape, leading to forced pregnancy. In cases where this forced pregnancy leads to childbirth, the men and their parents sometimes use the child as collateral to retain the women's forced labor or sexual slavery, or use the women's immigration status as coercion to dissuade them from reporting their abuses to the authorities. A small number of Chinese national women are reportedly subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor via forced or fraudulent marriages to men on Taiwan. Exploitative marriages featuring elements of sex trafficking and forced labor reportedly increased in some foreign countries where BRI construction projects are underway. Mongolian boys are at high risk of forced labor and sex trafficking under visa regimes that enable them to work indefinitely as herders, horse jockeys, and circus performers across the Chinese border, provided they return with a chaperone once a month.

North Korean refugees and asylum-seekers living without legal immigration status in China are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers lure, drug, detain, or kidnap some North Korean women upon their arrival in China and compel them into commercial sex in brothels and bars, through internet sex sites, or in relation to forced marriage. Traffickers – often North Korean “minders” – also subject these women to forced labor in agriculture, in domestic service, and at restaurants, karaoke bars, coffee shops, and factories; the “minders” reportedly restrict their freedom of movement and communication, garnish their wages, and at times force them to engage in commercial sex with Chinese national customers. According to media and NGO reports, the DPRK government subjects its citizens to forced labor in China as part of its revenue generation efforts for its weapons development programs, likely with the knowledge of Chinese officials; this includes forced labor in fishing, seafood processing plants, hotels, restaurants, textile factories, and remote cyber operations, and may involve hundreds of thousands of North Korean workers. Many of these workers are women, and DPRK national managers often also subject them to violence, sexual harassment and rape, and sex trafficking. Chinese national-owned manufacturing facilities located in China reportedly also subject North Korean workers to forced labor in the production of protective medical garments for international export. Observers also report DPRK authorities facilitate a system through which Chinese companies partner with DPRK state-owned enterprises to outsource some operations to DPRK prison camps; through these agreements, North Korean citizens are

forced to produce goods – including athletic clothing, wigs, and false eyelashes – that are then transported to DPRK special economic zones along the border, exported to China, and labeled as having been produced in China.

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