

## UK Faces Scrutiny Over Uyghur Forced Labour in Chinese Supply Chains

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Concerns are mounting that goods sold in the United Kingdom may be tainted by forced labour linked to China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims and other Turkic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Investigations point to the systematic use of forced labour, where individuals, many from the Uyghur population, are compelled to work in

penal facilities, state-run labour transfer schemes, and factories under oppressive conditions.

While China ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions against forced labour in 2022, it has not criminalised state-imposed forced labour (SIFL). Human rights groups argue that this practice is politically motivated and discriminatory, targeting ethnic and religious minorities through both incarceration and labour deployment policies.

The UK government is now under growing pressure to introduce stricter safeguards to prevent goods linked to forced labour from entering British supply chains. Submissions to the Joint Committee on Human Rights have called for urgent steps, including bans on imports from high-risk regions, mandatory corporate due diligence, and tighter enforcement of the Modern Slavery Act.

In response, the Department for Business and Trade is reportedly strengthening export controls and collaborating with other departments to assess the risk of forced labour in specific industries. A government-led Solar Taskforce is currently reviewing imports of solar panels originating from Xinjiang, due to reported links with coerced labour in the region's polysilicon production.

The United States has already enacted the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), which presumes that any goods produced in Xinjiang are linked to forced labour, barring their entry unless proven otherwise. Campaigners are urging the UK to adopt similar legal tools, including risk-based import bans and designated monitoring zones.

Items of concern include cotton, garments, solar technology, and critical minerals used in batteries and renewable infrastructure. Reports estimate that over 500,000 Uyghurs have been forced to work in cotton production, while more than 60 Western firms have allegedly sourced critical minerals from Xinjiang in recent years, raising questions about compliance with UK ethical standards.

Organisations such as the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and the Rights Practice argue that voluntary reporting and ethical audits are insufficient. They have called for enforceable legislation to ensure UK companies are not complicit in human rights violations abroad.

While ministers have stated that supply chain transparency and legal frameworks are improving, critics maintain that bolder, enforceable action is needed to uphold human rights obligations and prevent the UK economy from profiting, even indirectly, from forced labour.