

Preventing Transnational Repression:

The case of the Uyghur diaspora



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Executive Summary

Transnational repression is increasingly used by authoritarian states to coerce or intimidate their critics and diaspora groups beyond their borders. **This report defines transnational repression (TNR) as practices by external governments that aim to prevent or restrict the exercise of people's rights outside that state's sovereign jurisdiction.** Transnational repression can be conducted in collaboration with non-state actors or proxies and implemented with or without the support of host states. The role of the host state depends on its geopolitical relationships the perpetrator, the extent its political system guarantees civil rights, and its capacity to withstand economic and political pressure.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) that document rights abuses and breaches of international law, including transnational repression, are key targets for harassment by authoritarian states, with China's party-state driving the global growth in transnational repression. China's repression of the Uyghur and Kazakh diasporas are key facets of its domestic "ethnic policy" in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and its "soft power" drives outside China that present authoritarianism as a benevolent alternative to democracy.

This report explores how civil society organisations and governments respond to transnational repression by analysing its impact and the prevention strategies used in Uyghur and Kazakh diaspora communities. The analysis seeks to move to the solutions stage, to ask how to prevent and mitigate TNR, such as using official guidance, professional training, and local network support. The fieldwork included interviewing over 30 organisations in Türkiye, Kazakhstan,

and the U.K., which operate within different legal systems and represent different communities with different needs. What does best practice look like for Uyghur and Kazakh-focused organisations in preventing transnational repression? This research engages directly with Uyghur and Kazakh people's experiences to inform concrete practices towards preventing the threat of TNR to rights and security.

The report finds that civil society organisations working on issues related to Uyghurs face intensifying transnational repression and develop their own mitigation tactics, including consulting cybersecurity professionals, engaging with local authorities, and avoiding posting personal information online. These tactics can be more effective as a prevention strategy with increased co-ordination of knowledge-sharing, training, and monitoring.

Key Questions

- What forms of transnational repression are faced by organisations working with Uyghurs and Kazakhs from the PRC?
- How do organisations manage transnational threats and harassment from authoritarian governments?
- What measures do organisations take that effectively prevent transnational repression?

TNR Practice	Effective Preventative Measure
Cyber harassment and surveillance	Access to professional, well-resourced cyber-security
Threatening or enticing calls and private messages	Changing phone number or ignoring contact
Physical surveillance or physical violence	Reporting to authorities and personal security
Police harassment by host state	Co-operation with authorities <i>or</i> secrecy
Harassment or surveillance of family or associates	Confidentiality (e.g., using encrypted apps, avoiding personal details online)

Glossary of terms

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

National People's Congress (NPC)

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

People's Armed Police (PAP)

People's Liberation Army (PLA)

People's Republic of China (PRC)

Public Security Bureau (PSB)

Transnational repression (TNR)

United Front Working Department (UFWD)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

World Uyghur Congress (WUC)

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)

1 | Introduction

1.1 What is Transnational Repression (TNR)?

Transnational repression is an increasingly used tactic by authoritarian states to coerce or intimidate their critics and diaspora groups beyond their borders. **This report defines transnational repression as practices by external governments that aim to prevent or restrict the exercise of people's rights outside that state's sovereign jurisdiction.**

Government agencies tend to define transnational repression by focusing on the national security threats presented by the targeting of individuals by external states in their jurisdictions. The **US Department of Justice** considers TNR, “a range of tactics that foreign governments employ to reach beyond their borders to harm, intimidate, threaten, harass, or coerce individuals.”¹ The **FBI** describes TNR as “when foreign governments reach beyond their borders to intimidate, silence, coerce, harass, or harm members of their diaspora and exile communities in the United States”²

In the UK, TNR is not succinctly defined but **the Home Office** instead offers a practical, non-exhaustive list of forms of repression directed by foreign states that include harassment, surveillance, threats of violence, and attempts to forcibly return individuals to their country of origin.³ A 2025 draft report by the **EU Committee on**

1 U.S. Department of Justice, National Security Division (2025) “Transnational Repression,” <https://www.justice.gov/nsd/transnational-repression-tnr>.

2 F.B.I. (n.d.) “Transnational Repression,” <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/transnational-repression/>

3 U.K. Home Office (2025) “What to do if you think you are a victim of transnational repression,” <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transnational-repression/what-to-do-if-you-think-you-are-the-victim-of-transnational-repression>.

Foreign Affairs defines TNR as “attacks and threats by states that aim to defend and advance their interests by reaching across national borders to coerce, control or silence dissidents, political opponents, journalists, activists, HRDs and diaspora members through a broad range of methods.”⁴

Multilateral efforts have defined TNR with international application in mind and encompass the broad targeting of advocates and researchers. A 2024 **joint statement from the U.S. and 45 other signatories** in Geneva that described TNR as “when states reach beyond their borders to silence or coerce dissidents, journalists, human rights defenders, and others.”⁵ The 2025 **G7** statement defines TNR as “an aggressive form of foreign interference whereby states or their proxies attempt to intimidate, harass, harm or coerce individuals or communities outside their borders.”⁶ The 2025 briefing from the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** defines TNR as “acts conducted or directed by a State, or its proxy, to deter, silence or punish dissent, criticism or human rights advocacy towards it, expressed from outside its territory.”⁷

4 Committee on Foreign Affairs (2025) “Draft Report on addressing transnational repression of human rights defenders,” *European Parliament*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PR-774242_EN.pdf, p.3.

5 U.S. Mission to International Organisations in Geneva (2024) “Joint statement on transnational repression,” <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2024/06/26/joint-statement-on-transnational-repression>.

6 G7 (2025) ‘G7 Leaders’ statement on transnational repression’, *Prime Minister of Canada Website*, <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2025/06/17/g7-leaders-statement-transnational-repression>.

7 OHCHR (2025) ‘Transnational Repression,’ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/transnational-repression-1-en.pdf>.

1.2 Why are organisations targets for TNR?

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are key targets for harassment by authoritarian states because they document rights abuses and highlight breaches of international law, including transnational repression.

CSOs, in contrast to governments, tend to define TNR by emphasising infringements on individual rights more than threats to national security.

Freedom House (2022) defines transnational repression (TNR) as “governments reaching across borders to silence dissent among diasporas and exiles, including through assassinations, illegal deportations, abductions, digital threats, Interpol abuse, and family intimidation.”⁸ This definition is influential in policy circles, but the scope of relevant rights abuses is limited to diaspora communities. In the case of China, diaspora groups are the most severely affected because their families can be directly threatened. However, this definition does not encompass how researchers and advocacy organisations that work on or with diaspora groups are targeted using TNR.

Amnesty International (2024) focuses specifically on rights over security by defining TNR as “government actions to silence, control or deter dissent and criticism by human rights defenders, journalists, academics, opposition activists and others, especially from that country, who live in another country, in violation of their human rights.”⁹ **Human Rights Watch** (2024) similarly defines TNR as

8 Freedom House (2022) ‘Defending Democracy in Exile: *Policy Responses to Transnational Repression*,’ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression>.

9 Amnesty International (2024) “On my campus I am afraid’: China’s targeting of overseas students,” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ASA1780062024ENGLISH.pdf>, p.49.

“state actors reaching beyond their borders to suppress or stifle dissent by targeting human rights defenders, journalists, government critics and opposition activists, academics and others, in violation of their human rights.”¹⁰

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (2024) considers TNR, “the practice of governments reaching across national borders to target opponents abroad, with the aim of silencing critics and maintaining their grip on power.”¹¹ These broader definitions are less focused but do encompass the targeting of those who document or advocate on rights abuses, which includes CSOs.

1.3 How can organisations prevent TNR?

Most academic research on TNR has focused on defining the concept or documenting rights abuses across borders, leaving practitioners to address and analyse prevention strategies. Academic researchers have mapped domestic studies of political repression onto the international sphere with Andrew Chubb and Kirsten Roberts Lyer (2024) defining TNR as “infringements of fundamental rights that originate outside the jurisdiction in which they take effect.”¹² Other key works have defined the term succinctly as when states engage in “targeting of their citizens abroad,” highlighting that this is not a new practice, but that technology has facilitated its expansion and authoritarian states

10 Human Rights Watch (2024) “Q&A: Transnational Repression,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/12/qa-transnational-repression>.

11 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (2024) “Watch Out Because We’re Coming For You: Transnational Repression of Iranian Journalists in the UK,” <https://rsf.org/en/watch-out-because-we-re-coming-you-rsf-report-unprecedented-transnational-repression-iranian>.

12 Chubb, Andrew & Roberts Lyer, Kirsten (2024) ‘Transnational Human Rights Violations: Addressing the Evolution of Globalised Repression through National Human Rights Institutions,’ *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 16(3):770–793. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huae017>.

use it as an extension of their domestic pursuit of regime security.¹³ The rapid expansion of TNR and its technological enhancement highlighted in the academic literatures mean that analysis of the effectiveness of existing prevention efforts is needed for policy actors and to deepen scholarly understanding of how TNR operates.

Prior work on transnational repression in the Uyghur diaspora is consistent with the conceptualisations drawn from academic research and the focus on authoritarian governance but seeks to capture the CCP's practices of ethnic targeting and family separation, which remain overlooked in most of the literature. Yalkun Uluyol (2023) loosely defining TNR as harassment of Uyghurs abroad by Chinese security organs.¹⁴ Tobin and Elimä's prior work (2023) defined TNR as "practices by any state to repress or control the behaviour, thought, or identity of citizens outside its sovereign jurisdiction."¹⁵ This more expansive definition draws from the focus on ideology and everyday behaviour in China's domestic governance and its transnational targeting of citizens and former citizens.

In March 2025, the DC-based organisation, Human Rights Foundation (HRF) held an online workshop related to TNR prevention and human rights, "*Beyond Borders: Building a Toolkit to Resist Digital Transnational Repression*." Over 35 activists attended, primarily from diaspora groups originating from the PRC. The organisation confirmed participants' identities and declined those

13 Furstenberg, Saipira, Lemon Edward, and Heathershaw, John (2021) 'Spatialising state practices through transnational repression.' *European Journal of International Security*. 6(3):358-378. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2021.10>

14 Uluyol, Yalkun (2023) "Targeted in Türkiye: China's Transnational Repression Against Uyghurs," *Safeguard Defenders*, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/publications/turkiye-chinas-transnational-repression-against-uyghurs>, p.5-6.

15 Tobin, David and Nyrola Elimä (2023) "'We know you better than you know yourself': China's transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora," *The University of Sheffield*, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/las/research/east-asia/we-know-you-better-you-know-yourself-chinas-transnational-repression-uyghur-diaspora>, p.14.

who could not be verified or if based inside China because no secure communications were possible. The briefing for participants that emerged from those discussions recommended prevention measures related to cybersecurity (e.g., limiting personal information shared online and separating work and personal devices), and to “stop the normalisation of any form of transnational repression” (e.g., awareness of smear campaigns or coordinated attacks to damage and overwhelm individuals). The paranoia induced through the presence of Chinese surveillance and smears by proxies to label opponents as “spies” were also repeatedly raised in the fieldwork interviews for this research, particularly in Türkiye and Kazakhstan, where managing surveillance and smears are part of organisations’ daily work.

Legislative efforts on transnational repression must be designed to deter threats and repression by multiple authoritarian governments but they must account for their different political goals and tactics to be able to effectively identify or prevent TNR. This report adapts the definitions of TNR used by governments, CSOs, and researchers to include the specific dimensions of China’s TNR found in this research but also to enable its broader application in different contexts. The definition used here highlights how TNR transgresses state sovereignty by targeting individual rights to free speech, association, and assembly.

This report defines transnational repression as practices by external governments that aim to prevent or restrict the exercise of people’s rights outside that state’s sovereign jurisdiction.

2 China's Transnational Repression of the Uyghur Diaspora

The use of transnational repression by authoritarian states to target citizens and diaspora groups abroad has increased rapidly in the 21st century.¹⁶ However, *why* an individual is considered a target by a specific state and how they are targeted requires careful consideration of their domestic policymaking and security practices. The targeting of Uyghur and Kazakh-related organisations outside China's sovereign jurisdiction is an extension of its domestic repression and "ethnic policy" in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In 2022, Zhao Kezhi (former PSB party secretary and Counter-terrorism leading group chair) and deputy, Jiang Liyun, outlined how the new central focus of "Xinjiang policy" is international, and designed to "resolutely thwart attempts to 'control China with Xinjiang' and 'contain China with terror,'" namely, research on Xinjiang by experts from outside China, and "Islamic terrorism."¹⁷

Zhao Kezhi cited Xi Jinping's speech from the third Xinjiang Central Work meetings during his 2021 tour of Xinjiang¹⁸ and 2022 meetings

16 For example, see: Dukalskis, Alexander et al (2023) 'The Long Arm and the Iron Fist: Authoritarian Crackdowns and Transnational Repression,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 68(6): 1051-1079. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027231188896>.

17 Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China (2021) 'Press conference of the Ministry of Public Security, PRC,' <https://archive.ph/6diEM>. Also see: 'Ministry of Public Security: Resolutely thwart plots of 'using terror to restrain China' and 'using Xinjiang to control China' (公安部:坚决挫败“以恐遏华”“以疆制华”图谋), *Guibipei.com*, <https://archive.ph/84OZt>.

18 Guanchazhe (2021) 'Minister of Public Security inspects Xinjiang: Resolutely defeat the plot of "using Xinjiang to control China"' ('公安部部长调研新疆:坚决挫败“以疆制华”的图谋'), *guancha.cn*. <https://archive.fo/cCAYi#selection-175.0-175.23>.

in Beijing¹⁹, to reaffirm that central government targets of grid management, one-minute response times, and adherence to strict prison stability standards have been achieved and will be strengthened.

These policies previously met with some dissatisfaction amongst local officials who were subsequently labelled “two-faced” by state media and prosecuted for “separatism”, including Wang Yongzhi.²⁰ Xi Jinping himself described “Xinjiang policy” as “completely correct” in 2020, indicating that the party-state is satisfied with the implementation and the results of mass detention in the region and targeting of critics abroad.²¹

The departure of security-focused Chen Quanguo as Xinjiang's party chief in January 2022 and appointment of the technocratic Ma Xingrui, a member of China's “aerospace clique,” intended to show how the intensive period of mass detention in the region is being wound down.²² However, Xinjiang Regional Government People's Procuratorate annual work reports show that while mass detentions

19 Central Government of the P.R.C. (2022) ‘Zhao Kezhi: Solidly implement anti-terrorism tasks and measures to create a safe and stable environment for the successful convening of the 20th CPC National Congress’ (‘赵克志: 扎实抓好反恐怖工作任务措施的落实 为党的二十大胜利召开创造安全稳定环境’), <https://archive.fo/Ugtly#selection-321.9-321.48>.

20 Ramzy, Austin, & Buckley, Chris (2020) “‘Absolutely no mercy’: Leaked files expose how China organised mass detentions of Muslims.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>; Tobin, David (2022) ‘The ‘Xinjiang Papers’: How Xi Jinping commands policy in the People's Republic of China. The University of Sheffield. <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/las/research/east-asia/xinjiang-papers-how-xi-jinping-commands-policy-peoples-republic-china>, p.10-11.

21 Yee, Isaac and James Griffiths (2020) “China's President Xi says Xinjiang policies ‘completely correct’ amid growing international criticism,” *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/27/asia/china-xi-jinping-xinjiang-intl-hnk>.

22 Byler, Darren (2022) “In Xinjiang, a new normal under a new chief — and also more of the same.” *SupChina* <https://interpret.csis.org/imposing-the-partys-core-values-in-xinjiang/>; Clay, Marcus (2022) “The Re-emergence of an Aerospace Clique in Chinese Politics.” *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/the-re-emergence-of-an-aerospace-clique-in-chinese-politics/>.

peaked in 2017 (215,823 persons),²³ current official figures remain high (nearly 40,000 persons in 2023).²⁴ Following detention, conviction rates are nearly 100%, the average sentence is 8.5 years, and the imprisonment rate for Uyghurs is now 3.5 times that of El Salvador, the world's highest known national imprisonment rate.²⁵

The transfer of arbitrarily detained Uyghurs to forced labour facilities and standard prisons across China suggest that what Xi Jinping termed, the “painful period of interventionary treatment,” is considered complete but that arbitrary detention and ethnic targeting has not ceased.²⁶ Hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs remain in detention without trial, legal support, or access to family. Prisons and pre-trial detention centres (*kanshousuo* 看守所) have been core components of mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs,²⁷ which was initially overlooked by unhelpful media framings regarding “the camps.”

On-the-ground research by organisations such as Human Rights Watch finds ongoing evidence of ethnically targeted harassment and arbitrary detention in the region.²⁸ While there have been shifts in the party-

23 These figures do not include extra-legal detentions in camps.

24 People's Procuratorate of the Xinjiang Regional Government (2024) “2023 People's Procuratorate Annual Work Report,” *Sohu.com*, https://web.archive.org/web/20240409132228/https://www.sohu.com/a/755712248_121107000; Shahit.biz (2024). “Statistics.” <https://shahit.biz/eng/stats.php>.

25 Safeguard Defenders (2023). “Prosecutions Abandoned, Conviction Rate Record High, and More on China's Judiciary 2022.” <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/chinas-judiciary-2022>.

26 Xinjiang Documentation Project (2024) “Forced Labour and Detainment Transfer Timeline.” School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia. <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/timelines/forced-labour/>.

27 Shahit.biz (2024) “A Review of Pre-Trial Detention Centers in Xinjiang: I. Role in the Overall Detention System,” *the Xinjiang Victims Database*, <https://blog.shahit.biz/2024/09/26/a-review-of-pre-trial-detention-centers-in-xinjiang-i-role-in-the-overall-detention-system/>; Tobin, David (2022) “The ‘Xinjiang Papers,’” p.37-38.

28 Wang, Maya (2023) “China's ‘Beautiful Xinjiang’ Continues to Oppress Uyghurs.” *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/13/chinas-beautiful-xinjiang-continues-oppress-uyghurs>.

state's tactics of governance since 2017, the use of ethnically targeted detention and persecution of critics has not ceased. In this context, **any Uyghur individual returning to the PRC or speaking publicly on these issues while abroad remains at risk of persecution.**

2.1 Why does China conduct transnational repression?

Transnational repression (*kuaguo zhenya* 跨国镇压) is a sparsely found phrase in official Chinese media. Searching the *China.org.cn* media database in June 2025 returns only 12 references, many of which are listed in quotation marks with “so-called” (*suoweide* 所谓的) preceding the term to imply its fabrication by the U.S. government to advance its “China threat” narrative.²⁹ From June 2022 onward, accusations that the U.S. and the U.K. conduct TNR with regards to the case of Julian Assange began to grow³⁰ and by 2023, these claims were used by the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)** to reject and deflect the charges of PSB officials in a U.S. court as hypocritical.³¹

29 P.R.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022) Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on March 17, 2022 ('2022年3月17日外交部发言人赵立坚主持例行记者会'), <https://archive.ph/4nzM3>.

30 China-net (2022) 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The Assange case is a mirror that shows the US and UK's claim to uphold "press freedom" is hypocritical' ('外交部: 阿桑奇案是面镜子 它照出了美英声称的维护“新闻自由”是何等虚伪'), *Zhongguo Wang*, <https://archive.ph/Oc9ln>.

31 China-net (2023) "Spokesperson of the Commissioner's Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hong Kong: The authority of the Hong Kong National Security Law cannot be challenged" ('外交部驻港公署发言人: 香港国安法权威不容挑战'), *Zhongguo Wang*, <https://archive.ph/7ZW5s>.

The Chinese academic literature on the subject is also limited with the *China Academic Journals* (CAJ) database returning only 1 search result for titles and 107 for in-text references. Li Jindong (2024) of the **Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences** writes that the “transnational repression project” has been constructed by the US to contain China by swaying public opinion with “human rights reports” and “frivolous lawsuits.”³² Chen Shaobo (2024), Dean of the **Hong Kong Zhengsi Research Institute** calls the concept of TNR a form of “cognitive warfare” (*renzhi zuozhan* 认知作战) by “anti-China forces and Hong Kong destabilising forces” to mobilise street protest and push for “destabilising legislation.”³³

Writing for **United Front Studies**, a Chinese journal focused on the internationally active United Front Work Department, Zhang Wei (2023) writes that the “non-profit sector,” particularly the National Endowment for Democracy, is part of the US’ plan to “control China by interfering with Xinjiang (*yijiang zhizhua* 以疆制华)³⁴, with research on the “internal matter” of TNR described as a key tactic to “attack Chinese governance in Xinjiang...and destroy China’s ethnic unity”.³⁵

The paper only cites two reports by the Uyghur Human Rights Project on South Asia and Arab states. It then conspicuously omits mention of

32 Li, Jindong (2024) ‘Study on the legal response to the US’s abuse of litigation against China’ (‘反制美国涉华滥诉行为的法律应对研究’), *Journal of Xinjiang Police College*, 44(3), p.22.

33 Chen, Shaobo (2024) ‘Analysis of the intrinsic mechanisms of cognitive operations and their implementation in Hong Kong’ (‘认知作战的内在机理及其涉港实施分析’), *Hong Kong Research*, 4, p.3.

34 Zhang, Wei (2023) ‘The National Endowment for Democracy’s interference in Xinjiang affairs in the context of strategic competition’ (‘战略竞争背景下美国国家民主基金会对于新疆事务的干涉’), *United Front Studies*, 4, p.145.

35 Zhang, Wei (2023) ‘The National Endowment for Democracy’s interference in Xinjiang affairs in the context of strategic competition’ (‘战略竞争背景下美国国家民主基金会对于新疆事务的干涉’), *United Front Studies*, 4, p.150.

the wide range of source types with similar findings referenced here from government bodies, civil society organisations, and independent scholars. Towards more effective documentation efforts and the prevention of TNR, civil society organisations must increase their awareness of their impact inside China, particularly how they are actively used to delegitimise the rights of diaspora groups and the related research. CSOs should pre-empt the CCP's counter-“cognitive warfare” that uses their own reports by citing a wider range of sources and ensuring that findings are not reducible to single sources of government funding.

The CCP's transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora can be understood in the context of this “cognitive warfare,” with its goal of preventing exposure of rights abuses or poor governance, which threaten China's crafted international reputation as a “soft power.” If we look to official Chinese documents that guide cadres implementation of policy in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, there are clear examples of instruction on how to conduct TNR by documenting, monitoring, and attempting to forcibly return Uyghurs who leave the country and may have information or experiences that contradict the CCP's narratives of “counterterrorism.” For example, internal reports by **village-level work teams** for the regional government classify Uyghurs abroad as “out of contact” (*shilian* 失联).³⁶ When accused of “illegal religious activities,” Uyghurs are located and “persuaded to return” (*quanfan* 劝返) by the party's

36 Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region “Fanghuiju” Campaign Leading Group Office (2015a) *Hundred Examples: “Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Bring Together the Hearts of the People” Campaign* (Volume One) [百例·上], *Xinjiang Documentation Project*, <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/chinese-sources/cadre-materials/cadre-handbooks/>. P.271; Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region “Fanghuiju” Campaign Leading Group Office (2015b) *Hundred Examples: “Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Bring Together the Hearts of the People” Campaign* (Volume Two) [百例·下], *Xinjiang Documentation Project*, <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/chinese-sources/cadre-materials/cadre-handbooks/>, p.16-17.

surveillance network that includes official stability-maintenance (*weiwen* 维稳) teams and ordinary villagers who are offered financial reward to report on their whereabouts.³⁷



工作组入户走访群众了解情况

Figure 1: Image of work team visiting Uyghur homes to monitor families under the “becoming family campaign.” Caption reads “Working groups visited the people to understand the situation”. Source: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region “Fanghuiju” Campaign Leading Group Office (2015b) *Hundred Examples: “Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Bring Together the Hearts of the People” Campaign* (Volume Two) [百例·下], *Xinjiang Documentation Project*, <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/chinese-sources/cadre-materials/cadre-handbooks/>, p.156.

The CCP conducts transnational repression to restrict flows of

37 Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region “Fanghuiju” Campaign Leading Group Office (2015c) *Hundred Questions: “Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Bring Together the Hearts of the People” Campaign* [百问], *Xinjiang Documentation Project*, <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/chinese-sources/cadre-materials/cadre-handbooks/>, p.143.

information that damage China's international image, including Uyghur narratives of their Turkic identity and experiences of linguistic and religious erasure. Multiple news sources, including **the BBC**³⁸ and **Financial Times**,³⁹ have demonstrated how the party-state monitors Uyghur families and uses them to threaten or entice activists and researchers to end their work. Research using on the ground fieldwork finds that Chinese police leverage intelligence networks established in host states of large Uyghur diaspora populations to monitor their daily behaviour and restrict their rights to free speech, association, and assembly, exploiting financial difficulties and their family's safety inside China.⁴⁰

Academic publications have shown how the “becoming family campaign” enables local officials to monitor the daily behaviour and associations of all Uyghur families in the region.⁴¹ Official documents analysed in prior research, including the Ili Public Security Handbook,⁴² show how officials are given long lists of questions to monitor and record the daily behaviour and whereabouts of Uyghur families inside and outside China, with specific monitoring

38 Judah, B.S. (2023) “China using families as ‘hostages’ to quash Uyghur dissent abroad,” *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-66337328>.

39 Yang, Yuan and Ayla Jean Yackley (2023). “‘The hand of China reaches here’: how Beijing pushes Uyghurs to spy on each other overseas,” *Financial Times*, <https://archive.ph/solWr#selection-2255.65-2255.66>.

40 Uluyol, Yalkun (2023) “Targeted in Türkiye: China's Transnational Repression Against Uyghurs,” *Safeguard Defenders*, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/publications/turkiye-chinas-transnational-repression-against-uyghurs>, p.6.

41 Grose, Timothy (2019) ‘Once their mental state is healthy, they will be able to live in society,’ *Chinafile*, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/once-their-mental-state-healthy-they-will-be-able-live-happily-society>; Grose, Timothy (2020) ‘If you don't know how, just learn: Chinese housing and the transformation of Uyghur domestic space,’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(11): 2052-2073, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01419870.2020.1789686>.

42 Ili Prefecture Public Security Agencies (year unknown) Handbook on “Preventing Backflows”: National Security Branch, *Xinjiang Police Files*, <https://www.xinjiangpolicefiles.org/ili-prefecture-public-security-agencies-handbook-on-preventing-backflows-national-security-branch>.

guidelines when individuals travel abroad.⁴³ **The CCP's transnational repression fits broad definitions of rights abuses across borders but its specific tactics are designed to restrict flows of information that damage China's international image or that connect Uyghurs inside and outside the PRC.**

2.2 How does China target organisations?

The CCP targets organisations working on Uyghur issues as key nodes of information and international exposure on issues of human rights and governance, which it considers national security matters. All Uyghur or Kazakh-led organisations interviewed in this fieldwork noted that cyber harassment and human surveillance were real challenges to their daily work and that professional training was vital to protect those organisations and the information they hold.

The highest profile example of alleged surveillance and infiltration, which remains a live legal case, is the 2025 arrest and trial of Dilshat Reshit, spokesperson for the World Uyghur Congress from their first General Assembly in 2004 to the seventh in 2024.⁴⁴ Dilshat was arrested in Sweden, where infiltration of Tibetan groups was found in 2018 and perpetrators prosecuted.⁴⁵ Reuters quoted the Swedish Prosecutor, stating that Dilshat was “suspected of having illegally

43 Tobin, David and Nyrola Elimä (2023) “‘We know you better than you know yourself’: China’s transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora,” *The University of Sheffield*, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/las/research/east-asia/we-know-you-better-you-know-yourself-chinas-transnational-repression-uyghur-diaspora>, p.24-33.

44 World Uyghur Congress (n.d.) ‘World Uyghur Congress Seventh General Assembly,’ <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/introducing-the-world-uyghur-congress/fifth-general-assembly-of-the-world-uyghur-congress/world-uyghur-congress-7th-general-assembly>.

45 BBC (2018) “Tibet group thanks Sweden in ‘Chinese spy’ case,” BBC News, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-43753527>; Safeguard Defenders (2020) “Tibetan Refugee who turned spy for China in Sweden,” <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/tibetan-refugee-who-turned-spy-china-sweden>.

collected information and intelligence on people in the Uyghur environment on behalf of the Chinese intelligence service,” which suggests the targets include but are not limited to Uyghurs.⁴⁶

The WUC issued a statement in response that announced Dilshat's removal from the organisation following urgent meetings and called for “all governments and host countries to ensure effective cooperation between their counterintelligence services and Uyghur organisations,” and for “enhanced coordination and institutional support” to ensure freedom from “foreign intimidation and interference.”⁴⁷

Radio Free Asia reported that the accused and his legal team were not available for comment and that the WUC statement “provided no further explanation about how their organisation was allegedly infiltrated by someone spying for Beijing.”⁴⁸ Shortly after news of the trial was publicised, the East Turkistan Government in Exile, a US-based Uyghur advocacy organisation, called for an international investigation into this “act of political warfare,” which is not new but a “result of calculated, systematic effort by Beijing to fracture, manipulate, and control our movement”.⁴⁹

46 Reuters (2025) “Man detained in Sweden on suspicion of spying on Uyghurs for China,” *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swedish-prosecutor-seeks-detention-man-suspected-spying-uyghurs-china-2025-04-09>.

47 World Uyghur Congress (2025) “WUC statement on Chinese espionage case in Sweden” <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/statement-uyghur-arrested-over-espionage-charges-in-sweden>.

48 RFA Uyghur (2025) “Man accused of spying on Uyghurs in Sweden was exiled group's spokesperson,” *Radio Free Asia*, <https://www.rfa.org/english/uyghur/2025/04/10/uyghur-sweden-spy>.

49 ANI News (2025) “ETGE demands probe into CCP infiltration after Uyghur leader's espionage arrest,” *ANI News*, <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/us/etge-demands-probe-into-ccp-infiltration-after-uyghur-leaders-espionage-arrest20250411165642>.

One of the few research reports on infiltration in the Uyghur diaspora, “The Fifth Poison: the Harassment of Uyghur Overseas,” was published by the UHRP in 2017, building its analysis on a key interview with Dilshat to frame the nature, magnitude, and solution to TNR in Sweden.⁵⁰ In this instance, an alleged perpetrator of espionage was amplified as a victim and expert, and the analysis on an under-researched area shaped the knowledge base and potential policy responses available to prevent TNR. This example demonstrates why CSOs must use multiple sources and expand their community engagement beyond large organisations for the sake of accuracy, but also to prevent the potential dissemination of CCP narratives and the misinformation used in its transnational repression tactics to undermine research and advocacy on Uyghurs.

Greater cooperation between intelligence services and Uyghur organisations is part of the solution to infiltration. However, to build trust, Uyghur organisations must implement and demonstrate transparent preventative measures and safeguarding procedures that prioritise the people and data with which they work. In cases where the CCP may have infiltrated social networks or accessed personal data, affected individuals must be notified and provided with full information on their personal security, to prevent the distrust and paranoia induced by transnational repression that hinders research and advocacy.

50 UHRP (2017) ‘The Fifth Poison: the Harassment of Uyghur Overseas,’ *Uyghur Human Rights Project Report*, <https://uhrp.org/report/the-fifth-poison-the-harassment-of-uyghur-overseas>.

2.3 Methods: Semi-structured qualitative interviews

The remainder of the report focuses on the key findings from detailed, semi-structured qualitative interviews with staff from organisations that work on Uyghur and Kazakh issues during fieldwork visits to Türkiye (Istanbul), Kazakhstan (Almaty), and the U.K. (London). The political system, protection of rights, and relations with China differ in each case, which deeply shaped the forms of TNR encountered and the effective methods of prevention. Where possible, these personal accounts are also triangulated with official documents, open source media, and research publications, either to verify specific incidents of TNR or to provide context that the issues described by individuals have wider precedent.

The project interviewed 52 people working for 30 different organisations: 23 in Türkiye, 17 in Kazakhstan, and 12 in the U.K. The asymmetrical breakdown reflects the different sizes of diaspora population and number of existing related organisations in the field-sites. Background on the political system, economic development,⁵¹ and relations with China for each country are also included for context and to enable comparison.

51 Development here is defined according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI). Each of the three cases are ranked “very high” by the UNDP, however, the gap between the UK (0.946), and Turkey (0.853) and Kazakhstan (0.837), is modest but significant (UNDP (2025) ‘Country Insights | Human Development Reports,’ <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks>). **GNI per capita (PPP \$)** differs across the cases fairly significantly: 34,680 in Kazakhstan and 41,900 in Turkey, compared to 56,780 in the U.K. (World Bank (2025) ‘GNI per capita (PPP\$),’ https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD?most_recent_value_desc=true). The **Education Index** indicates a similar disparity: 0.94 in the U.K., compared to 0.84 in Turkey and 0.82 in Kazakhstan (World Population Review (2025) ‘Education Index by Country,’ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/education-index-by-country>). The **Life Expectancy Index** has a similar modest gap: 81 (U.K.), 77 (Turkey), and 74 (Kazakhstan) (World Bank (2025) ‘Life expectancy index,’ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN>).

The interviews ranged from 1-3 hours in length and were conducted by both authors, primarily in Uyghur language, though some opted to use Mandarin or English. In the U.K., all interviews were conducted in English language. These were conducted in locations of the participants' choosing and tended to be in private spaces such as offices or homes, though some in the U.K. preferred public spaces to ensure their office locations remained confidential.

Appendix 1 includes the interview template and detailed questions provided to participants with consent forms prior to meetings. The interviews allowed the participants to introduce their work and role, before asking follow-up questions based on their individual experiences and narratives. Some participants would explain their personal background and how they decided to work on these issues, with others focusing solely on current professional experiences. However, all interviews followed the simple structure of asking a) has TNR affected your work, b) what did you do about it, and c) what was the outcome.

3 | Türkiye (Turkey)

- **Political system:** Competitive authoritarian⁵²
- **Economic development:** Very high (HDI: 0.853)
- **Relations with external state:** Mixed
- **Uyghur population numbers:** Approximately 30,000
- **Key issues:** Offers of financial gain to conduct surveillance, harassment phone calls, targeting of activists' associations, human surveillance, pressure from the Chinese embassy, legal threats or pressure (e.g., housing and employment), deportations.
- **Key preventative measures:** cyber security, background checks, rejecting phone calls, rejecting offers of financial gain, training by INGOs or security specialists, confidentiality (e.g., posting details of events on social media after being held), citizenship, working with local authorities.

Türkiye, like Kazakhstan, is listed as one of CCP's "26 key countries involved in terrorism," which for Uyghur visitors increases the risk

52 "Competitive authoritarianism" describes political systems where the "coexistence of meaningful democratic institutions and serious incumbent abuse yields electoral competition that is real but unfair" (Levitsky & Way, 2020, p.51). Specifically, harassment of opposition, closure of media outlets, and restrictions on civil rights severely limit political contestation, all of which are clearly present. This differs from traditional authoritarianism, as seen in Kazakhstan and China, where rights to free speech, association, and assembly are neither explicitly endorsed nor protected by the executive or judiciary. See: Levitsky, S., & Way, L. (2020) 'The New Competitive Authoritarianism,' *Journal of Democracy* 31(1), 51-65. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0004>.

of TNR and persecution if they return to China.⁵³ The detention of Uyghurs and family members on return to the PRC following visits to Türkiye show consistent patterns of targeted persecution. Targeting families through guilt by association is a standard practice in Xinjiang,⁵⁴ as evidenced in the Konasheher List⁵⁵ that outlined the targeting and persecution of whole families without trial, including the well documented case of Nur’iman Abdureshid’s entire family.⁵⁶

The mixed environment of open advocacy, civil rights restrictions, and transnational repression of Uyghurs in Türkiye presents a complex landscape. However, Türkiye is no longer considered an entirely safe environment for rights defenders or asylum seekers in the Uyghur diaspora. This has been noted by key figures, including Abduweli Ayup in the feature film *All Static and Noise*⁵⁷ (see figure 2)

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- 53 Ili Prefecture Public Security Agencies (*year unknown*) Handbook on “Preventing Backflows”: National Security Branch, Xinjiang Police Files, <https://www.xinjiangpolicefiles.org/ili-prefecture-public-security-agencies-handbook-on-preventing-backflows-national-security-branch>, p.14. The full list is Algeria, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, Libya, South Sudan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates. Also, see: Tobin, David, and Nyrola Elimä (2023) “We Know You Better Than You Know Yourself,” p.26-28.
- 54 Sudworth, John (2022) “The Faces from China’s Uyghur Detention Camps,” *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/85qihtvw6e/the-faces-from-chinas-uyghur-detention-camps>.
- 55 Tobin, David (2022) ‘The ‘Xinjiang Papers’: How Xi Jinping commands policy in the People’s Republic of China. The University of Sheffield. <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/las/research/east-asia/xinjiang-papers-how-xi-jinping-commands-policy-peoples-republic-china>, p.54-57.
- 56 Iman, Nur (2019) “I Was a Model Uighur. China Took My Family Anyway,” *Foreign Policy* <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/08/i-was-a-model-uighur-china-took-my-family-anyway/>.
- 57 All Static and Noise (2023) “All Static and Noise – official trailer,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfcyMi2pdxU>; Kashgar, Kasim (2023) “Activists Cite Increasing Arrests of Uyghurs with Turkish Connections,” *Voice of America*, <https://www.voanews.com/a/activists-cite-increasing-arrests-of-uyghurs-with-turkish-connections/7226281.html>.

and Kuzzat Altay, who wrote that it is “no longer a safe haven.”⁵⁸ In 2024, Mehmet Tohti Attawula of the Uyghur Academy highlighted the increasing number of arrests of Uyghurs, while the well-known Istanbul-based lawyer, Jevlan Shirmemmet, noted increases in arbitrary detentions following allegations conveyed by the Chinese government.⁵⁹



Abduweli Ayup

14 February · 🌐

Turkey is almost the same. Uyghurs are living still in fear, but recently, some European countries are doing wrong, they started deporting Uyghurs to there directly or indirectly. It was February in 2018, there were several hundred Uyghurs came to Ankara to protest against mass incarceration in Uyghur homeland. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to protest in front of the Chinese embassy in Ankara. Then we went to the UN office, the police already blocked the gate, surrounded the building, someone took this picture when I was talking to the police.



Figure 2: Writer and advocate, Abduweli Ayup, likens the situation for Uyghurs in Türkiye to China.

58 Altay, Kuzzat (2021) “Why Erdoğan Has Abandoned the Uyghurs,” *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/02/why-erdogan-has-abandoned-the-uyghurs/>.

59 Kashgar, Kasim (2024) “Rights Advocates Cite Uptick in Uyghur Refugee Detentions in Turkey,” *Voice of America*. <https://www.voanews.com/a/rights-advocates-cite-uptick-in-uyghur-refugee-detentions-in-turkey/7713219.html>.

3.1 Residency status and deportations

Vulnerability to transnational repression in Türkiye is closely linked to residency status with citizenship offering greater rights and more access to legal support than residence permits. However, many Uyghurs live in Türkiye on “long-term” “residence permits.” All interviews with those who worked in smaller organisations without government connections suggested that applying for citizenship has become increasingly challenging and many seek routes to citizenship in Europe and North America. Some even report that during the application process for long-term residency, they had to commit to Turkish authorities that they would return to China if the situation improved.

The rights granted by the residency permit differ to those offered under citizenship as it does not provide a right to a work permit, to vote, to pass citizenship to children, and as stated by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), it does not give protection by “provisions of special laws” that apply to citizens (e.g., the Labor Law No. 4857 on working conditions and employment relations).⁶⁰ The MFA is clear that these residence permits do not guarantee a path to citizenship and can be revoked if the holder spends more than 120 days outside the country. Documents obtained by Axios in 2022 illustrate the pattern described by interviewees who were rejected for citizenship for reasons of “public order” without being provided with specific details, even in cases where individuals had been granted long-term residence permits.⁶¹

60 Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Interior, Presidency of Migration Management (n.d.) “Residence Permit Types,” <https://en.goc.gov.tr/residence-permit-types>.

61 Basu, Zachary and Allen-Ebrahimian, Bethany (2022) “Turkey rejected Uyghur citizenship applications over “national security” risks,” *Axios*, <https://www.axios.com/2022/03/01/turkey-rejected-uyghur-citizenship>.

“Long-term” Turkish residence permits of Uyghurs can also be revoked, with some interviewees reporting revocation and even reinstatement without explanation. One explained that they were denied access to banking or social services without explanation after publicly advocating against China’s treatment of Uyghurs. One Uyghur who had long-term residence in Türkiye was placed in a deportation centre for 2 years and then released with a humanitarian visa, which must be renewed every two years. Some interviewees reported and one provided single journey “travel documents” (旅行证), which stated they can be used “only once,” to enter the PRC. The Chinese Embassy issued these one-way passes to participants to persuade them to return to the PRC after they had applied to cancel their Chinese citizenship, a requirement for them to apply for Turkish citizenship. **All Uyghurs interviewed suggested that citizenship offered greater protection from transnational repression because people can access relevant legal services and work to build stable lives for themselves.**

The documented deportations of Uyghurs from Türkiye, including Zinnetgül Tursun,⁶² tend to go via third countries, often in Central Asia. Uyghur diaspora communities report cases of being deported indirectly via those countries to China under pressure from the PRC.⁶³ This was also a key issue raised by interviewees during fieldwork in

62 Government of the Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) *General country of origin information report: Turkey*, p.69.

63 Browne, Gareth (2020) “How Turkey is sending Muslim Uighurs back to China without breaking its promise,” *the Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/26/turkey-sending-muslim-uighurs-back-china-without-breaking-promise> (<https://archive.ph/5xm8G>); Judd, Emily (2020) “Former Turkish PM Acknowledges Turkey Policy of Returning Uighur Muslims to China,” *Al Arabiya English*, <https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2020/07/29/Former-Turkish-PM-acknowledges-Turkey-policy-of-returning-Uighur-Muslims-to-China>.

the country and has been reported by *Freedom House*,⁶⁴ *the Guardian*,⁶⁵ the *Middle East Eye*,⁶⁶ and *Foreign Policy*.⁶⁷ Deportations and arbitrary detentions of Uyghurs have also recently been covered in Turkish media (e.g., *Turkish Minute*⁶⁸ and *QHA*).⁶⁹

Recent reports in local media documented the case of Mahmut Inayet and Erkin Abduweli, claiming what many in the diaspora already believe, that non-citizens are most vulnerable to TNR because they can be directly deported to China.⁷⁰ The East Turkistan Human Rights Watch Association⁷¹ produced a briefing note (see **Appendix 2**)⁷²

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- 64 Freedom House (2022) “Turkey: Transnational Repression host country case study.” <https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression/turkey-host>.
- 65 McKernan, Bethan (2020) “‘I Miss My Homeland’: Fearful Uighurs Celebrate Eid in Exile in Turkey,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/24/fearful-uyghurs-celebrate-eid-in-exile-in-turkey>.
- 66 Ullah, Areeb (2020) “Turkey Accused of Deporting Uighurs Back to China via Third Countries.” *Middle East Eye*, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uyghurs-china-turkey-accused-deporting-third-countries>.
- 67 Altay, Kuzzat (2021) “Why Erdoğan Has Abandoned the Uyghurs,” *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/02/why-erdogan-has-abandoned-the-uyghurs/>.
- 68 Turkish Minute (2023). “Uyghur Living in Turkey for 10 Years Faces Deportation to China: Report,” <https://www.turkishminute.com/2023/02/01/uyghur-living-turkey-for-10-year-faces-deportation-to-china-report/>.
- 69 Kırım Haber Ajansı (2023) “Türk Vatandaşlığına Başvuran Uygur Türkü Ablikim, Çin’e İade Mi Edilecek?” (‘Will Ablikim, a Uyghur Turk who applied for Turkish citizenship, be extradited to China?’), *QHA*, <https://www.qha.com.tr/gundem/turk-vatandasligina-basvuran-uygur-turku-ablikim-cin-e-iade-mi-edilecek-481552>.
- 70 Calikoglu, Feyza Nur (2025) “Mahkemeye göre Doğu Türkistan’da zulüm yokmuş! Uygur’a Çin şoku” (‘According to the court, there is no persecution in East Turkestan, China shock to Uyghur’) *Karar*, <https://www.karar.com/guncel-haberler/mahkemeye-gore-dogu-turkistanda-zulum-yokmus-uygura-cin-soku-1941467>; Uygur News (2025) Turkish Courts Have Ruled to Extradite Two Uyghurs to China, *Uygur Haber*, <https://www.uygurnews.com/turkish-court-orders-extradition-of-two-uyghurs-to-beijing>.
- 71 East Turkistan Human Rights Watch Association (n.d.) <https://www.facebook.com/ethrwen>.
- 72 Tusun, Yusuf (2025) ‘Decisions Concerning the Deportation of Uyghur Turks,’ *East Turkistan Human Rights Watch Association – Briefing Note* (See **Appendix 2**).

Uyghurs across Türkiye have long claimed that arbitrary detention is used by Turkish police under pressure from China.⁷³ In 2024, Shirali Abdurehim told journalists how he had been detained by Turkish agents on false charges before being sent to a detention centre with six other recently arrested Uyghurs.⁷⁴ In 2025, Ilyas Ablikim was detained and sent to an Immigration and Detention Centre, despite holding a “long-term residence” card.⁷⁵ Interviewees without citizenship reported that this a growing concern across the community and consider themselves vulnerable to detention, often as a form of transnational repression.

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- 73 Kakissis, Joanna (2020) “‘I Thought It Would Be Safe’: Uyghurs In Turkey Now Fear China’s Long Arm,” *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/13/800118582/i-thought-it-would-be-safe-uyghurs-in-turkey-now-fear-china-s-long-arm>.
- 74 Kashgar, Kasim (2024) “Rights advocates cite uptick in Uyghur refugee detentions in Turkey,” *Voice of America*, <https://www.voanews.com/a/rights-advocates-cite-uptick-in-uyghur-refugee-detentions-in-turkey/7713219.html>.
- 75 Kırım Haber Ajansı (2023) “Türk Vatandaşlığına Başvuran Uygur Türkü Ablikim, Çin’e İade Mi Edilecek?” (‘Will Ablikim, a Uyghur Turk who applied for Turkish citizenship, be extradited to China?’), *QHA*, <https://www.qha.com.tr/gundem/turk-vatandasligina-basvuran-uygur-turku-ablikim-cin-e-iade-mi-edilecek-481552>.

3.2 Surveillance and espionage

Issues of Chinese surveillance have become increasingly publicised since 2023, including high profile cases of potential espionage, such as the Chinese “spy ring” who used fake cell-phone towers to record electronic communications.⁷⁶ Prior research on transnational repression in Türkiye by this report’s authors found a range of experiences among Uyghur diaspora communities. However, for many, particularly those without citizenship or legal connections, “it is not safe here” and “I could still disappear here” were common concerns related to the prevalence of Chinese informants across the country and limited government action to tackle the problem.⁷⁷

Consistent with these findings, the majority interviewed in a report by Yalkun Uluyol describe being pressured to avoid speaking publicly about China or to work for China as an informant in the Uyghur community.⁷⁸ Interviews for this project with participants who work in organisations (see section 3.3) were even more focused on this topic as they and their associates are harassed and pressured to conduct surveillance. Those who refuse report no further direct

76 Soylu, Ragip (2025) “Turkey busts Chinese spying ring using fake cell towers,” *Middle East Eye*, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-busts-chinese-spying-ring-using-fake-cell-towers>; Türkiye Today (2025) “Chinese spy network busted in Istanbul in major Turkish intel operation,” <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/nation/chinese-spy-network-busted-in-istanbul-in-major-turkish-intel-operation-3201723>; Yeşilada, Atilla (2025) “Turkey Uncovers Sophisticated Chinese Spy Ring to Monitor Uyghurs and Officials,” *PA Turkey*, <https://www.paturkey.com/news/2025/turkey-uncovers-sophisticated-chinese-spy-ring-to-monitor-uyghurs-and-officials-20891>.

77 Tobin, David and Elimä, Nyrola (2023) “We know you better than you know yourself: China’s transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora,” *The University of Sheffield*, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/las/research/east-asia/we-know-you-better-you-know-yourself-chinas-transnational-repression-uyghur-diaspora>, p.65.

78 Uluyol, Yalkun (2023) “Targeted in Türkiye: China’s Transnational Repression Against Uyghurs,” *Safeguard Defenders*, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/publications/turkiye-chinas-transnational-repression-against-uyghurs>, p.12-13.

harassment, but their associates then continued to be questioned and harassed regarding the organisation's activities.

The relatively successful prevention efforts instituted by organisations interviewed included refusing to engage or answer calls from the Chinese police and conducting background checks on proposed new members. Refusing to engage ends direct harassment but the pressure is then applied to other individuals who may be pressured to provide information on them. All participants considered the refusal to engage and background checks to be imperfect mitigation efforts as they relied on “word of mouth” reports regarding people's reputation rather than detailed intelligence.

The publicised arrests of suspected “spies” in the community from 2024⁷⁹ was welcomed amongst Uyghurs in Türkiye.⁸⁰ These specific arrests were highlighted by participants in interviews as critical to preventing TNR because these individuals gather personal information that is used to follow activists and to pressure them under orders from Chinese police.

79 Reuters (2024) “Turkey detains six suspected of spying on Uyghurs for China,” *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-detains-six-suspected-spying-uyghurs-china-2024-02-20>.

80 Nikkei Asia (2025) “Uyghurs welcome Turkey's crackdown on Chinese spy ring,” *Nikkei Asia*, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Uyghurs-welcome-Turkey-s-crackdown-on-Chinese-spy-ring> (<https://archive.ph/uOQW0>).

3.3 Case Studies

Given the limitations on civil rights and the mixed patterns of TNR, the landscape for Uyghur-related civil society organisations in Türkiye is complex but diaspora members interviewed suggest around 70-100 relevant organisations are officially registered. Several organisations interviewed do operate underground and provide education and social welfare support for orphans and young people. Two such interviews reported a range of cyberattacks and harassment by Chinese police and the PSB by phone. After receiving professional cyber security training from a US-based NGO, they changed phones and held events privately, ending all direct harassment. However, most organisations operate legally and request government support on security issues, particularly espionage and surveillance.

The largest Uyghur-led organisation is **International Union of East Turkistan Organisations**, an “umbrella institution that represents East Turkistan non-governmental institutions,”⁸¹ and manages multiple smaller organisations working on specific issues including research, advocacy, and welfare support.. **The Uyghur Academy** is a “legal research organisation” that “aims to contribute to the advancement of Uyghur national science and education” through the promotion of research and networking events.⁸² In Istanbul, there are also a greater number of organisations than other diaspora locations that focus on freedom of religious belief, research and engagement, and community mediation, such as **The East Turkistan Muslim Scholars**

81 The International Union of East Turkistan Organisations (n.d.) “About us,” <https://udtsb.com/en/cat/about-us/179>.

82 The Uyghur Academy (n.d.) “About UA,” https://akademiye.org/en/?page_id=40.

Union.⁸³ Community mediation in this context can be crucial to TNR prevention because most organisations report incidences of being smeared and accused of being “spies” without evidence but with significant impact on trust and their position in the community, which is essential to the documentation and advocacy on rights abuses.

All 23 individuals interviewed for the project reported direct experiences with Chinese surveillance through suspicious contact with individuals who were suspected of or detected conducting surveillance, or in direct offers of financial gain to monitor community activities and their own associates by the Chinese authorities. Three individuals who worked in key organisations separately reported having been monitored by those who were arrested by the Turkish authorities in 2025. Two individuals acted as witnesses in the case after being informed by police that the agents had collected and transmitted their personal data.⁸⁴ These CSOs subsequently enhanced their cyber security measures, which has severely limited cyber harassment, and they conduct more thorough background checks on new applicants with no major incidents reported since the 2025 arrests. These individuals all stressed that they must work with local authorities to keep them informed of their activities but because their background checking measures were limited to word-of-mouth, they needed direct support to identify and avoid human surveillance.

83 Turkistan Press (n.d.) “The Uyghur scholars were invited to participate in the meeting of the International Association of Muslim Scholars,” <https://turkistanpress.com/en/page/the-uyghur-scholars-were-invited-to-participate-in-the-meeting-of-the-international-association-of-muslim-scholars-/1210>; Uyghur Academy (2024) ““East Turkistan Organisations Jointly Commemorated the East Turkistan Republics in Istanbul” on 10th November 2024,” <https://akademiye.org/en/?p=2181>.

84 Reuters (2024) “Turkey detains six suspected of spying on Uyghurs for China,” *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-detains-six-suspected-spying-uyghurs-china-2024-02-20>.

Issues of residency status and deportations are less pressing for larger, well-connected organisations. However, smaller and unregistered groups universally reported that they feared directly speaking publicly on issues related to China because this would trigger harassment and affect their residency status. Many of these participants had not been accepted for citizenship and have “long-term residency” or the 2-year residency offered to those of Turkic ancestry. Residency status directly shaped who can speak publicly and who can access resources with one underground organisation asking the researchers how to gain citizenship and two asking how to manage threatening calls from the Chinese authorities. Two participants reported being legally targeted without explanation through their employer, landlord, and business registration, which they assumed came from Chinese pressure as they had not broken the law. One reported having his business closed and struggling financially after speaking publicly against Chinese policy.

Recent examples of TNR included one legally registered organisation, which reported that holding a public advocacy event in Istanbul in late 2024, which triggered contact with participants by families and the authorities in China, even for those who had no family contact for a decade. Cyber security and background checks were described as relatively effective prevention efforts, however, attracting new members was nearly impossible because of this harassment. For example, numerous participants described how the numbers of protesters at the Chinese embassy had declined from around 2,000 in 2020 to very small numbers today.

One organisation reported that when holding cultural events around 2015-17, Chinese embassy staff attended and took photographs despite the location not being advertised, which lead to significant trust and recruitment issues. Another organisation reported firing two staff in 2025 after discovering they had direct links with the Chinese embassy, which had pressured local authorities in multiple countries shortly prior to the group's advocacy visits by using baseless smears and accusations of terrorism. One organisation that produces regular public media reported that when Chinese officials were set to visit the country on two separate occasions, their websites experienced denial of service attacks, their associates were harassed, and they also received threatening calls from the Chinese security services. **Every participant described how prevention efforts such as cybersecurity, background checks, and limiting personal information online had reduced direct harassment.** However, they also describe these as imperfect mitigation measures because the risk of speaking publicly for Uyghurs with families in China is severe and access to professional cyber and security support to counter Chinese surveillance efforts was limited.

3.3.1 Case Study I: Münevver Özuygur (Nuzugum Family Association)



“They threatened me by threatening my family”

Münevver is a Uyghur woman who worked as a journalist in China. In 2004, she decided to leave China for the last time with her two sons and embarked on exile to Turkey: “As people around me were arrested one after another, I realised I was in danger and knew I had to leave. The process of leaving was extremely difficult.”

After arriving in Turkey, Münevver changed her last name to “Uyghur” to express her identification with her ethnicity. In Turkey, Münevver devoted herself to providing education and access to social welfare in the Uyghur community, primarily supporting widows, orphans and other vulnerable Uyghur groups.

Münevver initially worked for the East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association (ETESA). The association later split into 22 independent organisations, each focusing on a specific group within the community or areas of community need. Münevver served as the head of **the Nuzugum Family Association**,⁸⁵ focusing on providing educational and welfare assistance to women and orphans. The association is named after Nuzugum, a traditional Uyghur allegory of a Kashgar woman who kills the enemy she is forced to marry, rather than yield and bear his children.⁸⁶

When Münevver left China, before and after her final exodus, threatening phone calls and smears to her reputation by unknown actors in the community became incessant. Soon after she left the country, the Chinese authorities directly accused her of being linked to terrorism without evidence. She first spent time in Pakistan where she was approached many times by Chinese journalists who visited the local area. They asked her about her study and life under the guise of interviews and urged her to return to China.

Initially, Münevver was protected to a certain extent by the solidarity of the Uyghur community in Pakistan: “I could handle these situations because the Uyghur community in Pakistan was relatively united, providing some degree of protection.” However, she soon became the target of a defamatory smear campaign by being accused of being a “spy.” According to Münevver, she later discovered that the first person to spread the rumour was a couple who had deliberately approached her, visiting her when she was sick, and even inviting her to their home.

85 Ingram, Ruth (2024) ‘Nuzugum’s exiled heroines: how to keep Uyghur folklore alive’ *the New Arab*, <https://www.newarab.com/features/nuzugums-exiled-heroines-how-keep-uyghur-folklore-alive>.

86 Abramson, Kara (2012) ‘Gender, Uyghur Identity, and the story of Nuzugum,’ *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 71(4), p.1069.

One of the most dangerous moments for Münevver was in September 2000, long before the mass arbitrary detention campaign. At that time, the situation in Pakistan suddenly deteriorated. According to Münevver, the Chinese government offered community members in Pakistan \$5,000 per person to report, arrest and forcibly repatriate Uyghurs. She said that “for safety reasons, many Uyghurs were forced to hide, including me. My husband went to Dubai for safety. The entire Uyghur community was in extreme panic.” Münevver finally managed to leave Pakistan and go to Turkey. However, due to restrictions on travel documents, she faced many difficulties before finally reaching the country.

After arriving in Turkey, she started to work in the ETESA and was once again the target of harassment. She continued to receive anonymous threatening calls and messages, and individuals in Xinjiang contacted her using Turkish numbers. She was then asked to travel to Dubai to meet with Chinese government officials, who offered to cover all expenses. The core purpose of the harassment was clear: to coerce her to work for the Chinese government and monitor other Uyghurs, or to restrict her freedom of movement using surveillance and threats. She received calls from them many times, repeatedly asking about her whereabouts and daily life, and offering to pay in exchange for cooperation when she explained her financial difficulties: “For a time, I received frequent calls asking where I was and what I was doing. They even tried to bribe me, claiming that if I cooperated, my financial troubles would be alleviated.”

When the harasser called again, Münevver had lost her patience and told her that she was willing to read and teach her the Quran over the phone, knowing that they would decline and cease calling because that would endanger themselves: “Eventually, I could no longer tolerate it. One day, the person who had been harassing me called again, so I offered to read the Quran to her and teach her how to read it.” Since then, she has not received similar harassing calls from the Chinese police or PSB officials.

The threats did not stop there though: “In an attempt to stop my activities in Turkey, they threatened me by threatening my family.” The Chinese used her relatives to coerce her to stop her activities in Turkey by threatening her brother and sister, demanding they persuade her to end her work. The Chinese police proposed to allow her mother to visit Turkey, but on the condition that she must be brought back to China. The police also repeatedly told her mother not to talk or advocate in Turkey about the situation in Xinjiang.

However, when Münevver’s mother came to Turkey in 2021, she told her that the real situation in Xinjiang was “very good” and then returned alone: “I could never return. After staying with me for a while, she returned to China alone. As soon as she landed, she was detained at the airport. They confiscated her phone and passport. I lost contact with her. She passed away soon after.” Münevver shared her pain with us: “My mother died, and I was not there, but I am relieved that she died before the camps, otherwise, she would have suffered in the internment camps.” The Chinese police then threatened her siblings, forcing them to convince her to return. When that did not work, the police forced her siblings to cut off contact with her.

The Chinese authorities also tried to exchange her silence and cooperation by releasing some of her family members and allowing individual family members to travel abroad, but she never compromised in her work: “They released one of my relatives after I spoke with the biggest media outlets in Turkey, but not the others. I knew they were testing me to see if I would back down from my advocacy.” Münevver believed that because she is so well known by the media, government agencies, and universities in Türkiye, this awareness of her experience provided her with some protection. Münevver reported no current experiences of harassment after disconnecting from family and changing phones. She also holds private training sessions with limited resources that show the “quiet way to deal with it.” Münevver hoped that smears designed to undermine her work would be dealt with using background checks on the accusers and more real “spies” would be arrested.

3.3.2 Case Study II: Abdurešid Emin (IUETO)



*“If the (local) security services know you well,
any report by China will be defeated by their work”*

Abdurešid Emin has served as the Secretary General of the International Union of East Turkestan Organisations (IUETO)⁸⁷ since 2021. The IUETO is a Türkiye-based umbrella organisation representing 20 member groups across various countries. These organisations share common goals, particularly in preserving Uyghur cultural and religious traditions.

The IUETO’s work centres on two primary areas: advocacy and diaspora support. Its advocacy efforts include political and parliamentary engagement, humanitarian advocacy, cultural diplomacy,

⁸⁷ International Union of East Turkistan Organisations (n.d.) <https://udtsb.com/en>.

and civil diplomacy. These initiatives aim to influence policy decisions and “raise awareness of Uyghur issues at both national and international levels.”

The organisation also prioritises ‘diaspora building’: “Diaspora building is essential because all Uyghur advocacy work currently depends on the diaspora. Inside East Turkestan, there’s no possibility for advocacy due to the repression. The diaspora is the only space where advocacy can happen.” This work focuses on strengthening Uyghur communities in countries such as Türkiye, Sweden, and Finland (“projects that improve access to education and business opportunities, and engagements with governments to secure political protection for Uyghur refugees”). Activities in this area include educational initiatives, cultural and religious programming, and projects that enhance access to education and economic opportunities. The IUETO also works with governments to assist Uyghur refugees in securing political protection and legal residency. In addition, the IUETO engages in social development initiatives. A core priority is providing support to vulnerable individuals in the community, including older adults, individuals with health conditions, widows, and orphans.

According to Emin, the organisation has experienced an increase in surveillance, harassment, and direct interference by Chinese intelligence agents since 2023, including the harassment of associates for information or to cancel advocacy events: “As a union, we strongly feel and have proof that China is spying on us. We get this information from different countries where we are active, especially Turkey, Malaysia, and recently India.”

In February 2024, Turkish authorities arrested five Uyghur individuals accused of espionage on behalf of China.⁸⁸ These individuals reportedly collected information related to IUETO leadership, including Emin himself, the president, senior officials, and emerging youth leaders. Turkish authorities classified the individuals as victims of Chinese espionage operations: “For example, last year, five Uyghurs were arrested by the Turkish government for spying. The information they collected was mostly about our leadership, including our president, and some senior leaders, and young leaders. The Turkish government treated those Uyghurs as victims of Chinese spying.”

IUETO members experienced surveillance linked to the Chinese government in both Malaysia and India. In Malaysia, they were frequently followed or filmed at public events. The local government informed IUETO that these actions were often directed by the Chinese Embassy: “Every time we visit Malaysia, we notice people of Chinese ethnicity taking pictures of us or following us at public events. We usually find out later that they were sent by the Chinese embassy. Even during our visit in 2022, there were people providing information to the embassy and monitoring our activities. This information comes from local government security institutions.” During a 2022 visit, local security services confirmed that the IUETO’s detailed itinerary had been reported to Chinese authorities.

Similarly, before IUETO’s first public event in India in 2024, Indian officials warned that China had obtained detailed information about their advocacy schedule and plans. For security reasons, IUETO cancelled or rescheduled some meetings: “In 2024, India was the

88 Reuters (2024) ‘Turkey detains six suspected of spying on Uyghurs for China,’ <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-detains-six-suspected-spying-uyghurs-china-2024-02-20/>

first place where we held a public event. Before that, everything was secret. However, we were informed that China already knew the full schedule of all our activities—who we would meet and what we would discuss. Because of this, we had to cancel or change some programs for security reasons. Before our trip, the Indian government warned us that China had the full agenda.”

China also pressures the politicians and diplomats with whom the IUETO has met. This is particularly common in Türkiye and Malaysia. For example, soon after the IUETO met with Malaysian officials, the Chinese embassy requested meetings with the same officials as well. Abdurešid said that Turkish officials, on the other hand, tend to be more resolute, emphasise their country’s position, and do not easily accept pressure: “after meeting with diplomats or high-level political leaders in Turkey or Malaysia, we find out that the Chinese embassy has contacted them to put pressure on them. They either call directly or go through the foreign affairs ministries. Sometimes, they even request immediate meetings after we meet with someone”.

In 2024, the Chinese Embassy in Malaysia met with Muslim NGOs supporting Uyghurs. Although the discussion initially focused on Palestine, Chinese officials transitioned to accusing IUETO leaders, including Emin, of terrorism. They labelled IUETO a terrorist organisation and denounced the World Uyghur Congress as “Zionist.”

According to Abdurešid, to place direct political pressure on government officials, the Chinese government launched a state-organised civil diplomacy campaign to extend its transnational repression. The campaign continued with Chinese officials and civilians, including lawyers, security personnel, and researchers,

visiting NGOs in Malaysia individually. According to Emin, this small group coordinated their visits through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, making formal appointments with each organisation with which they had contact. During these meetings, the visitors presented narratives claiming that Uyghurs are inherently part of China, that most Uyghurs are loyal, and that those who oppose the state are terrorists or separatists. To counter this messaging, IUETO provided NGOs with materials to help them respond effectively: “It wasn’t a big event with famous people, but they sent about six people: one was a lawyer, one was from Chinese security, and one was a researcher. They visited every NGO we knew and made appointments through the Foreign Affairs Ministry. They showed presentations about how we Uyghurs are terrorists, how Uyghurs are supposed to be part of China, and that Uyghurs are very loyal.”

In 2023, IUETO appointed a Uyghur student representative from the PRC living in Malaysia to raise awareness about issues affecting the Uyghur people. After engaging the public, the student’s relatives in China were harassed and threatened for months. Ultimately, the IUETO advised the student to withdraw for safety reasons.

Although Malaysia has not directly blocked the IUETO’s work, the country lacks a formal mechanism to resist Chinese pressure. Emin said, “They give us some space to operate and don’t stop us. But, at the same time, they don’t fully protect us. They allow China to interfere greatly. They haven’t cancelled any of our events or visits, but it’s clear that China’s influence is strong, and they are trying to limit our impact.” As a result, many of IUETO’s advocacy efforts have faced restrictions.

To counter transnational repression by the Chinese government, Emin said the organisation has developed strategies focused on local partnerships, transparency with authorities, and community integration. They believe that establishing long-term partnerships with reputable local NGOs in each country in which they operate is one of the most effective strategies. Emin said, “We request that one or two highly credible local NGOs become our permanent partners. These NGOs serve as official references or guarantors to the host government.” Emin continued, “in countries such as Turkey, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, and Thailand, local partner organisations act as intermediaries and defenders, helping to counter false claims from Chinese authorities.”

To build trust and prevent TNR, the organisation maintains clear communication with local security services. Through their local partners in different countries, they request meetings with security officials and maintain ongoing relationships. Before and after visits, they submit reports detailing their planned activities and outcomes to ensure that host governments are well-informed. This transparency neutralises the impact of any disinformation sent by the Chinese state.

They also incorporate security planning into their public work. At events, team members and local partners monitor for individuals who may be gathering information or attempting to interfere. In some countries, such as Malaysia and India, they have identified such individuals and taken preventive steps, including informing the authorities. This system helps mitigate risks and demonstrates a proactive approach to safety.

Lastly, Emin shared that IUETO had employed a strategy called “localisation and legalisation.” Legalisation refers to registering NGOs within local legal frameworks, thereby giving their work legitimacy under local law. Localisation means ensuring that local citizens are involved in and lead advocacy work. Emin said, “in Malaysia, we have a registered organisation, but it’s not just us doing it; its Malaysian people working with us. In India, local citizens lead student advocacy work, not just us from Turkey.” The IUETO believes that localising advocacy shifts the risk away from individuals and puts it under the legal protection of the host country’s citizens: “This means that if China takes action, they can’t blame one individual. They would have to target Indonesian, Malaysian, or Indian citizens. This is safer because it is the constitutional right of those local people to do this advocacy work.”

3.3.3 Case Study III: Alimjan Bugda (East Turkistan Muslim Scholars Union)



“The capabilities of civil society organisations to prevent transnational repression are extremely limited.”

Alimjan Bugda is a teacher at Istanbul Cultural University and an Islamic scholar with the East Turkistan Muslim Scholars Union. The Union was established in 2016. It is an independent entity, unaffiliated with any organisation or government. The Union has 95 members distributed across various countries. Its original purpose was to protect the culture, religious beliefs, and identity of Uyghur people living abroad. The Union also aimed to raise awareness among Muslim communities in other countries about the Chinese government's repression of Uyghurs in various aspects of daily life. The Union addresses these issues through statements and dialogues with religious figures from other countries, and publishing research reports on

issues related to freedom of religious belief (e.g., Mosque demolitions, persecution of religious figures, etc). Alimjan's experiences illustrate the space for mediation with the Turkish state to protect the rights of Uyghurs but also the need for considerably greater support and action against transnational repression.

The Union believes that China's transnational repression of Uyghurs overseas has penetrated people's daily lives. Such acts can undermine the culture, traditions, and beliefs of the Uyghur people, as well as their reputation in the eyes of the outside world. Therefore, it is necessary for organisations to prevent these daily acts of destruction within the community: "The Chinese government also sends agents to infiltrate organisations to monitor their activities. There are also indications that they may arrange for personnel to contact Uyghur teenagers, attempting to corrupt the younger generation. Therefore, we must remain vigilant against the Chinese government's ongoing efforts to undermine the community."

Bugda explained that preventing TNR and community mediation are linked. He mediates community disputes because these can be manipulated or used by the CCP: "The Union acts as a mediator within the community. When conflicts arise between organisations, we step in to coordinate and maintain unity. We are well aware that personnel hired by the Chinese government sometimes create conflicts, spread rumours, defame individuals, and undermine trust within the community, thereby dividing it. There are also signs that they are attempting to infiltrate and 'corrupt' the next generation by targeting teenagers," by making friends and using them to gather information on their families.

The Union seeks to prevent TNR and radicalisation through mediation and regular communications and dialogue with other Uyghur organisations on social developments that may affect the community. For instance, the Union supports organisations focusing on orphans and youth by helping them organize community activities. The Union also communicates potential risks to parents and young people, such as drug exposure or exploitation by theft gangs: “Internally, we emphasise the importance of upholding the Islamic faith while also valuing the preservation and transmission of East Turkestan’s culture and traditions. For instance, we remind community members not to confuse the cultures of other countries with their understanding of Islam, as this can lead to the neglect of our own cultural identity, deviation from a moderate religious stance, and even becoming radicalised.”

Bugda told us that China has repeatedly attempted to monitor him by infiltrating his daily social circle. He once received calls from a stranger pretending to represent his brother and offering him a university post in Urumqi and for his mother to go on the Hajj to Mecca: “After that, this person tried to call me multiple times, offering various enticements, even saying, “Uyghurs in Turkey are very poor; we can give you money.” I kept making excuses, such as saying I was traveling or busy. Once he said he had arrived in Istanbul and wanted to meet, so I said I was out of town. Eventually, I got so fed up that I turned off my phone for a week. My family has never been allowed to leave the country. Since 2017, I have had no news from my family. Later, I heard that they had all been sent to a concentration camp.”

More recently, he has been severely targeted, in one instance by someone pretending to be a friend and showed excessive enthusiasm, frequently trying to find out his schedule and whereabouts, and even going out of his way to visit him in another city when he was teaching there: “Especially in the past two years, since I became the head of this Union, it has become clear that someone is trying to obtain information about me and our organisation. For instance, someone offered to give me a phone, which I refused; another time, when I was teaching in another city, he deliberately travelled to that city to meet me or suggested visiting my home. It turned out that he was among the spies working for the Chinese government who were arrested in Turkey earlier.⁸⁹ He was ultimately sentenced to 12 years in prison.”

Bugda then reflected on the suspicious behaviour of the arrested “spy,” particularly their desire for gossip and spreading division: “After he was arrested, I began to reflect on some of his previous behaviours. Looking back, there were indeed many unusual aspects, such as his constant desire to know what I was doing, where I was, and inquiring about the activities of others in other organisations. He would also spread divisive remarks and intentionally or unintentionally sow seeds of doubt, causing people to lose trust in those around them. These behaviours are all signs of undermining the unity within our community.”

89 Nikkei Asia (2025) “Uyghurs welcome Turkey’s crackdown on Chinese spy ring,” *Nikkei Asia*, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Uyghurs-welcome-Turkey-s-crackdown-on-Chinese-spy-ring>.

In addition, Bugda mentioned that the widely circulated belief within the Uyghur community that a religious scholar died in 2023 from poisoning by a Chinese government-hired spy in Istanbul remains a heavy cloud hanging over the community. This belief has also made him extremely cautious in his daily life.

Bugda believed that the government's serious response to China's transnational repression, namely, the arrest of spies, the filing of charges, and the sentencing, is an important means of protecting the Uyghur community: "The capabilities of ordinary individuals or civil society organisations to prevent transnational repression are extremely limited, so strong legal measures are still necessary to address the issue. We have long suffered harassment and persecution at the hands of these spies. Aside from trying to avoid them, we have little ability to confront them directly. In contrast, legal actions at the national level protect our community and send China a clear warning on the diplomatic front."

4 | Kazakhstan

- **Political system:** Authoritarian
- **Economic development:** Very high (HDI: 0.837)
- **Relations with external state:** Close
- **Uyghur population numbers:** Approximately 300,000
- **Key issues:** Human surveillance, pressure from local authorities, high level government pressure, legal threats, harassment phone calls.
- **Preventative measures:** cyber security, background checks, working with local government or secrecy, training by INGOs or security specialists, legal support.

While the space for civil society in Türkiye is a complex mixture of open advocacy and repression, the environment in Kazakhstan is considerably more closed. Academic literature on Kazakhstan's post-Soviet political system considers it authoritarian,⁹⁰ with high levels of corruption shaping political outcomes, particularly in large scale infrastructure projects.⁹¹ The government of Kazakhstan restricts the institutionalisation of opposition, limits contestation in elections through media controls, and uses violence to suppress protest,⁹² while

90 Isaacs, Rico (2022) 'The Development of a Personalist-Authoritarianism Regime in Kazakhstan,' in *Political Opposition in Authoritarianism: The Theories, Concepts and Practices of Democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06536-1_4.

91 Khamitov, Zhaslan & Knox, Colin, & Junusbekova, Gulsara (2022) 'Corruption, public procurement and political instability in Kazakhstan.' *Central Asian Survey*, 42(1): 89–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2022.2072811>.

92 Kudaibergenova, D. T., & Laruelle, M. (2022) 'Making sense of the January 2022 protests in Kazakhstan: failing legitimacy, culture of protests, and elite readjustments,' *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 38(6), 441–459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2077060>.

efforts at dialogue with civil society are widely viewed as co-option by CSOs.⁹³

Although the Uyghur population in Kazakhstan is around 300,000, the vast majority are Kazakh citizens and descendants of those who migrated during the 18th and 19th centuries and later when fleeing the PRC's land dispossession and collectivisation of agriculture from the 1950s until 1962.⁹⁴ These different diaspora groups are connected through history, language, and religion but their experiences of repression are markedly different related to the ability to integrate into everyday life using Russian or Kazakh languages, and their citizenship status.

The older Uyghur communities tend to avoid rights advocacy and multiple participants described how the public activities of these communities focus on cultural maintenance (e.g., *māshrāp*) and community support with almost no organised advocacy and political activity. These groups are significantly less affected by TNR than new arrivals and activists, who emerged after the PRC's mass detention campaign accelerated in 2017, or the ethnic Kazakhs from China invited by the Kazakhstan government to settle as "Oralman" (returnees) in the 1990s. This project focused specifically on

93 Schiek, Sebastian (2022) 'The Politics of Stability in Kazakhstan: Depoliticising Participation Through Consultative Ideology?' *Europe-Asia Studies*, 74(2): 266–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2034746>.

94 Harris, Rachel & Kamalov, Ablet (2022) 'Nation, religion and social heat: heritagizing Uyghur *māshrāp* in Kazakhstan,' in De Tiesenhausen, Aliya (ed) *The Social Role of Art and Culture in Central Asia*. London: Routledge; Kamalov, Ablet (2009) 'Uyghurs in the Central Asian Republics: Past and Present,' in Mackerras, Colin and Clarke, Michael (eds) *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction into the 21st Century*, London: Routledge; Roberts, Sean R (2007) 'The Dawn of the East: A Portrait of a Uyghur Community Between China and Kazakhstan,' in Beller-Hann, Ildiko, Cesaro, M. Cristina, & Smith Finley, Joanne (eds) *Situating the Uyghurs Between China and Central Asia*. London: Routledge.

organisations that publicly advocate or work with recent arrivals from the PRC, who are regularly harassed by the local authorities.

Although the constitution of Kazakhstan permits individual citizens “freedom of association,” the same clause (Article 23, clause 1) notes that “public associations are regulated by law”.⁹⁵ While the 2015 NGO Law ostensibly permits civil society organisations to operate, it has been heavily criticised by the UN for targeting CSOs and limiting their ability to associate with foreign organisations and advocates by restricting their “ability to access funding, in violation of Kazakhstan’s international obligations related to the right to freedom of association.”⁹⁶

The environment for CSOs in Kazakhstan has tightened further in recent years. International human rights organisations criticised the government’s 2023 decision to publish a “register of individuals and entities receiving money or other resources from foreign states, international and foreign organisations, foreign citizens and stateless persons” (“the foreign funding register”) because it will lead to stigmatisation and discrediting of human rights groups.⁹⁷ Members of the Kazakhstan Parliament are drafting a new law to further tighten oversight of civil society organisations intended to reduce the influence of foreign values and organisations.⁹⁸

95 The Official Website of the President of Kazakhstan (2022) *Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan*. <https://www.akorda.kz/en/constitution-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-50912>

96 OHCHR (2015) ‘Kazakhstan: Human Rights Office concerned at NGO law’. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2015/10/kazakhstan-human-rights-office-concerned-ngo-law?sub-site=HRC>.

97 Human Rights Watch (2023) ‘Kazakhstan: Abolish the ‘Foreign Funding Register’’, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/20/kazakhstan-abolish-foreign-funding-register>.

98 For example, see: Otkjer, Albert (2025) , “Kazakhstan’s foreign agent law proposal could severely impact civil society and media freedom”, *the Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/kazakhstans-foreign-agent-law-proposal-could-severely-impact-civil-society-and-media-freedom>.

In 2025, Rune Steenberg, one of the few social anthropologists to document Kazakh testimonies of rights abuses inside China, was notified by letter that he was banned from entering the country without an explanation being given.⁹⁹ This tightening environment means that the capacity for researchers to document transnational repression and other rights abuses in the country, even when they occurred inside China, is highly challenging with most participants remaining anonymous for their safety.

4.1 Relations with China

Close diplomatic and economic relations between China and Kazakhstan shape the civil society space in general and issues of TNR more specifically. Most academic literature does not consider Kazakhstan to be economically dependent on China but that their particularly close economic ties do shape their relations.¹⁰⁰ For example, the second Central Asia-China summit in Kazakhstan was attended by Xi Jinping in June 2025 with *Xinhua* reporting this as “high-level talks” that included “Chinese vision” and established a “comprehensive structure of co-operation.”¹⁰¹

99 Global Voices Eurasia (2025) “Danish anthropologist denied entry to Kazakhstan for criticizing China’s repression of Uyghurs,” *Global Voices*, <https://globalvoices.org/2025/05/12/danish-anthropologist-denied-entry-to-kazakhstan-for-criticizing-chinas-repression-of-uyghurs>.

100 Lim, G, Tjia, L. Y, & Murashkin, N. (2024) Opportunities and Challenges of China’s Economic Ties with Kazakhstan: Looking Back to Look Forward. *The Chinese Economy*, 58(1): 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10971475.2024.2373643>.

101 Xinhua (2025) “Xinhua Commentary: Closer China-Central Asia partnership brings greater certainty to global peace, development,” <https://english.news.cn/20250616/e988adb868874a0c994498931a47774b/c.html>; Xinhua (2025) “习近平抵达阿斯塔纳出席第二届中国—中亚峰会” (‘Xi Jinping arrives in Astana to attend the 2nd China-Central Asia Summit’), <http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/20250616/8ff83828de8d4b469396da4bebcffaea/c.html>.

The *Astana Times* reported that China, as Kazakhstan's largest trade and economic partner, signed 24 agreements on trade, cultural relations, and energy, "marking a significant step in strengthening mutual trust and strategic co-operation."¹⁰²

The *Xinhua* coverage also repeats the importance of security issues, specifically the issues of transnational crime, safeguarding the border regions with China, and "solidarity against 'the three forces' of terrorism, separatism, and extremism," the term used in key Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)¹⁰³ documents and the 2015 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Joint Declaration¹⁰⁴ that is taken from China's domestic policy of targeting ordinary Uyghurs in 'counterterrorism' efforts.¹⁰⁵

102 Akhmetkali, Aibarshyn (2025) "China, Central Asia Sign Treaty, Outline New Paths for Cooperation," the *Astana Times*, <https://astanatimes.com/2025/06/china-central-asia-sign-treaty-outline-new-paths-for-cooperation>; Omirgazy, Dana (2025) "Kazakhstan, China Deepen Strategic Partnership, Sign 24 Agreements," the *Astana Times*, <https://astanatimes.com/2025/06/kazakhstan-china-deepen-strategic-partnership-sign-24-agreements>.

103 For example, see: Hall Stephen GF (2023) *The Authoritarian International: Tracing How Authoritarian Regimes Learn in the Post-Soviet Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009089630>.

104 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015) "Joint Declaration on New Stage of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan," https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367302.html.

105 For example, see: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) Party Commission Information Department (eds) (2009) *Jiaqiang Minzu Tuanjie, Weihe Xinjiang Wending: Xuanchuan Jiaoyu Cailiao Yi* ('Strengthening Ethnic Unity, Protecting Xinjiang Stability: Information Education Materials No. 1'). Wulumuqi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe ('Xinjiang People's Publishing Press'). Available: <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/chinese-sources/50-whys>.

The SCO Media Cooperation Forum was also held in Urumqi in 2025 with Ma Xingrui, CCP Party Secretary for Xinjiang, stressing that the SCO mechanism was essential to “enhanced media cooperation.”¹⁰⁶ *Xinhua* commentary linked the importance of the SCO forum alongside increasing trade between Central Asia and Xinjiang to creating “confidence in the new era” and “a more friendly international public opinion environment for Xinjiang’s development, and present a credible, lovable and respectable image of China to the world.”¹⁰⁷

The Xinjiang Security Expo will be held in 2025, to “improve the level of the northwestern region’s public security technology and prevention technology” by inviting companies to Xinjiang to collaborate and market their products.¹⁰⁸ The Expo includes Digibird (小鸟科技), which has designed monitoring systems for prisons from its headquarters in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture since Chen Quanguo’s appointment in Xinjiang,¹⁰⁹ with ongoing contracts in Kazakhstan.¹¹⁰

106 Xinhua (2025) “马兴瑞艾尔肯·吐尼亚孜会见于绍良等出席2025上海合作组织国家媒体合作论坛中外嘉宾” (‘Ma Xingrui and Erken Tuniyazi meet with Yu Shaoliang and other Chinese and foreign guests attending the 2025 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Media Cooperation Forum’), <http://www.xj.news.cn/20250523/c21161cf8bb048c095f012e9627ff088/c.html>.

107 Xinhua (2025) “上合组织国家媒体合作论坛缘何落地新疆” (‘Why the SCO Media Cooperation Forum was held in Xinjiang’), <http://www.xj.news.cn/20250523/20fb5235fae74e75b07f47ac0d59af9b/c.html>.

108 Central Asia Digital Security Expo (2025) “Exhibition information,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20250512184018/https://www.yoafz.com>.

109 Reisboard, Jonah (2025) “Xinjiang Security Expo Reflects the Limits of U.S. Sanctions,” the Jamestown Foundation - *China Brief Notes*, <https://jamestown.org/program/xinjiang-security-expo-reflects-the-limits-of-u-s-sanction>.

110 Reisboard, Jonah (2025) Expo Participant Database, *Flourish*, <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/22982615>.

4.2 Protests and residency status

The close relations between the Chinese and Kazakh governments have triggered protests in Kazakhstan with anti-Chinese sentiment fuelled by environmental concerns, lack of transparency, land grabbing, and the treatment of ethnic minority Kazakhs in China.¹¹¹ In 2016, land reforms that enabled foreign companies to purchase significant amounts of farmland in Kazakhstan were considered by civil society actors to be designed for Chinese investment, triggering protests across the country.¹¹² Local citizens in three cities protested against the construction of Chinese factories in Kazakhstan in 2019, described by protestors as threatening to the environment while holding signs, “no to China expansion” and “no Chinese plants.”¹¹³

Even though very few of the staff at the CSOs interviewed for this project experienced direct transnational repression by Chinese authorities, they considered China’s diplomatic and economic relations with Kazakhstan to be the reason that they were targeted by local authorities for documenting or advocating on rights issues related to China. Of particular concern were the asymmetry of genuinely free travel under the free visa arrangements between the two countries¹¹⁴ with all CSOs reporting that relatively few ethnic Kazakhs are permitted to travel from China and staff of CSOs would not be permitted to China.

111 Baldakova, Oyuna (2022) Kazakhstan’s three-way balancing act between competing powers is under pressure. *Merics*. <https://merics.org/en/kazakhstans-three-way-balancing-act-between-competing-powers-under-pressure>.

112 Abdurasulov, A. (2016) “Kazakhstan’s land reform protests explained,” *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36163103>.

113 Maclean, W. (2019) “Dozens protest against Chinese influence in Kazakhstan,” *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kazakhstan-china-protests-idUSKCN1VP1B0/>.

114 Radio Free Europe/Radio Free Liberty’s Kazakh Service (2025) “Kazakh Senate Ratifies Deal With China To Exchange Citizens’ Personal Data,” *RFE/REL*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakh-senate-ratifies-china-deal-personal-data/32624281.html>.

Those who have travelled in the last two years have been strictly controlled and placed under surveillance by the Chinese authorities, including being given precise instructions on what to avoid talking about with their relatives.

The data sharing agreement on citizens who migrate between the two countries, described by the *South China Morning Post* as “closing route for some,”¹¹⁵ was highlighted by all CSOs interviewed as a key concern because it enabled cross-border surveillance between the two countries of any staff in CSOs, potentially labelled as promoting “separatism, terrorism, and extremism.”

An International Legal Initiative statement¹¹⁶ and submission to the U.N. Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Kazakhstan¹¹⁷ claims that article 2 of the agreement, which includes provisions to share information on refugees and asylum seekers from China, is a “threat to the security of those who have applied for asylum in Kazakhstan.” ILI documentation shows that significant numbers of people fleeing persecution and torture in China have been detained in Kazakhstan for attempting to apply for asylum and can be denied citizenship for doing so.¹¹⁸ The most recent UNHCR submission to the UPR notes how refugee status in Kazakhstan must be renewed every year, though

115 Zhao, Ziwen & Bela, Victoria (2023) “China-Kazakhstan to share migration data, closing route for some, including from Xinjiang, keen to bypass Beijing,” *South China Morning Post*, <https://archive.ph/EnDR5>.

116 International Legal Initiative (2023) “Implications of the adoption of the agreement on the exchange of information between Kazakhstan and China.”

117 International Legal Initiative (2024) “Submission of the International Legal Initiative on Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” <https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2024-11/InternationalLegalInitiativePublicFoundation.pdf>.

118 International Legal Initiative (2024) “Submission of the International Legal Initiative on Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” <https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2024-11/InternationalLegalInitiativePublicFoundation.pdf>, p.3.

some participants claim it can be every 3-6 months. Refugees face increasing difficulties in extending their status and that the penal code is punishing those who attempt to apply for asylum as described by the ILI.¹¹⁹

4.3 Case Studies

Given its proximity to and historical connections with Uyghurs and Kazakhs across the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Kazakhstan is a particularly significant location in the documentation of arbitrary detention and torture in the PRC. Many crucial testimonies of camp survivors are of those born in Kazakhstan or of Kazakh ethnicity.¹²⁰ For example, Gulbahar Jelilova¹²¹ and Qalbinur Sidik¹²² have testified to government and public tribunals on their experiences of arbitrary detention and the camp system, providing crucial timely accounts of its practical operation and evidence of rights abuses.

119 UNHCR (2025) “UNHCR Submission for the Universal Periodic Review – Kazakhstan – UPR 48th Session (2025),” <http://bit.ly/44Sq6gH>

120 See: Polverini, Lea (2023) “China’s prison camps in Xinjiang – in pictures,” *the Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/gallery/2023/dec/28/china-prison-camps-xinjiang-kazakhstan-uyghurs-kazakhs-in-pictures>; Steenberg, Rune (2024) “Remote ethnographic glances across the Chinese border: part 1,” *Remote Ethnography XUAR*, <https://www.remote-xuar.com/post/remote-ethnographic-glances-across-the-chinese-border-part-1>.

121 Jelilova, Gulbahar (2025) “Written Testimony,” *the China Tribunal*, <https://chinatribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Gulbahar-Jelilova.pdf>; Jelilova, Gulbahar (2021) “Witness statement,” *the Uyghur Tribunal* <https://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/06-0900-JUN-21-UTFW-004-Gulbahar-Jelilova-English.pdf>.

122 Sidik, Qelbinur (2021) “Witness statement,” *the Uyghur Tribunal*, <https://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/04-0930-JUN-21-UTFW-005-Qelbinur-Sidik-English-1.pdf>; Sidik, Qelbinur (2023) “Testimony of Qelbinur Sidik,” *Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party – Hearing on the CCP’s ongoing Uyghur genocide*, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/ZS/ZS00/20230323/115543/HHRG-118-ZS00-Wstate-SidikQ-20230323.pdf>.

One anonymous Uyghur participant who had worked for an international NGO described how they discovered their laptops were hacked and unusual activity in their home was detected after they reported the issue. They obtained professional cyber security support, which provided advice and a new clean network and devices. This prevented further cyber harassment and observable surveillance, however, the participant stressed that small Uyghur advocacy groups in the country had already been dismantled under this type of surveillance and pressure from police and local government. This made capacity building training for organisations impossible and had left new arrivals living in fear: “it is too dangerous now and they want to go to Turkey...we have to protect ourselves from our local government.” They lamented that extensive, targeted local government and police pressure on small events meant that there were now no active Uyghur-led advocacy organisations and that the reduction in funding from US government sources since February 2025 had left existing organisations and the community without any capacity to document rights abuses.

The **International Legal Initiative (ILI)** is one of the few organisations that works with Uyghurs and Kazakhs who have recently fled China. Its mission is described as “educational and human rights activities that promote public awareness” and “participation in legislative reforms to promote human rights.”¹²³ The highly influential Kazakh-led **Atajurt**¹²⁴ organisation was central in the documentation

123 The International Legal Initiative (n.d.) “Mission,” <https://ilifoundation.org/ru/missija>.

124 Williamson, Hugh (2019) “Silencing of Activist Shows Kazakhstan’s Contempt for Rights,” *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/21/silencing-activist-shows-kazakhstans-contempt-rights>; RFE/RL Kazakh Service (2023) “Kazakh Court Rejects Atazhurt Movement’s Complaint Over Registration,” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-atazhurt-atajurt-registration-xinjiang-bilash/32617090.html>.

process of initial testimonies from China in 2017 but has now been forced to operate underground. The publicly registered organisation with the same name was described by 5 separate participants as problematic in its disconnection from the relevant communities and potential infiltration by surveillance agents.¹²⁵

Despite the numerous obstacles to civil society organisations that operate in Almaty described in section 4.2, almost all participants warned that the environment was considerably more relaxed in Almaty than other parts of Kazakhstan where police pressure and brutality is considerably more threatening, particularly in the regions that border China. These comments described photographs of key civil society actors in Kazakhstan on display at the border as official examples of serious criminal activity. Nevertheless, each of the 17 individuals interviewed in Almaty described encountering forms of local police or government pressure, and how they had to take precautions to regularly change phones or have devices analysed by professionals in response to suspected and confirmed Pegasus attacks. They say they always remain vigilant in public spaces because the authorities' informants would be listening. They considered cybersecurity a crucial form of preventing harassment by the authorities but also that human surveillance and police harassment were unavoidable.

125 See: Pannier, Bruce (2019) "Analysis: Official Trickery? Pro-Government Atazhurt Gets Registered In Kazakhstan," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-kazakhstan-atajurtregistered-pro-government/30213406.html>.

The interview responses included multiple reports of how new arrivals from China are harassed by threatening calls and messages from Chinese authorities, using their families to pressure them. However, organisations in Kazakhstan reported almost no direct pressure from the Chinese authorities. They all described how the harassment was conducted by local authorities, but they believed, and some claimed to be told by police, that Chinese pressure on the Kazakh government was the source of the repression because their work did not criticise the Kazakh government. Participants were highly aware of the risks related to their work and used established, trusted professional networks to scan devices and conduct background checks. However, other than ILI which had significant in-house legal expertise, most operate in secrecy to avoid localised, indirect transnational repression and to document rights abuses in China, provide advocacy platforms to those who had fled persecution, or even to establish education centres for recently arrived children.

4.3.1 Case Study I: Aina Shormanbayeva (The International Legal Initiative)



“We are protecting civic space.”

The **International Legal Initiative** (ILI)¹²⁶ is an independent human rights organisation with offices in Almaty and Geneva. Through civic education, research, advocacy, and litigation, ILI promotes active citizenship, democracy, and human rights to achieve legislative and constitutional reform. The ILI provides direct legal assistance to

¹²⁶ International Legal Initiative (n.d.) <https://www.facebook.com/p/International-Legal-Initiative-100057636730289>.

new arrivals from the PRC and when possible, to imprisoned ethnic Kazakhs and Uyghurs detained in Xinjiang.

Aina Shormanbayeva is the president of the ILI and a legal specialist who has worked to protect all migrants, including those from Xinjiang. The ILI was established in Kazakhstan in 2010 and in Geneva in 2017. In Kazakhstan, the ILI actively defends civic space by legally challenging government attempts to restrict freedoms, and they consistently advocate for the rights of civil society organisations that have historically been seen as threats to those in power in Kazakhstan: “in Kazakhstan, we are protecting civic space. We always claim to the court, file to the court, regarding any attempts of the government to adopt laws on foreign agents...Every year there are different attempts to squeeze the civic space, and we always fight for the civic space, including freedom of association for civil society organisations.”

Aina explained how the controversial foreign agents laws discussed in section 4.2 is based on paranoia about state security and the influence of foreign values but seriously affects her work: “our authorities are the successors of the Soviet system. We still have the Gulag system... and we still have old communists in power. Nothing changed in their perception. So that’s why we are the foreign agents for them. And we are spies.” When asked how she counters smears, she explained that she emphasises the fruits of her labour: “We’re just doing our work and show the real results. The real results are the best protection for us.” However, she explained that “many organisations died because of this status of national security in Kazakhstan. Not related to Xinjiang, but strong public movements and associations,” referring to the authorities’ widespread crackdown on civil rights following anti-government protests in January 2022.

When the CCP's crackdown campaign intensified during 2017 in Xinjiang, members of the Kazakh and Uyghur diasporas began losing contact with their forcibly disappeared family members and felt compelled to organize press conferences to raise public awareness in Kazakhstan. ILI's lawyer in Astana helped victims' families hold their first press conference in Astana in October 2017, followed by another in Almaty in November.

The ILI then also collaborated with Atajurt Kazakh Human Rights, an organisation advocating for Kazakhs detained in Xinjiang, to gather testimonies and use legal mechanisms, including the United Nations, to bring attention to widespread human rights abuses. In 2018, ILI launched a medical assistance program for survivors of the Xinjiang internment camps. It began with crowdfunding and was later supported by the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and Freedom House, providing medical, psychological, and financial assistance.

For ethnic Kazakhs, Kazakhstan is a place of shared cultural and ancestral roots. Many Kazakhs from Xinjiang either hold citizenship or have close family members who are Kazakhstani nationals. Drawing on Kazakhstan's national laws and deep cultural and familial ties, the ILI submitted hundreds of petitions to the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The ILI requested assistance from the Kazakhstan government in locating missing relatives, the release of individuals, the return of confiscated passports, and the reunification of families in Kazakhstan.

Some of these cases were partially successful, though it is difficult to determine the exact number due to China's transnational repression. In some instances, family members in Xinjiang, pressured by Xinjiang police, urged their relatives in Kazakhstan to stop speaking out or to reveal the positive outcomes they had achieved. In other cases, families didn't speak publicly on the matter because they feared that acknowledging a positive outcome could lead to retaliation from Chinese authorities, putting their loved ones in Xinjiang at greater risk.

Aina also expressed her frustration over being unable to help victims of transnational repression, including a case involving a Kazakh individual who disappeared at the border. According to Aina and three additional local CSOs, Chinese authorities abducted some Kazakhs from the Kazakh side of the border during the height of mass detentions in Xinjiang and forcibly took them to China, including Askar Azatbek.¹²⁷

Additionally, some naturalised Kazakh citizens are currently serving prison sentences in Xinjiang. Due to counterterrorism cooperation between China and Kazakhstan under the SCO mechanism, alongside close economic ties, topics related to China's transnational repression and the situation in Xinjiang have become highly sensitive within the country. Within the Kazakh and Uyghur communities, many are suspected informants who provide intelligence to Chinese and local security authorities, making it difficult to establish trust. As a result, people are often afraid to seek help, fearing that contacting the wrong person could lead to being misidentified or targeted—potentially

127 Standish, Reid (2019) 'Kazakhs are the latest in victims of Chinese war on Islam,' *the Independent*, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/china-islam-kazakh-reeducaton-camp-communism-a8813866.html.

putting themselves or their family members in Xinjiang at serious risk: “sometimes we won’t even go to the Uyghur organisations because of the fear. Yes, they even have mistrust of each other.”

The ILI does enjoy a certain degree of visibility and protection as a legally registered organisation with strong connections within the international community, but they have still faced serious threats.

One example Aina shared with us was the planned assassination attempts against her: To establish direct contact with victims and their families, Aina travelled long distances to eastern Kazakhstan, the border regions, and even Uzbekistan. She mentioned that, during her conversations with Kazakh interviewees, she often felt pressured by Kazakh government officials and was frequently followed by vehicles. However, the most dangerous situation arose when she attempted to contact Uyghur victims. While in Uzbekistan, her movements were being monitored by local authorities, and she was poisoned the day before her departure. While there is no direct evidence linking this to the Chinese government, Aina believes it was a tactic employed by China to prevent her from contacting Uyghur victims: “I believe it’s a joint operation, as all the Central Asian countries are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation”.

This was not the only instance in which she faced threats to her personal safety. Another incident took place in Kazakhstan, when ILI was speaking with hundreds of people and David Novak was filming his documentary, *All Static and Noise*. During that time, unlicensed vehicles followed the ILI staff and her colleagues, who were later targeted in a staged car accident that deliberately struck them, mentioned in the film.

Many organisations in Kazakhstan have been forced to shut down or operate in secret after being labelled national security threats under the recent NGO laws. Even strong public movements and civil associations have faced pressure, though this is not necessarily related to Xinjiang. Authorities in Kazakhstan often infiltrate such organisations. Aina's organisation has managed to survive because it is not membership-based, focuses on legal aid and human rights, and consists of only Aina and one colleague, which makes it more difficult to infiltrate. They also handle civil cases unrelated to Xinjiang, meaning the authorities do not perceive the organisation as posing a high-level national security threat or as being "anti-China."

To prevent and counter transnational repression targeting her safety, Aina has also become more cautious and has deliberately changed her behaviour. She now prefers private meetings—either behind closed doors, at someone's home, or in an office—rather than meeting people in public settings. When working on Xinjiang-related projects, she also avoids eating or drinking anything served in public spaces to avoid being poisoned.

4.3.2 Case Study II: Bekzat Maxutkanuly (Nagyz Atajurt human rights organisation)



“We have faced countless forms of repression.”

Bekzat Maxutkanuly was born in Bole, Xinjiang, and moved to Kazakhstan in the late 1990s. Over the years, he worked as an English teacher and in the oil industry. For much of his early life in Kazakhstan, he remained apolitical. That changed in 2016, when the Kazakh government introduced a controversial proposal to lease

agricultural land to Chinese entities (see section 4.2). The policy sparked widespread concern over national sovereignty. For the first time, Bekzat participated in a public protest. He was arrested, fined, and released.

In 2017, after hearing a speech by Serikzhan Bilash, a well-known human rights defender and the co-founder of the **Nagy Atajurt Human rights organisation**, Maxutkanuly joined the organisation. Atajurt played a key role in documenting and publicising cases of Kazakh and other Turkic minorities imprisoned in China, particularly the initial testimonies of camp survivors. The group relied entirely on grassroots donations and volunteer-led initiatives.

Serikzhan Bilash was arrested for his role in the organisation and placed under house arrest in 2019. However, he was not confined to his own home in Almaty, but rather, to Maxutkanuly's apartment in Astana. During that time, both were subjected to threats and surveillance. On one occasion, five officers from Kazakhstan's national security service entered Maxutkanuly's home without a warrant. Three officers went directly to the room where Bilash was staying, and the other two entered the kitchen. Maxutkanuly feared they were going to poison Bilash. On another occasion, an ambulance arrived for no apparent reason, apparently to transport Bilash, even though no request had been made for an ambulance. The intimidation was constant.

Bilash, the leader of Atajurt at the time, was eventually released under strict conditions and according to Maxutkanuly, these included a seven-year ban on his human rights advocacy, which the police called "political work." Bilash currently lives in exile in the United States. Despite these challenges, Atajurt members continued its work

in Kazakhstan under new leadership. However, attempts to operate openly were met with obstruction through legal efforts and pressure. They were repeatedly evicted from rented offices, and efforts to formally register Atajurt were systematically blocked by local officials. In contrast, he says that pro-government individuals then created “fake organisations” under the same name with the goal of sowing confusion and paranoia, and to undermine their credibility.

Since then, Atajurt’s members have faced mounting financial repression. Over thirty members were fined, and even donors who contributed modest sums—sometimes as little as \$5—were targeted with large fines. In total, fines against the group and its supporters reached more than 10 million Kazakhstani tenge: “We have no financial backing—no foreign funding. We rely solely on grassroots donations. But even these are targeted. Over thirty members of our group have received fines, and even our donors are punished. People who gave us just \$5 or \$10 were fined up to \$2,000.” Members’ bank accounts were frozen, and travel restrictions were imposed on their families: “Our bank accounts were frozen. The government is clearly trying to break us financially. We are not allowed to travel abroad, and neither are our children.”

Maxutkanuly himself was detained twice after protesting Kazakhstan’s visa-free travel agreement with China. He was jailed for 15 days on the first occasion, during a Chinese state visit to Kazakhstan, and for 10 days in the second instance. Authorities accused him and others of “damaging the friendship between China and Kazakhstan”: “The repression we face is primarily from the Kazakh government, but much of it is due to pressure from China or its expanding soft power within the country.”

Atajurt's activism has continued in secrecy, but it is constantly threatened and targeted by Chinese surveillance. The group's members have been blacklisted at the Khorgos border checkpoint with China. Photos and contact details of Atajurt activists, including Bilash, Maxutkanuly, are reportedly used to screen travellers and some are on display at the border crossing. Anyone found with their images or phone numbers on a device is stopped for interrogation and often denied entry into China.

According to Yerkinbek Nurakyn, another Atajurt member, Chinese transnational repression in Kazakhstan extends beyond diplomatic pressure. Nurakyn began protesting after his family members were detained in Xinjiang. His appeals to the Kazakh Foreign Ministry were met with indifference; officials stated that it was "China's internal affair." Meanwhile, he claimed that Chinese companies operating in Kazakhstan routinely use administrative hurdles, such as delaying Kazakhs born in Xinjiang's pension paperwork, to silence dissent. Nurakyn also recalled an incident in which his son was attacked but instead of investigating, Kazakh police told his son to warn his father to stop his activism against China: "Tell your father to stop his anti-China activities. It could ruin your future."

The case of Atajurt illustrates the severe pressure faced by grassroots human rights organisations in Kazakhstan. Their work documenting abuses in China has drawn intense scrutiny from both Beijing and Kazakh authorities, the latter of which, from these accounts, appears increasingly responsive to Chinese political and economic influence. Atajurt's members acknowledged that, with no resources beyond mobile phones, they counter TNR by raising international awareness on the internet: "Our only tool of resistance is our mobile phones—we use them to expose everything."

4.3.3 Case Study III: Ravkat Mukhtarov (Jana Cekara Initiative)



“People need to know that the Uyghur community here is also being pressured”

Ravkat Mukhtarov is an ethnic Uyghur who was born and raised in Kazakhstan. For most of his life, he had little connection to his ancestral homeland of Xinjiang. Like many members of the Uyghur diaspora in Central Asia, he grew up in a different political context. However, everything changed when he started seeing international news reports about the mass detention of Uyghurs in China’s Xinjiang

region. His concern soon turned personal when his remaining relatives in Xinjiang suddenly cut all contact with him: “we received a message from them, “don’t contact us.” That’s when we lost connection with them.” This unexpected and unexplained silence was a turning point. He realised that something grave was happening and that he could no longer ignore it: “since 2017, observing the atrocities and genocide...I just couldn’t be indifferent...that was the moment I probably understood that I’m Uyghur.”

Motivated by the escalating repression in Xinjiang and the forced disappearance of his relatives, he became active in raising awareness about human rights abuses in the region. Despite the climate of fear and censorship, he recognised that Kazakhstan, home to an estimated 300,000 ethnic Uyghurs, could serve as a crucial platform to spotlight these issues and believed it was essential to break the silence.

What began with following news stories and holding solo protests at the Chinese embassy in Astana gradually turned into a deeper commitment. He faced no trouble after those protests, but problems arose when he began to network and connect with like-minded colleagues to hold public events. In 2022, Mukhtarov became one of the organizers of the **Jana Cekara** Film Festival.¹²⁸ “Jana Cekara” means “new frontier” in Kazakh, a translation of the official Chinese name, “Xinjiang.” The festival aimed to raise awareness of the human rights crisis in Xinjiang by showcasing the region’s identity, language, culture, and history through films, discussions, and local community engagement. The organisers hoped to foster solidarity within the Uyghur and Kazakh communities in Almaty by using cinema as a tool of resistance and education.

128 Tarim Network (2024) ‘Hide and seek: touring the Jana Cekara Film Festival Exhibition,’ <https://www.thetarimnetwork.com/post/hide-and-seek-touring-the-jana-cekara-film-festival-exhibition>.

Supported by Freedom House, the film festival was scheduled for October 2022 in Almaty. The curated selection included eleven films by Uyghur, Kazakh, and other Central Asian filmmakers that explored themes such as family separation, cultural resistance, language loss, camp survivor stories, and the broader context of state violence in the Xinjiang region. The team had also planned public discussions to accompany the screenings in hopes of creating a safe space for dialogue.

However, just days before the festival was set to begin, the organisers encountered unexpected problems. The Kazakh National Security Committee (NSC) intervened by pressuring the venue providers to cancel the event. According to Mukhtarov, the NSC made direct references to “red lines”—implying that any open discussion or criticism about China’s policies in Xinjiang was politically sensitive and off-limits. The sudden obstruction from the authorities revealed how the influence of the Chinese government extended into neighbouring countries, suppressing independent voices and public discourse about Xinjiang even beyond China’s borders.

Faced with this last-minute pressure, the festival volunteers and participants quickly convened to decide on their next steps. While some considered cancelling the event altogether to avoid further trouble, the group ultimately chose a different path. “We decided to go public,” Mukhtarov said. “Because this is the kind of pressure in Kazakhstan that shouldn’t go unnoticed or be hidden. People need to know that the Uyghur community here is also being pressured.”

The festival organisers quickly adapted. Rather than allowing the cancellation to silence them, they decided to move the screenings online. The digital festival went forward, and the films were shared with an even broader audience than originally planned. Their decision not only kept the message alive but also exposed the subtle yet powerful forms of censorship and surveillance operating within Kazakhstan by Chinese's influences.

Despite the risks, Mukhtarov and his team have worked to stay safe while continuing their activism. "I think we're pretty good at keeping ourselves safe—as much as we can be," he said. "People like me and my colleagues know some security protocols, and we use them when necessary. We're quite aware that our phones might be compromised by security services. We regularly check our devices." This awareness of cybersecurity has become one of their means to prevent TNR. Mukhtarov stressed the importance of basic training for activists, particularly in digital and personal security.

Soon after the online screenings, Mukhtarov received alarming news: at the border between China and Kazakhstan, Chinese border police showed a Uyghur man a photo of one of the filmmakers whose film had been screened at the festival. The police asked if he recognised the person and what they knew about them. This incident confirmed to him that Chinese authorities were monitoring cultural and political activities beyond their borders and tracking dissent, even in film and art.

Reflecting on the broader challenges of TNR, Mukhtarov emphasised the need for stronger international solidarity. He noted that although human rights organisations and civil society actors outside the region have raised alarm, local diplomats and officials in Kazakhstan have largely remained silent on the issue. “It would help a lot if local diplomats spoke more openly about these issues,” he said. “But that hasn’t been the case here.”

Lastly, Mukhtarov raised concerns about the effects of TNR on everyday life in the Uyghur and Kazakh communities in Kazakhstan. Even those who are not directly involved in activism face difficulties. Repeating the theme recounted by multiple participants, he said that “many people are having trouble getting citizenship.” “They can’t bring all the necessary documents, and that’s holding them back from securing legal status. This is one of the silent ways repression travels—by making life harder for ordinary people.”

5 | The United Kingdom

- **Political system:** Democracy
- **Economic development:** Very high (HDI: 0.946)
- **Relations with external state:** Mixed
- **Uyghur population numbers:** Approximately 300-500
- **Key issues:** Cyber harassment, threatening calls and private messages, harassment or surveillance of associates, targeting of vulnerable groups (e.g., Uyghurs), physical surveillance, travel restrictions (e.g., fieldwork, passport confiscation), psychological pressure.
- **Preventative Measures:** well-resourced cyber-security, reporting to authorities, confidentiality, access to expertise on security issues, reporting mechanisms with follow-up measures, background checks, specialised counselling, office security.

As a democratic society, the landscape for civil society organisations in the U.K. is significantly more open and offers wider access to professional security resources than more restrained environments in Türkiye and Kazakhstan. Although popular media debates regarding the role of “lefty lawyers” in civil society caused consternation in the sector,¹²⁹ robust public discussion and legal commitments to civil rights mean that this rhetoric may be challenging but has not presented the same obstacles to documenting or advocating against human rights abuses found in authoritarian and competitive authoritarian states.

129 Falconer, Charles (2023) “Lefty lawyers, ‘enemies of the people’: how upholding the law is a crime in some eyes,” *the Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/aug/12/lefty-lawyers-enemies-of-people-upholding-law-a-crime>; Goldsmith, Jonathan (2023) “Tearing up the ‘lefty lawyers’ script,” *the Law Society Gazette*, <https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/commentary-and-opinion/tearing-up-the-lefty-lawyers-script/5115415.article>.

Although the authors' previous research on transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora in the U.K. found around two thirds of the community have experienced threats to themselves or family members, the levels of feeling safe were significantly higher than in Türkiye, which qualitative interviews demonstrated were related to trust that government would not collaborate with China.¹³⁰

The U.K.'s democratic environment and professionalised non-profit sector offers significant pre-emptive protection against TNR in the form of cybersecurity training, data protection, and security expertise. As described in most interviews, these measures protect those who work in organisations, which address Uyghur-related issues, from TNR. International organisations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch with budgets and access to resources significantly greater than Uyghur or Kazakh-led organisations in Central Asia are often predominant in the advocacy and public events on these issues in the UK.

Large-scale international organisations have the advantage of access to wide audiences and resources that prevent TNR. However, the INGO sector is often criticised for “poor accountability,” due to being solely accountable to their Board of Directors, rather than the communities they ostensibly serve.¹³¹ The work of INGOs is also stretched across rights issues in numerous communities, and their narrow selection of issues and community voices in the Uyghur case does not demonstrate the same level engagement with or knowledge of Uyghur communities as CSOs in Türkiye and Kazakhstan.

130 Tobin, David and Nyrola Elimä (2023) “‘We know you better than you know yourself’: China’s transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora,” *The University of Sheffield*, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/las/research/east-asia/we-know-you-better-you-know-yourself-chinas-transnational-repression-uyghur-diaspora>, p.36-37 & 42.

131 Megersa, Kelbesa (2022) ‘Strengths and Weaknesses of INGOs in Delivering Development Outcomes,’ *Institute of Development Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.19088/K4D.2022.090>, p.10.

Large INGOs in the UK play a key role in knowledge production by yielding considerable influence over which issues and advocates are selected for amplification in public life. However, without deeper engagement in those communities, this influence cannot reflect their concerns or the issues that Uyghur and Kazakh-led organisations focus on in Türkiye or Kazakhstan, including welfare, education, citizenship, and capacity-building as deeper, longer-term efforts to prevent TNR.

In general, there is limited research on TNR in the U.K. upon which to draw, with the research focus and available advocacy resources split between multiple PRC diaspora groups, including Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, Tibetans, and Han dissidents. The widespread targeting of ordinary Uyghurs in the U.K. is an issue that CSOs should urgently address in considerably more detail for the sake of accuracy in documentation but also to more effectively distribute scarce resources and direct attention to those most in need. Uyghur communities remain marginalised in the CSO-driven research and policy discussions on TNR in the UK, which organisations should mitigate by engaging more widely and deeply with those communities.

The **Amnesty International** (2024) report, “*On my campus I am afraid*,” effectively documents the experiences of Han Chinese students in Britain.¹³² The documented practices of cyber harassment and physical surveillance match the findings in this research. However, the analysis does not address the significance that Chinese students are targeted for their actions and opinions, while ordinary Uyghurs are universally targeted as a suspicious group related to China’s authoritarian domestic policy environment and ethno-nationalist

132 Amnesty International (2024) “‘On my campus I am afraid’: China’s targeting of overseas students,” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ASA1780062024ENGLISH.pdf>.

security practices. Uyghurs are the group most vulnerable to TNR from the PRC and cannot wield the same resources to advocate in British public life as Chinese students.

UK-based CSOs, therefore, must urgently address this targeting based on the principles of human need and for the sake of accurate documentation. Documenting how TNR practices vary according to their targets is essential to constructing an accurate evidence-base, and to informing any practically useful guidance to those who are targeted but have limited access to social support or resources. For example, even the individuals who reported the most severe forms of TNR in U.K.-based CSOs were all Uyghurs, while those from Britain tended to report relatively minimal TNR.

5.1 Official guidance on transnational repression

The key issues that Uyghur diaspora members raised in 2023 were that low population numbers and experiences of social isolation mean that they need improved access to community spaces for meetings and cultural events, and clearer government guidance on TNR.¹³³ Since then, the Home Office has published clear guidelines on how to report TNR to the authorities and list the practices considered to constitute TNR, namely harassment, surveillance, threats of violence, and attempts to forcibly return individuals to their country of origin.¹³⁴

133 Tobin, David and Nyrola Elimä (2023) “‘We know you better than you know yourself’: China’s transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora,” *The University of Sheffield*, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/las/research/east-asia/we-know-you-better-you-know-yourself-chinas-transnational-repression-uyghur-diaspora>, p.43.

134 U.K. Home Office (2025) “What to do if you think you are a victim of transnational repression,” <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transnational-repression/what-to-do-if-you-think-you-are-the-victim-of-transnational-repression>.

The guidelines could be improved by using a succinct definition of TNR for police who may not be deeply familiar with the issue and could misinterpret state-led TNR practices as ordinary harassment.

One Uyghur participant interviewed stated that they did not believe that diaspora members had read the guidelines and that they should be published in Uyghur language to reach the community. There was limited visible public discussion of the publication of the guidelines, with no media coverage and no CSOs found to have shared the guidelines online. Another Uyghur research participant noted that without clearly described follow-up mechanisms, diaspora members would not report their experiences. This conclusion followed the findings discussed above that the Uyghur diaspora do consider the U.K. a relatively safe haven but they are not yet convinced that government will document or act on their TNR experiences.

The proposed new Chinese embassy building in London¹³⁵ was raised by several participants as an issue of concern, which they felt would compromise their safety and force changes in behaviour, such as avoiding the location and refraining from participating in protests at the site. They cited concerns about enhanced digital and human surveillance of protesters at the site, specifically for those who originate from the PRC or have family remaining in the country who can be threatened by the Chinese authorities. Two participants from the U.K. noted they would be undeterred from exercising their rights to association and assembly but that Uyghurs and colleagues from Hong Kong feel it would be too large a risk for them to attend

135 Sevastopulo, Demetri & Pickard, Jim (2025) "US raises concern over plan for Chinese embassy in London," *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/056c0343-2f8d-4a70-9901-5468894ecf24>; Vickers, Noah (2024) "Council opposes Chinese embassy by Tower of London," BBC News, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdd6yydmd03o>.

protests near the site. Leading Uyghur advocate, Rahima Mahmut, was quoted in public media, stating that “it will be a command centre for transnational repression, monitoring, intimidating, and silencing those who dare to speak up.”¹³⁶ While the media coverage and advocacy commentary on the topic may be hyperbolic, Uyghur community members have raised real concerns and those who work in the civil society space will be unequally affected in the exercise of their rights, depending on their ethnicity and country of origin.

5.2 Case Studies

The small number of Uyghur-related organisations in the U.K. reflects the both the low population numbers relative to the other cases and that the most urgent issues found elsewhere, deportations and local police harassment, are not present. Perhaps the only key Uyghur-lead organisation, **Stop Uyghur Genocide (SUG)** describes its mission as “raising awareness and driving action across British society in response to the ongoing genocide of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples in the Uyghur Region.”¹³⁷

SUG’s work in Parliament and in the media reflects the more open political environment in Britain compared to other field-sites and its “cross-party” mission to raise awareness involves high-level advocacy, which smaller organisations in Türkiye and Kazakhstan cannot so easily access. Nevertheless, the SUG Director, Rahima Mahmut, who fled China after the Ghülja massacre of 1997, then experienced personalised attacks and threats to her family. Considerable experience

136 Ingram, Ruth (2025) “A Row Brews Over Plans for Chinese Mega Embassy in London,” *Bitter Winter*, <https://bitterwinter.org/a-row-brews-over-plans-for-chinese-mega-embassy-in-london>.

137 Stop Uyghur Genocide (n.d.) “Our Mission,” <https://www.stopuyghurgenocide.uk>.

and access to professional cyber security advice has significantly reduced the transnational repression she faces (see section 5.2.2).

Like Yalkun Uluyol of **Human Rights Watch**, who describes how he disconnected from his family in China for their personal safety and to avoid TNR, Rahima has experienced targeting as a Uyghur that is qualitatively different from the harassment of British-born citizens. Most British-born citizens who participated in this project reported minimal harassment and none reported the targeting of their associates for surveillance as described in previous chapters. Nevertheless, the psychological pressure experienced by British-born advocates who are targeted by cyber harassment, including through phishing emails, impersonation attempts, and online trolling, was highlighted by three individuals as an unavoidable part of their work.

Three individuals working for large NGOs noted that Uyghur colleagues and other diaspora members from China do experience more targeted harassment and even threats to their families, which are considered in both risk management and in-house counselling services. They reported experiencing no transnational repression themselves, which is partly attributable to the lesser scale of targeting but also to long-term professional experience in the sector with significant cybersecurity training and access to experts who provide regular updates and advice.

Although organisations in Türkiye and Kazakhstan were all highly responsive, three key organisations working in this area did not respond to interview requests or follow-ups. This is most likely to be attributable to the lower levels of visible harassment they have experienced, but also to a lack of awareness of the severity and impact of the CCP's TNR on the communities they ostensibly serve. The asymmetry in knowledge on TNR issues across this report's field-sites was reflected in the interviews that were relatively surface-level in the UK but highly detailed and aware of transnational connections between different states' security services in Türkiye and Kazakhstan.

The researchers did have to clarify to some non-Uyghur interviewees in the UK that reporting no experiences of TNR is an important data point to establishing patterns of repression and subsequent prevention efforts. While participants in Türkiye and Kazakhstan routinely raised the issue of the harassment and monitoring of their associates, this was rarely commented on by non-Uyghur participants in the UK. It was unclear if this difference reflected a safer environment or complacency and a lack of awareness that this form of harassment is a documented TNR practice that seriously impacts Uyghur communities and researchers in this area. Non-Uyghur CSOs and their associates are targets for surveillance, therefore, measures such as cybersecurity, communication through encrypted apps, and confidentiality to specifically protect their Uyghur associates are crucial to preventing TNR.

5.2.1 Case Study I: Yalkun Uluyol (Human Rights Watch)



“I don’t try to make contact with anyone back home.”

Yalkun Uluyol is the China researcher at **Human Rights Watch** (HRW),¹³⁸ a leading international non-governmental organisation that investigates and documents human rights violations globally. His

138 Human Rights Watch (n.d.) <https://www.hrw.org/about/people/yalkun-uluyol>.

work focuses on documenting abuses committed against Uyghurs and other marginalised communities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, as well as tracking the Chinese government's growing transnational repression on Uyghur diaspora communities.

Due to HRW's long-standing position on China and its human rights record, the organisation itself faces restrictions that significantly impact how its researchers operate. "Human Rights Watch's previous executive director and China director were sanctioned by the Chinese government," Uluyol explains. "so, most of our China work is desk-based and relies on open source materials and interviews with people in exile." This means that HRW does not engage directly with individuals inside China, limiting their access to first-hand information: "it restricts your ability to conduct wider scale research or in-depth analysis of the situations on the ground," he adds.

Security risks are not limited to HRW staff—they could also affect the people they speak with. "If people talk to us and they're identifiable, then they're probably going to be targeted by the Chinese government. That directly affects the physical security of our study participants, so that is the number one concern," says Uluyol. To protect interviewees, HRW prioritizes anonymity, in addition, Uluyol prefers to use encrypted communication tools, and often conducts interviews in person rather than online. "We never pressure anyone to disclose more than they're comfortable with," he adds. "Everyone has a risk appetite, and we respect those who are cautious about their or their family's security."

These safety protocols create their own challenges, especially when it comes to producing publicly verifiable evidence. The strongest cases often rely on people who are willing to speak out publicly and be identified, but Uluyol pointed out victims of transnational repression often underreport or downplay their experiences because they have become so normalised. Uluyol said: “Someone may say, ‘I haven’t experienced much,’ and then go on to describe serious cases of intimidation or surveillance.” These stories reflect how widespread repression has become so much so that many individuals no longer see it as abnormal.

Uluyol also points to the evolving nature of transnational repression and how authoritarian states use different tactics that reflect their domestic governance and repression strategy: “The Chinese government is carrying out one of the most sophisticated campaigns against critics abroad. This includes issuing arrest warrants and bounties for Hong Kong activists, collective punishment, especially of Uyghur families in China, and—according to our latest research—using restrictions on travel to and from the Uyghur region to control and silence Uyghurs overseas.”

On a personal level, due to security concerns linked to his public role as a researcher and advocacy, Uluyol has chosen not to maintain contact with family members in China. “I don’t try to make contact with anyone back home,” he explains, acknowledging the likelihood that he is on a government blacklist. This decision is a preventive measure intended to reduce potential risks to himself and to those in Xinjiang who could be placed under surveillance or pressure due to his work. “I still am doing my research and my advocacy with my face on. So that puts me kind of in a dangerous position, but still, I didn’t want to go with anonymity because of various other reasons.”

Uluçol notes that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy to prevent transnational repression, as risks vary widely depending on the individual's background, profile, and the methods used by the targeting state. He emphasises that effective prevention starts with understanding individual cases and risk profiles. Regarding state responsibility, Uluçol stresses the need for governments to formally define transnational repression in their legal frameworks and establish clear enforcement mechanisms to respond to related threats and complaints. Without clear definitions and accountability structures, legislation alone is unlikely to deter such abuses.

5.2.2 Case Study II: Rahima Mahmut (Stop Uyghur Genocide)



*“If anyone calls or texts you...
don’t go see them unless you know the person.”*

Rahima Mahmut, former UK Director of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), is a well-known and highly experienced advocate for Uyghur rights. Her advised caution and vigilance when working on these issues emerges from her everyday life. Mahmut’s family in Ghülja have been harassed many times since the late 1990s. Sometimes, they were forced to contact Mahmut and tell her that the government wanted Mahmut to return. The harassment was so severe that her brother

risked his life to inform Mahmut: “My brother was very brave to tell me all that over the phone. I was quite worried about him, but he told me, ‘If anyone calls or texts you claiming to know us, don’t go see them unless you know the person.’”

Mahmut has always been the leader of protests, standing at the forefront. During her public protests, she and other protesters once experienced direct harassment from a UK citizen, highlighting how transnational repression can be conducted by proxy actors from other states. She believes that the Chinese government orchestrated the actions of the UK citizen who disrupted and provoked protesters who lost family members in China’s internment camp by singing the Chinese national anthem and revolutionary songs. “We were there to protest for our family’s release, and he was mocking us,” she said.

Mahmut understood how the WUC had faced TNR in terms of digital security, cybersecurity, and in-person security. Therefore, when she set up the **Stop Uyghur Genocide** (SUG)¹³⁹ organisation, she paid extra attention to cybersecurity, including two-step verification processes and incorporating the separation of work and private computers into funding applications. The SUG experienced two cyberattacks in 2023 and 2024, during which its website was completely taken offline. In response, cybersecurity professionals were engaged to install protective software, which has since been regularly updated by Mahmut to mitigate future risks. Recently, SUG’s team also received training from Frontline Defenders’ digital team.

139 Stop Uyghur Genocide (n.d.) <https://www.stopuyghurgenocide.uk>.

Given the sensitive nature of her work and frequent outreach from unknown individuals, Mahmut routinely conducts basic due diligence or seeks references before engaging. “I really do a due diligence check. I won’t just meet someone who claims to be a journalist or a student researching Uyghurs,” she noted. She also described a phishing attempt in which she received an email appearing to come from a trusted contact and containing an attachment. Before opening it, she verified the message directly with the sender and discovered that the email address was fake, closely resembling the legitimate address but created by an impersonator.

Mahmut also shared an experience in which she believed she was being monitored at a parliamentary event held in London. After overhearing a woman reporting details about the event on the phone in Chinese, she alerted the event organiser. Mahmut said, “You have to be more vigilant. You know what happened before. Two men were charged for spying for China.” She went on to express concern that the UK Parliament should implement more thorough vetting procedures for individuals attending such events: “They can just tell security they’re attending the event in this room, and they’d be allowed to enter—even Parliament.” Mahmut then recommended tightening security procedures at parliamentary venues. “I think security, especially in Parliament—both the police house and the other entrance—should check IDs...Especially for really sensitive events, there should be a list of attendees, and security should cross-check each person’s name against that list.”

5.2.3 Case Study III: Jaya Pathak (Yet Again)



“If civil society organisations do not take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously, it will weaken their argument with governments.”

Jaya Pathak serves as the Executive Director for **Yet Again**,¹⁴⁰ a youth-led initiative “to raise awareness of modern atrocity.” Jaya also serves as the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Uyghurs and is involved in various human rights initiatives within and outside the UK Labour Party. She focuses on atrocity prevention and engages

140 Yet Again (n.d.) <https://uk.linkedin.com/company/yetagainuk>.

with issues related to the actions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Tibet, Taiwan, and the wider Indo-Pacific region.

“My work on atrocity prevention led me to the Uyghur issue. From there, it became clear that the behaviour of the Chinese government needed to be examined across multiple contexts,” Pathak explains. Her Indian background informs her interest in India-China relations and the broader security and human rights implications of Chinese state behaviour.

Pathak raises serious concerns about the operational security practices of civil society organisations working on China-related issues.

Although she praises the internal protocols of the organisations for which she works as having “very good security,” she points out that these standards are inconsistent across the sector. “With civil society organisations, you don’t always know who you’re working with,” she says. “You have to rely on your guts.”

She recalls a recent incident involving a former organisation where a staff member with access to sensitive data was arrested on espionage charges. “This man managed our files—he managed databases. He has my private data,” Pathak recounts. The organisation itself never contacted her. Instead, a former colleague reached out to her privately to advise her to assess her digital security and reevaluate her interactions with the individual in the past. “If I hadn’t had those relationships with former colleagues, I wouldn’t have known anything. That’s my point—we need to know who in any organisation actually understands security and which experts they have access to.”

Pathak pointed out that there is a growing and urgent challenge facing civil society organisations that engage with politically sensitive issues related to China, and her incident indeed highlighted the broader

gap in due diligence and internal risk management. Pathak believes that if civil society organisations do not take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously, it will weaken their argument with governments: “The first thing the government will ask is, ‘What due diligence have you done as an organisation?’”

On a personal level, Pathak takes significant precautions to manage her digital footprint and safeguard her privacy. She is especially vigilant about ensuring that none of her family members are involved in or publicly associated with any of her work activities. This caution stems not only from the sensitive nature of her professional responsibilities but also from a deep awareness of the risks posed by the Chinese government’s surveillance and intimidation tactics. This personal boundary is part of her broader strategy to prevent potential targeting or harassment, a risk that is heightened for individuals with public facing roles in advocacy related to China.

Pathak is deeply engaged in Uyghur advocacy. However, she is not Uyghur herself, and that while she experienced serious forms of harassment and surveillance, she acknowledges that these experiences reflect a different reality than that of the Uyghur and Kazakh communities that are directly targeted by transnational repression. As a non-Uyghur living in the UK, she has not faced the same level of surveillance, threats, or family separation that many Uyghur and Kazakh activists routinely endure. Unlike Uyghur advocates, whose communication with family members in Xinjiang is often cut off due to government pressure, fear, Pathak has been able to maintain relationships with her family without endangering them. Her citizenship and location also allow her to travel more freely and safely, remaining cautious but without fearing monitoring, harassment, or detention due to her activism.

6 | Conclusion

This research has directly engaged with organisations that work with Uyghur and Kazakh diasporas to inform concrete practices towards the prevention and mitigation of transnational repression. **The report finds that civil society organisations working on issues related to Uyghurs face intensifying transnational repression and develop their own mitigation tactics. These tactics can be more effective as a prevention strategy with increased co-ordination of knowledge-sharing, training, and monitoring.**

Transnational repression aims to prevent or restrict the exercise of rights to free speech, association, and assembly outside that state's sovereign jurisdiction. As this report demonstrates, civil society organisations, as key actors in documenting and advocating on rights issues, are targets for harassment by authoritarian states seeking to stifle opposition and control information flows. The prevention efforts of organisations, including cyber security, background checks, and confidentiality, are effective mitigation measures but do not prevent or guarantee freedom from harassment, particularly in targeted communities that report high levels of transnational repression.

This report shows how civil society organisations respond and adapt to transnational repression in different ways because the domestic environment varies dramatically. As transnational repression is often conducted in collaboration with non-state actors or proxies, the role of the host state and open-ness of civil society is crucial in determining successful prevention efforts. The three countries compared demonstrate different guarantees of civil rights and different relations with the state conducting harassment, both of which shaped

the outcomes of transnational repression. Civil society organisations in the U.K. report relatively low levels of harassment and the freedom to advocate, primarily due to existing cybersecurity training and resources. Organisations in Türkiye experience varied levels of transnational repression depending on the organisation's access to resources and relationship with government. While in Kazakhstan, organisations must register with and report to the government, which is tightening the space for rights advocacy, and whose close relations with China are considered by civil society to drive transnational repression.

7 | Recommendations

- 1 **Cyber security training** - Regular access to professional cyber security advice and training for smaller organisations reduces transnational repression. Governments and larger organisations should, therefore, expand knowledge sharing and training for small and new organisations.
- 2 **Safeguarding procedures** - Organisations must implement transparent preventative measures and safeguarding procedures that prioritise the people and data with which they work to protect them from transnational repression.
- 3 **Security support** – Affected groups should be informed regarding the detection or arrests of informants as soon as possible. Security agencies should counter baseless smears that are used by authoritarian states and their proxies to harass advocates and researchers.
- 4 **Amplify more voices** – Organisations should expand their community engagement and avoid over-reliance on a small number of speakers and data sources. This would enhance their accountability to those communities and reduce the risk of disseminating disinformation that is used by authoritarian states to undermine all research on transnational repression and rights abuses.
- 5 **Sharing official guidance** – Organisations and government should share official guidance more widely using traditional and social media. These guidelines do not need to be uncritically commended but sharing the information is crucial to reaching vulnerable groups.

- 6 Defining transnational repression** - Official guidance on TNR should include a clear definition so that both victims and police can distinguish between individual harassment and government-led repression. This report defines transnational repression (TNR) as practices by external governments that aim to prevent or restrict the exercise of people's rights outside that state's sovereign jurisdiction.
- 7 Economic interdependence** – Trade and investment relations with authoritarian states dramatically increases exposure to transnational repression and the severity of the risk it poses to national security and civil rights. Government must manage those risks, firstly by identifying their severity, and secondly, by providing clear methods of prevention.
- 8 Data sharing** – sharing asylum seekers' personal data with the states from which they have fled significantly enhances transnational repression and should cease in line with international legal commitments.
- 9 Residency issues** - Individuals without citizenship are at greatest risk of transnational repression. Governments and civil society organisations should recognise that authoritarian and semi-authoritarian states, including Türkiye and Kazakhstan, are not safe havens for Uyghur asylum seekers nor do they offer freedom from transnational repression.

8 | Appendices

Appendix 1 — Interview Questions

1. **Has your organisation ever experienced the following...**
 - a. Threats to your wellbeing?
 - b. or your family's wellbeing?
 - c. Offers of support to you or your family in return for information, favours, or changes in behaviour?
 - d. Unclear communications or Anonymous contact from officials or police?
 - e. Online surveillance? (phone or email hacking) (unusual friend requests on social media, or trolling)
 - f. Disconnection of family contact via phone, messaging service, or any communication app?
 - g. Physical surveillance? e.g., being followed or questioned
 - h. Monitoring of your friends, colleagues or family members?
 - i. Monitoring at peaceful protests by the Chinese State?
2. **Was your organisation given reasons for this contact/ intimidation? Did you have to ask yourself?**
3. **What was the reason given?**
4. **How did your organisation deal with the problem?**

5. **Did this intimidation force you to change your organisation's behaviour in its state of residence or in its online activities?**
6. **How has your organisation established new processes or methods to prevent future instances of transnational repression?**
7. **Is your organisation safe from interference by the Chinese party state? Why/Why not?**
8. **To what extent would the following make your organisation safer in its current location?**
 - a. More international media coverage
 - b. Supportive statements from political leaders
 - c. The right to residence
 - d. A non-Chinese passport
 - e. The right to safely return home
 - f. Communication with your family
 - g. Your family being able to travel to visit you
 - h. Rights to free speech
 - i. Rights to free association
 - j. Reducing Chinese political influence in your state of residence

Appendix 2 — ‘Decisions concerning the deportation of Turks’



Uluslararası
Doğu Türkistan
STK'lar Birliği



Decisions Concerning the Deportation of Uyghur Turks

Prepared by Yusuf Tusun

Date: 16.03.2025

Introduction:

This briefing note summarizes three separate cases adjudicated by various Administrative Courts in Türkiye concerning the direct or indirect deportation of Uyghur Turks to China. The reasoning behind the rulings, the legal objections raised, and an assessment within the framework of Türkiye's international obligations are presented herein.

CASES 1 AND 2:

- **Summary of the Case:** The 16th and 18th Administrative Courts of Istanbul ruled in favour of the direct extradition of Uyghur Turks Mahemuti Anayeti and Aierken Abuduwaili to China. The courts based their decisions on the assertion that the claimants failed to provide serious and concrete material evidence demonstrating a risk of persecution upon return to their home country. These rulings are significant as they establish a precedent by ordering direct extradition to China, diverging from previous practices. In a public statement issued on 15 March 2025, the Directorate General of Migration

Management of the Republic of Türkiye affirmed that no Uyghur individual has ever been extradited to China in the past and that no such extraditions will occur in the future.

Details of the Court Proceedings:

- **Court:** The 18th Administrative Court of Istanbul
- **Case Number:** 2024/3235
- **Decision Number:** 2025/850
- **Date of Hearing:** 18/02/2025
- **Date of Decision:** 28/02/2025
- **Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office Investigation No:** 2024/226328 (Concluded with non-prosecution decision).
- **Important Dates and Numbers:**
 - **Date of Deportation:** 20/10/2024
 - **Deportation Case Number:** 3181739...18
 - **Date of Detention:** 17/10/2024

- **Date of the Non-Prosecution Decision:** 04/02/2025

CASE 3:

- **Summary of the Case:** Hafize İbrahim, a Uyghur Turk of Chinese nationality, filed a petition seeking the annulment of the deportation order issued by the Istanbul Governorship Provincial Directorate of Migration Management to return her to China. The claimant asserted that she faced a risk of death or torture if sent to China, highlighted that she has four minor children in need of care, and stated that both she and her children hold humanitarian residence permits valid until February 2025. She further indicated that, due to a confidentiality order concerning the ongoing criminal investigation, she was unaware of the investigation's details. The court dismissed the case on the grounds that no serious and concrete evidence was presented to demonstrate a risk of persecution.
- **Details of the Court Proceedings:**
 - **Court:** The 18th Administrative Court of Istanbul
 - **Case Number:** 2024/667
 - **Decision Number:** 2024/2546
- **Important Dates and Numbers:**
 - **Date of Deportation:** 06/09/2024
 - **Date of Court Decision:** 13/12/2024
 - **Validity Date of Humanitarian Residence Permit:** Until February 2025
 - **Istanbul 7th Criminal Peace Court Confidentiality Order, Case Number:** 2024/9464

CASE 4:

- **Summary of the Case:** In the case heard before the 1st Administrative Court of Kayseri, it was determined that the claimant violated Article 54/1 (d) of Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection. Consequently, it was ruled that, should the claimant voluntarily consent, they may be deported to their country of origin or to Kyrgyzstan or Ecuador, designated as safe third countries.
- **Details of the Court Proceedings:**
 - **Court:** The 1st Administrative Court of Kayseri
 - **Case Number:** 2024/2553
 - **Decision Number:** 2025/638
- **Important Dates and Numbers:**
 - **Date of Court Decision:** 12/03/2025

Assessment:

The three distinct court rulings summarised above reveal the differing approaches and legal debates within the Turkish administrative judiciary concerning the deportation of Uyghur Turks. While the decisions in Istanbul raise the possibility of direct extradition to China, the ruling in Kayseri proposes deportation to the country of origin or a safe third country as an alternative. The common denominator across all rulings is the argument that there is insufficient evidence indicating that the individuals' lives would be at risk in the countries to which they would be returned. However, this argument overlooks the systematic human rights violations in East

Turkistan and the findings documented in international reports. The People's Republic of China's systematic oppression and persecution of Uyghur Turks in East Turkistan have been repeatedly documented by the United Nations and international human rights organisations.

An examination of the legal basis of the court rulings reveals inconsistencies with Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention Against Torture, and the Geneva Conventions. Articles 4 and 55 of Law No. 6458 explicitly prohibit deportation to countries where there is a risk of torture, inhuman treatment, or life-threatening conditions. Furthermore, the finality of administrative court decisions and the lack of appeal rights impede legal challenges.

Türkiye's endorsement of UN declarations recognising human rights violations in East Turkistan, coupled with the contradictions of the court rulings with these commitments, pose a serious issue in terms of international obligations and human rights. The documented systematic oppression and persecution of Uyghur Turks by China, alongside the courts' dismissal of such evidence as insufficient, raise significant concerns within the international community.

The precedent set by these rulings for other Uyghur Turks residing in Türkiye endangers their security, facilitates China's extradition demands, and fosters an atmosphere of fear and panic within the Uyghur community, constituting a grave threat to communal safety. Additionally, the difficulties encountered in exceptional citizenship processes and the adverse conditions in deportation centres exacerbate these problems further.

Recommendations:

The relevant decisions of the 16th and 18th Administrative Courts of Istanbul and the 1st Administrative Court of Kayseri must be urgently annulled, and deportation procedures halted. Articles 4 and 55 of Law No. 6458, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, should be rigorously enforced. The United Nations and international human rights organisations' reports on East Turkistan must be duly considered, and the findings therein thoroughly investigated. Türkiye should act in accordance with its international human rights obligations and ensure the protection of the rights of Uyghur Turks.

It is essential to grant exceptional citizenship to Uyghur Turks residing in Türkiye and to reconsider rejected applications. Uyghur Turks held in deportation centres should be released without delay. A special parliamentary session should be convened in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye to discuss human rights violations in East Turkistan. Support programmes for the Uyghur community should be established in cooperation with civil society organisations and international bodies.

