



“On the Fringe of Society”

Humanitarian Needs of the At-Risk Uyghur Diaspora

UHRP

UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT

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About the Uyghur Human Rights Project

The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) promotes the rights of the Uyghur people through research-based advocacy. We publish reports and analysis in English and Chinese to defend Uyghurs' civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights according to international human rights standards.

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I. Executive Summary

The Chinese Party-state’s human rights atrocity crimes in the Uyghur region have caused a secondary humanitarian crisis among Uyghur diaspora communities worldwide. Since 2017, China’s mass incarceration of Turkic peoples in the Uyghur region has affected Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz worldwide, leaving many destitute and traumatized as their family members, including the primary providers, are interred in concentration camps. The Chinese state actively interferes with the ability of Uyghur exiles to meet their basic humanitarian needs, often with the help of foreign governments, subjecting them to harassment, intimidation, surveillance, enforced statelessness, family separation, and community and cultural trauma.

While many governments are guilty of transnational rights violations, including advanced democracies,¹ China has harassed and pursued dissidents overseas on an unprecedented scale — particularly among Uyghur communities. Collectively, the Chinese government’s strategies have created trauma, economic dislocation, and familial separation wherever deployed. The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) and its partner, the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, have documented this extraterritorial pursuit of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples around the world in a series of five reports shedding light on the scope of this campaign since 2017.²

¹ Colleen Barry, “Ex-CIA Agent Convicted in Kidnap Skips Italian Justice,” AP News, October 29, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/b22a5ec9711645c291404073e7113524>.

² See <https://uhrp.org/transnational-repression> and “Repression Across Borders: The CCP’s Illegal Harassment and Coercion of Uyghur Americans,” Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), August 28, 2019, <https://uhrp.org/report/repression-across-borders-the-ccps-illegal-harassment-and-coercion-of-uyghur-americans/>; Bradley Jardine, Edward Lemon, and Natalie Hall, “No Space Left to Run: China’s Transnational Repression of Uyghurs,” UHRP and Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, June 24, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/no-space-left-to-run-chinas-transnational-repression-of-uyghurs/>; Bradley Jardine and Robert Evans, “‘Nets Cast from the Earth to the Sky’: China’s Hunt for Pakistan’s Uyghurs,” UHRP and Oxus Society, August 11, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/nets-cast-from-the-earth-to-the-sky-chinas-hunt-for-pakistans-uyghurs/>; Natalie Hall and Bradley Jardine, “‘Your Family Will Suffer’: How China Is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies,” UHRP and Oxus Society, November 10, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/your-family-will-suffer-how-china-is-hacking-surveilling-and-intimidating-uyghurs-in-liberal-democracies/>; Bradley Jardine and Lucille Greer, “Beyond Silence: Collaboration Between Arab States and China in the Transnational Repression of Uyghurs,” UHRP and Oxus Society, March 24, 2022,

This report examines the humanitarian needs of Uyghur and other Turkic diaspora groups in the United States, Turkey, and post-Soviet Central Asia, where large communities remain, and highlights measures that the diaspora is taking to support itself in response to transnational repression, and identifies those areas where more help is needed. The study incorporates and builds on previous UHRP reports on the humanitarian crisis outside China caused by the atrocity crimes in the Uyghur region, as well as our extensive Transnational Repression of Uyghurs Database.³

II. Key Takeaways

- A secondary humanitarian crisis is unfolding in the Uyghur diaspora and exile communities abroad. Uyghurs living outside the Uyghur region face challenges including enforced statelessness and vulnerability to refoulement, loss of livelihoods and businesses, denial of access to healthcare and schools, single-parent families without a primary provider, homelessness, unaccompanied minors, collective trauma, cultural trauma, and ongoing harassment, threats, and cyberattacks.
- Uyghur diaspora civil society organizations (CSOs) have worked to meet the needs of Uyghur diaspora communities, offering skills training and support for home-based employment; scholarships for students; cash support for housing, food, clothing, and medical care; and social support through mutual aid programs, cultural programming, and mental health programming.
- While these organizations have had some success, their reach and ability to meet the needs of Uyghurs in diaspora communities are limited by a lack of resources for providing material humanitarian aid. Community and

<https://uhrp.org/report/beyond-silence-collaboration-between-arab-states-and-china-in-the-transnational-repression-of-uyghurs/>.

³ See Appendix 3.

generational trauma have hardly been addressed due to stigma, cultural barriers, and limited access to healthcare.

III. Recommendations

- **Academia:** Uyghur students, scholars, writers, and artists should be supported through scholarships, fellowships, and research grants.
- **Cultural organizations:** create fellowships and grants for performers and writers.
- **National governments:** investigate and enforce domestic law to protect Uyghur citizens and asylum seekers from harassment, threats, coercion, and reprisals by Chinese security agencies; publicly affirm a policy of never deporting Uyghur refugees and asylum seekers to China; expedite Uyghur political asylum and refugee applications; prioritize humanitarian acceptance of stateless and at-risk Uyghur refugees currently exposed to reprisals or deportation in third countries.
- **Donor organizations, including government agencies:** support for livelihood and small-business programming; hunger and homelessness relief; healthcare programs; funding for Uyghur NGOs that seek to document ongoing human rights violations in the Uyghur region; funding for the creation of a secure, legally admissible database of evidence that could be used to hold the perpetrators of the human rights violations in the Uyghur region and resulting humanitarian crisis accountable; convening closed-door meetings for researchers to present their evidence on the perpetrators of the human rights violations in the Uyghur region and the resulting humanitarian crisis to other governments.

IV. Introduction

On the outskirts of Istanbul there is an orphanage for children whose parents have been detained in the Uyghur region's camps. Turkey is one of 26 countries on a list used by Xinjiang authorities to detain Uyghurs on the grounds of contact with potential "terrorist" entities abroad. Around the city's Zeytinburnu and Sefakoy districts, many individuals we met who ran independent Uyghur language bookstores, restaurants, and childcare facilities informed us they had been contacted by Chinese police who reminded them that if they ever stray into activism, their families in the Uyghur region may suffer consequences.

Uyghur targets of transnational repression include those who support human rights and democracy in their former homeland and those who advocate for the well-being of the families and loved ones they have left behind. Even ordinary diaspora members leading quiet lives have been targeted, demonstrating the extraordinary scope and intensity of the Chinese government's efforts to impose collective punishment and repression across national borders.

Exile and diaspora communities must contend with many challenges to their day-to-day lives caused by this transnational repression. First, Uyghur refugees are often denied the right to valid documentation, resulting in enforced statelessness. As a result, many Uyghurs cannot legally work in their host countries, with some Uyghurs being unable to care for themselves and their family members, even becoming homeless in some instances. Further, many Uyghur children cannot attend school in their host countries without documentation. Second, Uyghurs must also withstand sophisticated digital campaigns designed to surveil and harass them, putting their families in danger and compromising their personal information and emotional well-being. Third, Uyghur families are separated; when spouses or parents disappear into the camps in the Uyghur region, many children are left in diaspora communities without documentation, means of support, and in some cases, an adult caretaker. Fourth, Uyghurs experience collective trauma due to the ongoing genocide, causing daily emotional distress. Finally, due to the loss of their families, their

homeland, and the mass roundup of prominent Uyghur intellectuals, Uyghurs face the loss of their community, culture, and identity.

The report first examines the vulnerabilities of these diaspora communities and the challenges they face. This section is broken down into two parts, documenting the legal and technological factors responsible for the humanitarian vulnerabilities, as well as the types and scope of economic and psychosocial needs. The report then examines the efforts of Uyghur and Kazakh CSOs, and other international organizations and fundraising initiatives, to meet these needs, specifically looking at where these efforts have been successful and where they require more support, particularly where Uyghur diaspora members lack legal documentation. The report then makes recommendations for how critical stakeholders can respond to the humanitarian needs of the Uyghur and other Turkic diasporas.

V. Methodology

This report provides primary data from two sets of interviews conducted in August and September 2022. (1) Community-member interviews [6 in total] provide case studies of the humanitarian needs of Uyghur refugees and diaspora members currently living in the U.S., Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. (2) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with NGO and CSO leaders [12 in total] provide information on existing programs and descriptions of unmet needs.⁴ The report also draws on survey data on the mental trauma suffered by individuals in diaspora communities, perceptions of cyber threats, and a research database built by UHRP in partnership with

⁴ We selected interviewees based on their expertise working with Uyghur communities in each target country, professional involvement in key events recounted in this independent analysis, and knowledge of China’s international policies. These KII interviews provide us with on-the-ground information about the ongoing efforts of Uyghur civil society organizations in the U.S., Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, to meet the needs of their communities and the ongoing challenges they face. They also informed us about the larger civil society context in which the repression occurred.

the Oxus Society, the China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs Database.⁵

This report also references secondary sources in English, Chinese, Uyghur, Turkish, Kazakh, and Russian, including online interviews and personal accounts by Uyghurs experiencing various forms of humanitarian crisis and transnational repression, as well as writing in traditional print, digital, broadcast, social media, and government documents. We have used these primary and secondary sources to build a detailed overview of the humanitarian needs of the Uyghur diaspora and other Turkic peoples outside China affected by the atrocity crimes.

VI. Protecting the Uyghur Diaspora: Current Challenges

This study provides an overview of the humanitarian needs of diaspora and refugee Uyghurs, as well as Kazakhs and Kyrgyz affected by the genocide, in four countries: the U.S., Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, to better understand the needs of Uyghur civil society in diverse socio-political contexts. Exiles and members of the Uyghur diaspora living in these countries have been subjected to extreme forms of transnational repression, which impact their humanitarian needs, including on their wellbeing and livelihoods.

⁵ See Appendix 1.

Country	Estimated Uyghur population
Kazakhstan	300,000 ⁶
Kyrgyzstan	50,000
Turkey	50,000–60,000
United States	10,000–15,000 ⁷

The global threat to human rights presented by the Chinese Party-state requires a global response. Lasting humanitarian aid for exiles and diasporas depends on governments to fortify their domestic protections as well as on coordinated, multilateral campaigns to provide immediate aid to victims and survivors of the genocide, and to pro-actively counter transnational repression.

The United States

The U.S. government has condemned the Chinese government’s crimes against humanity in the Uyghur region and implemented legislative and diplomatic measures to hold the Chinese government accountable for its human rights abuses. In June 2020, the U.S. Congress passed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, which mandated sanctions on officials and entities violating the human rights and religious freedoms of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples in the Uyghur region. Since then, the U.S. government has placed sanctions on 33 Chinese officials and government agencies, as well as banning imports and/or exports from more than 50 Chinese companies.⁸ In January 2021, then-Secretary of State

⁶ Sean Roberts and Dana Rice, “Kazakhstan’s Ambiguous Position Towards the Uyghur Cultural Genocide in Xinjiang,” ASAN Forum, October 23, 2020, <https://theasanforum.org/kazakhstans-ambiguous-position-towards-the-uyghur-cultural-genocide-in-china/>.

⁷ “Detailed Languages Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over: 2009-2013,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 28, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2013/demo/2009-2013-lang-tables.html>.

⁸ Marco Rubio, “S.3744 – 116th Congress (2019–2020): Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020,” legislation, June 17, 2020, 2019/2020, <http://www.congress.gov/>; see also: “U.S. Sanctions List – Uyghur Human Rights Project,” <https://uhrp.org/sanctions/>.

Michael Pompeo determined that the Chinese government was committing ongoing crimes against humanity and genocide in the Uyghur region.⁹ Shortly after taking office, Secretary of State Antony Blinken confirmed his predecessor's determination.¹⁰ In December 2021, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning China's human rights violations as genocide, and called on the U.S. government and UN Security Council to take further action. Most recently, President Joe Biden signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Protection Act into law in December 2021; the law, which steps up enforcement of U.S. prohibitions on the import of goods produced using forced labor with regard to goods sourced from the Uyghur region, came into effect in June 2022.¹¹

However, despite the dire needs of the Uyghur diaspora community, the U.S. has not instituted any programs for humanitarian aid and has admitted very few Uyghurs through the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Further, the U.S. sharply reduced the number of refugees it would accept under President Donald Trump: in 2017, the U.S. accepted 85,000 people; by the end of 2020, that number had decreased to 11,800. While the Biden Administration has promised to increase refugee resettlement, only 11,400 refugees were admitted in 2021. None of those admitted were Uyghurs.¹²

Uyghurs living in the diaspora community in the U.S. face challenges as well: many of those who have applied for asylum status in the U.S. are spending years in legal limbo, waiting for the results of their asylum cases. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has an unprecedented backlog of cases, which has only grown during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to research in progress (publication forthcoming) by Dr. Henryk Szadziewski,

While the Biden Administration has promised to increase refugee resettlement, only 11,400 refugees were admitted in 2021. None of those admitted were Uyghurs.

⁹ "Determination of the Secretary of State on Atrocities in Xinjiang," United States Department of State (blog), January 19, 2021, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/determination-of-the-secretary-of-state-on-atrocities-in-xinjiang/>.

¹⁰ Colm Quinn, "Blinken Names and Shames Human Rights Abusers," *Foreign Policy*, March 31, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/31/blinken-uyghur-china-human-rights-report/>.

¹¹ James P. McGovern, "H.R.6210 – 116th Congress (2019–2020): Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act," September 23, 2020, 11, 2019/2020, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/6210>.

¹² Jasmine Aguilera, "The U.S. Admitted Zero Uyghur Refugees Last Year. Here's Why," *Time*, October 29, 2021, <https://time.com/6111315/uyghur-refugees-china-biden/>.

director of research at UHRP, Uyghurs living in the U.S. were impacted by both Trump Administration policies on immigration, as well as COVID-19, and have experienced up to a five-year delay in asylum and other immigration processes. Many Uyghurs struggle with how poorly these delays have been communicated to them, leaving many to wonder about the status of their cases.¹³ The Uyghur American Association (UAA) has assisted many asylum seekers, particularly in guiding them through the procedures for requesting expedited interview scheduling and providing interpretation and translation. However, UAA’s capacity is limited. Further, many Uyghurs are fearful of Chinese government retaliation and choose to avoid any contact with UAA.¹⁴ As a result, there remains a large gap in communication and access to assistance with asylum and visa issues.

The U.S. government has taken law enforcement and legislative steps to prevent transnational repression within the U.S. For example, in early 2022, the FBI launched a website to explain transnational repression and how to report incidents for investigation. The FBI also published an intelligence bulletin in August 2021 that sought to inform the Uyghur community of attempted transnational repression by the Chinese government. In July 2021, Congress passed the Transnational Repression Accountability and Prevention (TRAP) Act, which seeks to counter the abuse of Interpol by authoritarian states and leverage American financial support for the institution.¹⁵ However, Uyghurs are still highly vulnerable to the long reach of the Chinese government in the U.S. One Uyghur living in Arlington, Virginia, wanted to protest at a courthouse near his home about the lengthy asylum bureaucratic process for legal status in the U.S. that Uyghurs face, but expressed concern about being in the public eye; he had already received threatening Telegram messages after starting his asylum process.¹⁶

¹³ Bradley Jardine, interview with Dr. Henryk Szadziewski, audio, September 29, 2022.

¹⁴ Bradley Jardine, interview with Elfidar Iltebir, audio, September 19, 2022.

¹⁵ Steve Cohen, “Text: H.R.4806 – 117th Congress (2021–2022): TRAP Act of 2021,” legislation, July 29, 2021, 2021/2022, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4806/text>.

¹⁶ Bradley Jardine, interview with Dr. Henryk Szadziewski.

While evidence suggests some movement for Uyghurs within the U.S. immigration system starting in 2022, there is work to be done, with many applications for asylum outstanding. Further, the psychosocial needs of Uyghur communities in the U.S. have gone largely ignored; instead, they have organized to meet these needs independently.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's government has taken a nuanced approach in its efforts to balance its interests in protecting its citizens with the importance of its economic and political relationship with Beijing. Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) is critical to Kazakhstan's economic well-being, with Chinese state-owned enterprises investing billions of dollars into Kazakhstan's energy and oil sector and infrastructure.¹⁷ Kazakhstan is home to large Uyghur communities, and some ethnic Kazakhs who have both Kazakh and Chinese citizenship in contravention of Chinese and Kazakh laws. Kazakhs in the Uyghur region are being imprisoned alongside Uyghurs – a fact many Kazakh CSOs have sought to draw attention to. As a result of this complicated relationship, Kazakhstan has positioned itself as largely neutral in the face of the Chinese state's human rights violations. This neutrality has taken many different forms. Kazakhs fleeing the Uyghur region into Kazakhstan are often arrested for trespassing Kazakhstan's border before being sent to court, where in their testimonies, they describe their experiences in the Uyghur region.¹⁸ Kazakhstan's courts grant temporary asylum

¹⁷ Reid Standish, "What Kazakhstan's Crisis Means For China," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 9, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-crisis-china-xi-toqaev/31646208.html>.

¹⁸ There are two Kazakhstan-based organizations conducting this type of work: Ata-jurt Eriktileri, and the Xinjiang Victims Database (XVD). Both seek to document and promote the narratives of individuals escaping from Xinjiang. The XVD in particular has become a reference point for many international tribunals and related documents, as well as Michele Bachelet's report on Xinjiang for the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights. For more, see: Mehmet Volkan Kaşıkçı, "Documenting the Tragedy in Xinjiang: An Insider's View of Atajurt," *The Diplomat*, January 16, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/documenting-the-tragedy-in-xinjiang-an-insiders-view-of-atajurt/>; Xinjiang Victims Database, <https://shahit.biz/eng/>; "OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 31, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>.

status to these refugees, generally lasting about a year, after which point individuals have had to leave Kazakhstan. Temporary asylees have included former detainee, activist and author Dr. Sayragul Sauytbay, as well as Tursunay Ziawudun, who has testified all over the world about her experiences in the camps. However, very little support or mutual aid is offered to these refugees from outside of the community or beyond other individual members of the broader diaspora – the government does little to help resettle these Kazakhs.

The government of Kazakhstan’s official stance on Kazakhs fleeing the Uyghur region is twofold: the government firmly denies the existence of the camps in the region. Still, it has successfully negotiated the release of Kazakhs from the Uyghur region on at least two occasions. In a December 2019 interview with *Deutsche Welle*, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev stated that Kazakhstan would not interfere in China’s affairs and that Kazakhstan would not become a front in a global anti-China movement.¹⁹ The Chinese government thanked Kazakhstan for its “support and understanding” of its “position” in the Uyghur region in March 2019, adding that others should follow its example. However, in January 2019, the government of Kazakhstan announced it had successfully negotiated the release of 2,000 Kazakhs from the Uyghur region. These Kazakhs, many of whom have dual citizenship and/or families in Kazakhstan, would be allowed to apply for permanent residency or citizenship, according to Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²⁰ This came after the

¹⁹ “Президент Казахстана: У нас нет культа личности,” *Deutsche Welle*, December 4, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3BYdEfe>.

²⁰ It is unclear if this provision is under the auspices of the Kandas (fka Oralman) policy. Under that policy, a person has to apply for this status which requires identification documents, and a notarized translation of those documents; Kazakhs can only apply in Shymkent, Astana, or Almaty, then once the application is submitted, Kazakhs receive a reply within four days; people who receive Kandas status get a certificate stating so which acts as their official documentation until they become citizens of Kazakhstan, at which point they are no longer Kandas. Further, it is unclear how Kazakh escapees from Xinjiang interact with this policy. For more, see: “Issuance of Permit for Accommodation by Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons for Permanent Residence in the Republic of Kazakhstan,” Kazakhstan E-Government, accessed September 24, 2022, https://egov.kz/cms/en/services/009pass_myd; “Kandas in Kazakhstan: Help, Privileges, Adaptation,” Kazakhstan E-Government, accessed September 24, 2022, https://egov.kz/cms/en/articles/kandas_rk; “Status and Rights of Kandas,” Kazakhstan E-Government, accessed September 24, 2022, egov.kz/cms/en/articles/kandas_rights_conditions.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs had negotiated for the release of 15 Kazakhs in November 2018.²¹

Kazakhs who have escaped, as well as those with family members still in the Uyghur region, have become some of the most powerful advocates for Kazakhs and Uyghurs in the camps, offering first-hand testimonials about their family members, friends, former neighbors, and colleagues still in the Uyghur region. In particular, Ata-Jurt Eriktileri and its successor organization Ata-Jurt Eriktileri Naghuz have collected written and video testimonials of Kazakhs and Uyghurs, providing critical documentation of the Chinese state's human rights violations. According to Gene Bunin, the Xinjiang Victims Database – the most comprehensive set of data on the victims of the Chinese government's atrocities – would not exist without Ata-Jurt Eriktileri.²² Current organization members have also sought to bring attention to the plight of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the camps more directly. Baibolat Kunbolatuly has protested outside the Chinese consulate in Almaty, Kazakhstan, almost every single day since early 2020. Having been arrested multiple times by Kazakhstan's police and security services for violating Kazakhstan's restrictive laws against protesting, he has persisted in his campaign, demanding further information about his brother. Kunbolatuly is frequently joined by others seeking information about family members in the Uyghur region.²³ Ahead of Xi Jinping's September 2022 visit to Kazakhstan, Kazakhs who protested the incarceration

²¹ "China Allowing 2,000 Ethnic Kazakhs to Leave Xinjiang Region," *AP News*, April 20, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/kazakhstan-ap-top-news-international-news-asia-china-6c0a9dcd7bd4a0b85a0bc96ef3dd6f2>.

²² Mehmet Volkan Kaşıkçı, "Documenting the Tragedy in Xinjiang: An Insider's View of Atajurt," *The Diplomat*, January 16, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/documenting-the-tragedy-in-xinjiang-an-insiders-view-of-atajurt/>.

²³ "'Your Heart Might Stop': Kazakh From Xinjiang Threatened After Pressing Chinese Diplomats About Missing Brother," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 18, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/china-xinjiang-kazakhstan-missing-threats-protests/31157124.html>; "Kazakh Man Gets 10 Days In Jail For Picketing Chinese Consulate In Almaty," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakh-man-gets-10-days-in-jail-for-picketing-chinese-consulate-in-almaty/31095510.html>; "Kazakhstan: Activist Detained for Hypothetical Anti-China Picket," *Eurasianet*, July 1, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-activist-detained-for-hypothetical-anti-china-picket>; Berikbol Dukeyev, "Do Kazakhstanis Care about Their Kin in Xinjiang?," *OpenDemocracy*, June 7, 2021, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/do-kazakhstanis-care-about-their-kin-xinjiang/>; Miriam Kiparoidze, "Kazakhstan Is Arresting Protesters Seeking Information about Missing Relatives in Xinjiang," *Coda Story*, August 6, 2021, <https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/kazakhstan-xinjiang/>.

of their families in Xinjiang were detained. Gulfia Qazybek, Khalida Aqytqhan, and Gauhar Qurmanalieva were taken off a bus traveling between Almaty and Shymkent and told that if they protested in Astana during Xi’s visit they would face up to 15 days in jail, and that the Chinese government would put pressure on their relatives in Xinjiang.²⁴

Kazakhstan is home to the largest Uyghur community outside the Uyghur region with over 300,000 Uyghurs living in the Central Asian state, primarily in Almaty oblast between Zharkent and the city of Almaty.²⁵ Uyghurs are represented in the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, a government body that acts as a forum for Kazakhstan’s ethnic minorities, by Rustam Kairiyev. Kairiyev, who was born in Almaty, is also the leader of the Uyghur Youth of Kazakhstan organization, and an active member of the Uyghur Ethnocultural Center of Kazakhstan.²⁶ Outside of these avenues, which are largely controlled by the state, however, Uyghur activities have been suppressed by the government of Kazakhstan since the early 2000s.²⁷ Further, since the late 1990s, researchers have observed that as the government of Kazakhstan has articulated and re-articulated Kazakhstan’s national identity, the Uyghur language, culture, and identity are being marginalized as the government of Kazakhstan privileges Kazakh culture.²⁸ Local tensions have also been known to flare below the state level. In November 2021, a brawl broke out, first between Kazakh and Uyghur students at a local

²⁴ “Ahead of Xi’s Visit, Pressure Increases on Kazakhs Who Have Protested Relatives’ Detention in Xinjiang,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 12, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-china-xi-visit-xinjiang-relatives-pressure/32030416.html>.

²⁵ Sean Roberts and Dana Rice, “Kazakhstan’s Ambiguous Position towards the Uyghur Cultural Genocide in China,” *The Asan Forum* (blog), October 23, 2020, <https://theasanforum.org/kazakhstan-ambiguous-position-towards-the-uyghur-cultural-genocide-in-china/>; Rachel Harris and Zulfiyam Karimova, “Women’s Chay Gatherings in Kazakhstan: Sustaining Identity in Migrant Communities,” in *Community Still Matters: Uyghur Culture and Society in Central Asian Context*, eds Rachel Harris and Zulfiyam Karimova (Hawaii, NIAS Press, 2022), 201–217.

²⁶ “Выступление Председателя РОО «Союз уйгурской молодежи Казахстана» Р.Кайрыева,” Ассамблея народа Казахстана, accessed August 22, 2022, <https://assembly.kz/ru/sess/vystuplenie-predsedatelya-roo-soyuz-uygurskoy-molodezhi-r-kayryevakazakhstan/>.

²⁷ Sean Roberts and Dana Rice, “Kazakhstan’s Ambiguous Position towards the Uyghur Cultural Genocide in China,” *The Asan Forum* (blog), October 23, 2020, <https://theasanforum.org/kazakhstan-ambiguous-position-towards-the-uyghur-cultural-genocide-in-china/>.

²⁸ Regina Uyghur and Yadikar Ganiyev, “Caught Between Two Fires: The Plight of The Uyghur Community in Kazakhstan,” in *Community Still Matters: Uyghur Culture and Society in Central Asian Context*, eds Rachel Harris and Zulfiyam Karimova (Hawaii, NIAS Press, 2022).

school, before spreading into the wider community. Residents of the village Penzhim, with a population of just over 5,300, described underlying tensions in the community that had been building before the brawl.²⁹

While Kazakhstan has sought to free Kazakhs living in the Uyghur region, the government has done little to support the needs of displaced Kazakhs and Uyghurs living in its territory. It has even gone so far as to threaten, harass, and endanger those who advocate for further awareness of China’s human rights atrocity crimes in the camps. Further, since January 2022, when the government of Kazakhstan cracked down on protesters demanding better working



Uyghur language theatre in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Photo credit: Bradley Jardine

²⁹ Manas Qaiyrtaiuly and Farangis Najibullah, “Life Returns To ‘Normal,’ But Divisions Remain In Kazakh Village After Ethnic Clashes,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 12, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhs-uyghurs-village-ethnic-tensions/31556879.html>.

and living conditions, Kazakhstan’s authoritarian government has grown even less tolerant of CSOs, with activists arrested, proposals for legislation threatening to further curtail individuals’ and organizations’ freedom of speech and assembly, and a refusal to register opposition organizations.³⁰

However, despite that reality, there have been grassroots efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of Kazakh escapees from the Uyghur region, particularly those requiring medical attention. The International Legal Initiative (ILI) and local researchers have successfully crowdsourced hearing aids for a Kazakh man who lost most of his hearing during beatings by Chinese guards while detained in the Uyghur region.³¹ ILI has also advocated for the return of Kazakhs from the Uyghur region, with a positive response from the government of Kazakhstan in 100 of the 162 cases ILI has worked on. However, the leader of ILI noted that many of these Kazakh returnees struggled to gain citizenship or find work, and continued to suffer from psychological trauma, often the result of torture.³²

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Kyrgyzstan

China is one of Kyrgyzstan’s primary economic partners, with China accounting for almost half of Kyrgyzstan’s FDI inflows.³³ Kyrgyzstan is also in debt to the Chinese government for up to USD 5 billion, or about 40 percent of the Kyrgyz government’s foreign debt.³⁴ Ethnic Kyrgyz people are disappearing into the Chinese

³⁰ “Kazakhstan: Civic Space Limited by Continued Fallout from January 2022 Events,” *International Partnership for Human Rights* (blog), May 2, 2022, <https://www.iphronline.org/kazakhstan-civic-space-limited-by-continued-fallout-from-january-2022-events.html>.

³¹ “Medical Examinations for Xinjiang Ex-Detainees,” organized by Gene Bunin, *gofundme.com*, accessed August 30, 2022, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/medical-examinations-for-xinjiang-exdetainees>.

³² Chris Rickleton, “Kazakhstan: After Xinjiang, the Long Road to Recovery,” *Eurasianet*, September 11, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-after-xinjiang-the-long-road-to-recovery>.

³³ “China and Kyrgyzstan: Bilateral Trade and Future Outlook,” *China Briefing News*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-and-kyrgyzstan-bilateral-trade-and-future-outlook/>.

³⁴ Reid Standish, “How Will Kyrgyzstan Repay Its Huge Debts To China?” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 27, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/how-will-kyrgyzstan-repay-its-huge-debts-to-china-/31124848.html>; “China and Kyrgyzstan: Bilateral Trade and Future

government's camps in the Uyghur region.³⁵ Between 2017 and 2018, during the winter break for universities in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 54 Kyrgyz students returned to the Uyghur region and disappeared. As a result, 20 of them were expelled from their university programs. These students, many of whom were musicians, dancers, and poets, have not been seen or heard from since.³⁶ The Kyrgyz government has not raised any objections with the Chinese government. Kyrgyzstan is home to about 50,000 Uyghurs.³⁷

In April 2022, a Christian Kyrgyz called Ovalbek Turdakun fled to the U.S. to give testimony on the mistreatment of Turkic minorities in the Uyghur region.³⁸ Before that, he had arrived in Kyrgyzstan in 2019, where he was repeatedly contacted by Chinese officials urging him to return to China; his bank account was frozen, and – after two years – Kyrgyz officials refused to renew his visa, putting him and his family at risk of deportation back to China.³⁹ The government of Kyrgyzstan has yet to take an official stance on the Chinese human rights violations, despite written appeals from the families of detainees asking the Kyrgyz government to take action, and the demands of MPs to hear an explanation from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs about what is “actually happening” in the Uyghur region.⁴⁰

Outlook,” *China Briefing News*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-and-kyrgyzstan-bilateral-trade-and-future-outlook/>.

³⁵ “Xinjiang Authorities Holding Hundreds From Kyrgyz Village in ‘Political’ Re-Education Camps,” *Radio Free Asia*, December 4, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/kyrgyz-12042018160255.html>.

³⁶ Gene Bunin, “Kyrgyz Students Vanish Into Xinjiang’s Maw,” *Foreign Policy*, March 31, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/31/963451-kyrgyz-xinjiang-students-camps/>.

³⁷ Ryskeldi Satke, “Uighurs in Kyrgyzstan Hope for Peace despite Violence,” *Al Jazeera*, January 8, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/1/8/uyghurs-in-kyrgyzstan-hope-for-peace-despite-violence>.

³⁸ Chao Deng, “From a Chinese Internment Camp to the U.S., a Former Xinjiang Detainee Makes a Rare Escape,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/former-xinjiang-detainees-arrival-in-u-s-marks-rare-escape-from-chinas-long-reach-11649775562>.

³⁹ Johana Bhuiyan, “Former Xinjiang Detainee Arrives in US to Testify over Repeated Torture He Says He Was Subjected To,” *The Guardian*, April 13, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/13/former-xinjiang-detainee-arrives-in-us-to-testify-over-china-abuses>.

⁴⁰ “Kyrgyzstan: Officials Muted in First Words on Xinjiang Crackdown,” *Eurasianet*, November 27, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-officials-muted-in-first-words-on-xinjiang-crackdown>.

Separately, the government of Kyrgyzstan has blamed Uyghurs for many homicides and terror attacks on Kyrgyz soil. In 2000 and 2002, Chinese government representatives were attacked and killed in Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz government attributed both attacks to Uyghurs. In 2016, the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, was bombed; the Kyrgyz government attributed the attack to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), an often mythologized Uyghur organization based in Afghanistan.⁴¹

Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan have become increasingly distrustful of the Kyrgyz state; many Uyghurs report Kyrgyz intelligence and security services closely surveilling the community and harassing its members since before the collapse of the Soviet Union over concerns about Uyghur demands for greater autonomy.⁴² In recent years, the government has sought to prevent Uyghur organizations from convening and prevented Uyghurs living in Kyrgyzstan from attending larger international Uyghur meetings. In 2011, four Uyghur activists were escorted off a plane by Kyrgyz security officers without explanation. The activists were on route to a Uyghur conference in Canada.⁴³ Since Sadyr Japarov became president of Kyrgyzstan, the space for civil society in Kyrgyzstan has shrunk considerably, with the government of Kyrgyzstan amending the constitution to more broadly constrain civil society.⁴⁴

In 2011, four Uyghur activists were escorted off a plane by Kyrgyz security officers without explanation. The activists were on route to a Uyghur conference in Canada.

⁴¹ Ryskeldi Satke, “Uighurs in Kyrgyzstan Hope for Peace despite Violence,” Al Jazeera, January 8, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/1/8/uighurs-in-kyrgyzstan-hope-for-peace-despite-violence>.

⁴² Ryskeldi Satke, “Uighurs in Kyrgyzstan Hope for Peace despite Violence,” Al Jazeera, January 8, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/1/8/uighurs-in-kyrgyzstan-hope-for-peace-despite-violence>.

⁴³ Cristina Maza, “Kyrgyzstan’s Uighurs Cautious, Still Fear Chinese Influence,” November 25, 2014, Eurasianet, 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstans-uighurs-cautious-still-fear-chinese-influence>.

⁴⁴ Catherine Putz, “Concerns Swirl Around Kyrgyzstan’s Draft Constitution: Presidential Power, Judicial Independence, and Civil Society,” *The Diplomat*, March 22, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/concerns-swirl-around-kyrgyzstans-draft-constitution-presidential-power-judicial-independence-and-civil-society/>; “Kyrgyzstan: Controversial NGO Law Passes,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, July 19, 2021, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyzstan-controversial-ngo-law-passes>.

Turkey

Historically, Turkey has been the primary location of the Uyghur diaspora community outside of Central Asia. As many as 50,000–60,000 Uyghurs live in the country today, according to estimates, but the community remains vulnerable to Beijing’s reach. The Turkish government has been an on-again, off-again supporter of Uyghur rights and has from time-to-time voiced concern about the Chinese government’s repression of Uyghurs. The Uyghur issue is often instrumentalized in Turkish politics to gain concessions from China, to show leadership in the Muslim world, or to play up to certain political and ideological factions in domestic politics. In 2009, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called the Chinese government’s crackdown in the aftermath of the unrest in Ürümchi “an act of genocide.”⁴⁵ Since 2016, Erdoğan’s tone has shifted markedly. While the Turkish leader reiterated in 2015 that his country’s doors would remain open to Uyghur refugees, he has become less vocal in championing their cause, instead moving closer to Beijing after several high-profile Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) meetings with members of the Chinese business community, and Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu has warned Uyghur protesters to stop spreading “American propaganda.” In 2017, Erdoğan signed a controversial extradition treaty with China, which the Chinese government approved in December 2020. However, citizen voices mobilized opposition parties to raise concerns, leaving the treaty unratified by the Turkish parliament. As the Turkish government moves closer to China in the name of international economic partnerships and bilateral alliances, Turkey has become more dangerous for Uyghurs.⁴⁶



Uyghur orphanage main courtyard. Photo credit: Bradley Jardine

⁴⁵ “Turkish Leader Calls Xinjiang Killings ‘Genocide,’” Reuters, July 10, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-china-sb/turkish-leader-calls-xinjiang-killings-genocide-idUSTRE56957D20090710>.

⁴⁶ Bradley Jardine, “Great Wall of Steel: China’s Global Campaign to Suppress the Uyghurs,” The Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, March 2022,

In March 2020 U.S. broadcaster National Public Radio reported that as many as 400 Uyghurs were detained by Turkey’s security services in 2019 alone.

In March 2020 U.S. broadcaster National Public Radio reported that as many as 400 Uyghurs were detained by Turkey’s security services in 2019 alone.⁴⁷ In January 2021, several Uyghurs were detained by police in raids on their homes in Istanbul and threatened with deportation to China amid accusations of being affiliated with Islamic State.⁴⁸ Further, police banned Uyghur gatherings, citing concerns over the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite the ban many Uyghurs have attended protests outside the Chinese consulate in Istanbul in recent months, demanding information about their family, friends, neighbors, and other community members who had disappeared in the Uyghur region. In a separate incident, many Uyghurs were briefly detained by police after the Chinese embassy in Ankara complained about their protests.⁴⁹ One Uyghur activist, Idris Hasan, fled the country after seeing his name on a list – made public by Turkish authorities – of Uyghur residents wanted by Beijing. He flew to Morocco but was detained in response to an Interpol notice (which was eventually removed, but Hasan still remains imprisoned).⁵⁰

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Great%20Wall_of_Steel_rpt_web.pdf.

⁴⁷ “I thought it would be safe’: Uighurs in Turkey now fear China’s long arm,” *National Public Radio*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/13/800118582/i-thought-it-would-be-safe-uighurs-in-turkey-now-fear-china-s-long-arm>.

⁴⁸ “Uyghurs living in Turkey fear deportation to China as police detain dozens,” Stockholm Center for Freedom, January 22, 2021, <https://stockholmcf.org/uyghurs-living-in-turkey-fear-deportation-to-china-as-police-detain-dozens/>.

⁴⁹ Asim Kashgarian and Ezel Sahinkaya, “Turkey Cracks Down on Uighur Protestors after China Complains,” *Voice of America*, March 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific-turkey-cracks-down-uighur-protestors-after-china-complains/6202920.html>.

⁵⁰ Asim Kashgarian, “Uyghur Man’s Long Journey to Freedom May End with Return to China,” *Voice of America*, January 13, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/uyghur-man-s-long-journey-to-freedom-may-end-with-return-to-china/6395787.html>.



Prayer room in the orphanage. Photo credit: Bradley Jardine

Increasingly, the Chinese government is operating in Turkey largely unopposed. In February 2020, Jevlan Shirmemmet, a Uyghur living in Istanbul, had been campaigning for information about his mother’s whereabouts in the Uyghur region when he received a call from the Chinese Embassy in Ankara saying she had been arrested for allegedly “aiding terrorists.” Four months later, Jevlan Shirmemmet received another unexpected call from his father in the Uyghur region telling him to stop his activism. He received similar calls from his uncle and younger brother.⁵¹

In addition to its weakening rhetorical support for the Uyghur cause, Turkey has proven complicit in its arrests and harassment. In

⁵¹ William Yang, “Uyghur man in Turkey demands answers from Beijing about his mom’s fate,” *Deutsche Welle* Mandarin service, July 27, 2020, <https://williamyang-35700.medium.com/uyghur-man-in-turkey-demand-answers-from-beijing-about-his-moms-fate-f2a35c4a0221>.

October 2016, Turkey imprisoned prominent Uyghur activist Abduqadir Yapchan, allegedly at the behest of the Chinese government. The 58-year-old Muslim religious teacher was born in Kashgar but had lived in Turkey since 2002. In 2003, China’s Party-state placed Yapchan on its first “terrorist list,” accusing him of having connections to ETIM. He was detained despite a Turkish court acquitting him of charges relating to terrorism.⁵² Other Uyghurs say Turkey’s anti-terror forces have been visiting Uyghur neighborhoods and questioning community members about whether they have participated in anti-China movements.

As mass internment has intensified, Turkey has also clamped down on domestic media coverage of human rights atrocities in the Uyghur region. During an official visit to Beijing in August 2017, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu promised, “We’ll regard China’s security as our security. We’ll never allow any activities that threaten China’s sovereignty and security on our territory or the region we are in. We’ll eliminate any media reporting targeting China.”⁵³

Turkey’s government has grown increasingly close to the Chinese government in recent years. In 2018, the countries signed a strategic partnership, signaling deeper coordination and cooperation. This partnership has been borne out in trade: in 2018, bilateral trade between China and Turkey amounted to USD 23.6 billion.⁵⁴ On at least one occasion, Uyghur investments in Turkey have attracted Beijing’s attention. Umer Hemdullah, an independent Uyghur bookstore owner in Sefakoy, tells us his two brothers in the Uyghur region had been planning to build a USD 100 million Uyghur traditional medicine facility in Ankara before China arrested them both for unknown reasons and the

⁵² Arslan Tash and Mamatjan Juma, “Turkish Court Rejects China’s Request to Extradite Uyghur Religious Teacher,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/turkey-dismiss-04092021192932.html>; “Exiled leader claims China is behind Turkey’s decision to detain a Uyghur activist,” *Radio Free Asia* via Refworld, October 10, 2016, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5811ff12a.html>.

⁵³ Le Tian, “Turkish FM: China’s Security is Our Security,” *China Global Times Network*, August 2017, https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d557a4d7745544e/share_p.html.

⁵⁴ Asim Kashgarian, “Turkey Turns Down Citizenship for Some Uyghurs,” March 16, 2022, *Voice of America*, <https://www.voanews.com/a/turkey-turns-down-citizenship-for-some-uyghurs/6488401.html>.

construction project was left abandoned.⁵⁵ “We all had so much we planned to do for our people, but China has destroyed our lives,” he said. Umer Hemdullah was a religious scholar in Saudi Arabia until he fled to Istanbul in 2017 after the Chinese government refused to renew his passport. “I made it here with my wife and three of my children, but China refuses to allow two of my children to leave the [Uyghur region] and come to Turkey. The Turkish embassy in China says it has asked for their release but there have been no updates and the situation remains unchanged,” he said. In an orphanage we visited on the outskirts of Istanbul, several of the children told us that their parents – Turkish citizens – had been detained in the Uyghur region and that they were left alone in Turkey with only friends of their family to care for them.

Uyghurs in Turkey are expressing growing concern that they will no longer be safe in the face of these changing relations as they endure ongoing harassment, intimidation, and rendition through third-party countries.⁵⁶ The Turkish government has, in other cases, sought to prevent the harassment and forcible rendition of other vulnerable communities within its borders: Turkish authorities have foiled two plots connected to the governments of Russia and Iran related to the attempted intimidation or abduction of individuals on Turkish soil.⁵⁷

VII. Legal and Technological Vulnerabilities

Transnational repression has become a hallmark of the Uyghur crisis. Beijing has used the family members of Uyghurs in the diaspora to intimidate them, compel their return, and pursue them

“I made it here with my wife and three of my children, but China refuses to allow two of my children to leave the [Uyghur region] and come to Turkey. The Turkish embassy in China says it has asked for their release but there have been no updates and the situation remains unchanged,” he said.

⁵⁵ Ahmet Hamdi Şişman, “China’s Uyghur Persecution Leaves a Hospital in the Turkish Capital Stalled,” *Straturka* (blog), June 8, 2020, <https://www.straturka.com/chinas-uyghur-persecution-leaves-a-hospital-in-the-turkish-capital-stalled/>.

⁵⁶ Bradley Jardine, Edward Lemon, and Natalie Hall, “No Space Left to Run: China’s Transnational Repression of Uyghurs,” UHRP, June 24, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/no-space-left-to-run-chinas-transnational-repression-of-uyghurs/>.

⁵⁷ “Turkey Foils Alleged Iran Plot to Kill Israelis in Istanbul,” *Reuters*, June 23, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/23/turkey-foiled-iranian-plot-to-kill-israelis-in-istanbul-fm>.

through bilateral and multinational extradition efforts. This practice has further traumatized diaspora members, many of whom had been subjected to Beijing’s repressive policies before their displacement. Reaching diaspora members with humanitarian assistance – including protection, documentation, and psychosocial support – is frequently complicated by the nature of the community, mostly urban refugees with limited resources, and in many cases precarious legal status within their host country. This research will consider previous state practice in reaching vulnerable refugee and diaspora populations and the lessons that may be learned for the Uyghur community.

Statelessness and Refugee Challenges

Many Uyghurs and Kazakhs from the Uyghur region live in a state of legal precarity as undocumented or under-documented migrants in second countries. Statelessness, according to the U.S. Department of State, is defined by the breakdown between individuals’ *de jure* or *de facto* relationship to the state, meaning that individuals lack documentation connecting them to a particular state or that they are not recognized as citizens of a particular state.⁵⁸ This can be enforced through practices like those of the Chinese government, which, since the beginning of the crackdown, has routinely refused to renew the passports of Uyghurs living abroad, rendering them stateless, without valid identity papers of any kind, and therefore unable to travel.⁵⁹ This statelessness further exposes the Uyghur community to the threat of arrest and potential deportation. The right to nationality is recognized in a series of international human rights instruments, including Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). As a UN member, China is obliged to meet the provisions of the UDHR; however, in the international system the UDHR is viewed as *lex ferenda*, or the law as it should be, making enforcement near impossible.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ “Statelessness,” United States Department of State (blog), accessed August 30, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/other-policy-issues/statelessness/>.

⁵⁹ “Weaponized Passports: The Crisis of Uyghur Statelessness,” UHRP, April 1, 2020, <https://uhrp.org/statement/weaponized-passports-the-crisis-of-uyghur-statelessness/>.

⁶⁰ “International standards relating to nationality and statelessness,” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, accessed on September 19, 2022, <https://www.oh>

Further, in 2022, the government of Turkey started to deny some Uyghurs' citizenship applications based on "risks to national security," or "social order." Uyghurs have been shocked and even traumatized by these communications. They are at a loss to understand why they would be considered by the Turkish state to be a "risk to national security" or a "risk to social order," especially those who deliberately stayed away from peaceful protests or any online advocacy or publicity about the fate of their families back home. The existence of such denials has caused extreme alarm, affecting even those who did not receive a denial on these grounds, (for example, those who already have temporary or permanent residence status).

The denials on these grounds heightened Uyghurs' fears that at any time the Turkish government could take action against them, whether to cut off employment or educational options, to detain them or to deport them. Some of the Uyghurs who have had their applications denied have since left Turkey, instead relocating to a secondary host country in Europe. Previously, the Turkish government allowed Uyghurs to become citizens, and indicated that it would continue to do so, accepting 8,000 applications for citizenship in 2021 alone.⁶¹ However, one interviewee we spoke to, Leo, pointed out Uyghurs' fear that if they apply for a Turkish passport, it makes any future asylum claims in European countries more challenging, as they cannot claim to be at immediate risk of deportation to China. Leo observed, "I spoke with one woman who can't meet her family in Europe, and she has been weighing up whether to apply for Turkish citizenship or whether this would just make reconnecting with her family more difficult. The problem is worse due to the expiration of passports as many European states don't accept refugees without passports or government-issued identity papers."

This dilemma has created intense fear and uncertainty, as Uyghurs in the diaspora community fear that there is no pathway

[chr.org/en/nationality-and-statelessness/international-standards-relating-nationality-and-statelessness](https://www.chr.org/en/nationality-and-statelessness/international-standards-relating-nationality-and-statelessness).

⁶¹ Asim Kashgarian, "Turkey Turns Down Citizenship for Some Uyghurs," *Voice of America*, March 16, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/turkey-turns-down-citizenship-for-some-uyghurs/6488401.html>. No updated information about the status of these applications has been made available.

to resolve the legal limbo, raising the prospect of being unable to obtain legal status in any country, and leaving them permanently unable to obtain safe haven from the risk of deportation, and unable to earn an income or provide for their children’s education and material needs. In Kazakhstan, many Uyghur and ethnic Kazakh refugees fleeing China to Kazakhstan are not permitted to stay for longer than a year, meaning that they have to migrate onward for their safety and security. Ersin Erkinuly, a Kazakh, escaped the Uyghur region to Kazakhstan in late 2019. However, he did not feel safe from deportation there; in 2020, he fled first to Turkey and then to Ukraine. After trying to flee to other European countries, Erkinuly was detained several times by the Ukrainian authorities. He was released in Kyiv when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Erkinuly escaped to Poland and then to Germany, where he was detained in July 2022.⁶²

Constant migration requires funds, documentation, and a safe endpoint — which, as our research indicates, are far from guaranteed. Ethnic-Kyrgyz refugees to Kyrgyzstan are also not given asylum status and are instead given a “special resident permit,” which can be renewed for up to five years.⁶³ However, as in Ovalbek Turdakun’s case, the Kyrgyz government refused to renew his permit after two years, which suggests that this matter is highly discretionary and inconsistent.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, there is a solution to this statelessness. In Sweden, Germany, and Canada, immigration agencies can access accurate and up-to-date information on the political situation in countries of origin and the threats to political, religious, and ethnic minorities when assessing asylum applications through systems they have built. The availability of this information increases awareness

⁶² Asim Kashgarian, “From China to Turkey, Ukraine: 2 Men’s Search for Safety,” *Voice of America*, March 5, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/from-china-to-turkey-ukraine-2-men-s-search-for-safety/6471359.html>; Catherine Putz, “Ethnic Kazakh From Xinjiang Detained in Europe, Again,” *The Diplomat*, July 15, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/ethnic-kazakh-from-xinjiang-detained-in-europe-again/>.

⁶³ “Legal Status of Foreign Nationals in the Kyrgyz Republic,” HG Legal Resources, accessed August 30, 2022, <https://www.hg.org/legal-articles/legal-status-of-foreign-nationals-in-the-kyrgyz-republic-4891>.

⁶⁴ Johana Bhuiyan, “Former Xinjiang Detainee Arrives in US to Testify over Repeated Torture He Says He Was Subjected To,” *The Guardian*, April 13, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/13/former-xinjiang-detainee-arrives-in-us-to-testify-over-china-abuses>.

among immigration officials about different forms of repression used by origin states. It also helps to build resistance to extradition or repatriation requests by authoritarian governments. These systems could be further strengthened by thorough vetting procedures for any interpreters employed at the agencies to ensure that they are not acting as agents of, or vulnerable to the demands of, a foreign state. Immigration agency staff should also be trained on authoritarian states' motives and tactics for engaging in transnational repression. Staff also need to be mindful of the difference between Han and Uyghur asylum seekers, the different threats they face, and the linguistic needs they have.

In the U.S., a large and complicated immigration system has resulted in a back-logged system: as of the end of 2020, there were more than 386,000 overall pending applications for affirmative asylum in the U.S. from around the world.⁶⁵ This lack of security deters Uyghurs' ability and desire to engage in activism, discourages contact with law enforcement, and seriously impacts their day-to-day health and livelihoods. As one Uyghur, Ahmad, noted to us, "My asylum application has been pending since May 2019, and I have no clarity. It makes me feel nervous and afraid, and it is hard to build a life living in that state of mind. They just keep telling me they have a backlog of applications. For several months 20–30 of us would gather at the office in Fairfax [Virginia] to protest the delays and make officers aware of our situation and struggles. There are a significant number of us still awaiting these asylum interviews."⁶⁶

Uyghurs have also expressed that the persistent lack of status in the U.S. poses an additional challenge: the filing fees — many of which are higher for individuals without prior status in the U.S. — and "endless" requirements for paperwork, as well as the need for documentation such as birth certificates, which are all but impossible for Uyghurs to obtain from the Chinese government.⁶⁷ Initial reports indicate that USCIS now recognizes and accommodates cases where official documents are unobtainable;

⁶⁵ Affirmative asylum claims are made by people who are not in removal proceedings and are proactively seeking protection from persecution within the United States.

⁶⁶ Bradley Jardine, interview with Ahmad, audio, September 19, 2022.

⁶⁷ Bradley Jardine, interview with Dr. Henryk Szadziewski.

UHRP and other NGOs are currently seeking clarification. Some Uyghurs we have interviewed have noted that they have received aid for fees from other members of the Uyghur community, but as far as we are aware there is no dedicated effort in place to provide such assistance.

International organizations have heightened this sense of precarity. Interpol – formally the International Criminal Police Organization – facilitates international cooperation on criminal matters.⁶⁸ Despite this, in a practice that has come to be known as “Interpol abuse,” the governments of countries, including China, issue Interpol Red Notices in an attempt to induce other governments to detain exiles and dissidents beyond their borders as in the case of Idris Hasan detained in Morocco.

As a result of these challenges to legal immigration and Uyghurs’ risk of enforced statelessness, many Uyghurs cannot work legally or send their children to school. This precarity presents a humanitarian need that has gone largely unmet. One Uyghur living in Turkey told us in September 2022 that he could not get a driver’s license and that he and his family were dependent on his wife, who made bedding at home and sold it on the street, and that their children were unable to attend school. He added that about 300 Uyghurs in Istanbul were illicitly renting stalls on a day-to-day basis in the bazaar to sell goods.⁶⁹

“My asylum application has been pending since May 2019, and I have no clarity. It makes me feel nervous and afraid, and it is hard to build a life living in that state of mind.”

Cyberattacks

Since 2002, the Chinese state has engaged in an unparalleled campaign of digital transnational repression as part of its efforts to coerce and control Uyghurs living abroad. The Chinese government and its security services have leveraged the interconnectivity of the globalized, digital world and are harassing Uyghurs living abroad.

⁶⁸ Interpol notices are a method for distributing information about wanted or missing people and stolen passports among member states; they are not international arrest warrants. Interpol prohibits its members from using notices to engage in political, military, or religious activities. This means that countries should only submit notices and diffusions in cases of ordinary, non-political crime. A diffusion is information that is shared directly between member states rather than by Interpol.

⁶⁹ “Weaponized Passports: The Crisis of Uyghur Statelessness,” UHRP, April 1, 2020, <https://uhrp.org/statement/weaponized-passports-the-crisis-of-uyghur-statelessness/>.

This approach includes spyware, intelligence collection, data gathering, coercion-by-proxy, and intimidation. The Chinese Party-state has used these tools to silence Uyghurs living abroad, in some cases to great effect; in others, the Chinese government's attempts to stifle Uyghur voices have only made Uyghurs speak louder and push for their voices to be heard.

Most of the cases we documented in our November 2021 report, "Your Family Will Suffer," were incidents of cyberattacks and malware — often in a bid to collect information on Uyghurs and their activities abroad. Relatedly, the next most common trend was intelligence and data collection, often coupled with coercion-by-proxy, with the Chinese government threatening Uyghurs' families in the Uyghur region unless the diaspora Uyghurs handed over data about themselves, their friends and neighbors, or their community in their country of exile. We also found many documented cases of coercion-by-proxy on foreign soil, in which Uyghurs were told to return to the Uyghur region to prevent their families from being arrested and put in the camps. These methods offer a window into the persistent harassment, intimidation, and everyday insecurity Uyghurs experience at the hands of the Chinese state.

Technology companies have sought to address the many ways that their tools can be used for malign purposes through creating special safety programs for individuals who are at high risk. Google has rolled out an Advanced Protection Program, and Facebook has Facebook Protect, which is meant to support targeted individuals. Facebook, in particular, has become a critical place for Uyghurs to meet and be part of a larger community. While tech companies have set up these programs, many in at-risk communities remain unaware of how to use them. They may also feel that even if the programs work as intended, Chinese agents have so many other ways to reach them to intimidate or coerce them, that it is useless to try using these tools.

In "Your Family Will Suffer," we surveyed 72 Uyghurs living in diaspora communities in liberal democracies across North America, the Asia Pacific, and Europe, 95.8 percent of whom reported feeling threatened, and 73.5 percent of whom noted that they had experienced digital risks, threats, or other forms of online

In our report, we surveyed 72 Uyghurs living in diaspora communities in liberal democracies across North America, the Asia Pacific, and Europe, 95.8 percent of whom reported feeling threatened, and 73.5 percent of whom noted that they had experienced digital risks, threats, or other forms of online harassment.

harassment.⁷⁰ Members of Uyghur communities worldwide are interested in protecting themselves, with 89.7 percent of respondents expressing interest in increasing their security knowledge. However, many respondents did not feel that this protection would necessarily come from their home governments – 44.1 percent felt that their host governments take the intimidation they face seriously, while only 20.5 percent felt that the host governments would fix these issues.⁷¹ To answer this rising tide of digital repression, governments and technology companies must work closely with civil society and targeted individuals and communities.

VIII. Psychosocial Vulnerabilities of Uyghurs Living in Diaspora Communities

As more Uyghurs have disappeared into the camps, more of their loved ones living abroad have been stranded without their primary providers and caretakers, resulting in a growing number of orphaned and homeless Uyghurs.

Uyghurs abroad face complex challenges as survivors or secondary survivors of an ongoing genocide. These psychosocial challenges present a threat to Uyghurs’ short-term and long-term well-being. Every member of the diaspora community has been cut off from family and their homeland for the past six years, and this situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Until the Chinese government’s Xinjiang policies change, the Uyghurs will essentially be an exile community, given the progressing stamping out of the Uyghur identity and community in their homeland. The psychosocial impacts of community-wide trauma stemming from

⁷⁰ Natalie Hall and Bradley Jardine, “‘Your Family Will Suffer’: How China Is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies,” UHRP, November 10, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/your-family-will-suffer-how-china-is-hacking-surveilling-and-intimidating-uyghurs-in-liberal-democracies/>.

⁷¹ Natalie Hall and Bradley Jardine, “‘Your Family Will Suffer’: How China Is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies,” UHRP, November 10, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/your-family-will-suffer-how-china-is-hacking-surveilling-and-intimidating-uyghurs-in-liberal-democracies/>.

the genocide and the prospect of multi-generational exile include damage to emotional wellbeing and relationships; family, kinship and community networks; social values; and cultural survival.⁷²

This section examines diaspora Uyghurs' economic, social, and psychological deprivations requiring a humanitarian response. As a result of the Chinese government's human rights violations in the Uyghur region, Uyghurs and other Turkic survivors have been stripped of their properties and cut off from their assets.⁷³ Targeted persecution abroad also includes withholding passports, birth certificates, and other identity papers required for economic self-sufficiency and livelihoods, whether operating a business, obtaining a legal permit to work, enrolling children in school, or obtaining higher education and skills certifications for employment. As a result, Uyghurs abroad live in a persistent precarity that impacts their economic well-being and that of their families, as well as their psychological well-being. Individual trauma also affects overall health and ability to attend to studies, work, and family responsibilities. Lastly, this section examines the impact of cultural and linguistic erasure in the Uyghur region. Diaspora communities and CSOs have sought to protect Uyghur culture and identity, as well as to continue teaching Uyghurs.

Family Separation, Single-Parent Families, Orphans, Homelessness

The Chinese government's human rights violations in the Uyghur region have separated families worldwide. Interviewees estimated that in Turkey alone, there are at least 1,000 children without parents.⁷⁴ Some were previously sent abroad to study, some were staying with overseas relatives when their parents were suddenly detained during a family visit or business trip back to China (undertaken before the extent of the crackdown was known). These

As more Uyghurs have disappeared into the camps, more of their loved ones living abroad have been stranded without their primary providers and caretakers, resulting in a growing number of orphaned and homeless Uyghurs.

⁷² Adapted from "What Is Psychosocial Support?" Papyrus, October 2, 2018, <https://papyrus-project.org/what-is-psychosocial-support/>.

⁷³ See: "Under the Gavel: Evidence of Uyghur-owned Property Seized and Sold Online," UHRP, September 21, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/under-the-gavel-evidence-of-uyghur-owned-property-seized-and-sold-online/>.

⁷⁴ Bradley Jardine, interview with Hikmet Hasanoff, September 7, 2022.

unaccompanied minors often lack documentation, means to protect themselves, or a way to earn money, making them highly vulnerable to trafficking. When stateless, Uyghurs cannot find legal jobs in their adopted host countries, forcing them to engage in the shadow economy to survive. Children cannot attend school without proper documentation. As more Uyghurs have disappeared into the camps, more of their loved ones living abroad have been stranded without their primary providers and caretakers, resulting in a growing number of orphaned and homeless Uyghurs. In Turkey, Uyghur children have joined criminal gangs, with some as young as 14 and 15 being drawn toward crime and drugs.

Hikmet Hassanoff, founder of the Shukr Foundation, estimates that there are about 2,000–3,000 “widows” and 1,000 orphans living in Turkey. These “widows” – women whose husbands have been imprisoned or detained – often lack the Turkish language skills or adequate documentation to access necessary medical care and schooling for themselves and their families. Hikmet Hasanoff observed that many women lack employable skills, as they have not traditionally been responsible for the financial well-being of their families. This has only been compounded by the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting inflation: “Many [women] who had found work in restaurants or washing dishes were forced out of work after COVID-19, and they have struggled to get back on their feet... The heavy inflation in Turkey has destroyed these income streams, and where people had previously been surviving, they are now barely making ends meet.” Another interviewee, Leo, noted that in Turkey, Uyghur small businesses have been negatively impacted by the depreciating currency and inflation, and many people were either forced to quit their jobs or sell their businesses to work in factories.⁷⁵

This family separation is closely related to collective trauma, with many Uyghurs reporting sadness, trauma, and loss related to being separated from their families. “In 2017, I lost all contact with my family after the mass arrests began. Soon after, I deleted WeChat and apps I had used to communicate with them as I was afraid I would put them in danger,” Ahmad, a Uyghur living in Virginia,

⁷⁵ Bradley Jardine, interview with Leo, audio, September 21, 2022.

told us. “I became deeply depressed and struggled.” Gauhar Qurmanalieva, a woman based in Kazakhstan, confirmed to us that she had not spoken to her family members in the Uyghur region since 2018 because they were afraid of the consequences. Another Uyghur living in Istanbul who used the name Nufisa told the Shukr Foundation, “The pain of not knowing what has become of our parents and relatives is unbearable... Because we don’t have our own land, we rely on each other perhaps more than other people... All we have is each other. The thought that we might never see or hear from them again is a torment I can’t describe. I feel as if I have been torn into a million pieces... The simple thought of what has happened and is happening now is a sharp pain that never goes away.”⁷⁶

Collective Trauma

Uyghurs worldwide are experiencing ongoing grief, survivor’s guilt, and other forms of intense emotional distress due to the Chinese government’s human rights violations in the Uyghur region. In short, the Uyghur diaspora is suffering collective trauma. A variety of other terms refer to the same experience, including community-wide trauma, historic grief, historical trauma, intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder, intergenerational trauma, and multigenerational trauma.⁷⁷

Uyghurs have been separated from their families, friends, and loved ones; many report harassment while living abroad. As has been reported in *The New York Times* and other media,⁷⁸ Uyghur communities are experiencing ongoing trauma and the full range of effects often grouped under the rubric of complex post-traumatic

⁷⁶ Ruth Ingram, “Time Is No Healer for Uyghur ‘Widows’ and ‘Orphans’ in Turkey,” *Bitter Winter Magazine*, June 6, 2019, <https://bitterwinter.org/time-is-no-healer-for-uyghur-widows-and-orphans-in-turkey/>.

⁷⁷ Wehmah Jones and Tammie M. Causey-Konaté, “Understanding Collective Trauma,” National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education, accessed on January 17, 2023, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/events/pdf/2021jan21/Addressing-Collective-Trauma-2-508.pdf>.

⁷⁸ See, for example: Amy Qin and Sui-Lee Wee, “‘A Daily Cloud of Suffering’: A Crackdown in China Is Felt Abroad,” *New York Times*, June 11, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4eja5m>, and Andrew McCormick, “Uyghurs outside China are traumatized. Now they’re starting to talk about it,” *MIT Technology Review*, June 16, 2021, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/06/16/1026357/uyghurs-china-minorities-trauma-telehealth-social-media/>.

According to Dr. Imin’s research, Uyghurs across the diaspora community often experience “feelings of hopelessness, anger, and depression.” Almost 25 percent of respondents said they regularly experienced thoughts of suicide – roughly five times the adult average in the U.S.

stress (CPTSD), which has also been found among other communities of displaced and persecuted refugees.⁷⁹ They experience ambiguous loss, ongoing unresolved grief, and survivor’s guilt, with effects including depression, anxiety, sleep disorders including night terrors, insomnia, and intra-familial stress. According to an informal online survey conducted by Dr. Memet Imin in 2018, 90 percent of the almost 1,100 Uyghur respondents were experiencing “deep psychological stress.” According to Dr. Imin’s research, Uyghurs across the diaspora community often experience “feelings of hopelessness, anger, and depression.” Almost 25 percent of respondents said they regularly experienced thoughts of suicide – roughly five times the adult average in the U.S.⁸⁰ Dr. Imin noted that this was likely an undercount due to fears of sharing information in the context of active espionage attempts in Uyghur communities and the stigmatization of discussing these challenges.⁸¹

Mehmet Tohti, founder and Executive Director of the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project (URAP), described the trauma many Uyghurs in his community in Canada feel: “Our people have accumulated a great deal of trauma – it is like a toxic substance. You remember the pain every time you sit at a table alone and think of the loved ones who aren’t there. I haven’t seen my family for over 31 years. It’s a lifelong punishment from the Chinese state. Whoever you talk with, they all share remarkably common experiences wherever they reside. Not knowing the whereabouts or condition of loved ones is a constant torment.”⁸² Ahmad noted to us that the

⁷⁹ Angela Nickerson et al., “The Factor Structure of Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Traumatized Refugees,” *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 7, no. 1 (December 2016): 33253, <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v7.33253>.

⁸⁰ “Suicide,” National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>.

⁸¹ According to London-based The Rights Practice, Uyghurs living in the UK “live in fear of the Chinese state.” According to their reporting, 62 percent of those surveyed were “worried about being followed and monitored by Chinese authorities and alert to the presence of CCP spies in the UK who might use information about their activities overseas against family members back home.” For more, see Ruth Ingram, “Survivor’s Guilt, a Uighur Exile’s Constant Companion,” *The New Arab*, June 4, 2021, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/features/survivors-guilt-uighur-exiles-constant-companion>, and “China’s long arm: How Uyghurs are being silenced in Europe,” *Index on Censorship*, February 2022, https://www.indexoncensorship.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/index-report-2022-uyghurs_web.pdf.

⁸² Bradley Jardine, interview with Mehmet Tohti, audio, September 6, 2022.

news of recent starvations as a part of the August–September 2022 “Zero Covid” policies in the Uyghur region had kept him up at night, made him very depressed, and affected his ability to focus and control his emotions, which has impacted relationships with friends and colleagues.

These feelings, as Abdurresit Celil Karluk noted in his chapter in *Exchange of Experiences for the Future: Japanese and Turkish Humanitarian Aid and Support Activities in Conflict Zones* on Uyghur refugees in Turkey, are exacerbated by the feeling of “constantly being threatened.” Karluk notes: “This situation has caused the prevalence of serious psychological depression in migrants and revealed the situation of immigrants living in a sense of insecurity. [Uyghurs] could not benefit from any of the facilities provided to the Syrian [refugees]. [Uyghurs], possessed by financial difficulties, hopelessness and psychological breakdown, have become open to various cases of abuse.”⁸³

Kazakh and Uyghur torture survivors experience intense ongoing trauma stemming from their experiences in the Chinese government’s system of camps and the carceral system. After arriving in a host country, many of these survivors do not seek necessary medical treatment out of fear that it will put their families in the Uyghur region in danger. Some choose to keep to themselves, isolated from the wider community.⁸⁴

Bill Clark, a program director for Peace Catalyst and one of the leaders of the Uyghur Wellness Initiative (UWI), which helps Uyghurs suffering from trauma, noted that “Many Uyghurs suffer depression – a severe form that prevents them from getting out of bed for days on end. Several of our networks have said they suffer from this severe depression, and many struggle to maintain jobs or stay in school.” Thomas Schulze, a researcher conducting a study of Uyghurs’ trauma, noted that “Some of the Uyghurs I have talked with seem fine on the surface, but they have a deep sense of loss that prohibits them from living a full life. They are normal during the

“Many Uyghurs suffer depression – a severe form that prevents them from getting out of bed for days on end. Several of our networks have said they suffer from this severe depression, and many struggle to maintain jobs or stay in school.”

⁸³ Abdürreşit Celil Karluk, “Uyghur Refugees Living in Turkey and Their Problems,” in *Exchange of Experiences for the Future: Japanese and Turkish Humanitarian Aid and Support Activities in Conflict Zones*, eds Dünder, A. Merthan and Uygulamalı Bilimler Fakültesi (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 2018).

⁸⁴ Bradley Jardine, interview with Aina, audio, September 21, 2022.

day, but at night they worry about their relatives back home and are reduced to tears. The lack of closure and uncertainty keeps them in a perpetual state of fear and anxiety.”⁸⁵

This stigmatization of mental health care among Uyghurs has deep historical roots: the Chinese state has often weaponized diagnoses of mental health disorders to criticize, discredit, and imprison activists and dissidents. Mingsheng Guancha, a Chinese human rights website, recorded 510 cases of dissidents being forcibly entered into psychiatric facilities between 2007 and 2020.⁸⁶ A 2022 Safeguard Defenders report found that 99 people in China had been placed in psychiatric care against their will 144 times between 2015 and 2021, likely the tip of the iceberg due to the extreme secrecy surrounding this practice.⁸⁷

Like many others around the world, some Uyghurs, especially from the older generations, feel that “mental health” is a coded term for “mental illness” and that difficulties with emotional and mental health are a weakness or disorder that shames the sufferers and their families.⁸⁸

Cultural Trauma: Cultural and Linguistic Erasure

Uyghurs in the diaspora community are also experiencing collective grief over their likely permanent exile from their homeland. This is known as cultural trauma, “a process initiated by a horrendous event that is believed to have significantly affected a cultural membership, forever embedded in their memory and permanently changing their identity.”⁸⁹ The disruption caused by the Chinese

⁸⁵ Bradley Jardine, interview with Thomas Schulze, audio, September 6, 2022.

⁸⁶ Dahai Han, “China Uses Mental Illness to Discredit, Imprison Dissidents, Rights Observers Say,” *Voice of America*, September 30, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific-voa-news-china-china-uses-mental-illness-discredit-imprison-dissidents-rights/6196591.html>.

⁸⁷ “Mental Torture: China Is Locking up Critics in Psychiatric Facilities,” Safeguard Defenders, August 16, 2022, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/mental-torture-china-locking-critics-psychiatric-facilities>.

⁸⁸ Uyghur Wellness Initiative, accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.uyghurwellnessinitiative.com>; Amy Qin and Sui-Lee Wee, “‘A Daily Cloud of Suffering’: A Crackdown in China Is Felt Abroad,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/06/world/asia/uyghur-mental-health-china.html>.

⁸⁹ Jocelyn Poe, “Theorizing Communal Trauma: Examining the Relationship between Race, Spatial Imaginaries, and Planning in the U.S. South,” *Planning Theory* 21, no. 1 (2021): 56–76.

government's ongoing crimes against humanity and violence against Uyghurs both within China and abroad has harmed Uyghur livelihoods and communities worldwide. As millions have been taken to the camps, many who have escaped have taken on the responsibility of preserving and transmitting a living Uyghur culture, language, identity, and history.

In the Uyghur region itself, the Chinese government has intentionally and systematically targeted and destroyed or altered physical markers of Uyghur culture and traditions, including approximately 16,000 mosques in the Uyghur region (65 percent of the total), graveyards, and other important sites sacred to Uyghurs, such as shrines and pilgrimage routes, even those supposedly protected by Chinese law.⁹⁰ The Chinese government has also specifically targeted Uyghur intellectuals in its crackdowns, with the long-term imprisonment of writers, poets, and professors, as well as business leaders and economists, among others, to undermine and indeed erase Uyghur cultural heritage and community autonomy.⁹¹

The Chinese government has also sought to transform Uyghur everyday identity by targeting Uyghurs' homes, faith, diets (introducing pork and alcohol), arts, and language to forcibly assimilate Uyghurs into the "Chinese nation" and erase any indigenous, transnational, autonomous, or Islamic features that make Uyghur culture and identity unique.⁹² In an interview with

⁹⁰ Nathan Ruser et al., "Cultural Erasure," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 24, 2020, <http://www.aspi.org.au/report/cultural-erasure>.

⁹¹ Abdullah Qazanchi and Abduweli Ayup, "The Disappearance of Uyghur Intellectual and Cultural Elites: A New Form of Eliticide," UHRP, December 8, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/the-disappearance-of-uyghur-intellectual-and-cultural-elites-a-new-form-of-eliticide/>.

⁹² See: Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, "'Absolutely No Mercy': Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>; Adrian Zenz, "Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang," Jamestown Foundation, June 2020, <https://jamestown.org/product/sterilizations-iuds-and-mandatory-birth-control-the-ccps-campaign-to-suppress-uyghur-birthrates-in-xinjiang/>; Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Exposed: China's Operating Manuals for Mass Internment and Arrest by Algorithm," International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, November 24, 2019, <https://www.icj.org/investigations/china-cables/exposed-chinas-operating-manuals-for-mass-internment-and-arrest-by-algorithm/>; "Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims," Human Rights Watch, September 9, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>.

UHRP, Clark, the program director at Peace Catalyst and a founder of UWI noted the community-wide impact of cases of Uyghur parents who had recovered their children from Chinese state boarding schools and orphanages in the Uyghur region; the children had ongoing effects of the trauma suffered during their separation from their families, and the parents were shocked that their children had lost the ability to speak Uyghur and were no longer able to speak to their grandparents. Uyghurs everywhere felt an intense wave of grief and despair when these cases were reported by Radio Free Asia and other media.⁹³ A BBC article from July 2019 observed that hundreds of Uyghur children had been taken to these boarding schools and orphanages after one or both of their parents were taken into the camps in the Uyghur region. Many of these children, young enough to be in preschool and kindergarten, are completely separated from their parents and made to learn “better life habits.”⁹⁴

⁹³ “Uyghur Children Face Legacy of Trauma Caused by Mass Incarceration Campaign,” *Radio Free Asia*, March 22, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/children-03222021190834.html>; “Two Uyghur Children Describe What Life Was Like In A Chinese Boarding School,” *National Public Radio*, February 3, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/03/1077899437/two-uyghur-children-describe-what-life-was-like-in-a-chinese-boarding-school>; “Young and Fragile Uyghur Minds Indoctrinated with Chinese Nationalistic Propaganda,” *Voice of Uyghur*, July 26, 2022, <https://uyghurtimes.com/posts/2a0c5846-102c-4773-b5a8-482e4c1823c9/young-and-fragile-uyghur-minds-indoctrinated-with-chinese-nationalistic-propaganda>.

⁹⁴ “China Muslims: Xinjiang Schools Used to Separate Children from Families,” *BBC News*, July 4, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-48825090>; see also: “‘Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots’: China’s Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims,” Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>; “Two Uyghur Children Describe What Life Was Like In A Chinese Boarding School,” *National Public Radio*, February 3, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/03/1077899437/two-uyghur-children-describe-what-life-was-like-in-a-chinese-boarding-school>; “Uyghur Children Face Legacy of Trauma Caused by Mass Incarceration Campaign,” *Radio Free Asia*, March 22, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/children-03222021190834.html>; “Young and Fragile Uyghur Minds Indoctrinated with Chinese Nationalistic Propaganda,” *Voice of Uyghur*, July 26, 2022, <https://uyghurtimes.com/posts/2a0c5846-102c-4773-b5a8-482e4c1823c9/young-and-fragile-uyghur-minds-indoctrinated-with-chinese-nationalistic-propaganda>.

IX. Uyghur Diasporan Civil Society

Uyghur activism emerged in Turkey in the 1950s among new diaspora members who had just fled the Uyghur region following its occupation by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The heart of Uyghur civil society remained with the Istanbul diaspora community until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The newly independent Central Asian states appeared to be a new center for Uyghur diaspora groups due to the long-established populations of Uyghurs in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: Kazakhstan had a Uyghur community of more than 300,000 people; Kyrgyzstan had a community of more than 50,000.

By the early 2000s, an internationally oriented diasporan civil society emerged in Europe, North America, and Australia, where Uyghurs could freely organize and express their opposition to state policies in their homeland. Further, these countries were more independent economically and politically and, therefore, able to resist Beijing's diplomatic pressure to silence and suppress diaspora voices.

In the U.S. for example, the first Uyghur community associations were formed in the 1990s, merging in 1998 to form the Uyghur American Association (UAA). The UAA is based in northern Virginia, with active informal chapters in Boston, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Uyghur-language schools for children, run by volunteers, are active in several cities and also serve as hubs for cultural programming, such as celebrations of traditional holidays and music and dance classes for children. In 2004, UAA founded UHRP to conduct documentation and advocacy. Since the beginning of the genocide in 2017, several more human rights advocacy groups and centers have been formed on the east coast and in California. Uyghur Americans also participate in youth networks with a global reach, such as the Tarim Network and the Uyghur Collective, which have a public presence on Instagram and Twitter. The global Uyghur diaspora is tightly knit across the globe, using myriad chat groups with hundreds of members, as well as

Facebook, which is the premier social media platform for communication in the Uyghur language.

Key Organizations Providing Humanitarian Aid in the Diaspora

To illustrate current humanitarian aid efforts, we have highlighted a selection of activities by Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz CSOs in response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the diaspora. In addition, we outline the challenges these communities and organizations still face, including enforced statelessness resulting in homelessness and unemployment, collective trauma and mental stress, family separation, and cultural and linguistic erasure.

Mehmet Tohti, Executive Director of the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, an organization based in Canada, notes that “More cultural life and social gatherings allow the Uyghur community to regenerate and share experiences which would help in processing this trauma. Community centers, mosques, and schools that have been set up have been important sources of solidarity and resilience. Many Uyghurs have been energized by this mission to build something and preserve their culture for future generations in the diaspora. It is psychological healing through activism.”⁹⁵

Mental Wellbeing

In our interviews, many of our respondents noted the trauma and suffering of the Uyghur diaspora community as secondary survivors of genocide. Crucially, one respondent noted that his university had been understanding of his situation and covered the cost of his therapy.⁹⁶ There are a few organizations and institutions that have structures to help Uyghurs; cooperation with these nascent efforts presents an opportunity for educational institutions and workplaces to provide for employees in need.

In May 2020, representatives of Uyghur organizations in the U.S. – including UHRP, UAA, and the Campaign for Uyghurs – and

⁹⁵ Bradley Jardine, interview with Mehmet Tohti, audio, September 6, 2022.

⁹⁶ Bradley Jardine, interview with Ahmad.

the religious nonprofit Peace Catalyst International, launched the Uyghur Wellness Initiative (UWI). UWI seeks to address psychosocial challenges by creating “a safe, dedicated space for Uyghurs to come together in this time of crisis for our holistic wellbeing – as individuals, families, and a community.”⁹⁷

UWI recruits counselors and wellness coaches willing to provide pro bono services and matches them with Uyghurs seeking help for their grief, despair, and depression. UWI also organizes webinars and in-person talks, and highlights educational materials, including a guide to recognizing and coping with survivors’ guilt, and examples of how the Uyghur diaspora is coping with grief and “ambiguous loss” due to the loss and disappearance of family, friends, teachers, and neighbors.⁹⁸ The educational activities serve to destigmatize discussion of the emotional challenges Uyghurs face, including effects on health, career, children, and other aspects of family life. The initiative provides orientations for volunteer therapists about Uyghur culture and identity to better equip them to help members of the Uyghur community.⁹⁹ The initiative is sustained by voluntary staff time at the four sponsoring nonprofits, supported by a five-hour-per-week paid coordinator. UWI is seeking grant funds to hire a part-time or full-time coordinator, and to hire a part-time counselor or cover costs for Uyghurs to continue therapy after counselors complete eight pro bono sessions.

Housing and Basic Needs

As a result of being cut off from their families and lives in China, as well as any legal means to earn money and establish savings, many Uyghurs end up homeless and unemployed. By one estimate, there are around 800 homeless Uyghurs in Istanbul.¹⁰⁰

Hope House, an organization in Istanbul, was founded by Uyghurs, philanthropy organizations, and community leaders with the purpose of “providing accommodation for homeless Uyghurs in

⁹⁷ Uyghur Wellness Initiative homepage, Uyghur Wellness Initiative, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.uyghurwellnessinitiative.com/>.

⁹⁸ “Understanding the Burden of Survivor’s Guilt” Briefer,” Uyghur Wellness Initiative, May 6, 2021, [uyghurwellnessinitiative.com/files/ugd/609ae7_5977c12922594126885644e188b443a4.pdf](https://www.uyghurwellnessinitiative.com/files/ugd/609ae7_5977c12922594126885644e188b443a4.pdf).

⁹⁹ Bradley Jardine, interview with Bill Clark, September 6, 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Bradley Jardine, interview with Julie Millsap, audio, September 12, 2022.

Istanbul.” Julie Millsap, the former Public Affairs & Advocacy Director for the Campaign for Uyghurs, also notes that Hope House provides vocational training for women, including sewing classes, computer training, and English and Turkish language classes, all of which would help Uyghurs become employed locally. Additionally, Hope House provides community mentoring for Uyghurs struggling with mental health after being cut off from their families in the Uyghur region, as well as mental health support based on a similar model put forward by UWI. Hope House also seeks to teach women advocacy skills and “Train them to be involved in speaking out,” although, as Millsap notes, “The vast majority were extremely hesitant to do so.”¹⁰¹ When Hope House was opened, it was at full capacity (40 beds). The Istanbul-based East Turkestan New Generation Movement Association (ETNGMA) and the U.S.-based Campaign for Uyghurs worked to raise funds to buy a four-story building, which has been converted into a house for 37 young men. Abdusemi Hoten, a Uyghur living in Istanbul, maintains the building and seeks to help its inhabitants by offering them safety, encouragement, and a roof over their heads.¹⁰² According to Julie Millsap, “For the Uyghur youth left stranded and financially cut off in Turkey when parents were taken into the camps, the situation has been especially dire. We’re proud of the youth who are excelling there, and we hope to have more people join us in growing the resource pool available for them.”¹⁰³ Similarly, Nuzugum Family and Cultural Association has sought to crowdsource aid for the Istanbul Uyghur diaspora community on LaunchGood, collecting several rounds of funding for Uyghurs’ food, rent, clothing, and other basic necessities.¹⁰⁴

According to President Elfidar Iltebir, UAA has organized mutual aid, including helping members of the Uyghur community apply for unemployment assistance during the COVID-19

¹⁰¹ Bradley Jardine, interview with Julie Millsap, audio, September 12, 2022.

¹⁰² Ruth Ingram, “Destitute Uyghur Youth Struggle on the Streets of Istanbul,” *The New Arab*, December 2, 2021, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/features/destitute-uyghur-youth-struggle-streets-istanbul>.

¹⁰³ Ruth Ingram, “Destitute Uyghur Youth Struggle on the Streets of Istanbul,” *The New Arab*, December 2, 2021, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/features/destitute-uyghur-youth-struggle-streets-istanbul>.

¹⁰⁴ “Support Uyghur Orphans and Women in Turkey,” LaunchGood, accessed September 19, 2022, launchgood.com/campaign/support-uyghur-orphans-and-women-in-turkey.

pandemic, as well as helping with asylum applications, including gathering paperwork, preparing for interviews, and interpretation needs.¹⁰⁵

Gene Bunin, who runs the Xinjiang Victims Database, along with the International Legal Initiative (ILI), has also set up several GoFundMe fundraisers to help former detainees in Kazakhstan. In one instance, a man needed medical assistance after his time in a Chinese detention facility had left him with limited to no hearing. Bunin and ILI worked together to crowdsource a pair of hearing aids for the man, enabling him to start seeking employment.¹⁰⁶ In another instance, Bunin launched a funding campaign for food and rent support for former detainees, which has also helped fund tuition for the children of detainees or provide coal for the winter.¹⁰⁷

Skills-Building and Employment

Some Uyghurs are economically vulnerable due to a lack of transferable skills that would facilitate their employment in a foreign country. Women who have taken responsibility for child-rearing and may not have played the role of primary provider would greatly benefit from skills development suited to their current residence. The diaspora community and CSOs have sought to fill that gap through offering training in classes in specific skills, as well as languages.

“In Islamic tradition, men are often the breadwinners, which has meant that widowed women have struggled due to a lack of skills,” Hikmet Hasanoff noted to us. Uyghur women who



Children's books written in Uyghur language. Photo credit: Bradley Jardine

¹⁰⁵ Bradley Jardine, interview with Elfidar Iltebir, audio, September 19, 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Chris Rickleton, “Kazakhstan: After Xinjiang, the Long Road to Recovery,” *Eurasianet*, September 11, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-after-xinjiang-the-long-road-to-recovery>; “Medical Examinations for Xinjiang Ex-Detainees,” organized by Gene Bunin, [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com/f/medical-examinations-for-xinjiang-exdetainees), accessed August 30, 2022, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/medical-examinations-for-xinjiang-exdetainees>.

¹⁰⁷ “General Aid for Xinjiang Incarceration Victims,” organized by Gene Bunin, [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com/f/general-aid-for-xinjiang-incarceration-victims), accessed September 19, 2022, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/general-aid-for-xinjiang-incarceration-victims>.

traditionally worked at home may be adept at sewing, cooking, and childcare, but may need help in bringing these skills to commercial enterprises, and they lack certification, connections or networks that could enable them to find a higher paying job. “The Shukr Foundation bought sewing machines and partnered with textile companies to try and find employment for these women along with training,” notes Hikmet Hasanoff. While this program has been

successful, he also notes the impact of the ongoing pandemic as well. “The heavy inflation in Turkey has destroyed these income streams, and where people had previously been surviving, they are now barely making ends meet. Even for a married couple, accommodation takes up 50 percent of the household budget, so single mothers and widows struggle. We provide rental assistance and food assistance.”

Several of our interviewees praised the Virginia-based Cydeo for its intensive IT training program. This school has provided hundreds of Uyghurs with valuable, in-demand skills, leading to employment.¹⁰⁸ Ahmad had a very good experience with this Uyghur-led training program, through which he received IT training and support for his job search, enabling him to obtain a job in the IT industry and receive a work permit.¹⁰⁹



Uyghur bookstore. Photo credit: Bradley Jardine

¹⁰⁸ Bradley Jardine, interview with Ahmad; Bradley Jardine, interview with Alfred Uyghur, audio, n.d.

¹⁰⁹ Bradley Jardine, interview with Ahmad.

Education and Cultural Resilience

The Chinese government's genocide has sought to erase Uyghur culture and identity, imprisoning hundreds of prominent academics and cultural figures.¹¹⁰ In addition to being cut off from their families and homes, many Uyghurs deeply feel the Chinese Party-state's assault on their very identity, culture, and history. They are in a kind of anticipatory mourning for the loss of a great civilization in their own historic homeland.

In response, Uyghurs feel that a core action to prevent the complete execution of the genocidal program is to prevent the destruction of Uyghur civilization and culture. Uyghur community



The Taklimakan Uyghur Nesriyat bookstore in Zeytinburnu. Photo by Nicholas Muller.

¹¹⁰ Abdullah Qazanchi and Abduweli Ayup, "The Disappearance of Uyghur Intellectual and Cultural Elites: A New Form of Eliticide," UHRP, December 8, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/the-disappearance-of-uyghur-intellectual-and-cultural-elites-a-new-form-of-eliticide/>.

organizations have supported Uyghur academics and researchers, published books, and launched programs that offer Uyghur language and history classes to ensure that Uyghur culture will not disappear in future generations, despite the long-term prospect of surviving as a people only in exile. Some are taking their inspiration from the history of the Jewish people, who have survived as a people despite many centuries of exile and persecution, in addition to the 20th-century genocide in Europe.

The Uyghur Academy, an education organization based in Istanbul, conducts various activities. According to founder Abdulhamit Karahan:

Normally, we publish about Uyghur culture and history, but we also help Uyghur scholars by creating academic exchanges across our seven branches in North America, Japan, Australia, Europe, and Central Asia. There are many Uyghur students in Turkey, and we provide scholarships and opportunities for young researchers to interact with established peers in their field. We host conferences and events to help educate the Uyghur and international communities. We have provided over 300 scholarships since 2013 and continue to support around 20–30 students each year, providing opportunities for them that otherwise wouldn’t be available in Turkey. The World Uyghur Congress Foundation began collaborating with us last year, and several Uyghur businessmen continue to donate to support our work.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Bradley Jardine, interview with Abdulhamit Karahan, audio, September 9, 2022.

The Uyghur Science and Enlightenment Foundation was opened in Istanbul in 2015 to teach children the Uyghur language and Uyghur culture and history. Habibullah Kuseni, who opened the school, left the Uyghur region in 2012 and started a tutoring program in Istanbul. After receiving donations from Uyghur diaspora communities in the Middle East and Europe, Kuseni opened the foundation's school, which offers daytime and evening classes to students. The foundation also runs a boarding school for 33 boys; a girls' wing is under construction. The foundation also invites psychiatrists to the school every few months to evaluate the psychological well-being of its students, given that every student has at least one close relative in the camps.¹¹² These findings are used to create programming to address feelings of grief, loss, loneliness, and anger. A Turkish NGO, the Nuzugum Family and Culture Association, provides financial assistance for 20 students per month and also provides education in addition to collecting aid for housing; while children's mothers work in a textile center nearby, the Nuzugum Association provides them with Uyghur classes.¹¹³



Uyghur language bookstore. Photo credit: Bradley Jardine

The Tarim Network operates internationally in coalition with other Uyghur organizations to connect Uyghurs and disseminate knowledge about Uyghur identity, language, culture, and history through classes and events, including musical events and bazaars. The Tarim Network is also working to create a standardized Uyghur

¹¹² Jaclynn Ashly, "The Turkish School Preserving Culture of Young Uighurs in Exile," *Al Jazeera*, August 2, 2022, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/8/2/the-turkish-school-preserves-culture-of-young-uighurs-in-exile>; Durrie Bouscaren, "In Turkey, a Boarding School Cares for Uighur Children Separated from Their Parents," *The World*, November 20, 2019, <https://theworld.org/stories/2019-11-20/turkey-boarding-school-cares-uighur-children-separated-their-parents>.

¹¹³ "Uyghurs in Turkey Fearful of China's Influence," Underrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, May 24, 2020, <https://unpo.org/article/21906>.

language curriculum and publish anthologies of Uyghur writing and literature. The Tarim Network describes itself as “by Uyghurs, for Uyghurs,” with many offerings being targeted specifically at younger diaspora Uyghurs interested in delving more deeply into Uyghur history, literature, and culture.¹¹⁴

In the U.S., UAA also works to “promote Uyghur language and culture.” According to Elfidar Iltebir, the organization’s president, “We try to be as responsive as we can to the needs of the community.”¹¹⁵ The Ana Care and Education School, which cooperates closely with UAA, offers Uyghur-language weekend classes in northern Virginia, along with cultural activities such as dancing, music, singing, and other activities and skills.¹¹⁶ Other organizations conducting publishing and cultural programming include the East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Organization, and other community-based schools offering language, music, and dance classes, in Australia, the U.S., and other countries with substantial Uyghur diasporas.

“Unfortunately, when our projects with international partners end, the funding stops, and the problem is treated as resolved. But the reality is that continued care is often needed, and we need to continue our work, or we will lose the trust and connection we have worked hard to establish with these victims of repression.”

Challenges for Humanitarian Programming and Support

Lack of Resources and Funding

Many Uyghur organizations lack sufficient funding to serve the needs of the diaspora community. Whether individuals or larger groups fund them, many Uyghur organizations still require more funds to meet the overwhelming need in diaspora communities.

The Shukr Foundation, based in Australia with operations worldwide, raised AUD 1 million to help Uyghur orphans and “widows” in Istanbul. However, as Hikmet Hasanoff noted, this funding “doesn’t begin to scratch the surface,” with many students and families still in need.¹¹⁷ Shukr’s website offers a variety of ways

¹¹⁴ The Tarim Network, accessed September 19, 2022, <https://www.thetarimnetwork.com>.

¹¹⁵ Bradley Jardine, interview with Elfidar Iltebir.

¹¹⁶ Avery Kleinman, “Uyghur school aims to keep a community together, even during the coronavirus pandemic,” *The Washington Post*, July 20, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/uighur-school-aims-to-keep-a-community-together-even-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/2020/07/16/87aa075c-a443-11ea-b473-04905b1af82b_story.html.

¹¹⁷ Bradley Jardine, interview with Hikmet Hasanoff.

for donors to give, specifically encouraging Muslim donors to give part of their *zakat* to help Uyghurs in need.¹¹⁸ Hikmet Hasanoff also observed that fundraising year-round for the Shukr Foundation rather than just during Ramadan, as well as competition with other NGOs, presents a challenge to Uyghur civil society and its efforts.¹¹⁹ As Abdulhamit Karahan also notes, “The Turkish government tends to interact more with religious organizations and benefits their activities at the expense of secular counterparts.”¹²⁰ Therefore, Uyghur organizations without an explicitly religious mandate often tend to be marginalized by Turkish government funding sources.

Further, many Uyghur organizations, in addition to lacking funding, struggle with more intangible resources, including therapists and teachers. Clark notes a dearth of counselors with the appropriate cultural, historical, and linguistic knowledge to help Uyghurs, as well as Kazakh and Kyrgyz, who are camp survivors or secondary survivors of the genocidal policies. UWI provides an orientation for volunteer counselors on history, culture, and the current political context. Still, Clark notes that if there were more counselors, then Peace Catalyst would be able to help more people.

Aina, the director of ILI in Kazakhstan, noted in an interview, “We need constant support to maintain trust and continue to offer support. Unfortunately, when our projects with international partners end, the funding stops, and the problem is treated as resolved. But the reality is that continued care is often needed, and we need to continue our work, or we will lose the trust and connection we have worked hard to establish with these victims of repression.”¹²¹ Consistent funding, as Aina notes, is critical not only for the longevity of these organizations and their ability to offer care, but also for developing community trust.

Stigma and Cultural Barriers Regarding Trauma Care

UWI, while providing the go-to model for psychological support for Uyghurs worldwide, still faces the challenge of stigma around

¹¹⁸ Shukr Foundation, “Current Appeals,” accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.shukrfoundation.org.au/current-appeals/>.

¹¹⁹ Bradley Jardine, interview with Hikmet Hasanoff.

¹²⁰ Bradley Jardine, interview with Abdulhamit Karahan, audio, September 9, 2022.

¹²¹ Bradley Jardine, interview with Aina.

mental health. Further, as Clark and Dr. Memet Imin noted to us, there is little openness to seeking professional help for mental and emotional distress; indeed, therapy is widely stigmatized among the Uyghur diaspora, and there is a lack of knowledge on what therapy is. Further, Uyghur identity and culture continue to stumble against traditional therapeutic practices in the West, with Uyghurs in the diaspora wanting to get to know their therapists better, leading to the therapists becoming something more akin to surrogate mothers and grandmothers.¹²²

Clark noted a generational gap between older Uyghurs who had migrated to the West and their children and grandchildren who had grown up here: while the older generations feel therapy to be a stigmatizing process, the younger generations are not so put off by the idea. This provides an opening for therapeutic assistance. If those more active in Uyghur communities speak more openly about their struggles and experiences with therapy, it may help encourage others to also do so. Further, many of the cultural stigmas in the Uyghur diaspora community can be broken through education, through assurances that information will be kept confidential based on the principles of mutual trust and confidentiality, and the normalization of mental health issues.¹²³ Additionally, Uyghur diaspora communities need more counselors with an understanding of Uyghur culture and identity, and the current genocide, which will better enable counselors to understand what their clients’ experiences are. Peace Catalyst, for example, has created a peer group for counselors to share best practices.¹²⁴

Uyghurs who do not speak English are unable to receive mental health assistance in the U.S. at this time, because there are no Uyghur-speaking trained therapists. Due to the stigmatization mentioned above, Uyghurs are reluctant to discuss their distress in the presence of a Uyghur-speaking interpreter, who would inevitably be a fellow member of the close-knit Uyghur-American

¹²² Bradley Jardine, interview with Bill Clark.

¹²³ Bradley Jardine, interview with Memet Imin, audio, September 7, 2022; Bradley Jardine, interview with Tomas Schulze, audio, September 6, 2022.

¹²⁴ Bradley Jardine, interview with Julie Millsap; Bradley Jardine, interview with Bill Clark; Bradley Jardine, interview with Memet Imin.

community.¹²⁵ Aina noted this in Kazakhstan as well: “We provide healthcare support, and we find doctors who can speak Uyghur and Kazakh languages. Russian-speaking doctors are more common, but unfortunately, Kazakhs from Xinjiang don’t usually speak Russian. We use our doctors to provide therapy and medical tests, medications, and psychological assistance.” Language can be a critical barrier for Uyghurs and Kazakhs to receive aid.

Health Insurance and Healthcare Coverage

According to Thomas Schulze, Uyghurs living in Germany lack awareness of the healthcare system and options that may be available to them. Additionally, due to staffing shortages, wait times to receive mental health care are at least a month across the EU, and an average four to six months in Germany.¹²⁶ The only alternative is to pay for private mental health care, which poses another set of problems.¹²⁷ Healthcare for those who do not have employer-provided insurance, including many Uyghur entrepreneurs, small-business owners, and those participating in the “gig economy,” is expensive, putting further demands on Uyghurs’ limited funds, and some common forms of employer-provided health insurance do not cover therapy.

Government Suspicion and Hostility

In Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, organizations seeking to offer aid to Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz diaspora communities are often treated with suspicion by their host governments.

In Kazakhstan, Aina reported with regard to ILI’s experience, that “The national security services watch us when we meet with victims. It is a very sensitive issue, and we operate on the fringe of civil society. Sometimes this work is life-threatening. We believe the security services have intentionally tried to cause car accidents for our workers. Some of the interviewees are targeted by security services and monitored and even threatened after we have provided them with legal or medical assistance – they have alerted us to this

Language can be a critical barrier for Uyghurs and Kazakhs to receive aid.

¹²⁵ Bradley Jardine, interview with Julie Millsap.

¹²⁶ “Pay up or Put It off: Europe Fails to Treat Mental Health,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 3, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/pay-up-or-put-it-off-europe-fails-to-treat-mental-health/a-56812344>.

¹²⁷ Bradley Jardine, interview with Tomas Schulze.

issue. We know that the security services collect materials on the victims and continue to share this information with their Chinese counterparts.” Camp survivors, including Tursunay Ziawudun and other escapees to Kazakhstan, have reported similar harassment by members of Kazakhstan’s security services.¹²⁸

X. Conclusion

Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz CSOs are responding to the humanitarian crisis in diaspora communities caused by the Chinese Party-state’s human rights abuses in the Uyghur region and its transnational repression and persecution. However, this work often goes under-supported both domestically and internationally. Donations from within the community cannot address the crisis of statelessness and destitution, isolation, trauma, and cultural erasure caused by the genocide, including ongoing transnational persecution.

Domestically, governments have obligations to protect their citizens from crime and harassment and where possible, help victims seek justice and restitution, either through the prosecution of the perpetrators and/or compensation and services provided by the state. Further, states have a clear mandate to protect the rights and freedoms of all their citizens, and the civil rights of those seeking asylum within their borders. The denial of these rights to Uyghur refugees counters these fundamental principles and must be redressed through protecting Uyghur asylum seekers and working to guarantee their rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

For ongoing international crimes such as genocide, persecuted groups require international action. The international community has a responsibility to provide safe haven for victims and others fleeing persecution, and must step in when there is no domestic or international mechanism to address humanitarian needs stemming from such international crimes. Assistance should include medical

“The national security services watch us when we meet with victims. It is a very sensitive issue, and we operate on the fringe of civil society. Sometimes this work is life-threatening.

¹²⁸ Bradley Jardine, interview with Aina; Tursunay Ziyawudun, “Tursunay Ziyawudun – UK Uyghur Tribunal Testimony,” June 5, 2021, <https://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/UT-211111-Tursunay-Ziyawudun.pdf>.

care for victims of torture or extraterritorial violence, counseling, employment and housing assistance, community and cultural support programs, and additional programs that work to ameliorate the suffering of secondary survivors in the diaspora community. Government programs should provide assistance directly to Uyghurs or to the CSOs that strive to support them as they build new lives in their host states. Furthermore, states must deter and prevent transnational repression and persecution of individuals who have escaped the territory of the genocide. Extraterritorial persecution of genocide survivors and secondary survivors is an affront to host states' national interests and values, including the core values of constitutional democracies, including both sovereignty and the guarantee of fundamental civil rights.

XI. Recommendations for Humanitarian Relief

Donor Organizations

- Adopt funding parameters that are global rather than country-specific in nature, so that programs can assist genocide survivors in more than one country of refuge.
- Adopt funding parameters that do not require “on-the-ground” presence in the country where atrocity crimes are ongoing, or other requirements that Uyghur community organizations and their partners cannot meet. Funders and operational organizations should re-examine any across-the-board requirement for an “on the ground” presence in order to assist the victims and survivors of atrocity crimes, as this is impossible in the Uyghur region. Such a requirement rules out any assistance for victims who do not live in the Uyghur region, even when support for victims of atrocity crimes is part of the organization’s mandate.
- Fund organizations that support entrepreneurship, education, job training and skills certifications.

- Fund organizations that provide pro bono mental health care to Uyghurs.
- Fund organizations that provide humanitarian assistance to destitute orphans and children of single-parent families.
- Fund Uyghur NGOs that seek to build community resilience, including cultural programming, archiving and digitization of Uyghur-language cultural and religious heritage texts, language-transmission programming, and programs addressing emotional trauma.
- Convene closed-door meetings for researchers to present their evidence on the perpetrators of the human rights violations in the Uyghur region and resulting humanitarian crisis to other governments.

Academia

- Uyghur scholars and students need to be supported through student visa programs, fellowships, and research grants.
- Provide scholarships for Uyghur- and Kazakh-speaking individuals to become certified counselors.

National Governments

- Create more user-friendly pathways for Uyghurs to report digital transnational repression to government security services in democratic states.¹²⁹
- Address the separation of Uyghur children from their families by identifying pathways for the reunification of Uyghur families in the U.S. or wherever relatives have settled.

¹²⁹ For more policy recommendations relating to cyber-security, see Natalie Hall and Bradley Jardine, “‘Your Family Will Suffer’: How China Is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies,” Uyghur Human Rights Project, November 10, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/your-family-will-suffer-how-china-is-hacking-surveilling-and-intimidating-uyghurs-in-liberal-democracies/>.

- Implement permanent forms of protection for refugees and consideration of transnational repression within asylum review processes (see below for more details).

XII. Recommendations for Providing Protection to Uyghurs in the Diaspora

National Governments

- Governments should reject criminal justice cooperation requests against Uyghurs that put them at risk of refoulement and ensure that Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples are effectively protected against the misuse of international databases and alerts by the Chinese authorities;
- Create a pro-active resettlement program for Uyghurs at risk;
- Expedite the asylum cases of Uyghurs, use “Priority 2” status in the U.S., and create an internationally coordinated refugee resettlement program for Uyghurs;
- Ensure that Uyghur resettlement is not impeded by lack of documentation, such as passports and birth certificates;
- Funding programs must reach beyond country-specific aid categories to recognize the unique dangers faced by Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples residing within their borders;
- Increase funding for legal aid and training on legal and political rights in the countries where Uyghurs reside;
- Increase funding for assisting Uyghur CSOs and individuals to implement digital security to defend against persistent state-directed malware, impersonation, and hacks;
- The U.S., Canada, and other countries should create a formal coordination group on Uyghur refugee admissions so that the responsibility does not only fall on one country;

- Engage in more proactive diplomacy: U.S. diplomats abroad, including the U.S. Secretary of State, must make it very clear to foreign governments what the expectations and consequences of continued compliance with Chinese deportation requests, arrests, and harassment are. U.S. diplomats must also continue to speak about transnational repression

XIII. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Uyghur Humanitarian Aid and Community-Resilience Organizations Mentioned in this Report

<u>Ana Care and Education</u>	U.S.	Ana Care and Education was founded as a 501(c)3 organization in 2017 in northern Virginia. Ana Care Uyghur programs include Uyghur language classes, dance and the arts, and youth sports.
<u>Blue Crescent Humanitarian Aid Society</u>	Turkey	The Blue Crescent Humanitarian Aid Society (BCHAS) is known as <i>Kok Ay Insaniy Yardem Jemiyiti</i> in Uyghur and <i>Mavi Hilal Insani Yardim Dernegi</i> in Turkish. It supports Uyghur refugees in Turkey who have had their businesses confiscated by Chinese authorities or who have lost touch with their family members, their husbands and wives, and even their children. BCHAS collects donations from philanthropists in Turkey and distributes aid to widows, orphans, the elderly, and other Uyghurs most in need. Aid helps cover food, clothing, rent, doctors’ bills and medicine, and school supplies.
<u>Campaign for Uyghurs</u>	U.S.	The Campaign for Uyghurs (CFU) was established in 2017 in the U.S. CFU helped support the start-up of Hope House in Istanbul in 2021. Overall programming includes equipping Uyghur communities around the world to raise international awareness of the human rights abuses in the Uyghur region.

<p>East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association (Maarip)</p>	<p>Turkey</p>	<p>The East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association, known by its Uyghur name Maarip (“education”) was established in 2006 by Uyghur community members in Turkey. It is focused on educating Uyghurs and meeting their “religious, social, cultural, spiritual, and earthly needs.” Maarip provides scholarships and runs several elementary schools as well as other activities to support education.</p>
<p>International Legal Initiative</p>	<p>Kazakhstan</p>	<p>The International Legal Initiative (ILI) has sought to raise funds for Kazakhs who have left the Uyghur region and need medical attention. ILI also advocates for Kazakhs in the camps through the government of Kazakhstan.¹³⁰</p>
<p>Nuzgum Family and Cultural Association</p>	<p>Turkey</p>	<p>The Nuzgum Family and Cultural Association provides Uyghur cultural and language classes and cultural programming for the Uyghur community in Istanbul.¹³¹</p>
<p>Shukr Foundation</p>	<p>Australia</p>	<p>Shukr Foundation is a charity organization empowering people to enhance their livelihoods, end hunger and overcome hardship. Shukr Foundation’s “Uyghur Refugee Appeal” helps the most destitute and needy Uyghur refugees in Turkey with food, shelter, medical aid, and education. With a particular focus on women and children, the project provides immediate and long-lasting relief to thousands of widows and orphans in dire need.</p>
<p>The Tarim Network</p>	<p>U.K., U.S., and Australia (global)</p>	<p>The Tarim Network was established in 2018 and focuses primarily on connecting Uyghurs and promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of Uyghur identity and culture. On the organization’s website and on social media, the Tarim Network offers readings and classes on the Uyghur language and history. The Tarim Network is developing a standardized curriculum for the Uyghur language and publishing an anthology of writing by</p>

¹³⁰ “Kazakhstan: After Xinjiang, the Long Road to Recovery,” *Eurasianet*, September 11, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-after-xinjiang-the-long-road-to-recovery>.

¹³¹ “Uyghurs in Turkey Fearful of China’s Influence,” Underrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, May 24, 2020, <https://unpo.org/article/21906>.

		Uyghur youth. In 2022, the network organized musical events and book talks, and co-organized a bazaar for Uyghur arts and crafts in Falls Church, Virginia.
<u>Uyghur American Association</u>	U.S.	Established in 1998, the Uyghur American Association (UAA) promotes and preserves Uyghur culture and supports the rights of Uyghur people to use peaceful, democratic means to determine their political future. Based in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, UAA serves as the primary hub for the Uyghur diaspora community in the United States. UAA programs train and support community advocacy for action on the Uyghur crisis, provide the Uyghur American community with unique educational programming that preserves Uyghur language, music, culture, and history, and empowers Uyghur youth to become leaders in their community.
<u>Uyghur Human Rights Project</u>	U.S.	The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) provides assistance and humanitarian relief for camp survivors and their families, in addition to its primary program of human rights documentation and advocacy. UHRP conducts research and advocacy on the human rights of Uyghurs both in the Uyghur homeland and throughout the diaspora, in partnership with both local and international organizations.
<u>Uyghur Refugee Relief Fund</u>	Canada	The Uyghur Refugee Relief Fund (URRF) is a non-profit organization registered in Ontario, Canada, in March 2019. URRF works with various government organizations, NGOs, and communities worldwide to offer resettlement services for Uyghur refugees who have fled the Chinese government's ongoing persecution and are in dire need. URRF also assists displaced Uyghurs living in third countries by providing food and other basic humanitarian supplies.

The Uyghur Science and Enlightenment Foundation (Uyghur School)	Turkey	The Uyghur Science and Enlightenment Foundation was established in 2015 to help educate students about Uyghur culture and identity. ¹³²
Uyghur Wellness Initiative	U.S.	The Uyghur Wellness Initiative (UWI) was launched in May 2020 to meet the needs of Uyghurs suffering from the grief and trauma of being separated from their families and communities through offering public events and pro bono counseling referrals. The UWI disseminates educational materials for Uyghurs, and its website features information about the emotional and health-related impact of the genocide on Uyghur diaspora communities. The initiative is led by a consortium formed by Peace Catalyst International, UHRP, UAA, and CFU.

Appendix 2 - Incidents of Transnational Repression in Case Study Countries

As of November 2021, we verified 198 incidents of transnational repression in the U.S., Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, with an upper estimate of 824 since 1997. This upper estimate is based on findings that include bulk cases with limited details of particular individuals or where individuals were reported with pseudonyms or anonymously. These figures rely on reported data, representing just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the number of renditions likely occurring according to anonymous interviews conducted by human rights organizations active in these countries.¹³³

Country	Lower Estimate (fully verified)	Upper Estimate (unverified)
Kazakhstan	28	200
Kyrgyzstan	66	69

¹³² Jaclynn Ashly, "The Turkish School Preserving Culture of Young Uighurs in Exile," *Al Jazeera*, August 2, 2022, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/8/2/the-turkish-school-preserves-culture-of-young-uighurs-in-exile>.

¹³³ Bradley Jardine, Edward Lemon, and Natalie Hall, "No Space Left to Run: China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs," UHRP, June 24, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/no-space-left-to-run-chinas-transnational-repression-of-uyghurs/>; Natalie Hall and Bradley Jardine, "Your Family Will Suffer': How China Is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies," UHRP, November 10, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/report/your-family-will-suffer-how-china-is-hacking-surveilling-and-intimidating-uyghurs-in-liberal-democracies/>.

Turkey	56	474
United States	48	81

Appendix 3 - Uyghur Human Rights Project Documentation of Related Issues

See uhrp.org/transnational-repression/ and specific reports below.

<i>Beyond Silence: Collaboration Between Arab States and China in the Transnational Repression of the Uyghurs</i> , March 2022
<i>The Disappearance of Uyghur Intellectual and Cultural Elites: A New Form of Eliticide</i> , December 2021
<i>“Your Family Will Suffer”</i>: How China is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Western Democracies , November 2021
<i>Under the Gavel: Evidence of Uyghur-owned Property Seized and Sold Online</i> , September 2021
<i>“They Sent Her to a Concentration Camp Because She Came to Turkey”</i> , September 2021
<i>“Nets Cast from the Earth to the Sky”</i>: China’s Hunt for Pakistan’s Uyghurs , August 2021
<i>No Space Left to Run: China’s Transnational Repression of the Uyghurs</i> , June 2021
<i>“The Government Never Oppresses Us”</i>: China’s proof-of-life videos as intimidation and a violation of Uyghur family unity , February 2021
<i>“Return Our Relatives’ Passports”</i>: Uyghurs’ Calls for Family Reunification , August 2020
<i>Weaponized Passports: The Crisis of Uyghur Statelessness</i> , April 2020
<i>Repression Across Borders: The CCP’s Illegal Harassment and Coercion of Uyghur Americans</i> , August 2019
<i>“Another Form of Control”</i>: Complications in obtaining documents from China impacts immigration processes and livelihoods for Uyghurs in the United States , July 2018
<i>The Fifth Poison: The Harassment of Uyghurs Overseas</i> , November 2017



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