



# MANIFEST RISK

## "Air Silk Road" Cargo Flights Carry Risk of Uyghur Forced Labor into Europe

July 2025 | By Peter Irwin and Dr. Henryk Szadziewski

### ***Manifest Risk: "Air Silk Road" Cargo Flights Carry Risk of Uyghur Forced Labor into Europe***

documents the rapid expansion of air cargo routes connecting Ürümqi with over a dozen cities across Europe, creating a trade corridor which risks deepening Uyghur forced labor in European supply chains.

## Key Takeaways

- **Air cargo routes are rapidly expanding between Ürümqi and over a dozen European cities.** Since June 2024, nine cargo companies have launched new air freight routes between Ürümqi and cities across the EU, UK, and Switzerland, creating a direct trade corridor from a region where the Chinese government is perpetrating atrocity crimes, including forced labor.
- **Goods transported by air include products from sectors linked to Uyghur forced labor.** Cargo includes e-commerce goods, textiles, footwear, electronics, and agricultural products, sectors documented as tainted by Uyghur forced labor.
- **New air freight routes are part of China's broader Air Silk Road strategy to integrate the Uyghur Region into global markets.** The Chinese government has positioned Ürümqi as a central hub for transcontinental cargo flights under the Belt and Road Initiative.
- **Immediate action is required to close enforcement gaps and prevent complicity.** Without urgent intervention, the growing volume of cargo flights risks embedding Uyghur forced labor into European supply chains.

## Recommendations

- **The EU should** investigate air cargo routes from the Uyghur Region, designate the region as high-risk for forced labor under the EU Forced Labour Regulation, and support legislation to ensure full transparency of import manifests.
- **The UK should** investigate air cargo imports from the Uyghur Region, ban goods produced with forced labor, and require full public disclosure of air cargo trade data to enhance transparency and accountability.
- **Cargo companies should** cease all air cargo operations originating in the Uyghur Region. Given the impossibility of conducting credible human rights or labor rights due diligence in the region, there is no reliable way to verify the absence of forced labor in shipments.

Full report:  
[uhrp.org](https://uhrp.org)

