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**PERVASIVE, PUNITIVE,
AND PREDETERMINED:**
UNDERSTANDING
MODERN SLAVERY
IN NORTH KOREA
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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all those individuals and organisations who contributed to the production of this report.

In particular, the authors extend their sincere thanks to the participants of the project for their openness and sincerity in the sharing of their experiences which have contributed to greater understanding of modern slavery in North Korea.

The authors would like to thank Dr Kim Kwangch'eol and Mr Jang Jin-sung, colleagues at the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (Dr Yoon Yeosang and Teodora Gyupchanova) and colleagues at the Walk Free Foundation (Fiona David, Jacqueline Joudo Larsen and Elise Gordon) for contributions made throughout the development of this study and drafting of this report.

This study was commissioned in 2017 by the Walk Free Foundation to deepen the understanding of modern slavery in North Korea.

Cover: Kim Jeong-Ya (a pseudonym), 67, who lives near the North Korean border in Yanji, China, belongs to a handful of Chinese activists who have dedicated their lives to helping North Koreans make a safe passage from North Korea to South Korea via mainland China. Kim has been imprisoned twice and beaten up by North Korean agents operating in China. Kim's relatives, who did the same kind of support work "disappeared" in North Korea. Since her release from jail, Kim has been under intense police surveillance. Her meager life savings was confiscated by local authorities, and she is not allowed to leave her home in the suburbs of Yanji. Photo credit: Katharina Hesse

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This study sheds light on the hidden reality that is forced labour and other forms of modern slavery inside the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, better known as North Korea. As it is not possible to directly survey or otherwise perform data collection within North Korea, the research findings are based on interviews with 50 defectors from North Korea who are living in South Korea.

All but one of the interviewees described situations they had been subjected to while living in North Korea that meet the international legal definition of “forced labour.”

To understand the experiences of these 50 men and women, it is necessary to understand the operating environment inside North Korea. Following the famine in the late 1990s and the collapse of the Public Distribution System for all but a minority, North Korean daily life has become a contradictory mix of socialist rhetoric (in which the Supreme Leader and the State provide for the people) and market-based realities (in which the general population supports and funds the Supreme Leader and the State).

As reported in interviews with the respondents, key features that impact on degrees of freedom in the working lives of North Koreans include the following:

- › All officially recognised work is centrally organised.
- › Social class determines the nature of the employment one receives (along with housing, access to education, and other benefits). There are three main classes: the core class (the elite, party cadres, and their families), the wavering class (average North Koreans), and the hostile class (including descendants of landlords or capitalists). Status can be and frequently is inherited.
- › The punishment for being unemployed or failing to attend work is being sent to a labour training camp.
- › Workers are provided with food rations, which can be withheld as punishment.

- › While in theory all work earns an income, in reality most salaries remain unpaid and many people work on the black-market trading or selling whatever they can.
- › In order to obtain a job, keep a job, or switch jobs, payment of bribes to officials were usually required.

In the interviews, three key typologies of modern slavery emerged. The first was repeated mobilisation of children and adults, through mandatory, unpaid “communal labour” in agriculture, road building, and construction.

- › For children, this might involve daily work in agriculture, or a month of work at harvest time. Any payments would be given to their schools, and not the children. If children did not participate or otherwise cover their share of the work through a bribe or payment, they would later be punished and criticised at school.
- › For adults, communal labour involved being mobilised for “battles” in which workers were sent to work for 70 to 100 days in a row. The penalty for refusal was a cut in food rations or the levying of taxes.

The second typology was forced labour of the general population by the state. Many of the interviewees indicated they had either not been paid for their work other than through provision of food rations (which could be refused or withheld as punishment) or, if they had been theoretically paid, wages were withheld due to official donation drives and other deductions. As some workplaces exist but have no production, workers reported having to pay for the goods their workplaces are supposed to be producing.



Others paid to be registered (to avoid being unemployed and thereby risk being sent to a labour training camp) but actually worked elsewhere. To survive and cover the cost of holding their jobs, they would trade or otherwise sell their labour on the black market. All but one respondent noted that it was impossible to refuse or leave a job without permission, as the result would initially be loss of rations and then being sent to a labour training camp if without a job for greater than 15 days. There were two defectors in the group of 50 who had worked for the North Korean government in factories located overseas. Both said their wages were withheld and, at most, only a portion was eventually paid to them. While physically being located overseas, they described working in an exported North Korean environment, in which the hierarchical structures and ideological sessions travelled with them.

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The final typology described by respondents was forced labour inside the labour training camps. Labour training camps are prisons where North Koreans who are without officially registered employment for more than 15 days can be sent as punishment. Inmates have to perform hard labour, reportedly for a minimum of six months.¹

The picture that emerges is as disturbing as it is unique. While not a representative sample, the respondents in this group described first-hand experiences of state-imposed forced labour. They also described a broader system of modern slavery operating around them, one that is perpetrated by the state and upon which it depends for its very survival.

Young-soon, 80, former prisoner and forced labourer in North Korea. "I knew Song Hye-rim from school. One day, she told me she was moving into the 'great leader' Kim Jong-il's residence. A few months later, my family and I were sent to Yodok, a prison camp. My parents and my eight-year-old son died of malnutrition there, and the rest of my family were either shot or drowned. Nine years later, after my release, I was told we'd been imprisoned because I knew about Kim Jong-il's relationship with Song. Song Hye-rim and Kim Jong-il's illegitimate son, Kim Jong-nam, was assassinated earlier this year". Photo credit: James Whitlow Delano

INTRODUCTION



It has long been known, though difficult to verify, that citizens of North Korea are forced to work by the State on a far greater scale than seen elsewhere in the world. Recent estimates reveal that 1 in 10 North Koreans are living in modern slavery with the vast majority being forced to work by the state.² While these estimates shed light on the scale of this crime, a more nuanced understanding of modern slavery in North Korea and the conditions that give rise to it, is required. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the hidden reality that is forced labour and other forms of modern slavery inside North Korea. Because it is not possible to directly survey or otherwise undertake data collection within North Korea, the study methodology involved conducting qualitative interviews with defectors from North Korea living in South Korea.

This report draws on qualitative analysis of the interviews to examine specific features of labour arrangements inside North Korea: known types of forced labour; working conditions, hours and overtime; payment, deductions and food rations; freedom of movement and freedom to leave employment; the use of labour training camps; and overseas labour. While the findings are not representative, the picture that emerges is one of state-imposed forced labour on a mass scale.

State-imposed forced labour takes on different forms and ranges from a requirement for children in schools to perform communal services through to the use of forced labour in “labour training camps” as a form of punishment and social control.

The interviews shed light on the complex economics and power dynamics that make the North Korean situation so difficult for external observers to understand. Through a mix of apparent socialist policies (requiring everyone to work for the state and the state providing wages and food) and market-based realities (in which many people have to work or sell goods and services privately because they are not being paid or fed), North Korean citizens find themselves engaging the black market (and thereby risking arrest and transfer to labour training camps) simply to pay for an official “job number” to prove employment, a requirement for a person to avoid being sent to a labour training camp.



Disguising his identity, a 20 year old refugee from North Korea now living in Northern China agreed to be photographed on the condition that his face and location were not recognisable. He reports that he left his mother and sister behind in North Korea. He used to be a road worker but was constantly hungry (North Korea uses selective food allocation as a tool of control). In China he works as a farm labourer and construction worker. If he is lucky, he makes about 40 Euros per month. However, he says his boss often does not pay him. Also, locals, who know about his illegal status and that he cannot seek help, beat him. Photo credit: Katharina Hesse

BACKGROUND OF NORTH KOREAN REGIME AND SYSTEM



North Korea is at first sight, a socialist state with a strong personality cult centred on the leader, Kim Jong-un, and his predecessors from the Kim family. It retains the rhetoric, and organisational structure that one typically associates with hard-line socialism, including state ownership of both the means of production and state provision of basic human services such as healthcare, education, housing and food production – along with a professed national self-reliance unique to the Kim regime. Society is organised accordingly: all adult male and adult female unmarried citizens are obliged to contribute to society and work for state institutions (which may range from a farm or a factory to bureaucratic agencies), in return for which the state provides its citizen-workers with salaries (called “living expenses”), housing, rationed foodstuffs, and other daily necessities through the nationally managed Public Distribution System.

While this may be how the North Korean system is supposed to work, today’s reality is something else, perhaps in many ways more akin to capitalism, albeit a poor rendition of it. Average North Koreans earn their livelihoods outside of the official system by smuggling, working and trading on the black market, and by trading outside the official system with China. Others profit from this and augment their virtually non-existent state incomes by levying informal taxes (bribes, essentially) on the activities of others. Successful traders and those high up in the government bureaucracy are in positions to collect more money than others and become wealthy.

Another important factor that determines life in North Korea is the notion of “social class,” which, having long been intertwined with the ruling political ideology, is surviving the apparent deterioration of the official socialist system. While ostensibly a relic of Leninist-Marxism, the notion of class has taken on a special significance in North Korea, where one’s inherited social position is determined by the political, social, and economic status of one’s parents, grandparents, and perhaps great-grandparents, but this may also be influenced by the behaviour (good or bad) of one’s living relatives. North Korea recognises three main social classes and almost 50 sub-classes.

The main classes are the core class (the top 25 percent who are considered loyal and trustworthy and hence worthy of state appointments and proper treatment; these are the party cadres and their families), the wavering class (slightly over half the population and consisting of average North Koreans), and finally the hostile class (the 20 percent of the population who are considered to be descendants of landlords, capitalists, and subversives and, accordingly, not to receive good positions in employment, comfortable housing, and so forth).³ Being a member of the core class usually means having access to university education, career-track employment, and comfortable housing in the capital city, among other advantages.

North Korean society revolves around a “monolithic leadership system”, according to which the Supreme Leader, the ranking male member of the Kim clan, is all-knowing, unassailable, infallible, omnipotent, and owed complete loyalty. Practical reality is somewhat different, with political, administrative, and executive power residing in a small group of bureaucrats who represent various factions in Pyongyang. Each of these factions, however, needs Kim Jong-un, his legacy, and his unchallenged primacy to carry out their work.

The organisation of labour in North Korea is complicated, multifaceted, and, given the country's isolation and the peculiarities in how labour is compensated,⁴ also difficult to research. Adding to the challenge is that official statistics are unreliable and field study in North Korea is a practical impossibility.

But it is clear from our interviews, and supported by other research, that most impactful have been the systemic changes that followed a famine in the late 1990s⁵ that killed hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of North Korean citizens. Importantly, this was accompanied by the collapse of the Public Distribution System,⁶ upon which North Korean citizens relied for their survival.⁷ As a result, North Korean society came to possess a number of salient characteristics that not only changed the way people worked and were compensated for their labour, but which were increasingly associated with a capitalist system, with working people using their own resourcefulness to earn income in functioning markets (however illegitimate from the government's point of view) to make up for the shortcomings of the barely functioning official socialist system.

Through interviews with former North Korean citizens who fled their country, it is possible to compose an accurate, if indirect, picture of what labour in North Korea has looked like in the recent past. It is one that differs significantly from the image that the North Korean government continues to project to the world, which is that of a self-reliant socialist society on its way to becoming a communist one. The interviews conducted as part of this study provide greater understanding of the momentous changes of the past 20 years in the North Korean employment system.⁸ Essentially, the prevalent socialist work patterns of North Korea (where all adults, with the possible exception of married women, were compulsorily employed by the state) changed into a hybrid socialist-capitalist pattern of work.⁹

One of the by-products of these momentous changes is the further institutionalisation of forced labour and modern slavery in North Korea. It has been common knowledge for four decades that North Korea state has had political concentration camps whose inmates are, virtually enslaved, being forced to work for the state without compensation, often for the remainder of their natural lives.¹⁰ The radical changes beginning in the 1990s have meant not only the

furtherance of state-imposed forced labour, but also the practice of modern slavery moving out of the camps and into wider society.

It seems apparent that, in the wake of the famine and the collapse of the Public Distribution System that safeguarded the physical well-being of its citizens, a significant number of state-run factories, farms, institutes and other places of work effectively stopped running. Due to the directives of the state, they retained their employees, even when production had long since stopped due to lack of raw materials, resources, finances, or demand. This led to the majority of the population seeking paid, and illegal, work elsewhere. While such a situation had the potential to lead to the collapse of the North Korean economy, society, and perhaps even the government, North Korea has managed to survive.¹¹ This, in part, has been by developing and managing its own peculiar version of modern slavery (and form of debt bondage) that leverages the difficult position

that average workers find themselves in when the state requires them to be officially employed (under penalty of being put into a forced labour training camp) yet not paid salaries by their registered place of employment. When the demands of the employer and the state clash – as they frequently do – it is left to the workers to juggle the competing demands and find solutions.

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Geographically, the picture is diverse. Contemporary slavery is particularly widespread in the northern parts of the country which comprise the provinces of Chagang-to, Ryanggang-to, Pyŏngan puk-to, and Hamgyŏng puk-to and home to about a third of North Korea's seven million inhabitants. The situation in Pyongyang, where about three million of the country's 23 million citizens live and where institutions pre-famine suffered to a lesser degree, is different from the rest of the country. Living in Pyongyang means having received the permission from the government to live there and partake in what is left of the Public Distribution System. As such, this report focuses on the area outside of what is colloquially known as "Republic Pyongyang."

All our respondents are from the area outside of Pyongyang, although some of them lived in Pyongyang for a time. Leaving Pyongyang usually means exile, as living conditions and opportunities outside the capital are markedly worse.

METHODOLOGY



For this qualitative study, a total of 50 semi-structured interviews with defectors from North Korea living in South Korea were conducted in 2017. Interviews were conducted with 27 women and 23 men. All those interviewed were adults who, with one exception, left North Korea between 2011 and 2016.¹² All but two of the respondents had worked solely inside North Korea, whereas two respondents had experience working for the regime outside of the country (one of whom had worked outside of North Korea in two countries). Participants were identified through the networks of the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights in Seoul and randomly selected in order to be invited to participate.

The aim of the interviews with defectors from North Korea was to chart what working life is like in North Korea and the questions were accordingly designed to ask about all aspects of working life in North Korea, touching as little as possible on private life. An interview guide was developed together with the Walk Free Foundation and DPRK before being translated into Korean. The survey consisted of 69 questions and was designed to allow the respondents to talk about their professional experiences in North Korea in some detail. Questions were a mix of multiple choice and open, depending on the kind of question. All questions allowed the respondent to elaborate if so desired. See Annex A for a copy of the interview guide.

The study adhered to the rules and ethical principles in place for academics in the Netherlands as articulated in the Codes of Conduct of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands.¹³ To ensure integrity and quality both the research staff and the respondents were fully informed about the purpose, methods and uses of the research results. They were briefed about their participation in the project and possible risks were discussed. Research staff were instructed to conduct the interviews in such a way as to avoid emotional harm or risk of upset. Respondents were made aware that they could stop the interview at any time and that they could refuse any questions they did not want to answer. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and in Korean. All interview respondents consented to the interviews on the condition of anonymity.

Respondents were also able to redact information deemed sensitive or private. To ensure the privacy of the respondents, the confidentiality of the information supplied by them, and the anonymity of respondents, data on the results was de-identified. The interviews lasted between two to four hours. Interviews were transcribed and then translated to English for the purpose of publication. The translations have been checked by the authors of this study twice.

Trafficking of North Korean women to China

While none of the respondents in our study were trafficked abroad (other than through the government's program of hiring out workers to employers in other countries), and no recent quantitative studies of trafficking or North Korean women exist, anecdotal reports suggest that up to 90 percent of North Korean refugees, many of them women and children, end up as trafficking victims in China, most for the purpose of sexual exploitation.¹⁴ Additionally, the involvement of the North Korean state in the trafficking of women into China is much less clear than it is in the case of overseas labour. A more intensive effort to study human trafficking of North Koreans into China and elsewhere is sorely needed.

DEFINING MODERN SLAVERY IN NORTH KOREA



“Situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, abuse of power or deception,”¹⁵ the Walk Free Foundation’s operational definition of modern slavery, is an apt description of the situation North Korean workers find themselves in. The situation is also suitably reflected in the International Labour Organization definition of “forced or compulsory labour,” one of the elements of “modern slavery,” in the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”

While one might try to argue that bribing one’s way into a job could be considered offering oneself voluntarily, the ILO convention further elaborates that “voluntary offer” refers to a person freely giving consent to enter into an employment relationship *and* to have the freedom to leave one’s employment.¹⁶ The experiences drawn from our survey of defectors and from previous studies indicates that most workers are employed based on instruction by the North Korean Ministry of Labour.¹⁷ Almost all respondents in our study gave the same answer to the question regarding freedom to leave their employment: “not without penalty.”

These findings are supported by the US Department of Labor’s 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report, which describes forced labour in North Korean prison camps, among North Korean workers abroad, and of victims that are forcibly repatriated from abroad.¹⁸

Also, compulsory work mobilisation, which is common in North Korea, should be regarded as forced labour, since it exceeds the level of “minor communal services” and involves work for public purposes such as compulsory public works of general importance, which is forbidden by the ILO’s Forced Labour Convention, as well as its Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), which explicitly forbids governments from “mobilising and using labour for purposes of economic development.”¹⁹ Forced labour in North Korea is deeply rooted not only in these specific environments, but also in most aspects of regular employment throughout North Korea, which amounts to widespread, state-imposed forced labour due to the state’s firm grip on every aspect of the employment process and the harsh penalties it imposes on workers who flout the rules, notwithstanding the efforts of many to do so.

COMMUNAL WORK – CHILDREN



Citizens in North Korea start communal services from either elementary, middle, or high school, depending on when and where they live and the policy that applies to their locality. Schoolchildren are mobilised for mandatory work through their schools in what survey respondents identified as work in agriculture, collecting wood for heating, road repairs, and, for older children, construction work.

The periods and frequency of work varied according to the type of work that was being done, and the interviewees noted that children typically were required to meet quotas. Families with sufficient means could, to excuse their children from having to meet these quotas, offer financial compensation or buy the required products and deliver them to the school. On top of this, children were expected to provide their school with (mostly agricultural) products or financial contributions, sometimes on a daily basis. In case the work demanded the use of tools, such as shovels, the children were obliged to bring the tools from home. Children who could not meet those demands tended to stay at home, knowing they would be punished, but shirking communal duties typically meant that schoolteachers would subsequently place further burden on these children and their families.

I constantly did farm work until the sixth year in elementary school. We did everything by hand, or with hand hoes and buckets. Nothing is provided by the farm, we had to bring our own tools from home. In the spring, we had to work for about one month in the summer, when we did weeding. We finished with our classes in the morning and then we spend the afternoon working. We planted cabbage seedlings in pots, rice seedlings. In the autumn we worked longer, for about two months, as there was a lot of work associated with the harvest. So at first we were told that we were mobilised to work for a month and a half, but they would extend it to two months. We also dug up potatoes. (Respondent No. 3, female, adult)

When I was in primary school, I was sent to pick pine cones as part of winter preparation; in middle school, I cut firewood in order to heat the classroom. We did this for the teachers too. The amount of the work was different depending on the number of students, like five trucks of wood or four trucks of wood. (Respondent No. 1, male, adult)

At the farm we picked corn, in spring we planted corn and vegetables. This is what we did. We filled large bowls with water and watered the fields. We studied in the morning and in the afternoon, we worked. In the spring, we planted greens. Until I was 14 I also did some weeding. We usually worked from April to October. More than two to four days per week. [...] After the fourth year of middle school we were subjected to regular farm work mobilisation. In the spring, we stayed for about a month at a farm field, we slept and ate there. This was the spring mobilisation. In the summer, we did weeding for a few days, in the autumn we did hop mobilisation. Hop is a plant that grows up on a rope, its flowers have yellow powder. This powder is used to make beer, so we picked the hops (the hop flowers). Before September for about a month we gathered hops. They say it is imported by foreign countries. (Respondent No. 2, male, adult)

After 2010 my children always took tools (shovel, pickaxe) and went to work in the afternoon. At a nearby stream, creek, construction site or if the fence falls down at school they put it back up. There was also a lot of damage to the school buildings, something broken or destroyed, so they repaired it. Or they had to put back up sports tools such as pull up bars. They were summoned to work every day. About 4-5 times per week they went to work after they finished their classes. Some 4-5 times every week between April and October. (Respondent No.2, male, adult)

When I was a high school student, I was sent to weed in the spring and the fall by my school. I did it every year. [...] There is a month-long rice planting every year. In the winter, we were free from these duties. Students could cut trees or pay money to buy firewood in the winter, that's what we did in the two weeks winter holiday season. (Respondent No. 46, female, adult)

The children are not paid to work. Schools are compensated by the state for providing the labour of schoolchildren, based on the number of students they mobilise. All but one respondent testified that the work was mandatory, they didn't receive payment, and that those working in agriculture were explicitly forbidden from eating or taking home any of the food they were harvesting. Teachers, however, in some cases were allowed to take some products for themselves. One respondent added that not only were children not paid for their work, but in addition their families had to make payments to the school.

You must pay money. When you go to school you really have to pay every day. When some construction work had to be done, cement and reinforcement bars were needed, so every day the children were asked to bring to school 2000 KPW, or 5000 KPW. Children who do not have money cannot go to school. (Respondent No.2, male, adult)

They didn't even give us food. In fact, they would be suspicious of children taking potatoes and would check our pockets. (Respondent No. 18, female, adult)

If you refuse to work, they would go after you immediately. (Respondent No. 19, female, adult)

If I refused to go, I would be bullied. They searched for me and forced me to go to work. However, I could refuse if I provided financial support. Although I was sick, I had to provide financial support. (Respondent No. 42, female, adult)

Male teachers sometimes beat students who hadn't shown up. For one or two times of absence, they swear at the students. When they are absent repeatedly they will get beaten. (Respondent No. 40, male, adult)

Children from parents with money or connections who could financially compensate their communal services could be exempted from work.

There were cases in which the mothers of some children used their connections to give rice or side dishes, and in exchange their kids' names were taken of the farm work mobilisation list. People who had no money or power could not refuse to go. (Respondent No. 3, female, adult)

When a child is sick you can pay money and then he/she may not go to work. When you say that you cannot send your child to work you had to give money to the school class leader. (Respondent No. 6, female, adult)

The work is compulsory and regulated by school. Respondents noted that there were consequences for children who could not fulfil the compulsory work and were also not able pay for it.

If you don't go to work the kids start to talk. They made fool of me. That is why I did not skip any work mobilisation. You get pressured by the teachers. They hated you for not going to work. They also assigned larger quota to the parents of such students when the class had something to purchase. (Respondent No.8, female, adult)

Children either worked regularly on certain weekdays or every morning in some cases, or some continuously for a month at a time. Most work by children was done in agriculture; weeding, watering, or harvesting agricultural products. Accordingly, most respondents' work was done during spring, autumn, and a few consecutive weeks to two months in the summer. If the work was done in a remote (agricultural) area, children stayed away from home for four to six weeks in one stretch. Apart from agricultural work, children were mobilised to repair railroad beds and fill them with rocks.

The coercive powers of the state worked through many different channels at the same time, some directly and immediate, others indirectly and on a deferred basis. This is when forced child labour is at its most visible in North Korean society.

When I was a teenager in the Youth League, I had to participate in the speed battles as part of the shock brigade at least once. I was mobilised to do construction on the Pyongyang Highway for six months. (Respondent No. 7, female, adult)

If I said that I hated to go, my mother made me go no matter what. So I had no choice. She said I should go as others went. If you don't go to work the kids start to talk. (Respondent No. 8, female, adult)

From the age of 13, every student is mobilised for farm work without exception. It lasts 40 days for the spring mobilisation and 30 days for the autumn one. (Respondent No. 10, male, adult)

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COMMUNAL WORK – ADULTS



Work mobilisation for adults is coordinated either on a national level, such as preparations for national events, or by regional or local governmental branches. The amount of work and the time spent on social work mobilisation varies depending on the status of the person, the region, the type of work, and the season. The frequency with which workers are mobilised can range from a few hours daily to a few months per year through mobilisations referred to as 70-day or 100-day “battles.”

Being mobilised by the state typically does not free anyone of their obligations at their regular jobs, which may create insurmountable problems for the workers faced with competing demands – that is, unless one pays bribes.

Mobilisation work can be routine. For instance, so-called morning mobilisations can include road pavement every morning from 6am until 7am. Or it can be sporadic, such as working on projects like constructing apartment buildings or statues. Some citizens are mobilised for infrastructure work on road building or reinforcement of riverbanks after flooding. Mobilised individuals must bring their own tools, buckets, and smashed gravel and also have to provide their own transport and food. There is no financial compensation whatsoever – not for the labour nor for the materials and other expenses.

Mobilisations for agricultural work are mostly for a longer period of time between June until August, during which people are typically sent to live and work in the countryside. The workers are given a quota that they have to meet and are explicitly forbidden to take with them any of the harvest.

People with specific jobs, such as drivers, or people with the means to financially contribute or provide extra materials, can be exempted from communal work. For the majority of citizens, however, communal work is compulsory under the penalty of reduction of food rations.

When asked about freedom to refuse labour mobilisation, one respondent answered:

You cannot refuse. If the work unit leader orders you to go to work, you have to do it. If you don't, then your food rations are cut off. (Respondent No. 1, male, adult)

All but one of the respondents in this study had undergone frequent compulsory mobilisation. All were aware that this obligation extended to all other citizens who were not able to buy it off – that failure to participate would either result in a reduction of food rations or the levying of additional taxes, and that the only way to avoid mobilisation was to pay a bribe:

There is a certain mobilisation campaign that people should work for three years. There is mobilisation to Mt. Paektu for making grass fields. People from the government would come to a certain region and mobilise residents for joint work for a large-scale construction project such as paving highways. I did not participate in such mobilisation. I paid money instead. I paid 50 North Korean won in 2008. Why should I work when I have money? Working there is extremely hard and people escape from there. (Respondent No. 39, male, adult)



In some cases, employees of workplaces were mobilised on rotation. For instance, in the case of a workplace with 10 workers, only one person would be chosen to be mobilised for one or three years. When the one-year mobilisation was over, another worker would be mobilised for the following year. Generally, however, with regard to these mobilisations, the interaction between the state and local employers is intricate and at times competitive, with the worker in the middle forced to satisfy demands from both sides. This is most clearly seen in the way labour mobilisation by the state (handled through its local institutions) interferes with duties at work.

Eighty to 90 percent of the labourers' working life was spent doing mobilisation work outside of the workplace. I would clean the streets, build houses, support farm work in the farming villages (this was mandatory), join the shock brigade (this was done in turns): there is a central shock brigade and a provincial shock brigade. The central shock brigade would do construction on Mt. Paektu Tourist Area and on the Mashingnyŏng Ski Resort. (Respondent No. 10, male, adult)

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The frequency and the intensity of the assigned tasks increases with the age of the mobilised, as they enter adulthood.

Work mobilisation is a constant factor in the lives of North Koreans – often starting in primary school and continuing until retirement – with the exceptions of the well-connected and the wealthy who can buy off this state-imposed obligation. The frequency and the intensity of the assigned tasks increases with the age of the mobilised, as they enter adulthood. For adults who cannot rely on connections, social background or money, summer mobilisation may mean one month or more of unpaid labour. Given that, for most North Koreans called up for mobilisation, for whom there is no option to refuse nor compensation for their labour, this is a form of forced labour. In the present-day North Korean context, being penalised for not participating in forced mobilisation results in a reduction of food rations and/or the levying of extra taxes or bribes, which may place families at the risk of malnutrition if not at the brink of starvation.

Collective works in the street, Pyongyang, North Korea. Work mobilisation is a constant factor in the lives of North Koreans – often starting in primary school and continuing until retirement. Photo credit: Eric Lafforgue / Art in All of Us / Contributor

EMPLOYMENT: RECRUITMENT, CONSENT, AND REGISTRATION



The North Korean labour system revolves around the authority of the state (and its representatives) determining who works where, when, and for what compensation. The Ministry of Labour decides the types of jobs that are given to workers, but under certain conditions it can be influenced. This is largely dependent on money and on networks. For good jobs people must pay a bribe or otherwise a certain amount of money.

One respondent explained that the prices were fixed for each position.

If you have some money you can go to the head of the labour department at the city people's committee and give a bribe of about 500 yuan. Then you can work at the place you want. You give the bribe once you find a place to go and get permission from the workplace first. (Respondent No. 13, male, adult)

But even if a bribe is paid, the whole process of acquiring a job takes a long time, since the approval of many people is required. Approval stamps must be received from the People's Safety Officer, the State Security Officer, the head of the factory, farm, or company, the party secretary of the factory, farm, or company, and finally the Ministry of Labour. Additional bribes are to be paid along the way, often in the form of money and cigarettes. People who cannot pay or bribe the Ministry of Labour must work in the place the ministry sends them and will most likely be assigned to unpopular working places like a livestock farm or other agricultural workplace.

For most ordinary North Koreans, working life exposes them to all kinds of acts of discrimination. Most conspicuous is the discrimination based on social class and wealth. Every interviewee stated that elevated social class, wealth, or a combination of both was the only way to circumvent the rules of the system.

I was assigned by the Ministry of Labour there. I didn't do anything for a year after graduation, but I was summoned by the Ministry of Labour. There they told me they had assigned me to a breeding factory. There are better workplaces but my social status is not good, so I could not be assigned a better job. (Respondent No. 6, female, adult)

Higher ranked jobs are only accessible for those considered to be of proper birth and means; these jobs bring more authority, less strict control, less work, and more pay – as well as the reduced likelihood of ever being confined in a labour training camp. For everyone else, work means little to no holidays and being subjected to arbitrary investigations. Interesting in this respect is that social background not only determines one's success in their place of work but may even determine one's profession.²⁰ Train operators, for example, tend to come from families where the males have worked as train operators or at other positions at the railroads. But this also applies to the less coveted jobs. A male defector noted that:

In North Korea, if your parents work in the coal mines, so will you. (Respondent No.22, male, adult)

Also, membership of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) makes a difference in how relatively free one is in choosing a job and in remuneration for the work done. However, membership in the KWP is highly selective. Consideration for membership not only requires excellent evaluations in a multitude of ideological group meetings every North Korean citizen is obliged to attend, it also means that one is supposed to have been born to a family with a proper revolutionary background, that one has no political criminals among the relatives, among other criteria. Of crucial importance is the presence of a social network extending into the KWP that can greatly facilitate the membership process. Once you are in, though, life and work get a lot better. While the majority of the people interviewed said that they would sometimes not be remunerated for their work for years at a time, they also noted that this generally does not happen to party members in good standing.

They also noted that party members who work for prestigious party institutions are not called upon when the rest of the population is rounded up for extra mobilisation duties:²¹

As an employee of the Supreme Guard Command you're excluded from labour mobilisation in society. (Respondent No. 11, male, adult)

Anyone working in the police, the State Security Department, the city party office, or hospitals does not have difficulties living in North Korea. No one can hurt them. It is referred to as having a "powerful background." Those with a powerful family and with money live with such power. We have to pay management fees (bribes) as much as one million won every two to three months. When I failed to make sufficient profits, I would not answer the phone calls (from officials). I would usually take 40 to 50 percent of the monthly income for myself and the rest of it should be given as bribes. (Respondent No. 39, male, adult)

Some professions are transferred from one generation to the next, most particularly those in the "dirty, dangerous, and demeaning" (3D) jobs:

In North Korea, the 3D jobs were coal mining, farming, and forestry. People in these fields weren't able to change their jobs and their children were required to carry on the work. (Respondent No.27, male, adult)

One interview respondent refused to go to work in a coal mine where his father was employed and was punished by being sent to labour training camp. Another respondent noted that since her whole family worked at the railway company, each family member had to be cautious of their conduct and performance, as a mistake might result in action against all of them.

The importance of being officially registered in a workplace cannot be overstated. The penalty for not being registered or not showing up for work for more than 15 days is being labelled as "unemployed" and, as a result, being sent to a labour training camp for six months. Being asked whether it is possible to quit your job and what the consequences could be, respondents answered:

If you quit without receiving approval, you will be detained at a labour training camp. (Respondent No. 30, male, adult)

If I'd quit, I would be caught. And if I didn't go to work for more than two months and was caught as unemployed, I would be investigated by the police office and would be detained in a labour training camp. Usually, the period of detainment was six months. (Respondent No. 38, male, adult)

I couldn't quit my job. If I didn't go to work, I would be sent to a labour training camp. (Respondent No. 44, male, adult)

If you are unemployed, you'll be sent to a labour training camp. You are given 15 days for the procedure but anything beyond that and you'll be considered unemployed. (Respondent No.27, male, adult)

We would be considered unemployed if we don't register ourselves within 15 days. When we change our jobs, we are considered unemployed if we don't start working again within 15 days. This means that if we quit our jobs, we must have another job. If not, we would be subject to forced labour. (Respondent No. 31, male, adult)

If you don't register at a factory and don't work at all, there is an Unemployment Group that investigates people like that and when they expose you, they forcibly assign you in groups to a workplace. Or if they are stricter you would be punished by being sent to a labour training camp. (Respondent No. 28, male, adult)

In order to avoid being unregistered, people without jobs register as so-called "8/3 workers," a term derived from Kim Il Sung's directive of August 3, 1984 to recycle discarded materials to produce new products. Now it refers to employees who pay a steep monthly sum to an officially recognised workplace to be registered as an official employee there, while working a different job (such as market trader) to earn the money to make a living and to pay their official employer.

There usually isn't any work to do in the workplaces so most people work as 8/3 workers. The workplaces are run on the money that 8/3 workers pay to the workplace every month. As a result, labourers cannot quit. If you want to quit, you first have to find a new place to work and receive a stamp of approval. You have to receive about 40 stamps. It takes about a month to get all the stamps and costs 300-400 yuan. [...] The Export Material Production Office of DPRK Railways exports mainly to China. [...] There were five labourers that were registered in 2013 and 15 in 2016. All of them were 8/3 workers and they paid 60,000 won a month and didn't have to come to work. (Respondent No. 13, male, adult)

In North Korea, you have to have a job, so I chose a workplace and gave money to my workplace as an 8/3 worker. (Respondent No. 17, male, adult)

I was registered as an 8/3 worker from the first day onwards. So, I haven't been to the workplace not even once. (Respondent No. 31, male, adult)

I had to pay money very punctually at work. Maybe this was why I was not threatened. I paid 30,000 or 50,000 North Korean won before the currency reform. Nowadays 8/3 workers in North Korea have to pay in dollars, it's 10 dollars. Before the currency reform 100 dollars was approximately 350,000 North Korean Won. Now, about 10 dollars is close to 80,000 won. (Respondent No. 31, male, adult)

.....
Some professions are transferred from one generation to the next, most particularly those in the "dirty, dangerous, and demeaning" (3D) jobs:

Asked whether he had ever experienced debt bondage, a respondent replied:

Yes. I was an 8/3 worker so I paid a fixed amount every month because I didn't have a job, I think that is similar to being in debt. (Respondent No. 17, male, adult)

Another example of the situation of “8/3 workers” is that of a woman who worked in a pig processing plant:

On paper I was a labourer, but in reality, I did not work as one. It was a place that raised pigs to support the People's Army and shock brigades. It was supposed to raise pigs. But no one actually raised pigs there. There was no space to raise pigs there and no feed for them either. Since the labourers cannot work, they are required to pay a certain amount of money instead. Every month the labourers must give 2kg of pork to the management office. (Respondent No. 23, female, adult)

In her case, she was not only forced to pay to be registered as an official employee at the pig processing plant, but she had to source 2kg of pork each month for management. In all probability, (at least some of) the pork would be sent on to the People's Army, so as to fulfil the formal obligations of the pig processing plant. The complete reversal of the production process (the worker sourcing the product externally) and of the remuneration (the worker paying the employer) is an excellent indicator of how radically North Korean society has changed, how it has adapted to the collapse of its old system, and the impact on average North Korean labourers.

Their lack of freedom is evident: unless of good social status and in the possession of surplus wealth, North Koreans are obliged to work but cannot chose their jobs, nor can they quit, resist state-imposed labour exploitation, or expect payment for their services.²² They are often also burdened with the responsibility of *paying* for their official jobs and with sourcing goods that can no longer be produced at the place of work. They find themselves caught in a system that is authoritarian, repressive, and traps its labourers in debts that, in practice, are almost impossible to pay off – a form of contemporary slavery from which escape is all but impossible and if attempted, stiffly punished.

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*Failing to reach quotas
 can have serious
 consequences that lead
 to a situation not unlike
 debt bondage.*

Once a worker is employed or registered in North Korea, there is usually no record of mutual consent (e.g. by way of an employment contract). Workers might get a letter from the Ministry of Labour saying where they are dispatched to, but few have any notion of an employment contract, let alone signed an employment contract. This appears to support the objective of the employer (the state, through its proxies) to force workers to fulfil their duties (and habitually more than that) and shirk its own responsibilities towards them. As consequence of the absence of an employment contract (or something comparable to it), with the exception of KWP employees or influential party members, workers do not know how much they are owed in wages and when or even if they will ever receive those wages. Not being paid sufficiently – or at all – is compounded by the common practice of holding workers personally liable for the failure to reach the quota set by the management (quotas are determined centrally). Reaching the quota set by management is the most important duty of any North Korean worker engaged in production work. Failing to do so can have serious consequences that lead to a situation not unlike debt bondage:

If you get into debt, you have to work more. They don't give you more communal work but I have witnessed many cases in which people are ordered to weed their bosses' farming strips of land or to harvest corn. Your debt doesn't get reduced even though you do this work ordered by your boss, as you are made to do more work as punishment because you have a debt. (Respondent No. 5, female, adult)

A practice like this is reminiscent of debt bondage, but given North Korea's unique hybrid of organising work, debt bondage takes on an unusual form.

I quit two to three years before I got my pension. If you don't work then you have to give money. In North Korea, they tell you to go and earn money elsewhere, when there are no raw materials. You have to give your workplace 60 percent of the money you earned using your talent and skills. (Respondent No. 16, male, adult)

In the example cited above, the worker nearing retirement was in fact subcontracted out by his employer when there was not sufficient work available at his original place of work. He would then have to pay his original employer more than half of the money he earned while working elsewhere.



Children in a village collecting grains, Kaesong, North Korea, 2012. Citizens in North Korea start communal service from either elementary, middle, or high school. The communal service described by the respondents in this study meets the ILO definition of forced labour. Photo credit: Eric Lafforgue / Art in All of Us

WORKING CONDITIONS, WORKING HOURS, AND OVERTIME



Officially, the working day in North Korea is eight hours, but in reality workers work six to seven days a week, for approximately 10 hours a day, or as long as needed, and on top of that are required to participate in an hour or more of meetings and political study sessions.²³ Agriculture workers normally work significantly longer during the planting and harvesting seasons, and most work until their quotas or deadlines are met. In textile factories, the deadlines for production are very strict and “battle period” strategies of 70 or 100 days are applied in which workers work 12 to 16 hours a day, or in some cases up to 22 hours. On the other hand, there are working environments where there is hardly any work and the daily eight hours are not exceeded. Since most workers don’t receive their salaries, they have side jobs – besides their formal registered jobs – to ensure an income.

Normally we worked eight hours per day at the [women’s] clothes factory but during “battle periods” we worked 12 hours. During the 70-day battle and 100-day battle we worked long hours. (Respondent No. 6, female, adult)

During a 70-day battle period we had “two-hours-sleep” campaigns. We would be ordered to go home and sleep two hours and then get back to work. If we would meet the work plan, we would receive a reward. If not, our salaries would be reduced. If we would meet 70 percent, we would get 25 won. That’s a reduced salary. (Respondent No. 6, female, adult)

I usually worked for eight hours but working hours at the kitchen were not defined. I worked from dusk till dawn. As meals and accommodation were provided, I sold the remaining ingredients to buy necessary items. (Respondent No. 39, male, adult)

I worked 12 hours on average a day from 9 a.m., the work was tough at the garment factory. Because the factory was run on a conveyor system and there were many details on the suits. As it was a conveyor system, if I didn’t work fast the worker next to me got nothing to do. On the fifth of every month, the products had to be delivered to Nampo. So we had to work quickly to meet the deadline.

Sometimes we had to work from 9 a.m. till 2 a.m., about 10 days every month. It was only after we would meet the monthly deadline on the fifth and the products had left for export, that we could leave work earlier during about a week. Sundays would be the day of rest, but not always. And we had a day of on national holidays, Kim Il-Sung’s birthday or Lunar New Year, and the first Sunday of the month. But not every month. (Respondent No. 45, female, adult)

Our government limited working hours to eight hours a day, but I don’t recall any eight hours working day. I would say we’d work 10-12 hours average. That’s normal. Strangely enough, the munitions factory never lacked materials, and was constantly working at full capacity. You know that that is prioritised above anything else. What we wished for mostly was a blackout. Even during a blackout there were other things we could do, sitting down. But in those days, I would simply crave for a moment to be away from the machines. (Respondent No. 48, female, adult)

I worked from eight in the morning till six in the evening. North Korea has an eight-hour working day. Mostly they would stick to the formal working hours. But well, you know that’s because we didn’t receive salary anyhow. (Respondent No. 31, male, adult)

In other cases, it may be that there is not enough work and workers are allowed to work elsewhere, in which case they then have to surrender most of their earnings to the company.

I did not receive payment once in the 13 years I worked (1996-2008). (Respondent No. 7 female, adult)

I worked every day of the week. At the farm, I had three days off per month – on the 1st, 11th, and 21st of the month. Those were the days determined by the farm and we could only take days off on these dates. The management committee of my Cooperative Farm determined the dates. (Respondent No. 8, female, adult)

Most workers are not able to take their own holidays, except for those in some privileged professions, and only enjoy the fixed national holidays. Workers can call in sick with a medical certificate but are not given food rations in that case, which can present a major problem for those whose salaries are not paid and who receive only food rations as compensation.

Working instructions have to be followed carefully. Not following instructions, questioning them, or arguing with a manager can lead to immediate dismissal, which in turn can lead to being sent to a labour training camp or imprisonment for up to a year. Consequences for not following instructions can also affect one's family:

No, if you are dismissed because of a mistake you made, then that has an effect on your children. (Respondent No. 11, male, adult)

Faults in manufactured products can also have consequences. Products are inspected and if a product with a fault is discovered, everyone involved in the production process is seen as possessing joint responsibility and is required to write a statement of self-criticism. Such statements typically influence one's social status and career.

At work, a strict hierarchy is maintained, breach of which yields much feared sanctions. These sanctions are not necessarily violent in nature but are usually imposed during frequent political ideology meetings that workers are required to attend. Reports of worker performance and conduct from these meetings are sent up the bureaucratic chain and greatly influence one's private and professional life. Housing, finding work, permission to marry, permission to move to a new house, and promotion are all partly dependent on these reports. As one experienced party member put it:

If you do not do the extended tasks, then you are criticised at the ideological battle of your party cell. A party cell is made up of 15 to 20 people. If you are criticised here, the cell secretary records it and reports it to the sector party secretary. The sector party secretary then reports it to the local party secretary. And in this fashion, it is reported to each superior. There is a criticism stage organised once a month where everybody gathers. On these criticism stages the people who showed to be problematic during the regular self-criticism sessions are brought up on a stage. They come up on the criticism stage and are criticised. (Respondent No. 15, male, adult)

Those whose names are processed through the reporting system in this manner can eventually receive severe punishment and sanctions, not excluding the possibility of public execution in Pyongyang, as a means of deterrence for others.²⁴ These ideological-political activities were considered a significant burden by the respondents:

We have so many political activities and we do not have personal lives. After finishing work at five, we have to study until eight or nine. We have only two days in a week without political education. There are many sessions like lectures, classes on the history of revolution, education for members of the Democratic Youth League. In general, it would be ten in the evening when we return home after finishing work. It takes one hour to walk back home from work so people can hardly be satisfied with their lives. (Respondent No. 37, female, adult)

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Not following instructions, questioning them, or arguing with a manager can lead to immediate dismissal, which in turn can lead to being sent to a labour training camp or imprisonment for up to a year.

PAYMENT, DEDUCTIONS, AND FOOD RATIONS



In theory, the salaries associated with certain positions can range from several hundred won, which is just enough to pay for two kilograms of rice, to 5,000 won a month. The theoretical nature of these salaries is demonstrated by the fact that the salary levels are found in bureaucratic guidelines but in reality, but are not used to determine the salary that is actually paid to the employee. This is justified by either raising deductions to a level at which meets the salary actually given (often nothing) or by requiring workers to support a multitude of official donation drives – in either case, the workers typically end up paying money out of pocket to their employer.

The reason for donations drives can range from national celebrations, gifts to the leader or other national funds (such as the construction of a ski resort), to money for daily necessities, reparation of machinery, and the day-to-day running of hospitals. According to the respondents, these obligatory contributions seemed to rise when Kim Jong-un came to power, to the extent that many people have not been paid anything since.²⁵

I did not receive compensation. My salary was 2000 KPW per month and you cannot even buy one loaf of bread with this money. However, I didn't even get that money. From my workplace, they were taking money to support "shock brigades" and as a result of deducting such amounts from our salaries we did not receive any money. Even if you worked, as the hospital didn't have any money, I even gave money to the hospital. On average, each time I gave 20-30 Chinese Yuan (25,000 KOW). (Respondent No. 12, female, adult)

They constantly took money from me. It was the state that demanded the money. If the state said that certain hospital needs a certain amount of support, then we had to split the total amount among us, depending on the number of employees. If the state ordered that 10,000 won had to be donated and there are 20 employees, the amount was divided by 20 and each had to pay 1/20 of the total amount. (Respondent No.12, female, adult)

In some situations, workers working in teams must meet quotas and when they are not met, the market value of the shortage has to be paid by the team. As for quotas, these can be set arbitrarily, and records can be manipulated by managers, whereby they register less than what the worker has done or change the names of the workers. To earn the money to pay for this, people often have their own businesses on the side, for example, trading with China or gathering and selling medicinal herbs.

In some cases, the non-payment of salaries is presented as a form of deferred wage. Workers are told that the state is not able to pay the money, but the deferred wages will be registered with a bookkeeper for future payment. However, if components needed for the production process are damaged, the money that is needed for repairs are deducted from the deferred wages and in the end the workers often receive nothing at all.

I received a monthly salary; 150-160 won per month. At work, I was obliged to pay 50 won a month for a savings account. But I didn't get any of that when I left my job. The reason is simple. The factory supplied to each worker industrial electric sewing machines, shuttle boxes, shuttles, awls, scissors and other parts of the machine. So, you would be responsible for those parts, if they would get lost or wear out. When I left the job, I would have to hand over everything to the next worker. And the factory would deduct an amount of money from my saving account based on the market price of the insufficient components.



Then there was only 12 or 13 won left. So, I wasn't able to receive any of it. When I went to the financial department in the factory, that was their explanation, which I thought was unfair. [...] However, there was nothing I could do about it. It was impossible to preserve the equipment in the same condition as when it was first supplied. For example, either the needle could break or the shuttle box could be crushed during the production process. Anyway, the factory shifted all these costs to the individual workers. Even though the machine was not mine. (Respondent No. 45, female, adult)

Many of the respondents we spoke with said they had not received anything resembling proper pay for the last 20 years.

Instead of a salary, workers tend to receive a food ration for themselves and a smaller portion for family members. In some cases, the food portions are measured according to the volume of work done. In that case, workers receive daily working points and periodically the amount of food rations they are entitled to is calculated based on these points.

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Many of the respondents we spoke with said they had not received anything resembling proper pay for the last 20 years.

If their quota is not met, it could mean that no food rations are given. In one respondent's reports a fatal accident happened at a workplace and as a result food rations were withheld from those thought to be involved. For some jobs, however, the food rations are beyond the volume that is needed for personal consumption, so the rest can be traded for money or other necessities. Workers are provided with food rations, but the frequency with which this happens is irregular. In agricultural areas, workers may be expected to source their own food rations – for example, from their own produce.

Sometimes workers are provided housing. It should be noted however, that this is not always seen as a benefit. Sometimes they are required to live near the workplace when the authorities want to prevent theft of the commodities, as with agricultural workers who, after their day of working in the fields, have to guard them at night to prevent theft.

A woman works in a farm village in August, 2015, in Pyongyang, North Korea. Many respondents interviewed for this study reported they received food rations instead of a salary. In agricultural areas, workers may be expected to source their own food rations from their own produce. Photo credit: Xiaolu Chu / Getty Images

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, FREEDOM TO LEAVE



The Ministry of Labour decides and arranges the mobilising of workers. It also decides who is placed where and whether a particular worker may switch to a different place of work, and workers do not have the freedom to refuse the ministry's decisions. In the absence of the payment of a bribe, quitting your job is possible only when you have a new job lined up, and when you possess a certificate of employment from another workplace.

Any adult male or unmarried adult female is by law obliged to have an officially registered job or otherwise face the prospect of spending significant time in a labour training camp.

The punishment for being unemployed was six months in a labour training camp. In more severe cases it was one to three years. The severe cases are people who have never worked. Those are people who continuously did not have any working experience and stayed only at home. (Respondent No. 8, female, adult)

If you are absent without an excuse you are detained in a labour training camp. (Respondent No. 13, male, adult)

A reference to being at "work" in the above responses to our questionnaire refers to the status of being registered as having a state-approved job, and not to doing work that makes one's livelihood possible.

I saw someone in my mother's neighbourhood get sent to a labour training camp for six months for staying without work. Most of the people there didn't work. Even if they go to work they cannot earn money. That is, they only work and don't get a salary. That is why people did some trading instead. Sometimes those people will get inspected by police officers while doing the trading, and questioned where they work. That's how police officers find out they are not going to the workplace they should go to everyday. Then the workplace notifies the police exactly when they have not been working, and they are sent to a labour training camp for being jobless. (Respondent No. 8, female, adult)

This paradox, whereby workers must have both officially assigned (yet often unpaid) work or risk harsh penalties and unofficial (but paid) work in order to be able to make a liveable wage is one of the defining characteristics of present-day North Korea.

LABOUR TRAINING CAMPS



When the officials of the Unemployment Group do an inspection and catch people who did not go to work, they said they would send them to either a shock brigade or a labour training camp. I heard this from the people in the Group every time they go out for inspections. They said that they sent people who did not work to a shock brigade or a labour training camp. (Respondent No.12, female, adult)

Labour training camps are prisons where inmates have to perform hard labour, reportedly for a minimum of six months.²⁶ Typically, workers are sent for being unemployed – not officially registered at a workplace and thereby labelled as “jobless” – or for not following work instructions or arguing with a superior. Absence from work for a period of 15 days can also land someone in a labour training camp without trial or means of appeal. Once the verdict is reached, it is executed by North Korea’s federation of trade unions and the Ministry of Labour. Being sent to a labour training camp can sometimes be avoided by bribing an official.

According to our respondents, the Organization and Guidance Department, an agency of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers’ Party, also has an important say in who is sent to a labour training camp. Respondents stated that there were worse punishments than being sent to a labour training camp, such as permanent exile to the countryside or even being buried alive. The punishment is typically arbitrary. In one case, a worker lost his leg in a workplace accident. Facing illegal joblessness because he could no longer work, the KWP apparently realised the futility of sending him to a labour prison camp for not working. Instead, they decided to put him on a criticism stage for not working, potentially leading to serious sanctions which would have, at the very least, made his daily life much more difficult. The state made it clear that they thought his disability was his own fault and a liability to the state.

According to respondents, the work in the labour training camp is extremely demanding, with workers being required to run, not walk when performing their duties.

The work was hard. Gathering beans in the autumn was fine because I had done this kind of work, but because it was done in the labour training camp and I did not have any freedom, that was the difficult part. It was difficult to work under surveillance. [...] I couldn’t use the toilet whenever I wanted, I had to ask for permission before using it. [...] I got up at six in the morning and went to bed at ten in the evening. In the morning, I got up and cleaned the yard, then washed my face. They lined us up in the morning. The line-up officer talked with the head of the camp and distributed our work tasks. (Respondent No. 8, female, adult)

Serving time in a labour training camp can plague a worker’s reputation long after his or her release, often making it difficult to find another job, obtain a registration, and thereby risking arrest and a return to a camp. When one respondent was asked if he knew of anyone who had been penalised for quitting a job or seeking to change jobs, he reported the following:

Prostitutes get arrested and so do the unemployed. All criminals start with a crime of unemployment. There are so many cases like that that it is hard to count them all. (Respondent No. 31, male, adult)

OVERSEAS LABOUR



North Korean workers have been sent abroad since the 1960s to work and earn money for the regime. They have gone to neighbouring countries like Russia and China, as well as countries in South-East Asia, the Middle East, Africa and even the EU.²⁷ Since the ascension of Kim Jong-un to Supreme Leader in 2011, this program has grown rapidly, both in terms of the number of workers being sent abroad and the number of receiving countries, largely to meet the a pressing need for hard currency to finance the regime and its development of nuclear weapons.

When assigned to work outside the country, North Korean workers live with each other, isolated from local society and in conditions similar to those back home. While working abroad used to be a coveted assignment that workers were willing to pay bribes to get, this is no longer the case. According to one of the two respondents who reported working abroad for the North Korean government, people do not want to join overseas construction companies particularly because of the high rate of injuries and fatal accidents that occur on those assignments. He added that payment is withheld most of the time and that there were times in which no wages would be paid at all, with the managers saying that the money they earned had to be sent to the North Korean government. Working in a capitalist country, this respondent said he managed to earn US\$2,000 dollars in three years, which amounts to US\$55 dollars a month.

Payment is withheld most of the time. Most of the time I didn't receive my wages because they would say that money had been given to a superior office in North Korea. Or there were times that the hiring company would say that some work had not been done well and maintenance was needed. (Respondent No. 15, male, adult)

Now, people don't want to join overseas construction companies. As they hear people who go abroad die from accidents or aren't even able to bring back money that they

have earned because the state takes a lot of the money. (Respondent No. 15, male, adult)

Around three people died. There were about three to four people who became disabled. At first there were no doctors, but at some point, doctors were sent. I wasn't sick so I'm not sure but I heard that all doctors were robbers. They would demand money but it would be more expensive than buying medicine at a pharmacy. People generally don't go to hospitals. If they are really sick they go back to North Korea. Medicine is usually bought at pharmacies, you deal with that yourself. Donations to help the bereaved family would be given by each worker paying the same amount, but generally more money was given when the death was in the work unit you were in. If someone died from a different work unit then you would have to pay around two dollars. If it was in your work unit then you would pay around 10 dollars. Most people who died, would die from accidents. (Respondent No. 15, male, adult)

I worked around 14-16 hours a day. When I worked late it would be until 2 a.m. Then I had to go back out at 5 or 6 a.m. If I calculate how much I got every month in dollars, it was about 10 to 50 dollars. It depended on how much work I got. If I didn't have a lot of work it would be 10 dollars, there were also times I didn't receive anything. (Respondent No. 15, male, adult)



The second respondent in the survey who reported working abroad worked in construction in two different countries and had his money withheld for over half a year. He reported that workers lived in crowded conditions, and at one point he was living in a shipping container. Once a month they might be able to leave their living quarters outside of working hours. When the respondent got sick and wanted to return home, he was threatened that his family would be exiled to the countryside. After three years he had earned enough to live for three months in North Korea.

Once overseas, North Korean workers find themselves in an exported North Korean environment, in which the hierarchical structures and ideological sessions travel with them, as do the sanctions and the threats against them and their families in case of disobedience or political dissent. Any hopes of being closer to freedom by working abroad are quickly dashed by the reality that the state and its system travel with them.

.....
In North Korea, you cannot even earn one dollar. You have to go work overseas in order to get some dollars.
.....

In North Korea, you cannot even earn one dollar. You have to go work overseas in order to get some dollars. At first in Country 1 I had a very difficult time so I decided not to work overseas anymore but with time I changed my mind. You cannot earn money in North Korea. I was dispatched to Country 1 together with 40 other people. In Country 2 I was dispatched together with 60 other people. (Respondent No. 20, male, adult)

In Country 1 we built our accommodation. Twenty-five of us lived in one room. In Country 2 I lived in a container, eight of us lived there. (Respondent No 20, male, adult)

This picture taken on December 14, 2012 from China's northeastern city of Dandong, looking across the border, shows a North Korean military officer (R) and a North Korea man (L) standing behind a pile of coal along the banks of the Yalu River in the northeast of the North Korean border town of Siniuju. Trade in coal to China has provided a major source of foreign income for North Korea. Photo credit: WANG ZHAO / AFP/Getty Images

CONCLUSION



North Korea possesses a unique hybrid system of organising work that includes capitalistic features such as individual initiative (undertaken primarily for survival) under a dilapidated and poorly functioning socialist structure that maintains many of the old socialist processes and rhetoric. As a result, while the state proclaims that it takes care of its people, in reality it is the people who are taking care of the state, through practices such as paying for 8/3 jobs, working without pay, and fending for themselves in a black-market economy, all the while facing risk of arbitrary arrest and sentence to a labour training camp for doing so.

Prior to the famine of the 1990s, forced labour in North Korea was mostly limited to penal institutions (such as concentration camps, prison camps, labour training camps, and work brigades) and to government-ordered social mobilisation efforts such as emergency repairs, agricultural work, and road maintenance.²⁸ Now, while these earlier forms are still present, forced labour has moved decisively into the overall North Korean workforce. This has occurred over the past 20 years since a major famine in the country, as the average worker's duties (including to work) toward state and system have remained standing, while the right to be paid and fed has disappeared due to the fact that so many factories, farms, and companies have either stopped functioning or stopped paying salaries. As a result, while workers are required by law to be registered in an officially-recognised job – and they face the risk of being sent to a labour training camp if they are not – they must scramble to earn money in an underground market economy to support themselves and often to pay their employers (or bribe others) to keep them officially employed and safe from arrest.

Behind all of this is the power of the system to dictate every North Korean's life and death (immediate or delayed through the imprisonment in labour training camps), the fear of which, for now, keeps this system afloat and functioning. The extremely hierarchical nature of the North Korean system makes it impossible to change or quit one's job, or even to complain about working conditions, without serious consequence. Not showing up for work is also an offense that risks severe punishment.

There is also the additional burden of forced mobilisation (both regular, such as agricultural work, and *ad hoc*, such as emergency repairs to roads), which the state frequently levies on the population. These instructions are ignored at one's own peril. The only way to circumvent this is through payment of bribes.

Putting this all together, one cannot avoid the conclusion that forced labour is widespread in North Korean society. Average workers are prevented by the state from choosing their own jobs, or from changing or quitting their jobs. Typically, they are not sufficiently remunerated, if they receive anything at all for their labour. In fact, they are kept in a unique North Korean-style of debt bondage in which the employee is obligated to pay the employer to avoid severe sanctions by the government. All of this occurs in an environment controlled by a repressive and, in practice, unescapable ideological population management system managed by the government, which includes being requisitioned for largely unpaid communal work to prop up the regime.

In our interviews with respondents, all agreed that average workers are forced to obey every instruction from superiors, even if this means having to move to another job and place of residence without their consent.

The bottom line in all is that state-imposed forced labour practised by North Korea is now systemic and far-reaching and touches the vast majority of the North Korean population. The experiences conveyed by the respondents in this study make it clear that the average North Korean citizen lives, works, and dies in a state of contemporary slavery.



A worker processes silk at the Kim Jong Suk Silk Mill in Pyongyang in 2017. The Mill employs a workforce of 1,600 people. As noted by respondents in this study, deadlines for production are very strict and workers are forced to work up to 22 hours a day during "battle periods". Photo credit: Ed Jones / AFP/Getty Images

ANNEX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE



1. How was your life in North Korea?
 - ① Very satisfactory
 - ② Satisfactory
 - ③ Unsatisfactory
 - ④ Widowed
 - ⑤ Domestic partner
 - ⑥ Don't know
 - ⑦ Refused to answer
2. While you lived in North Korea did you have access to outside information and what were the main ways in which you obtained this information?
 - ① TV (programs from other countries)
 - ② Radio
 - ③ Propaganda leaflets by South Korean sources
 - ④ USB/CD-R (cultural content from other countries)
 - ⑤ Others
3. When were you born?
4. Where have you lived in North Korea?

Place of residence

Period (From: To:)
5. When you lived in North Korea what was the income bracket of your household?
 - ① Low-income
 - ② Lower-middle income
 - ③ Middle income
 - ④ Upper-middle income
 - ⑤ High income
6. Before you last left North Korea what was the monthly average income of your family?
 - ① Primary school
 - ② Middle/high school
 - ③ Professional/ vocational school
 - ④ University and beyond
10. Were you official member of the Workers' Party of Korea?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No

Working in North Korea

11. Please list all the jobs you had while you lived in North Korea:

Job

Affiliation

Period

Location of workplace

For each job you held could you please answer the following questions:

Personal Information:

7. Gender
 - ① Female
 - ② Male
8. What is your current marital status?
 - ① Single/never married
 - ② Married
 - ③ Separated
 - ④ Divorced
12. What did you do in this job?
13. How did you get this job?
 - ① I chose and applied for this job
 - ② I was assigned this job – Explain
 - ③ Other – Explain
14. On average how many hours a day did you work?
15. How many days per week in total did you work?
16. Did you receive rest or sick days while you were in this job?
17. Could you choose where you lived while you did this job?

18. Have you signed an employment contract for this job?
- ① Yes, I have signed an employment contract
 - ② Yes, I have seen an employment contract or have heard about one
 - ③ No, I had never seen or heard about an employment contract in North Korea.
19. Did you receive regular payment for this job?
- ① Yes
 - ② No
 - ③ Other (I was not paid in money/ payment was not regular)
20. If you did not receive regular compensation for this job, how long were the periods in between payment?
21. If you did receive regular compensation for this job, did you know in advance how much you would receive?
- ① Yes [How much]
 - ② No
22. Were you able to quit this job when you wanted?
- ① Yes
 - ② No
 - ③ I could not quit whenever I wanted but I could request to be assigned another job whenever I wanted – Please explain
23. If you quit this job would there have been any consequences? Please explain (who/who/how).
24. Who or which institution decides and implements such consequences?
25. Did you ever see other people you knew, being subjected to disadvantages or penalties for quitting a job or seeking to change job? Who? When? Where? What happened?
26. If you changed from one job to another, how did this come about?
- ① I changed jobs because I wanted to
 - ② I received instructions from above to switch to another job
 - ③ Other – Explain
27. If you received instructions to switch to another job, who did they come from? Could you refuse these instructions? Please explain.
28. Were you ever able to refuse a direction or instruction at work? Why / why not? Please explain.
29. Were you ever worried that your actions at work would have an impact on the treatment received by others, such as your family? Please explain.
30. At work were you ever threatened if you did not fulfil the work you were expected to?
31. Were you ever physically violated by your manager/ employer?
32. Did you depend on somebody for transportation/ accommodation/food?
33. If you left that job were you afraid about the safety of your family in North Korea?
34. Were you forced to stay in this job because you had to repay a debt to your employer/manager?
35. Was money taken from you for any pretext at this job? Who took the money and for what?

Overseas Dispatch of Labour

36. Were you ever sent abroad to work in another country for the state?
- ① Yes
 - ② No (Go to Question No. 54)

Please list the country and the time period for each time you were sent abroad

Job	Country	Period
1		
2		
3		

37. Did you receive regular payment for the work you did?
- ① Yes [How much]
 - ② No
38. Were your wages withheld and if so for what period of time and by whom?
39. What kind of work did you do there?
- ① Construction
 - ② Forestry
 - ③ Shipbuilding
 - ④ Restaurant
 - ⑤ Manufacturing
 - ⑥ Services (medical services, education, etc.)
 - ⑦ Farming
 - ⑧ Other (Please specify)
40. How did you get to go abroad?
- ① I wanted to (Please explain further your motivations to want this job)
 - ② I received orders to go
41. Were you able to exercise freedom of movement while in this overseas country?
42. Could you choose where you lived?
43. Outside of work hours, were you able to come and go freely from the place of work or place of residence?
44. Were you able to choose who you met or associated with outside of work time, in your social life? Please explain.

45. Did you get to keep your passport/ migrant worker permit/ other ID?
46. Did you have days off/vacation days/ sick leave?
47. Were you allowed to go back to North Korea whenever you wanted?
48. At work were you ever threatened if you did not fulfill the work you were expected to?
49. Were you ever physically violated by your manager/ employer?
50. Did you depend on somebody for transportation/ accommodation/food?
51. If you left that job were you afraid about the safety of your family in North Korea?
52. Were you forced to stay in this job because you had to repay a debt to your employer/manager?
53. Was money taken from you for any pretext at this job? Who took the money and for what?

Additional labour mobilisation apart from one's workplace

54. Were you ever mobilised by the state to perform work in addition to your regular job?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No (Go to Question No. 59)
55. If so, what kind of work was expected from you? – Explain
56. How long did the periods of work last (duration)? How often did this happen? – Explain
57. Did you receive payment for this work?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No
 - ③ Other (I was not paid in money) – Explain
58. Did you have the freedom to refuse to do this work if you did not want to?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No – Explain

Child Labour

59. As a student in primary, middle or high school, were you ever mobilised by the state to perform work?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No (Go to Question No. 63)
60. If so, what kind of work was expected from you? For how long did the work last? How many times did this happen?
61. Did you receive payment for this work?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No
 - ③ Other (I was not paid in money/ payment was not regular) – Explain
62. Did you have the freedom to refuse to do this work if you did not want to?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No – Explain
63. (Skip to Question No. 67 if the interviewee has no children) As students in primary, middle or high school, were your children ever mobilised by the state to perform work?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No
64. If so, what kind of work was expected from them? How long was the period of work? How many times did this happen?
65. Did they receive payment for this work?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No
 - ③ Other (I was not paid in money) – Explain
66. Did they have the freedom to refuse to do this work if they did not want to?
 - ① Yes
 - ② No – Explain

Leaving North Korea

67. When did you escape North Korea for the final time?
68. When did you enter South Korea?
69. What made you decide to escape from North Korea?

North Korean people having a meeting before collective works, North Hwanghae Province, Kaesong. Mobilised individuals must bring their own tools and equipment. There is no financial compensation whatsoever – not for the labour nor for the material. Photo credit: Eric Lafforgue / Art In All Of Us / Corbis via Getty Images



ENDNOTES

- 1 Hawk, D 2012, *The Hidden Gulag, Second Edition, The Lives and Voices of "Those Who are Sent to the Mountains,"* Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_HiddenGulag2_Web_5-18.pdf [2 April 2018]. Hawk, D 2012, *North Korea's Hidden Gulag: Interpreting Reports of Changes in the Prison Camps,* Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: [https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/NKHiddenGulag_DavidHawk\(2\).pdf](https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/NKHiddenGulag_DavidHawk(2).pdf). [2 April 2018]. Hawk, D & Mortwedt-Oh, A 2017, *The Parallel Gulag – North Korea's "An-jeon-bu" Prison Camps,* Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/Hawk_The_Parallel_Gulag_Web.pdf. [2 April 2018].
- 2 Walk Free Foundation 2018, *Global Slavery Index 2018*. [forthcoming].
- 3 Kim, Jae Woong 김재웅 2012, "북한의 계급정책과 계급위 계구조의 형성(1945-1950)." ("Class Policies and Formation of Hierarchical Class Structure in North Korea (1945 1950)," *역사와현실 Yöksa-wa hyŏnshil Quarterly Review of Korean History* 85 (2012.9): 393-433. Available in Korean from: <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Journal/PDFViewNew?id=NODE01984841&prevPathCode=> [accessed on 2 April 2018]; Collins, R 2012, *Marked for Life: Songbun, North Korea's Social Classification System.* Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_Songbun_Web.pdf. [2 April 2018]. Myers, BR 2011, *The cleanest race: how North Koreans see themselves and why it matters,* Melville House Publishing, New York.
- 4 See for example Pak, Yŏngja 박영자 2009, "2003년 <종합시장제> 이후 북한의 '주변노동'과 '노동시장' – 노동일상의 상황과 구조 ("The Marginal working and the Labor market of North Korea after the Implementation of 'Comprehensive Market System' in 2003 : Situation and Frame of Everyday labor"), *한국정치학회보 (Korean Journal of Political Science)* 43.3, pp. 149-171. Available in Korean from: <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Journal/PDFViewNew?id=NODE01254277&prevPathCode=> [2 April 2018]. Song Kangjik 송강직 2015, "북한 사회주의 노동법의 특징 ("Characteristics of the Labor Law in North Korea"), *江原法學 (Kangwŏn Law Journal)* 44, pp. 251-280. Available in Korean from: <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Journal/ArticleDetail/NODE06221010>. [2 April 2018]. Yun Ch'ŏlgi 윤철기 2016, "북한 시장화 이후 계급체제와 노동계급 마음체제의 변화: 노동계급의 정체성 위기와 계급의식의 변화를 중심으로" ("Change of Class-System and Working-Class' Ideological Identity after Marketization in North-Korea"), *북한연구학회 춘계학술발표논문집 Review of North Korean Studies* 19.2, pp. 117-137. Available in Korean from: <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Journal/PDFViewNew?id=NODE07002124&prevPathCode=>. [2 April 2018]. Joung, Eun Lee 정은이 2014, "북한 도시노동자의 식량조달메커니즘에 관한 연구 – 함경북도 무산지역의 소()토지 경작사례를 중심으로 – A Study on the Food Procuring Mechanism of City Workers in North Korea – SOTOJI cases of Musan region in Hamgyeongbuk-do – 동북아경제연구 26.1, pp. 261-302. Available in Korean from: <http://kiss.kstudy.com/thesis/thesis-view.asp?key=3226529>. [2 April 2018].
- 5 Fahy, S 2015, *Marching through suffering: Loss and survival in North Korea,* Columbia University Press, New York. Haggard, S & Noland, M 2007, *Famine in North Korea: markets, aid, and reform,* Columbia University Press, New York. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/hagg14000>. [2 April 2018].
- 6 Park, J 2009, *North Korea, Inc.: Gaining Insights into North Korean Regime Stability from Recent Commercial Activities,* USIP Working Paper, May, United States Institute of Peace. Available from: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/North%20Korea%2C%20Inc.PDF>. [2 April 2018]. Haggard, S & Noland, M 2007, *Famine in North Korea: markets, aid, and reform,* Columbia University Press, New York. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/hagg14000>. [2 April 2018]. Chang, YC, Haggard, S & Noland, M 2009, 'Exit polls: Refugee assessments of North Korea's transition,' *Journal of Comparative Economics*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 144-150. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147596708000413>. [2 April 2018].
- 7 As a socialist country, at least until the early 1990s, North Korea took care of its citizens through its Public Distribution System, which guaranteed DPRK citizens food and other basic necessities. The type and size of rations one would receive through the PDS depended on social class, professional position, and political reliability. During the famine of the mid-1990s, the PDS collapsed because it ran out of products to distribute to the average citizen. The PDS still exists today in a dramatically reduced form: it now serves mainly to provide the members of the elite with the gifts to buy their loyalty.
- 8 Myers, B 2011, *The cleanest race: how North Koreans see themselves and why it matters,* Melville House, New York.
- 9 There is no comprehensive study yet of North Korea as a fundamentally capitalist state and society, but a number of separate studies reach similar conclusions for parts of North Korean society. See for example: Bin, RUO 2012, 'DPRK in the Period of Kim Jung Eun and Sino-Russia-DPRK Cooperation in Tumen River Region,' *Northeast Asia Forum*, vol. 3. Available from: http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTOTAL-DBYL201203001.htm. [2 April 2018]. Lankov, A, & Seok-Hyang, K 2008, 'North Korean Market Vendors: The Rise of Grassroots Capitalists in a Post-Stalinist Society,' *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 1, pp. 53-72. Available from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40377482?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents. [2 April 2018].
- 10 North Korea has an intricate system of penal facilities. There are several different facilities that function as prisons for inmates who have been convicted of non-political crimes. Generally, the serve finite terms. Mostly, such facilities also demand from its inmates that they perform hard labour. These facilities, which include the regular labour training camps and work brigades, are part of the North Korean legal structure, although this system fall seriously short of international standards and is also seen as a system that is rife with human rights abuses. Then there are the political prison camps that are extra-legal entities: their existence is not mentioned in the North Korean law codices and no legal procedure exists that sends defendants to these camps or to release inmates; anyone who is sent to such a camp is assumed to be there until his/her death. The state does not communicate about these camps or its inmates, not even with the relatives of those who are imprisoned. While prison terms in the regular penal system are extremely harsh and often fatal, relatives know where a prisoner is, how long the sentence is, what the sentence is for, and if they can, they can bring the inmate food and other necessities. This is impossible in the political concentration camps where inmates are no longer seen as humans and thus are no longer seen as citizens. See Hawk, D 2003, *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps,* US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, Washington, DC. Hawk, D 2013, *North Korea's Hidden Gulag: Interpreting Reports of Changes in the Prison Camps,* US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Hawk, D & Mortwedt-Oh, A 2017, *The Parallel Gulag – North Korea's "An-jeon-bu" Prison Camps,* Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/Hawk_The_Parallel_Gulag_Web.pdf. [2 April 2018].

- ¹¹ An argument can be made that attributes North Korea's survival to the Sunshine Policy instigated by then-president of South Korea Kim Dae Jung. The Sunshine Policy was a decade long effort between 1998 and 2008 by the South Korean government to appease and fund North Korea, in the hope that this would bring structural détente to inter-Korean relations and beneficial changes to North Korean society. North Korean exile and dissident public intellectual Jang Jin-sung wrote extensively about this crucial episode from the perspective of a former counterespionage official in: Jang, Jin-sung, 2015, *Dear Leader: My Escape from North Korea*, Simon & Schuster, New York.
- ¹² One respondent left North Korea sometime after 2001, it is not clear when exactly. The exact date of leaving could be used to identify respondents in combination with other information. Consequently, we have taken care to ensure that this would not be possible by mostly omitting dates of birth and by not reproducing the exact date of leaving, but only an approximation within the year.
- ¹³ Codes of Conduct of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands can be accessed from: https://www.vsnul.nl/nl_NL/gedragcodes.
- ¹⁴ Kim, E, Yun, M, Park, M & Williams, H 2009, 'Cross border North Korean women trafficking and victimisation between North Korea and China: An ethnographic case study,' *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, vol. 37, no.4, pp. 154-169. Davis, K 2006, 'Brides, bruises and the border: The trafficking of North Korean women into China,' *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 131-141. United States Department of State 2005, 'North Korean refugees frequent victims of human trafficking'. Available from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/china/north-korean-refugees-frequent-victims-human-trafficking>. [2 April].
- ¹⁵ International Labour Organization & Walk Free Foundation 2017, *Methodology of the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*, ILO, p. 10. Available from: http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_586127/lang-en/index.htm. [2 April 2018].
- ¹⁶ International Labour Organization 2012, *Giving Globalization a Human Face, Report III (Part 1B)*, International Labour Conference 101st Session, Geneva. Available from: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_174846.pdf. [2 April 2018].
- ¹⁷ See for example: Kim, Kwang-jin 2016, *Gulag, Inc.: The Use of Forced Labor in North Korea's Export Industries*, US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/KKJ_Gulag_INC_FinalFinal_WEB.pdf. [2 April 2018].
- ¹⁸ United States Department of State 2018, *2017 Trafficking in Persons Report*, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, pp. 234. Available from: <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2017/index.htm>. [2 April 2018].
- ¹⁹ International Labour Organization 2012, *Giving Globalization a Human Face, Report III (Part 1B)*, International Labour Conference 101st Session, Geneva. Available from: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_174846.pdf. [2 April 2018].
- ²⁰ Kim, Kwang-jin 2016, *Gulag, Inc.: The Use of Forced Labor in North Korea's Export Industries*, US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/KKJ_Gulag_INC_FinalFinal_WEB.pdf. [2 April 2018].
- ²¹ Among the respondents, there appear to have been only two party members. Since whether someone was a party member was not an explicit question in the survey, this is not entirely certain.
- ²² Surplus wealth in North Korea is usually accrued by engaging in private trade and by receiving bribes.
- ²³ South Korea also has a similar maximum working week of 68 hours. While in South Korea, the long working week is recognised as an important problem with regard to work, in North Korea it is considered a minor problem due to the pressing need to address other issues, such as the lack of freedom to quit and the lack of remuneration.
- ²⁴ Yi, Kyöngsu 이경수 2007, "조직생활 : 소년단부터 조선로동당까지 - 모든 주민 1개 이상 조직에 가입 학습 · 총화 통해 '집단주의' 의식 내면화," (Organized Party Life in North Korea), *민족 (The Nation) 21*, pp. 66-71. Available in Korean from: <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Journal/ArticleDetail/NODE01120034>. [2 April 2018].
- ²⁵ Twelve respondents noted that they had enjoyed a more or less regular income. Party members or members of the state security apparatus enjoyed stable monthly incomes. Some others also did, but also because of their unofficial side earnings. It is not always clear when this is the case. It is clear, however, that at least 38 respondents out of the 50 interviewed did not have a regular monthly income.
- ²⁶ Hawk, D 2012, *The Hidden Gulag, Second Edition, The Lives and Voices of "Those Who are Sent to the Mountains"*, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/HRNK_HiddenGulag2_Web_5-18.pdf [2 April 2018]. Hawk, D 2012, *North Korea's Hidden Gulag: Interpreting Reports of Changes in the Prison Camps*, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: [https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/NKHiddenGulag_DavidHawk\(2\).pdf](https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/NKHiddenGulag_DavidHawk(2).pdf). [2 April 2018]. Hawk, D & Mortwedt-Oh, A 2017, *The Parallel Gulag - North Korea's "An-jeon-bu" Prison Camps*, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. Available from: https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/Hawk_The_Parallel_Gulag_Web.pdf. [2 April 2018].
- ²⁷ See Breuker, R & van Gardingen, I (editors) 2016, *Slaves to the System: North Korea Forced Labour in the European Union, the Polish Case*, Leiden Asia Centre Press; Breuker & van Gardingen 2018, *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*, Leiden Asia Centre Press.
- ²⁸ Although this could be debated, because in earlier periods, social mobilisation could still be compensated by the state.

