

Apple's Dependence on China in Its Supply Chain

An Investigative Report on Foxconn Zhengzhou



Report by China Labor Watch

September 2025



Executive Summary

Foxconn Zhengzhou, Apple's largest iPhone supplier, employed an estimated 150,000–200,000 workers during the 2025 peak production season to manufacture the iPhone 17. Despite Apple's repeated pledges to improve conditions over the past decade, our investigation finds that core labor issues remain.

The factory continues to rely heavily on dispatch workers, who make up over 50% of the workforce—five times the legal cap. These workers, along with student workers, form the backbone of iPhone production yet are systematically denied benefits and stability.

Harsh working conditions have led to high worker turnover, while Foxconn's wage system is used as a tool to maintain retention. Low base wages push workers to depend on overtime to earn a livable wage. Dispatch workers are offered large economic incentives to keep them in their jobs for a period of time. Hourly workers are paid in two installments, with no overtime pay. If they resign early, the factory only pays them portions of the installment at 12 RMB per hour, which may raise forced labor concerns. Student workers, paid RMB 12 (~ 1.7 USD)/hour, are widely assigned to night shifts and overtime in contravention with labor laws, with some placements tied to graduation requirements—also raising concerns of coercion.

Meanwhile, other issues, such as discriminatory hiring practices, gender segregation, harassment and bullying, and inadequate health and safety protection persist. Independent worker representation and third-party grievance mechanisms are lacking, while surveillance and information control, including device confiscations, forced password disclosures, and alleged intimidation of workers who post criticism online serve to keep workers at bay.

Compared with 2019, when CLW conducted that last investigation into the park, much of the conditions remain unchanged or worsened. While no underage workers were found and peak overtime hours are slightly lower, overtime hours showed a slight decrease compared to July 2019, but in August returned to 2019 levels, with some individual cases reporting even longer overtime. Other issues such as dispatch overuse, wage manipulation, harassment, and safety gaps persist.

These findings reflect not only Foxconn's practices but also broader structural drivers in China's labor market. With profit margins of around 3% and a 300-million-strong migrant labor force excluded from full urban benefits, Apple's supply chain continues to depend on a vast, disposable workforce. Meaningful change requires more than corporate pledges. Enforcement of labor laws, equal pay and benefits for dispatch and student workers, independent grievance mechanisms, and consumer-driven accountability are essential. Without structural reforms, Foxconn's labor model will remain one of high turnover, suppressed wages, and systemic precarity sustaining Apple's global profits.

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Introduction

In September 2025, Apple announced a \$600 billion U.S. investment from the White House podium, projecting an image of growth and responsibility. Meanwhile, Foxconn Zhengzhou, Apple's critical supplier, offered a record-high dispatch worker recruitment bonus of 9,800 RMB (USD 1,380). Within just over a month of hiring, the factory workforce quickly swelled to nearly 200,000 employees, nearing its historical peak.

As a key Apple supplier, Foxconn Zhengzhou has long been scrutinized for labor issues and alleged violations of Chinese labor law. Numerous investigations and media reports have consistently revealed the factory's heavy reliance on dispatch workers and student workers,^[1] wage delays, excessive overtime, inadequate training and safety protections, and discriminatory hiring practices against women. Just during the investigation, our investigators have observed Apple employees in the production workshop multiple times. Apple's corporate social responsibility standards have proven to be little more than empty rhetoric, and the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA) Code of Conduct has not been effectively implemented.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, large-scale worker walkouts and protests occurred over recurring disputes over unpaid bonuses. These incidents further highlight serious labor concerns, and underscore a management model that prioritizes production over worker welfare. Altogether, they exposed the deep gap between Apple's stated supply chain commitments and the reality on the ground.

As early as 2019, China Labor Watch documented labor issues at Foxconn Zhengzhou, prompting Apple to pledge investigations and corrective action. This investigation by China Labor Watch, conducted from March to September 2025, seeks to assess this commitment and review the working conditions behind Foxconn's recent hiring drive. Key findings include Foxconn's excessive reliance on dispatch and student labor, withholding of wages, excessive overtime, inadequate protections, discriminative hiring practices, lack of benefits for dispatch workers, and harassment complaints. The report primarily focuses on the facility's dispatch worker population.

^[1] Note: In this case, "student workers" refers to students employed at the facility who despite having signed official employment contracts, are paid lower wages than other categories of workers. It is not intended to denote a legal category.



It is important to note that the Chinese authorities are not unaware of the aforementioned issues at Apple's supplier factories. Instead, it has tolerated them in exchange for Apple's technology transfers to China. One outcome of this bargain is that the new iPhone 17 is being mass-produced at Foxconn Zhengzhou. In addition, these findings demonstrate that far from being corrected, issues promised to address in 2019 remain in 2025, as summarized below.

Key issues identified in 2025



01 Reliance on dispatch workers

Dispatch workers more than 50% of the workforce, exceeding the 10% legal limit.



02 Low wages

Base wage for some workers is as low as 12 RMB/hour.



03 Excessive overtime

Most workers clock 60 hours/week; some up to 75 hours.



04 Recruitment discrimination

Workers may be rejected based on region, ethnicity, religion, and gender.



05 Wage theft

Wages withheld through complex payment schemes for dispatch workers. Fines for minor workplace infractions.



06 Lack of benefits and social insurance

for dispatch and student workers.



07 Insufficient safety training

Workers required to falsify 2 days of training records.



08 Surveillance

Online surveillance, bag checks.



09 Workplace bullying and harassment



10 Lack of independent representation

Union is largely ineffective & unrepresentative; worker hotline remains functionally limited.



11 Occupational health and safety risks.

Workers exposed to occupational hazards denied proper exit medical checks; Personal Protective Equipment is lacking.

Zhengzhou Foxconn: Comparison of 2025 vs. 2019 investigation

Issue	2019 Report	2025 Report	Trend
Dispatch worker ratio	50–55%, far above the 10% legal cap	Still over 50%, dispatch workers remain the majority	Unchanged - severe overuse
Overtime hours	Peak season 100–130 hrs/month	Peak season 76–84 hrs/month; some over 130 hrs	Unchanged
Use of students	Widely used; night shifts and overtime	Still common; paid only 12 RMB/hr; some forced by schools; formal employment contracts signed, no interns found	Unchanged
Underage workers	Some vocational school minors identified	None found	Improved
Wage levels	Base pay ~2,100 RMB; workers rely on overtime to reach ~3,000 RMB total	Base pay 2,100–2,400 RMB; take-home still ~3,000 RMB	Unchanged - income stagnant
Wage system	Hourly wage + overtime; dispatch bonuses often delayed	New “wage differential confirmation” and rebate schemes; delayed payments used as control	Worsened
Training	Insufficient pre-job training; mostly formalities	Still superficial; some falsified training records	Unchanged
Managerial bullying / harassment	Frequent verbal abuse and harassment	Still widespread; female workers report unsafe conditions; no management intervention	Unchanged / worsened
Union	Chairman appointed by management; no real role	Still ineffective; limited to holiday activities	Unchanged
Ethnic/regional discrimination	Not specifically noted	Explicit exclusion of Uyghur, Tibetan, Hui, Yi ethnic minority workers	Worsened
Gender/pregnancy discrimination	Non-transparent medical checks; cost burdens	Mandatory X-rays (suspended in September); women concentrate in low-paying positions	Unchanged
Information control	Worker hotline ineffective; no real representation	Strict device checks; forced password disclosure; whistleblowers threatened or doxxed	Worsened
Dormitory conditions	8-person rooms with AC and hot water; average quality	6-8 person rooms; dirty, clogged drains; balconies sealed	Unchanged
Occupational safety	Exposure to alcohol or X-rays; weak protection	Clear evidence of toluene/xylene exposure; PPE shortages on night shifts; no exit medical exams	Worsened

01 Background

Methodology

The investigation was carried out by multiple investigators who entered the Foxconn Zhengzhou factory as frontline workers. The team included both male and female investigators, using both first-hand observation and informal interview conversations with other workers to ensure ground-based findings.

Interviewees: 102

Gender of interviewees: 60 Male : 42 Female

Ratio of interviewed regular workers: dispatch workers: student workers: 40 : 51 : 11

Investigation period: February 2025 to September 2025

Factory overview

Total factory workforce: 150,000–200,000 (Factory workforce still expanding)

Regular employees: ~60,000–80,000

Dispatch workers: ~80,000–110,000

Student workers: Present in nearly every workshop; unable to estimate exact numbers

Proportion of dispatch workers in total workforce: At least 50%

Address: Zhengzhou Comprehensive Bonded Zone, Xinzheng Aviation Port District, Zhengzhou City, Henan Province

Main clients and products: Mainly produces the new iPhone 17 series.



02 Findings

The following subsections detail various aspects of Foxconn Zhengzhou's work conditions, though certain details may vary based on time and production needs. A brief mention of Foxconn's employment categories is provided below to contextualize how labor conditions can vary for the different categories of workers.

Employment categories

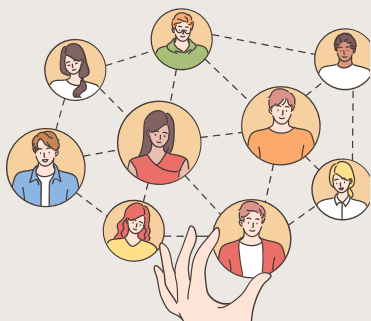
Workers at Foxconn are typically employed under one of three general categories: regular, dispatch, or student workers.

Regular workers are directly employed by Foxconn under employment contracts, occupying technical or other general positions. Dispatch and student workers form the other two categories. They are usually employed through third-party entities such as labor agencies or vocational schools, and as a result receive fewer benefits and weaker protections. These two groups form a temporary but critical workforce.

By law, dispatch and student workers are intended only for temporary, auxiliary, or substitute positions, and their share of the workforce is subject to strict caps or other restrictions. However, as we will detail later in the report, Foxconn persistently relied on dispatch and student workers far beyond their legally permitted scope during the period of investigation, shifting risks from itself onto labor agencies and schools and creating a tiered workforce where temporary workers become the norm rather than the exception.

This tiered labor management strategy has offered Foxconn the flexibility to recruit and maintain a large pool of temporary labor through rebates and other incentives, as production and demand fluctuates throughout the year. For example, in 2025 during the peak season, labor agencies offered high entry bonuses – from no entry bonuses in June, to RMB 4,800 (~675 USD) in early July and RMB 9,800 (~1380 USD) in August. This amount is equivalent to four times the monthly wage of a non-technical dispatch worker position. These workers are typically required to stay for three to four months to receive their full bonuses or face delayed wage payments to keep their retention, a situation detailed in section 2.4. It is worth noting that this investigation found that all categories of workers signed formal labor contracts with their employers and are covered by labor-related legal protections.





02.1 Recruitment and Resignation

Foxconn relies heavily on labor agencies for recruitment.^[3]

These agencies maintain online groups where job seekers can access information on current wage rates and vacancies. Some also operate physical offices where applicants can register for interviews. Workers who are hired through these agencies are known as ‘dispatched workers’, accounting for more than 50% of a workforce of ~150,000-200,000. Compared to 2019, or CLW’s last investigation, no significant reduction has been observed in the number of dispatch workers.

Beginning in August 2025, during the peak season for Apple orders, Foxconn collaborated with labor agencies to launch large-scale recruitment drives to attract dispatch workers, offering sign-on bonuses of up to 9,800 RMB (~1,380 USD). Workers reported that their overtime hours and workloads sharply increased during this period.

Aside from using labor agencies, Foxconn also directly recruits workers via its WeChat official account and through employee referral. Online, applicants fill out a form with basic information, and an interview is usually arranged the next day.

Current employees can also recommend job candidates through an internal referral channel, and receive a 500 RMB (~70 USD) reward if the referred candidate is successfully hired. Applicants must provide and verify their ID cards, which are then returned. The factory does not charge fees or withhold worker documents, and no deposit is required for employment.

Medical examination process

All applicants are required to undergo a mandatory medical examination, which costs 50 RMB (~7 USD) and is reimbursed with the following month’s wages. The examination includes both physical checks and medical tests, covering items such as medical history, the presence of tattoos, mobility, bloodwork, and an X-ray. During medical checks and onboarding procedures, supervisors often remind applicants not to take photographs of forms or procedures. One worker who was found photographing their medical exam form was verbally reprimanded.

In September 2025, the mandatory medical examination requirement was suspended to facilitate large-scale recruitment.



Pictured above: An advertisement distributed by a labor agency in August, offering up to USD 1279 (9,100 RMB) sign-on bonus.

[3] Our research identified at least 12 labor dispatch companies cooperating with Foxconn, such as include Zhengzhou Futong Human Resources, Zhengzhou Huajie Human Resources, Henan Wancai Human Resources, Bomo Human Resources, Zhengzhou Hengli Human Resources, Zhengzhou Huida Human Resources, Henan Yongwei Human Resources, Henan Shentong Human Resources, Henan Geili Human resources, Henan Jiutong Human Resources, Henan Qingchuang Human Resources, and Zhengzhou Zhichao Human Resources.

Recruitment discrimination

Recruitment is marked by discriminatory practices, which appeared more explicit compared to 2019. During recruitment, workers' ages are capped at 48. Uyghur minorities from the Xinjiang region are systematically excluded, with recruiters describing the issue as "sensitive." Similarly, recruiters reject applicants from other minority groups, including Tibetans, Yi from Liangshan, and Hui from Ningxia.

According to conversations with workers, pregnant women face indirect exclusion, as the mandatory medical examinations require exposure to X-ray radiation, which many pregnant women decline for health reasons. However, this condition was paused in September 2025, when the mandatory medical exam itself was waived. Some pregnant women were still found within the facility.

Gender segregation is also apparent in job assignments. Men are more likely to be placed in higher-paid technical positions with base salaries between 2400-3,000 RMB (~420 USD). Women are concentrated in lower-paid, unskilled roles at 2,100 RMB (~294 USD), regardless if they are direct hires or dispatch workers.

Pre-employment Training

Similar to 2019, workers are required to undergo pre-employment training, which is often perceived as largely performative. New hires attend an initial full-day onboarding session covering Foxconn's CSR code, occupational safety, and factory regulations. According to workers, this session consists mainly of management playing pre-recorded videos with minimal explanation.

Supervisors also require workers to sign additional attendance sheets certifying participation in two more days of training that never actually occur. This allows Foxconn to falsely document three full days of pre-job training, where workers are only paid for the first day and receive only one day training (~8 hours). This 8-hour training appears to fall below the legal minimum stipulated in the Chinese Labor Law.



Investigators also found that workers are required to pass three examinations during the onboarding process, which further underscores the performative nature of training:

1. The first exam was held after the initial training, allowing for three attempts. After a failed attempt, correct answers are shown, which can be copied to ensure a pass.
2. The second test is tied to job-specific safety certification. Foxconn provides printed answer sheets for workers to copy directly.
3. The third exam, conducted online, follows the same multiple-attempt format as the first, enabling workers to memorize and re-enter correct answers until they pass.

The above practices allowed Foxconn to maintain records of training and certification without genuinely equipping workers with the knowledge or skills needed for safe and compliant work.



Resignation Procedures & Exit Procedures

Workers generally indicated that resignation at Foxconn Zhengzhou is a relatively straightforward process. During the probation period, workers may resign following formal procedures or leave without formal approval. Otherwise, resignation procedures differ depending on the business unit:

1. Business Group A: Workers can submit a resignation request through an internal phone application (iPocket app) at least one day in advance. Approval usually takes two to three days, after which workers can proceed to complete their resignation offline, returning their ID badge, static-proof clothing, and hat.
2. iPEG Business Group: Workers must go to their labor agency's office three days in advance to collect a resignation slip, then obtain signatures from their line leader, supervisor, or section head. After three working days, they can finalize their resignation.



Pictured above: resignation procedure at Zhengzhou Foxconn

Beyond the formal resignation request, workers who are absent for three consecutive days or four non-consecutive days are considered having resigned. This form of resignation is known as “self-termination.” However, they must still complete resignation procedures to officially leave their positions.

Some workers shared that they suspect Foxconn imposes hidden penalties for those that have resigned this way. Some alleged losing at least one day's wages upon reviewing their final wage payment. As resigned workers are unable to access the internal payroll system, they cannot review their pay stubs or confirm whether their wage details are accurate. In addition, during peak seasons, supervisors often discourage resignations by steering workers toward temporary leave instead.

Workers are informed that they will receive an exit medical examination upon resignation. However, investigators found no evidence that this was enforced. In addition, Foxconn obliges workers to complete a resignation “exit experience,” a formal procedure not counted towards paid working hours. If workers must take time off during their shift to complete it, their attendance bonus is deducted, effectively reducing their income at departure.

An illustration of a hand holding a pen, signing a document labeled 'CONTRACT'. The document is held by a clip and features a red circular stamp with a diagonal line through it. The background is a solid dark green.

After signing employment contracts with labor agencies, dispatch workers must also complete Foxconn's own internal paperwork. This includes a: (1) supplemental agreement (Wage Differential Confirmation Letter or Rebate Agreement, pictured below) , and (2) confidentiality agreement (pictured in the next page).

Although the employment contracts detail a list of social security benefits, many of these provisions are rarely enforced in practice for dispatch and student workers (see section 2.4), despite benefits such as social security payments being statutory responsibility for employers. In this sense, employing through labor agencies enables Foxconn to avoid social security-related liability in potential labor disputes, effectively leaving dispatch workers without meaningful access to the rights guaranteed under their contracts.

Pictured above: Employee wage differential confirmation letter



02.3 Employment Models, Compensation, Benefits

Foxconn implements multiple tiers of employing and categorizing workers: regular workers, dispatch workers (rebate or hourly), and student workers, with each model offering different compensations and benefits:

Regular Workers. Regular workers are directly employed by Foxconn under labor contracts. They are generally further divided into two roles: technical workers (e.g., operators of large machinery, production service technicians, and inspectors) and ordinary workers (e.g., operating simple machines, placing components, tightening screws, scanning, and other low-skill tasks).

Regular technical workers earn base salaries of 2,400–3,000 RMB (~336–420 USD) plus a 500 RMB (~70 USD) skills bonus. Ordinary workers receive 2,100–2,400 RMB (~294–336 USD). With overtime, technical workers receive around 3,500–5,100 RMB (~493 USD) per month, while ordinary workers around 3,000–3,500 RMB (~420–490 USD) per month.

Regular workers also receive social insurance contributions from Foxconn. Workers pay 348 RMB (~48 USD) in their share of social insurance payments per month.

Dispatch Workers. Dispatch workers are further sub-divided into two types: rebates and hourly .

Rebate workers receive a base salary of around 2,100 RMB (~294 USD) per month and are promised large bonuses ranging from 4,800 to 9,800 RMB (~675–1,380 USD), depending on the recruitment needs. These bonuses push rebate workers' wages to some of the highest levels in China's manufacturing scene. However, these bonuses are only paid after 90 consecutive days of employment and are forfeited entirely if the worker leaves employment prior to that. During the investigation, there are cases where rebate workers left the facility before receiving their entry bonuses, citing harsh conditions. Despite performing the same production tasks as regular employees, rebate workers are not offered social insurance contributions.

Hourly dispatch workers earn slightly more than rebate workers, with rates between 25 and 28 RMB per hour (~3.50–3.90 USD). This is based on a two-part calculation, including a base wage and a "wage differential". The base wage is 12 RMB (~1.70 USD) per hour, which is paid on a monthly basis. The wage differential is about 13 RMB (~1.82 USD) per hour, which is withheld until the end of the following month and is only paid if the worker remains employed past the 25th of that month. This effectively means workers who resign before that date lose both the current and previous month's differential, i.e. nearly half of their earnings are effectively withheld for up to two months. Hourly dispatch workers are denied separate overtime pay, as their overtime is absorbed into the standard hourly calculation. Like rebate workers, they do not receive social insurance contributions from their employers.

These wage systems for dispatch workers operate as a powerful retention tool. Locally, a regular one-bed apartment costs around 1,800 to 2,700 RMB (~252–378 USD) per month. Earning a base wage is generally considered insufficient for workers' basic needs. With this taken into consideration, dispatch workers' wage structure incentivizes workers to remain in their positions while simultaneously punishing those who resign early, even under exhausting conditions.

The employment conditions of hourly workers may constitute forced labor and also potentially violate Chinese labor law. For example, one hourly worker signed a labor contract stipulating that wages would be paid in two installments: although the nominal wage was 25 RMB per hour, only 12 RMB was paid monthly, while the remaining 13 RMB was withheld and delayed for 45 days. If the worker resigned early, they would only receive 12 RMB per hour. As a result, their overtime pay effectively fell below the legal standards in China, which require 1.5 times the base wage on weekdays and twice the base wage on weekends. Some workers, fearing the loss of withheld wages, were forced to remain in their jobs. Why this may constitute forced labor:

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO)’s 11 indicators of forced labor, the practice of “withholding part of wages and forfeiting them upon early resignation” meets several criteria:
Withholding of wages: Delaying the payment of 13 RMB per hour restricts workers’ freedom to resign.
Abuse of vulnerability: Hourly workers are highly dependent on this portion of wages to sustain their livelihoods.

Further, since no separate overtime pay is provided, workers are compelled to work long hours while receiving less than the legally mandated rates. If workers fear losing thousands of RMB in wages by resigning, they are effectively pressured to remain in their jobs. This economic coercion, under international standards, may constitute a situation of forced labor.

Student Workers/Dispatch Workers. The student workers mentioned in the report have signed labor contracts with the factory but still retain their student status. Thus, they may not legally constitute as student workers. However, to distinguish them from regular dispatch workers, we refer to them as student workers. At the time of the investigation, student workers were present throughout the factory. Most of the student workers encountered were aged 18–21, and investigators did not find evidence of underaged workers.

Student workers are typically recruited through two channels. We found that they were hired under employment relationships, rather than internships. The first is Foxconn’s cooperation with vocational colleges under a “modern apprenticeship” scheme promoted by the Ministry of Education in 2019, also known as a Corporate-School Cooperation, under which apprentices hold a dual status as both “students” and “employees,” with their work at the facility seen as a part of their vocational training. Officially, students recruited through the Corporate-School Cooperation are permitted to exit this program freely. However, some student workers conveyed that completing their Foxconn placements was a mandatory precondition to obtaining their diplomas. This can serve as powerful retention tools preventing students from resigning.

The second channel of recruitment is open and non-school based, where student workers would take short-term jobs at the factory during school holidays.



Pictured above: Report on Foxconn–Henan Vocational School cooperation

Under China's work-study provisions, student workers are prohibited from working night shifts or overtime, yet investigators found that Foxconn routinely required students to do so. We also found that students did not have access to social insurance, sick leave, or other benefits even though in China, employers are legally obligated to make social security contributions on behalf of their employees. These include the five mandatory insurances — pension, medical, unemployment, work injury, and maternity—as well as the housing provident fund ('five insurances and one housing fund'). The absence of a social insurance scheme for student and dispatch workers, despite a persistent issue found also in previous investigations, may contravene the Labor Law and the Social Insurance Law of the PRC.

As such, while student workers performed the same tasks as dispatch workers, they received lower pay and fewer protections. All of these student workers were paid at the rate of 12 RMB (~1.7 USD) per hour, without rebate or other bonuses. This results in a system of unequal pay for equal work. Their overtime was compensated at 1.5 times the base wage on weekdays, twice the base wage on weekends, and three times the base wage on holidays—but even with these rates, their overall compensation and rights remained far below those of other workers.

Much of the issues detailed above have remained unchanged from 2019.

Pay stubs

All workers (regular, dispatch, student) can check their pay stubs through an online platform. A typical wage slip would list the base salary, skills subsidies, weekday overtime pay, weekend overtime pay, holiday overtime pay, and deductions (including social insurance contributions, dormitory and meal fees, and possible fines).

Leave and absences

Leave policies further highlight unequal treatment between different employment tiers. Dispatch workers were explicitly barred from taking sick leave, with the internal leave system not listing 'sick leave' as an option (see screenshot on the right).

If ill, dispatch workers must request unpaid leave, with approval from supervisors, although workers reported that this was rarely granted during peak production periods.

Regular workers may apply for sick leave with partial pay, though they must present medical certificates. Both groups can apply for unpaid personal leave with their supervisors in advance, but in practice, this negotiation can be proven difficult during peak production seasons.

Student workers do not qualify for sick leave.

在i 好办上面申请，填写表单，提前和

Pictured above: For dispatch worker, the leave request form excludes a leave/time-off option



02.4 Working Hours

Shift system

Foxconn workshops generally operate 24/7 on a two-shift scheduling system: a day and night shift and two unpaid breaks for meals.

For day shift workers, their regular workdays are from 8am - 5pm, with an unpaid hour-long break in between. Standard schedules involve six-day workweeks. Overtime is often expected, scheduled for 2 hours per day. For day shift workers, overtime is scheduled from 6pm - 8pm, with an additional unpaid hour-long break between 5pm - 6pm. Every workshop entrance is equipped with a time clock to record attendance. Work hours are calculated based on punch-in records, which are generally accurate. Workers can report mistakes to supervisors or line leaders otherwise for correction.

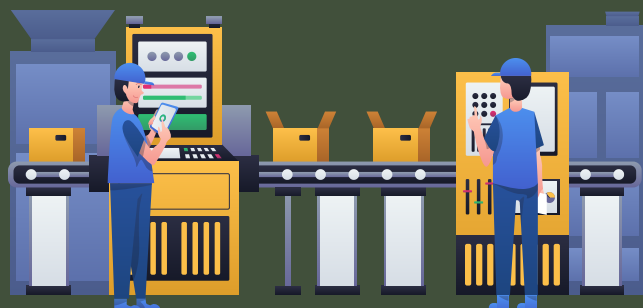
Excessive Overtime

Similar to 2019, workers' monthly overtime far exceeded the legal limit of 36 hours per month. In general, workers reported 25-26 working days per month. During Apple's peak production season (July - September), monthly overtime generally ranged between 70 to 130 hours. Some workers reported 10 consecutive workdays. During off-season, overtime also exceeded the legal limit, at an average of 52-84 hours monthly. Onsite supervisors generally schedule overtime one day in advance, which workers can decline occasionally. However, workers who consistently refuse overtime are labeled "uncooperative" and may lose access to overtime altogether, reducing their income.

Between August and mid-September 2025, some workers who alternated between day and night shifts reported working more than 300 hours per month, or 130 hours in overtime. We observed that factory management issued notices allowing workers to take leaves more flexibly—likely in response to the risk of overwork-related deaths or stress incidents, but this will result in reduced income for workers and lower bonuses.

Production Targets and Pressure

Workers shared that each position carries specific production targets. For experienced workers, these are usually achievable as long as machines function properly. However, new workers find them difficult to meet and typically require over a week to adapt. Failure to meet targets often results in workplace bullying and punishment from line leaders and supervisors.





02.5 Food and Accommodation

Food

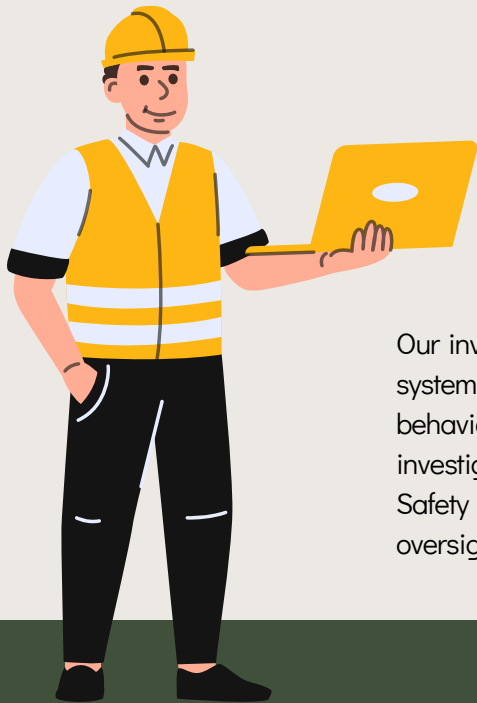
Most workers relied on the factory canteens for their meals as the industrial park spans a vast area and workers would not have sufficient time to leave the workplace for outside meals during their one-hour lunch break. Factory dormitories are also not equipped with kitchens.

Factory canteens offered a range of meals between 7–16 RMB (~1–2.24 USD), paid with the worker's preloaded 400 RMB (~56 USD) meal allowance, which is deducted from their monthly wages. Although hygiene standards were generally acceptable to workers, many noted the price was relatively expensive relative to their income levels. Prices differed by food stall, and while options were diverse—ranging from standard hot dishes to items such as steamed buns, flatbreads, dumplings, noodles, hot-and-sour soup, and rice noodles—workers emphasized that the cost remained high.

Accommodation

Dormitory accommodations cost 150 RMB (~21 USD) per month, which was waived for student workers. There were several dormitories at the worksite. New workers were generally assigned to the Fuhang building, where six people shared a room. Workers conveyed that conditions were poor, with outdated facilities, inadequately maintained bathrooms, and balconies which have been sealed off to prevent suicide attempts. Workers who just arrived would often encounter dusty floors, leftover construction debris, and clogged drains.

Workers may also opt out of factory dormitories. Many who do so tend to rent single rooms in nearby farmer-owned houses for as low as 200–300 RMB (~28–42 USD) per month, which, while more expensive, often provided better privacy and living conditions than dormitory accommodation.



02.6 Occupational Safety & Labor Protection

Our investigation revealed significant gaps in Foxconn's health and safety systems. While the factory maintained inspection posts that monitor behaviors such as smoking and personal protective equipment (PPE) use, investigators found no evidence of a functioning Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) committee. This raises concerns about the absence of formal oversight and worker participation in safety governance.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Foxconn provided workers with basic PPE. Anti-static uniforms were issued free of charge, but replacements must be purchased if lost. In molding workshops, workers receive earplugs, activated carbon masks, and finger cots. One activated carbon mask was distributed daily, which workers said was generally sufficient for reducing odors. Earplugs must often be requested. Several workers reported that during night shifts, when inspectors and supervisors were absent, they were not given masks or earplugs at all.

Workshop Conditions

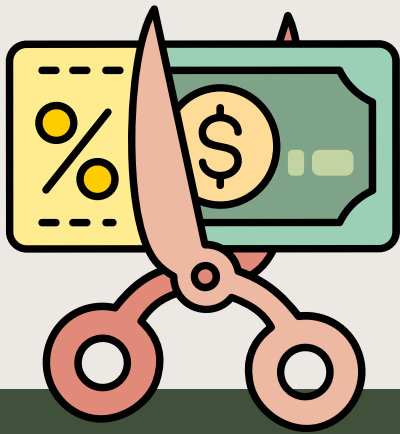
Temperatures in workshops were generally manageable, though other aspects of the environment concerned workers. Natural light was entirely absent across production floors, corridors, and even toilets and break rooms. Where windows exist, they were sealed and painted dark blue. Break areas, often located near toilets, are dirty and poorly maintained. While Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) were installed, many were locked, restricting emergency access. First-aid kits were present in workshops but entirely absent in dormitories.

Chemical Exposure and Medical Oversight

Workers were exposed to hazardous chemicals such as toluene and xylene. Although ventilation systems existed and machinery regularly inspected, these measures do not replace adequate medical monitoring. Supervisors claimed that workers in hazardous roles would undergo exit medical examinations upon resignation, but investigators found no evidence that these were conducted. This gap suggests Foxconn may not be meeting its legal obligations to safeguard workers exposed to toxic substances.

Fire Safety

Workshop passageways and emergency exits were clearly marked and unobstructed. While some corridors outside workshops were poorly lit, they were free of obstructions. Dormitory hallways and emergency exits were also clearly marked, well-lit, and unobstructed. Emergency exit doors were not locked. Both factory and dormitory areas contained flammable materials, but fire safety equipment was available, including dry powder extinguishers placed throughout the plant. However, workers reported that no fire drills had been conducted in the past six months.



02.7 Rewards & Punishments

Mirroring the findings from previous investigations, Foxconn enforces strict punishments for workplace infractions.

Fee penalties

Fights or confrontations with supervisors can result in both demerits and fines. Workers reported a case where one employee who openly challenged a supervisor received a major demerit and a 1,000 RMB (USD 140) fine.

Other infractions that would result in fee penalties include smoking in non-designated areas of the plant or dormitories. Major demerits would be issued, such as loss of annual bonuses, denial of pay raises or promotions for three years, and a permanent disciplinary record—some of which would be retained even if the worker leaves and later rejoins Foxconn. In dormitories, workers caught smoking in prohibited areas were expelled immediately and stripped of housing rights.

Covert punishments and denial of overtime

Beyond formal penalties, Foxconn supervisors employed covert punishment measures. Since base wages were set at the legal minimum, workers relied heavily on overtime to reach a livable income. Supervisors, line leaders, and section chiefs held full control over overtime assignments. If they perceived a worker as slow, uncooperative, or “disobedient,” they may punish them by withholding overtime opportunities. One worker reported that after raising concerns about a temporary reassignment, he clashed with his supervisor and was subsequently denied overtime for several consecutive days, significantly reducing his income and pressuring him to quit.

Restricted breaks

Rest breaks in workshops were tightly restricted. Workers must often find replacements before leaving their stations to drink water or use the restroom. Fearing disapproval from supervisors or the risk of slowing production progress, many workers reported avoiding breaks altogether.



02.8 Others

Absence of independent grievance mechanism, presence of surveillance, and workplace harassment

Union

Foxconn maintained a factory union; however, no evidence was found of genuine worker representation or regular union meetings. Interviews revealed that most workers were unaware of the union's functions or role in workplace matters.

The union's activities appear limited to organizing holiday events and distributing gifts. When workplace issues surfaced, workers would typically turn to their supervisors or line leaders, or submit complaints through Foxconn's internal app. While a hotline number was printed on the back of meal cards, workers reported rarely using it—even for serious grievances. In fact, some workers indicated that some who used the hotline were identified by their managers, creating tension that ultimately pushed them to resign. There was no independent grievance mechanism in place.

Surveillance

Compared to our previous investigation in 2019, Foxconn has intensified its surveillance of workers, extending control beyond the factory floor and into their personal lives.

Employees' bags were routinely inspected when entering and leaving the factory, and personal electronics such as laptops, cameras, USB drives, or memory cards were strictly prohibited. Confiscated devices were sent to inspection centers, where workers had to hand over passwords and wait three to five days for clearance. According to interview and observations, workers' personal details and a written incident statement will be recorded, with fingerprints affixed to each entry during this process. These measures underscore Foxconn's high level of vigilance in preventing information leaks.

Beyond physical inspections, Foxconn's information security team monitors workers' online activity and retaliates against criticism. In one case, a former worker who shared videos on Xiaohongshu and Douyin describing harassment was quickly contacted and threatened. Foxconn staff exposed the individual's full name and home address, warning them to delete their posts and "be careful." Such tactics reveal a strategy of surveillance and intimidation designed to silence dissent and suppress public scrutiny.

Workplace harassment

Bullying and sexual harassment remained widespread within Foxconn factories, disproportionately affecting women workers. Investigators documented frequent verbal harassment from male coworkers, including persistent sexist remarks and threats of taking surreptitious photos to coerce compliance. Women workers also reported being stalked by male colleagues from workshops to canteens. Out of fear of escalation, many avoided reporting incidents. Supervisors and management rarely intervened. Bullying by workshop supervisors and line leaders was frequently brought up by workers. Workers who made mistakes or failed to meet production quotas were subjected to verbal abuse, intimidation, or retaliatory measures. A common form of punishment was a denial of overtime opportunities, effectively reducing workers' incomes.

Workers' perceptions

Workers acknowledged several advantages of employment at Foxconn, most notably the timely payment of wages and the opportunity to earn overtime, which provides a critical supplement to otherwise low base salaries. Many considered the reliability of wage payments an important guarantee, especially in comparison to other factories where wage arrears are common. For local Zhengzhou residents, Foxconn's proximity to home and the lack of alternative job opportunities made it an attractive—if limited—option.

However, dissatisfaction with wages was widespread. Workers consistently expressed that these income levels were insufficient to meet living costs. Because wages were heavily dependent on production orders and are supplemented largely through overtime, workers pursue excessively long hours with inadequate rest.

Many workers also voiced deep frustration with Foxconn's management and working environment. Older workshops were described as poorly maintained, with toilets, break rooms, and general facilities in substandard condition. The production floors were characterized as closed, oppressive spaces marked by high noise levels and stressful conditions that quickly drain workers both physically and mentally.

The combination of low wages, dependence on overtime, poor facilities, harsh supervision, and pervasive harassment has led to high turnover rates. These factors reflect not only deep worker discontent but also the structural weaknesses in Foxconn's labor model, which relies on a cycle of recruitment and attrition rather than sustainable improvements to working conditions.

18-year-old student worker Ms. Li joined Foxconn Zhengzhou as a student worker after graduating from high school. At the time of the investigation she had been employed for only one month.

She heard that dispatch workers can often earn 5,000–6,000 RMB (USD 701–841) through overtime and bonuses. Meanwhile, earning the statutory minimum wage at 12 hours per hour, her monthly pay was just over 3,000 RMB (USD 420).

She received neither the hourly subsidies or rebates available to dispatch workers nor the benefits provided to regular workers, making her dissatisfied with her conditions. She hoped to enjoy equal pay for equal work. Ms. Li also described the factory environment as highly oppressive, noting that she rarely saw sunlight. The cost of living in Zhengzhou is high for her, and she must pay 150 RMB (USD 21) per month in dormitory fees. To save money, she sometimes skips proper meals and survives on steamed bread.

She plans to work until she saves enough money for college.



Conclusion

Overall, Foxconn's wage employment system creates and sustains a temporary labor force.

Low base wages push workers to rely on overtime to earn a livable income, and create a hierarchy of precarity: regular workers depend on overtime to reach a livable income, dispatch workers face wage withholding schemes that tie them to exhausting jobs under threat of financial loss, and lack social protections and benefits, and student workers face potential exploitation through low pay and work-related graduation requirements.

These issues reflect structural issues to Foxconn's labor management practices that center productivity over worker wellbeing and externalize operational risks onto third-party entities.

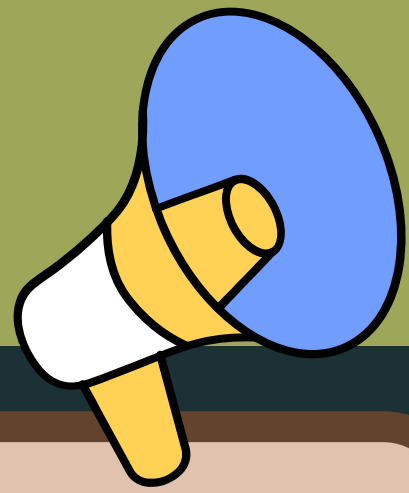
At a broader level, these conditions are embedded within China's labor market, where the suppression of labor costs in manufacturing is the default. China's migrant labor economy consists of ~300 million migrant workers leaving rural areas annually to seek temporary employment in urban areas. Without full access to urban social benefits and protections, migrants cycle between short-term jobs before returning to their rural homes. This creates a vast, disposable labor reserve that is absorbed into the urban gig economy or precarious manufacturing positions, ultimately exerting downward pressure on wages and employment schemes that center around temporary labor, as observed in the dispatch worker employment schemes at Foxconn.

Addressing these structural issues require more than piecemeal corporate initiatives to improve factory conditions. The way forward demands multi-stakeholder efforts—from policy reforms that dismantle systemic barriers and strengthen labor protections, to institutional accountability mechanisms, to consumer-driven demands for ethical supply chains. Only through coordinated action at every level can meaningful progress be made toward uplifting labor standards and ensuring dignity for China's industrial workforce.



Appendix: Worker Stories

(all names have been changed)



Xiao Chen (Regular Worker)

Xiao Chen, 23, a high school graduate, joined Foxconn Zhengzhou in August 2024. She first entered as a dispatch worker and later converted to a regular worker.

At the beginning, she often struggled to keep up with the production pace, which brought significant stress. At times, she was subjected to harsh verbal treatment from managers. Over time, such incidents decreased, though she was still reprimanded whenever defective products appeared. Her production line has over 120 workers.

Before December 2024, Xiao Chen consistently had overtime opportunities, with monthly take-home pay reaching 3,200 RMB (USD 448). However, after December, overtime was reduced, and the workforce was cut by more than half. Following tariff adjustments in April 2025, overtime opportunities decreased further, and her monthly income dropped to just over 2,000 RMB (USD 280).

Xiao Chen previously worked in other electronics factories. She noted that although Foxconn's working environment is far from ideal, at least regular workers were not subjected to wage arrears. What troubles her most is sexual harassment: some male workers frequently approached her under the pretext of "making friends," or make sexually suggestive comments. If she refuses, some may follow her, making her feel unsafe.

She admitted that she hopes to find a stable and trustworthy partner soon but would never choose someone from the production line. Although she herself is a line worker, she believes that "there is no future" for those who remain long-term on Foxconn's assembly lines. With limited job opportunities available, Xiao Chen has no plans to leave Foxconn in the short term.



Xiao Li (Student Worker)

Xiao Li, 18, a recent high school graduate, entered Foxconn Zhengzhou as a student worker and had been employed for just one month at the time of the interview.

She reported that her income is very low, with an hourly wage of only 12 RMB (USD 1.7)—the statutory minimum in Zhengzhou—much lower than dispatch or regular workers. Dispatch workers can earn 5,000–6,000 RMB (USD 701 - USD 841) with overtime and subsidies, but her monthly pay is just over 3,000 RMB (USD 420). She receives no hourly bonuses, rebates, or benefits available to other categories of workers. She hopes at minimum to achieve “equal pay for equal work.”

Her working hours are long, and as a dormitory resident, she walks 30–40 minutes to and from the factory daily. She described the factory environment as oppressive, noting that she rarely sees sunlight. The cost of living in Zhengzhou is high relative to her income: she pays 150 RMB/month (USD 21) for dormitory fees. To save money, she sometimes skips meals and eats only steamed buns. She plans to continue working until the end of August to save enough money for college.

Her workstation is located near large machinery, posing risks such as accidental contact with robotic arms. The workshop is also extremely noisy, leaving her exhausted after long shifts. There is little rest space; toilets are unsanitary, and break rooms are cramped and dirty. What unsettles her most is that some male workers frequently make derogatory remarks about women, leaving her with a constant sense of insecurity.



Xiao Wang (Dispatch Worker)

Xiao Wang, 25 years old works as a dispatch hourly worker at Foxconn Zhengzhou, earning 25 RMB/hour (USD 3.50) With heavy overtime and almost no rest, he can earn more than 5,000 RMB (USD 701) a month.

Xiao Wang feels the working hours are too long. He hopes for earlier finishing times, and while he can tolerate working six days with only one rest day, he finds night shifts unbearable. Night shifts last 10 hours, with workers required to stay in workshops for up to 12 hours. He often ends shifts completely exhausted and struggles to sleep during the day, leaving him in chronic fatigue.

Commuting is another burden. His dormitory is far from the factory, requiring a 2 RMB (USD 0.30) ride by tricycle followed by a bus transfer, meaning he must wake more than an hour earlier to prepare.

Xiao Wang hopes his working hours can be reduced, ideally with two rest days per week and earlier finishing times. However, he worries that fewer hours will also reduce his income. He described the workshop environment as oppressive, harming his physical and mental state. Regarding the future, he said he could only “take things one step at a time.” He is deeply dissatisfied with his current work and life, and often considers quitting.



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