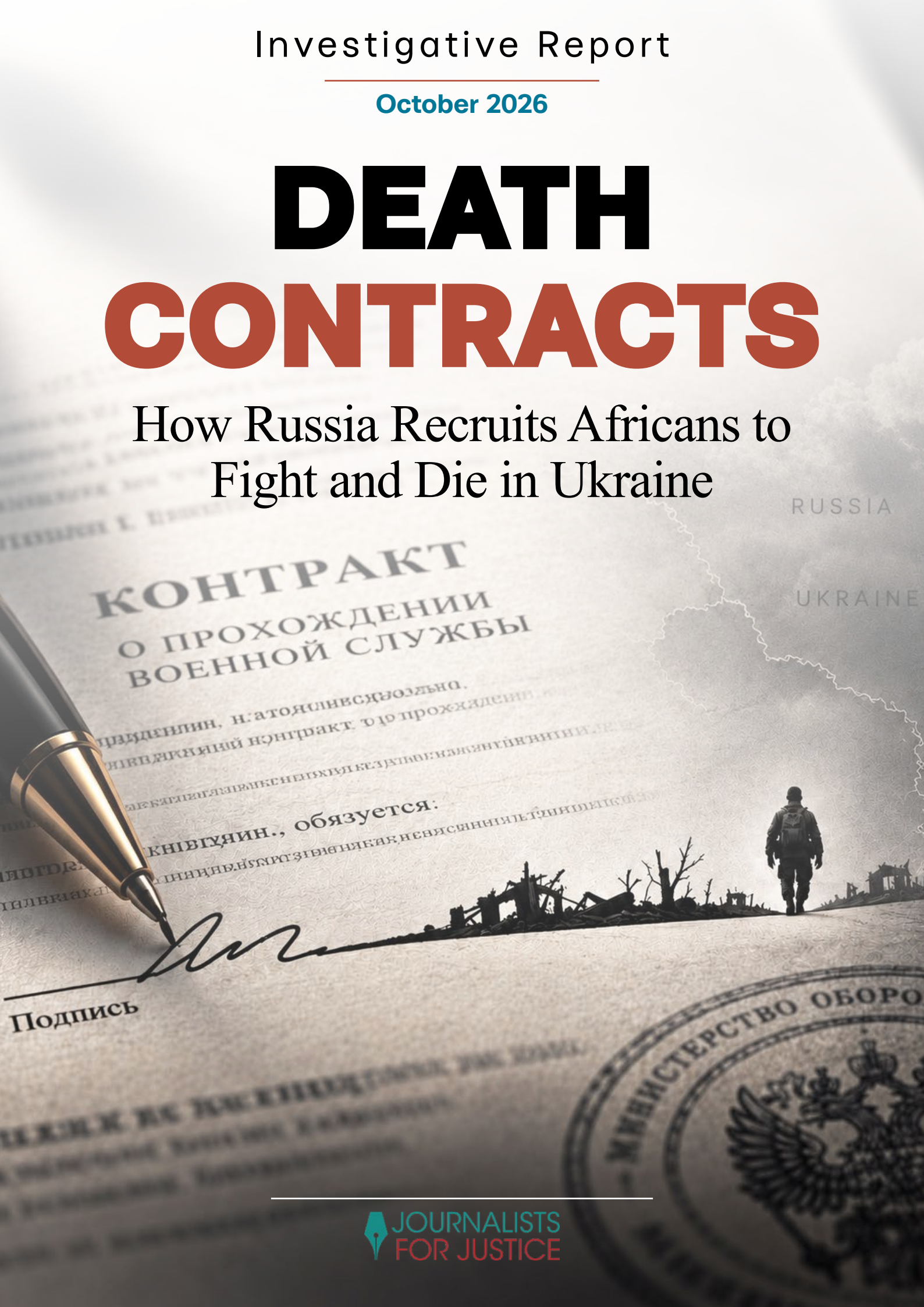
Investigative Report

October 2026

DEATH CONTRACTS

How Russia Recruits Africans to Fight and Die in Ukraine



JOURNALISTS FOR JUSTICE

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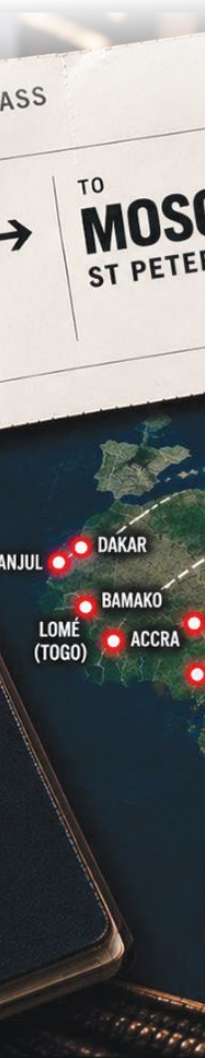












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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was produced by Journalists For Justice. Rosemary Tollo led the investigation and writing, with contributions from Mwalimu Mati and Korir Isaac. Jessica Hatcher and Mary Wasike edited and reviewed the report.

Journalists For Justice thanks all those who shared their experiences and information for this investigation, often at considerable personal risk. Many cannot be named for reasons of safety and privacy.

RIGHTS

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PROLOGUE

On the morning of 27 December 2025, two days after his 32nd birthday, Charles Waithaka[1] called his mother from somewhere inside Russia.[2] He was crying. He kept repeating the same broken phrase – "Mum… today… Mum… today…" – and could not finish the sentence. The call ended. Bibiana Wangari Waithaka would never hear her son's voice again.

In the weeks that followed, she sent him messages every day.

Good morning.

Good afternoon.

Good evening.

Good night. There was no reply.

Charles had left Kenya three months earlier. A woman had arranged what she said was a job opportunity as a plant mechanic in Russia, the kind of work he already knew. Within days of arriving, he told his mother he had not been placed in mechanical work but instead put into military training and forced to sign documents he could not read. During one call, he was crying. "Mum, I am in military training against my will." A few days before his birthday, he sent her a photograph showing his eyes swollen. Then a message: "My birthday is the sunrise, but sunset may come first." When she asked what he meant, he told her that by sunset, he meant death.

On 24 January 2026, Bibiana learned that her son was dead. She didn't find out from any embassy or official government call. She found out through social media. As she laments, "The whole world knew that my son was dead before his own mother did."

His body was never returned to Kenya. The family held a memorial without his remains. Somewhere, his mother said, her son lies in a place she does not know and has never seen.

Charles did not leave Kenya to fight in a war. Like thousands of other young African men before and since, he left his motherland to find work.

> **The whole world knew that my son was dead before his own mother did."**
>
> Bibiana



Bibiana Waithaka and her son, Charles, shortly before he went to Russia.

1 JFJ interview with Bibiana Wangari Waithaka, mother of Charles Waithaka Wangari, conducted in Nairobi, February 2026. All quotations attributed to Bibiana in the Prologue and throughout this report are drawn from this interview unless otherwise noted.

INTRODUCTION

Why this report?

Thousands of African men have been recruited into Russia's war with Ukraine through a system that disguised military service as civilian employment, moved men across borders on tourist visas, and bound them by contracts written in a language they could not read. By the time they understood what they had signed, they could not leave.

This report documents how that system works, who built it, what it does to the people inside it, and why the governments responsible for protecting them have so far failed to act. The investigation by Journalists For Justice (JFJ), a Hague-based media investigative team, has found that the recruitment operation exhibits multiple indicators of trafficking under international law[2] and relies extensively on deception, abuse of vulnerability, and financial and legal mechanisms that trap recruits in the system, leaving them with no realistic means of withdrawing once inside Russia. Evidence gathered by JFJ indicates that return is often only possible through escape, injury, intervention by embassies and national authorities, or repatriation of bodies after death.

> **Kenyans, as well as many citizens of other states who signed contracts to participate in the special military operation, did so on a voluntary basis... Contracts provide that as soon as the contract terminates, no repatriation is needed... this person is no longer bound by a contract and may do whatever they want. Moreover, but this should be done within the Ministry of Defence."**
>
> Musalia Mudavadi, Foreign Minister of Kenya, 16 March 2026

Whether or not recruits receive assistance from their governments often depends on the willingness and capacity of national authorities to intervene. In practice, several African governments have accepted the validity of the military service contracts signed by recruits with the Russian military. One Sudanese recruit who told JFJ he had been promised civilian employment but was instead recruited into Russia's armed forces reported that when he contacted his country's ambassador in Moscow seeking assistance, he was asked whether he had completed his contract. When he replied that he had not, he was told "go and complete your contract." Speaking at a press conference, Kenya's Foreign Affairs Minister Musalia Mudavadi[3] adopted more or less the same stance.[4] He accepted his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov's description of Africans serving in the Russian military as "volunteers – those who join the special military operation fully in line with Russian legislation." This exchange came months after Kenyan officials had publicly warned that citizens were being lured into the Russian military by what they described as "ruthless agents".

The month of March 2026 saw a flurry of events in which both Moscow and Kyiv responded to African concerns about the recruitment crisis. By May 2026, the Kenyan government reported that 53 Kenyan nationals had been repatriated from Russia.[5]

The JFJ investigation found that a Kenyan embassy official also assisted some Ugandan and Sudanese recruits who were unable to obtain support from their own diplomatic missions. In some Kenyan cases, politically connected individuals attempted to leverage their relationships with government officials and contacts in Moscow to secure the return of recruits from their home areas.[6] In South Africa, government

2 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (the "Palermo Protocol"), adopted 15 November 2000, entered into force 25 December 2003. Article 3(a) defines trafficking in persons.

3 His official title is Prime Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs. For brevity we have adopted the moniker Foreign Minister.

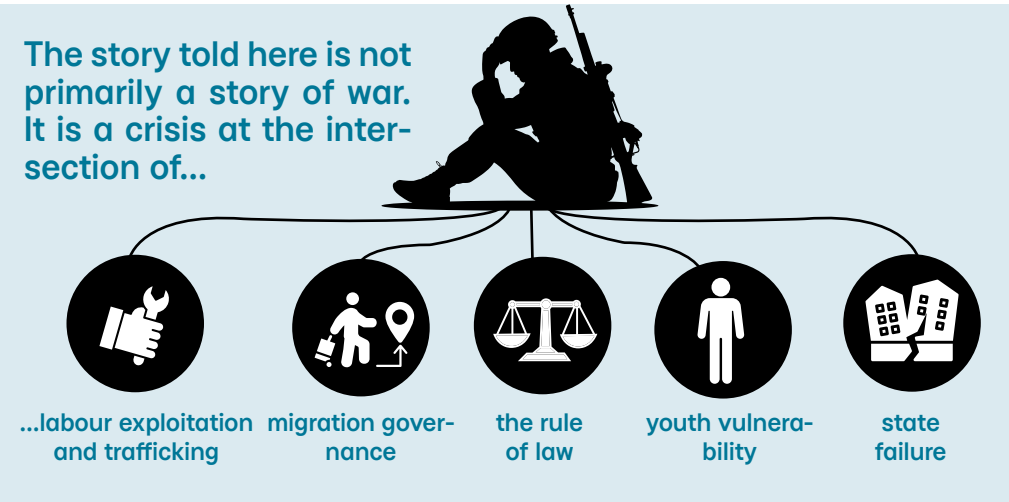
4 Moscow, 16 March 2026.

5 See Statement of the Prime Cabinet Secretary https://parliament.go.ke/.

6 A prominent example is the return of Leparakwo Saitei and Kelvin Lemashon Koriko, released from service in the Russian military immediately after Mudavadi-Lavrov 16 March 2026 meeting in Moscow. Mudavadi was accompanied to Russia by Julius Sunkuli, a prominent Kenyan politician and diplomat who currently represents the constituency from which the two returnees hail.

intervention was required to facilitate the return of 17 recruits from Russia in February 2026,[7] while Ghana announced an agreement[8] with Ukraine for the invocation of the Geneva Conventions. Zimbabwean authorities stated they had processed and cleared the paperwork to repatriate the remains of four citizens killed while serving with Russian forces.[9] Regardless of these announcements, no African has been released from Ukrainian custody or repatriated by Ukraine to their country of nationality.

The story told here is not primarily a story of war. It is a crisis at the intersection of labour exploitation and human trafficking, migration governance and the rule of law, youth vulnerability and state failure. The men at the centre of this report were not ideologues or adventurers. In none of the interviews conducted by JFJ did ideology or political support for Russia emerge as a motivation for enlisting.[10] These were job seekers who entered a recruitment pipeline expecting work but found themselves as infantry on the frontline of one of the world's first AI wars, where they face devastating swarm drones that can find and destroy targets with unprecedented accuracy.[11]



Ukrainian military data records reviewed by JFJ, combined with additional cases identified through interviews and independent reporting, identify at least 3,034 African nationals from 40 countries enlisted in Russia's armed forces since October 2022. Interim data establishes the names and details of 502 dead African nationals from 29 countries, meaning the fate of over 2,500 other Africans is unconfirmed at the date of this publication. These figures do not establish the full scale of African recruitment. Russia has never published a complete accounting of foreign enlistment, and the true number is likely higher.

The report first examines the drivers of demand for foreign recruits and vulnerability among African populations. It then traces the recruitment system itself, the experiences of those drawn into it, its spread across the continent, and the failures of national and international institutions to respond. It concludes with a legal analysis, formal findings, and recommendations.

The evidence in this report establishes that the recruitment of Africans into Russia's war is not a bilateral matter between individual African states and Russia. It is a continental crisis requiring a continental response. This report seeks to provide the factual and legal foundation for that response.

7 https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/president-ramaphosa-welcomes-return-south-african-men-russian-frontlines.
8 https://www.graphic.com.gh/international/international-news/ghanaian-fighters-captured-in-ukraine-countries-pledge-cooperation-under-geneva-conventions.html.
9 Statement of the Zimbabwe Government spokesperson Nick Mangwana https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2026/5/14/zimbabweans-lured-into-russias-war-as-families-plead-for-their-return.
10 Based on JFJ interviews conducted with prisoners of war, serving recruits, returnees, escapees, and the families of recruits from Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, Egypt, Somalia, Nigeria, and Cameroon.
11 The ethics and legality of weaponised AI raises novel moral questions and the scholarship is nascent. At present drones are remotely controlled by pilots under a responsible commander subject to the laws of war, but "autonomy is on the imminent horizon". See Linn, Thomas C. (2026) "Research & Debate–The First AI War," Naval War College Review: Vol. 79: No. 2, Article 9. Available at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol79/iss2/9.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2022 and 2026, Russia built a transnational recruitment system that enlisted thousands of African nationals into its armed forces through deception, financial coercion, and the complicity of state actors on both sides. Journalists For Justice has investigated this operation across multiple countries, interviewing prisoners of war, serving recruits, returnees, escapees, and the families of those killed or missing. JFJ identifies at least 3,034 African nationals from 40 countries in Russian military service and 502 dead African nationals from 29 countries.[12] The true number is likely higher.

Why it happened. Heavy losses during the early stages of the war created domestic discontent, hence Russia's demand for foreign infantry grew. A series of Russian presidential decrees promulgated between 2022[13] and 2025 formalised the arrangement, offering Russian citizenship to foreign nationals who signed military service contracts.[14] These presidential offers[15] were used to influence the decisions of many African recruits, who filled a structural role: absorbing casualties in infantry assaults and reducing the political cost of losses among Russian conscripts.

The supply of candidates was created by Africa's own economic crisis. Across just seven of the countries whose nationals JFJ interviewed, more than 13 million young men are classified as NEET (not in education, employment, or training).[16] In none of the interviews conducted did ideology or political support for Russia emerge as a motivation for enlisting. The dominant factors were unemployment, family obligation, and the promise of wages far exceeding anything available at home.

How it worked. Recruitment operated through licensed employment agencies, informal brokers, and personal networks that promised well-paid civilian work abroad.

JFJ reviewed three different versions of in-country recruitment contracts. Although their wording and language differed, all presented the opportunity as civilian employment and did not identify the Russian military as the employer.[17] Some did not clearly identify Russia as the destination. The contracts also failed to disclose that candidates would later be required to sign Russian military service agreements.

Recruits were moved on tourist and business visas, in some cases issued within 36 hours of first contact with a recruiter,[18] assembled in apartments or other holding locations before departure and moved in groups. Many candidates had limited incomes, little or no international travel history, and profiles unlikely to support ordinary tourist or business travel without assistance. Brokers monetised that vulnerability by arranging for visas and, in some documented Kenyan cases, newly issued passports shortly before departure. Candidates often paid substantial fees and exhausted scarce family resources before discovering the true nature of the promised work.

Flight records and the accounts of recruits reviewed by JFJ show a pattern of movement from African capitals to Moscow and St Petersburg through major transit hubs including Istanbul, Dubai, Sharjah, Doha, and Addis Ababa. In many cases, recruits waited at layover points for others in their group before being moved onward together.

12 Ukrainian military intelligence data reviewed by JFJ, current as of June 2026. JFJ arrived at this figure after analysing Ukrainian data and conducting its own interviews with recruits, returnees, families of recruits, government sources, and open-source material.

13 See 690 30.09.2022 Presidential decree of the Russian Federation of December 30, 2022 No. 690 "About admission to citizenship of the Russian Federation in the simplified manner of foreign citizens who have concluded contracts for the passage of military service, and members of their families," http://actual.pravo.gov.ru/content/content.html#pnum=0001202209300053.

14 Decrees of the President of the Russian Federation; Decree No. 690 of 30 September 2022; Decree No. 350 of 15 May 2023; Decree No. 10 on 4 January 2024; Decree No. 534 on 31 July 2025; and Decree No. 821, issued on 5 November 2025.

15 Ibid.

16 The International Labour Organization defines NEET as the percentage of the youth population (aged 15 to 24, though sometimes extended up to 29) who are neither in employment nor in any form of education or training.

17 Based on JFJ review of in-country recruitment agency contracts. A sample is reproduced in Appendix II.

18 Based on JFJ review of Russian tourist and business visas and corresponding passport copies. See also Recruitments of Kenyans into the Russian Military, National Assembly Hansard, Wednesday, 18 February 2026 – Afternoon Sitting, p. 11, https://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2026-02/The%20Hansard%20-%20Wednesday%2C%2018%20February%202026%20%28P%29.pdf.

JFJ found that Russia's African recruitment pipeline operated through two overlapping channels. One targeted economically vulnerable civilians with promises of ordinary employment. The other deliberately sought serving and former soldiers, police officers, and people with paramilitary training who could be deployed with less preparation.

In Kenya, recruiters sought former military, police, and National Youth Service personnel. Reporting identified recruits from the Kenya Defence Forces, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, and other specialised police formations.

JFJ found that this preference for trained candidates also created a market for false credentials. Simon Letaya Ndiema, a recruiter operating in Kilgoris, arranged forged military service certificates for candidates who had never served in the armed forces, enabling them to present themselves as former military personnel and satisfy the recruitment network's requirements.

Some candidates were told that the unusually high promised salaries were connected to an overseas peace support operation comparable to Kenya's deployment in Haiti, rather than frontline service in Russia's war against Ukraine. That explanation made the salaries appear plausible while concealing the true destination and purpose of the deployment.

The pattern extended beyond Kenya. Cameroon acknowledged the unauthorised involvement of serving defence and security personnel in the war and introduced tighter restrictions on their overseas travel. Reporting in Uganda identified military veterans and former private security contractors among those targeted. Individuals with military backgrounds were also identified in recruitment networks involving Ghanaian and Nigerian nationals.

Where genuine military experience was available, recruiters sought it; where it was not, they accepted inexperienced civilians or manufactured the appearance of experience through forged records.

On arrival in Russia, the job offer turned into a military contract. The recruits were taken to a state-controlled bank, made to open accounts, and pressured to sign powers of attorney granting intermediaries access to their funds. They were presented with a second contract in Russian Cyrillic, without translation, binding them to military service under penalty of criminal prosecution.[19] Their passports and personal apparel were confiscated and they were given matching civilian outfits instead. Agency deductions consumed much of the signing bonuses. International sanctions blocked fund transfers home, trapping wages in accounts recruits often could not access.

JFJ followed the money. The recruitment pipeline was not only designed to move men into Russia's war; it was built to make money from them. Across Africa, JFJ estimates that recruitment intermediaries earned more than US$50 million in agency fees from African recruits; in Kenya alone, one licensed agency, Global Face Human Resources Limited, may have earned more than US$8.25 million.[20]

Tracing the money after it entered Russia proved difficult. Sanctions on Russian financial institutions, the use of local bank accounts, and the opacity of the recruitment network made it difficult for JFJ to follow the funds beyond the point of deduction. Recruits and intermediaries told JFJ that some proceeds were believed to have been shared through cryptocurrency, but JFJ could not independently verify those transfers.

What JFJ could establish was the structure of extraction. In Kenya, recruits sent money to the recruiters through the M-Pesa mobile money application before their departure. In Russia, their bonuses and wages were paid into local bank accounts opened under handler supervision. Access to those accounts was controlled through powers of attorney, and large deductions to "compensate all expenses borne by the agent"[21] were made as soon as the money arrived in the account.

19 Russian military service contracts reviewed by JFJ, signed by African nationals in Moscow and Veliky Novgorod in 2024 and 2025. A copy of the signature form listing criminal code provisions is reproduced in Appendix I. This is the master contract-evidence note.

20 Figures derived by JFJ from a sample of recruitment contracts, calculated by multiplying the average agency service fee per contract by the documented number of recruits per channel. The US$8.25 million Global Face estimate is based on approximately 500 recruits processed by that agency between May 2025 and February 2026. The US$50 million continental estimate aggregates all documented recruitment intermediaries across the countries covered in this report. JFJ estimates that across all intermediaries beyond Global Face, agency fees in Kenya exceed US$18 million.

21 From Clause 3 of the 2025 Global Face Human Resources Limited Agreement for "Job Search and Employment Support Services Abroad."

The money was collected at different points in the chain. In many cases, recruits first paid to register, handing over facilitation fees for visas, travel and accommodation, before discovering that the promised work had become a military contract.

In Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, brokers secured payment upfront, charging recruits between US$1,500 and US$7,000 in facilitation fees, largely to obtain visas and cover accommodation on arrival in Russia. For many recruits, the visa was the first obstacle. They had limited income, weak travel histories, and profiles that made international travel difficult without the services of a broker.

Brokers monetised that vulnerability. They presented themselves as able to secure documents, arrange travel, and open access to work abroad. But once recruits reached Russia, the arrangement collapsed. Having already paid fees, travelled abroad, and exhausted scarce resources, many faced enlistment not as a free choice, but as the only remaining way to recover the cost of the journey and earn money.

In Kenya, the main money trail leads to former military personnel and Global Face Human Resources Limited, a licensed recruitment agency operating in plain sight. Recruits told JFJ that, before departure, they sent payments through M-Pesa directly to people they identified as agency directors. Once in Russia, financial control shifted to local bank accounts opened under the supervision of handlers. Signing bonuses and wages were paid into those accounts, while powers of attorney gave intermediaries access to the funds. Global Face contracts seen by JFJ imposed service fees of 1 million to 1.4 million roubles (US$11,700 to US$16,500), payable through deductions from recruits' Russian bank accounts. In some cases, those fees consumed as much as 66 per cent of the signing bonus.



After enlistment, some recruits and families encountered another payment system. JFJ found evidence that payments (bribes) were made to intermediaries or commanders to keep recruits in holding areas, avoid assault units, or delay frontline deployment. Recruits and relatives described the practice as an open secret at enlistment centres in Moscow: those who understood how it worked, or had access to people who could negotiate with commanders, had a better chance of buying time away from the frontline.

The pattern was uneven. Ghanaian recruits, according to evidence gathered by JFJ, often took longer to reach the frontline, and most enlisted in Moscow. Kenyan recruits, who mainly enlisted through St Petersburg, were often moved quickly into assault roles and learned of the payment system only after it was too late.

JFJ's investigation found that Kenyan Global Face handlers, as identified by recruits, visited camps in Russia to check on specific recruits. The visits, recruits said, were not welfare checks but to determine who was still alive, missing, injured, or dead.

Around the same time, recruits complained to commanders that wages were missing from their bank accounts. JFJ could not independently verify every transaction, but the reports show how little control recruits had over the money they had been promised.

The banking system deepened the trap. Recruits could withdraw only limited amounts of cash each day, while many were rushed to the frontline before they could gain access to the bonuses and wages paid into their accounts. Thousands of dollars' worth of roubles now sit in Russian bank accounts opened in the names of African recruits. For their families back home, the money is almost impossible to recover. Many do not know which bank holds the account, who controls it, what documents are required, or where to file a claim.

The contract trap. JFJ found that job contracts sat at the centre of the scheme, creating the appearance of consent while concealing the true destination, employer, work, and legal consequences.

Many recruits signed twice. The first contract, signed in-country, presented the arrangement as civilian employment. It did not always identify Russia as the destination and never named the Russian military as the employer. For recruits, the document appeared to confirm that they were travelling for work. The second contract was presented only after their arrival in Russia. In Moscow and Veliky Novgorod, African recruits were given contracts written in Russian Cyrillic, without translation, and pressured to sign. These contracts bound them to one year of military service.

Copies signed by African nationals in 2024 and 2025 contained almost identical language and bore the names of Russian military recruitment officials, including Major I.S. Tekuchev, head of Moscow's military service recruitment station, and Captain I.R. Arsentyeva, head of the Selection Point for Military Service under Contract in Veliky Novgorod. Both were listed as representatives of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.

Some documents went further, presenting military service as a pathway to Russian residency or citizenship. JFJ reviewed a bilingual form completed by a Ghanaian recruit who appeared to believe he was applying for citizenship. Asked his motive for concluding a contract with the Ministry of Defence, he wrote: "Helping Russia."

Asked about future plans, he wrote: "Bring my family and stay in Russia and become a Russian citizen." Many African prisoners of war in Ukrainian custody continue to believe that their enlistment entitled them, or their families, to Russian citizenship. Some said they intended to return to Russia upon their release for that reason alone.

> **It's a death contract."**
>
> Kenyan POW Evans Kibet told JFJ

But the fine print carried severe consequences. The contracts required recruits to acknowledge provisions from Chapter 33 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. Among the crimes listed are Absence from Unit or Place of Service Without Leave (Article 337),[22] Desertion (Article 338),[23] Evasion of Military Service Duties by Simulation of Illness or Other Means (Article 339)[24] and Voluntary Surrender (Article 352.1)[25]. The penalties for these offences are not disclosed in writing but range from several years' imprisonment to sentences of up to 10 years.

By the time the recruits reached military units and understood what they had signed, they could no longer simply walk away; the legal consequences were severe from the outset. In several African countries, enlistment in a foreign military entity is also a criminal offence, leaving some survivors exposed to prosecution not only in Russia's military system, but at home as well.

As Kenyan prisoner of war (POW) Evans Kibet told JFJ: "This is a death contract."

What it did to people. Training periods collapsed from six weeks in 2023 to as little as three days in 2025.[26] Recruits were deployed as frontline infantry, often advancing ahead of Russian forces, under sustained drone and artillery attack. A JFJ survey of the families of 57 Kenyan recruits found that the average interval from arrival in Russia to death, hospitalisation, or capture was 44 days.[27]

Families learned of the death of their relatives through social media and WhatsApp messages, not through official channels.[28] A list compiled from Ukrainian data and JFJ's own investigations identifies 502 African recruits from 29 countries reported dead after entering Russia's military pipeline.

22 Imprisonment between 6 months to 5 years.
23 Imprisonment between 7 years to 10 years.
24 Imprisonment between 6 months to 7 years.
25 Imprisonment between 3 to 10 years.
26 Per-case data on training intervals: Abdullahi (six weeks); Mburu (three days); full data in Chapter 5.
27 JFJ survey based on 57 Kenyan recruit households. The 44-day mean covers the interval from documented arrival in Russia to confirmed death, confirmed hospitalisation, or capture.
28 See note 1 (Bibiana case).

THE LARGEST RECORDED DEATH TOLLS

Cameroon	104
Ghana	85
Egypt	81
Kenya	76
Nigeria	24
The Gambia	22
Mali	15
Algeria	14
South Africa	10
Senegal	8
Burundi	7
Sudan	7
Zimbabwe	6
Cote d'Ivoire	5
Sierra Leone	5
Morocco	4
Guinea	3
Ethiopia	3
Republic of the Congo	3
Togo	3
Uganda	3
Benin	2
Botswana	2
Zambia	2
Tanzania	2
Tunisia	2
The Central African Republic	2
Gabon	1
Chad	1



The figures are a snapshot, not a final tally. JFJ continued to identify additional recruits and deaths as this report was being prepared for publication, and the numbers are likely to rise further. The true toll across all nationalities is substantially higher. The largest recorded tolls were from Cameroon, with 104 deaths; Ghana, 85; Egypt, 81; Kenya, 76; Nigeria, 24; The Gambia, 22; Mali, 15; Algeria, 14; South Africa, 10; and Senegal, 8. Deaths were also recorded among recruits from Burundi and Sudan, with 7 each; Zimbabwe, 6; Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, 5 each; Morocco, 4; Guinea, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo and Uganda, 3 each; Benin, Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania, Tunisia and the Central African Republic, 2 each; and Gabon and Chad, 1 each.

Others survived the frontline only to end up in captivity in Ukraine. As of June 2026, Ukraine was holding 32 African prisoners of war from at least 15 countries. The largest group are Egyptians, with seven confirmed prisoners, followed by five Kenyans, three Nigerians, three Ugandans, two Ghanaians, two Togolese and two Cameroonians. JFJ also identified one prisoner each from Sierra Leone, Somalia, Benin, Senegal, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Morocco, and Algeria. African prisoners of war held in Ukraine have been systematically excluded from prisoner exchanges with Russia, which has never placed an African national on any exchange list. By June 2026, Ukraine reported that 9,606 military personnel and

civilians had been returned from Russian captivity through exchanges and other negotiated releases since the full-scale invasion in February 2022. On 26 June 2026, Ukraine and Russia carried out their 76th prisoner exchange. African nationals were again absent from the lists.

Ghana announced in February 2026 that it had reached an understanding with Ukraine concerning the repatriation of two Ghanaian prisoners. Before agreeing to return, however, the men sought three assurances from their government: that they would not be prosecuted for their involvement in the war; that they would be assisted in recovering their wages and other money held in Russian bank accounts; and that they and their families would receive practical support, including help finding employment, after their return. One prisoner initially withheld his consent while seeking answers to those concerns.

Their requests exposed the same vulnerabilities that had drawn many Africans into the recruitment pipeline in the first place. Returning home offered safety, but not necessarily employment, income, or protection from prosecution. For men who had travelled because they could not support their families, repatriation without economic assistance risked returning them to the conditions that recruiters had exploited.



As of 30 June 2026, no African government had completed the release of its citizens from Ukrainian captivity. Although Ghana had announced that it had reached an agreement with Kyiv to repatriate two of its nationals, the cases had not yet resulted in a completed return. The announcement remained the exception to a wider pattern of limited diplomatic action.

29 See Chapter 1 for full details of the Nyirenda and Tarimo cases.
30 Continental chronology compiled by JFJ from Ukrainian military intelligence data and country-by-country interview evidence; full chronology in Chapter 7.
31 Figures compiled by JFJ from Ukrainian military intelligence data cross-referenced with JFJ-conducted interviews, current as of May 2026.

Where it spread. The recruitment model changed and adapted as it moved across the continent. The earliest cases (October 2022) involved Zambian and Tanzanian nationals recruited from Russian prisons.[29] Civilian recruitment across Africa gained traction in 2023 through Egyptian and Cameroonian networks, then expanded to Ghana and Gambia in 2024, and to Kenya and South Africa in 2025.[30] So far, Kenya accounts for the largest documented contingent (841), followed by Egypt (407), Cameroon (383), Ghana (337), Nigeria (214), and Uganda (108).[31]

Deceptive contracts. It's a basic requirement in contract law (in any jurisdiction) that the terms of a contract are fully disclosed to and understood by all contract parties before they sign, in particular the weaker party in the relationship – in this case the "employee/recruit". A contract that contains "hidden" or "deceptive" terms is not a legally binding contract, as there is no free and informed consent and the engagement is not voluntary. Such a "contract" is null. If indeed the contracts concluded between recruiters and recruits do not disclose to the recruits the true nature of the activities that they will engage in when they arrive in Russia (military activities), then those so-called contracts are legally unenforceable. In this case, the "recruits" would then not be considered military recruits, but rather victims of human trafficking.

Who failed to act. African governments generally responded only after public outcry, securing the return of a negligible number of their citizens and prioritising diplomatic relations with Russia over accountability. In Kenya, a licensed recruitment agency conducted mass recruitment events at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), in the heart of the government district, while state officials from immigration, criminal investigation, intelligence, and employment services were identified in Parliament as having facilitated the trafficking.[32] None have been prosecuted.[33] Ghana described the trafficking as "youth enlistment".[34] South Africa expressed "heartfelt gratitude" towards Russia.[35] India, by contrast, reported 202 citizens enlisted, secured 106 repatriations, and submitted formal parliamentary reports, [36]demonstrating that assertive engagement is possible without diplomatic rupture.

The African Union (AU) had, as of May 2026, made no resolution, statement, or formal intervention while the European Parliament adopted Resolution 2026/2641(RSP) condemning the practice in March 2026.[37]

Prohibition of enlistment of foreign citizens. For most African nations, enlisting in foreign armies without state authorisation is generally illegal or prohibited, particularly if it involves mercenary activity or fighting against friendly states, or violates national security interests. Both the recruiter and the recruit can be prosecuted, as can operators of planes and ships who knowingly facilitate the passage of recruits to Russia. The laws of South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana explicitly criminalise recruitment without state authorisation and accepting recruitment into a foreign military engaged in war against a friendly state. Almost all African countries involved consider Ukraine to be a friendly state yet did not warn their nationals of the potential for severe consequences.

For example, despite knowing that both Ukraine and Russia had called for Africans to join their respective armies, the Kenyan government failed for four years to publicly state that it was a criminal offence to enlist in, and to recruit for, a foreign military engaged in a war with a friendly state. For a more comprehensive look at specific laws forbidding African foreign enlistment, see Appendix VI Foreign Enlistment Law – selected African countries.

Following a public outcry (see Chapter 1), Russia, in February 2026, introduced a list of countries whose nationals would not be eligible for enlistment in its military. But numerous countries remain unaffected by the restrictions and recruitment continues.

32 See Recruitments of Kenyans into the Russian Military, National Assembly Hansard, Wednesday, 18th February, 2026 - Afternoon Sitting, page 13, https://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2026-02/The%20Hansard%20-%20Wednesday%2C%2018%20February%202026%20%28P%29.pdf.

33 Kenyan Director of Public Prosecutions' public statements.

34 Statement of the Ghanaian Ministry of Foreign Affairs following a technical session with Russia on 14 March 2026.

35 See Al Jazeera, 'South Africa secures return of 11 men lured into Russia-Ukraine war,' 25 February 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/25/south-africa-secures-return-of-11-men-lured-into-russia-ukraine-war.

36 Indian Ministry of External Affairs response to Lok Sabha question December 2025.

37 European Parliament Resolution 2026/2641(RSP) of 12 March 2026 on human trafficking and grave human rights violations linked to the recruitment of non-Russian nationals, in particular from Africa, for Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Full text available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2026-0081_EN.html.

PART I THE MARKET

1 WHY RUSSIA NEEDS FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Lemekhani Nyirenda was 23 years old. Sponsored by the Zambian government to study nuclear engineering at the Moscow Engineering Physics Institute, he had been convicted of an unspecified offence in April 2020 and sentenced to nine years and six months in a Russian prison. On 23 August 2022, he was pardoned.[38] Exactly one month later, on 22 September, he was dead, killed in combat near Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, founder of the Wagner Group, confirmed in a public statement that he personally recruited Nyirenda from Tver regional prison.[39] Nyirenda's body was transported to Rostov-on-Don, then repatriated to Zambia in December 2022, with Wagner paying the transport costs. He was buried in his home village. Zambia's Foreign Affairs Minister Stanley Kakubo, who received the information directly from Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, confirmed the circumstances of his pardon and death.[40]

Nemes Tarimo was 33. A Tanzanian student at Moscow's Russian Technological University before his arrest, he joined the Wagner Group on 24 August 2022 – the day after Nyirenda was pardoned – as one of almost 400 convicts departing prisons in the Yaroslavl region, according to a commanding officer's death report subsequently obtained by Reuters.[41] Two months later, on 24 October 2022, he was killed near Odradivka, south of Bakhmut, when his unit came under artillery fire. His body was returned to Dar es Salaam on 27 January 2023, where a memorial attended by several hundred mourners and government officials was held before he was transported to Mbeya for burial. Tanzania's Foreign Affairs Minister Stergomena Tax confirmed his death and reminded citizens that Tanzanian law prohibits enlistment in any foreign military.[42]

These are the earliest documented African fatalities of Russia's war in Ukraine. Both were students. Neither had military experience. Both were recruited from prison by a private military company closely aligned with the Kremlin. Before any wider civilian deception model emerged – before the labour agencies, the tourist visas, the WhatsApp messages promising civilian work – Nyirenda and Tarimo established the basic mechanics of what this report terms the *prison-to-frontline template*. Their cases are the origin story of a system that would, within three years, reach across the African continent.

38 Al Jazeera, 'Zambian killed in Ukraine was pardoned Russian prisoner: official,' 9 December 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/9/zambian-killed-in-ukraine-was-pardoned-russian-prisoner-official. See also Zambia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, statements by Foreign Affairs Minister Stanley Kakubo. Nyirenda was 23 years old at the time of his death and had been sentenced in April 2020 to nine years and six months in a Russian prison.

39 Statement by Yevgeny Prigozhin issued through the Concord Management press service Telegram channel. The statement explicitly named Tver regional prison as the recruitment site.

40 Zambia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, statement by Foreign Affairs Minister Stanley Kakubo.

41 Reuters Special Report, 'The Africans fighting on Russia's frontline in Ukraine.'

42 BBC News, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-64338677.

The Wagner model and its dissolution

Prior to mid-2023, Russia's principal mercenary formation in Ukraine was the Wagner Group, co-founded in 2014 by Prigozhin and Dmitry Utkin. At its peak in late 2022, Wagner had an estimated 50,000 fighters deployed in Ukraine (roughly 10,000 mercenaries and 40,000 prison recruits), a force larger than most African standing armies. Wagner's recruitment model in Russia was built around prisons: Prigozhin personally toured penal colonies, offering convicts pardons, salaries, and freedom in exchange for six months of frontline service. Nyirenda and Tarimo were drawn into this system, not because they were African, but because they were in Russian prisons when the recruitment drive reached them – their nationality was incidental.

On 23 August 2023, Wagner's founders Prigozhin and Utkin died in a plane crash two months after a brief mutiny by Prigozhin against Russia's military command. Wagner's units in Ukraine were redistributed into private military companies, including Redut and Konvoy.

The presidential decrees

A series of Russian presidential decrees promulgated between 2022 [43] and 2025 formalised the arrangement offering Russian citizenship to foreign nationals who signed military service contracts.[44] These presidential offers[45] were used to influence the decisions of many African recruits. The decrees gave recruiters a powerful tool: the promise of citizenship in a country whose passport permits visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to more than 80 countries, in exchange for one year of military service. For men whose Somali, Cameroonian, or Ghanaian passports restricted them to a narrow band of countries, the offer was transformative.

The structural role of African recruits

Russia's war had entered a phase of sustained, high-casualty attritional warfare. Frontline positions required constant replenishment. Domestic mobilisation carried political risks: each Russian conscript killed or injured was a potential source of dissent in a society to which the state had promised the war would be limited and short.

For the Russian military, African recruits serve a structural purpose in addressing that problem. Men enlisted under contract have been institutionalised within Russia's armed forces by law and fill several strategic roles. They are deployed to high-risk infantry positions, typically in frontline assault operations, and supplement force deficiencies in units that have sustained heavy casualties. They reduce the political cost of losses among Russian conscripts, particularly during the war's annual spring offensives when casualty rates peak.[46]

This is not a humanitarian crisis; this market emerged from a structural need: Russia needed additional manpower for positions associated with high casualty rates, and it needed that manpower from sources that would not generate domestic political costs. The only question was where to find it.

The selective 'stop list'

According to an America-based think tank,[47] following sustained public outcry in Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana, in February 2026, Russia introduced what Kenyan officials later described as a "stop list" of

43 See 690 30.09.2022 Presidential decree of the Russian Federation of December 30, 2022 No. 690 "About admission to citizenship of the Russian Federation in the simplified manner of foreign citizens who have concluded contracts for the passage of military service, and members of their families," http://actual.pravo.gov.ru/content/content.html#pnum=0001202209300053.

44 Decrees of the President of the Russian Federation; Decree No. 690 of 30 September 2022; Decree No. 350 of 15 May 2023; Decree No. 10 on 4 January 2024; Decree No. 534 on 31 July 2025; and Decree No. 821, issued on 5 November 2025.

45 Ibid.

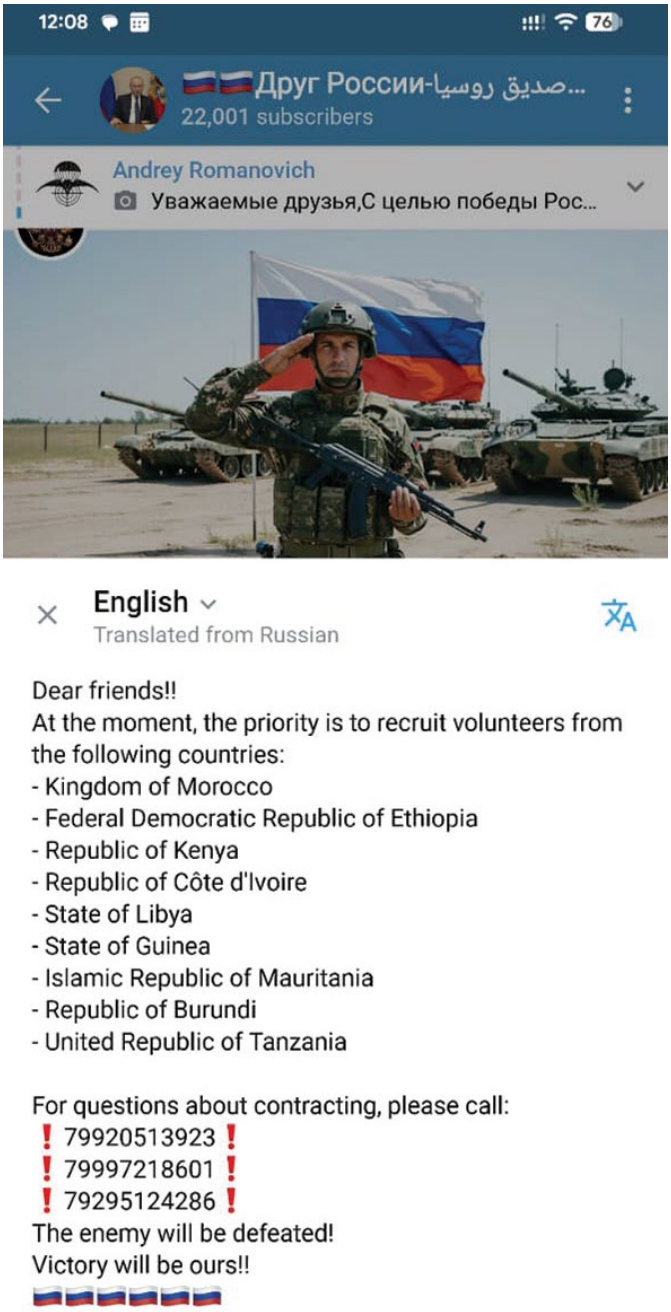
46 See 'A Crucial Weapon in Russia's Spring Offensive: Leafy Trees,' https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/06/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war-spring-foliage.html.

47 See 'Russia's Recruitment Policy Shift in Africa: Strategic Motives and Implications for Military Recruitment,' Robert Lansing Institute, 5 March 2026, https://lansinginstitute.org/2026/03/05/russias-recruitment-policy-shift-in-africa-strategic-motives-and-implications-for-military-recruitment/.

countries whose nationals would no longer be eligible for enlistment through the Russian Ministry of Defence.[48] Had the underlying demand for foreign manpower been satisfied, or the strategy abandoned, Russia could simply have ended foreign recruitment altogether. Instead, it selectively closed recruitment in countries where the political costs had risen – while keeping it open where those costs remained low.

Numerous countries remain unaffected by the restrictions, including Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Togo, and Benin. The pledge to Kenya also appears to have limits. It applies to recruitment through the Ministry of Defence and does not necessarily extend to recruitment into private sector enterprises supporting the war effort, including operations such as the Alabuga Special Economic Zone's drone-production facilities in Tatarstan.[49]

As of May 2026, the recruitment networks remain active. Recruiters on the African continent constantly shift towards countries where the political costs of recruitment are lower. For example, JFJ's investigation identified a Kenyan politician[50] who clandestinely recruited in Malawi during 2025 and has since established a base in Uganda. More Ugandan recruits have since surfaced, and families are beginning to come forward seeking information about relatives who left for Russia and have not returned. At least three Ugandan nationals are now being held as prisoners of war in Ukraine. The Kenyan politician is reportedly linked to a general in the Uganda People's Defence Force.



Russian Telegram channel that was announcing opportunities long after Russia said it had stopped recruiting.

48 On the Russian commitment of 16 March 2026 ending enlistment of Kenyan nationals through the Ministry of Defence, see Kenyan Foreign Minister Mudavadi's statement at https://x.com/MusaliaMudavadi/status/2033570547741683815.

49 On Alabuga Special Economic Zone drone-production facilities and recruitment into them, see 'My skin was peeling' - the African women tricked into making Russian drones, BBC News 5 November 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdrzdpre058o. See also Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, 'Who is making Russia's drones? The migrant women exploited for Russia's war economy,' May 2025, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Who-is-making-Russias-drones_-The-migrant-women-exploited-for-Russias-war-economy-GI-TOC-May-2025.v2.pdf.

50 Candidate for Member of Parliament for Embakasi South constituency in the 2022 general election.

2 THE ECONOMICS OF VULNERABILITY

CASE STUDY: ADIL ABDULLAHI AHMED MOHAMMED – THE PRESUMED 'RUSSIAN' FROM MOGADISHU

2020 – Abdullahi enrols at the University of Somalia to study computer applications but drops out due to financial difficulties. He begins selling wares at a local market in Mogadishu, earning around US$100 a month. Growing up in the city, he says, made a normal life feel out of reach. "Everyone has a gun, like a telephone. If you have a phone, you have a gun."

Mid-2023 – Aged 26, he leaves Mogadishu citing a lack of prospects. As the only son in his family, he says the decision felt like a duty. He leaves behind his parents and his 11-year-old sister in a crowded neighbourhood off Hodan Street. "I couldn't see a future there." He travels to the Eastleigh suburb in Nairobi, Kenya, and applies for a Russian tourist visa, receiving it within a week, a speed that struck him as significant. "With a Somali passport, no one accepts you unless you are a refugee. Not England. Not France." Russia, he felt, asked fewer questions.

> **With a Somali passport, no one accepts you unless you are a refugee. Not England. Not France. Russia asks fewer questions."**
>
> Somali POW Adil Abdullahi Ahmed Mohammed

August 2023 – He flies from Nairobi to Moscow on a three-month tourist visa, having borrowed around US$2,000 from friends to cover his travel and living expenses during his first weeks in Russia. He arrives with no contacts and no assistance. "No agent. No help." He begins searching for work almost immediately, navigating the city with a translation app.

August-September 2023 – After several days walking the streets, stopping at factories and workshops, he finds work at a clothing factory in a city he identifies as Naminsk. He works 12-hour shifts for around US$200 a month, paid in cash, without formal employment documents. When he can no longer afford the hotel listed on his visa application, he begins sleeping on a mattress on the factory floor.

Autumn 2023 – As his visa expiry approaches, he notices military recruitment advertisements posted along streets and bus stops across Moscow, promising bonuses, salaries, and fast-tracked citizenship. He calls one of the listed numbers, is given an address, and arrives to find other foreign men already waiting, some from West Africa, others from Central Asia. Officials photograph and fingerprint him, then hand him a contract in Russian. He photographs it on his phone and translates portions into English before signing. The terms: a one-year contract, a signing bonus of two million roubles (around US$23,600), and a monthly salary of 200,000 roubles (around US$2,366). But for Abdullahi, it is the promise of legal status that seals it. "At least I will have a new passport, a new country, and my own money," he thinks. A Sberbank account is opened in his name and he begins receiving payments in instalments, sending a portion home via Somali remittance networks. "I paid my debts," he says.

Autumn/Winter 2023 – He completes around six weeks of training. The first month is at a base outside Moscow covering weapons handling, battlefield medicine, and drills, followed by around two weeks at a site he identifies as Brusov. Mornings begin with the Russian national anthem. Instructions are relayed through a translator, although not always reliably. He trains alongside recruits from Nigeria, Cameroon, and Ghana. "I had never experienced military life, never held a gun. Everything was new for me." Around three months after signing, he receives a Russian passport – though he is required to hand it to his commander before deployment.



Adil Abdullahi Mohammed during an interview with JFJ at a Ukrainian prison camp.

January 2024 – Four days after reaching the frontline in Donetsk, he and a Russian soldier take shelter in a damaged building. The experience at the front, he says, shifted abruptly from drills to a fight for survival. Ukrainian forces surround the building and call on them to surrender. The Russian soldier goes first, Abdullahi follows.

January-July 2024 – He is held in an underground detention facility in Ukraine with 140-150 other detainees in a space that was clearly built for far fewer people. Two or three men share a bed. Meals are served twice a day. He does not know exactly where he is being held. Alongside the physical constraints, he describes episodes of racial hostility, including derogatory remarks about his skin colour. "Some words, they stay with you," he says.

Mid-2024 onwards – He is moved to a prisoner-of-war camp in Ukraine, spending his days doing duties or working in a small factory inside the compound, waiting to be exchanged for a Ukrainian prisoner. Somalia, he says, is not where he plans to return. He hopes his mother and sister will eventually join him in Russia. Asked if he would warn others against taking the path he had, he is direct: "Everyone has his own issues, his own problems." He pauses. "I have no regrets. Given another chance, I would do the same thing again."

Adil Abdullahi Ahmed Mohammed's case [51] sits apart from many of the accounts gathered by JFJ. He was not promised a civilian job. He did not arrive in Russia believing he was headed for factory or security work, or construction. He knew he was signing a military contract and he understood that it could send him to the frontline.

Abdullahi's experience highlights a different dimension of the same system. His decision was shaped less by deception than by economic calculation. Before enlisting, he had travelled in search of work and spent time in low-paid employment with limited prospects. The military contract offered wages, legal status, and the possibility of citizenship on terms that appeared preferable to the alternatives available to him.

The distinction matters because an explanation based solely on deception is incomplete. Deception helps explain how many recruits entered the system, but it does not fully explain why the opportunity itself attracted interest. The existence of men willing to accept the risks of military service abroad points to broader structural conditions that extend beyond the conduct of recruiters. Those conditions include unemployment, underemployment, limited economic mobility, and the importance of migration as a strategy for individual and family advancement.

51 JFJ interview with Adil Abdullahi Ahmed Mohammed, conducted at a POW camp in Ukraine in May 2025. All quotations attributed to Abdullahi in this report are drawn from this interview unless otherwise noted.

CASE STUDY: DANIEL KARIUKI – YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE

October 2015 — Daniel Kariuki enlists in the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), training at the Kenya Military Academy in Lanet. He is commissioned as a second lieutenant in 2018, later completing advanced flight training in Jordan with the Kenya Air Force. "I know war," he will say later. "I know how to fight."

December 2023 – He resigns from the military and attempts to start over, investing his savings in importing spare parts for motor vehicles from Dubai.

July 2024 – During unrest along the Kirinyaga Road in Nairobi, his car parts shop is burned down. With his investment up in smoke, he begins looking for work abroad.

June–July 2025 – A former Air Force colleague connects him to Global Face recruitment, operating from Chai House on Koinange Street in Nairobi. He is told the job involves security work paying around US$2,000 a month: no academic certificates are required, and no formal briefing is provided. A woman named Florence handles his papers.

2 July 2025 – He boards a Turkish Airlines flight from Nairobi alongside another Kenyan recruit. At the airport, Kariuki photographs the departure screens and sends the images to his family – proof, he thinks, of a new beginning. More photographs follow from Istanbul: the cabin window, the terminal, the aircraft. After an 18-hour layover, they land in St Petersburg. A handler meets them in the arrivals hall, collects their passports, and drives them directly to Promsvyazbank. Within hours of landing, they are seated at desks signing documents in Russian, a language they cannot read. "Everything felt hurried and urgent," Kariuki will say. He later finds out that one of the documents he signed granted a third party access to his bank account.

> **I hear many are going every day. They feel they have no options. But I tell them the truth – Russia is not the solution. You may earn the money, but your family may never see it. And if you die, they will not get it."**
>
> Daniel Kariuki, Kenya

Early July 2025 – After three days in what appears to be the handler's apartment in St Petersburg, they are moved to Veliky Novgorod to sign additional contracts, then they are transferred to Kamenka, the headquarters of a Russian motorised rifle unit. Reality sets in fast. "After we got locked up at Kamenka, that's when reality hit," he says. "This was no security job. We were there for combat." Russian federal payments totalling 1.2 million roubles (about US$14,200) are deposited into his account. By the time he can access the mobile banking app, the money is gone. "The handler took all the money," he says. "I reported it to my commander, but nothing happened."

Summer 2025 – His unit is deployed near Volchansk, close to the Russia-Ukraine border, an area he describes as among the "most dangerous sections of the front". The soldiers are told they will have to cross a river in full combat gear, then sprint across roughly 150 metres of open ground under constant drone surveillance. "You don't walk there," he says. "You run." Positions are watched from above and adjusted in minutes. "If you don't shoot," he says, "you will be shot."

23 August 2025 – Shortly before deployment, he sends his mother a WhatsApp message and asks her to read it carefully. It is, he says, a kind of eulogy. "I knew I was going to cross the river," he says. "I love my daughter so much, and my mother. I was ready to die before them – I should not be the one to bury them." As he recalls the message during the interview with JFJ, his voice breaks.

9 October 2025 – While advancing with his unit, Kariuki steps on a land mine. He believes at first that he can disarm it, but as he bends down to remove his jackknife, it detonates. Shrapnel tears through his right hand and lodges near his ribs and kidney. The blast forces blood into his chest cavity. "I couldn't move the first day," he says. He lies where he has fallen, disoriented and bleeding. The following day, he drags himself back towards the Russian lines. He does not remember how long it takes.

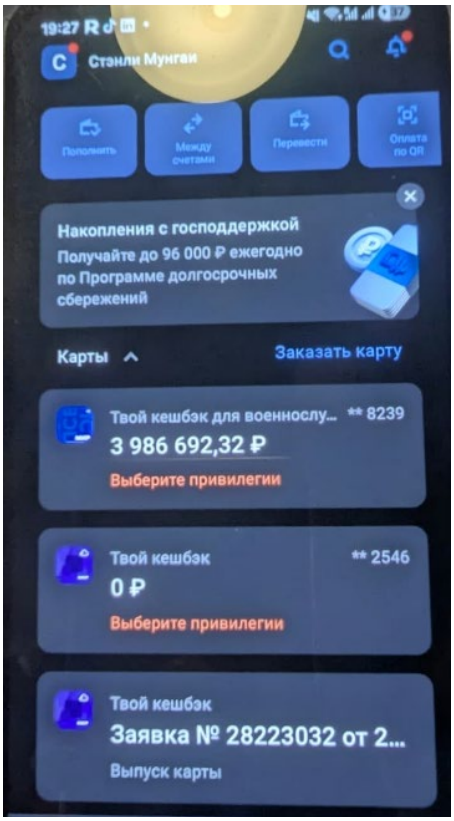
October-November 2025 – He is evacuated to the Vishnevsky Central Military Clinical Hospital in Sergiev Posad, outside Moscow. Doctors stabilise him, remove some fragments, and treat internal bleeding. From the hospital, he sends his mother brief daily videos to show he is still alive. A Russian soldier in the

adjacent bed listens to his story – the documents he could not read, the money he cannot access – and hands him 50,000 roubles (about US$592) in cash. "He said, 'Take it,'" Kariuki recalls. The same man buys him a mobile phone through the online retailer Ozon. Kariuki never sees him again. Before the doctors formally clear him, a member of his unit arrives with orders to return him to Kamenka. He is given 30 days of sick leave. He uses the time to begin planning his exit.

Late November 2025 – With two weeks of leave remaining, he tells his commanders that his wife has come to visit and requests permission to leave the base. The story is false – he is not married – but his injuries are visible and the request is approved. He travels more than 700 kilometres to St Petersburg, obtains a new power of attorney for about 4,000 roubles (around US$47), and begins withdrawing money: 300,000 roubles at the counter, another 300,000 the following day, and 100,000 from an ATM. Nearly four million roubles (about US$47,336) remain in the account. Emptying it at that rate would take weeks and risks drawing attention to himself. He calls his mother – the choice is simple: the money or his life.

Late November-early December 2025 – From a taxi in St Petersburg he calls a number his mother passed to him while he was still in hospital, a contact at the Kenyan embassy in Moscow. The man who answers asks if Kariuki can help another injured Kenyan soldier who also needs to escape. Kariuki agrees. The soldier has no money for a ticket, he learns. He hesitates, then calls his mother for advice. Her counsel is brief: "Treat it like a tithe." He pays about 50,000 roubles for a private taxi to Moscow. "The road to Moscow was risky," he says. "If police stopped us, we would be taken back." The two soldiers arrive after dark and spend the night in a hotel. The following morning, they go to the Kenyan embassy. Consular officials document their presence and issue emergency travel documents but instruct them to buy their own tickets. Kariuki pays for both. That night, they sleep on mattresses on the floor of a small room inside the embassy building.

December 2025 – An embassy contact known only as Fred drives them towards Sheremetyevo International Airport, switching taxis three times. "He was very paranoid," Kariuki says. "He thought we were being followed." At the departure hall, Fred reminds them to use their emergency travel documents and, if questioned, to say they have lost their passports. They approach the counter and hand over their documents. "No one asked us anything…," he says, sounding incredulous.



Daniel Kariuki's bank balance.

At Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, officers from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) are waiting. Kariuki declines to answer their questions. He has metal fragments still lodged in his body and has returned with less than a quarter of what he earned. The rest – nearly four million roubles in compensation for his injuries – remains in a Russian bank account he can no longer access.

His mother is waiting at the airport. "I cannot describe to you what I felt in that instant; God had brought my son home," she says.

Doctors have recommended surgery to remove the remaining shrapnel near his ribs and kidney. He has not scheduled it because he cannot afford it. His mother says his physical recovery is only part of what he has to face. "He came back alive," she says. "But what he has seen there – that is something you cannot remove with surgery."

Kariuki still keeps the phone the Russian soldier bought for him – the one he used to plan his escape. The balance in his Russian account remains visible through mobile banking. He looks at it sometimes, he says, and considers it not lost income but proof of a life he survived.

CASE STUDY: EIGHT KENYANS LEFT NAIROBI TOGETHER. TWO MET AGAIN IN A UKRAINIAN PRISON CAMP

Our investigative team followed one eight-man cohort from recruitment in Kenya to the war in Ukraine.

WhatsApp messages, payment records, travel instructions, and a Russian military contract allowed JFJ to reconstruct their path through Global Face Human Resources Limited, into the hands of a Russian handler and, within days of arriving, into the Russian military.

Before the men left Nairobi in July 2025, Edward Kamau Gituku sent them a message.

"Dear team," it began.

Eight candidates would travel on Sunday, July 27. They were to report to the airport the evening before.

"Tickets are ready," it said.

Then came the names in the group:

1. Chacha Jones Mairaria
2. Simon Omondi Muga
3. John Murimi Njagi
4. Newton Maliro Nambani
5. Hillary Ligabo Wasa
6. Wilson "Willy" Muniu Macharia
7. Bonface Mugambi Machoki

8 Evans Kibet Sullo

They had paid recruitment fees, undergone medical examinations, and received the same travel instructions. They had been told someone would meet them in Russia.

Within weeks, they would be scattered across the war.

Two routes into the same network

Evans Kibet, 37 had trained as a competitive athlete in Iten and later in Ngong until a hip injury derailed his career.

He made several attempts to return to competition and repeatedly applied for visas to Europe and the United States without success. Eventually, he bought land in Koisunguru, built a home and combined occasional training with farming.

By April 2025, Kibet was again looking for a way forward. He had a daughter to support.

Then another former athlete in Iten told him about an opportunity in Russia: about KSh250,000 a month, tax-free.

Around the same time, Wilson Muniu Macharia, 22, completed his National Youth Service training and returned home to Gaturi, in Kiharu, Murang'a County.

He looked for an internship or a job, but found neither.

A friend and fellow NYS graduate told him about an opportunity in Russia. The offer was being promoted by Isaac Gichuki, whom recruits describe as having a military background.

Macharia says he understood that the opportunity promised a formal contract, substantial pay and the prospect of building a better life after the contract ended.

"First of all, it was for money," he later said. "Then the idea of a good life after your contract had ended."

Kibet and Macharia did not know each other. Kibet entered through an athletics contact and Macharia came through a fellow NYS graduate, but by May, they were sitting in the same recruitment meeting in Nairobi.

Inside the recruitment meetings

During May and June 2025, Global Face Human Resources Limited held frequent recruitment meetings at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre in Nairobi.

Some drew 40 or 50 men. Recruits recalled others with as many as 80.

They had been summoned through WhatsApp messages advertising a "rare opportunity" abroad.

In the room were NYS graduates, former soldiers, prison officers, security personnel, drivers, athletes, traders and men surviving through informal work.

JFJ found that many had connections to military, prison, or security institutions through their own service, former colleagues, or friends. Others, like Kibet, entered through different personal networks.

The recruits were told they were among a lucky few who had been selected — and were warned not to discuss the meetings with "outsiders".

One of the men involved was Edward Gituku. Some candidates already knew him from WhatsApp, where he had been answering questions and helping move recruits through the process.

Another was Festus Omwamba, who appeared to lead the meetings.

Omwamba told the recruits that he had recently returned from Russia, that he travelled frequently between Kenya and Russia, and was a director in an organisation creating employment opportunities for Kenyans there.

If they completed their contracts successfully, he told them, some could rise to senior positions and become as successful as he was.

Murmurs spread through the room. The mood lifted.

The recruits also remember Mikhail Lyapin, a Russian national, being present. They say he handled visas and other Russia-related matters.[52] Isaac Gichuki was also in the room.

Candidates say they were told they could choose among several kinds of military work: driving, guarding facilities, cooking, construction, and operating equipment.

After the speeches, a woman moved through the room carrying what appeared to be a rooming list, checking names and arranging accommodation before the recruits' departure.

The recruits were told they would gather again shortly before travelling for basic Russian language instruction and practical guidance.

Passports, tests, and payments

Macharia and Kibet handed over their passports as their applications were processed.

Candidates were directed through medical examinations, document preparation, visa processing and travel arrangements.

They were instructed to undergo tests for HIV and hepatitis at clinics on a list they were given. The test results had to bear the clinic's stamp, a doctor's signature, and contact details.

Recruits say they paid a KSh50,000 facilitation fee directly to Omwamba through the M-Pesa mobile phone banking service. They were instructed to make additional payments, including KSh3,000 for medical screening, KSh3,000 for legal processing, and KSh4,500 as a commitment fee.

By July, Kibet and Macharia had been placed in the same eight-man travel group.

52 He later came under investigation in Kenya. A Kenyan parliamentary record states that Lyapin was arrested on 25 September, 2025, and **repatriated the following day**. The Russian embassy disputed reports that he had been deported, saying he was questioned by the DCI and then left Kenya according to previously arranged travel plans. In May 2026, the United Kingdom sanctioned Lyapin, citing reasonable grounds to suspect his involvement in the deceptive recruitment of Kenyans through links to **Global Face Human Resources and the Russian embassy.**

'Tickets are ready'

The men received instructions about what to pack, how much cash to carry, and how to communicate in Russia.

They were told to bring solar chargers, power banks, thick socks, bar soap, several phones, and an activated MiFi device.

They were advised to download an offline Russian-language translator and RuStore, an application they were told they would need for banking, and were told to avoid iPhones.They were also advised to carry about $500, but to say they had only $100 if questioned at the airport.

Then came Gituku's message naming the eight travellers. They were to report to Jomo Kenyatta International Airport on July 26 and would fly out the following day.

St Petersburg

On July 27, the group flew from Nairobi through Istanbul to St Petersburg.

A Russian man was waiting for them at the airport. The recruits describe him as a handler and translator who called himself Mulad. He spoke some English, they say, though not fluently.

JFJ later established that Mulad worked with two other men, receiving recruits who had travelled through Global Face Human Resources Limited.

When JFJ showed Mulad's photograph to multiple Global Face recruits, they independently identified him as one of the men who had received them in Russia and accompanied some groups to the bank to open accounts.

That day, the recruits say, Mulad accompanied them through a tightly organised processing schedule: to a Russian military enlistment facility for their contract paperwork, to a hospital for medical screening, and to a bank to open accounts for their military payments.

The sequence closely mirrored Russia's formal process for recruiting contract soldiers, which includes enlistment processing, medical examination and the provision of banking details for military pay.

Russian-language documents were later brought to the men for their signature.

The recruits say Mulad gave little explanation and repeatedly pointed to where they should sign. "Sign here. Sign there," they recalled him saying.

The bank

The men were taken to a Russian bank to open accounts in their names using their passports. They received bank cards and "small phones" that were linked to the accounts. "All the paperwork was in Russian.

The recruits say they did not understand all the documents they were being asked to sign. When some asked what the papers contained, they say Mulad became angry and gestured for them to sign. One recruit says he tried to connect to the internet so that he could use Google Translate to understand the documents being placed before him. Mulad warned him against doing so. The recruits say they nevertheless signed a series of documents they could not fully understand. Only later did they discover that among them were powers of attorney authorising others to act on their behalf. JFJ obtained a copy of one of the powers of attorney, which is reproduced in the appendix to this report.

Their phones became the main way of monitoring money deposited into their accounts. Later, some recruits saw that money had been withdrawn. They say they raised the matter of the withdrawals with their commanders and were told that other people had authority over the accounts.

Military contracts

A second Russian man appeared partway through the processing. The recruits knew him as Ali. Like Mulad, he was easy and friendly in manner, but they described him as the man who appeared to be in charge, giving instructions and directing the process.

When some of the men hesitated or questioned what they were being asked to sign, the recruits say Ali's tone changed. He made it clear, they recalled, that signing was not optional. The contracts were written in Russian. The men say they were given only partial explanations and directed where to sign. By then, they were far from

home and dependent on the people controlling their movements and documents.

A contract reviewed by JFJ was signed through a Russian Ministry of Defence recruitment point in Veliky Novgorod. The official recorded as signing on behalf of the Ministry of Defence was I.R. Arsentyeva.

The one-year contract enrolled the serviceman in the Russian armed forces with the rank of private. The recruits say they were not given complete translations and were directed where to sign. “We were also told that after six months, or once you had completed the contract, you could go home and see your family,” one recruit said.

Macharia says he knew the opportunity involved security work. But as the process unfolded, he became increasingly uneasy.

Kibet says he signed documents he could not read. Before leaving Kenya, he was told he would receive a signing bonus of 1.9 million roubles (about US$22,484) paid in three instalments, a monthly salary of 210,000 roubles ($2,487), and additional equipment allowances.

"On signing the contract, I saw from my mobile phone that the agents had taken one million roubles (US$11,834). I was left with 900,000 roubles (US$10,650)," he said.

The Wagner name

The Kenyans were issued military clothing and taken to a military facility that one recruit described as a Wagner unit. Two Russian men they had not seen before travelled with them in the van, bringing to four the number of Russian men accompanying or handling the group that day. One recruit recalled the men bantering and laughing together in Russian during the journey.

The reference to Wagner is significant, but difficult to verify. By then, the group had been substantially reorganised following its 2023 mutiny and the death of its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin. Parts of its personnel and operations had subsequently been absorbed into or brought under greater control of the Russian state.

In Africa, some former Wagner operations were taken over by Africa Corps, a structure linked to the Russian Ministry of Defence. JFJ has not established whether the Kenyan recruits had any connection to Africa Corps, whether the facility they described as “Wagner” was formally operated by Wagner personnel, or whether the name was simply being used informally to describe the unit or facility.

A commander took the men’s passports. Macharia says he was told his passport would be returned after he came back from the war. He also says he signed documents connected to Russian citizenship. Kibet describes a similar experience. He too says his passport was taken and that he later learned Russian records identified him as holding both Kenyan and Russian citizenship.

Macharia says Red Cross officials later told him that Russian records also listed him as a dual Kenyan-Russian citizen.

Training

At first, the eight Kenyans remained together. Kibet recalls about five days of military instruction. He was taught to shoot, throw grenades and move while wearing heavy protective equipment.

Macharia estimates that he trained for about two weeks. He compared the experience with his National Youth Service training, except now there were firearms, battlefield movement, and military communications.

The group is broken apart

In August, the Kenyans began complaining about their treatment, access to their money, and the conditions in which they had been placed, according to several recruits.

Soon afterwards, they say, the commanders separated them. Macharia remained with Hillary Ligabo Wasa for some time. Kibet and Chacha Jones Mairaria were moved elsewhere. Newton Maliro Nambani, who had been the most vocal in questioning what was happening, was sent to a different unit.

The others were dispersed among different units.

By August 25, Kibet had been deployed near Vovchansk in northeastern Ukraine. He says he was ill, weak and coughing. A doctor had recommended rest, but after only one day he was ordered back to the battlefield.

He moved through a forest near the Vovcha River with a Russian soldier. Drones hovered overhead. Explosions struck the trees. He saw many bodies scattered on the ground.

Kibet took a photograph of himself beside a tree and sent it to a friend.

“If I die, take care of Chero,” he wrote, referring to his daughter, Cherono.

Then he left the Russian position. He removed his Russian uniform and walked through the night towards the Ukrainian lines.

As he approached several damaged buildings, dogs began barking. Ukrainian soldiers appeared and opened fire as he tried to hide. Kibet stepped forward with his hands raised.

“I am Evans Kibet,” he shouted. A commander ordered the soldiers not to shoot and he was taken into custody. He had been in Russia for less than a month.

Kibet in captivity

Kibet was interrogated, medically examined, and transferred through several Ukrainian facilities.

By October 2025, he had been moved to a prison camp where we interviewed him later that month. A UN representative has explained to him his options: wait for Kenya to claim him, be exchanged with Russia, or wait for the end of the war. "Russia only takes their own people," he says.

Kibet has one clear wish: "I just want to go home. If I am released, my only wish is to see my daughter. I love her so much. She is the first person I would want to see. I am sorry she had to be exposed to all of this."

Macharia at the war front

Four days after Kibet’s capture, Macharia was deployed near Vovchansk. A drone struck near his position on his first day at the frontline, he says, but it didn’t harm him because it got entangled in a tree.

He remained near the front for almost three months, learning to distinguish the sounds of drones and judge when to move and when to hide. He says two Russian soldiers assigned to him were later killed by drones.

Macharia’s family says it lost contact with him on November 15, 2025. Before then, they had sometimes communicated through a phone number belonging to his unit commander.

As the silence stretched on, reports began circulating that Macharia had been killed. His name later appeared in Kenyan media reports listing recruits said to have died in the war.

Back in Kenya, his father, Elias Mbira, refused to accept the reports. He went public, appealing through the media for help and insisting that the family had received no proof of his son’s death.

The reports were wrong.

On November 22, Macharia and the Russian soldiers in his unit suddenly encountered two infantrymen fleeing from a drone. Within seconds, there were several drones overhead. One attempted to drop explosives through the trees as another one descended.

Macharia ran, but a blast struck him before he could get far, sending fragments tearing into his right leg. He abandoned his radio and other equipment so that he could move faster.

Then he saw a smaller drone with a light. Macharia initially thought it belonged to the Russians and followed, but it led him toward Ukrainian soldiers, who took him prisoner.

His capture did not resolve his uncertainty about what happens next. Macharia told JFJ that he feared that returning directly to Kenya could expose him to arrest because of his service in a foreign military.

“What if I go back to Kenya and I’m detained?” he asked.

The fear is not unfounded. Kenyan law criminalises unauthorised service in a foreign military, although it provides a defence where the enlistment was not voluntary. In April 2026, the government told Parliament that it was extending an amnesty to Kenyans who disengaged voluntarily, while also warning that those involved could in future face prosecution.

For recruits like Macharia, that leaves a difficult question: will they return home as offenders, or as people who were deceived and trapped in a recruitment system they could not freely leave?

The video

A video made after Macharia's capture later circulated publicly. In it, he appeared to warn other Africans against joining Russia's war.

Macharia says he was told what to say and was required to record several takes while injured and distressed.

JFJ has not independently established the circumstances in which the video was produced beyond Macharia's account. Questions sent to the Coordination Headquarters about the circumstances surrounding the recording went unanswered.

Together again



Evans Kibet (left) and Wilson Muniu Macharia (centre) during an interview with JFJ at a Ukrainian POW camp.

Kibet and Macharia eventually ended up in the same prison camp in western Ukraine.

They had entered the recruitment operation through different contacts.

They left Nairobi in the same eight-man group.

They were received in Russia through the same network, opened bank accounts, signed Russian-language documents, and initially trained together.

Then they were separated.

Kibet was captured in August, while Macharia came into Ukrainian custody nearly three months later. They were eventually reunited.

JFJ has traced the fate of several members of the group of eight men that left Kenya on 27 July, 2025.

Chacha Jones Mairaria was killed in a drone attack that Kibet says he witnessed.

Newton Maliro Nambani was injured, hospitalised for three months and later returned to Kenya.

Hillary Ligabo Wasa was killed in the war.

JFJ has not established the current status of Simon Omondi Muga, John Murimi Njagi, and Bonface Mugambi Machoki.

What began as one organised journey out of Nairobi for eight men has ended with the men scattered across Russia's war in Ukraine.

CASE STUDY: JOSHUA KWAKU NKRUMAH – THE GHANAIAN EDUCATION SEEKER



Joshua Kwaku in his previous job at Dubai Airport.

2019 – Kwaku arrives in Dubai after paying a recruiter in Accra for a job that does not materialise. He finds cleaning work instead, eventually securing a position at the Dubai International Airport with the Emirates Fire and Rescue Company. He works his way up to supervisor. Ambitious, he sets his sights on a university degree. "In my whole career, I've wanted one day to become the president of Ghana," he will say later.

Early 2024 — He applies to study in Canada. The visa is rejected. He then applies to Synergy University in Moscow. The acceptance letter arrives quickly, and so does the visa – approved less than a week after he submits his application in Dubai.

5-6 July 2024 – He flies from Dubai to Moscow, only to find he has missed the university's enrolment deadline. His 30-day notice period at his Dubai job has eaten up the time. Stranded and unable to return to his former position, he stays with acquaintances in Moscow's Butovo district, where he meets a Nigerian man called Kylian. Kylian offers what sounds like an attractive alternative: security work tied to a long-stay visa and a salary of 195,000 roubles (about US$2,307) a month.

10 July 2024 – Kwaku and Kylian visit what he describes as a civil defence office. He has a medical examination, opens a bank account, and signs a one-year contract. "Kylian told me not to worry," he says. "Just security." A bus arrives the same day, carrying Russians and other foreign nationals, including Chinese men. It drives them to a base he calls Abaga. "It was only then I realised that I had signed up for war." He protests and asks to leave. A supervisor tells him he will have to wait for transport back to Moscow. The bus never comes. He trains for two weeks before being moved to Rostov for weapons instruction. "I didn't see any way out," he says. "Seeing other Africans there… I surrendered everything to God."

Over one million roubles (about US$11,834) appear in his bank account in instalments. With international sanctions restricting official financial channels, he uses trusted Ghanaian contacts within his unit to send money home, instructing his sister to donate part of it to an orphanage. "I knew what I was doing was not good," he says. "By sending part of my bonus to the children's home, I thought maybe God could forgive me."

3 September 2024 – He calls his sister to tell her his unit is being moved to the frontline and sends a short message to Salome. Then he disappears. His family will hear nothing more for eight months.



I signed a contract for citizenship, I have proof. I thought it was a security job."

Ghanaian PoW Joshua Kwaku Nkrumah

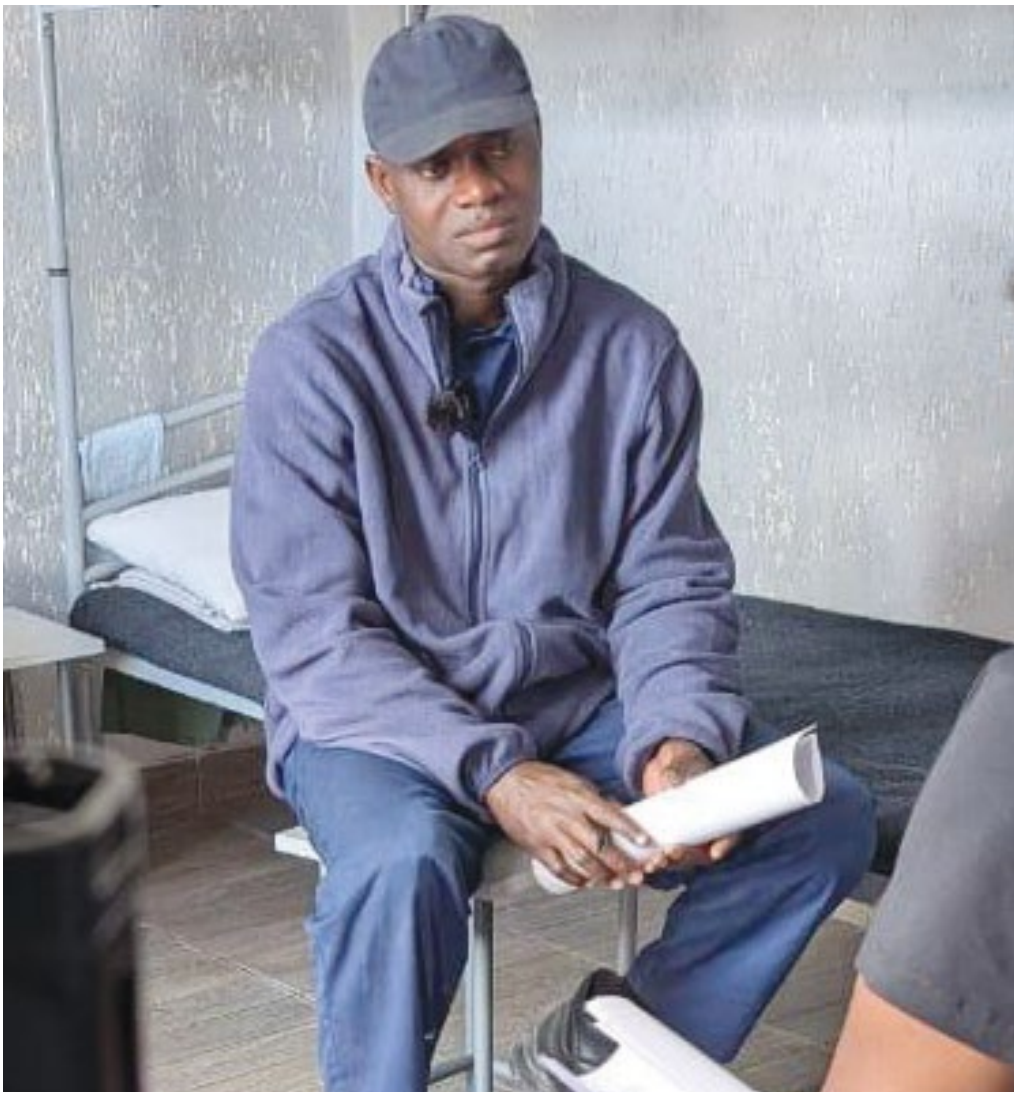
9 September 2024 – He sends a final photograph of himself in military gear to his sister and his partner, Salome, who is five months pregnant. That same day, he is deployed to the frontline in a tank unit of 12 men. A drone strike destroys the vehicle almost immediately: "Eight members of my unit died on the spot." Wounded, he hides in ruined buildings for days before moving towards smoke he believes marks a friendly position. Ukrainian soldiers capture him and give him water and medical treatment. He is later confirmed captured in the Donetsk region in early September 2024.

In Dubai, Salome faces pregnancy alone, dealing with severe medical complications, including bleeding. She quits her job and returns to Kenya, where she is hospitalised for two months: "I almost died. The baby almost died," she recalls. Their daughter, Azin, is born premature and underweight but survives.

26 May 2025 – The investigation team visits a prisoner-of-war camp in western Ukraine. Kwaku steps forward voluntarily when detainees are asked if they will speak to journalists. He agrees to talk for the first time. His opening request is not about himself: "Please send her a voice note," he says, reciting his sister's number from memory. "Tell her I'm still alive. Call Salome too. Ask if it was a boy or a girl." Eight months have passed since he last communicated with his family and he does not know if the baby survived, its name, or whether Salome can afford rent or her next meal.

He explains why he agreed to be identified on camera, having initially asked for his face to be obscured. "If no one knows I'm here, I won't be on the list. Nobody is fighting for Africans." He is referring to the prisoner exchanges between Russia and Ukraine. By his account, he has never seen an African leave the camp – including after the largest prisoner swap of the war in May 2025, when 1,000 inmates were released by each side. Ukrainian officials confirm that Russia has never placed African nationals on the exchange lists it submits for negotiations.

Kwaku maintains he never intended to fight. "I signed a contract for citizenship," he says. "I have proof." He had photographed the papers at the military registration centre in Moscow and sent them to a relative. Copies reviewed by the investigation team include sections in English and confirm that after one year of service, citizenship would be granted. "I thought it was a security job."



Joshua Kwaku during an interview with JFJ at a Ukrainian prison camp.

At the end of the interview, he shakes the hand of the Ukrainian videographer on the team. "I am very sorry," he says. "I hope the Ukrainian people will forgive me."

23 September 2025 – The investigation team meets Salome in Nairobi. She is unemployed and living with relatives, her savings exhausted. She has no plans to join Kwaku in Russia even after his release; her focus now is on raising their daughter. "He believed he was doing this for us," Salome says. "And yet here we are."

23 October 2025 – During a camp visit, the team shows Kwaku a photograph of Salome and his newborn daughter taken at her family's home in Nairobi. Tears stream down his face. "My daughter," he keeps saying. "My daughter. Isn't she beautiful?"

25 February 2026 – Ghanaian officials, led by the Foreign Affairs minister, speak with Kwaku by Zoom at about 15:00 before later visiting the prisoner-of-war camp in person at around 1:00 am They tell Kwaku and the other Ghanaian detainee that they will be repatriated.

30 July 2026 – Kwaku is still waiting. Five months earlier, Ghanaian officials told him he would soon be repatriated. “I hope they have not forgotten about us,” he says. “I cannot wait to meet my daughter.”

CASE STUDY: RICHARD KANU – THE SIERRA LEONEAN ARMY VETERAN

2006 – Kanu enlists in the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), beginning a 17-year military career. He is deployed to districts including Koinadugu and Kambia, plays for the military football team, and after Sierra Leone's 2018 elections, is selected for the presidential guard and posted to the vice president's security detail near the State House.

Late 2023 – Following a change of government, a former military colleague turned Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs accuses Kanu of political disloyalty and warns him he does not belong in sensitive security posts. Kanu feels threatened. He tries and fails to obtain visas to Europe. Russia, he concludes, is the only option remaining. "I just wanted to leave the country." Through a contact in Guinea, he is introduced to a man he knows only as Mr Harry, who speaks vaguely about "programmes" that can secure a Russian tourist visa. Kanu pays around $7,000 covering the visa, accommodation, and flights, borrowing from siblings based in the UK. He travels from Sierra Leone through Conakry, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Dubai.

27 November 2023 – He arrives in St Petersburg. No one meets him at the airport. Instead, a text message instructs him to wait in a certain spot for a taxi. By the time the vehicle arrives, it is dark and cold. He must hand over an additional $1,500 to a man he can barely see.

2 December 2023 – Kanu is taken to a hostel-like building and told to stay in his room. After three days, documents written in Russian are placed before him. There is no translator. He signs them anyway, photographs the pages, and sends them to the intermediary. On 7 December, calls begin arriving from an unfamiliar Russian number. He forwards it to Harry. The response is swift: the contract has been accepted. Next will be two weeks of training.

> **I don't want money anymore; I don't want contracts. I don't want war⚓ Just tell my people that I am still alive."**
>
> Richard Kanu, Sierra Leone

9 December 2023 – He is sent by train to Rostov alongside five Russian-speaking recruits, the only African in the group. On arrival at a military facility, their passports are collected. That's when he realises this is a military camp. He messages Harry, insisting there's been a mistake. The reply is brief: he has signed a one-year contract and nothing can be done. When he keeps pressing, his messages stop being delivered. His UK relatives who try to intervene are also cut off. He learns from fellow recruits that the contract promises a sign-on bonus of one million roubles (US$11,834) and a monthly salary of around 200,000 roubles ($2,366). He later finds only around half the bonus – about 500,000 roubles – in his account, but he can't transfer any of it home.

January 2024 – After two weeks of training alongside Russian nationals he says were recruited from prison, he is deployed to the frontline near Donetsk. His account of combat is detailed: drones overhead, suppressing fire, orders to advance across open ground. At one point he is ordered forward with only two others towards positions defended by tanks. "They wanted us to take a position with the tanks," he says. "I told them, this is not possible." He fears the consequences of outright refusal – "If I don't, maybe they will shoot me from behind," he thinks, so he advances.

9 February 2024 – Less than three months after arriving in Russia and around two weeks into frontline deployment, he is injured in a blast during a retreat under drone fire. Unable to run, he moves alone through damaged buildings, reciting Psalm 23 from a pocket Bible. The following morning, Ukrainian soldiers find him. His first question is whether they intend to kill him… They do not.

2024–2025 – More than 15 months on, Kanu remains a prisoner of war in Ukraine, transferred between facilities and held for periods underground. There is no clear path out – prisoner exchanges have so far primarily involved Russians, not foreign nationals. He fears that if returned to Russia, his contract could be automatically renewed under wartime rules.

His tone across three interviews shifts between pragmatism and frustration – at Russia, at the recruiter, at the contract he could not read. His case sits in a grey zone: unlike those who say they were deceived with no prior military experience, Kanu is a trained soldier who recognised a military camp when he saw one. Yet he insists that what drove him to Russia was escape, not combat.

CASE STUDY: 'KWABENA' – GHANAIAN BUSINESSMAN-TURNED-POW

For seven months, Kwabena* stayed alive in Russia's military recruitment pipeline by paying bribes – until the commander who was taking his money was replaced.

7 July 2024 – Kwabena arrives in St Petersburg from Accra carrying a return ticket and $600 in cash. His visa, reviewed by the investigation team, was issued as a short-term, single-entry business document. He tells his wife "Adjoa"* he is travelling to purchase a printing press for his small business in Ghana – he is looking for work after unsuccessful attempts to secure employment in the UK. At the airport, a woman connected to the agent who arranged his travel drives him to a three-bedroom apartment where two other Ghanaian men are already staying. There is one bed between the three of them, so Kwabena sleeps on the floor.

Mid-July 2024 – Uneasy with the arrangement after three days, Kwabena leaves for Moscow, where migrants have told him he can find day work at a warehouse operated by online retailer Ozon. By now his visa has expired. There are frequent police inspections near the warehouse. Several African fighters interviewed for this investigation describe the same pattern: encounters with officers that end with cash bribes to avoid detention. So Kwabena pays. One officer who has taken money from him several times eventually proposes an alternative. "He said there are jobs," Kwabena recalls. "Military jobs… soft jobs." Facing detention or deportation, Kwabena agrees.

Late July 2024 – Two weeks after his arrival in Russia, Kwabena is at an enlistment centre signing a contract written in Russian. He photographs the documents and sends them to Adjoa. "Just in case," he writes. She is alarmed, but he reassures her that he understands the risks and would be careful. His passport is surrendered to his commander shortly afterwards and returned around three months later.

Money begins arriving in Accra through MoMo transfers, becoming a primary source of support for the family alongside Adjoa's teacher's salary. The couple speak nearly every other day. School fees are paid and repairs made to the family home; relatives believe he is doing civilian work.

Late 2024 – Kwabena learns at a military processing site that foreign recruits can pay to avoid being sent to the frontline. "There was a number," he recalls. "If you send money to that number, you will not go to the war." He transfers 400,000 roubles (about $4,733) from his Russian account – part of his signing bonus. For months, the arrangement holds. He remains behind the lines performing non-combatant duties: digging trenches, cutting trees, packing supplies. Adjoa loses direct contact with Kwabena but is in regular WhatsApp communication with a man who claims to be his commander, who sends reassuring updates: Kwabena is "at the training ground" and "everything is fine". Kwabena later tells the investigation team he believes these messages were connected to his payments.

Early 2025 – The unit commander is replaced. "Everything changed," says Kwabena. The new officer does not recognise the bribery arrangement. Kwabena is issued with combat gear, given a rifle and explosives, and sent to the front. He describes being moved forward in stages, drones overhead, bodies along the line – many of them black people.

19 August 2025 – Kwabena runs. He abandons nearly a million roubles remaining in his Russian bank account and surrenders to Ukrainian forces. "I thought of my family," he says. "I just wanted to be alive."

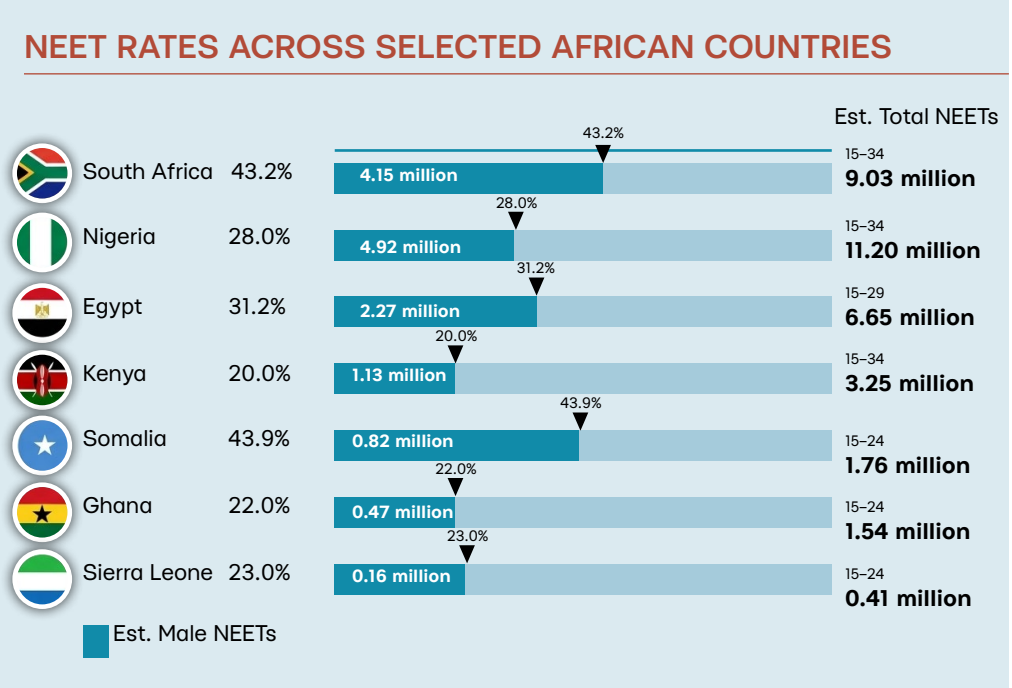
Back in Accra, Adjoa keeps sending messages to his phone, searching for answers. The JFJ investigation team interviews Kwabena in a Ukrainian prisoner-of-war camp on 24 October 2025 and informs her he is still alive. She continues messaging his number, hoping someone will let her hear his voice. In December, a reply finally comes. "I have your husband," it reads. "He is currently under investigation." Another one follows shortly afterwards. "He came to Ukraine to kill." Ukrainian authorities confirm that phones are routinely confiscated from captured combatants. Kwabena's device was in military custody.

Kwabena is now in a Ukrainian prisoner-of-war camp, awaiting possible repatriation. In Accra, Adjoa continues visiting Ghana's Foreign Ministry, asking when – or if – he might come home.

**Names changed to protect identity.*

13 million candidates

Across Africa, tens of millions of young people are classified as NEET: not in education, employment, or training. In just seven African countries whose nationals were interviewed by JFJ in Ukrainian POW camps, there are more than 13 million young men of fighting age who fall into this category.[53]



These figures help explain the vulnerability recruiters were able to exploit. But unemployment alone does not explain why African men end up in Russian trenches.

To understand why Russia's recruitment operation finds candidates, three additional factors matter: remittance economies that make overseas work a household strategy rather than a personal choice; wage differentials that make even dangerous offers appear worthwhile; and a migration infrastructure that already connects African job seekers to foreign opportunities, including fraudulent and exploitative ones.

The remittance imperative

The irony is that many Africans encouraged their loved ones to pursue recruitment opportunities because the job on offer was felt to be the opportunity of a lifetime. In South Africa, for example, the most prominent recruitment scandal involved the family of ex-President Jacob Zuma. His daughter, a member of Parliament, recruited eight of her own family members, apparently believing that they were to receive specialised military training in Russia for the benefit of her father's political party.[54] The men were saved before they were deployed to the frontline. Not so lucky were the groups of men in Kenya who were enlisted by older relatives who were either well connected or in the military. JFJ interviews establish remittances as a primary driving force supporting Russian recruitment of Africans.

For many African families, overseas employment is a household economic strategy. Remittances (money sent home by workers abroad) are a critical source of income across the continent and in some countries, they are the single largest source of foreign exchange. In Kenya, household remittances accounted for US$5

53 Population figures are calculated estimates based on the most recent gender-disaggregated rates from the World Bank at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.NEET.MA.ZS and Statistics South Africa at https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=18398.
54 See Duduzile Zuma declares herself a victim in affidavit against alleged mercenary recruiter at https://iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/2025-11-25-duduzile-zuma-declares-herself-a-victim-in-affidavit-against-alleged-mercenary-recruiter/.

billion in annual revenue as of 2024, the largest foreign exchange earner for the country, contributing 4.2 per cent of GDP.[55] Since 2007, gross international remittance inflows into Africa have surpassed official development assistance levels and recently overtook foreign direct investment (FDI).[56]

The consequence is that migration is often not an individual act but a family and latterly a national investment. Households pool resources to send one member abroad in the expectation that his earnings will support those who remain behind. When recruitment agencies in Nairobi or Accra promise US$2,000 a month in Russia – a very large sum considering the US$100 to US$500 per month available at home – the pressure to accept comes not only from the man's own circumstances but from the family that depends on him. Most interviewees also reported verbal promises of Russian citizenship for the recruit and his nuclear and extended family upon completion of a one-year contract. The offer was presented as a path to family-level economic mobility, not simply individual employment.

What recruiters did not disclose was that international sanctions on Russian banks effectively blocked SWIFT transfers to many African countries, and also sanctioned crypto transactions.[57] Most recruits who travelled to Russia believing they would be able to send money home found that in reality they could not. Some were deployed so quickly that they never accessed their signing bonuses or first month's salary. Others could see wages deposited in Russian bank accounts but had no practical way to use or transfer the money. "My own money was there, but I couldn't touch it," one recruit told JFJ.[58] For many recruits, the remittance promise proved impossible to realise because they could not practically access or transfer their earnings after their arrival in Russia.

The migration infrastructure

Russia's recruitment operation did not build its pipeline from scratch. It exploited one that already existed. Across Africa, a well-established migration infrastructure connects job seekers with overseas employment through licensed agencies, informal brokers, personal networks, and digital platforms. This infrastructure has long served legitimate labour migration. It has also long been exploited by traffickers.

African economies exemplify the phenomenon of jobless growth, a structural disconnect where GDP rises but formal employment fails to keep pace. The continent's economies need to create roughly 15 million jobs each year to absorb the young people entering the labour market. At the current rate, they are around 12 million jobs short.[59] High internet penetration in urban areas and a global culture of social media have enabled this unemployed population to dream globally.[60] But the same platforms that give rise to new ambitions have long been used by traffickers posing as recruitment agencies promising jobs abroad. The digital infrastructure that connects a young man in Mogadishu to a Russian military recruitment advertisement is the same infrastructure that has, for years, connected Kenyan domestic workers to abusive employers in the Gulf and Nigerian workers to scam call centres in Southeast Asia.[61]

55 Central Bank of Kenya, Press Release: 2025 Remittances Household Survey, https://www.centralbank.go.ke/uploads/press_releases/391352851_Press%20Release%20-%202025%20Remittances%20Household%20Survey.pdf.

56 See Remittances to Africa 2024 at https://futures.issafrica.org/thematic/10-financial-flows/#02-remittances-to-africa.

57 On the sanctions regime affecting Russian banks' SWIFT access and crypto transfers, see https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/ukraine-eu-agrees-exclude-key-russian-banks-swift-2022-03-02_en and https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/07/23/21st-package-of-sanctions-eu-hits-russian-energy-financial-services-and-crypto-hard/.

58 JFJ interview with a Kenyan recruit. The same observation is corroborated by JFJ interviews with Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean recruits regarding SWIFT-blocked transfers. This is the master recruit-testimony note on non-disclosure of financial-access barriers.

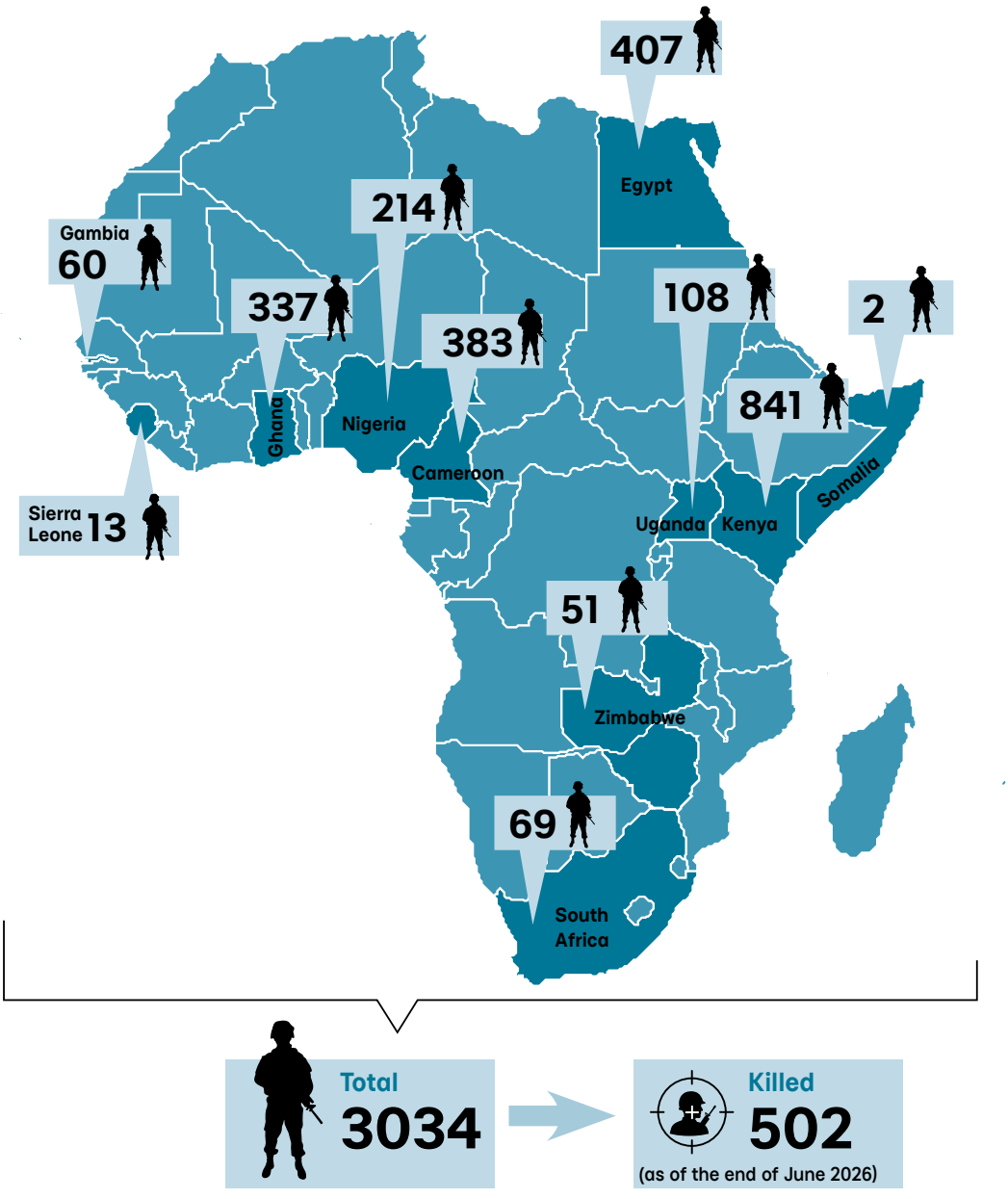
59 See Regional outlook for youth in the labour market – Sub Saharan Africa 2024 in Global Youth Employment Trends in Africa, International Labour Organization, August 2024 at page 2 https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Sub-Saharan%20Africa%20GET%20Youth%202024_0.pdf.

60 See for example "Africa's Youthquake - Decoding the continent's largest generation and its transformative impact", February 2026 which establishes exposure via mobile internet bridges the geographic gap between African youth and global consumerism. The report details a surge in the desire for high-end consumer tech, modern housing, and global luxury standards, driven entirely by seeing these "material comforts" normalised on global digital platforms. It is available online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/400936148_Africa's_Youthquake_Decoding_the_continent's_largest_generation_and_its_transformative_impact_2026.

61 On the exploitation of digital platforms by trafficking networks, see https://www.freedomcollaborative.org/forced-criminality-2026. On the exploitation of Kenyans in Southeast Asian scam call centres, see https://www.parliament.go.ke/index.php/node/25753.

In Kenya, the government itself accelerated this process. In 2023, the state established a labour export programme, Kazi Majuu (Work Overseas), within a new department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Department of Diaspora Affairs, with a target of one million foreign jobs annually, in the hope of more than doubling annual remittances, while reducing youth unemployment.[62] That programme's lax oversight created the institutional environment that recruitment agencies would later exploit. The details of how that infiltration occurred are the subject of the next chapter.

NUMBER OF AFRICAN RECRUITS PER COUNTRY



62 Government of Kenya / Ministry of Labour, 'Government secures 200,000 foreign jobs as Kenya aims for one million annually,' https://www.labour.go.ke/government-secures-200000-foreign-jobs-kenyans-aims-one-million-annually. See also 'Kenyan Workers Get Abused Abroad. The President's Family and Allies Profit,' New York Times, 14 November 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/14/world/europe/kenya-president-saudi-arabia-maids.html.



Some of the African recruits recruited into the Russian military.

It's economics, not ideology

Economic opportunity was the dominant factor in every case documented by JFJ. In none of the interviews conducted – with prisoners of war, serving recruits, returnees, escapees, or families – did ideology or political support for Russia emerge as a motivation for enlistment. The motivations were consistent across nationalities: wages, citizenship, family obligation, and the absence of alternatives at home.

This finding has direct implications for the legal and policy analysis in the later chapters of this report. If the men documented here had been ideological volunteers, the legal framework for addressing their situation would have been different. Instead, they are economic migrants who were either deceived into military service or were driven to it by conditions that left them with no choice.

The conditions described in this chapter created the supply. What remains to be explained is the machinery that connected them: how recruiters found candidates, how candidates were moved, and how the promise of civilian work became a military contract. That machinery is the subject of Part II.

4 ENTRAPMENT AND CONTROL

The shift that Kibet describes – from tourist bus to forest camp, from work contract to military uniform, from civilian to conscript – is the central transition in the recruitment pipeline, from deception to compulsion: criminal penalties, passport confiscation, financial control, and the impossibility of exit.

Arrival and processing

On arrival in Russia, recruits were taken to a branch of Promsvyazbank, a state-controlled bank servicing military personnel and the defence sector.[97] A translator with limited English moved them through the paperwork. "Sign here. Sign there." The documents were in Russian. Accounts were opened in each recruit's name.

What many recruits did not understand was that they were also signing powers of attorney, granting intermediaries – handlers they had met only hours or days earlier – access to their bank accounts.[98] Multiple recruits subsequently reported that funds were withdrawn from their accounts without their knowledge or consent. This power-of-attorney arrangement appears to have been a Kenya-specific feature of the pipeline: none of the recruits interviewed by JFJ from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, or Egypt reported being asked to sign similar documents, a comparative finding that distinguishes the Kenyan pipeline from others. In at least one documented case, a recruit discovered only weeks later, through his mobile banking app, that the documents he had signed at the bank had given a third party full access to his finances.

From the bank, recruits were taken to military facilities. Their clothes were discarded and replaced with matching tracksuits and shoes. One recruit said he thought he was going to work as a driver – until he was handed a gun.[99]

The second contract

In Russia, a fresh set of contracts and paperwork was presented. All documentation was written in Cyrillic, untranslated. Pressure was placed on recruits to sign quickly. Russian military paperwork reviewed by JFJ fixed the service term at one year.[100]

Recruits were required to undersign a list of 18 sections of Chapter 33 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, titled "Crimes Against Military Service". The penalties referenced include imprisonment of up to 10 years for desertion, absence without leave, evasion of military service duties, and voluntary surrender. These consequences were not disclosed in writing, or in any language the recruits could read, prior to their arrival in Russia.[101] No recruit interviewed by JFJ said they understood the criminal penalties they were accepting when they signed.[102]

97 Promsvyazbank (PSB) was disconnected from the SWIFT international financial messaging system by the European Union on March 12, 2022. Because PSB serves the Russian military, it operates strictly outside Western financial ecosystems, routing its remaining domestic and cross-border trade through Russia's internal System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) network or alternative shadow networks. In July 2026, the EU enhanced penalties on foreign banks that connect with the SPFS network. A Somali national recruited from within Russia says he was made to open a bank account with Sberbank, Russia's largest bank, which was disconnected from the international SWIFT financial messaging system by the European Union on June 3, 2022.

98 Based on JFJ interviews with Kenyan recruits and recruits from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Egypt, conducted early 2026.

99 FJ interview with recruits and their families.

100 The 18 criminal code sections recruits were required to undersign are listed in full in Appendix IV.

101 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, Articles 337 (Absence Without Leave), 338 (Desertion), 339 (Evasion by Simulation of Illness), and 352.1 (Voluntary Surrender).

102 Based on JFJ interviews with recruits. On the specific penalties involved, see Appendix IV.

The second contract is the mechanism through which the deception established in Chapter 3 becomes institutionalised. A man who was promised security work in Kenya now holds a Russian military service contract, undersigned with criminal penalties, in a country where he has no passport, no translator, and no means of communication.

Passport confiscation

Passports were confiscated upon or shortly after arrival at military facilities.[103] Recruits who sought to leave were told they would face criminal prosecution under Russian military law. Desertion was effectively impossible: recruits were under constant guard and subject to prosecution for any attempt to leave.

He arrived in St Petersburg on a business visa, overstayed, found work at a Moscow warehouse, and was eventually steered into military enlistment by a police officer threatening detention. For seven months he paid bribes to stay off the frontline – until the commander who had been taking the money was replaced.



Sample of a Russian military service contract document issued by the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.

103 Based on JFJ interviews.

The financial trap

The financial architecture of the pipeline serves a dual purpose: it enriches intermediaries and prevents recruits from leaving. The two functions are inseparable.

i) **Agency fees.** The Global Face contract reviewed by JFJ set an agency service fee of 1 million to 1.4 million roubles (approximately US$11,700 to US$16,500), payable by automatic deduction from the recruit's Russian bank account within 35 days of signing with the employer.[104] That fee represented between 58 and 66 per cent of the one-time signing bonus. Multiple recruits described the signing bonus in practice as about 1.9 million roubles (approximately US$22,484). After the agency deduction, recruits were left with approximately 900,000 roubles (US$10,650).

Global Face sent at least 500 Kenyan men to Russia. At the contract rate, the company may have earned more than US$8.25 million[105] in agency fees between May 2025 and February 2026 alone. At times, Global Face sent as many as 22 recruits in a single week; at the contract rate, that would have generated between 22 million and 30.8 million roubles in agency fees (roughly US$260,350 to US$364,490) in one week alone. Based on the contracts reviewed by JFJ, recruiters appear to have earned more than US$50 million in agency fees from African recruits overall. In Kenya alone, agency fees exceeded US$18 million.[106]

In Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon, recruits described paying brokers between US$5,000 and US$7,000 to facilitate travel to Moscow. Once there, they made their own way to enlistment centres.

ii) **Salary structure.** The agreement set out a two-tier salary structure. During training, the candidate would receive 40,000 to 60,000 roubles a month (approximately US$473 to US$710). From the second month, the monthly salary would rise to 170,000 to 210,000 roubles (approximately US$2,011 to US$2,485). The document stated that the recruitment agency would recover its expenses and fees from the one-time signing bonus, rather than receive deductions from the monthly salary. In practice, multiple recruits reported that up to 66% of the signing bonus was withdrawn by handlers through the powers of attorney signed at the bank.

104 Rouble-to-dollar conversions at prevailing exchange rate.

105 Figures derived by JFJ from a sample of recruitment contracts, calculated by multiplying the average agency service fee per contract by the documented number of recruits per channel. The $8.25 million Global Face estimate is based on approximately 500 recruits processed by that agency between May 2025 and February 2026. The $50 million continental estimate aggregates all documented recruitment intermediaries across the countries covered in the main report. JFJ estimates that across all intermediaries beyond Global Face, agency fees in Kenya exceed $18 million.

106 Based on JFJ interviews with Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean, and Cameroonian recruits.

iii) **The SWIFT blockade.** International sanctions on Russian banks effectively blocked SWIFT transfers to African countries.[107] Recruits who had travelled to Russia believing they would be able to send money back home found that in reality most could not. To send money home, they had to withdraw cash and rely on informal Hawala-style networks, where funds are moved through trusted intermediaries rather than formal banking channels.[108] Most said they were deployed to the frontline so quickly that they had little or no time to arrange these transfers. The SWIFT blockade – a fact not always disclosed to recruits before departure – trapped wages in accounts that recruits often could not access and could not transfer.

iv) **Injury compensation.** JFJ documented 10 men who received official letters indicating that compensation had been approved or was being processed after they were wounded. Only two managed to leave Russia with even part of the money.[109] Compensation ranged from 100,000 roubles for minor injuries to 3 million roubles (approximately US$35,502) for severe injuries. In November 2024, the Russian government reduced compensation for less severe injuries as the financial costs of the war mounted. In at least one case reviewed by JFJ, a certificate described the injury as a "тяжелое увечье" (grave injury), commonly linked to a lump sum payout of about 3 million roubles. The recruit never received the money.

v) **Bribes.** A recruit's story, as told in full in Chapter 4, demonstrates what these mechanisms look like in practice.[110] He arrived in St Petersburg on a business visa, overstayed, found work at a Moscow warehouse, and was eventually steered into military enlistment by a police officer threatening detention. For seven months he paid bribes to stay off the frontline – until the commander who had been taking his money was replaced. On 19 August 2025, he abandoned nearly a million roubles in his Russian bank account and surrendered to Ukrainian forces. "I thought of my family," he said. "I just wanted to be alive." What it illustrates here is the bribery economy's structural fragility: a temporary reprieve available only to recruits who still had money, and only for as long as the commander who took it remained in place. When the commander changed, the reprieve ended, and the underlying coercion reasserted itself.

The bribery economy that the recruit describes was not unique to his case. Other recruits in 2024 said they paid a 200,000 roubles lump sum to stay away from the frontline, with most saying the money was handed directly to commanders in cash.[111] The existence of a secondary market in which recruits pay to delay their own deployment is evidence of the coercion: no one pays to avoid a job they accepted voluntarily

107 On the sanctions regime affecting Russian banks' SWIFT access and crypto transfers, see https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/ukraine-eu-agrees-exclude-key-russian-banks-swift-2022-03-02_en and https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/07/23/21st-package-of-sanctions-eu-hits-russian-energy-financial-services-and-crypto-hard/.

108 Based on JFJ interviews with recruits and family members.

109 Based on JFJ review of 10 case files of wounded recruits who received official compensation letters.

110 JFJ interview with a POW.

111 Based on JFJ interviews with recruits.

What the financial system achieves

The combined effect of agency deductions, power of attorney fraud, the SWIFT blockade, salary diversion, injury compensation theft, and the bribery economy is a financial system in which:

- The recruit pays to enter the pipeline (pre-departure fees and cash payments to brokers).
- The agency takes most of his signing bonus before he receives it.
- His wages are deposited in an account he often cannot access or operate.
- If he is wounded, his compensation is approved on paper but rarely reaches him.
- If he pays to avoid the frontline, his remaining funds are drained.
- If he decides to leave, he forfeits everything in his Russian bank account – and faces criminal prosecution for desertion.

At every stage, leaving meant forfeiting accumulated earnings, creating a powerful incentive to stay – even when doing so could cost you your life.

The financial trap is only one aspect of the entrapment strategy, which includes a contract signed in a language the recruit could not read, undersigned with criminal penalties he did not understand; a passport held by a commander he could not challenge; a bank account controlled by intermediaries he had met only hours earlier; wages blocked from transfer by sanctions he was not told about; and a military system in which the only language spoken was one he did not know. Each mechanism, taken individually, might have been overcome, but taken together they constituted a system of control that recruits could not escape.

The next chapter describes the men who survived the pipeline long enough to face the choice between their money and their lives.

PART III WHAT THE SYSTEM DOES TO PEOPLE

5 INSIDE THE WAR

Daniel Kariuki knew what he was walking into before he crossed the river.[112] A former Kenya Air Force officer who had resigned from the military eighteen months earlier and lost his business in the July 2024 unrest, he had taken a job described to him as security work paying US$2,000 a month – his full story is described in Chapter 2. But by the time he reached Vovchansk, one of the most contested sections of the front, he understood exactly what the work involved. On 23 August 2025, the day before he was deployed, he sent his mother a WhatsApp message he described as a kind of eulogy – he feared he was a dead man walking. From the moment he landed in St Petersburg to the day he stepped on a landmine – which he miraculously survived – it was fewer than 100 days.

Kariuki's experience – the speed of processing, the brevity of preparation, the immediate exposure to front-line combat – is not an outlier. It is the system operating as designed.

Training, deployment, attrition

The evidence collected by JFJ across nationalities and time periods reveal a consistent pattern: training periods have collapsed, deployment has accelerated, and the interval between arrival in Russia and death, injury, or capture has shortened to a matter of weeks. The data that follows draws most heavily on Kenyan cases, which constitute the largest documented national contingent and the most complete evidentiary record available to JFJ. But the pattern it describes, an ever-faster progression from recruitment to combat, is documented across every nationality in the investigation. What the Kenyan data measures precisely, the Somali, Ghanaian, Cameroonian, Nigerian, and South African cases confirm.

In 2023, Adil Abdullahi, the Somali recruit who signed the contract knowingly, received approximately six weeks of training before deployment to the frontline in Donetsk. By 2024, South African and Ghanaian cohorts were receiving two to four weeks. Udoka, a Nigerian recruit documented by JFJ, received five days. By 2025, Mburu, a Kenyan, received three. Evans Kibet, who arrived in Russia in late July 2025, described five days of intensive instruction – weapons handling, grenade throwing, running with heavy armour – before being told he was going to the front.

112 Most likely the Vovcha River (which flows between Shebekino in Russia and Vovchansk in Ukraine), a documented Ukrainian kill zone where drone attacks are indiscriminate. In late 2025, there was a series of unsuccessful attempts by Russian soldiers to cross the Vovcha River, resulting in large-scale deaths and injuries including to African recruits. See map here https://understandingwar.org/map/assessed-control-of-terrain-in-the-kharkiv-direction-december-26-2025-at-130-pm-et/. Reports indicate that as recently as 29 April 2026 Kenyans were still being pushed across the Vovcha River.

Length of Training

Year	Recruit	Nationality	Training Duration
2023	Abdullahi	Somalia	6 weeks
2024	SA/Ghanaian cohorts	South Africa / Ghana	2–4 weeks
2024	Udoka	Nigeria	5 days
2025	Mburu	Kenya	3 days

After processing and minimal training in Russia, recruits were transported to occupied Ukrainian territory, typically by bus or military convoy, under conditions that left them no ability to refuse. The mechanism was consistent across nationalities. JFJ has documented the interval between arriving in Russia and being deployed to Ukraine across Kenyan cases specifically; the data confirms an accelerating compression from weeks to days as the system scaled up.

Documented deployment locations in Ukraine are concentrated along the eastern frontline. African recruits of multiple nationalities have been deployed to Donetsk Oblast, Luhansk Oblast, and Kharkiv Oblast. The primary deployment zone for Kenyan fighters has been the Lyman–Kupiansk axis in Donetsk, while Ghanaian and Cameroonian recruits have also been documented in the Donetsk region and around Vovchansk. Staging areas in Belgorod and Rostov-on-Don within Russia itself serve as transit points before deployment across the border.

African Recruits in Russia's War: Deployment & Transit Corridor

Documented deployment zones, eastern Ukraine, and Russian staging points



Ukrainian military officials have stated that most foreign fighters do not survive more than one month on the frontline. JFJ's research supports this. A survey of the families of 57 Kenyan recruits, the largest sample available to JFJ for any single nationality, found that the average time from arrival in Russia to death, hospitalisation, or being declared missing was 44 days. The same pattern appears to play out across the continent: interviews with Ghanaian, Cameroonian, and Sierra Leonean families describe the same compressed timeline from departure at an international airport to a WhatsApp message informing a family that their son is dead, injured, or has disappeared.

Behind the average timeline are individual intervals that are shorter still. Udoka, the Nigerian recruit who received five days of training, was killed just weeks after signing his contract – the shortest documented contract-to-frontline interval in JFJ's record. Kibet, the Kenyan athlete, crossed into Ukraine approximately 10 days after landing in Russia; within hours of reaching the front, he was surrounded by the bodies of the African fighters who had preceded him. Richard Kanu, the Sierra Leonean veteran, was deployed after two weeks of training and was injured two weeks later. The pattern is consistent: the system processes men faster than it can prepare them for what awaits them, and the men it processes do not last long at the frontline.

The View from inside the machine

Mohamed Salah, an Egyptian national, began his war career as an interpreter.[113] He had left Egypt for Russia at 19, hoping to earn an international certificate to complement his programming degree from Cairo University. When his university documents lapsed, he faced losing the right to remain in the country. Several friends had already enlisted. The military offered a way to extend his residency and potentially obtain citizenship. He knew he was signing up for a war. "No one pushed me to the registration centre," he said. Before deployment, he transferred money into separate accounts and signed documents granting his father authority to access his funds if he was killed. "For us foreigners," he said, "it's not only about us. It's about our families."

On deployment, Salah found himself in a Russian military unit crowded with foreign recruits from Cameroon, Iraq, Egypt, Ghana, and elsewhere – many of them university graduates, some of them doctors. He became an indispensable intermediary, translating orders into Arabic, English, and French, relaying commands under fire, and at times leading small units himself. "I was carrying four people," he said. The questions he fielded were always the same: How can I break my contract? How can I go back home? His answer rarely changed: "Once you sign, it's finished."

He remembered one Cameroonian recruit by name. Fonko was a trained doctor who had been assured he would never fight. "One hundred per cent not going to fight," Salah recalled hearing him say. Salah was later wounded and briefly hospitalised. When he returned, he learned that Fonko had been enlisted and was dead.



Mohamed Salah during the interview.

113 JFJ interview with Mohamed Salah, Egyptian prisoner of war.

An Egyptian friend who had signed up around the same time was also killed early in the fighting, without ever having received his passport or accessed his bank account. “He had nothing,” Salah said. “No chance to use the money. No passport in his hand. Nothing his family can even claim because he didn’t complete the paperwork.” He paused. “I will try to find his family after this and tell them what happened. They deserve to know.”

Salah’s account confirms that the promises made to recruits – of non-combat roles, of citizenship, of financial security – were understood by those within the system to be unreliable: the interpreters, commanders, and administrative staff all knew they were processing human beings faster than they could train, equip, or protect them. The system’s internal logic was only concealed from the men at the bottom of it.

For families still waiting for official confirmation of a death, the uncertainty can make even mourning difficult.

Mourning without a body

The death toll spans the continent. Ukrainian military data reviewed by JFJ documents casualties among nationals of multiple African countries; Cameroon alone accounts for 104 confirmed deaths, according to Ukrainian records, against 16 acknowledged by Russia. In Kenya, 76 deaths have been confirmed by JFJ, yet the government will only admit to 19. Suffice it to say that the true number is much higher than 76 deaths. Across all nationalities, precise figures remain impossible to establish because Russia has never published a complete accounting of foreign casualties and many families have received no official confirmation of death.



Bibiana Waithaka lights a candle on her son’s “grave” during a symbolic burial held in Mukurweini, Nyeri County, on February 5, 2026.

What families across the continent have received instead is information through channels no government ever intended to serve as death notifications. Mothers have learned of their sons' deaths through WhatsApp messages from fellow recruits. Wives have found out through social media posts circulating online. Siblings have pieced together the news from fragments forwarded through informal networks they barely understand. As Bibiana Wangari, the mother of Charles Waithaka Wangari, said of the moment she learned of her son's death: "The whole world knew that my son was dead before his own mother did." Her experience is not unique to Kenya; it is the standard mode of death notification in this war for African families from Accra to Kampala to Freetown.

In that vacuum – no embassy call, no official letter, no body to bury – some families have turned to practices that predate any modern state's obligations. Across several Kenyan communities, including the Kikuyu, Luhya, Meru, and Embu, symbolic burials have long been used when a body cannot be recovered. These rituals offer structure: a way to acknowledge death, fulfil communal obligation, and give mourners a place to direct their grief. For families whose sons died thousands of miles away, the symbolic grave offers something essential – a place for grief to land and a way to close a life otherwise suspended between absence and mourning.

For families with no body to wash, no coffin to lower into the ground, and no grave to visit, the banana stem burial is more than symbolic; it is a final act of duty in the face of absence.

Of all the substitutes for a body that cannot be brought home, the banana stem may carry the deepest cultural resonance. To an outsider, the choice might seem strange. To Dr Jeremiah Nganda, a communications scholar at Daystar University who studies African cultural traditions, it is anything but.[114] "If you look at how the banana trunk looks, it almost looks like a person," he said. "And the behaviour of that trunk as it goes into the soil is also like a person. Because once it's covered, someday it's going to rot. It's going to become one with the soil." The symbolism goes beyond resemblance. A banana plant fulfils its purpose when it bears fruit; once the fruit is harvested, the trunk becomes, in Dr Nganda's words, "essentially useless". In much the same way, when a person dies and the spirit departs, they leave only the remains; what mattered most has gone.

"When someone buries the banana trunk," Dr Nganda said, "it appears that it's kind of like taking almost the shape of a human being. It's able to also rot within some period of time and then it just disappears." In some communities, similar rites have been used using animals, though less commonly and for different reasons. "It's the same thing," he said. "They just want to put it into the ground so that the spirit of this person can feel as if the people have made some significant attempt."

For families with no body to wash, no coffin to lower into the ground, and no grave to visit, the banana stem burial is more than symbolic; it is a final act of duty in the face of absence. It is also an indictment. Does any institution intend to answer for the harm caused by the system described in this report?

114 JFJ interview with Dr Jeremiah Nganda, communications scholar at Daystar University, conducted in Nairobi.

6 CAPTIVITY

Life inside the camps

To establish what becomes of foreign fighters once they are captured, JFJ first had to obtain permission from the Ukrainian authorities to interview them. Under the Geneva Conventions, prisoners of war cannot be compelled to give interviews; consent must be obtained and recorded on video before any conversation begins.[115] Each prisoner was made to understand that it was his choice to speak freely or to decline. "These are not ordinary prisons," said Petro Yatsenko, a spokesperson for Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War.[116] "This is a prison camp. They are prisoners of war – detained combatants, not criminal convicts."

The detainees JFJ spoke with agreed with the classification. It mattered to them. "We are not criminals," Nkrumah said. "We were soldiers," added Kanu, the Sierra Leonean.[117] A Togolese prisoner put it simply: "We are waiting."



Prisoners of war speak with a journalist during a JFJ interview at a prison camp in Ukraine on July 30.

Inside the camps, conditions reflected the obligations of the Third Geneva Convention more visibly than in many parts of the documented system. Prisoners received medical care, food, and access to communication channels through the International Committee of the Red Cross. The contrast with the conditions some recruits had experienced inside Russian military units, confiscated passports, locked barracks, undisclosed deployment orders, was obvious to them. During one visit to a Ukrainian POW camp in June 2025, members of JFJ's investigative team met Shaun Pinner and Aiden Aslin. The two British men had fought with Ukrainian forces, were captured in Mariupol in 2022 and were later sentenced to death by a court in Russian-occupied Donetsk before being released in a prisoner exchange.

115 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Third Geneva Convention), adopted 12 August 1949, entered into force 21 October 1950, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciii-1949; Article 13 prohibits compulsion to give interviews; Article 17 governs interrogation and the limits of compelled disclosure. JFJ obtained recorded consent from each prisoner before any interview, in accordance with the Convention's requirements.

116 JFJ interview with Petro Yatsenko, spokesperson, Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

117 JFJ interview with Richard Kanu.

Both men have described abuse in captivity. They came to the Ukrainian camp, in part, to see how foreign prisoners captured while fighting for Russia were being treated[118].The contrast was difficult to miss: two former prisoners of Russian-backed forces were now walking through a Ukrainian camp holding foreign fighters captured on the other side of the war.

The exchange exclusion

Nkrumah's frustration, however, does not reflect the full diplomatic record. Ghana and Kenya had both sought the release of their citizens through official channels. Between February 2022 and June 2026, Russia and Ukraine completed multiple prisoner exchanges but no African national has appeared on any exchange list provided by Russia.

Mohamed Salah put the dynamic plainly to JFJ: a foreign recruit captured by Ukraine is, from the perspective of the Russian state, a man whose obligations to that state end upon capture. He has signed his contract, he has been deployed and, in the framework Moscow has constructed, his death or capture is a private matter between him and the contract he signed. He is not a Russian conscript whose family will write letters demanding his return and he is not a politically costly absence – he is, for the system that recruited him, expendable inventory.

The diplomatic gap

African governments have, with two partial exceptions, made no formal effort to secure the release of their nationals through prisoner exchange. In March 2026, Kenyan Prime Cabinet Secretary and Foreign Affairs Minister Mudavadi announced, following a visit to Moscow, that Kenyans held in Ukrainian prisons would be included in subsequent POW exchanges between Russia and Ukraine. The prisoners confirmed that they had been contacted by Kenya's honorary consul in Kyiv and informed of this development. Since then, however, two prisoner exchanges have taken place without any Kenyans being included.

On 6 November 2025, President William Ruto raised the case of a Kenyan prisoner directly with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.[119] Although the intervention demonstrates that head-of-state engagement is available to those willing to use it, it remains unclear what followed these discussions or why the process appears to have stalled.

No other African head of state has publicly made a similar intervention. The other partial exception was Ghana, whose Foreign Affairs minister travelled to Kyiv and publicly announced that an agreement had been reached for the release of two Ghanaian prisoners.

The contrast with non-African governments is sharper still. India submitted formal parliamentary reports on its citizens in Russian service and secured 139 repatriations through sustained diplomatic engagement.[120] Nepal issued a direct public warning to Russia against the recruitment of Nepalese citizens.[121] Both governments operated within the same constraints as their African counterparts – bilateral relationships to preserve, limited consular capacity in Russia, and the absence of any multilateral framework dedicated to repatriating foreign recruits – but they acted anyway.

The grey zone

Not every recruit in the camps had been deceived in the same way. Richard Kanu, the Sierra Leonean military veteran captured in eastern Ukraine, occupies what one investigator on the JFJ team called "the grey zone". His military background was not incidental to his recruitment. The Russian recruiter he met in

118 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEPoMlTqne4

119 On President William Ruto's engagement with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy concerning a Kenyan prisoner, see https://nation.africa/kenya/weekly-review/exposed-secret-russia-war-recruitment-pipeline-putting-kenya-on-the-spot-5281590. On Ghanaian Foreign Affairs Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa's February 2026 visit to Ukraine to meet two Ghanaian detainees, see https://mfa.gov.gh/index.php/minister-for-foreign-affairs-embarks-on-official-visit-to-ukraine-to-engage-president-zelenskyy-on-protection-of-ghanaian-citizens-and-bilateral-cooperation/.

120 https://www.firstpost.com/world/mea-says-139-indians-freed-from-russian-army-two-dozen-still-await-return-14035186.html

121 On Nepal's public warning to Russia, see https://www.reuters.com/world/nepal-urges-russia-not-recruit-its-citizens-into-army-says-six-killed-2023-12-05/.

St Petersburg – where Kanu had been living as a migrant labourer for several years – welcomed his service record. The contract Kanu was offered described logistics work, not infantry combat. But Kanu had spent almost two decades in uniform before leaving the Sierra Leonean army. He understood, more clearly than most recruits, what military contracts look like and what they do not say.

The grey zone Kanu represents matters legally. A recruit like Kanu who knew he was entering some form of military service, even on the basis of misleading representations about his role, occupies a different legal position from one who believed he was going to a security job at a factory or a construction site. The distinction is the degree of informed consent – and it has direct implications for the trafficking analysis examined in Chapter 10.

Identity and verification

When prisoners came forward voluntarily and asked their captors to inform their families, the question of who they were – and which family to inform – was not always straightforward. Some recruits had travelled under aliases. Some had used borrowed or fraudulent passports. Some had multiple names recorded across travel documents, recruitment contracts, and personal communications. The diplomatic verification process JFJ documented – in which a small number of African embassies sent officials to POW camps to confirm the nationality of detainees – was inconsistent in its application and incomplete in its coverage.

Propaganda and consent

The Third Geneva Convention protects prisoners of war from being made objects of "insults and public curiosity". That protection has not always been observed by either party to the conflict in Ukraine.

Russia. JFJ documented multiple cases in which African recruits were forced to pose for photographs and videos in which they smiled, danced, and appeared enthusiastic about serving in the military. The material was later circulated through pro-Russian propaganda channels, X accounts and WhatsApp groups, where it was framed as evidence that Africans were fighting for Russia of their own volition and encouraging others to enlist. Some recruits told JFJ they were forced to act as "influencers", reassuring prospective recruits that joining the Russian military was safe, well paid, and offered a path to citizenship. Some equated them to peace missions, selling support roles, even though the recruit would be sent to the frontline in days. Russia also used military parades and public ceremonies to project an image of international support, presenting the participation of foreign nationals as evidence of their inclusion and commitment to the Russian war effort.

Ukraine. Videos of captured African prisoners released by Ukrainian units drew international attention to allegations that some men had been deceived or trafficked into joining the war. Their publication had the effect of bringing those claims into public view and prompting wider scrutiny of the recruitment networks that had brought Africans to the battlefield.

Some African prisoners captured by Ukrainian brigades told JFJ they were compelled to record messages warning others not to join the war. One prisoner said he was required to repeat the same statement as many as 10 times. Because the Ukrainian soldier directing the recording did not speak fluent English, he said, the message was written in broken English and had to be repeated word for word.

A review of several videos found recurring language. Prisoners praised their treatment after capture, sometimes using nearly identical descriptions of being given bread and water. "When I was captured I told the Ukrainians what I thought they wanted to hear. I just wanted to survive and here I am, sleeping and eating well," one prisoner told JFJ. "I know Russia would not have treated African prisoners the same way."

There is no evidence allowing a direct comparison with how African prisoners would be treated in Russian custody. But the prisoner's fear is set against a well-documented record of abuse.

United Nations investigators have repeatedly documented torture and other ill-treatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war held by Russia, including severe beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence, mock executions, inadequate food and denial of medical care.

FRANCIS NDARUA: VIRAL 'SUICIDE BOMBER' CALLS VIDEO INTO QUESTION





A screenshot of Francis Ndarua's photo with an anti-tank mine strapped on his chest as it appeared on a CNN broadcast.

Francis Ndarua's case shows how difficult it can be to establish consent when prisoners' images are used as propaganda.

In January 2026, a video began circulating that appeared to show a particularly brutal episode from the war: an African man in Russian uniform, an anti-tank mine strapped to his torso, being sent towards Ukrainian positions while a Russian-speaking man hurled racist abuse and called him a human "can opener". Posted first to the Ukrainian Telegram channel Exilenova+ on 9 January, the footage was picked up within hours by Anton Gerashchenko, a former deputy interior minister of Ukraine, and from there reached CNN, The Telegraph and, by March, had contributed to a human rights resolution in the European Parliament. By August 2026 the video had been viewed 5.6 million times.

The man in the footage was Ndarua, a Kenyan recruited through Global Face who had believed he was travelling to Russia for security work. By his account, the scene was staged at his captors' request as a deterrent aimed at Africans considering signing up: "They requested me to do that video," he told JFJ. "I come from Africa, and so I take

that bomb and act like this guy is forcing me to go to war, and I keep resisting, so they show it is like how Africans are being used in the Russian war." He agreed to take part, he said, because the scene echoed something he had genuinely lived through: at a river crossing under drone fire, he had stumbled and grabbed what turned out to be a corpse, one of several bodies scattered around him, while a Russian soldier ordered him forward. "I was told there was no surrender. It was hell," he said.

He recorded a second video later; this time, he said, he spoke of his own free will. Ukrainian military units regularly publish post-capture interviews with POWs in this format, and JFJ found the second recording had much the same tenor and presentation as those. What neither video disclosed was that Ndarua was, by then, a POW in Ukrainian custody – not the casualty the first video had implied. His mother, Anne, received a copy of the first video from a Ukrainian phone number on the day it surfaced, with a message urging her to circulate it widely and, cryptically, not to lose hope since her son might still be alive and "in captivity". ZMINA, the Ukrainian human rights outlet, flagged on 15 January that the footage "requires further thorough verification", a caution that went largely ignored as the story spread.

As the video suggested Ndarua's death, Russia moved to confirm it. By May, it had formally notified Kenya that he was missing in action, and his family was contacted by the State Department for Diaspora Affairs to begin the paperwork for a compensation payout of an estimated KSh22 million. Of the 24 men trafficked alongside him, Ndarua is the only one known to be alive; the rest are missing or reported dead. Ndarua spent weeks in a dugout; he was blamed for exposing a Russian position and eventually abandoned by his unit and captured by Ukrainian forces, exhausted and ill.

JFJ traced Ndarua to a prison camp in western Ukraine on 30 July 2026, roughly 250 days into his captivity. He spoke for long stretches, in English and Kiswahili, breaking off periodically to ask whether the team could tell his mother he was alive. A week after this account was first published, Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War responded to JFJ's questions about the first video. It said it held no reliable information about who had recorded the footage, where or when, or how it had entered circulation; that the video was not connected to any of its humanitarian programmes; and that no recording of this kind could have been made at an official Ukrainian detention facility. It did not explain how the video had been made, nor address Ndarua's account that he had been asked to record it, and said it would review the footage further.

Scammers targeting families

The families left behind have also been victims of attempts to exploit them. The International Committee of the Red Cross warned JFJ that scammers have posed as Red Cross staff and extracted money from desperate relatives of prisoners of war and the missing, offering false confirmations of life, fraudulent repatriation services, or supposed bribery payments to Russian or Ukrainian officials.[122] The scam economy has thrived in the vacuum left by African governments' failure to establish official channels of information for affected families. Where institutions have not stepped forward, fraudsters have.

Coffin money – Kenya's compensation industry

A shadowy network of intermediaries is offering compensation and the return of bodies to Kenyan families desperately searching for relatives drawn into Russia's war. The government has yet to explain who qualifies, how the claims work, or whom the families can trust.

JFJ has found that the information vacuum around missing and dead recruits has left their families desperate. Government officials and recruitment agents have been exploiting this. Private Russian intermediaries have approached the Kenyan families of dead recruits with offers to pursue Russian death compensation (collo-

122 Interview with ICRC.

quially called "coffin money"). Relatives have been offered up to US$150,000 within 60 to 90 days in return for commissions of as much as 30 per cent. Families have been asked for passports, birth certificates, DNA, and other sensitive documents, but have not been shown any verifiable mandates, claim forms, registered offices, or clear payment channels. While the recruitment chain profited from these men while they were alive, the compensation chain seeks to profit from their death.

In all the cases in which the relatives were approached, they were also required to stop any public agitation about the fate of their missing relatives.[123]

The middlemen

Even before Nelly Wambui could confirm whether her son is alive or not, a private Russian intermediary offers to help her collect compensation for his death. Her son is among the roughly 1,000 Kenyans whom National Assembly Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wah said had been recruited to fight for Russia, citing information from the National Intelligence Service. Wambui says her son was promised civilian work but instead ended up fighting in Russia's war against Ukraine. Wambui last heard from him in November 2025. Since then, she says, neither the Kenyan nor the Russian authorities have provided reliable confirmation of his whereabouts or status.

The Russian intermediary, known only as Alexey or Alex, claimed he could secure as much as US$150,000 (about KSh19.4 million) per family within 60 to 90 days. His fee was 30 per cent. At this rate, Alex would receive US$45,000 (about KSh5.8 million) per claim before additional costs for lawyers, travel, or the return of a body. With about 100 affected families in Nairobi, Alex could stand to earn as much as US$4.5 million (Ksh582 million) in commissions, assuming each claim reached the maximum amount and every family used his services.

Alex and his associates already have the names of the people identified as next of kin from the recruits' military contracts and are contacting them, assembling a group of potential beneficiaries to pursue compensation. Alex is a largely anonymous figure. None of the family members interviewed say they have seen his face. During the last Zoom call held on the afternoon of 18 June 2026 and attended by several affected families, Alex kept his camera off, even as he asked relatives to surrender sensitive records. From the very start, the families have been asking Alex for any official communication from Russia's Defence Ministry or military confirming their eligibility for compensation and how to file a claim – yet he has produced none. Nor has he produced an official letter authorising him to act on behalf of the Russian government or military, a registered business address or verifiable credentials for the Moscow lawyer whom he claimed would handle the cases.

Kelvin Ochieng is the Kenyan intermediary working with Alex. He serves as the local point of contact and communicates with families in Kiswahili and Sheng, describing himself on Facebook as the national youth leader of the Mabadiliko Party of Kenya. A Kenyan woman identified only as Winnie is also said to be working with them behind the scenes, although her precise role remains unclear.

In a phone interview on 1 August, 2026, after being contacted for comment, Ochieng said he did not seek to profit from the proposed compensation arrangement. "I'm only trying to help," he said.

"The only part I'm playing is that these are families who had reached out and maybe I had a network that could help." He said any payment would go to Alex, not to him.

To test how the proposed arrangement is presented to an individual family, our reporter contacted Ochieng on 22 July 2026, posing as a relative of a Kenyan man who had travelled to Russia and stopped communicating. The reporter wanted to find out why Ochieng and Alex were seeking sensitive records from the affected families and discussing substantial payments while providing little verifiable information about themselves, and how families could confirm that the promised compensation process was legitimate. Ochieng spoke confidently as he described Alex as a commander in Russia who could help trace the men and process the compensation claims. "Alex is the one helping us," he said. "He is a commander there, so he has been

123 See Rosemary Tollo, 'Death brokers' of Russian-Ukraine war promise millions to grieving Kenyan families, 9 August 2026, https://nation.africa/kenya/weekly-review/-death-brokers-of-russian-ukraine-war-promise-millions-to-grieving-kenyan-families-5551222#story.

helping us know the people who are there and helping in the compensation process." Ochieng did not provide Alex's full name, rank, unit, or official authority to handle compensation claims.

According to Ochieng, the families would be required to provide passports, birth certificates, identification records, and proof of their relationship to the missing men. Ochieng said that the documents were intended to establish a claimant's relationship to the deceased recruit. If they were accepted, he said, the relative could qualify for a visa to travel to Russia. Some relatives would even have to travel to Moscow and stay there for as long as three months and provide DNA samples to help identify their kin's remains. He said Winnie acted as a go-between. Ochieng said Alex, who is based in Russia, would cover the cost of flights and accommodation, while the families would be responsible for preparing and notarising the required documents and paying their own legal fees. The families could hire their own lawyer to represent them during this process.

"Once you have received your funds, you give us our share," Ochieng said. His team in Kenya would take KSh2 million after the money reached the family's bank account. If Alex took the 30 per cent commission described by families, the Kenyan fee would amount to an additional deduction.

But speaking to our reporter, Ochieng gave a different account of Alex's fee, saying he might make a profit of about one per cent after being reimbursed for travel and accommodation. "Even if I wanted a token, how much would they pay me at the end of the day?" Ochieng said. "There's no benefit in somebody's son or relative who has died. So, they'll give the token to Alex while there in Russia. For me, the only thing is just networking with them… I'm only doing my civic duty as a Kenyan in helping them because one way or another, the government has failed us," he added.

"We were lagging behind," Ochieng said. "But in other countries, Alex has taken so many people. That's why I got the connection and I said, 'No, let me chip in and help my people here on the ground so that they can benefit.'"



The questions he fielded were always the same: How can I break my contract? How can I go back home? His answer rarely changed: "Once you sign, it's finished."

Given the financial restrictions affecting Russia institutions, neither Ochieng nor Alex identified the Russian institution that would release the compensation, nor the payment channel through which it would reach Kenya. Given that Kenyan recruits who travelled to Russia often struggled to access the money they were paid and were coerced into handing over power of attorney, the question remains whether any families travelling to Moscow to process compensation payments would ever have control over the money.

Ochieng said the first group of Kenyan claimants could begin travelling in August because many families had already submitted their documents. "So far, we are trying to push our first candidate to see if he can get the compensation from Russia," he said. "His son was taken there, and it has been nearly a year."

Ochieng also said relatives who travelled to Russia might be able to recover the bodies of family members. "Most of these bodies are somewhere in the military morgue," he said. "Once they get there and a DNA sample has been done, it's easy for them to identify the body which is there. Then they help you on how the body can be flown to Kenya."

Asked whether this meant there was an official process for compensation and repatriating bodies, Ochieng said there might be, but asserted that the Kenyan government did not want to make it public. "The Kenyan government doesn't want to help Kenyans," he said. "But if you do your investigation in other countries, you'll find that [their citizens] are getting benefits."

"If you do your analysis well, you'll realise that the Kenyan government is not interested," he added.

Sri Lankan media reported in April 2026 that Russia had agreed to begin procedures to compensate the families of Sri Lankan nationals who died while serving in its military.

Ochieng also said that for a fee his group could arrange the release of a Kenyan held as a POW in Ukraine. He first quoted a fee of KSh1 million. He later referred to a current case that he said would cost KSh3.2 million, without identifying the prisoner involved.

A list provided to the investigative team by Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War identifies five Kenyans in Ukrainian custody: Evans Kibet, Willy Muniu Macharia, Joseph Kabuga, Francis Ndarua, and Aaron Pachenje. Ochieng did not identify the prisoner he said he could help release. "Through the armed networks, the people we work with know one another," he said. "There is someone who knows the commander and tells him: 'This man came from Kenya. This is what the family can pay for his release so that he can return home'."

Since 2022, Ukraine's prisoner exchanges have been handled through state institutions, led by the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Ukrainian officials have also publicly warned families against sharing personal information with unauthorised intermediaries or paying to secure a place on an exchange list.

Alex and Ochieng are not the only ones offering families a private route to information about their kin's whereabouts and possible compensation for their loss. In communications reviewed by JFJ, Festus Arasa Omwamba offered to connect a representative of several affected families with people he said could help them obtain information about their relatives and pursue compensation. Omwamba already has a case pending in the Kahawa Chief Magistrate's Court, in which he has been charged with trafficking 25 Kenyans to Russia through deceptive job offers.[124] He has pleaded not guilty and was, on 24 March 2026, released on a KSh5 million bond. The court ordered him to surrender his travel documents and barred him from leaving Kenya while the case is pending. Omwamba did not respond to questions from JFJ about his role in the discussions with the family representative, the basis for the compensation process he described, whether he had been authorised to assist with such claims, or whether he stood to receive any payment or other financial benefit.

For a man facing criminal charges linked to the fraudulent recruitment of Kenyans to join the Russian military, Omwamba did not appear to see the irony of seeking to position himself between the families of those adversely affected by his activities and unnamed contacts he claimed could provide faster access to information and compensation.

His legal problems seemed not to have deterred him at all, only prompting him to insist that his role remain secret. Speaking at times in English and at times in Sheng, he told the representative: "I want to connect you with a guy who is in the department that handles that thing. Please do not say that I am the one who connected you. If you mention me, the next thing you will hear is that I have disappeared… I am under strict instructions not to speak about these issues," Omwamba said.

He seemed keen to establish the scale of the group. After being told that the group included about 100 families, he asked: "Are they all united?" Omwamba urged the representative to organise the relatives under a chairman and submit their cases collectively. He said doing so could bring the matter to a conclusion and argued that negotiation rather than litigation offered returnees and families a better prospect of obtaining information or payment.

"What is happening now is that the men who went and returned believe they will be paid if they take people to court. That is their biggest mistake. Nobody will pay them. Those people [Russians] prefer diplomacy. What has failed is the attempt to force issues, because they do not like being forced. The returnees should organise themselves and identify who they are. Those whose relatives have not been found should at least obtain records showing who is alive, who has been released and the status of each person." Within two weeks, he said, they could all be "sorted".

124 Criminal Case No. E015 of 2026.

Omwamba did not explain what "sorted" meant – whether it was locating the missing men, opening compensation claims, or arranging for the return of their bodies. "I want to connect you with someone in that department," he said. "You will speak to him directly. He will tell you exactly what to do so that we can help you very, very quickly." Omwamba said relatives would have to travel to Russia to complete the process. "You have to go there," he said repeatedly. "You all have to go."

When the representative asked why the families could not rely on the process being handled by Kenya's Department of Diaspora Affairs, Omwamba questioned whether the official route had produced any results. "Have you seen anyone who has actually been paid?" he asked. He presented his own contact, a man named Sasha, as the faster alternative. "I don't want anyone to broker this. I want you to do it directly. It could pay thirteen million shillings," he said.

In a subsequent call with the family representative, Sasha said the compensation would be transferred through cryptocurrency because it was "the only possible way".

Omwamba also discouraged public scrutiny and emphasised the need for discretion, saying media coverage had made it harder to secure cooperation. He suggested that the Russian authorities did not want to be publicly associated with the recruitment of foreign fighters.

"They don't want to take liability," he said. "The men who went and returned believe they will be paid if they take people to court; that is their biggest mistake. Nobody will pay them... Do not allow this process to pass through a law firm. You will be badly exploited," he said.

At one point, he referred cryptically to an unspecified operation: "This thing was structured," he said. But he did not explain what had been structured, by whom, or for what purpose.

Omwamba also said it was "a very big mistake" to blame the Kenyan government for what had happened. "Because the government didn't send those people. Even if you try to prove that someone in the government sent someone, you can't. You cannot prove it."

Moments later, however, Omwamba described what he said had been direct communication between Kenyan defence officials and families in the early stages of the recruitment. "When this thing started, our government's Department of Defence used to make calls," he said. "They would tell them, 'I'm calling you from the camp here. Your relative so-and-so came here and has fallen.' That's how it was." He said Russian officials had initially shown "goodwill," but that the communication stopped once the issue began receiving media attention.

Omwamba then offered a darker assessment of the forces surrounding the families' search for information and compensation. He said the fate of missing recruits had become entangled with money and politics, and powers far greater than their own. "You need to understand that nobody cares that your relative went there and disappeared," he said. "People are calculating how they can get that money. We are heading into a campaign period."

A new intermediary who identified himself as Igor approached several families whose relatives died in Russia, saying he represented Nasha Derzhava, a Moscow company, and could help secure compensation from the Russian government. Communicating from a Kenyan number, he said each family could receive between KSh10 and KSh15 million, with no upfront payment, after signing documents at the Russian embassy in Nairobi authorising the company to act on its behalf. He said the money would be paid within three to four months and assured the families: "This is not a scam."

Nasha Derzhava's public website primarily advertises travel and concierge services, and JFJ found no public indication that it was authorised to handle compensation claims for foreign military recruits. Calls to the Kenyan number went unanswered.

No answers from Nairobi

These private approaches have gained purchase thanks to the vacuum left by the Kenyan government's failure to provide the families with timely and reliable information about their relatives' fate. At a closed-door meeting on 14 July 2026, Roseline Njogu, Principal Secretary for Diaspora Affairs, acknowledged that officials had not responded adequately to the families' enquiries. She said Kenya was still depending on Moscow to confirm whether individual recruits were alive, injured, detained, missing, or dead.

"We can only give you information based on what the Russian government tells us," she said.

She also confirmed that an official compensation process had begun for some families, even though the government had not published any clear rules or timelines.

"A number of you have received letters from the ministry stating that your relative was probably killed in action and asking you to submit documents for compensation," the Principal Secretary said. "If you received that letter, the claim is already being processed."

Rules governing payments to military families in Russia require documentary confirmation of death or, in cases involving a missing serviceman, a court decision recognising the person as missing or declaring him dead. They also require records establishing the claimant's relationship to the serviceman.

Russia also introduced an expedited court process in 2023 in which a person who disappeared under circumstances suggesting death may be declared dead after six months without information. A person already recognised by a court as missing may be declared dead three months after that ruling. The process still requires a legal application to a court and supporting evidence about the disappearance.

iStories, an independent Russian investigation outlet, estimated that courts declared 921 military personnel missing in Ukraine legally dead during the first two years of the war. It was common for relatives to tell courts that they needed the ruling to obtain Defence Ministry payments, pensions, or inheritance rights. In one case, a Russian family said it had been denied payments without a death certificate. The existing rules do not identify "probably killed in action" as a final legal status that, on its own, guarantees payment.

Njogu did not clarify whether the letters the Kenyan families had received from her office represented only the preliminary collection of documents or whether compensation could be approved before their deaths were legally established. Officials also declined to provide the families with copies of the original communications received from the Russian authorities on which the compensation notifications were based. The ministry also did not disclose the criteria used to select the families to get compensation, or what evidence was used to assess their cases.

Like some of the private intermediaries claiming to offer links to information and compensation, Njogu also urged the families to keep the journalists out of the process. "When you come to seek assistance, it is important that you leave the media outside," she said. "When people hear that you have come with the media to expose them, nobody will help you."

Peter Kamau, a spokesperson for the affected families in Nairobi, said the meeting focused on explaining the government's position rather than addressing the concerns raised by the families. "Going forward, the families remain committed to constructive engagement," Kamau said. "We will continue pursuing every available avenue, including the public petition placed before the Senate by Senator Edwin Sifuna, to ensure that justice is served for all affected families."

Without a publicly announced official decision and communication from Russia's Defence Ministry or the government of Kenya, a family might never know the full value of its claim. It might know only the figure disclosed by the intermediary and the deductions said to have been incurred.

Elsewhere, governments have taken a more active role in helping families navigate the same problems. India has taken a more direct approach. On 31 July 2026, the country's Supreme Court ordered the Ministry of External Affairs to appoint an official to assist the families of those who had been killed, injured, or gone missing after joining the Russian military. The court also directed the government to help them pursue compensation through the Russian embassy, facilitate DNA matching to identify bodies, and assist with repatriation. The intervention stands in contrast to the experience of many Kenyan families.

Nelly Wambui is still in the dark about her son's wellbeing. The Kenyan government has yet to give her a definitive answer.

Note: Nelly Wambui is a pseudonym. Her identity has been withheld because she fears that speaking publicly could jeopardise efforts to obtain information or assistance concerning her son.

PART IV THE CONTINENTAL EVIDENCE

7 HOW THE PIPELINE SPREAD ACROSS AFRICA

The preceding chapters traced how the recruitment system works from the inside: how candidates were found, how they were moved, what happened to them on arrival, and what happened to them on the frontline. This chapter turns to the system's geography. It documents how the pipeline spread across the African continent between October 2022 and mid-2026, adapting its methods to local conditions as it moved from country to country, exploiting whatever institutional infrastructure each environment made available.

This is a story of sequential adaptation. The recruitment model evolved through distinct phases, each defined by the institutional channel it exploited: prisons, then student populations, then licensed employment agencies, then military networks, then corporate structures, and finally political facilitation. Each phase produced a country-level variant of the pipeline the reader has already encountered. Taken together, they confirm a continental pattern: a single system, operating through local variations, producing the same outcome in every case.

The country studies that follow account for the largest documented contingents, which together represent more than three quarters of the 3,034 identified cases. They are organised not by size of cohort but by the evolution of the recruitment method each country exemplifies. The figures within each section establish the documented minimum level of recruitment in each country.

A. Prison recruitment: The origin

Zambia and Tanzania

Recruitment in Zambia and Tanzania began in the prisons. The deaths of Lemekhani Nyirenda and Nemes Tarimo – the earliest documented African fatalities of Russia's war in Ukraine, introduced in Chapter 1 – established what this report terms the prison-to-frontline template. [125] Both were students, neither had military experience, and both were recruited by the Wagner Group from Russian prisons in August 2022 and killed within weeks of deployment. Their cases defined the basic mechanics of a system that would, within three years, reach across the continent.

What their cases also exposed, and what this chapter draws out, is a recurring failure by national authorities to protect their citizens as the recruitment pipelines developed. Nyirenda had been sponsored by the Zambian government to study in Russia. He was convicted, imprisoned, pardoned, recruited, deployed, and killed on foreign soil: what responsibility did the Zambian authorities have to monitor his welfare, establish how he entered military service, and intervene once he was sent to the front?

The episode is not simply a case of consular negligence, but a case in which every institution that might have intervened – the sponsoring government, the embassy, the prison system, the military contractor – failed in sequence, and the information about that failure flowed in one direction only: from Russia to Zambia, after death.

125 See Chapter 1 for full details on Nyirenda and Tarimo, as well as information on the prison-to-frontline template.

Tanzania's response to Tarimo's death was notable for its directness. Foreign Affairs Minister Stergomena Tax confirmed his death publicly and reminded citizens that Tanzanian law prohibits enlistment in any foreign military. The statement stands as one of the earliest formal acknowledgements by any African government that citizens were being recruited into the Russian military. Zambia's response, however, which was routed through diplomatic backchannels rather than public intervention, reflected a different instinct: manage the information rather than confront its implications. Most governments, when they responded at all to the recruitment of African nationals, chose Zambia's model over Tanzania's.

Nyirenda and Tarimo were not recruited because they were African but because they were in Russian prisons when Prigozhin's recruitment drive reached them. The template their cases established – the exploitation of captive populations, the binding power of contracts signed under duress or ignorance, and the absence of any protective intervention by the states responsible for these men – would prove foundational as every subsequent phase of recruitment built on it.

B. Student and prison exploitation

Egypt – 407 identified cases



Reports from early 2024 described the deployment of mixed battalions in the Donetsk region, specifically near Soledar, that included Egyptian nationals.

Egypt represents the first major expansion beyond the prison-to-frontline template, and it did so by operating on two tracks simultaneously. The first targeted Egypt's large student population in Russia. The second continued the prison model that had consumed Nyirenda and Tarimo.

Russia has long attracted Egyptian students through relatively affordable tuition and relaxed admissions requirements. Official estimates from 2023 placed between 16,000 and 23,000 Egyptian students in Russia. [126] This population constituted a recruitment reservoir of young men already inside Russian territory, already integrated into Russian institutional life, and already in compliance with Russian visa and residency requirements. Recruiters targeted students whose visas had expired or who faced deportation, offering what were described as administrative or logistics positions. In practice, those offers led to combat deployment. The promise was familiar: salaries of up to US$6,000 per month and a pathway to Russian citizenship.

The prison track operated in parallel. Egyptian nationals imprisoned for drug-related offences or for working without proper documentation were offered military contracts in exchange for release or reduced sentences. The dynamic was the same one that had produced Nyirenda and Tarimo, but now operating at a significantly larger scale and targeting a specific national population rather than processing incidental cases.

Reports from early 2024 described the deployment of mixed battalions in the Donetsk region, specifically near Soledar, that included Egyptian nationals. At least 81 Egyptian deaths have been confirmed through convergent reporting from Egyptian media and open-source investigations, with unofficial estimates running higher.[127] Egyptians captured in Donetsk include Mohamed Salah, whose role as an interpreter inside a mixed foreign-recruit unit translating orders under fire between Russian, Arabic, English, and French is examined in Chapter 5.

The response of the government of Egypt was among the most assertive of any African state. In March 2025, it introduced mandatory security clearance for citizens aged 18 to 35 seeking to travel to either Russia or Ukraine, an administrative intervention that directly targeted the demographic profile of recruits. In April 2025, the Interior Ministry went further, formally revoking the nationality of an Egyptian citizen who had joined the Russian military under Law No. 26 of 1975, which prohibits citizens from acquiring foreign citi-

126 On the Egyptian student population in Russia in 2023 (estimated 16,000 to 23,000), see Russian Ministry of Education statistics and Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education statements.

127 JFJ has cross-validated these figures against Ukrainian military intelligence data.

zenship or enlisting in a foreign military without prior authorisation. This appears to be the first documented case of an African government revoking citizenship in connection with participation in the conflict.[128] The action was punitive rather than protective, but it signalled a willingness to treat the issue as a matter of national law rather than diplomatic inconvenience.

The Egyptian variant reveals the system's capacity to exploit multiple institutional channels within a single country. The student pipeline and the prison pipeline operated in parallel, drawing from different populations through different mechanisms but feeding into the same military apparatus. The model was no longer just opportunistic recruitment from prisons – it had learned to identify and exploit structured populations of vulnerable men.

C. Growth in the recruitment pipeline

Kenya – 841 identified cases

Kenya accounts for the largest documented contingent in JFJ's data and the most thoroughly documented recruitment pipeline in this report. The Kenyan case represents the system's most significant structural evolution: the infiltration of licensed employment agencies operating within a government-sponsored labour export programme. Where the Egyptian variant exploited existing student and prison populations inside Russia, the Kenyan variant built a pipeline that began at home, passed through legitimate institutional channels, and delivered men to the Russian military through a process designed to appear lawful at every stage.



In February, a batch of 15 men on a single day marked the first evidence of organised, large-scale recruitment. From March through June, an average of eight men per month indicated steady mid-level processing.

Parts II and III of this report traced the Kenyan pipeline in detail: the role of Global Face Human Resources Limited, the contracts that did not name Russia or the Russian military, the safe houses in Nairobi, the batch departures through Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, the arrival process at Promsvyazbank, the second contract in Cyrillic, the confiscation of passports, and the deployment to the frontline. What follows is the quantitative evidence that confirms the pipeline's scale, trajectory, and institutional embeddedness.

JFJ's analysis of contract data, family testimonies, returnee accounts, and the missing persons register identifies at least 276 named recruits out of the 841 known to have been enlisted. The data spans from October 2024 through December 2025, with a marked acceleration from mid-2025 onward.

The monthly recruitment trend reveals the pipeline's growth. In October through December 2024, two recruits comprised the earliest known signings – a pilot intake that targeted military veterans, with at least one confirmed as a former member of the KDF. January 2025 produced three recruits. In February, a batch of 15 men on a single day marked the first evidence of organised, large-scale recruitment. From March through June, an average of eight men per month indicated steady mid-level processing. July brought 21 recruits across multiple batches on different dates, suggesting parallel processing channels operating simultaneously. After a modest dip in August, September produced 38 recruits – a scale of movement that appears to have triggered the first law enforcement intervention, which disrupted the travel of at least 21 additional men. But the intervention did not halt recruitment. October produced 35, November produced 32, and December was the highest single month with 39 – including a batch of 13 on 29 December, three days after the call Charles Waithaka Wangari made to his mother and could not finish.

The first confirmed Kenyan death was Oscar Khagola Mutoka, a 39-year-old who had departed approximately in June 2025 through the Global Face Human Resources agency. He was killed in combat near

128 On Egypt's March 2025 introduction of mandatory security clearance for citizens aged 18–35 seeking to travel to Russia or Ukraine, and the April 2025 revocation of nationality under Law No. 26 of 1975, see https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250311-egypt-mandates-govt-approval-for-travel-to-russia-ukraine-to-prevent-recruitment-into-war/ and https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/1234/544438/Egypt/Foreign-Affairs/Egypt-revokes-nationality-of-young-man-over-partic.aspx.

Rostov-on-Don on 14 August 2025.[129] By the time Kenya's National Intelligence Service presented its findings to Parliament in February 2026, more than 1,000 Kenyans had been recruited – five times earlier estimates – with 89 on the frontline, 39 hospitalised, 28 missing, and 44 subsequently repatriated.[130] JFJ has confirmed at least 76 Kenyan deaths.

Following public outcry and parliamentary questions, the Kenyan government claimed to have officially de-registered approximately 600 labour recruitment companies. JFJ's review of the formal register of employment agencies tells a more complicated story. As of late March 2026, there were 569 employment agencies registered with the National Employment Authority; a further 786 were recorded as having expired licences. Many companies listed in the Kenyan press as de-registered were never on the NEA's information management system. One company reported as de-registered held a current valid certificate. [131] The register that was supposed to protect Kenyan workers from precisely this kind of exploitation had never functioned as a reliable safeguard.

The Kenyan pipeline is distinctive for how deeply it penetrated local institutions. Recruitment events were held at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre, in the heart of the government district. State officials from immigration, criminal investigation, intelligence, and employment services were identified in parliament as having facilitated the trafficking. The financial scale of the operation – including agency fees as examined in Chapter 4 – confirms that the pipeline was not a marginal criminal enterprise but a substantial commercial undertaking, operating in plain sight, with institutional acquiescence at multiple levels. None of the government officers identified has been prosecuted. The agency's director is being prosecuted under counter-trafficking laws, but not under Section 68 of the Penal Code, which specifically prohibits and punishes foreign enlistment as a felony. The distinction matters: it is the difference between treating the case as an aberration and treating it as what it was.

Ghana – 337 identified cases

The Ghanaian pipeline shares the Kenyan variant's reliance on employment intermediaries but differs from it in one critical respect: Ghanaian recruits paid their own way.

The earliest documented Ghanaian recruitment began in 2022, during the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. JFJ has information that a prominent Ghanaian businessman met an Indian national representing the Russian Ministry of Defence at the event, and together they subsequently facilitated the trafficking of 20 Ghanaians. [132] This places the beginning of the Ghanaian recruitment within the international circuit of commercial and sporting events where intermediaries and state representatives mingle – a reminder that the pipeline's architects did not confine themselves to a single recruitment strategy.

Ukrainian data on signed enlistment contracts shows Ghanaian recruitment ramping up steadily between June 2023 and December 2025. In 2023 and 2024, 68 Ghanaians were recruited. By 2025, that figure had risen to 269 – a nearly fourfold increase.[133] Recruitment has been consistently aggressive, with brokers providing supporting documents for visa applications and business and tourist visas issued by the Russian embassy in Accra.

Most Ghanaian recruits travelled through Togo to obscure their journey's purpose. The routing through a third country served a dual function: it distanced the act of departure from the act of arrival, and it reduced the likelihood of interception by Ghanaian authorities. Several fighters interviewed by JFJ described nearly identical arrival arrangements in Russia involving the same agent and his wife: airport pickups by the woman, temporary housing shared with other Ghanaians, and eventual trips to military recruitment centres.

129 Mutoka is the first confirmed Kenyan death in JFJ's record.
130 Kenya National Intelligence Service report to Parliament, February 2026, Recruitments of Kenyans into the Russian Military, National Assembly Hansard, Wednesday, 18th February, 2026 - Afternoon Sitting, page 13 https://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2026-02/The%20Hansard%20-%20Wednesday%2C%2018%20February%202026%20%28P%29.pdf.
131 JFJ review of the National Employment Authority's information management system register accessible online at https://neaims.go.ke.
132 JFJ field investigation in Ghana.
133 Calculated by JFJ from Ukrainian military intelligence data on signed enlistment contracts, June 2023 – December 2025.

Unlike Kenyan recruits, Ghanaians paid their own visa and travel fees upfront. This made them less dependent on agency infrastructure but also meant that recruits had a direct financial stake in completing the journey – having already invested money they could not recover, the pressure to proceed with whatever awaited them in Russia was compounded by the sunk cost of their own investment. Under the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1961, Ghanaian citizens joining foreign militaries without presidential permission face prosecution as a first degree felony.



Russian contracts offered a US$2,000 signing bonus and at least US$2,000 monthly, along with the promise of a Russian passport.

D. Military network desertion

Cameroon – 383 identified cases

The Cameroonian pipeline is set apart from every other African case by a single feature: it drew substantially from within Cameroon's own active-duty military. Where the Kenyan and Ghanaian variants recruited civilians through employment intermediaries, the Cameroonian variant recruited soldiers through their own professional networks. Serving members of the Cameroonian armed forces deserted to enlist with Russian forces.

The economic incentive is not difficult to understand. A second-class Cameroonian private earns a basic monthly salary of approximately 51,880 Central African francs – equivalent to around US$85 – after two years of service. Deployment in an active zone brings an additional CFA90,000 ($148) per month.[134] Russian contracts offered a US$2,000 signing bonus and at least US$2,000 monthly, along with the promise of a Russian passport. The salary differential – roughly US$85 against US$2,000 – is stark enough to explain the movement without recourse to any other variable. For soldiers already trained, already habituated to military discipline, and already earning poverty wages in a country with active internal conflicts, the Russian offer represented significantly more money for work they already knew how to do.

JFJ's analysis of Cameroonian contracts, spanning September 2023 through December 2025, identifies 372 men with documented enlistment records, largely processed in batches of five. The wider figure of 383 includes individuals identified through Ukrainian military intelligence sources but for whom JFJ has not obtained individual contract records.[135] Between November 2023 and June 2024, recruitment averaged eight to nine men a month. By July 2024, that rate had risen to 18 a month, reaching a peak of 36 recruits in January 2025 before tapering over the following months. The batch processing and steady escalation confirm a structured operation, not a series of individual decisions.

In March 2025, Cameroonian Defence Minister Joseph Beti Assomo issued an internal classified directive to commanding officers, instructing them to take strict emergency measures to prevent further desertions and banning all uniformed personnel from travelling abroad without ministerial authorisation. [136] The document constituted the first formal acknowledgement by any Cameroonian state institution of the scale of the problem. But it was classified, and the government declined to discuss the matter publicly.

Public acknowledgement came a year later. On 7 April 2026, Cameroon's Ministry of External Relations published the names of 16 Cameroonian nationals killed while serving with Russian forces in Ukraine. [137] It was the first time the government had publicly confirmed the deaths of its citizens in the conflict. But the number it acknowledged and the number Ukraine has documented are very different. Ukrainian data records 104 Cameroonian deaths – six and a half times the figure of 16 that Cameroon made public. The gap between 16 and 104 is not a rounding-off error but indicative of the government's reluctance to acknowledge the scale of the problem.

134 See Grave risks for Cameroon as soldiers desert to fight in Ukraine, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/grave-risks-for-cameroon-as-soldiers-desert-to-fight-in-ukraine.
135 JFJ analysis of Cameroonian contracts, see note 84. The 372 / 383 distinction reflects the difference between cases with individual contract documentation in JFJ's possession and the wider Ukrainian intelligence figure.
136 Op. cit. Grave risks for Cameroon as soldiers desert to fight in Ukraine.
137 See https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvg0v5gy01go for the circumstances surrounding this revelation.

E. Corporate structures

Uganda – 108 identified cases

Uganda presents a layered recruitment picture that combines the civilian deception common to the East African cases with a distinct corporate recruitment structure. In Kenya, recruitment was channelled through licensed employment agencies exploiting a government labour export programme. In Uganda, it operated through a corporate entity: a recruitment structure operating under the name Magnit.

On 12 August 2025, Ugandan authorities intercepted nine men at Entebbe International Airport before they were due to board flights to Moscow. Local media reported that their travel had been arranged under the cover of high-paying security jobs. Intelligence indicated that Moscow was a transit point, with the final destination being the Ukrainian theatre of operations. A Russian national identified as the lead coordinator of the Magnit recruitment operation was arrested. He was subsequently released.[138] JFJ understands that the investigation into that arrest has not progressed.



Daily Monitor broke the story of Ugandan recruits to the public. They published videos showing stranded Ugandan recruits in snow-covered forests being called "disposable" by Russian personnel.

The most extensively documented Ugandan case in JFJ's data is that of Akantorana Richard, born 1982, who describes being approached on the streets of Kampala by a recruiter promising supermarket work, factory employment, or airport security positions in Russia earning US$1,000 to US$2,300 a month – roughly 100 times his earnings back home of around 50,000 Ugandan shillings a month. [139] Akantorana secured a loan from a savings cooperative to finance his travel. On arrival in Russia, armed men told him that he and others in his group were joining the Russian military. When they refused, they were forced to sign contracts at gunpoint. He was held in an underground facility, escaped at night, and ran until he reached a Ukrainian military checkpoint near Lyman in the Donetsk region. He surrendered to the 63rd Mechanised Brigade and has been held as a POW since.

Major investigative reports by global outlets like AFP[140] and regional media like the *Daily Monitor*[141] broke the story of Ugandan recruits to the public. They published videos showing stranded Ugandan recruits in snow-covered forests being called "disposable" by Russian personnel. Rather than publicly condemning or formally acknowledging the fact of the recruitment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs actively maintained public diplomacy with Moscow. In February 2026, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Henry Okello Oryem hosted Russian Ambassador Vladlen Semivolos to quietly discuss "topical issues of bilateral cooperation".[142] The Ugandan government has trodden very lightly on this issue due to deep-rooted military and economic commitments with Russia. While local media and security agencies exposed the fake employment pipeline in February 2026, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs avoided making a sweeping, official diplomatic admission that could strain ties with Moscow. As such, Uganda remains targeted by a separate recruitment channel with implications that extend beyond the immediate pipeline. The Alabuga Start programme, promoted to young African women as an employment and training opportunity, offered positions at Russia's Alabuga Special Economic Zone in Tatarstan. The zone hosts drone production facilities. Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sport shared promotional materials for the programme on official channels, and officials held recruiting events in the country. Reports from Alabuga's own Telegram messaging group indicate that recruiters attempted outreach at orphanages.[143] The targeting of orphanages for recruitment into facilities connected to weapons production represents a qualitative escalation in the exploitation documented in this report.

138 On the 12 August 2025 interception at Entebbe International Airport see https://plusnews.ug/ugandans-intercepted-at-entebbe-in-suspected-eu-ukraine-military-recruitment-plot/

139 JFJ interview with Akantorana Richard.

140 See https://www.africanews.com/2026/02/13/ugandans-lured-to-fight-for-russia-in-ukraine-reports-say/#:~:text=A%20video%20posted%20online%20last,them%20%E2%80%9Cdisposable.%E2%80%9D.

141 See https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/-africans-pay-the-price-as-russia-ukraine-war-enters-fifth-year-5369890#:~:text=February%2024,%202026,,battlefields%20of%20Europe.

142 On the meeting of the Russian ambassador with the Foreign Affairs minister of Uganda, 18 February 2026, https://mid.ru/en/maps/ug/2081440/.

143 On the Alabuga Start programme and Ugandan government involvement, see "Uganda moves to regularise girls' work scheme in Russia" https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/uganda-moves-to-regularise-girls-work-scheme-in-russia-5410894.



Nigeria's Foreign Ministry issued a statement on 15 February 2026 expressing "grave concern" about the recruitment of its nationals. It announced no repatriation mechanism.

Nigeria – 214 identified cases

Nigeria has been relatively muted in its response to the recruitment of its citizens despite at least 214 Nigerians having been identified in Russian military service. Ukrainian intelligence has confirmed two Nigerian deaths: Hamzat Kazeen Kolawole, 42, and Mbah Stephen Udoka, 37, both killed in a drone strike in Luhansk Oblast in November 2025.[144]

Udoka's case contains a data point examined in Chapter 5: the shortest documented interval from contract to combat deployment of any African case on record. He signed his contract on 28 September 2025 and was on the frontline five days later. A third Nigerian, Bankole Manchi, was wounded and released a video testimony about forced recruitment before going missing.

Nigeria is also connected to the Alabuga Start programme. In 2022, Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education reportedly shared Alabuga Start promotional materials before the programme's military links became widely public.[145] As with Uganda, the official government ministry distributing recruitment materials for a programme connected to weapons production raises questions about the vetting processes applied to foreign employment and training opportunities promoted through state channels.

Nigeria's Foreign Ministry issued a statement on 15 February 2026 expressing "grave concern" about the recruitment of its nationals. It announced no repatriation mechanism. [146]

F. Political facilitation

South Africa – 69 identified cases

The South African case introduced a recruitment mechanism that had not appeared in any other country: direct facilitation by an elected political figure. Where other pipelines operated through employment agencies, corporate structures, military networks, or informal brokers, the most prominent South African cohort was organised by a then-sitting member of parliament.

On 8 July 2025, 22 recruits, including two Botswanan citizens, travelled to Russia alongside Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla, a member of parliament for the MK Party and daughter of former President Jacob Zuma.[147] On 11 July, 17 members of the group were made to sign infantry contracts written in Russian and deployed to Donetsk. The remaining members of the group, including former President Nelson Mandela's grandson Andile Mandela, returned to South Africa with Zuma-Sambudla.

The timeline from recruitment to deployment followed the compressed pattern documented elsewhere in this report: men promised training as bodyguards found themselves signing military contracts within days of arrival and deployed to an active frontline shortly after. But the involvement of a parliamentarian added a dimension not present in any other case. Her position lent the arrangement a veneer of legitimacy that no labour broker or corporate entity could match.

Zuma-Sambudla resigned as a member of parliament on 28 November 2025, days after her half-sister Nkosazana Bonganini Zuma-Mncube, opened a criminal case against her and two others over the recruitment of South African men for Russia's war in Ukraine. The case was subsequently referred to the Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation, known as the 'Hawks', whose Crimes Against the State Unit opened a formal investigation into possible human trafficking, fraud and illegal recruitment.[148] The MK Party distanced itself

144 See https://apnews.com/article/nigeria-ukraine-russia-9a20f89354aab509bf68680c0c0b578e.
145 See Scholarship Offer from Alabuga SEZ, March 2022, Federal Ministry of Education website at https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/RUSSIA-2022-SPECIAL-ECONOMIC-ZONE.pdf#:~:text=Alabuga%20Start%20Programme%20which,scholarships%20to%20International%20students.
146 For the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement of 15 February 2026 expressing "grave concern" about the recruitment of Nigerian nationals, see the official Ministry of Foreign Affairs Instagram Account at https://www.instagram.com/p/DUxYxkrCMHd/.
147 Op cit. https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2025/dec/14/south-africans-tricked-fighting-for-russia-ukraine.
148 On Zuma-Sambudla's 28 November 2025 resignation from parliament after her sister opened a criminal case and the Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation (the Hawks) opened a formal investigation, see https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/nov/28/jacob-zuma-daughter-resigns-claims-south-africans-tricked-fight-russia#:~:text=Accusers%20claim%20men,bodyguards%20for%20MK%20party

from the recruitment. The government and law enforcement response to the South African cases, including the head-of-state diplomacy that secured partial repatriations, the Kempton Park prosecution, and the broader legal implications under the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act, are examined in Chapter 8.

The South African variant is significant not for its scale. Its 69 cases are modest by comparison with Kenya or Egypt, but it's important because it demonstrated the pipeline's adaptability. In each country, recruitment was channelled through whatever institutional infrastructure offered the path of least resistance. In South Africa, that path ran through the political system.



The timeline from recruitment to deployment followed the compressed pattern documented elsewhere in this report: men promised training as bodyguards found themselves signing military contracts within days of arrival and deployed to an active front line shortly after.

G. Ongoing expansion into southern and central Africa

The pipeline did not stop at the countries documented above. As of mid-2026, recruitment continues in parts of southern and central Africa, moving into countries where public awareness is lower, political costs are smaller, and the institutional conditions that enabled recruitment elsewhere remain intact.

Sierra Leone – 13 identified cases

Sierra Leone's small, documented contingent includes at least one POW held in Ukraine. The case of Richard Kanu, a long-serving military veteran who signed what he believed was a logistics contract while living as a migrant in St Petersburg, is examined in Chapter 6.[149] His experience sits in the grey area between deception and informed risk: his military background was an asset that the recruiter welcomed. The legal implications of this are discussed in Chapter 10.

Somalia

Somali cases were among the earliest non-prisoner African cases identified, with documented recruitment from 2023. They include Adil Abdullahi Ahmed Mohammed (see Chapter 2), whose Mogadishu-to-Moscow trajectory illustrates the pipeline's capacity to absorb individuals who arrived in Russia independently, outside any organised recruitment channel, and were drawn into military service through a combination of economic desperation and the offer of legal status that no Somali passport could otherwise provide. [150]

The countries not on the stop list

In February 2026, Russia introduced what Kenyan officials described as a "stop list" of countries whose nationals would no longer be eligible for enlistment through the Ministry of Defence. Kenya was explicitly included on the list, along with Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and several other countries where recruitment had generated sustained public and diplomatic pressure.

The restrictions were a response to political pressure from countries where the recruitment had generated sustained public outcry. But its significance lies less in what it closed than in what it left open.

Numerous countries did not appear on the reported 36-country list, including Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Benin.[151] In each of these countries, the same conditions that enabled recruitment elsewhere – high youth unemployment, established migration infrastructure, limited consular protection, and the absence of effective foreign enlistment enforcement – persist. Rather than end foreign recruitment, the restrictions appear to have shifted it toward countries where the political cost of continuing was lower.

149 JFJ interview with Richard Kanu.
150 JFJ interview with Adil Abdullahi Ahmed Mohammed.
151 See Malawi Omitted From Russia's Recruitment 'Blacklist' Despite Safety Concerns, https://allafrica.com/stories/202603040552.html.

JFJ has identified a Kenyan politician who conducted clandestine recruitment in Malawi and subsequently relocated to Uganda, where he is believed to be operating in association with a senior military officer of the Uganda People's Defence Force. The cross-border movement of recruiters into new jurisdictions mirrors the pipeline's own logic: when one channel closes, the system finds another. JFJ is continuing to investigate this network.

As of the date of this report, the conditions that created this system remain in place. The demand for foreign manpower has not diminished. The supply of economically vulnerable young men has not contracted. The institutional weaknesses that enabled recruitment – lax agency oversight, under-resourced consular services, unenforced foreign enlistment laws, and the absence of any continental coordination mechanism – persist across the countries now entering the pipeline's path. The recruitment continues.

The one-way ticket and air routes

African recruits enter Russia by air with flights originating from airports in Africa, the Arabian Gulf, and Turkey. JFJ interviews suggest that the cost of travel varied by country.

Some West African recruits told JFJ they paid for their own transport to Russia, and media reporting has suggested similar patterns in parts of Southern Africa.

In Kenya however, the recruits' travel was paid for by the recruiting agents. The costs, they said, were later recovered from the signing bonus paid after formal enlistment in the Russian military.

Kenyan recruits, however, travelled on a one-way ticket to Russia, which is unconventional.

The recruits were travelling in batches, a pattern that suggested an organised operation rather than isolated individual travel. Many were using tourist visas, with brand-new passports issued within days of travel, sometimes only days before departure, and arrived in Russia in groups travelling with almost no luggage. Immigration and airline officials in Africa, the Arabian Gulf, and Russia all acted against convention in the case of these travellers.

Until these networks were exposed, it was generally accepted that it was not possible travel to Russia from Africa on a one-way ticket with a standard tourist or business visa. Russia enforces highly rigid immigration policies, and both the Russian border control and the airlines serving Russia (such as Emirates or Ethiopian Airlines) ordinarily require proof of an exit plan. Russian tourist visa applications explicitly require "invitation letters" (tourist voucher) that specify exact entry and exit dates. Immigration officials and airline check-in agents expect flight itineraries to mirror those exact dates. The one-way tickets raise questions about how the recruits moved through commercial air routes on tourist visas without any apparent return plans.

Airlines and border authorities had incentives to detect passengers whose documents or stated purpose of travel did not match ordinary tourist travel. Yet the recruits continued to move through departure airports, transit hubs, and Russian points of entry.

The one-way tickets raise a larger question: how did groups of recruits move through commercial air routes on tourist visas, with no apparent return plan, without triggering intervention?

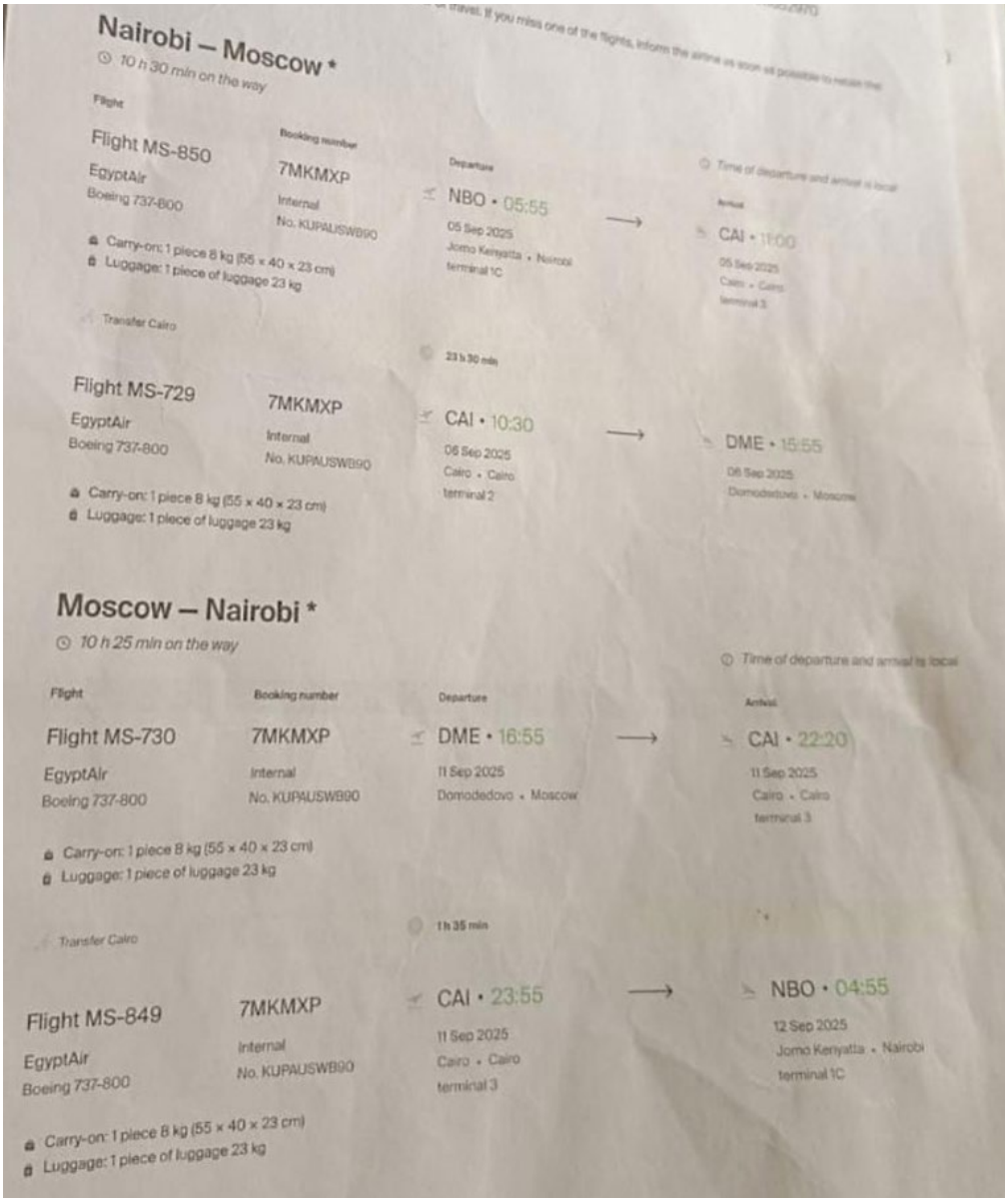
The only exceptions to the one-way ticket rule are for visa types related to long-term or permanent stays. For example, under a work visa if the emigrant has an official long-term employment contract and work permit; under a student visa for moving to Russia for a full degree programme with a university invitation; or if you possess a Russian temporary or permanent residence permit, or a private visa based on close family ties with a Russian citizen. JFJ has not encountered any recruit falling under these exceptions.

What is the significance of the one-way ticket?

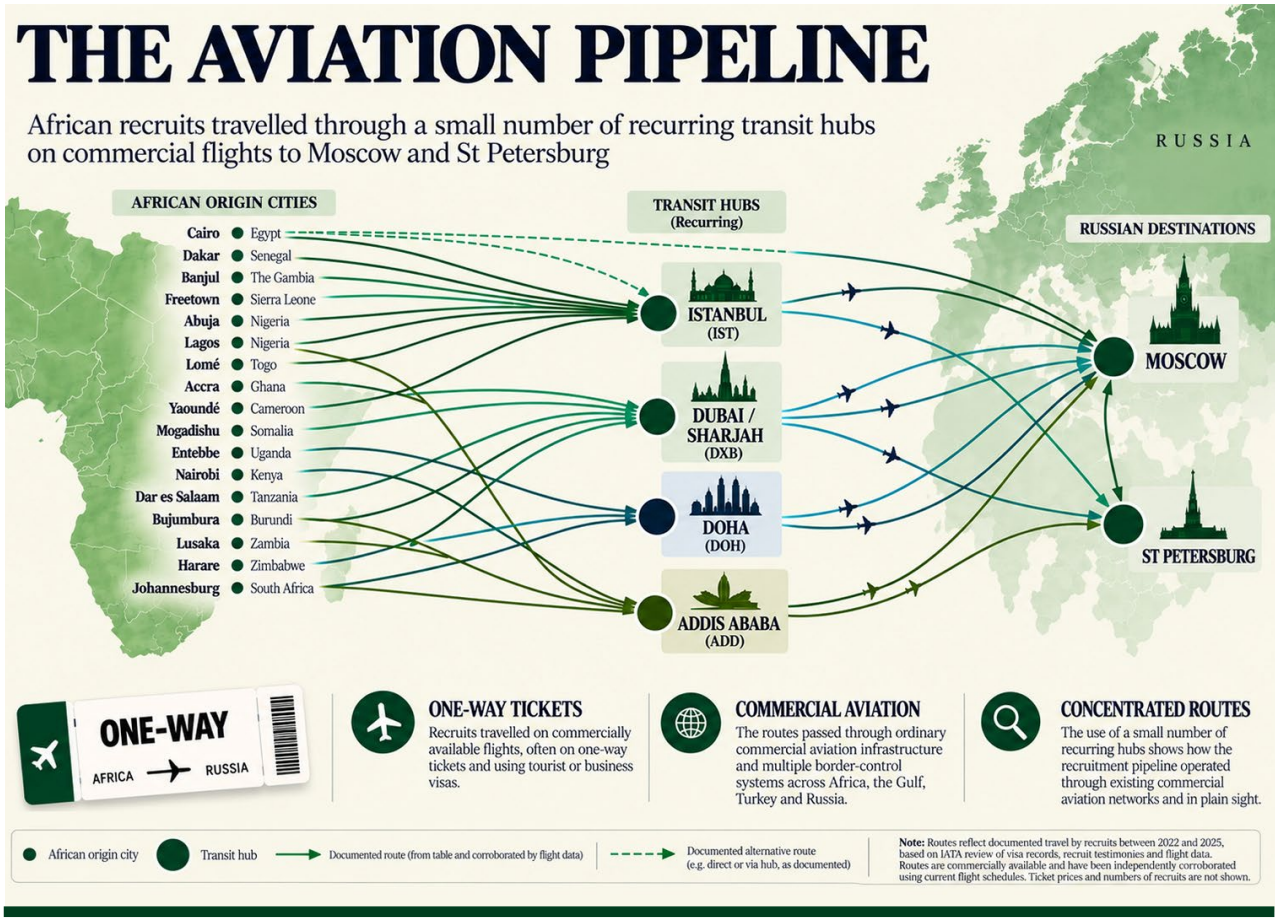
In the recruitment agent's eyes, the one-way ticket was sufficient. The agent would be repaid from the signing fee once the recruit enlisted in Russia. In theory, the recruit would, by the end of his one-year contract, have earned enough to buy himself a one-way ticket back to Africa. The one-way ticket also has evidential or inferential value in establishing official and commercial condonation of the recruitment by Russia of Africans into its military. Even after widespread publicity of mercenary involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war, immigration officials across Africa and the Arabian Gulf allowed odd groups of men to travel to Russia on one-way tickets and tourist visas despite the rules and practice.

Even after growing publicity about foreign fighters in Russia's war against Ukraine, recruits continued to pass through airports in Africa, the Arabian Gulf, and Russia. JFJ's findings point to the need for closer scrutiny of aviation and border control systems, including the role of airline screening, immigration controls, and anti-trafficking desks at airports.

Airlines clearly bent the rules to allow this traffic. An inquiry into the role of peripheral enablers of trafficking in the aviation industry is strongly suggested.



A recruit's EgyptAir flight itinerary.



The above graphic documents the principal air routes used to transport African recruits to Russia between 2022 and 2025.[152] The consistency of the routing – through a small number of Gulf, Turkish and Ethiopian hub cities, on commercially available flights, using tourist and business visas – underscores the degree to which the pipeline operated in plain sight, through ordinary commercial aviation infrastructure, and past the border controls of multiple transit countries.

The reader who has followed the pipeline from its origins in Russian prisons through its expansion into student populations, employment agencies, military networks, corporate structures, and political facilitation now sees its full continental footprint. Each country case is a variation on the same system. The pipeline adapted its methods to local conditions – exploiting prisons in Zambia and Tanzania, students in Egypt, labour agencies in Kenya and Ghana, military desertion in Cameroon, corporate entities in Uganda, and political connections in South Africa but the underlying architecture remained constant: deception or economic coercion at the point of recruitment, loss of agency at the point of arrival, and deployment to the frontline with minimal preparation and no meaningful avenue for withdrawal.

The system was not improvised: it learned, it scaled, and – as of mid-2026 – it continues.

152 Air route graphic compiled by JFJ from visa records, recruit testimonies and flight data.

PART V ACCOUNTABILITY

8 OFFICIAL RESPONSES BY AFRICAN STATES

Bibiana Wangari Waithaka's son called her on 27 December 2025 and could not finish his sentence. She learned of his death through social media. His body was never returned. Those facts opened this report. What has happened since is the subject of this chapter.

After Charles died, Bibiana did what the institutions of her country should have done. She went to the local chief's office, the Diaspora office, and the Directorate of Criminal Investigations. She asked, repeatedly, why the woman who had recruited her son had not been arrested and charged. When no one provided answers, she organised protests with other families of missing and dead recruits in the Russian military. In March 2026, she presented her case before the European Parliament. She filed a formal petition with the Kenyan Parliament the following month. In May 2026, she spoke at a side event of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul.[153]

This is just one mother's journey, from a WhatsApp message to an international accountability claim. Her trajectory poses the question this chapter examines: who failed, and what did families have to do because their governments would not act?

Diplomacy Trumping Citizens' Rights

Across the continent, a pattern has emerged. African governments, confronted with evidence that their citizens were being trafficked into a foreign war, chose diplomacy over protection. They moved to preserve their relationships with Russia rather than confront the system that was consuming their young men. The responses differed in tone and timing but converged on the same outcome: no African government, as of May 2026, has held Russia accountable for the recruitment of its citizens. None has completed a formal prisoner exchange, established a repatriation fund for victims, or prosecuted a government official identified as having facilitated the trafficking.

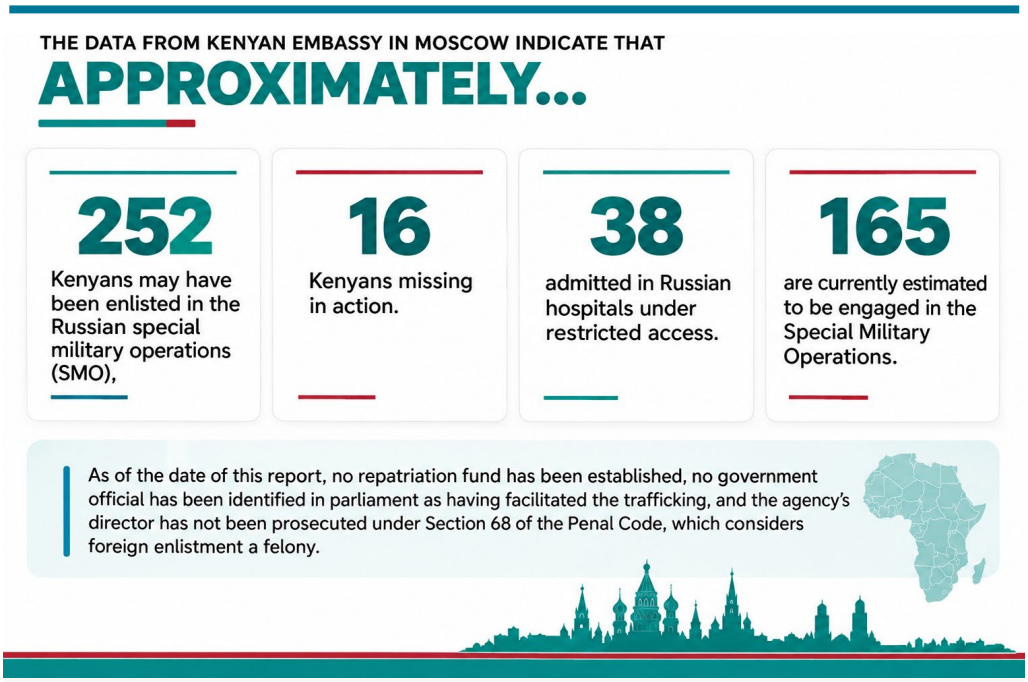
Egypt's response was more assertive than most. India and Nepal, whose citizens were also recruited (see 'The Counterexamples' provided later in this chapter), demonstrated that confronting Russia directly is possible without risking diplomatic rupture. Their examples make the African record not merely disappointing but also indefensible.

Kenya

Kenya's response to the recruitment of its citizens is the most extensively documented in this report, and the most damning. The country that accounts for the largest documented contingent of African recruits – 841 identified cases, with the National Intelligence Service reporting more than 1,000 – produced a government response defined by delay, deflection, and the quiet abandonment of its own people.

Musalia Mudavadi, Kenya's Prime Cabinet Secretary and also responsible for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, made a belated trip to Moscow in March 2026 – months after the alarm was first raised in the second half of 2025, and after sustained public outcry, parliamentary questions, and media investigations had made further inaction untenable. By the time Mudavadi arrived in Moscow, dozens of Kenyans were dead, scores were hospitalised or missing, and hundreds remained deployed on the frontline or trapped in Russian military units with no avenue for departure.

153 See Bibiana Waithaka's appearance before the European Parliament in March 2026, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/events/details/third-country-nationals-forced-to-fight-/20260313CHE13882 and before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul in May 2026, https://alkambatimes.com/kenyan-mother-exposes-sons-death-in-ukraine-war-at-banjul-rights-forum/.



The outcome of that visit was a "stop list" arrangement. Russia agreed that Kenyan nationals would no longer be eligible for enlistment through the Ministry of Defence. As Chapter 1 documented, however, the commitment does not appear to have ended recruitment into private sector enterprises supplying the war effort, including the Alabuga Special Economic Zone's drone production facilities. The distinction between the Ministry of Defence and the private sector that services it is, for a recruit, meaningless.

The contractual trap remained. Both Kenya and Russia agreed that resolution lay in the laws of contract and that neither government would interfere with the terms binding Kenyans to military service. The contracts in question require a tour of duty of at least one year. Kenyans already recruited could not immediately leave the units to which they were assigned. The earliest tours of duty were not expected to end until approximately October 2026. In the meantime, men who had been trafficked into the Russian military through deception and coercion would continue to serve under contracts they had signed in a language they could not read, undersigned with criminal penalties they did not understand, in a war they had not chosen.

On compensation, the government's position was to invoke the same statute it had failed to enforce. Kenya announced its intention to deny compensation claims on behalf of the dead and the wounded by relying on Section 68 of the Penal Code, which criminalises foreign enlistment without presidential authorisation. [154] Between March and July 2026 the Foreign Affairs Minister and the Principal Secretary for Diaspora Affairs invoked the law on at least four occasions.

The government that failed to enforce Section 68 to prevent recruitment, that failed to prosecute the recruiters operating in plain sight at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre, that failed to intercept batches of recruits passing through the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport past counter-trafficking desks and immigration officers – would now invoke the same unenforced statute to deny relief to the victims of its own failure. The legal incoherence of that position is examined in Chapter 10.

Complementary to this, Moscow treats the recruitment as a private contractual matter over which it bears no state responsibility. The two positions – Kenya's invocation of criminal law to deny compensation and Russia's invocation of contract law to deny accountability – interlock to ensure no one is responsible, and no one will pay.

154 Any person who, without the authority of the President in writing, being a citizen of Kenya, quits or goes on board any vessel with a view of quitting Kenya, with intent to accept any commission or engagement in the military, naval, air, police or other armed forces or service of any nature whatsoever of any, foreign state shall, unless he proves to the satisfaction of the court that the commission or engagement concerned was not voluntary, be guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for ten years.

In 2022, Kenya's ambassador to the United Nations told the Security Council that Kenya registered its "strong concern and opposition" to Russia's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states – the fabricated *casus belli* and pretext for the invasion of Ukraine. By April 2026, there had been a notable shift in language: Mudavadi had started using the Russian descriptor for the conflict, calling it a "special military operation."

On April 1, 2026, Mudavadi addressed the Senate Standing Committee on National Security, Defence and Foreign Relations regarding the crisis. In his official statement to the committee, and subsequently published on his official Facebook page, he stated: "The data from our embassy in Moscow indicate that approximately 252 Kenyans may have been enlisted in the Russian special military operations... our embassy in Moscow reported 16 Kenyans missing in action, 38 admitted in Russian hospitals under restricted access, and an estimated 165 currently engaged in the special military operations."[155] The Kenyan government moved from opposing the war's premise to adopting its architect's terminology – terminology that was being used to sanitise the loss of life.

As of the date of this report, no repatriation fund has been established, no government official has been identified in Parliament as having facilitated the trafficking has been prosecuted, and the recruiting agency's director has not been prosecuted under Section 68 of the Penal Code, which considers foreign enlistment a felony.

Ghana

Ghana's Foreign Ministry described the trafficking of its citizens as "youth enlistment" in a statement issued following a technical session with Russia.[156] The language is revealing. "Youth enlistment" implies agency, voluntariness, and a degree of personal responsibility that the evidence does not support. It reframes trafficking as a lifestyle choice. The term appeared in a formal government communication after Ghana had engaged directly with Russia on the issue – meaning that the euphemism was not a careless slip, but a diplomatic formulation adopted in full knowledge of the circumstances.

Ghana's Foreign Affairs Minister, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, subsequently travelled to Ukraine and met two Ghanaian nationals detained as prisoners of war, initiating negotiations for their return. As of July 2026, no formal exchange has taken place. The Ghanaian government has not prosecuted any recruiter under the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1961, which classifies enlistment in a foreign military without presidential permission as a first degree felony.

South Africa

South Africa expressed "heartfelt gratitude" toward Russia for returning some of its nationals, without attributing responsibility to that state for their recruitment.[157] The formulation treats the return of trafficked citizens as a favour rather than an obligation, and the trafficking itself as something that happened to South Africans rather than something that was done to them by, or with the knowledge of, Russian state structures.

The South African case is complicated by the involvement of Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla, a then-sitting member of parliament for the MK Party, who accompanied 22 recruits to Russia in July 2025. The heads-of-state diplomacy that followed – including direct engagement between South African and Russian leadership – secured the return of some nationals. Five individuals were charged at Kempton Park Magistrate's Court under the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act. Zuma-Sambudla resigned from parliament in November 2025 after the Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation opened a formal investigation. But the broader pattern held: diplomatic relations with Russia were preserved, and the government's public posture was one of gratitude rather than accountability.

155 On Kenya's 2022 UN Security Council statement registering "strong concern and opposition" to Russia's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states, see Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations, statement by Ambassador Martin Kimani to the UN Security Council, 21 February 2022, https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/martinkimaniunitednationsrussiaukraine.htm. The shift to the Russian descriptor "Special Military Operation" in 2026 statements is documented at https://www.facebook.com/Mudavadi.Musalia/posts/appeared-before-the-senate-committee-on-national-security-defence-and-foreign-re/1584410666384316/?%22amp%3B_rdr.&_rdc=2&_rdr

156 See press statement of the Ghanaian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 March 2026, at https://www.citinewsroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Foreign-Affairs.jpg.

157 See https://dirco.gov.za/president-ramaphosa-welcomes-return-of-south-african-men-from-russian-frontlines/.

Egypt

Egypt's response stands apart from the continental pattern. In March 2025, the government introduced mandatory security clearance for citizens aged 18 to 35 seeking to travel to Russia or Ukraine – an administrative intervention that directly targeted the demographic profile of recruits. In April 2025, the Interior Ministry revoked the nationality of an Egyptian citizen who had joined the Russian military, Pursuant to Article 16, Paragraph 2 of Egypt Law No. 26 of 1975, which states that an individual can lose their Egyptian citizenship for entering foreign military service without authorisation. Specifically, the clause gives the Cabinet of Ministers the authority to strip citizenship of an Egyptian national who "agrees to enter the military service of a foreign state without prior authorisation from the Minister of War (Defence)."[158] This is the first documented case of an African government revoking citizenship in connection with participation in the conflict.

The Egyptian response was punitive rather than protective. It disciplined the citizen who defied state authority rather than confronting the state whose military apparatus recruited him. The distinction reflects a government exercising sovereign control over its nationals' foreign military affiliations – a posture consistent with Egypt's broader approach to security governance – rather than seeking accountability from Russia for the recruitment system itself. Egypt acted where others did not. But the action was directed inward, at its own people, and the system that produced their recruitment remained unaddressed.

The counter-examples: India and Nepal

The argument that confronting Russia would jeopardise bilateral relations is contradicted by the conduct of India and Nepal.

India confronted Russia directly and repeatedly. A reported 202 Indian citizens were enlisted in Russian military service since 2022, with 26 killed. The Indian government urged Moscow to halt the practice, issued public warnings, submitted formal parliamentary reports on 18 December 2025, and secured 139 repatriations.[159] India's strategic relationship with Russia, spanning defence, energy and diplomacy, remained largely intact.

The relationship survived assertive engagement because both sides recognised that the recruitment of Indian citizens was an aberration to be corrected, not a feature of the partnership to be tolerated.

Nepal publicly warned Russia against the recruitment of Nepalese citizens. The warning was issued without ambiguity and without the diplomatic circumlocution that characterised African responses.

These cases demonstrate that African governments weren't forced to choose between protecting citizens and preserving diplomacy because India proved that the two things were compatible. The African record suggests that governments chose to avoid discomfort, instead choosing to sacrifice their citizens.

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Many of those whose sons were killed, wounded, captured, or remain missing in Russia's war did not wait for their governments to act. Bibiana Waithaka went from the chief's[160] office all the way up to the European Parliament because every institution in between had failed her. Other families organised protests, pooled resources, contacted embassies, petitioned parliaments, and navigated bureaucracies that had no mechanism for addressing what had happened to their children. They did this without legal representation, without government support, and in many cases without knowing whether their relatives were still alive.

158 See https://clr.africanchildforum.org/Legislation%20Per%20Country/Egypt/egypt_nationality_1975_en.pdf.
159 Op cit. https://www.firstpost.com/world/mea-says-139-indians-freed-from-russian-army-two-dozen-still-await-return-14035186.html.
160 A Chief in Kenya is a frontline civil servant who represents the national government at the local community level. The position is part of the National Government Administration Officers (NGAO) framework, operating under the Ministry of Interior and National Administration.

9 INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

The preceding chapter documents the failure of national governments to protect their citizens. The current one records the response of institutions with the mandate to address what national governments will not.

The African Union

As of July 2026, the African Union (AU) has passed no resolution, at the level of its principal political organs, issued no formal statement, and taken no comparable public action on the recruitment of African citizens into Russia's war in Ukraine. More than 3,000 African nationals from 40 countries have been identified in Russian military service. Over 500 are confirmed dead, dozens more are held as prisoners of war, yet the recruitment continues. Meanwhile, the continent's principal multilateral institution has yet to mount a formal political response.

The issue has nevertheless begun to reach the AU's human rights institutions. In May 2026, evidence of Russia's recruitment of Africans was presented at the 87th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul, The Gambia. The commission's chairman, Idrissa Sow, said the issue was new to the body and raised the possibility of an urgent intervention, a resolution, or a formal study. By the end of July, however, none had followed, and the commission's published decisions from its 87th and 88th sessions contained no formal action on the recruitment.[161]

Speaker Moses Wetang'ula further urged the Government to issue an immediate public advisory warning Kenyans that there are no legitimate job opportunities in Russia, and that such offers are a front for recruitment into a war zone. National Assembly Speaker, Hon. Moses Wetang'ula described the matter as grave, noting that more families from across the country had come forward with similar complaints. "I have personally spoken to our Ambassador in Moscow and to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. He insists the Russian government is not involved and that those dying at the frontlines are buried in mass graves," the Speaker told the House.

It cannot be said that the AU lacks the mandate to tackle a challenge like this one. In 2023, the African Commission adopted guiding principles guaranteeing migrants protection from forced labour and a right to "fair and ethical recruitment". The commission has invoked those principles elsewhere: in 2025, addressing abuses of sub-Saharan migrants in Libya, it called on states to prevent trafficking and forced labour and to address the conditions that leave migrants vulnerable to exploitation. No comparable formal intervention has followed over Africans recruited into Russia's war. The organisation was founded, in part, to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of African states and the rights of African peoples. Its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, adopted the 1977 Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa in direct response to the use of mercenaries against African states during the decolonisation period.[162] The recruitment documented in this report – the organised movement of African men into a foreign war through deception, coercion, and the exploitation of economic vulnerability raises many of the same concerns that led to the convention, while also exposing the limits of a legal framework drafted nearly half a century ago.

161 Truth Hounds, 'Truth Hounds and FIDH Presented a Report on Russia's Predatory Recruitment at the Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in The Gambia,' 13 May 2026, https://truth-hounds.org/en/cases/truth-hounds-and-fidh-presented-a-report-in-the-gambia/; African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Final Communique of the 87th Ordinary Session, 20 May 2026, https://achpr.au.int/en/news/final-communiques/2026-05-20/final-communique-87th-ordinary-session.

162 OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, adopted 3 July 1977 in Libreville, entered into force 22 April 1985, https://au.int/en/treaties/convention-elimination-mercenarism-africa. The convention was adopted in response to the use of mercenaries against African states during the decolonisation period; it did not anticipate the recruitment of Africans as mercenaries for deployment in conflicts outside Africa.

The convention does not automatically cover all the cases documented here. Its definition of a mercenary may exclude foreigners formally incorporated into the armed forces of a party to the conflict, while people deceived or trafficked into military service may not meet the requirement that they were motivated to fight primarily by private gain. [163]

The 1977 convention has been the subject of a revision process within the Pan-African Parliament.[164] Its committees examined a zero draft of a revised convention in 2024, and the plenary subsequently adopted a recommendation on the proposed revision.[165] The review presents an opportunity to address a gap in the existing text: the convention was designed to prevent the deployment of mercenaries against African states, but it did not anticipate the recruitment of Africans as mercenaries – or as trafficking victims misclassified as mercenaries for deployment outside Africa. The revised convention should prohibit both. But while the convention is under review, the political will to confront the issue remains uncertain. That silence was particularly notable in July 2026, when African Union Commission Chairman Mahmoud Ali Youssouf met Lavrov in Addis Ababa for high-level consultations. According to the AU's public account, they discussed peace and security, international developments and the expanding Russia-Africa partnership. The account made no mention of the recruitment of Africans into Russia's military, and as of the date of this report, no comparable AU political response has emerged.

The European Union

On 12 March 2026, the European Parliament adopted Resolution 2026/2641(RSP), which condemned "the trafficking and coercive recruitment of foreign nationals into Russia's military service and war-related labour exploitation" and stated that these practices "are grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity."[166]

"the trafficking and coercive recruitment of foreign nationals into Russia's military service and war-related labour exploitation" and stated that these practices "are grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity."

The resolution is the most explicit political condemnation issued by a multilateral institution on the recruitment of African nationals. It names the conduct, identifies the legal categories, and locates the practices within the framework of international criminal law. Bibiana Wangari presented her testimony before the European Parliament in the same month the resolution was adopted.[167] She addressed European legislators about the death of her son in a Russian war because no African institution had provided her with a comparable forum. The Parliament went beyond condemnation. It called on affected governments to investigate recruitment networks, hold facilitators accountable, warn citizens about deceptive Russian employment and education offers, and facilitate the return of those recruited through fraud. It also called on online platforms to identify and remove deceptive recruitment material.

The United Nations

The United Nations has not issued a specific resolution or statement addressing the recruitment of African citizens into Russia's war. In early 2022, UNHCR condemned the discrimination African civilians faced while fleeing the invasion – barred from trains, turned away at borders.[168] But it did not anticipate the system that drew Africans into the war.

163 OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, art. 1. The definition includes requirements concerning motivation by private gain and whether the person is a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; see https://au.int/en/treaties/convention-elimination-mercenarism-africa.

164 On the ongoing Pan-African Parliament review of the 1977 OAU Convention on Mercenarism, see https://pap.au.int/en/news/press-releases/2024-06-27/pan-african-parliament-committees-delve-revised-oau-convention.

165 African Union, 'Pan-African Parliament Committees delve into Revised OAU Convention for Eliminating Mercenaries in Africa,' 29 June 2024, https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20240629/pan-african-parliament-committees-delve-revised-oau-convention-eliminating; Pan-African Parliament, Recommendation on the Zero Draft of the Revised OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, July 2024. 166

166 Op cit. European Parliament Resolution 2026/2641(RSP) of 12 March 2026 https://oeil.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2026/2641(RSP).

167 Op cit. Bibiana Waithaka European Parliament testimony, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/events/details/third-country-nationals-forced-to-fight-/20260313CHE13882.

168 On UNHCR's 2022 condemnation of the discrimination African civilians faced while fleeing the invasion, see UNHCR chief condemns 'discrimination, violence and racism' against some fleeing Ukraine, https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114282.

The United Nations has, however, begun to address the recruitment through its specialised human rights mechanisms. In March 2026, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine reported that it had investigated foreign nationals from 17 countries recruited to fight with Russian forces, including citizens of Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda. The commission found that some had been deceived with promises of civilian employment, met on arrival in Russia by military personnel, pressured into signing Russian-language contracts they did not understand, and sent to dangerous frontline duties. It recommended that Russia cease recruiting foreign nationals through inducement, deception, or other means that undermine free and informed consent.[169]

The commission stopped short of determining that the recruitment itself constituted a war crime or crime against humanity, saying that its investigation into the applicable legal characterisation was continuing.

The issue had also reached the UN's special procedures.

The UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries has a term for the kind of conduct documented in this report: "predatory recruitment". It uses the phrase to describe recruitment that exploits economic hardship, relies on deception or coercion, and leaves people uncertain about the work they are being drawn into.[170] In July 2025, the Working Group and several UN Special Rapporteurs raised with Moscow the alleged trafficking and forced recruitment of three Sri Lankan men into the Russian army. The methods closely resembled those documented here: false job offers, economic vulnerability, Russian-language military contracts and deployment to the front. Russia did not respond publicly.[171] The Working Group has not issued a comparable assessment focused on African recruits.

By August 2026, the issue had also reached members of the UN Security Council. Latvia and Britain convened an informal Arria formula meeting on prisoners of war, civilian detainees, and foreign fighters, with the UN human rights office among the briefers. The meeting raised the issue of the deceptive and coercive recruitment of foreign nationals into Russia's armed forces and the need for a more coordinated international response. But an Arria meeting is an informal forum: it produced no Security Council resolution or other binding action.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, the Working Group on the use of mercenaries, and the UN Commission of Inquiry on the situation in Ukraine each hold mandates that encompass the practices documented in this report. Some have now exercised those mandates. What remains absent is a coordinated international response capable of stopping the recruitment, dismantling the networks behind it, or securing effective remedies for those already drawn into the war.

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The cumulative picture is less one of total institutional silence than of a fragmented and uneven response: national governments prioritised diplomacy over their citizens' safety, the AU has yet to mount a comparable political response, and the European Parliament condemned the practice but lacks the power to stop it.

The UN Commission of Inquiry has investigated the recruitment and called on Russia to stop it, while UN special procedures have intervened in comparable trafficking and forced recruitment cases. The issue has now reached an informal forum of the Security Council as well. Within the African human rights system, the issue has been raised before the African Commission, but has yet to produce a resolution, study, or other formal measure.

The European Parliament remains the forum that has issued the clearest political condemnation, while the UN Commission of Inquiry has undertaken the more substantial evidentiary examination. Neither has, however, an enforcement mechanism capable of ending the practice.

The institutional architecture designed to prevent exactly this kind of exploitation – the Palermo Protocol on trafficking, the Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war, the OAU Convention on mercenarism, and the mandates of the UN Human Rights Council and its special procedures – exists.

169 Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, findings presented to the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026. The Commission reported investigating recruits from 17 countries, including Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda, and described deception, coercion into Russian-language contracts and frontline deployment. United Nations in Ukraine, 12 March 2026, https://ukraine.un.org/en/311741-un-commission-concludes-deportation-and-forcible-transfer-ukrainian-children-russian; UN Geneva press conference record, https://www.unognewsroom.org/story/en/3046/hrc-press-conference-independent-international-commission-of-inquiry-on-ukraine/9149.

170 United Nations Human Rights Council, Working Group on the use of mercenaries, Recruitment, including predatory recruitment, of mercenaries and mercenary-related actors, A/HRC/54/29, 12 July 2023, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4017705.

171 UN Special Procedures, Joint Allegation Letter RUS 11/2025, 22 July 2025, concerning the alleged predatory recruitment of three Sri Lankan nationals through false employment promises and their trafficking and forced recruitment into the Russian army. The public communications database records no Russian reply, https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TmSearch/RelCom?code=RUS+11%2F2025.

10 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS, TRAFFICKING, MERCENARISM, AND STATE RESPONSIBILITY

This chapter summarises the legal issues that matter most to African recruits and their relatives, based on interviews with some of the recruits and their next of kin. It sets out how they understand the legal system, including their hopes and fears, rather than offering a full national or international legal analysis.

Recruits and their families are aware now, though they were not at the beginning of the war, that foreign enlistment is generally illegal without official permission.

Concern about the enforcement of African laws against foreign enlistment

A number of African countries restrict the recruitment of their citizens into foreign armed forces, but the laws differ considerably in whom they cover, what conduct they prohibit, and the consequences they impose.[172] In Kenya, Section 68 of the Penal Code criminalises recruitment or enlistment of a Kenyan citizen in a foreign military without the president's authorisation as a felony. The punishment is up to 10 years imprisonment. But the law contains an important qualification: in cases involving enlistment, an accused person may avoid liability by proving that the engagement was not voluntary.

In Kenya, Section 68 of the Kenyan Penal Code criminalises recruitment or enlistment of a Kenyan citizen in a foreign military without the President's authorisation as a felony. The punishment is up to 10 years imprisonment.

Similar provisions are found in many African countries especially from the British Commonwealth, but most treat it as a misdemeanour. Egypt and Somalia can strip foreign enlistees of citizenship. Cameroon prohibits unauthorised recruitment or enlistment for foreign armed forces, while JFJ found no comparable general prohibition in Sierra Leone making it an offence for a civilian citizen simply to enlist in a foreign military.

The Russian government and some African officials maintain that the recruits freely entered into valid military service contracts despite their national laws criminalising such an act. This stance raises the possibility that recruits may face prosecution or other legal consequences for enlisting with the Russian military.

The laws of South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana explicitly criminalise the recruitment of their nationals into foreign military service without state authorisation, and the acceptance of such recruitment. These are not obscure statutes. South Africa's Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act,[173] Kenya's Section 68 of the Penal Code, [174] and Ghana's Foreign Enlistment

172 See Appendix VI for a table of African foreign enlistment laws.
173 South Africa's Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act 15 of 1998, sections 2–3 (prohibiting mercenary activity and the rendering of foreign military assistance without authorisation from the National Conventional Arms Control Committee).
174 Penal Code (Cap. 63), Laws of Kenya, Section 68 ("Foreign enlistment"), Chapter VIII (Offences Affecting Relations with Foreign States and External Tranquility).

Act of 1961[175] are clear in their terms and unambiguous in their application. In each case, both the recruiter and the recruit are subject to prosecution. In each case, operators of aircraft and vessels who knowingly facilitate the passage of recruits are also liable.

Almost all African countries whose nationals appear in this report consider Ukraine to be a friendly state. Yet not one of them warned its nationals, in the four years between 2022 and 2026, that enlisting in a foreign military engaged in a war with a friendly state carried severe criminal consequences. The failure to issue that warning was not merely a lapse in public communication; it shaped public understanding of the law. As recently as late 2025, a prominent Kenyan editor told a Ukrainian conference that Kenyan law did not prohibit citizens from serving in foreign armed forces – a statement that was incorrect, but that reflected a widespread misunderstanding the government had done nothing to correct. Kenya knew that both Russia and Ukraine had called for Africans to join their respective forces. For four years, it failed to publicly state that responding to either call was a criminal offence under its own law.

The foreign enlistment statutes across these jurisdictions serve a dual function that the governments invoking them have selectively ignored. They criminalise the recruit who enlists without authorisation, but they equally criminalise the recruiter who facilitates that enlistment. In Kenya, the recruiters – who operated in the heart of the government district, whose agency director had been previously arrested for fraud, and who processed hundreds of men through the Kenyatta International Convention Centre – have not been charged under the foreign enlistment statute. The government officials identified in the Parliament as having facilitated the trafficking have not been charged under any statute. The law has been invoked against the victims of the pipeline, but it has not been applied to those who built it.

Nevertheless, the Kenyan recruits may be in legal jeopardy because Section 68 has been cited in public debates as a possible basis for prosecuting Kenyans who travelled to fight for Russia.

Section 68 of Kenya's Penal Code criminalises unauthorised enlistment by Kenyan citizens in the armed forces of a foreign state and provides for a prison term of up to 10 years. Some legal opinions suggest that Kenya cannot invoke Section 68 with respect to those recruits who were lured into military service through deceptive contracts. It is a defence to prosecution under this law to prove to the court that the enlistment "was not voluntary". In this view, such individuals are victims of trafficking who have not themselves broken any law. In this scenario, Russia cannot lawfully insist on the performance of contracts which are by law invalid for lack of consent.

Public statements by Kenyan officials suggest that recruits who knowingly signed up for military service could face prosecution under Section 68 of the Penal Code when they return to Kenya. This hardline stance impacts on the prospects recruits and their next of kin have in possible compensation for death, injury, and other losses, particularly against the Kenyan state if the charge of condonation is provable, and against recruiters personally.

The Employment and Labour Relations Court in Nairobi ordered a recruitment agency, Gratify Solutions International Ltd, and three of its directors to pay Kenyan victim Haron Nyakong'o Ksh5 million for human trafficking, forced labour, and modern slavery.

175 Foreign Enlistment Act, 1961 (Act 75) (Ghana), section 1.

Concerns about the potential for civil compensation

Generally, recruits and their families are eager for confirmation that compensation, whether it be from Russia or their home country, is possible for what they unanimously consider a very damaging episode in their lives.

JFJ observed that recent judicial precedent in Kenya offers recruits or even their legal representatives an avenue to sue for damages against the recruitment agents. In a landmark November 2025 judgment, [176] the Employment and Labour Relations Court in Nairobi ordered a recruitment agency, Gratify Solutions International Ltd, and three of its directors to pay a Kenyan victim KSh5 million for human trafficking, forced labour, and modern slavery. Haron Nyakong'o had deferred his university studies after being lured by the promise of a lucrative customer service job in Bangkok, Thailand, with a monthly salary of KSh180,000. Upon arrival in Bangkok, he was kidnapped, had his passport confiscated, and was smuggled by boat into a rebel-held area of Myanmar where he was forced to conduct online fraud and cyber scams targeting individuals in the US. His failure to meet scamming targets resulted in torture. After surviving months in captivity, he was among 78 Kenyans rescued and repatriated. Presiding Justice Byram Ongaya declared the recruiters liable for the gross violation of his rights and issued a permanent injunction barring the agency from exporting Kenyan labour.

Concerns about amnesty

As regards amnesty, JFJ is not aware of any law in the listed African states that allow authorities to grant amnesty from prosecution. For amnesty to be legally possible, laws must be enacted to expressly provide for it. Generally, however, laws exist on pardons, which can be given by the head of state after a person is convicted. Therefore, for any recruits (those who consciously consented to military service) to be eligible for pardons, they must first be prosecuted, found guilty, and sentenced before they can be pardoned.

Concerns about POW status

POW status generally applies to members of a recognised formal armed force, or persons forming part of that armed force. If the recruits were formally absorbed into the Russian military as members, then they would be considered POWs if captured and are consequently entitled to the protections accorded to POWs under international humanitarian law. POW status may also apply to other persons participating in hostilities/combat who, though not being formal members of an armed force, "belong to" the armed force for all intents and purposes. Arguably, therefore, Africans fighting for/with the Russian military would qualify for POW status and be entitled to all protections accorded to POWs in international humanitarian law.

Even if, arguably, these persons do not qualify as POWs under international humanitarian law, basic entitlements would still apply to them under international human rights law, including the right to have their inherent dignity recognised and upheld and not to be subjected to inhumane or degrading treatment.

Foreign Enlistment Prohibitions Across African Jurisdictions

Concerns about categorisation as mercenaries

Those recruits who were fully aware of the job description (military service) cannot be considered victims, even if the incentive of citizenship turned out to be false (in any case, the promise of citizenship is such a fundamental term of a contract that it cannot be implied, but must be expressly provided for in the contract).

The key fact is that they knew that they were being recruited to join in military activities; the benefits that they stood to gain (or that they were promised) are irrelevant when considering their legal responsibility. If they are not formally absorbed into and as members of the armed forces of Russia, then this category of recruits would qualify as mercenaries. Even though Russia and many of the African states whose nationals are implicated are not parties to the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, Ukraine is a party to this convention, and is, therefore, entitled to treat these persons as mercenaries and to prosecute those found on its territory for the offence of mercenarism.

176 Haron Nyakong'o v Gratify Solutions International Ltd & 3 Others; National Employment Authority (Interested Party), Employment and Labour Relations Court at Nairobi, Petition No. E126 of 2025, [2025] KEELRC 3258 (KLR), Judgment of 20 November 2025, https://new.kenyalaw.org/akn/ke/judgment/keelrc/2025/3258/eng@2025-11-20

Validity of Russian military service contracts and deceptive recruitment tactics

A contract whose material terms are concealed from or misrepresented to one party lacks informed consent and is void. This is a foundational principle of contract law in every jurisdiction relevant to this report. It requires no novel legal argument. It requires only that the principle be applied to the facts.

The facts are as follows: In-country contracts reviewed by JFJ did not identify Russia as the destination and did not name the Russian military as the employer. Recruits were told they were going to civilian jobs: plant mechanic work, security positions, factory employment, logistics roles. On arrival in Russia, a second set of contracts was presented to them, written in Russian Cyrillic, without translation, under conditions of time pressure and physical control. No recruit interviewed by JFJ said they understood the criminal penalties they were accepting when they signed. The contracts were undersigned with 18 sections of Chapter 33 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which imposes imprisonment of up to 10 years for desertion, absence without leave, and voluntary surrender.

The conclusion is direct. Where recruits did not know they were enlisting in the Russian military – because their in-country contracts did not disclose this, and because the second contracts were presented only in Russian without translation – the resulting agreements are unenforceable. They are void for lack of consent. Russia cannot lawfully insist on the performance of contracts that are void. The men bound by these instruments are not military contractors whose terms must be honoured. They are victims of deception whose purported consent was never obtained.



Foreign enlistment statutes and the compensation problem: The Kenya case

Kenya's reliance on Section 68 of the Penal Code illustrates a broader legal problem. Foreign enlistment statutes are designed to prevent citizens and residents from entering the service of foreign armed forces without state authorisation. They are not designed to convert trafficking victims into voluntary combatants or relieve the state of responsibility where recruitment occurred through deception, coercion, or official neglect.

Section 68 criminalises enlistment in the armed forces of a foreign state without presidential consent. Properly applied, the provision points in two directions. First, where a person knowingly and voluntarily enlists in a foreign army without authorisation, the statute may expose that person to domestic legal consequences. Secondly, and more importantly for the cases documented in this report, the same provision also confirms that the recruitment pipeline itself was unlawful. Recruiters, brokers, agencies, transport facilitators, and any public officials who enabled the unauthorised enlistment were not operating in a legal vacuum. They were facilitating conduct Kenyan law already prohibited.

The government's compensation position, therefore, fails on its own terms. If the men were deceived, coerced, or trafficked into military service, Section 68 cannot fairly be invoked against them as if they had knowingly volunteered for foreign combat. Their legal character is that of victims of deceptive recruitment and trafficking, not voluntary foreign fighters. If, on the other hand, the state insists that Section 68 applies, then the statute cannot be used only against the dead and wounded while being ignored against those who recruited, transported, processed, and facilitated them.

Nor can Russia's reliance on the contract cure the defect. A military service contract procured through deception, signed in a language the recruit could not read, and embedded in a recruitment process that concealed the true nature of the work cannot be treated as a valid answer to trafficking, forced labour, or victim protection claims. At minimum, Kenya should not recognise such contracts as defeating claims for repatriation, compensation, consular protection, or diplomatic intervention.

The point is not that foreign enlistment statutes are irrelevant. It is that they cannot be applied selectively. They cannot be used by states as shields against victim compensation while the same states decline to prosecute the recruiters and facilitators who made the enlistment possible. Where foreign enlistment was procured through deception or coercion, trafficking law and victim-protection principles must prevail.

Amnesty

JFJ is not aware of any law in the listed African states that allows authorities to grant amnesty from prosecution. Amnesty, as a legal instrument, requires specific legislation to authorise it. No such legislation exists in any of the countries whose nationals are documented in this report.

What does exist, in most of these jurisdictions, is the power of presidential pardon. But a pardon is available only after conviction. It is a post-sentencing instrument, not a pre-trial one. For any recruits who knowingly enlisted in violation of domestic law to be eligible for a pardon, they must first be prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced. The legal pathway from foreign enlistment to forgiveness runs through the criminal justice system, not around it.

The implication is that governments cannot simply wave the matter away. If they intend to pursue criminal liability against recruits who signed knowingly, they must commit to full prosecution. If they do not, they must explain on what legal basis they decline. What they cannot do is use the threat of prosecution to deny compensation while declining to prosecute – which is precisely what Kenya's current posture amounts to.



What POW status has not delivered is exchange. Russia has never placed an African national on any prisoner exchange list.

Prisoner of war status

If the recruits documented in this report were formally absorbed into the Russian military – and the evidence, including Russian military service contracts, unit assignments, and the January 2024 presidential decree extending citizenship eligibility to foreign military contractors, indicates that they were – they qualify as prisoners of war when captured and are entitled to the full protections of international humanitarian law, including the Third Geneva Convention.

POW status applies to members of a recognised armed force and to persons who, though not formally enlisted, belong to an armed force for all intents and purposes. The African recruits documented in this report were issued Russian military uniforms, assigned to Russian military units, deployed under Russian military command, and subjected to Russian military law, including criminal penalties for desertion. They are, by any reasonable construction, members of Russia's armed forces. Their status as prisoners of war follows directly.

Even if that status were contested – and JFJ does not consider it reasonably contestable on the evidence – basic protections under international human rights law would still apply. These include the right to have their inherent dignity recognised and upheld, and the right not to be subjected to inhumane or degrading treatment. The men documented in Chapter 6, held in Ukrainian prisoner-of-war camps, are protected by these standards regardless of how their legal status is classified.

What POW status has not delivered is prisoner exchange. Russia has never placed an African national on any prisoner exchange list. Every documented exchange since 2022 has excluded them.[178] The legal entitlement to protection exists. The political will to act on it does not.

Concerns about propaganda and violation of POWs rights

Under the Third Geneva Convention, prisoners of war must be protected against any acts of violence, insults, and public curiosity. Captors are strictly prohibited from subjecting prisoners to humiliation, degrading treatment, or using their images for propaganda. Yet Ukraine has apparently made or facilitated the making of videos of African POWs to send propagandist messages to global audiences; the case of Francis Ndarua illustrates the particular risks surrounding the use of POWs in propaganda (see Chapter 6).[177] Generally, messages are coached and recruits are instructed to discourage other Africans from joining the Russian military: the recordings feature descriptions of Russian racism, mistreatment, or deception. Several of these videos are posted on the social media pages of the Ukrainian military units that captured the men. In some cases, the interviews appear to have been conducted immediately after capture, when the individuals were unlikely to be able to refuse or give meaningful consent. The recordings often follow similar formats. Many include direct appeals to Africans or to those considering travel to Russia, using similar language across different cases. This raises questions about whether the messages were spontaneous or coached.

In the propaganda war, Russia too has staged incidences of singing and dancing African recruits and these videos were used by recruiters to show fresh targets that the jobs in Russia were benign military assignments.

177 The case of Francis Ndarua. See 'Kenyan mercenary Francis Ndarua: My viral 'suicide bomber' video was staged by Ukraine but reality in Russia is worse', Weekly Review, Sunday, August 23, 2026, https://nation.africa/kenya/weekly-review/kenyan-mercenary-francis-ndarua-my-viral-suicide-bomber-video-was-staged-by-ukraine-but-reality-in-russia-is-worse-5567746#story.

AFRICA IN THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE WAR — SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO LOG

Compiled by JFJ | 14 March 2026 | YouTube/X/TikTok/Facebook

#	Side	Subject / Description	Nationality / Origin	Platform	Likes	Comments	Shares	Saved	Link
1	Ukraine	Evans Kibet — POW video	Kenyan	Facebook	227	6	55	3	View
2	Ukraine	Willy Macharia — POW video	Kenyan	Facebook	39	8	2	8	View
3	Russia	Group of Kenyans proudly claiming no job compares in pay or prestige to serving as a Russian soldier against Ukraine.	Kenyan	YouTube Shorts	390	68	-	-	View
4	Russia	African Mercenaries saying they love Russia	African (mixed)	YouTube	63	-	-	-	View
5	Russia	African combatant holding AK-47, declaring readiness to fight against Ukraine, expressing allegiance to Russia. (Amplified by a different account)	Cameroonian / Congolese (DRC)	X (Twitter)	149	32	87	22	View
6	Ukraine	118th Territorial Defence Brigade captured African mercenary from Cameroon fighting with Russian Armed Forces. He said he was forced to fight.	Cameroonian	X (Twitter)	718 (45.1k views)	80	143	47	View
7	Ukraine	Two African men captured by K-2 Battalion. Both claimed they came to earn money, not fight — said they were supposed to travel to Russia to make shampoo and provide dental care.	African (unspecified)	X (Twitter)	102 (56.4k views)	21	102	18	View
8	Ukraine	African mercenary fighting for Russian army captured by Ukrainian forces in the Kursk region.	African (unspecified)	X (Twitter)	1,100 (118k views)	37	146	43	View
9	Ukraine	An African mercenary praising Putin.	African (unspecified)	X (Twitter)	1,200 (59.5k views)	206	164	21	View
10	Ukraine	African man advising Nigerian men to join the Russia-Ukraine war.	Nigerian	TikTok	131	8	7	5	View

COLOUR KEY: = Ukraine-side | = Russia-side

SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO LOG (CONTINUED): VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS

ID	Platform	Date	Title	Link	Source	Description
RUS-001	YouTube Short	2025-10-06	#Kenyans fighting for #Russia in #Ukraine war.	https://youtube.com/shorts/zq2Tt2JaDZ4?si=PLbzOcWQpmJeAMPa	Sauce TV	The short, titled Kenyans fighting for Russia, shows approximately ten African men in Russian military fatigues speaking among themselves in Kiswahili, interspersed with Sheng (slang spoken by urban Nairobi youth). Their conversation revolves around speaking approvingly of pay, working conditions, and relations within the group, while dismissing naysayers. The interaction is presented in an informal, conversational style. The overall takeaway is to present military service as socially cohesive, manageable, and desirable.
RUS-002	YouTube Short	2025-10-25	African volunteer troops in the Russian army entertain their comrades.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP7R9aToxXU	International Volunteers Association	The video shows about five African men in Russian military fatigues singing and dancing amongst themselves, and inviting other combatants in the observing crowd to join them. Sounds of a drum playing an upbeat tempo can be heard. The depiction suggests camaraderie, inclusion and normality within the military service.
RUS-003	YouTube video	2025-04-12	African recruit in Putin's army: Tricked, betrayed, abandoned. captured soldier about war in Ukraine	https://youtu.be/l4p2Ns-JgLHE	UNITED24 Media	The video is structured as a formal sit-down interview with a Togolese prisoner in Ukrainian custody. It opens with a dramatic extract from his testimony, followed by his statement that he is speaking without being forced. The main interview is conducted in French by an off-camera interviewer, while English-language commentary is inserted at intervals to interpret his account for an international audience. The questions invite extended answers following a deliberate sequence: personal and economic background, reasons for travelling to Russia, awareness of the war, immigration status, military recruitment, training, frontline deployment, capture and regret. The production later incorporates telephone conversations with relatives, adding a personal and emotional dimension to the testimony. Through its questioning, editing and commentary, the video presents the prisoner's account as a warning to Africans considering travel to Russia or enlistment in Russian forces.
RUS-004	YouTube Short	2025-09-17	Ukraine captures Kenyan serving in Russian army	https://youtube.com/shorts/vSpoB7Ypg8E	The Kyiv Independent	The short presents Evans Kibet, described as a Kenyan athlete, stating that he travelled as a tourist and was deceived into joining the Russian army by a recruiter who didn't declare the nature of the work he was inviting Evans to do to secure a visa to remain in Russia. The impact is to expose the underhanded tactic used by recruiters for Russia, first enticing Kibet to Russia, then trapping him in military work.
RUS-005	YouTube Short	Not publicly resolved	Russian army: Kenyans, Chinese, Ghanaians, Dagestanis	https://youtube.com/shorts/0HiJ0SsErhQ	UNITED24 Media	Three Kenyans and one Ghanaian are among a group of about 20 recruits introducing themselves by their names, age, and the country they are from. The clip was posted by UNITED24media, a Ukrainian media platform, titled "Here's the Russian army: Kenyans, Chinese, Ghanaians, Dagestanis". They appear subdued and pensive, as though they might have been caught by the Ukrainian army. The video suggests that there are multiple nationalities fighting on the Russian side.

SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO LOG (CONTINUED): VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS

ID	Platform	Date	Title	Link	Source	Description
RUS-006	YouTube Short	2025-09-05	African mercenary was captured by Ukrainian soldiers	https://youtube.com/shorts/sjGrPhMEGLo	UNITED24 Media	An African man in military fatigues, with His hands tied together, is asked what his name is, responding "Mohammed". The interviewers are presumably Ukrainian, as it is hosted on the state media channel, and he appears to be a captured combatant. The intent appears to be to portray Ukraine as capturing recruits who are misled into serving Russia in the conflict.
RUS-007	YouTube video	2024-09-18	African POWs on fighting for Russia in Ukraine	https://youtu.be/PM9Dn-RxxWC0	The Kyiv Independent	The video shows the interview of prisoners described as Somali and Sierra Leonean nationals who say they were recruited to fight for Russia with promises of high wages. The video is structured as a formal, chaptered interview with a Somali and a Sierra Leonean prisoners in Ukrainian custody. It introduces the circumstances under which they found themselves recruited to fight for Russia. The interview is conducted in English by an off-camera questioner and divided into 12 labelled sections. The questioning follows a deliberate chronological sequence: personal and economic background; reasons for travelling to Russia; the employment, salary and citizenship reportedly offered; the signing process; military training and deployment; battlefield experience and capture; possible repatriation; and message to other foreigners. Although the questions generally allow extended answers, they repeatedly draw attention to economic vulnerability, recruitment promises, language barriers, battlefield casualties, regret, and the possibility of being returned to combat. The video concludes by directly asking the recruits to advise other Africans not to follow in their footsteps.
RUS-008	YouTube video	Not publicly resolved	African soldier fighting with the Russian soldiers in Luhansk, Ukraine	https://youtu.be/t7ijnfM-WbW4	un	The video is structured as a brief, edited field-style interview conducted in Russian with a Congolese student in Luhansk. An off-camera interviewer directs the exchange through short, consecutive questions concerning how the interviewee reached Luhansk, what he had been studying, how he joined the local militia, where he obtained information about it, whether he had been deceived, how he regarded the conflict, and how he felt living and serving there. The closing questions refer to his experience in Rubizhne. The respondent's relatively brief answers are organised by the interviewer into a narrative of voluntary participation, political alignment and integration into the Russian-aligned military community. Russian is the primary language, indicating an immediate Russian-speaking audience, and perhaps also portraying how easy it is for African recurits to integrate into Russia.

SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO LOG (CONTINUED): VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS

ID	Platform	Date	Title	Link	Source	Description
RUS-009	YouTube Short	2024-01-14	Somalia mercenary captured near Marinka after joining Russian troops two months ago to make money	https://youtube.com/shorts/9HyG_ROLinU	Daily Mail World	An off-screen interviewer mockingly interviews a man he calls "Somali", an African of Somali extract, who confesses that he had been in the country for two months, and was brought to the army for money. The recorder appears to be mocking the recruit. The video was posted by a Daily Mail YouTube account.
RUS-010	YouTube video	Not publicly resolved	African mercenaries in the Russian army	https://youtu.be/t_SQqTGsvJo	Segi Fella	Two recruits – one who identifies as Ghanaian, and the other, who states that he is Cameroonian – explain that they like Russia and are happy to be serving in the army. The interviewer appears to be friendly to them.
RUS-011	YouTube video	Not publicly resolved	Central African Republic mercenaries to fight for Russia in Ukraine	https://youtu.be/80qn5IR-sHko	TUN AFRICA	The video combines a short opening clip of uniformed Central African Republic men with an extended English-language commentary. The opening participants are described by the presenter as members of the Central African Republic's military who are expressing support for Russia and offering to fight in Ukraine. Their remarks appear to be delivered in French, while reference is also made to their receiving military instructions in Russian. This footage serves as the starting point for the presenter's interpretation rather than as the main body of the video.The remainder of the video follows a direct-to-camera commentary format aimed at an English-speaking African and diaspora audience. After introducing the footage as a breaking story, the presenter uses rhetorical questions, hypothetical scenarios, and a numbered explanatory structure to discuss why Central African Republic soldiers might volunteer. Economic incentives, Russian and Wagner involvement in the Central African Republic, institutional loyalty, dissatisfaction with local pay and the prospect of leaving the country are presented as possible motivations. A France 24 news extract concerning Wagner's activities in Africa is inserted to provide supporting context. The presentation communicates a mixed message. Joining the Russian side is portrayed as financially and strategically understandable for trained Central African Republic soldiers and as evidence that Russia retains international and African support. At the same time, the presenter describes frontline service as dangerous and suggests that African recruits could be used as expendable personnel. Their position is contrasted with that of African volunteers fighting for Ukraine, with service on the Russian side presented as the more rational choice. The video concludes by urging prospective participants to think carefully before becoming involved.
RUS-012	YouTube Short	Not publicly resolved	African mercenary in Ukraine	https://youtube.com/shorts/GNfaDOpBIhw	Ukraine War Raw Videos	The short shows a Black man who the title describes as an African mercenary in Ukraine posting a selfie video appears to send a brief greeting and signs off with a "W" finger salute.

SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO LOG (CONTINUED): VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS

ID	Platform	Date	Title	Link	Source	Description
RUS-013	X post	2024-03-22	Post describing African soldiers fighting for Russia	https://x.com/dijoni/status/1771026390353424622	Don Salmon	Five African men in military fatigues wielding guns and appearing in high spirits mention Russia in the clip.The poster on X expresses surprise that Africans are fighting for Russia against Ukraine.
RUS-014	X thread	2024-01-11	Thread on African criminals and mercenaries reported with Russian forces	https://x.com/ChrisO_wiki/status/1745385122084409698	ChrisO_wiki	The numbered X threads connect several African nationals to Russian prison recruitment. A Cape Verdean man, Pina Nelson, appears with Russian soldiers delivering greetings and victory messages from Luhansk; the thread then presents his criminal history and reported recruitment after imprisonment. A Somali captured near Avdiivka and the deaths of Tanzanian and Zambian recruits are cited as related cases. A second thread reconstructs how Tanzanian student Tarimo Nemes Raymond moved from imprisonment to Wagner service before being killed near Bakhmut. Overall, the posts reframe Russian imagery of military belonging, victory and sacrifice as evidence of a broader system in which African prisoners and migrants were recruited for dangerous frontline service.
RUS-015	X post	2025-02-24	Ghanaian man describes frontline conditions in Russian service	https://x.com/eddie_wrt/status/1894144283180966151	EDHUB	Two different scenes are combined in one clip. In the first, a man appearing to speak in a Nigerian accent interviews what appears to be his comrade in arms about their experience in the war so far. The comrade responds that it is a difficult experience to have to kill in order to avoid dying, but the clip is framed in an upbeat tone, as it ends with mutual laughter. The video then shifts to another African man in Russian fatigues playing an upbeat hip-hop song as he shows off the terrain behind him.
RUS-016	X post	2024-01-28	African combatants described as serving in the Russian army	https://x.com/wartranslated/status/1751666773579993344	WarTranslated	Four Africans appear in a video with two apparently Russian soldiers, embracing one another warmly and speaking positively that they will be victorious in battle. The group members are in high spirits and engage together warmly. The lead speaker, who is off-camera, provokes responses about their experiences, with the group responding enthusiastically.
RUS-017	X post	2022-03-10	French-speaking African fighters declare readiness to fight Ukraine	https://x.com/war_noir/status/1502024593770532876	War Noir	The video depicts French-speaking men, said to be from Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, declaring readiness to fight Ukraine. It also identifies visible AKM and RPK-pattern weapons. The soldiers appear to be speaking unprompted and presumably away from the frontline, possibly in their own home countries.
RUS-018	X post	2025-05-14	Captured Cameroonian says Russian forces compelled him to serve	https://x.com/GloOouD/status/1922669957612999024	Clooooud	An African, said to be Cameroonian, in military fatigues appears repeatedly in the same video in different contexts, in general appealing to the Ukrainina president to pardon him as he had been misled and tricked into fighting for the Russians. He then thanks Ukraine's 118th Territorial Defence Brigade for capturing him, and notes that he has received medical care and food. The video appears to contrast Russian's duplicity with Ukraine's generosity.

SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO LOG (CONTINUED): VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS

ID	Platform	Date	Title	Link	Source	Description
RUS-019	X post	2023-10-27	African personnel described as recruits in Russian ranks	https://x.com/albafella1/status/1717887683861606713	Albina Fella	An African man in Russian military fatigues identifies himself as Samuel and announces that he had arrived on the frontline having come from Africa. He is well-spoken and appeals to an ideological base, declaring that he is defending the Russian motherland. He thanks God for enabling him to attain a full military status. He appears to be in high spirits, and though men can be heard speaking nearby, it is impossible to tell whether they are directing him behind the scenes.
RUS-020	X post	2022-08-29	Post citing TASS video of Zimbabwean personnel preparing to fight for Russia	https://x.com/JayinKyiv/status/1564175120582807552	Jay in Kyiv	The X post from an individual identifying themselves as an American in Ukraine attaches and cites a video said to be from Russian propaganda outlet TASS purporting to show Zimbabwean soldiers preparing to fight for Russia. It adds the commentary that, due to racist attitudes in the Russian military, these soldiers would be the first to die on the frontline. Hostile and racialised commentary.
RUS-021	X post	2025-07-06	Nigerian national Kehinde reported captured while fighting for Russia	https://x.com/Unit-ed24media/status/1941833112519889337	UNITED24 Media	The X post by Ukrainian state media identifies a 29-year-old Nigerian national named Kehinde who has been captured while working as a translator for the Russian army. He reports that there are many nationalities in the service, with five Africans among the unit he served in. His interviewer is off-screen and has muffled his voice, suggesting that the video was recorded at the frontline.
RUS-022	X post	2025-06-30	Captured men say they travelled for shampoo production and dental care	https://x.com/wartranslated/status/1939603216704192905	WarTranslated	The post presents two captured Cameroonian men who reportedly say they travelled to Russia for shampoo production and dental treatment rather than military service. Four soldiers in Ukrainian fatigues stand around them and encourage them to speak with their body language. One of the African men appears injured and in significant pain.
RUS-023	X post	2024-12-16	Russian soldier says 'Africa is here with us' while filming Black personnel	https://x.com/wartranslated/status/1868705874405212502	WarTranslated	The post translates a Russian speaker saying that Africa is present with them while filming Black personnel in military clothing. The person filimg chuckles as he announces that Africa is with them, suggesting that the presence of African men at the Russian frontline may still be a marvel to some.
RUS-024	X post	2024-08-27	African combatant reported captured in Russia's Kursk region	https://x.com/lsiafrica/status/1828534298967687530	LSI Africa	The post reports that an African French-speaking combatant serving in the Russian army was captured in the Kursk region. The scene appears to be relaxed, with two men lying on their backs in the background.
RUS-025	X post	2024-06-01	African personnel shown with Russian occupation forces	https://x.com/albafella1/status/1796953133748224499	Albina Fella	The post appears to depict a training session, where two African recruits are seated at desks alongside several other recruits, being instructed on the appropriate use of shoulder-fired anti-tank rocket launchers. The recorder, who also appears to be an instructor, repeats the instructions to one of the Africans, asking him to look at the recorder.

SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO LOG (CONTINUED): VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS

ID	Platform	Date	Title	Link	Source	Description
RUS-026	X post	2024-05-22	African combatant praises Vladimir Putin and insults Volodymyr Zelenskyy	https://x.com/albafella1/status/1793198270648390040	Albina Fella	The post shows a Black man in military clothing who repeatedly praises Vladimir Putin and insults Volodymyr Zelenskyy. His audience, all off-screen, first prompts him to describe his feelings towards Zelenskyy and then laughs at his insult of The Ukrainian president. The interaction appears to show authentic support for Russia by an African recruit, who appears relaxed and speaks Russian in the video.
RUS-027	X post	2025-09-13	African personnel described with Russian armed forces in Donetsk	https://x.com/visionergeo/status/1966897276690809150	Visioner	The video depicts at least five Black personnel in a wooded area during what appears to be a resting session. Loud hip hop music is playing in the background, to which one of the combatants is dancing seductively, to the encouragement and laughter of his peers. The X post suggests that they are part of the Russian Armed Forces assembled in Donestk.
RUS-028	X post	2025-09-18	Captured African combatant makes anti-Putin statement	https://x.com/albafella1/status/1968709515710251482	Albina Fella	The post depicts an African man with a demeanour suggesting that he was in significant distress, eating from a container as the recorder interjects and asks the man to repeat insults towards Putin, The man responds, to which the recorder replies "Good, good man, good." The setting suggests the structural constraints placed upon POWs - they may be treated with generosity, but may be asked to repeat statements which they may or may not agree with, but cannot reasonably decline under the circumstances.
RUS-029	X post	2024-01-12	Post identifies personnel from Somalia, India and Syria with Russian forces	https://x.com/albafella1/status/1745833364504903961	Albina Fella	The video depicts men shown in the media as being from Somalia, India and Syria and serving with Russian forces. The men appear to be speaking freely. It appears that the video is meant to depict the cosmopolitan nature of the Russian army.
RUS-030	X post	2025-04-23	Senegalese national reported captured while fighting for Russia	https://x.com/wartranslated/status/1915084574234755491	WarTranslated	TThe video depicts soldiers who the post states are part of Ukraine's Carpathian Sich unit interviewing and then mocking a Sengalese POW. They variously describe him as stinking and pitiful, and make fun of his skin colour. The video appears to be targeted for the consumption of Ukraine's own population, as the treatment of the POW suggests it wasn't meant as propaganda.
RUS-031	X post	2024-05-28	Black personnel shown dancing with Russian-speaking soldier	https://x.com/albafella1/status/1795461155759997337	Albina Fella	The post combines three posts:- First, a Black man showing off his dance moves while a Russian-speaking person records. The scene appears to be the unit's rest area, as other men in fatigues appear to be lying about. His audience claps approvingly of his dancing prowess. In the second post, also taken in a resting area, a man said to be of Cuban descent records his fellow combatants, starting with a Black man, who embraces him enthusiastically, before recording the rest of the team, which includes three other black men. The clips appear to depict miliatary recruits in their natural environment, with African recruits appearing to have integrated successfully into the military.

SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO LOG (CONTINUED): VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS

ID	Platform	Date	Title	Link	Source	Description
RUS-032	TikTok video	2025-10-03	Nigerian creator comments on joining the Russia–Ukraine war	https://www.tiktok.com/@osasjuddie/video/7557022886272208135	Juddie Osas	The video presents a man's voice talking over a video recording reported to have been made to encourage Nigerian youth to join the Russian army. The commentator speaks disapprovingly of the recruiter's video. The commentator's reaction towards the video suggests awareness of more videos distributed by recruiters targeting Nigerian youth.
RUS-033	X post	2026-01-09	Post alleges Russian soldier humiliated African combatant with an anti-tank mine	https://x.com/Gerashchenko_en/status/2009629026197950702	Anton Gerashchenko	The post depicts an African man named Francis with what is said to be an anti-tank mine strapped to his belly being pushed out at gunpoint and mocked over his apparent fear by the Russian recorder. The Russian insults him racially, and pushes him out to what appears to be the vanguard of the fighting unit. It's an unusual video by Russian standards, as most opt to show Africans having happily integrated into the frontline, even though the reality of the rate of death and injury of African recruits belies that narrative.

The public dissemination of these recordings raises concerns under the Third Geneva Convention, which requires prisoners of war to be protected from insults and public curiosity.

11 FINDINGS

The findings below are based on evidence gathered by Journalists For Justice between 2025 and 2026. That evidence includes interviews with African prisoners of war held in Ukraine, serving recruits, returnees, escapees, and families of the dead and missing; Russian military service contracts; recruitment agency contracts; financial records; visa and travel documents; WhatsApp communications between recruiters, handlers, and candidates; Ukrainian military intelligence data; official government statements; parliamentary proceedings; and open-source material.

A. Scale and geography

Finding 1: At least 3,034 African nationals from 40 countries have been enlisted into Russia's armed forces since October 2022; 502 have been documented as killed in action as at the end of June 2026.

JFJ arrived at this figure by cross-referencing Ukrainian military intelligence data with its own interviews, family testimonies, missing persons information, government sources, and open-source material. Kenya accounts for the largest documented contingent, with 841 identified cases, followed by Egypt with 407, Cameroon with 383, Ghana with 337, Nigeria with 214, and Uganda with 108. Smaller cohorts have been identified across North, West, East, Central, and Southern Africa.

These figures do not establish the full scale of African recruitment. Russia has never published a complete accounting of foreign enlistment, and the true number is likely higher. Ukraine told the European Parliament in March 2026 that Russia had enlisted at least 27,000 foreign nationals in total since the start of the war.

The largest recorded death tolls were from Cameroon, with 104 deaths; Ghana, 85; Egypt, 81; Kenya, 76; Nigeria, 24; The Gambia, 22; Mali, 15; Algeria, 14; South Africa, 10; and Senegal, 8. Deaths were also recorded among recruits from Burundi and Sudan, with 7 each; Zimbabwe, 6; Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, 5 each; Morocco, 4; Guinea, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo and Uganda, 3 each; Benin, Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania, Tunisia and the Central African Republic, 2 each; and Gabon and Chad, 1 each.

Finding 2: The recruitment operation expanded systematically across the African continent between 2022 and 2026, adapting its methods to local conditions as it moved.

The earliest documented African cases involved Zambian and Tanzanian nationals recruited by the Wagner Group from Russian prisons in 2022. Continental civilian recruitment began in 2023, predominantly through Egyptian and Cameroonian networks. By 2024, Ghana and The Gambia had been drawn into the pipeline. Kenya and South Africa followed in 2025.

The model did not remain fixed. It moved from prison recruitment to the exploitation of student populations, from informal brokers to licensed labour agencies, from civilian job offers to official mobility programmes, and from unemployed civilians to active-duty military networks. As scrutiny increased in Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa, Russia introduced a selective "stop list" or blacklist of countries whose nationals would no longer be recruited through the Ministry of Defence. But the restriction was partial. Numerous countries remained outside it, including Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As of mid-2026, the recruitment market had shifted to exploit these countries.

B. Recruitment mechanics and deception

Finding 3: Recruitment across multiple African countries relied on systematic misrepresentation of the nature of the work, the identity of the employer, and, in some cases, the destination.

JFJ documented recruits who were promised work as plant mechanics, security guards, drivers, cooks, logistics workers, factory workers, and cultural festival participants. In-country contracts reviewed by JFJ,

including contracts issued by the Kenyan agency Global Face Human Resources Limited, did not identify the Russian military as the employer and did not disclose the military service contract recruits would later be required to sign in Russia. In the Global Face contracts, the only visible sign pointing toward Russia was the use of Russian roubles as the currency for wages and fees.

In WhatsApp communications obtained by JFJ, a recruiter explicitly assured a Kenyan candidate that foreigners would not participate in military action and would only provide security. In multiple cases documented by JFJ, recruits did not learn that they had been enlisted into the Russian military until they had already arrived at military facilities inside Russia.

Finding 4: Russian state institutions were involved in the recruitment pipeline at multiple points.

Russian consular authorities issued tourist and business visas to recruits, in some cases within 36 to 48 hours of first contact with a recruiter, despite applicant profiles inconsistent with ordinary tourism or business travel. In Ghanaian cases reviewed by JFJ, the inviting organisation listed on visa documents was the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation.

On arrival in Russia, recruits were moved into formal state systems. Military service contracts were signed with the Ministry of Defence and executed by named military officials, including Major I.S. Tekuchev, head of Moscow's military service recruitment station, and Captain I.R. Arsentyeva, head of the Selection Point for Military Service under Contract in Veliky Novgorod. Recruits were required to open accounts at Promsvyazbank, a state-controlled bank servicing military personnel and the defence sector. A 2024 presidential decree offered a path to Russian citizenship for foreign nationals who signed military service contracts. The Russian embassy in Kenya denied issuing the tourist visas used by Kenyan recruits, but JFJ holds passport copies documenting their issuance.

C. Financial control and inability to exit

Finding 5: Recruitment intermediaries extracted substantial fees from African recruits through a layered financial system. JFJ estimates that agency earnings from African recruitment exceed US$50 million.



1 m to 1.4 m roubles

A contract reviewed by JFJ between a Kenyan recruit and Global Face Human Resources Limited set an agency service fee of 1 million to 1.4 million roubles, approximately US$12,300 to US$17,200, payable by automatic deduction from the recruit's Russian bank account within 35 days of signing with the employer.

The financial architecture of the recruitment system turned the recruit into a revenue source before he became a soldier. A contract reviewed by JFJ between a Kenyan recruit and Global Face Human Resources Limited set an agency service fee of 1 million to 1.4 million roubles, approximately US$11,700 to US$16,500, payable by automatic deduction from the recruit's Russian bank account within 35 days of signing with the employer. That fee represented between 58 and 66 per cent of the one-time signing bonus. Global Face sent at least 500 Kenyan men to Russia; on that basis, the company may have earned more than US$8.25 million in agency fees between May 2025 and February 2026 alone.

The formal fee was only one layer. In Kenya, additional pre-departure cash payments to informal brokers ranged from KSh50,000 to KSh200,000, approximately US$390 to US$1,550. In Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon, recruits reported paying brokers between US$5,000 and US$7,000 to facilitate travel. Multiple Kenyan recruits reported that intermediaries withdrew 1 million roubles from their accounts almost

immediately after arrival, before the recruits could meaningfully access the funds. In at least one documented case, recruits were required to sign powers of attorney granting intermediaries access to their bank accounts. Multiple recruits subsequently reported unauthorised withdrawals.

Finding 6: Once inside Russia, recruits were bound by criminal penalties, control of their documents, financial isolation, and geographic remoteness that together made withdrawal effectively impossible.

On arrival, recruits signed contracts presented only in Russian Cyrillic, without translation, and under time pressure. These contracts required recruits to undersign a list of 18 sections of Chapter 33 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. The penalties referenced included imprisonment of up to 10 years for desertion, absence without leave, evasion of military-service duties, and voluntary surrender. These consequences were not disclosed in writing before recruits travelled to Russia.

Passports were confiscated upon or shortly after arrival at military facilities. International financial sanctions against Russian banks blocked or severely restricted SWIFT transfers to African countries, preventing recruits from sending earnings home and removing one of the primary incentives for their original decision to travel. The combined effect of criminal penalties, passport confiscation, financial isolation, and deployment into remote military zones was to trap recruits inside a system from which they could not meaningfully withdraw.

D. Deployment, casualties, and captivity

Finding 7: Training periods for African recruits shortened dramatically between 2023 and 2025. Among Kenyan recruits surveyed by JFJ, the average interval from arrival in Russia to death, hospitalisation, or disappearance was 44 days.

In 2023, some early African recruits received up to six weeks of training. By 2025, Kenyan recruits received as little as three days of weapons and explosives training before deployment to the frontline. The shortest documented interval from contract signing to frontline deployment was five days: Nigerian recruit Mbah Stephen Udoka signed his contract on 28 September 2025 and was deployed on 3 October 2025. He was killed weeks later.



3days to 6 weeks of training

In 2023, some early African recruits received up to six weeks of training. By 2025, Kenyan recruits received as little as three days of weapons and explosives training before deployment to the frontline

A JFJ survey of the families of 57 Kenyan recruits found that the average time from arrival in Russia to death, hospitalisation, or being declared missing was 44 days. JFJ has confirmed the deaths of at least 76 Kenyan nationals. Ukrainian military officials have stated that most foreign fighters deployed in these conditions do not survive more than one month on the frontline.

Finding 8: As of May 2026, Russia had never placed an African national on any prisoner-exchange list submitted to Ukraine.

JFJ confirmed this through Ukrainian officials, including Petro Yatsenko, spokesperson for Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War. The prisoner swap of 5/6 March 2026 involved approximately 500 prisoners exchanged between the two sides, but none were African nationals. The largest prisoner exchange of the war, in May 2025, saw 1,000 prisoners released by each side and no African was included.

JFJ interviewed African prisoners of war who said they had never seen an African national leave a prisoner-of-war camp through an exchange. Ukraine has stated that it is open to African governments seeking the repatriation of their citizens directly. As of May 2026, however, no African state had completed the repatriation of a POW from Ukrainian custody through formal exchange mechanisms.

E. State failure and institutional silence

Finding 9: African governments generally failed to prevent recruitment within their jurisdictions, responded only after public outcry, and secured the return of a negligible number of their citizens.

In Kenya, a licensed recruitment agency conducted mass recruitment events at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre, located within sight of the Parliament of Kenya, the Office of the President, the Supreme Court, and the Office of the Governor of Nairobi City County. At the same time, the state's National Industrial Training Authority assessed candidates for Russian job opportunities. JFJ confirmed that between October and December 2025, at least 110 Kenyans were trafficked to Russia in groups as large as 22, passing through Jomo Kenyatta International Airport past counter-trafficking, criminal investigation, intelligence, and immigration officials, carrying brand-new passports containing Russian tourist visas.

Government officials from the Directorate of Immigration Services, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, the Anti-Narcotics Unit, and the National Employment Authority were identified in the National Assembly as having facilitated the trafficking. Kenya's Foreign Affairs minister did not visit Moscow until March 2026, months after the alarm was first raised. Kenya has not established a repatriation fund, leaving families to seek the return of the sick, the wounded, the detained, and the dead in an institutional vacuum.

Other governments also adopted language and positions that obscured responsibility. Ghana's Foreign Ministry described the trafficking as "youth enlistment" following a technical session with Russia. South Africa expressed "heartfelt gratitude" toward Russia for returning some of its nationals, without attributing responsibility for how they had been recruited or deployed. As of May 2026, no African government official identified as having facilitated recruitment had been prosecuted.

Finding 10: The African Union has made no resolution, statement, or formal intervention on the recruitment of African nationals into Russia's armed forces.

As of May 2026, the African Union had not formally discussed the recruitment of Africans to fight for Russia. The Pan-African Parliament is reviewing the 1977 OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, but that convention does not currently address the recruitment of African nationals as mercenaries or foreign fighters in conflicts outside Africa.



The European Parliament has formally condemned the trafficking of non-Russian nationals, particularly Africans, and the serious rights violations linked to their recruitment for Russia's war in Ukraine.

The contrast with Europe is stark. On 12 March 2026, the European Parliament adopted Resolution 2026/2641(RSP), condemning human trafficking and grave human rights violations linked to the recruitment of non-Russian nationals, in particular from Africa, for Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the AU remained silent.

F. Legal classification and unmet obligations

Finding 11: The recruitment operation exhibits multiple indicators of trafficking under the Palermo Protocol, but the protocol has not been invoked by any state or international body as of May 2026.

The Palermo Protocol defines trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons by means including deception, coercion, fraud, or abuse of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation. JFJ's evidence documents recruitment through misrepresentation of the nature of the work and the identity of the employer; transportation across international borders on visas obtained through false pretence; exploitation through forced military service under threat of criminal prosecution; and abuse of the economic vulnerability of young men with limited employment, education, and migration options.

Both Russia and the African states from which recruits originate are parties to the Palermo Protocol. Yet no party has formally invoked the protocol in relation to the recruitment of African nationals into Russia's war. Articles 6 and 8 require states parties to provide victims of trafficking with assistance, including measures for physical and psychological recovery, and to facilitate repatriation with due regard for safety.

The non-punishment principle also applies. Trafficking victims should not be penalised for unlawful conduct they were compelled, coerced, or deceived into committing. This principle is recognised in the OHCHR Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, the UNODC Model Law Against Trafficking in Persons, and domestic anti-trafficking legislation across multiple African states. Recruits who were deceived or coerced into Russian military service should therefore be treated as victims entitled to protection, not as offenders to be abandoned or prosecuted.

Finding 12: Contracts signed by recruits who were deceived about the nature of the work cannot be treated as valid answers to trafficking, repatriation, compensation, or victim protection claims.

A contract whose material terms are concealed or misrepresented lacks the informed consent required for legal validity. Where recruits were promised civilian work, moved on tourist or business visas, then presented in Russia with military service contracts written only in Russian and signed under pressure, the resulting agreements cannot be treated as evidence of free and informed enlistment.

Domestic foreign enlistment statutes do not alter that conclusion. In Kenya, for example, Section 68 of the Penal Code prohibits enlistment in a foreign military without presidential authorisation. Properly applied, that provision confirms the unlawfulness of the recruitment pipeline. It may expose voluntary foreign enlistment to domestic legal consequences, but it cannot fairly be invoked against trafficked or deceived recruits as though they had knowingly volunteered for foreign combat. Nor can it be used selectively against the dead and wounded while recruiters, brokers, agencies, transport facilitators, and public officials who enabled unauthorised enlistment escape accountability.

Russia's reliance on military service contracts and African governments' reliance on foreign enlistment prohibitions both attempt to convert a trafficking and victim protection problem into a private contractual or criminal liability problem. But neither argument succeeds where enlistment was procured through deception, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, or concealment of material terms. Instead, trafficking law and victim protection principles must prevail.

These findings are supported by the evidence presented in the preceding chapters of this report. Where findings refer to quantitative indicators, source documentation including contracts, visa records, financial documents, interview transcripts, official data, and communications records is held by Journalists For Justice.

Conclusion

The recruitment of African nationals into Russia's war in Ukraine is not a collection of unrelated national cases. It is a continental crisis processed through national channels: different brokers, different agencies, different visa routes, different cover stories, but the same destination and the same institutional end point. The men caught in it were treated by the system as interchangeable; only their names, passports, and families differed.

The legal question is, therefore, not whether individual recruits signed documents in Russia. Many did. The question is whether a signature obtained after deception, concealment of the true employer, untranslated military contracts, threats of criminal prosecution, passport confiscation, financial isolation, and deployment to the front can be treated as consent. It cannot. Where military service is procured through deception, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, or concealment of material terms, the law delivers protection before punishment.

The recruitment of African nationals into Russia's war in Ukraine is not a collection of unrelated national cases. It is a continental crisis processed through national channels: different brokers, different agencies, different visa routes, different cover stories, but the same destination and the same institutional end point.

That principle matters because the positions adopted by Russia and by several African states fall at the same hurdle. Russia treats the matter as contractual. African governments have too often treated it as consular embarrassment, private misfortune, or unauthorised foreign enlistment. Both approaches avoid the central fact: men who left home in search of work were moved through a pipeline that turned economic vulnerability into military labour. The consequence is predictable: families searching for sons in silence while the wounded wait indefinitely, without support from their own government. Prisoners of war remain outside exchange lists and the bodies of the dead return late, or not at all.

Russia is the destination state and principal beneficiary of the operation, but African states have permitted recruitment networks to operate within their jurisdictions, through their labour migration systems, airports, agencies, and official blind spots. Recruiters and brokers have profited. Public officials were named and not held to account. And continental institutions remained silent while a continental problem crossed borders faster than any national response could contain it.

This report opened with Bibiana Wangari Waithaka, who learned of her son's death, not from an embassy, a ministry, a military authority, or a recruitment agency, but through social media. Her case is not an exception to the system documented here, but its starkest rendering: a mother sent daily messages into silence while the institutions that should have known, acted, and answered stood elsewhere.

Survivors and prisoners of war must be identified and repatriated. Families of the dead and missing must be informed, supported, and compensated. Recruiters, agencies, facilitators, and complicit officials must be prosecuted. The African Union must treat this as a continental crisis, not as a series of bilateral irritants between individual states and Moscow.

Until that happens, the market remains open. The routes may shift, the countries may change, the recruiters may rename themselves – but their logic will remain the same: African vulnerability converted into foreign military labour, and Africans spending their lives in a war they did not choose.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I - METHODOLOGY

This investigation began as a journalistic inquiry into a changing pattern among African nationals fighting for Russia in Ukraine.

Earlier cases involving African nationals had included West African men associated with the Wagner Group and fighters with previous military experience. By 2024, however, a different profile was becoming visible: men from a wider range of African countries, many of them civilians with little or no previous military experience.

JFJ travelled to Ukraine in May 2025 to investigate. Interviews with African POWs provided the starting point for the reporting. The men came from different countries and backgrounds, but key elements of their accounts repeatedly overlapped: the opportunities they believed they were travelling for, the people involved in arranging their journeys, the routes they took to Russia, the contracts they encountered after arrival, and the circumstances in which they entered Russian military service and reached the frontline.

JFJ followed those accounts backwards from the battlefield to the places where the men had been recruited. The reporting widened across Africa and Ukraine as JFJ identified and interviewed recruits, returnees and escapees, families, recruiters, intermediaries, government officials and others connected to individual cases and recruitment networks. Families in Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda and Egypt described relatives who had left home in search of work, study or travel and later resurfaced in Russian military facilities, on battlefields, in hospitals, in detention, in captivity or in graves far from home.[178]



178 Field research was conducted in Kenya, Ghana, and Ukraine between 2025 and 2026. Interviews were conducted in person in Western Ukraine; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana and other locations.

As the reporting progressed, individual cases led to new sources, documents and connections. JFJ examined contracts, travel and visa records, financial transactions and communications alongside testimony, allowing the investigation to reconstruct individual journeys and identify recurring methods, actors and links across cases that initially appeared unrelated.

Over the course of the investigation, JFJ interviewed more than 280 family members, friends and associates of recruits, including families tracing missing relatives or mourning confirmed deaths. JFJ also interviewed more than 30 recruits and former recruits, including men still serving in Russian military units who communicated covertly with the investigation team, returnees and escapees who had left Russian military service, and individuals who had been recruited but did not ultimately travel to Russia; families of recruits tracing missing relatives or mourning confirmed deaths; government officials, diplomats, and parliamentary sources across multiple African states; and Ukrainian military and intelligence officials, including the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

The interviews repeatedly pointed to patterns consistent with human trafficking. Some interviewees were spoken to more than once, as their cases progressed and fresh evidence came to light.

These interviews helped identify recurring indicators consistent with human trafficking. Some were interviewed multiple times as their cases developed and new information and evidence emerged.

A central component of the investigation was direct access to African prisoners of war held in Ukraine. JFJ interviewed 12 African POWs over the course of 24 interviews and made five visits to two different POW camps in Ukraine. Interviews were conducted with the consent of the prisoners. Participation was voluntary, and prisoners were informed that they could decline to answer questions or end an interview. Where interviews were recorded on video, this was done with their consent. Many of the prisoners said they wanted their experiences documented in the hope that their governments would take notice of their cases and take steps on their behalf. Over time, however, their concerns and expectations sometimes shifted. In repeat interviews, some expressed growing frustration with their circumstances, concern for families struggling in their absence, hope that they might be included in a prisoner exchange, hopes of returning home, or uncertainty about what would happen to them after captivity. Others spoke about the possibility of returning to Russia, including as Russian citizens where they believed citizenship had been granted or promised, while some expressed hope for an end to the war and peace between Russia and Ukraine. These changing perspectives formed part of the continuing interviews and were recorded as the men's situations evolved.

JFJ also interviewed or contacted more than 10 recruiters, influencers and other actors connected to recruitment networks. JFJ identified three compensation brokers, interviewing one and contacting two others, who did not respond.

The investigation also drew on interviews and information from government officials, diplomats and parliamentary sources across multiple African states; Ukrainian military and intelligence officials, including the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War; and humanitarian actors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Field research was conducted in Kenya, Ghana and Ukraine, including five reporting trips to Ukraine.

JFJ reviewed a range of documentary evidence, including Russian military service contracts signed by African nationals; in-country recruitment agency contracts; visa records and passport copies; WhatsApp communications between recruiters, handlers and candidates; financial records, including bank account documentation; agency fee structures; official government statements and parliamentary proceedings and Ukrainian military and intelligence data concerning foreign nationals serving in Russian forces.

These records were linked, where possible, to individual cases and used to reconstruct recruitment journeys, test accounts and identify connections between individuals, cases and recruitment networks.

The investigation additionally drew on open-source material, academic research and reporting by other media organisations. Information obtained from secondary sources was not treated as independently established by JFJ unless it could be corroborated through JFJ's own reporting or other reliable evidence.

JFJ sought to corroborate material information provided by interviewees against documentary evidence, official records and independent sources wherever possible. Testimony was compared across sources and, where available, checked against contracts, travel and visa documentation, passport records, financial records, communications, official data and other contemporaneous material.

Repeat interviews were used to clarify timelines, resolve discrepancies and test accounts against evidence obtained later in the investigation. JFJ did not rely on any single category of evidence to establish its findings. Where possible, JFJ sought multiple points of corroboration before drawing conclusions about an individual's recruitment, travel, contracting or deployment.

Official figures and datasets cited in the report are attributed to the authorities or institutions that provided them.

JFJ obtained repeated physical access to African POWs held in Ukraine but did not have equivalent access to Russian military facilities or African recruits inside Russia or Russian-occupied territory. JFJ nevertheless maintained direct contact with some African nationals serving in Russian military units, including individuals communicating covertly with the investigation team. Their accounts were tested, where possible, against testimony from returnees, families and other sources and against documentary and open-source evidence.

The investigation does not purport to identify every African national recruited into Russian military service. The cases and figures documented by JFJ reflect the individuals and information the investigation was able to identify and examine through available sources and evidence.

Given the sensitive nature of the investigation, some interviews and communications were conducted confidentially. Where disclosure could expose individuals to retaliation from recruiters, military authorities, government actors or others, JFJ withheld or altered identifying details where necessary to protect sources. Particular care was taken with individuals still serving in Russian military units and others communicating with JFJ under conditions of heightened risk.

Where individuals, companies, recruitment agencies, brokers or public authorities were the subject of material allegations, JFJ sought their response where practicable before publication. Those approached were provided with sufficient information about the relevant allegations to enable them to respond.

Responses received were considered and incorporated where relevant.

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - JULY 10TH 2024

In accordance with amendments established by
Order of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation
No. 625 dated 18 September 2023,
for enlisted personnel and non-commissioned officers

CONTRACT FOR MILITARY SERVICE

1. This contract for military service in the **Armed Forces of the Russian Federation** *(in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other troops, military formations, organisations, or military units of the federal fire defence service – [italics added to show the pre-typed field names or options in the contract form – transl.]*) is concluded between [redacted] (military rank, surname, first name and patronymic of a citizen (foreign citizen), day, month and year of birth) born [redacted] and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (*name of the federal executive authority or federal government agency*) represented by the Head of the Moscow Contract Military Personnel Recruitment Point, Major I. Tekuchev (*position, military rank, surname and initials of the official*) for a term of 1 year (*contract duration*)

2. [redacted] (*surname and initials of the citizen (foreign citizen)*)

voluntarily undertakes to:

a) serve under contract for the duration established by this contract;

b) during the period of contract military service, fulfil in good faith all general, official, and special duties of military personnel established by legislative and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation;

c) reimburse, in cases provided for by Federal Law "On Military Duty and Military Service," federal budget funds spent on his military or special training, in the amount of ___[*blank*]_____ (*amount of funds subject to reimbursement (in words, in rubles)*)

d) be faithful to the Military Oath (obligation), serve the people of the Russian Federation unreservedly, courageously and skillfully defend the Russian Federation (paragraph three of Article 16 of the Internal Service Regulations);

e) undergo, in accordance with Article 34.1 of Federal Law No. 53-FZ dated 28 March 1998 "On Military Duty and Military Service" (hereinafter - Federal Law No. 53- FZ), probationary testing within three months from the date of entry into contract military service to verify compliance with the requirements of federal regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation defining general, official, and special duties of military personnel;

f) meet the physical fitness requirements for military personnel established by Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation No. 230 dated 20 April 2023 "On Approval of the Manual on Physical Training in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 20 June 2023, registration No. 73917);

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - JULY 10TH 2024

g) comply with the requirements of Federal Law No. 152-FZ dated 27 July 2006 "On Personal Data" (hereinafter - Federal Law No. 152-FZ) and provide information for processing personal data in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in accordance with Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation No. 707 dated 1 December 2019 "On Personal Data in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 17 March 2020, registration No. 57675);

h) comply with the Law of the Russian Federation No. 5485-I dated 21 July 1993 "On State Secrets";

i) participate in combat operations, perform tasks during mobilisation period, under conditions of emergency or martial law, wartime, armed conflicts, and also participate in activities to maintain or restore international peace and security or suppress international terrorist activities outside the territory of the Russian Federation (subparagraph "a" of paragraph of Article 37 of Federal Law No. 53-FZ);

j) observe the service time regulations established in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (subparagraph "e" of Article 8 of the Internal Service Regulations);

k) improve military skills (paragraph five of Article 16 of the Internal Service Regulations);

l) vacate living quarters occupied under a specialised housing lease agreement in cases of termination or cessation of said agreement (Part 1 of Article 103 of the Housing Code of the Russian Federation);

m) observe restrictions, prohibitions, and obligations related to military service established by Federal Law No. 273-FZ dated 25 December 2008 "On Combating Corruption" and Federal Law No. 76-FZ dated 27 May 1998 "On the Status of Military Personnel" (hereinafter - Federal Law No. 76-FZ).

3. **Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation** (*name of the federal executive authority or federal government agency*) ensures respecting the rights of the military servicemen concluding this contract and the rights of his family members, their receipt of monetary payments and compensations established by legislative and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation defining the status of military personnel and the procedure for military service.

Including:

a) organises training (retraining) of the servicemen in line with the military specialty in accordance with his service designation;

b) ensures that the total duration of weekly service time for military personnel serving under contract does not exceed the normal duration of weekly working time established by federal laws and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation. Engaging military personnel in the performance of military service duties beyond the established weekly service time duration in other cases is compensated by rest of corresponding duration on other days of the week. When it is impossible to provide said compensation, time performing military service duties beyond the established weekly service time duration is accumulated and provided to military personnel in the form of additional days off, which may be added at the request of said military personnel to their main leave (Article 11 of Federal Law No. 76-FZ);

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - JULY 10TH 2024

c) ensures provision to the servicemen, in accordance with Article 11 of Federal Law No. 76-FZ, of additional rest time or payment of monetary compensation for involvement in activities conducted when necessary without limitation of total weekly service time duration;

d) ensures protection of personal data provided by the servicemen in accordance with Federal Law No. 152-FZ;

e) provides the servicemen with specialised housing fund accommodations, and in the absence of said accommodations, monthly pays the servicemen monetary compensation for rental (sublease) of housing in the manner and amounts provided for by Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 909 dated 31 December 2004 "On the Procedure for Calculating and Amounts of Payment of Monetary Compensation for Rental (Sublease) of Housing to Military Personnel" - to citizens of the Russian Federation and other persons in accordance with Federal Law "On the Status of Military Personnel" and Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation No. 686 dated 16 November 2022 "On Establishing the Procedure for Payment in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation of Monetary Compensation for Rental (Sublease) of Housing" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 22 December 2022, registration No. 71775);

f) guarantees the provision of housing in the form of providing the servicemen with monetary funds for the acquisition or construction of housing or providing him with housing in the manner and under conditions established by Federal Law No. 76-FZ, other federal laws and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation, at the expense of federal budget funds (Article 15 of Federal Law No. 76-FZ);

g) organises provision of free medical care to the servicemen;

h) implements mandatory state personal insurance at the expense of federal budget funds (paragraph 1 of Article 18 of Federal Law No. 76-FZ);

i) ensures realisation of the servicemen's right to education (Article 19 of Federal Law No. 76-FZ):

for training in military professional educational organisations and military educational organisations of higher education;

for training in state-accredited educational programs of secondary professional education and higher education, as well as in preparatory departments of federal state educational organisations of higher education at the expense of federal budget funds with mastery of educational programs in part-time or correspondence form of education in the manner determined by Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 1115 dated 3 November 2014 "On the Procedure for Implementing the Right of Military Personnel Serving Under Contract (except officers) with Continuous Duration of Contract Military Service of at least 3 years to Training in State-Accredited Educational Programs of Secondary Professional Education and Higher Education, as well as in Preparatory Departments of Federal State Educational Organisations of Higher Education at the Expense of Federal Budget Funds with Mastery of Educational Programs in Part-time or Correspondence Form of Education"; for professional retraining in one of the civilian specialties without charging tuition fees and with preservation of provision of all types of allowances in the year of discharge from military service upon reaching the maximum age limit for military service, expiration of military service term, health condition, and in connection

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - JULY 10TH 2024

with organisational and staffing measures, in case the total duration of military service of the servicemen serving under contract is five years or more (not counting time of training in military professional educational organisations and military educational organisations of higher education), in the manner and under conditions determined by Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation No. 270 dated 15 May 2021 "On Determining the Procedure and Conditions for Implementation by Military Personnel of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Serving Under Contract of the Right to Professional Retraining in One of the Civilian Specialties" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 18 June 2021, registration No. 63930);

j) provides comprehensive material and equipment support to the servicemen at the expense of federal budget funds.

4. This contract enters into force from the day of its signing by the authorised official and is executed in two copies.

5. Signatures of the parties

[redacted] (signed) **10 July 2024**

(*military rank, signature, surname and initials of the citizen (foreign citizen*)

Head of the Moscow Contract Military Personnel Recruitment Point, Major I. S. Tekuchev (signed) **10 July 2024** (seal: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, details illegible)

(*position, military rank, signature, surname and initials of the official*)

Entry into force of this contract was announced by order of **Head of the Moscow Contract Military Personnel Recruitment Point** dated **28 June 2024** No. (828 Service Use Only) (date and number of order of the corresponding official)

This contract ceased to be effective _____[blank]_____ (date of cessation of contract effect) in connection with _____ (basis for cessation of contract effect in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation)

Note. The head of the federal executive authority or federal government agency in which military service is provided has the right to specify in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the standard contract form the specific rights and duties of military personnel provided for by the legislation of the Russian Federation and conditioned by the peculiarities of their military service.

The condition for reimbursement of federal budget funds spent on military or special training is included in contracts for military service for citizens studying in military educational institutions.

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - DECEMBER 21ST 2024

With additions established by Order of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation dated 18th of September 2023 No. 625, for soldiers and sergeants

CONTRACT FOR MILITARY SERVICE

1. This contract for military service in the **Armed Forces of the Russian Federation**

(in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other troops, military formations, bodies or military units of the federal fire service)

is concluded between [redacted]

(*citizen's (foreign citizen's) military rank, surname, first name and patronymic*)

[redacted]

(*date, month and year of birth*)

and on behalf of the **Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation**

(*name of the federal executive authority or federal government body*)

represented by **Moscow City Contract Service Recruitment Station Head, Major I.S. Tekuchev**

(position, military rank, surname and initials of the official)

for a period of **1 year**.

(*contract duration*)

2. [redacted]
(*surname and initials of the citizen (foreign citizen)*)

voluntarily undertakes to:

a) **serve under contract for the period established by this contract;**

b) during the period of military service under contract, to conscientiously fulfil all general, official and special duties of military personnel established by legislative and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation;

c) reimburse, in cases provided for by Federal Law "On Military Duty and Military Service", federal budget funds spent on his military or special training, in the amount of [blank] (*amount subject to reimbursement (spelled out, in rubles)*);

d) be faithful to the Military Oath (obligation), to selflessly serve the people of the Russian Federation, to courageously and skillfully defend the Russian Federation (paragraph three of Article 16 of the Internal Service Regulation);

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - DECEMBER 21ST 2024

e) **undergo testing** in accordance with Article 34.1 of Federal Law No. 53-FZ dated 28 March 1998 "On Military Duty and Military Service" (hereinafter Federal Law 53-FZ) for **three months from the date of entry** into military service under contract in order to verify compliance with the requirements of federal laws, general military regulations of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation that define the general, official and special duties of military personnel;

f) meet the physical fitness requirements for military personnel established by Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation dated 20 April 2023 No. 230 "On Approval of the Manual on Physical Training in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 20 June 2023, registration number 73917);

g) comply with the requirements of Federal Law No. 152-FZ dated 27 July 2006 "On Personal Data" (hereinafter Federal Law 152-FZ) and provide information for the processing of personal data in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in accordance with Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation dated 4 December 2019 No. 707 "On Personal Data in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 17 March 2020, registration number 57762);

h) comply with Law of the Russian Federation No. 5485-1 dated 21 July 1993 "On State Secrets";

i) **participate in combat operations,** perform tasks during mobilisation, under conditions of emergency or martial law, wartime, armed conflicts, and also participate in activities to maintain or restore international peace and security or to suppress international terrorist activities outside the territory of the Russian Federation (subparagraph "a" of Article 37 of Federal Law No. 53-03);

j) observe the service time regulations established in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (subparagraph "e" of Article 8 of the Internal Service Regulations);

k) improve military skills (paragraph five of Article 16 of the Internal Service Regulations);

l) vacate residential premises occupied under a specialised residential premises lease agreement in cases of termination or cancellation of said agreement (Part 1 of Article 103 of the Housing Code of the Russian Federation);

m) comply with restrictions, prohibitions and obligations associated with military service established by Federal Law No. 273-FZ dated 25 December 2008 "On Combating Corruption" and Federal Law No. 76-FZ dated 27 May 1998 "On the Status of Military Personnel" (hereinafter Federal Law 76-FZ).

3. **Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation**

(*name of the federal executive authority or federal government body*)

ensures compliance with the rights of the military service member who has concluded this contract, and the rights of members of his family, including the receipt of social guarantees and compensation established by legislative and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation that determine the status of military personnel and the procedure for military service.

Amongst other things, it:

a) organises training (retraining) of the military service member in their military occupational specialty in accordance with their service assignment;

b) ensures that the total weekly service time of a military service member serving under contract does not exceed the normal weekly working time established by federal laws and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation. Engaging military personnel in the performance of military service duties beyond the established weekly service time in other cases is compensated by rest of appropriate duration on other days of the week.

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - DECEMBER 21ST 2024

If it is impossible to provide such compensation, the time for performing military service duties beyond the established weekly service time is summed up and provided to military personnel in the form of additional days of rest, which may be added, at the request of said military personnel, to their main leave (Article of Federal Law No. 76-FZ);

c) ensures the provision to the military service member, in accordance with Article 11 of Federal Law No. 76-FZ, of additional rest time or payment of monetary compensation for involvement in events that are carried out, when necessary, without limiting the total weekly service time;

d) ensures the protection of personal data provided by the military service member in accordance with Federal Law No. 152-FZ;

e) provides the military service member with residential premises from the specialised housing fund, and in the absence of such residential premises, pays monthly, at the request of the military service member, monetary compensation for renting (subleasing) residential premises in the manner and amounts provided for by Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 909 dated 31 December 2004 "On the Procedure for Calculating and Amounts of Payment of Monetary Compensation for Renting (Subleasing) Residential Premises to Military Personnel - Citizens of the Russian Federation and Other Persons in Accordance with the Federal Law 'On the Status of Military Personnel'" and Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation No. 686 dated 16 November 2022 "On Establishing the Procedure for Payment in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation of Monetary Compensation for Renting (Subleasing) Residential Premises" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 22 December 2022, registration number 71775);

f) guarantees the military service member the provision of housing in the form of providing him with funds for the acquisition or construction of residential premises or providing him with residential premises in the manner and on the conditions established by Federal Law No. 76-FZ, other federal laws and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation, at the expense of federal budget funds (Article 15 of Federal Law No. 76-03);

g) organises the provision of free medical care to the military service member;

h) carries out compulsory state personal insurance at the expense of federal budget funds (paragraph of Article 18 of Federal Law No. 76-03);

i) ensures the realisation of the military service member's right to education (Article 19 of Federal Law No. 76-FZ):

- for training in military professional educational organisations and military educational organisations of higher education;

- for training in state-accredited educational programs of secondary vocational education and higher education, as well as in preparatory departments of federal state educational organisations of higher education at the expense of federal budget funds. This may include taking educational programs in part-time or correspondence form of study in the manner determined by Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 1155 dated 3 November 2014 "On the Procedure for Implementing the **Right of Military Personnel Serving Under Contract (Except Officers), Whose Continuous Duration of Military Service Under Contract Is at Least 3 Years, to Study in State-Accredited Educational Programs of Secondary Vocational Education and Higher Education**, as Well as in Preparatory Departments of Federal State Educational Organisations of Higher Education at the Expense of Federal Budget Funds, Covering Educational Programs in Part-Time or Correspondence Form of Study";

- for **professional retraining in one of the civilian specialties free of charge** and with preservation of all types of allowances in the year of dismissal from military service upon reaching the maximum age of military service, expiration of the term of military service, [by] health status or in connection with organisational and staffing measures, if the total duration of military service of a military service member serving under **contract is**

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - DECEMBER 21ST 2024

five years or more (not counting the time of study in military professional educational organisations and military educational organisations of higher education), in the manner and on the conditions determined by Order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation No. 270 dated 15 May 2021 "On Determining the Procedure and Conditions for Implementing the Right of Military Personnel of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Serving Under Contract to Professional Retraining in One of the Civilian Specialties" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 18 June 2021, registration number 63930);

j) provides food and clothing support to the military service member at the expense of federal budget funds.

4. **This contract enters into force from the date of its signing by the official, and is executed in two copies.**

5. Signatures of the parties

[Signed] [redacted]
(*military rank, signature, surname and initials of the citizen (foreign citizen)*)

[handwritten:]**21. 12. 2024**
(*date*)

NPOVSK [Contract Service Recruitment Station Head] Major I.S. Tekuchev

(*position, military rank, signature, surname and initials of the official*)

(official seal, date) ___ [blank]_____

The entry into force of this contract was announced by Order of NPOVSK Moscow dated _ [blank]__ No. _____ [blank]__

(*date and number of the order of the relevant official*)

This contract ceased to be in effect __ [blank]_____

(*date of termination of the contract*)

in connection with ___ [blank]_____

(*grounds for termination of the contract in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation*)

Note: The head of the federal executive authority or federal government body, in which military service is provided, has the right to specify in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the standard contract form, the specific rights and obligations of military personnel provided for by the legislation of the Russian Federation and due to the specifics of their military service.

The condition on reimbursement of federal budget funds spent on military or special training is included in contracts for military service for citizens studying in military educational institutions.

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - JULY 29TH 2025

MILITARY SERVICE CONTRACT

CONTRACT *for military service*

1. This military service contract in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (*in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other troops, military formations, bodies or military units of the State Fire Service*)

is concluded between **Private** [redacted], [redacted] (*military rank, surname, name and patronymic of the citizen (serviceman), date, month and year of birth)*

on behalf of the Russian Federation – **the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation** (*name of the federal executive body*) represented by **the head of POVSK (3rd category) (Veliky Novgorod) I. Arsentyeva**

for a term of **1 (one) year**

[redacted] (*surname and initials of the citizen (serviceman)*)

voluntarily undertakes obligations:

- **a)** to serve under contract for the period established by this contract;
- **b)** during military service under contract, to conscientiously perform all general, official and special duties of military servicemen established by the legislative and other normative legal acts of the Russian Federation;
- **c)** to reimburse, in cases provided for by the Federal Law "On Military Duty and Military Service," funds from the federal budget spent on his military or special training in the amount of _____ (*amount subject to reimbursement, roubles*);
- **d)** to be faithful to the Military Oath, to selflessly serve the people of the Russian Federation, bravely and skilfully defend the Russian Federation (*Article 16, paragraph 3 of the Internal Service Regulations of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, approved by Presidential Decree of 10 November 2007 No. 1495 – hereinafter the Internal Service Regulations*);
- e) to meet the physical fitness requirements for servicemen of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, established by order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation of 20 April 2023 No. 230 "On approval of the Guidelines on Physical Training in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 20 June 2023, registration No. 73917);
- f) to comply with the requirements of Federal Law No. 152-FZ of 27 July 2006 "On Personal Data" and to provide personal data for processing in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in accordance

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - JULY 29TH 2025

with the order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation of 4 December 2019 No. 707 "On Personal Data in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 17 March 2020, registration No. 57762);

- g) to comply with the Law of the Russian Federation of 21 July 1993 No. 5485-1 "On State Secrets";
- h) to participate in combat operations, to perform tasks under conditions of a state of emergency or martial law, armed conflicts, and also to participate in activities to support or restore international peace and security or to counter international terrorist activities beyond the territory of the Russian Federation (Article 37, paragraph 1(a) of Federal Law No. 53-FZ);
- i) to comply with the service time regulations established in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Article 8, subparagraph (e) of the Internal Service Regulations);
- j) to improve military skills (*Article 16, paragraph 5 of the Internal Service Regulations*);
- k) to vacate the specialised residential premises occupied under a rental agreement upon termination or dissolution of said agreement (Article 103, paragraph 1 of the Housing Code of the Russian Federation);
- l) to observe the restrictions, prohibitions and obligations connected with military service, established by Federal Law of 25 December 2008 No. 273-FZ "On Combating Corruption" and Federal Law of 27 May 1998 No. 76-FZ "On the Status of Military Servicemen" (hereinafter – Federal Law No. 76-FZ).

Private (signature) [redacted] (*rank, signature, full name of the serviceman*)
"29" ___ 07 2025

Key Details Extracted:

Field	**Detail**
Signatory	Private [redacted]
Date of Birth	16 March 1988
Contracting Authority	Ministry of Defence, Russian Federation
Representative	I. Arsentyeva, POVSK Head, Veliky Novgorod
Contract Duration	1 year
Signing Date	29 July 2025

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - AUGUST 19TH 2025

[redacted] Military Service Contract

CONTRACT *for military service*

1. This military service contract in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation *(in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other troops, military formations, bodies or military units of the State Fire Service)*

   is concluded between **Private** [redacted]**, 10.01.200_** *(military rank, surname, name and patronymic of the citizen (serviceman), date, month and year of birth)* on behalf of the Russian Federation – **the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation** *(name of the federal executive body)*

   represented by **the Head of POVSK (3rd category) (Veliky Novgorod) Captain Arsentyeva I.R.**

   for a term of **1 (one) year**

   [redacted]**,** *(surname and initials of the citizen (serviceman))*

voluntarily undertakes obligations:

a) to serve under contract for the period established by this contract;

b) during military service under contract, to conscientiously perform all general, official and special duties of military servicemen established by the legislative and other normative legal acts of the Russian Federation;

c) to reimburse, in cases provided for by the Federal Law "On Military Duty and Military Service," funds from the federal budget spent on his military or special training in the amount of _____ *(amount subject to reimbursement, roubles – left blank);*

d) to be faithful to the Military Oath, to selflessly serve the people of the Russian Federation, bravely and skilfully defend the Russian Federation *(Article 16, paragraph 3 of the Internal Service Regulations of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, approved by Presidential Decree of 10 November 2007 No. 1495 – hereinafter the Internal Service Regulations);*

e) to meet the physical fitness requirements for servicemen of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, established by order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation of 20 April 2023 No. 230 "On approval of the Guidelines on Physical Training in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 20 June 2023, registration No. 73917);

f) to comply with the requirements of Federal Law No. 152-FZ of 27 July 2006 "On Personal Data" and to

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] - [redacted]

provide personal data for processing in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in accordance with the order of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation of 4 December 2019 No. 707 "On Personal Data in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (registered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 17 March 2020, registration No. 57762);

g) to comply with the Law of the Russian Federation of 21 July 1993 No. 5485-1 "On State Secrets";

h) to participate in combat operations, to perform tasks under conditions of a state of emergency or martial law, armed conflicts, and also to participate in activities to support or restore international peace and security or to counter international terrorist activities beyond the territory of the Russian Federation *(Article 37, paragraph 1(a) of Federal Law No. 53-FZ)*;

i) to comply with the service time regulations established in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation *(Article 8, subparagraph (e) of the Internal Service Regulations)*;

j) to improve military skills *(Article 16, paragraph 5 of the Internal Service Regulations)*;

k) to vacate the specialised residential premises occupied under a rental agreement upon termination or dissolution of said agreement *(Article 103, paragraph 1 of the Housing Code of the Russian Federation)*;

m) to observe the restrictions, prohibitions and obligations connected with military service, established by Federal Law of 25 December 2008 No. 273-FZ "On Combating Corruption" and Federal Law of 27 May 1998 No. 76-FZ "On the Status of Military Servicemen" (*hereinafter – Federal Law No. 76-FZ*).

Private (signature) [redacted] (rank, signature, full name of the serviceman)

[redacted]

First name "[redacted]"	Low-medium – first letter and vowels unclear
Birth year last digit	Unclear – 200_
Initials on line 2 ([redacted])	High – clearly written in Cyrillic Д.Ш.
Signing date 19.08.2025	High
Representative rank "Captain"	High
Veliky Novgorod / Arsentyeva	High – matches [redacted] contract exactly

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] – [redacted]

Контракт
о прохождении военной службы

Настоящий контракт о прохождении военной службы в Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации _____

наключен можау _____ [redacted]
(воинское звание, фамилия, имя и отчество

[redacted]
(граждании (иностранного гражданина), число, меояц и год рождения)

и от имени Российской Федерании с Министерством обороны Российской
(наименование федерального органа

Федерации _____
конкчиительной власти или федерарсного государственного органа)

в нале ННОВСК (2 разред) г. Ярославая майор Кузненов Артём Юрьевич
(свожность, воинское зкание, фамилия и иниииалы должностного лица)

на срок 1 (один) год
(срок контракта)

1. [redacted] [redacted]
(фальших и ниицпала граждаииа (иностранного гражданина)

добрововной дбет обязательства:

а) проходить военную службу по контракту и течение установленного настояцим контрактом срока;

б) в период прохождения военной службы по контракту добросовество исполнять все общие, должностные и специальные обязанности военнослужащих, установленные законодательными и инмми нормативными правовыми актами Российской Федерации;

а) возместить в случаях, предусмотренных Федеральным законом "О коинской обхзанности и военной службо", средства федерального бюджета, затреченные на его военную или специальную подготовку, в размере

(размер подлажащих

возмещецио средств (пронисско, в рублях)

т) быть верным Военной присяге (обязательству), беззаветно служить народу Российской Федерации, мужественно и умело защищать Российскую Федерацию (абзан третий статьи 16 Устава внутренней службы Вооруженных Сил
Российской Федерации, утвержденного Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 10 ноября 2007 г. № 1495 (далее — Устав Восировной службы);

— 20 июй 2007 г. _____ _____

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APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] – [redacted]

поступления на военную службу по контракту и пелях проверки на соответствие требованиям федеральных законов, общевоинских уставов Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации и иных нормативных правовых актов Российской Федерации, определяющих общие, должностные и специальные обязанности военнослужащих;

д) пройти в соответствии со статвей 34.1 Федерального закона от 28 марта 1998 г. № 53-ФЗ «О воинской обязанности и военной службе» (далее – Федеральный закон № 53-ФЗ) испытания в течении трех месяцев со для поступления на военную службу по контракту в целях проверки на соответствие требованиям федеральных законов, общевойнских уставов Вооруженных Сия Российской Федерации и иных нормативных правовых актов Российской Федерации, определяющих общие, должностные и специальные обязанности военнослужащих;

е) соответствовать требованиям физической подготовленности военнослужащих, установленным приказом Министра обороны Российской Федерации от 20 апреля 2023 г. № 230 "06 утверждении Наставления по физической подготовке в. Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации" (зарегистрирован Министерством юстиции Российской Федерации 20 июня 2023 г., регистрационный № 73917);

ж) соблюдать требования Федерального закона от 27 июля 2006 г. № 152-ФЗ "О персональных данных" (далее - Федеральный закон № 152-ФЗ) и предоставлять сведения для обработки персональных данных в Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации в соответствии с приказом Министра обороны Российской Федерации от 4 декабря 2019 г. № 707 "О персональных данных в Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации" (зарегистрирован Министерством юстиции Российской Федерации 17 марта 2020 г., регистрационный № 57762);

з) соблюдать Закон Российской Федерации от 21 июля 1993 г. № 5485-I "О государственной тайне" .

и) участвовать в боевых действиях, выполнять задачи в период мобилизации, и условиях презвычайного или военного положения, военного времени, вооруженных конфликтов, а также участвовать в деятельности по поддержанию или восстановлению международного мира и безопасности либо пресечению международной террористической деятельности за пределами территории Российской Федерации (подпункт "а" пункта 1 статьи 37 Федерального закона № 53-ФЗ);

к) соблюдать регламент служебного времени, установленный в Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации (подпункт "е" сстава 8 Устава внутренней службы); л) совершенствовать войнское мастерство (абзац патый статьи 16 Устава внутренней службы);

м) осбободить жилое помещение, которое занималось по договору найма специализированного жилого помещения, в случаах расторжения или прекращения указанного договора (часть 1 статьи 103 Жилишного кодевва Российской Федерации);

PAGE 2

APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] – [redacted]

и) соблюдать ограничения, запреты и обязанности, связанные с прохождением якенной службы, установленные Федеральным законом от 25 декабря 2008 г. № 273-ФЗ "О противодействии коррупции" и Федеральным законом от 27 мая 1998 г. № 76-ФЗ "О статусе военнослужащих" (далее Федеральный закой № 76-ФЗ).

3. Министерство обороны Российской Федерации
(наименование федерального органа исполнительной власти или федерального государственного органа)

обеспечивает соблюдение прав военнослужащего, заключившего настоящий контракт, и прад членов его семьи, включая получение социальных гарантий и компенсаций, установленных законодательными и иными нормативными правовыми актами Российской Федерации определяющими статус военнослужащих и порядок прохождения военной службы.

В том числе:

а) организует проведение подготовки (передодготовки) военнослужащего по военно-учетной специальности в соответствии с его служебным предназначением;

б) обеспечивает общую продолжительность еженедельного служебного времени военнослужащего, проходящего военную службу по контракту, не превышающую нормальную продолжительность еженедального рабочего времени, установленную федеральными законами и иными нормативными правовыми актами Российской Федерации. Привлечение военнослужащих к исполнению обязанностей военной службы сверх установленной продолжительности еженедельного служебного времени в иных случаях компенсируется отлыком соответствующей продолжительности в другие дли недели. При невозможности предоставления указанной компенсации время исполнения обязанностей военней службы сверх установленной продолжительности еженедельного служебного времени суммируется и предоставляется военнослужащим в виде дополнительных суток отдыха, которые могут быть присоедиилим по желанию указанных военнослужащих к основному отпуску (статья 1 1 Федерального закона № 76-ФЗ);

в) обеспечивает предоставление военнослужащему в соответствии со статьей 11 Федерального закона № 76-ФЗ дополнительного времени отдыха или выплаты денежной компенсации за привлечение к мероприятиям, которые проводятся
при пребходимости без ограничения общей продолжительности еженедельного служебного времени;

г) обеспечивает защиту персональных данных, предоставленных военнослужащим, в соответствин с Федеральным законом № 152-ФЗ;

д) предоставлает военнослужащему жилые помещения специализированного жилишного фонда, а в случае отсутствия указанных жилых помещений ежемесячно выплачивает по желанию военнослужащего денежную компенсацию за наем (поднаем) жилых помещений в порядке и размерах, предусмотренных постановлением Правительства Российской Федерации от 31 декабря 2004 г. № 909 "О порядке размера а размерах выплаты денежной компенсации за наем (поднаем) жилых помещений военнослужащим гражданам Российской Федерации и иным лщам в соответствии с Федеральным законом "О статусе военнослужащих" и приказом Министра обороны Российской

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APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] – [redacted]

Федерации от 16 ноября 2022 г. № 686 "06 установлении Порядка выплаты в Вооруженных Силах Российской Федерации денежной компецеации за наем (поднаем) жилых помещений" (зарегистрирован Министерством юстиции Российской Федерации 22 декабря 2022 г., регистрационный № 71775);

е) граантирует военнослужащему обеспочение его жилым помещением в форме предоставления ему денежных средств на приобретение или строительство жиного помещения дибо предоставления сму жилого помещения в порядке и на условиях, установленных Федеральным заколом № 76-ФЗ, другпый федеральными законами и плыми пормативными правовыми актами Российской Федерации, за счет средста федерального бюджета (статья 15 Федерального закона №76-ФЗ);

ж) организует оказание бесплатной медицинской помощи военнослужащему;

з) осуществляет обязательное государственное личное страхование за счет средств федерального бюджета (пункт 1 статьи 18 Федерального закона № 76-ФЗ);

ж) обеспепивает реализащио права военнослужащего на образование (статья 19 Федерального закона № 76-ФЗ);

н) обучение в военных профессиональных образовательных организациях и военных образовательных организациях высшего образования;

на обучение по имеющим государственную аккредитацию образовательным программам среднего профессионального образования и высшего образования, а также на подготовнтельных отлечениях федеральных государственных образовательных организаций высшего образования за счет средста федерального бюджета с освоением образовательных программ по очно-заочной или заочной форме обучения в порядке, определенном постановлением Правительства Российской Федерации от 3 ноября 2014 г. № 1155 "О порядка реализации права военнослужащих, проходящих военную службу по контракту (за исключением офицеров), пепредывная предолжительность военной службы по контракту которых составляет не менее 3 лет, на обучение по имеющим государственную аккредитацию образовательным программам среднего профессионального образования и высшего образования, а также на подготовительных отделениях федеральных государственных образовательных организаций высшего образования за счет средста федерального бюджета с освоением образовательных программ по очно-заочной или заочной форме обучения" ,

на прохождение профессиональной переподготовки по одной из гражданских специальностей без взимания платы за обучение и с сохраненнем обеспечения всеми видами докольствия в год увольнения с военной службы по достижении предельного возраста пребывания на военной службь, истечении срока военной службы, состоянию здоровья или в связи с организационно-штатными мероприятиями, в случае если общая продолжительность военной службы военнослужащего, проходящего военную службу по контракту, составляет пать лет и более (не считая премени обучения в военных профессиональных образовательных организациях и военных образовательных организациях высшего образования), в порядке и на условиях, определенных приказом Министра обороны Российской Федерации от 16 мая 2021 г. № 270 "06 определении Порядка и условий реализации военнослужащими Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации, проходящими военную службу по контракту, права на профессиональную переподготовку
по одной из гражданских специальностей"

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APPENDIX II – RUSSIAN SERVICE CONTRACT

[redacted] – [redacted]

(зарегистрирован Министерством юстиции Российской Федерации 18 июня 2021 г., регистрационный № 63930);

к) осуществляет продовольственное и вещевое обеспечение военнослужащего за счет средств федерального бюджета.

4. Настоящий контракт вступает в силу со дня его подписания должностным лицом, составлен в двух экземплярах.

5. Подписи сторон

[redacted]
(воинское звание, подпись,

[redacted]
Фамилия и инициалы гражданина (иностранного гражданина)

Начальника ПОВСК (2 разряда) г. Ярославль
(должность, воинское звание,

Кузнецов А.Ю.
подпись, фамилия и инициалы должностного лица)

М.П.

11.09.2023
(дата)

11.09.2024
(М.П., дата)

6424g in on 21.09.2025
(дата и номер приказа соответствующего должностного лица)

Настоящий контракт прекратит свое действие _____
(дата прекращения действия контракта)

в связи с _____

(основание прекращения действия контракта в соответствии с законодательством Российской Федерации)

Примечание. Руководитель федерального органа исполнительной власти или федерального государственного органа, в котором предумотрена военная служба, вправе указать в пунктах 2 и 3 типовой формы контракта конкретные права и обзанности военнослужащих, предусмотренные законодательством Российской Федерации и обусловленные особенностями их военной службы.

Условие о возмещений средств федерального бюджета, затраченных на военную или специальную подготовку, включается в контракты о прохождении военной службы для граждан, обучающихся в военно-учебных заведениях.

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APPENDIX IV - CRIMINAL CODE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION - CRIMES AGAINST MILITARY SERVICE

CRIMINAL CODE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Chapter 33. CRIMES AGAINST MILITARY SERVICE

Article 331. Concept of Crimes Against Military Service

Article 332. Failure to Execute an Order

Article 333. Resistance to a Superior or Coercing Him to Violate Military Service Duties

Article 334. Violent Actions Against a Superior

Article 335. Violation of Statutory Rules of Relations Between Military Personnel in the Absence of Relations of Subordination Between Them

Article 336. Insult to a Military Service Member

Article 337. Absence from Unit or Place of Service Without Leave

Article 338. Desertion

Article 339. Evasion of Military Service Duties by Simulation of Illness or Other Means

Article 340. Violation of Rules of Combat Duty

Article 341. Violation of Rules of Border Service

Article 342. Violation of Statutory Rules of Guard Duty

Article 343. Violation of Rules of Service for Protection of Public Order and Ensuring Public Safety

Article 346. Intentional Destruction or Damage of Military Property

Article 347. Destruction or Damage of Military Property Through Negligence

Article 348. Loss of Military Property

Article 349. Violation of Rules of Handling Weapons and Items Presenting Increased Danger to Others

Article 352.1. Voluntary Surrender

21st of December, 2024
[Signed] (Signature, Full name)

APPENDIX VI – FOREIGN ENLISTMENT LAW – SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Country	Prohibits Foreign Enlistment ✓	Does Not Prohibit Foreign Enlistment ✗	Specific Law	Text
Ghana	✓		The Foreign Enlistment Act, 1961 (Act 75) Sections 1,2 and 3	*Section - 1 - Illegal Enlistment* *(1) A person who, being a citizen of Ghana, within or without the Republic accepts or agrees to accept, without the permission in writing of the President first had and obtained, any commission or engagement in the military service of any other country or induces any other person, whether a citizen or not, to accept or agree to accept any commission or engagement in the military service of any other country is guilty of first degree felony.* *Section - 2 - Leaving Ghana For Enlistment* *A person who leaves the Republic or goes on board any vessel, vehicle or aircraft wherever situate for the purpose of accepting or agreeing to accept, without the permission in writing of the President first had and obtained, any commission or* *engagement in the military service of any other country or induce, any other person, whether a citizen or not, to leave the Republic or to go on board any vessel, vehicle or aircraft for the purpose of leaving the Republic with intent to accept or agree to accept any commission or engagement in the military service of any other country is guilty of first degree felony.* *Section - 3 - Inducing Enlistment By Misrepresentation* *A person who induces any other person, whether a citizen or not, to leave the Republic or go on board any vessel, vehicle or aircraft within the Republic under a misrepresentation or false representation as to the service in which that person is to be engaged with intent that that person may accept or agree to accept any commission or engagement in the military service of* *any other country is guilty of first degree felony.*
South Africa	✓		Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act, 1998 [1] Section 2 and section 3	*Prohibition on mercenary activity* *2. No person may within the Republic or elsewhere recruit, use or train persons for or finance or engage in mercenary activity.* *Rendering of foreign military assistance prohibited* *3. No person may within the Republic or elsewhere—* *(a) offer to render any foreign military assistance to any state or organ of state, group of persons or other entity or person unless he or she has been granted authorisation to offer such assistance in terms of section 4;* *(b) render any foreign military assistance to any state or organ of state, group of persons or other entity or person unless such assistance is rendered in accordance with an agreement approved in terms of section 5.*

1 https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a15-98.pdf

Country	Prohibits Foreign Enlistment ✓	Does Not Prohibit Foreign Enlistment ✗	Specific Law	Text
Nigeria		✗	No Specific statutory provisions	*There is no single statute that explicitly prohibits individual Nigerians from traveling abroad to join a foreign military as a personal choice. However, the Nigerian government uses a combination of domestic penal laws and international protocols to criminalize unauthorized recruitment and mercenary activities. The primary legal bases for these prohibitions include: Criminal Code Act (Chapter 77): While it does not explicitly name "foreign enlistment," various sections under the Criminal Code Act (and the Penal Code in Northern Nigeria) are used to prosecute activities that threaten national security or involve unauthorized military-like conduct. Laws Governing Mercenary Activities: Nigeria is a signatory to international conventions that strictly define and prohibit mercenary activities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that joining foreign conflicts independently may violate these international laws, which are recognized within the Nigerian legal framework. Armed Forces Act (CAP A20): This act strictly regulates the conduct of existing Nigerian service members. Under Section 42 of the Armed Forces Act, any service outside of Nigeria must be officially sanctioned. Unauthorized departure to join another force would be classified as desertion or absence without leave (AWOL).Official Proclamations & Gazette Orders: The President has the authority to issue orders via the Federal Gazette that can restrict specific foreign engagements or define the legal status of Nigerians participating in foreign conflicts*
Egypt	✓		Law No. 26 of 1975 Concerning Egyptian Nationality [2] Article 16	*Article 16:* *The Ministers Council may issue a decree stripping the Egyptian Nationality off anyone enjoying it, in any of the following cases:* *2. If he accepts to join military service in a foreign country without a prior license from the Minister of War.*
Kenya	✓		Penal Code, Chapter 63, Laws of Kenya[3] Section 68	*68. Foreign enlistment* *(1) Any person who, without the authority of the President in writing—* *(b) being a citizen of Kenya accepts or agrees to accept any commission or engagement in the military, naval, air, police or* *other armed forces or service of any nature whatsoever, or, whether a citizen of Kenya or not, induces any other person to accept or agree to accept any commission of engagement in the military, naval, air, police or other armed forces of any foreign state; or* *(c) being a citizen of Kenya, quits or goes on board any vessel with a view of quitting Kenya, with intent to accept any commission or engagement in the military, naval, air, police or other armed forces or service of any nature whatsoever of any, foreign state; or*

2 https://clr.africanchildforum.org/Legislation%20Per%20Country/Egypt/egypt_nationality_1975_en.pdf
3 https://new.kenyalaw.org/akn/ke/act/1930/10/eng@2023-12-11

Country	Prohibits Foreign Enlistment ✓	Does Not Prohibit Foreign Enlistment ✗	Specific Law	Text
Kenya	✓			*(d) being the master or owner of any vessel, knowingly either takes on board, or has on board such vessel, any illegally enlisted person; or* *(e) with intent or knowledge, or having reasonable cause to believe that the same will be employed in the military or naval service of any foreign state at war with a friendly state, builds, agrees to build, causes or allows to be dispatched any vessel, or issues or delivers any commission for any vessel, shall, unless he proves to the satisfaction of the court that in any case falling within provisions of paragraph (b) and (c) the commission or engagement concerned was not voluntary, be guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for ten years.*
Uganda	✓		Penal Code, Chapter 128 , Laws of Uganda[4] Section 50	*50. Foreign enlistment* *A person commits a misdemeanour who does any of the following acts without the licence of the President—* *(b)who, being a citizen of Uganda, accepts or agrees to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any foreign State at war with any friendly State, or whether a citizen of Uganda or not, induces any other person to accept or agree to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any foreign State;* *(c)who, being a citizen of Uganda, quits or goes on board any vessel with a view of quitting Uganda, with intent to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any foreign State at war with a friendly State, or, whether a citizen of Uganda or not, induces any other person to quit or to go on board any vessel with a view of quitting Uganda with the like intent;* *(d)who, being the master or owner of any vessel, knowingly either takes on board, or engages to take on board or has on board the vessel any illegally enlisted person*
Tanzania	✓		Penal Code, Chapter 16, Laws of Tanzania[5] Section 65	*65.—Any 'person commits a misdemeanour who does any of the following acts without the licence of the President, that is to say—* *b) being a citizen of the United Republic, accepts or agrees to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any foreign state at war with any friendly state, or whether a citizen of the United Republic or not, induces any other person to accept or agree to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any such foreign state;* *(c) being a citizen of the United Republic, quits or goes on board any vessel with a view of quitting the United Republic, with intent to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any foreign state at war with a friendly state, or whether a citizen of the United Republic or not, induces any other person to quit or to go on board any vessel with a view of quitting the United Republic with the like intent;* *(d) being the master or owner of any vessel, knowingly either takes on board or engages to take on board, or has on board the vessel any illegally enlisted persons*

4 https://ulii.org/en/akn/ug/act/ord/1950/12/eng@2024-12-23
5 https://www.un.org/depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TZA_penal_code.pdf

Country	Prohibits Foreign Enlistment ✓	Does Not Prohibit Foreign Enlistment ✗	Specific Law	Text
DR Congo		✗		*No specific law prohibits citizens from foreign enlistment, but the DR Congo is a state party to several international and regional frameworks that criminalize mercenary activities: OAU Convention (1977): The DRC is subject to the OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, which declares mercenary activities a "crime against peace and security". This convention mandates member states to prevent the recruitment and training of mercenaries within their territories. UN Convention (1989): Under the UN International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, mercenary activities aimed at overthrowing governments or destabilizing states are criminalized.*
Malawi	✓		Penal Code, Chapter 7:01, Laws of Malawi [6] Section 62	*662. Foreign enlistment* *Any person commits a misdemeanor who does any of the following acts without the licence of the President, that is to say—* *(b)who, being a citizen of Malaꝟi, accepts or agrees to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any foreign state at war with any friendly state, or, whether a citizen of Malaꝟi or not, induces any other person to accept or agree to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any such foreign state as aforesaid; or* *(c)who, being a citizen of Malaꝟi, quits or goes on board any ship with a view of quitting the Republic, with intent to accept any commission or engagement in the military or naval service of any foreign state at war with a friendly state, or, whether a citizen of Malaꝟi or not, induces any other person to quit or to go on board any ship with a view of quitting the Republic with the like intent; or* *(d)who, being the master or owner of any ship, knowingly either takes on board, or engages to take on board, or has on board such ship any illegally enlisted person to quit or to go on board any ship with a view of quitting the Republic with the like intent; or* *(d)who, being the master or owner of any ship, knowingly either takes on board, or engages to take on board, or has on board such ship any illegally enlisted person*
Botswana	✓		Foreign Enlistment Act, Chapter 21:06, Laws of Botswana[7] Section 3 and Section 9	*Section 3. Illegal enlistment* *(1) A citizen of Botswana who, within or outside Botswana, accepts or agrees to accept, without first obtaining in writing the permission of the President, a commission or engagement in the military service of any other country, or induces any person, whether a citizen or not, to accept or agree to accept a commission or engagement in the military service of any other country, shall be guilty of an offence.* *(2) A person who is not a citizen of Botswana but to whom a Botswana passport has been issued shall not, while he-* *(a) is in possession of the passport;* *(b) has any claim to the possession of the passport; or*

6 https://malawilii.org/akn/mw/act/1929/22/eng@2014-12-31
7 https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/0762f8/pdf/

Country	Prohibits Foreign Enlistment ✓	Does Not Prohibit Foreign Enlistment ✗	Specific Law	Text
Botswana				*(c) otherwise claims or enjoys the protection of Botswana by reason of the issue of the passport,* *accept or agree to accept, without first obtaining in writing the permission of the President, a commission or engagement in the military service of any other country, or induce any person, whether a citizen or not, to accept or agree to accept a commission or engagement in the military service of any other country.* *(3) Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of subsection (2) shall be guilty of an offence.* *Section 9. Penalties* *(1) Any person who contravenes any provision of this Act shall be guilty of an offence and on conviction thereof shall be liable to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 10 years.*
Somalia	✓		Law 28 of 22 December 1962 on Somali Citizenship[8] Article 10	*Article 10.* *Renunciation of Citizenship* *Any Somali citizen who:* *c) being abroad and having accepted employment from a foreign Government or voluntarily serving in the armed forces of a foreign country, continues to retain his post, notwithstanding the notice from, the Somali Government that, unless he leaves the employment or the service within a definite period of time, he shall lose Somali citizenship; shall cease to be a Somali citizen.*
Algeria	✓		Algerian Military Justice Code, established by Ordinance No. 71-28 of April 22, 1971 Article 258 and 259	*While Algerian law does not have a single law prohibiting foreign enlistment, joining a foreign military is effectively prohibited for many citizens due to strict National Service obligations and Military Criminal Code provisions. Failure to report for call-up can lead to a criminal charge of desertion while abroad, an offence punishable by ten years imprisonment*
Cameroon		✗		*No specific public law in Cameroon prohibits citizens from enlisting in foreign armies.*
Sierra Leone		✗		*There is no explicit, general prohibition in the laws of Sierra Leone that bars a citizen from joining a foreign military. Sierra Leone, as a party to international conventions against mercenary activities, states it prohibits its citizens from serving as mercenaries.*

8 https://citizenshiprightsafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Somalia_Citizenship_Law_28_22-Dec-62.pdf

JOURNALISTS FOR JUSTICE

About JFJ

Journalists For Justice (JFJ) works to strengthen investigative journalism and advance justice, accountability and human rights across Africa. Its mission is to challenge impunity and advocate for justice for victims of atrocity crimes. JFJ pursues this mission through investigations, reporting, research, advocacy and strengthening the capacity of journalists to report on serious human rights violations and international justice.

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