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.