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.