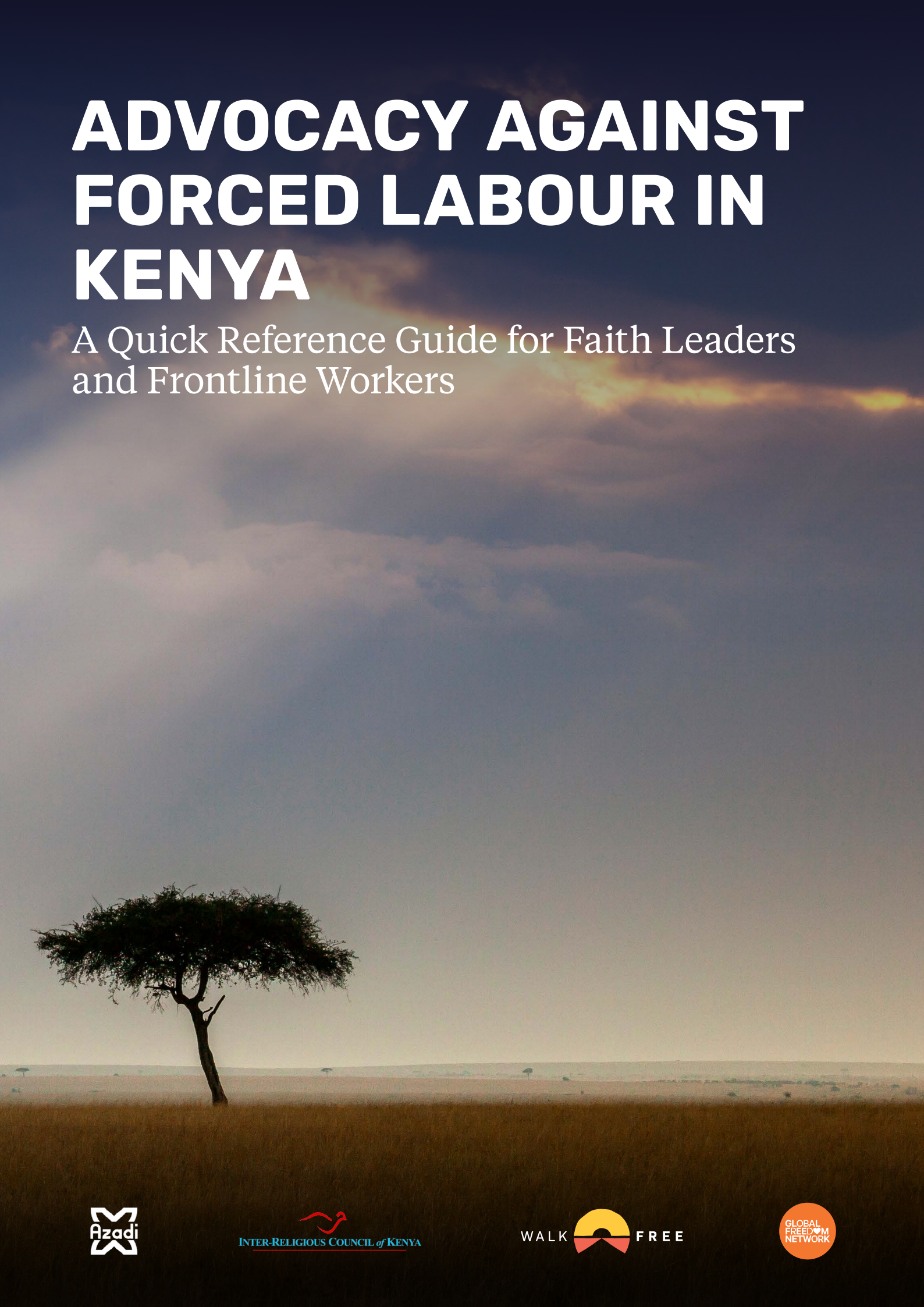
ADVOCACY AGAINST FORCED LABOUR IN KENYA

A Quick Reference Guide for Faith Leaders and Frontline Workers



Azadi

INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL of KENYA

WALK FREE

GLOBAL FREEDOM NETWORK



Tindiret, Kenya, August 2023. Farmers harvest coffee in the Nandi region, where highland conditions support coffee production. Agricultural workers, including those in coffee supply chains, can face risks of forced labour. Photo credit: Gerald Anderson via Anadolu Agency/Getty Images.

WHAT IS FORCED LABOUR?

Forced labour is work or service imposed under the threat of a penalty and not offered voluntarily. Control can involve threats, deception, debt, withheld wages or identity documents, violence, isolation or restrictions on movement. A person does not need to be physically restrained for forced labour to occur.

PREVALENCE AND STATISTICS

27.6 million
people globally were estimated to be in forced labour on any given day in 2021[1].

17.3 million
were exploited in the private economy; 6.3 million in forced commercial sexual exploitation; 3.9 million in state-imposed forced labour[2].

269,000
people in Kenya were estimated to be living in modern slavery in 2021 according to the Global Slavery Index Report 2023[3].

8.5% / 1.3m
Children in Kenya were reported as engaged in child labour, based on Kenya National Bureau of Statistics data cited by UNICEF[4].

WHY IT HAPPENS

Poverty, unemployment, lack of decent work, unsafe recruitment and migration, climate shocks, discrimination, informal work, weak labour inspection, corruption and limited services can increase vulnerability. Exploiters take advantage of these conditions to control people and profit from their labour.

SIGNS AND INDICATORS OF FORCED LABOUR

- **Abuse of vulnerability:** Exploiting poverty, age, disability or insecure status.
- **Deception:** Lying about the job, wages, conditions or recruitment.
- **Restriction of movement:** Preventing workers from leaving freely.
- **Isolation:** Cutting workers off from family, friends or support.
- **Physical and sexual violence:** Using violence or sexual abuse to control workers.
- **Intimidation and threats:** Threatening workers or their families with harm or punishment.
- **Retention of identity documents:** Taking or withholding passports, IDs or other documents.
- **Withholding of wages:** Refusing to pay workers to control or prevent them from leaving.
- **Debt bondage:** Forcing workers to work to repay debts they cannot reasonably clear.
- **Abusive working and living conditions:** Subjecting workers to degrading, unsafe and inhumane conditions
- **Excessive overtime:** Forcing workers to work excessively long hours under coercion.

Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), ILO Indicators of Forced Labour.

REMEMBER

Initial agreement to take a job does not mean a person freely agreed to all that followed. Receiving some wages does not rule out forced labour. Responsibility rests with those using coercion and exploitation—not the person exploited.



WHERE FORCED LABOUR CAN HIDE

It can occur in ordinary workplaces, private homes and recruitment journeys—not only in places that look criminal.

HIGH-RISK SETTINGS

- **Domestic work:** Private homes can conceal excessive hours, withheld wages, isolation, threats, violence and dependence on an employer for food or accommodation.
- **Agriculture and seasonal work:** Remote farms and informal work may have limited inspection; risks include deceptive recruitment, debt, withheld wages and child exploitation.
- **Fishing and lake communities:** Isolation on boats or at landing sites, brokers, debt and withheld wages may limit workers' freedom to leave.
- **Mining, quarrying and sand harvesting:** Informal or remote sites can hide dangerous work, debt, withheld pay and child exploitation.
- **Cattle herding, street vending and begging:** Exploitation may be presented as family duty or informal work; abusers may take earnings, set targets or use threats.
- **Construction, hospitality and informal businesses:** Casual work, no written contract, unpaid wages, recruitment debts and weak complaint channels can conceal coercion.
- **Labour migration and recruitment:** False job offers, contract substitution, recruitment fees, passport confiscation, debt and threats can trap workers in Kenya or abroad.
- **Family, religious and community settings:** Trust, obligation, mentorship or repayment of a favour can be used to normalise work that is coercive and not freely chosen.
- **Emerging risks:** Online scam centres may force people to conduct online fraud. The guide also flags deceptive recruitment of Kenyans into military-related activity but it's important assess circumstances carefully rather than assuming every recruit is trafficked.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Several indicators together should prompt safe inquiry and referral.

- **Was the person deceived about the job, pay or conditions?**
- **Can they refuse or leave without threats, debt penalties or other harm?**
- **Are wages or documents withheld? Are they isolated or controlled?**

Image: Kisumu, Kenya, June 2023. Kenyan fishers work on Lake Victoria from early morning until evening, spending long hours on the water to earn a living. Photo credit: Gerald Anderson via Anadolu Agency/Getty Images.

LAWS, GAPS & ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Kenya has a legal foundation, but implementation, coordination and a dedicated policy remain key gaps.

KEY LAWS AND FRAMEWORKS

- **Constitution of Kenya, 2010 — Article 30:** Prohibits slavery, servitude and forced labour.
- **Employment Act, 2007 — Section 4:** Prohibits forced or compulsory labour and provides a basis for action on exploitative work.
- **Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010:** Criminalises trafficking and provides for prevention, prosecution and victim protection; forced labour can be a purpose of trafficking.
- **Alliance 8.7 Kenya Country Roadmap 2025–2030:** National framework identifying forced labour, trafficking, modern slavery and child labour as priorities.

KEY GAPS IDENTIFIED

- **No dedicated national policy and action plan:** The response is spread across laws, policies and institutions.
- **Uneven implementation:** Limited capacity, labour inspection and identification, especially in informal and hard-to-reach sectors.
- **Fragmented data and coordination:** Limited centralised data and weak coordination/referral can obscure the scale and impede response.
- **Recruitment oversight:** Fraudulent recruitment and labour-broker practices need stronger regulation and coordination.
- **International Commitments:** Kenya has not ratified ILO Protocol of 2014 to Convention No. 29 (P029), ILO Convention No. 189 on domestic workers or ILO Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment.

PRIORITY ADVOCACY ASKS

1. **Initiate a national study on prevalence of forced labour:** Ask the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics to initiate a national study on the prevalence of forced labour and emerging.
2. **Develop a national forced labour policy and action plan:** Ask the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to initiate the development, adoption of a national forced labour policy and resource the implementation action plan.
3. **Strengthen labour inspection and enforcement:** Prioritise domestic work, agriculture, construction, hospitality and informal work and review penalties to deter serious offences.
4. **Hold recruiters accountable:** Strengthen coordination between employment authorities, labour inspectors, police and migrant-worker protection actors.
5. **Ratify ILO P029 and strengthen worker protection:** Use the Alliance 8.7 Roadmap commitments to press for progress and accountability.
6. **Provide holistic survivor care and support service:** Government and stakeholders to ensure survivors have access to holistic support and care including safe accommodation, healthcare, psychosocial support, legal assistance, compensation and sustainable livelihoods.

FAITH-LED ADVOCACY & SURVIVOR SUPPORT

Faith leaders and frontline workers play a critical role in preventing and addressing forced labour in Kenya. Faith leaders can use their influence and trusted platforms to challenge exploitation, promote dignity and safe migration, raise awareness, support reporting and advocate for stronger government action.

Frontline workers can identify warning signs, provide safe and survivor-centred referrals, document concerns, support affected people and engage duty bearers to strengthen protection and enforcement. Survivor support is equally essential to ensure people affected by exploitation are supported in their recovery and empowered to participate in advocacy and decisions that affect their lives.



Malindi, Kenya, July 2026. Sheikh Famau Mohammed takes part in a regional workshop to help develop practical guidelines on forced labour. Photo credit: Azadi Community.

PRACTICAL ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

- **Sermons, khutbahs and temple discourses:** Connect faith teachings on justice, dignity, compassion and fairness to workers' rights and the duty to challenge exploitation.
- **Community dialogues and outreach:** Bring together workers, survivors, youth, women, parents, employers, recruiters, local administrators and service providers. End with actions, responsible people and follow-up dates.
- **Interfaith coalitions:** Agree on shared messages and advocacy asks; use county interfaith networks to engage decision-makers.
- **Radio and digital campaigns:** Share clear messages on red flags, safe recruitment, reporting and support. Do not identify survivors or share unverified allegations.
- **Engage duty bearers:** Meet labour officers, county officials, ministries, MPs, county assemblies, police and recruitment regulators. Seek specific commitments and track progress.
- **Policy briefs, memoranda and petitions:** Use community evidence to make concise recommendations during policy, legislative and budget processes.
- **Monitor commitments:** Record the ask, responsible institution, deadline, resources promised and progress.

SURVIVORS MUST BE PARTNERS —NOT JUST STORYTELLERS

Meaningful and ethical engagement of survivors is essential to effective advocacy against forced labour because survivors possess lived experience and practical knowledge that cannot be replaced by professional or institutional perspectives. Their participation therefore helps ensure that advocacy messages, community interventions, policies and services respond to the realities of affected people rather than being designed around assumptions about them.

WHY SURVIVOR SUPPORT MATTERS

Forced labour can cause injury, trauma, isolation, debt, lost income, family separation, stigma and loss of dignity. Without practical support, survivors may be pushed back into unsafe work. Support enables recovery, self-determination and meaningful participation in advocacy.

SUPPORT AND REFERRAL:

- **Safety and basic needs:** Check immediate danger; support safe accommodation, food, clothing, transport and safety planning.
- **Health and psychosocial care:** Connect to medical care, counselling, peer support and safe spaces according to the person's needs.
- **Legal and practical assistance:** Offer information on rights, legal aid, unpaid wages, compensation and replacement documents.
- **Recovery and inclusion:** Support livelihoods, skills, education, school re-entry and safe reconnection with trusted people, where appropriate and with consent.

SHARED COMMITMENT

- **Recognise the signs.**
- **Protect people's choices and confidentiality.**
- **Build referral partnerships.**
- **Demand stronger laws, implementation and resources.**
- **Put survivors at the centre.**
- **Turn faith and concern into sustained action.**

LISTEN • PROTECT • CONNECT • RESPECT



Malindi County, Kenya, April 2026. Faith leaders and survivor leaders gather for an inception and co-creation workshop. The workshop brings participants together to shape practical guidance on forced labour. Photo credit: Azadi Community

Endnotes:

1 International Labour Organization, Walk Free & International Organization for Migration 2022, Global Estimates of Modern Slavery. https://cdn.walkfree.org/assets/uploads/resources/global-estimates-of-modern-slavery-forced-labour-and-forced-marriage/GEMS-2022_Report_EN_V8.pdf.
2 International Labour Organization, Walk Free & International Organization for Migration 2022, Global Estimates of Modern Slavery. https://cdn.walkfree.org/assets/uploads/resources/global-estimates-of-modern-slavery-forced-labour-and-forced-marriage/GEMS-2022_Report_EN_V8.pdf.
3 Walk Free 2023, Global Slavery Index 2023. Available from: https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/. [2 October 2026].
4 Chibebe, W & Zaman, M 2021, Let's end child labour in Kenya, UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/kenya/stories/lets-end-child-labour-kenya.



Masai Mara, Kenya, July 2018. Faith can play a vital role in fighting modern slavery because faith leaders are in a unique position to see into the hearts of their communities. Photo by Ibrahim Suha Derbent/ The Image Bank via Getty Images.