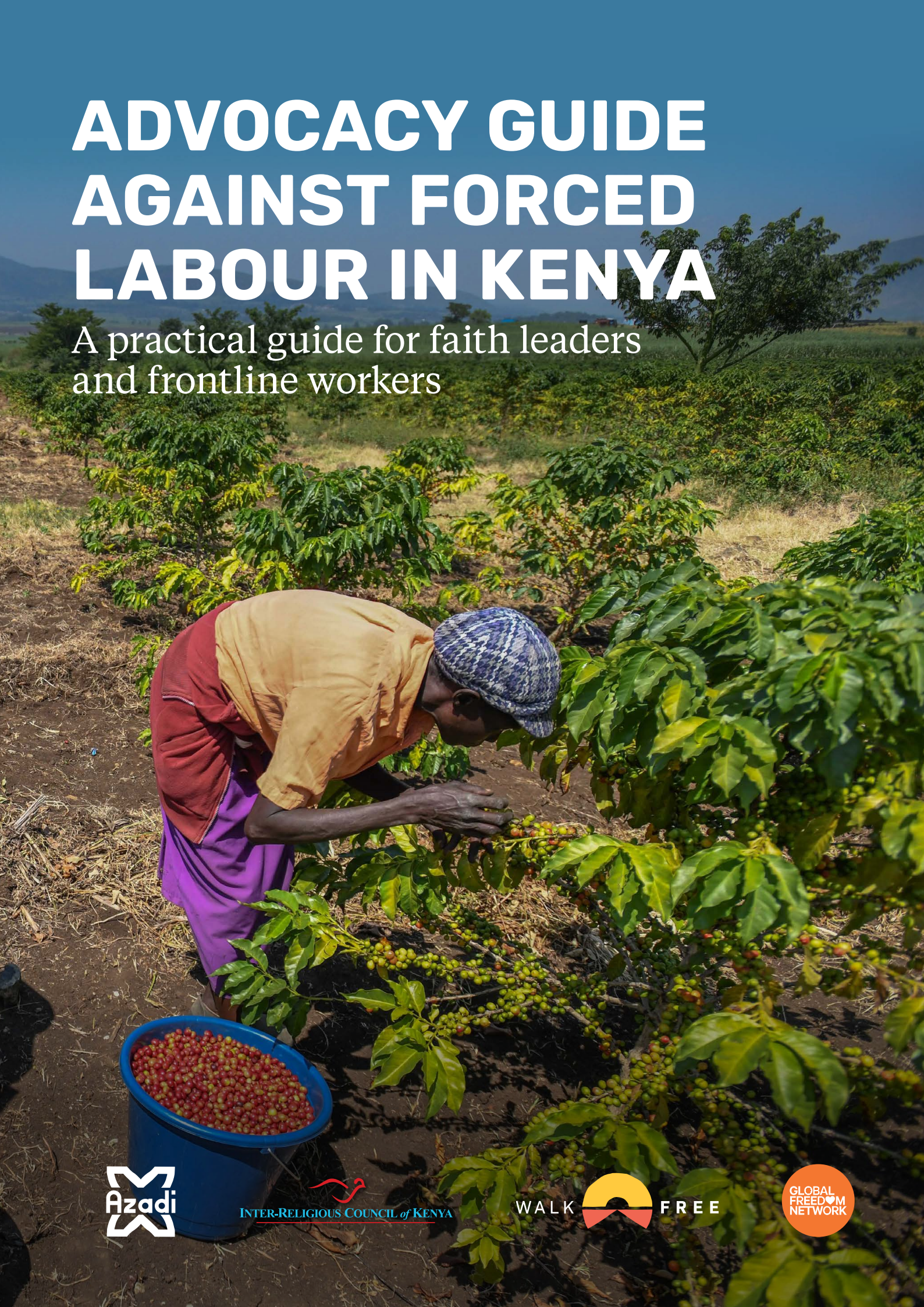
ADVOCACY GUIDE AGAINST FORCED LABOUR IN KENYA

A practical guide for faith leaders and frontline workers



Azadi

INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL of KENYA

WALK FREE

GLOBAL FREEDOM NETWORK

WHO WE ARE

Azadi Community

Azadi Community is a survivor-led, value-based and feminist organisation whose goal is to create spaces and programs that enhance the agency of survivors of trafficking, support recovery from trauma, and to sustain their reintegration into society. We operate a resource center where the survivors receive skills training for empowerment and to build competencies. We run several programmes, all meant to facilitate healing, reintegration, and survivor leadership. The Economic Justice and Self Determination program empowers women survivors of human trafficking to become self-sufficient, resilient, and able to determine their own paths. Survivor Leadership and Advocacy program fosters a community of leaders driving societal change through advocacy and capacity strengthening. The Knowledge Production and Sharing program focuses on honing survivors lived experience expertise through consultancy, evidence generation and sharing and using it to inform practices in the human rights sector.

The Inter-Religious Council of Kenya

The Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) is a national coalition of all major faith communities in Kenya that works together to deepen interfaith dialogue and collaboration among members for a common endeavor to mobilize the unique moral and social resources of religious people and address shared concerns. IRCK comprises of nine Religious Coordinating Bodies (RCBs) including; Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK), Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK), Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEEF), Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA), Shia Ithnasharia Muslim Association Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) and Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC Kenya). IRCK also comprises 38 County Interfaith Networks across different counties in Kenya, the Kenya Women of Faith Network (KWFN) and Kenya Interfaith Youth Network (KIYN). The RCBs, KIYN and KWFN have national coverage with structures that reach out to grassroots levels at the Counties.

Walk Free

Walk Free is an international human rights group working to accelerate the end of all forms of modern slavery. We are the creator of the Global Slavery Index, the world's most comprehensive dataset on modern slavery. We use this data to mobilise powerful forces for change against these human rights abuses. We work with governments and regulators, businesses and investors, faith and community leaders to drive systems change and partner directly with frontline organisations to impact the lives of those vulnerable to modern slavery. We work with survivors to build the movement to end modern slavery, recognising that lived experience is expertise and they are central to identifying lasting solutions.

Global Freedom Network

Global Freedom Network (GFN) is the faith-based arm of Walk Free. We recognise that 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. With a philosophy built on interfaith collaboration, GFN has worked since its inception in 2014 with faith leaders around the world to build bridges between survivors and law enforcement, cooperative connections with governments, social workers and survivor support groups, especially in countries of strong faith and high prevalence of modern slavery. By building relationships and collaborating with faith leaders and faith-based organisations we believe we can increase awareness, understanding, impact, and action.

Cover Image:
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.



> *Nairobi, Kenya, July 2026. Participants gather for a group photograph during the Forced Labour Guidelines Co-Creation Workshop, which brought together diverse perspectives to help develop practical guidance on forced labour. Photo credit: Walk Free.*

Our Interfaith Pledge

As faith leaders, we affirm that no person should be trapped in labour or controlled through fear, debt, deception and withheld wages. We will speak out against forced labour, support survivors, and move from prayers to action.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Advocacy Guide is the result of the knowledge, experiences and contributions of many people who shared their time, reflections and ideas to strengthen collective action against forced labour in Kenya. We extend our sincere appreciation to the faith leaders, frontline workers and survivors across Kenya who participated in consultations, discussions and co-creation sessions. Your willingness to share your experiences, perspectives and practical knowledge has helped ensure that this guide speaks to the realities faced by individuals, families and communities affected by forced labour. We particularly appreciate the survivors who contributed their lived experience and insights.

We are grateful to the IRCK theologians namely Fr John Webootsa, Ven John Kamau, Sheikh Salim Charo, Mr. Das Rukma and frontline worker advisors who provided their expertise and technical guidance throughout the development of this guide. Your knowledge of faith, community realities, labour issues and practical responses helped strengthen the messages, approaches and advocacy actions contained in this resource. Your thoughtful advice has helped bridge faith-based perspectives and frontline experience making the guide relevant and accessible to those working directly with communities.

Our sincere appreciation goes to Walk Free for providing the technical support and resources that made the development of this guide possible. Their support contributed to the consultations, co-creation process and development of a practical resource that can be used by faith leaders, frontline workers and other community actors. We are grateful for the partnership and commitment to strengthening collective efforts to address forced labour in Kenya.

We are grateful to the Executive Director, Mr. Linus Nthigai and Program Manager, Antony Blaize from the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) and Peter Olewe, Mercy Mwende, Irene Wanje, Maurie Okello, Mwongeli Ndambuki, Victoria Ambiyo and Rose Ambuvi from Azadi Community for coordinating the development and consolidation of this guide. Through their collaboration, they brought together different voices and perspectives and supported a process that remained connected to the lived realities of forced labour in Kenya. Their support helped to shape a guide that is practical, relevant and responsive to the challenges experienced by workers, families and communities across the country.

This guide is not intended to remain on a shelf. This guide is a practical tool for turning knowledge into action. Faith leaders and frontline workers can use it in sermons, community meetings, counselling, training and conversations with workers and families to help people understand forced labour and know where to seek help. It can also be used to identify local concerns, agree on common advocacy messages and strengthen reporting and referral of cases. Let us use this guide to speak up, support people at risk, and work together to make workplaces and communities safer for everyone.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forced labour is "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily[1]." The concept covers coercion by employers, recruiting agencies, individuals or state authorities and can occur in both formal and informal economies. Coercion may involve physical or sexual violence, threats, intimidation, restriction of movement, withholding wages or identity documents, debt bondage, deception or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities[2].

Kenya's national commitments to addressing forced labour are anchored in its constitution and driven by an accelerated international strategy. The country operates as an official "Pathfinder Country" under the Alliance 8.7 global framework, binding the state to rigorous, time-bound targets to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking[3]. However, severe funding shortages for victim protection services, lack of a centralized national data management system to track offenses, weak regulatory oversight in the vast informal economy and corruption are some of the primary challenges affecting its implementation.

According to the 2023 Global Slavery Index, an estimated 50 million people were living in situations of modern slavery on any given day in 2021. Of these people, approximately 28 million were in forced labour and 22 million were in forced marriages. In Africa, an estimated 7 million people were living in modern slavery with forced labour accounting for over half of the cases. In Kenya, the report highlighted that 5 out of every 1,000 people had experienced forced labour or forced marriage[4]. Addressing forced labour in Kenya requires stronger enforcement of labour laws, increased labour inspections and effective identification, referral and protection of victims.

Faith leaders and frontline workers are trusted and influential community actors who can play a leading role in preventing forced labour in Kenya. Azadi Community, IRCK and Walk Free, in partnership with faith leaders, frontline workers and survivors, have developed an advocacy guide to strengthen community-led action against forced labour in Kenya. The guide provides practical messages and approaches that can be adapted for community dialogues, social media campaigns, policy advocacy, awareness activities and engagement with duty bearers, helping communities recognise forced labour, promote prevention and reporting, amplify survivor voices and advocate for stronger policy enforcement.

Understanding forced labour in Kenya

Forced labour in Kenya involves people being compelled to work through threats, coercion, deception, debt, abuse of power or restrictions on their freedom to leave. Poverty, unemployment, unsafe migration, limited awareness of workers' rights, discrimination and weak enforcement can increase vulnerability, particularly among women, children, migrants, refugees, informal workers and people in precarious employment. These risks are particularly evident in sectors such as domestic work, agriculture, construction and other informal activities[5].

Laws, gaps and opportunities

Kenya has several laws, policies and institutional mechanisms relevant to addressing forced labour, including the Employment Act, the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, labour inspection mechanisms and measures addressing labour migration and worker protection. The Kenya 2025–2030 Alliance 8.7 Country Roadmap[6] also provides a broader national framework for addressing forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and the worst forms of child labour. However, Kenya does not have a stand-alone national policy and action plan dedicated specifically to forced labour, leaving the response distributed across different frameworks and institutions. Gaps also remain in the implementation and coordination of existing measures, including limited institutional capacity, fragmented data, uneven labour inspection and victim identification, and weak coordination and referral between relevant actors.

To address forced labour in Kenya, the Government must strengthen labour inspections, enforce laws, improve victim identification and referral systems, and ensure access to justice and decent work. Religious leaders can challenge exploitation and create trusted spaces for reporting abuse. Frontline workers including labour officers, police, health workers, social workers and community leaders should recognize indicators of forced labour, respond without victim-blaming, protect survivors and connect them to appropriate support and justice services.

Prevention efforts should also address poverty, unemployment and unsafe migration through decent work and livelihood opportunities, while faith leaders, frontline workers, employers, civil society and communities strengthen awareness, reporting and accountability to ensure that perpetrators are held responsible and affected workers can access justice and support.

Advocacy strategies for faith leaders and frontline workers

Faith leaders and frontline workers can use community dialogues, sermons, radio and social media to raise awareness about forced labour and workers' rights. They can document concerns and survivor experiences safely, engage county and national duty bearers, and advocate for stronger enforcement, labour inspections and victim protection. They should build referral networks with government and civil society actors, support safe reporting, and use evidence from communities to influence policies, budgets and programmes.

How to use the guide

This guide is intended to be used by faith leaders and frontline workers to support their advocacy on forced labour. This guide is designed for sermons, Friday khutbahs, temple discourses, community dialogues, national and county-level advocacy. It consists of four sections:

- Section A: **Understanding forced labour In Kenya**
- Section B: **Laws, gaps, and opportunities**
- Section C: **Advocacy strategies for faith leaders and frontline workers**
- Section D: **Survivor care and support**

Key advocacy messages that draw on Christian, Hindu, and Islamic religious teachings are highlighted throughout this guide and can be used by faith leaders to conduct advocacy to address forced labour.

Theological reflections are mainly drawn from the following:

- Christian theological reflections
- Islamic theological reflections
- Hindu theological reflections

> *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.*



Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
AHTCPU	Anti-Human Trafficking and Child Protection Unit
ANPPCAN	African Network for the Prevention and Protection of Child Abuse and Neglect
ASAL	Arid and Semi Arid Lands
BLA	Bilateral Labour Agreement
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CTiP	Counter-Trafficking in Persons
DCI	Directorate of Criminal Investigations
FBO	Faith-Based Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
NATF	National Assistance Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking
NEA	National Employment Authority
NPA	National Plan of Action
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
ODPP	Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nation International Children Emergency Fund
USDOL	United States Department of Labor
US	United States
VoT	Victim of Trafficking

Key definitions

Term	Description
Modern slavery	Modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, slavery and slavery-like practices, and human trafficking.
Forced labour	Under ILO Convention No. 29, forced or compulsory labour means work or service exacted from a person under menace of penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily.
Human trafficking	Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person for exploitation through means such as force, threats, coercion, fraud, deception or abuse of vulnerability.
Worst Forms of Child Labour	Drawing on the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), the term “worst forms of child labour” for the purpose of this guide is comprised of: all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performances and the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties
Exploitation	Exploitation means taking unfair or harmful advantage of another person for personal, financial or other benefit.
Policy advocacy	Policy advocacy is the organised effort to influence laws, policies, budgets, programmes, decisions and practices so that they better address a particular problem.
Safe migration	Safe migration means having the information, documents, choices, support and protection needed to move and work while reducing the risk of deception, exploitation, abuse and trafficking.
Key drivers	Key drivers are the social, economic, cultural, political or environmental conditions that increase the risk of trafficking and forced labour or allow exploitation to continue.
Faith advocacy	Faith advocacy is the use of the values, teachings, influence and community networks of faith traditions to promote positive social change.
Recruiter	A person, agency, broker or intermediary who connects or recruits people for employment or work by using deception, coercion, excessive recruitment fees, debt, threats or abuse of vulnerability to place or keep workers in exploitative conditions.
Duty Bearer	A person, institution or authority responsible for taking action to protect people’s rights and prevent or respond to violations such as forced labour.



CASE STUDY 1: MALAIKA'S STORY

"In 2019, I was promised a job as a cashier in the Middle East through a referral from a local agency in Nairobi. I was told I would receive a good monthly salary and believed that the opportunity would help me support myself and my family. I agreed to travel because I trusted the people who recruited me and believed I was going to a genuine job.

When I arrived in the Middle East, everything changed.

Instead of taking me to the cashier job I had been promised, I was taken to a holding place and later moved to another location where I was made to work as a domestic worker in two households. I had not agreed to this work and had no way of choosing where I would work.

My days were extremely long. I started working at around 3:00 a.m. and often continued until 10:00 p.m. I was expected to care for large households without adequate rest. I was not paid the salary I had been promised. I experienced physical and psychological abuse and was often deprived of sleep. When I became sick, I did not receive the medical care I needed. My phone was also taken away, making it difficult for me to contact my family or ask for help.

I wanted to leave and return to Kenya, but I was told that I could not go.

I was told that I had been "bought" for USD 14,000 and that I had to continue working. This made me feel trapped.

I did not have my phone, I did not have control over my movement, and I did not know who I could trust or where I could get help.

Eventually, I managed to escape through the help of a friend and received assistance to return to Kenya. I was deceived about the work I would do, controlled by others, prevented from leaving and forced to provide labour under abusive conditions. In 2024, A Kenyan court made the verdict that I had been subjected to slavery, servitude and forced labour and the perpetrators were ordered to compensate me for the damage and harm caused"

Malaika's (not her real name) story shows how the promise of a job can become a pathway to forced labour when recruitment is deceptive and workers are isolated, controlled or prevented from leaving.

Faith leaders, frontline workers and communities must know these warning signs, listen to people who report abuse, and help them access safe protection and support.

< *Beirut, Lebanon, August 2020. A Kenyan migrant worker sleeps outside the Kenyan Consulate while awaiting repatriation amid Lebanon's economic crisis. Migrant domestic workers, particularly women, can face exploitation when their work takes place in private homes and is less visible to authorities. Photo credit: Chris McGrath via Getty Images.*

INTRODUCTION

The latest global estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Walk Free and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimate that 27.6 million people were in forced labour on any given day in 2021. This included approximately 17.3 million people exploited in the private economy, 6.3 million people in forced commercial sexual exploitation and 3.9 million people in state-imposed forced labour. The number represents an increase from the estimated 24.9 million people in forced labour in 2016.

The global estimates also show that some groups face significantly higher risks. Migrant workers are three times more likely to experience forced labour than non-migrant workers. Children account for approximately 3.3 million people in forced labour, while women and girls account for a significant proportion of those affected, particularly in domestic work and forced commercial sexual exploitation. These findings demonstrate that forced labour is not confined to one country, sector or population group[7].

According to the Global Slavery Index 2023, an estimated 7 million people in Africa were living in modern slavery in 2021, equivalent to 5.2 people per 1,000 population. Forced labour was the most common form of modern slavery in Africa, affecting approximately 3.8 million people, or 2.9 people per 1,000 population. This represents 14% of all people estimated to be in forced labour globally. In Kenya, the GSI estimated that 269,000 people were living in modern slavery, equivalent to 5.0 people per 1,000 population. However, the Kenya figure combines forced labour and forced marriage, and the GSI does not provide a separate national estimate for forced labour[8].

Forced labour in Kenya is driven by a combination of poverty, unemployment, limited access to decent work, informal employment, unsafe recruitment and labour migration, weak enforcement of labour standards and social inequalities. People who urgently need employment may accept jobs without contracts or adequate information about the employer, wages or working conditions. Recruiting agencies can exploit this vulnerability through deception, excessive recruitment fees, debt, false promises and withholding of documents or wages.

Informal workers can face particular risks because they may have limited access to labour inspections, written contracts, social protection or effective complaint mechanisms. Migrant workers can also be isolated from family and community support and may depend on employers or recruiting agencies for accommodation, transport, documentation and immigration-related assistance. These dependencies can make it difficult to leave abusive employment. The risks are also shaped by gender, age, poverty, discrimination and social exclusion. Women and girls may be particularly vulnerable to domestic servitude and other forms of labour exploitation, while children can be exploited in agriculture, domestic work and other hazardous activities.



> *Banissa, Kenya, January 2026. A young boy crosses a rapidly drying water pan near Lulis village, one of the remaining water sources for residents and livestock. Severe drought has left families struggling to access water and protect their livelihoods, pressures that can increase the risk of exploitation. Photo credit: Tony Karumba via AFP/Getty Images.*

Efforts to address forced labour in Kenya

Kenya has established important legal and institutional measures to address forced labour, human trafficking, child labour and modern slavery. These include prohibitions against forced labour under the Employment Act, the Counter-Trafficking in Persons framework and national efforts to strengthen prevention, protection, prosecution and coordination.

A major recent development is Kenya's designation as an Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Country and the development of the Kenya Alliance 8.7 Roadmap 2025–2030. The Roadmap provides a national framework for coordinated action against forced labour, human trafficking, child labour and modern slavery. It emphasizes stronger legal and institutional frameworks, improved data, awareness, coordination, survivor participation and accountability[9].

For the roadmap to meet its goals and objectives, these four key strategies should be prioritized:

Strengthen prevention and safe recruitment

Regulate recruitment agencies and labour brokers, particularly for overseas employment. Ensure workers receive written contracts, accurate job information and clear information on their rights. Expand safe migration awareness through communities, faith institutions, media and digital platforms.

Improve identification, reporting and referral

Train frontline workers and faith leaders to recognize signs such as withheld wages, threats, debt, document confiscation, restricted movement and inability to leave work. Establish clear and confidential referral pathways linking victims to protection, legal, health and psychosocial services.

Strengthen survivor protection and justice

Provide survivors with safe accommodation, legal assistance, healthcare, psychosocial support and access to compensation. Investigate and prosecute recruiting agencies, employers and others who facilitate exploitation, including those involved in harbouring, transporting or controlling victims.

Promote community and institutional behaviour change

Use community dialogues, sermons, radio and social media to challenge the normalisation of exploitation. Faith leaders, frontline workers, employers and civil society should promote workers' rights, encourage safe reporting and use survivor experiences to influence policies, budgets and enforcement.

> *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.*



Guidance structure

This guide consists of four sections that inform faith leaders and frontline workers on understanding the issue of forced labour in Kenya and support them to conduct advocacy to strengthen the government's response.

Section A: Understanding forced labour in Kenya.

This section examines the context of forced labour in Kenya, its causes and consequences, and outlines key messages for faith leaders to conduct advocacy to eliminate the practice.

Section B: Laws, gaps & opportunities.

This section outlines the existing laws and policies on forced labour in Kenya, as well as gaps in the government's response. It highlights key advocacy opportunities and recommendations to strengthen the national response to forced labour.

Section C: Advocacy strategies for faith leaders and frontline workers.

This section provides guidance on strategies for faith leaders to develop policy asks and conduct advocacy to improve action to address forced labour in Kenya.

Section D: Survivor care and support.

This section provides a summary of the important role that faith leaders and frontline workers play in providing support to survivors of forced labour.

The role of faith leaders and frontline workers

Faith leaders are a central pillar of the communities they serve. They act as counsellors, sources of information and education, and their places of worship become fixed landmarks in their communities. These various roles are underpinned by the moral standing provided by their ordination and training, which places them in a vantage position to respond to societal issues such as forced labour. The trust bestowed upon faith leaders by their communities makes them well- placed to lead advocacy efforts to positively transform societal values and practices. Religious scriptures provide the basis for faith leaders' advocacy[10].

Frontline workers including community health workers, social workers, labour officers, police, teachers and local administrators are trusted community actors who are often among the first to identify people at risk of forced labour. Their proximity to communities enables them to recognize warning signs, listen to affected workers, provide referrals and connect survivors to protection and support services. Frontline workers can also use their trusted positions to influence community attitudes and duty bearers by sharing evidence for stronger labour policies and services.

Faith leaders and frontline workers are present in villages, estates, farms, beaches, schools, informal settlements, migration networks and community support systems where state systems may be thin. They can recognize red flags, support referrals, challenge exploitative practices and hold institutions accountable. Faith leaders and frontline workers can use community dialogues, public awareness campaigns, survivor-led storytelling, social media, referrals and engagement with local authorities to advocate against forced labour. They can build community networks with survivors, document emerging risks and cases, engage employers and recruitment actors, mobilise religious and community platforms, and use evidence and survivor experiences to influence policies, budgets and enforcement.

KEY MESSAGE

We have a moral responsibility to examine and speak against forced labour.

Forced labour thrives when society becomes comfortable with the exploitation, control or dehumanization of human beings. Let us challenge attitudes that normalise exploitation, reject practices that subject people to forced labour and slavery-like practices.

The Bible encourages people to speak up for those who are vulnerable, defend the rights of the poor and needy, and promote justice and fairness.

Biblical Scripture: *Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute, speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy"*

Proverbs 31:8-9

The Quran/Hadith encourages people to support those who are oppressed and to prevent oppression by stopping others from harming or mistreating people.

Islamic Scripture: *The Prophet (PBUH) "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is oppressed." The Companions asked how to help an oppressor, and the Prophet explained: "By preventing him from oppressing others."*

Hadith, Sahih al-Bukhari 2444.

The Bhagavad Gita also teaches that a virtuous person should show compassion and friendship towards all beings, reject hatred and respond to suffering with kindness.

Hindu Teaching: *"He who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all…"*

Bhagavad Gita, 12:13

CALL TO ACTION

Do not look away! Confront injustice and help create communities that protects human rights.



> *Nairobi, Kenya, 18 March 2026. Residents load salvaged building stones, sold for 10 Kenyan shillings each, onto a cart in Shauri Moyo's Blue Estate following clearance orders under the Nairobi River Regeneration Project. The initiative involves clearing homes and businesses along the Nairobi, Ngong, and Mathare rivers to restore ecosystems, reduce flooding risks, and develop public infrastructure, including sewer lines, walkways, and green spaces. Photo credit: Boniface Muthoni via SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images.*



Section A:

UNDERSTANDING FORCED LABOUR IN KENYA

> *Migori, Kenya, June 2024. A worker harvests sugarcane at a plantation in western Kenya. Photo credit: James Wakibia via SOPA Images/ LightRocket/Getty Images .*

WHAT IS FORCED LABOUR?

Forced labour is one of the most extreme forms of economic exploitation and exists when a person's labour is controlled through coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception, threats, debt, confinement, withheld wages or other penalties that strip away freedom and consent.

Under ILO Convention No. 29, forced or compulsory labour means work, or service exacted from a person under menace of penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily[11]. Kenya's Employment Act uses a closely related definition, and the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act treats forced labour as a form of exploitation within trafficking cases. A situation may move along a continuum. It may begin as deceptive recruitment, underpayment, excessive hours or salary diversion and may later become document retention, confinement, intimidation, debt bondage, violence or sexual abuse. Early detection is therefore critical.

Forced Labour Indicators

Indicators may suggest a person is being subjected to forced labour or is at increased risk of exploitation. A single indicator does not necessarily confirm forced labour, but several indicators occurring together should prompt attention. Below are the identified indicators by ILO on forced labour that faith leaders, survivor leaders and frontline workers should be aware about.

Table 1: ILO forced labour indicator checklist

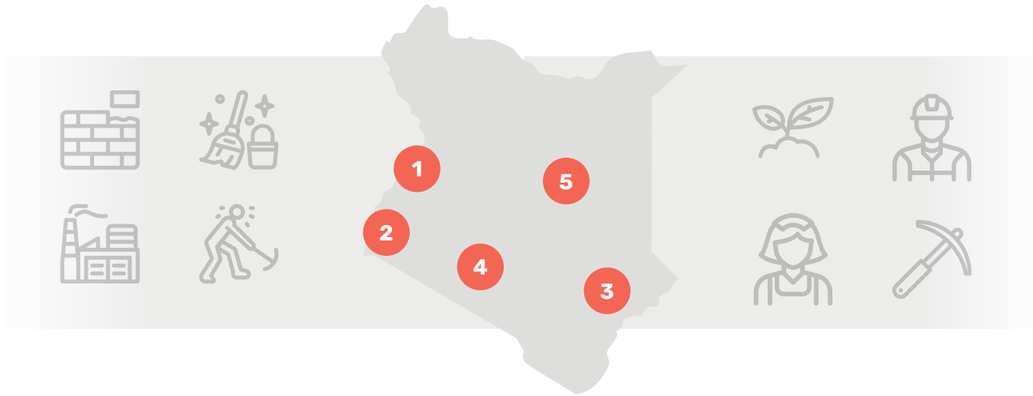
ILO indicator	What it means in practice
1. Abuse of vulnerability	Taking advantage of a person's vulnerable situation, such as poverty, migration status, lack of alternatives, age, disability or dependence on others.
2. Deception	Providing false information about the job, wages, working conditions, location, employer or other important terms of employment.
3. Restriction of movement	Preventing or limiting a worker from leaving the workplace, accommodation or employment situation.
4. Isolation	Separating workers from their families, communities, support networks or sources of assistance, making it difficult to seek help.
5. Physical and sexual violence	Using or threatening physical or sexual violence to force a person to work or prevent them from leaving.
6. Intimidation and threats	Threatening workers with harm, dismissal, reporting to authorities, deportation, financial penalties, harm to family members or other consequences if they leave or refuse work.
7. Retention of identity documents	Keeping passports, identity cards, work permits or other documents to restrict a worker's freedom to leave or move.
8. Withholding of wages	Delaying, withholding or deducting wages in ways that create dependency or prevent workers from leaving.
9. Debt bondage	Using recruitment debts, loans, advances, recruitment fees or other debts to compel a person to continue working to repay what they owe.
10. Abusive working and living conditions	Subjecting workers to conditions that are excessively harsh, degrading, unsafe or otherwise abusive.
11. Excessive overtime	Requiring workers to work excessive hours, particularly where refusal could result in a penalty or other form of coercion.

Prevalence of forced labour in Kenya

Kenya does not have a national published report on the prevelance of forced labour but the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) data cited by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) indicates that 8.5% of children in Kenya, about 1.3 million children, are engaged in child labour, with rates above 30% in some Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) counties[12]. Many Kenyan youth are lured by fake employment opportunities advertised via social media. They often find themselves trapped in abusive domestic work in the Gulf states or cyber-slavery operations in Southeast Asia[13].

The most visible risk sectors in Kenya include domestic work, agriculture, fishing, cattle herding, forced begging, street vending, construction, quarrying, sand harvesting, mining and some forms of commercial sexual exploitation linked to trafficking. Forced labour risks also extend to migrant labour and manual work, including Kenyans recruited abroad through formal or informal employment agencies. The 2025 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report notes that Kenyan migrant workers have been exploited in domestic servitude and manual labour in the Middle East and other destinations, while workers in Kenya including some foreign workers in construction can also face forced labour risks[14]. The informal economy is particularly important because workers may lack contracts, social protection and effective mechanisms for reporting abuse[15].

Table 2: Region Prevalence Data from US State Department TIP Report Kenya 2025



Although county-level prevalence figures are unavailable, recent Kenyan evidence points to several geographic risk patterns:

Region	Documented forced-labour risks
1 **Western Kenya**	Children are reported to be vulnerable to labour exploitation around gold-mining areas and khat-growing areas; agriculture and informal economic activities also present risks.
2 **Lake Victoria region**	Fishing communities are identified as locations where children and women have been exploited, including through forced labour and trafficking.
3 **Coastal Kenya**	Mombasa and coastal counties face risks involving domestic servitude, commercial sexual exploitation and migrant workers; research cited in the 2024 TIP report identified child trafficking in Kilifi and Kwale.
4 **Nairobi**	The capital is an important destination and recruitment/transit centre, with risks affecting domestic workers, migrant workers and people recruited through fraudulent employment arrangements.
5 **Northern/Eastern and pastoral areas**	Children engaged in cattle herding and people affected by drought and livelihood loss face heightened vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking.
Other areas of documented forced-labour risks	
Highways and transport corridors	Children and other vulnerable people around major highways and trading centres face increased trafficking risks; truck drivers have also been identified among actors exploiting children.
Refugee-Hosting Areas	Refugees and asylum seekers, particularly children, face increased vulnerability because of restricted movement and limited livelihood opportunities in Kakuma and Dadaab.

Where forced labour can hide in Kenya

Forced labour does not always involve physical confinement or obvious violence. It can be hidden within ordinary employment, family arrangements, recruitment processes, apprenticeships or informal work. It occurs when a person is compelled to work through threats, coercion, deception, debt, abuse of power or other forms of penalty and is not genuinely free to leave. The following sectors and settings present particular risks in Kenya.

Domestic work – hidden within private homes

Domestic work can be difficult to monitor because it takes place in private households. Workers, particularly women, children and migrants, may experience excessive working hours, withheld wages, restrictions on movement, threats, violence, isolation or dependence on an employer for food and accommodation. Kenyan and international reports have identified domestic service as a sector where forced labour and trafficking risks occur.

Agriculture – hidden within farms and seasonal work

Agricultural work is often informal and takes place in rural or remote areas where labour inspection is limited. Workers may be vulnerable to deceptive recruitment, recruitment debts, withheld wages, excessive working hours and threats. Children are also at risk of exploitation in agricultural activities, including in tea and coffee value chains[16].

Fishing – hidden on boats and around landing sites

Fishing can conceal forced labour because workers may spend long periods away from their families and outside the reach of support services. Debt, recruitment through brokers, withheld wages, deception and restrictions on leaving employment can increase vulnerability. In Kenya, fishing communities around Lake Victoria have also been identified as areas where children face trafficking and forced-labour risks.

Mining and quarrying – hidden in informal and remote workplaces

Small-scale mining and quarrying activities can operate outside effective labour monitoring. Workers may be exposed to debt, dangerous conditions, withheld pay and coercion, while children can be particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Gold-mining areas in western Kenya have been identified among locations where children face trafficking and labour exploitation risks[17].

Cattle herding and pastoral work – hidden as family or community obligations

Child labour in cattle herding can be difficult to identify because it may be presented as part of family or community responsibilities. However, where children or adults are compelled to work through threats, violence, debt or other forms of coercion and cannot freely leave, the situation may amount to forced labour. Kenyan trafficking reports identify cattle herding among areas of concern for child exploitation.

Street vending and begging – hidden in public spaces

Forced labour can occur in highly visible places such as streets, markets, transport centres and informal settlements. Children and vulnerable adults may be controlled by individuals who take their earnings, impose daily targets, restrict their movement or use threats and violence to compel continued work. Kenyan reports have documented forced labour involving street vending and forced begging, particularly affecting children[18].

Construction and informal manual work – hidden behind casual employment

Construction and other manual work can present risks where workers are recruited informally, have no written contracts, depend on employers for accommodation or become trapped through unpaid wages or recruitment debts. Workers with limited bargaining power may be reluctant to report exploitation for fear of losing their livelihood. Construction is also recognised internationally as a sector vulnerable to forced labour.

Labour migration – hidden behind legitimate job opportunities

Forced labour can begin during recruitment, before a person reaches their workplace. Deceptive job offers, excessive recruitment fees, debt, contract substitution, withholding of passports or wages and threats can leave migrant workers unable to leave abusive employment. Kenyan workers migrating to the Middle East and other destinations have been documented as vulnerable to trafficking, domestic servitude and forced labour.

Informal businesses and workplaces – hidden because of limited oversight

Forced labour can occur in small shops, restaurants, workshops, salons, transport businesses, farms and family enterprises. The large size of Kenya's informal economy means that many workers operate without formal contracts, social protection or effective complaint mechanisms, increasing the risk that exploitation will remain hidden.

Family, religious and community settings – hidden behind trust and obligation

Exploitation may also occur within relationships where people are expected to work because of family ties, religious connections, community obligations or promises of support. These situations can be particularly difficult to identify because exploitation may be normalised or presented as assistance, mentorship or repayment of a favour. However, the nature of the relationship does not remove the possibility of forced labour where coercion and lack of genuine freedom are present[19].

Emerging trends and risks

Scam centers and forced criminality

Trafficking and forced labour in online scam centers is increasing globally, with reports that Kenyan nationals are being recruited and trafficked into such operations abroad. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that a growing number of people are being trafficked by air into Southeast Asia for forced criminality in online scam centers[20]. Recruitment can look like a legitimate employment opportunity, for example, an advertisement for customer service, online marketing, cryptocurrency, technology or other office-based work.

Once people arrive, however, traffickers may confiscate passports and phones, restrict movement, impose financial penalties, threaten or physically abuse workers and force them to conduct online fraud[21]. This is particularly important for young Kenyans to consider if they are seeking employment, digital work and opportunities abroad. If a person is deceived, coerced or forced into illegal activities and are unable to leave because of threats, violence, debt or other forms of control, they are also a victim of crime. While international anti-trafficking authorities increasingly recognise this as trafficking for forced criminality[22], it can be challenging to access appropriate support even after survivors have escaped the scam centre, especially in countries where there is no consular presence.

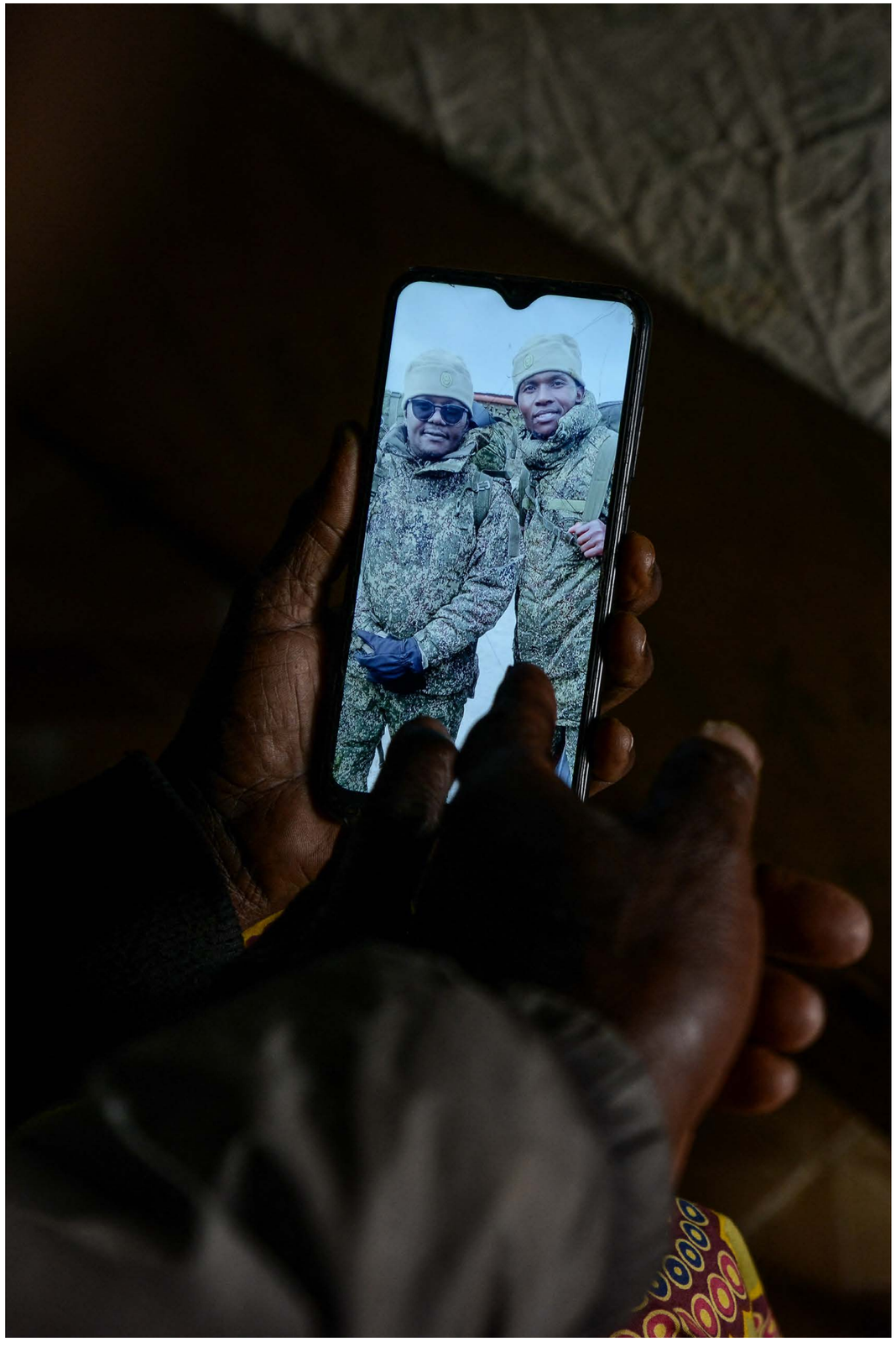
Recruitment of young Kenyans into the Russia–Ukraine War

A particularly significant emerging forced labour and trafficking concern is the recruitment of Kenyan nationals who have been taken to Russia through deceptive employment offers and subsequently ended up fighting in the Russia–Ukraine war. In February 2026, Reuters reported on a Kenyan intelligence briefing presented to Parliament alleging that more than 1,000 Kenyans had been recruited to fight for Russia. The reported recruitment targeted, among others, former soldiers and police officers and unemployed people, with promises of high salaries and bonuses. Routes reportedly included travel through Turkiye and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with later routes reportedly involving Uganda, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo[23].

The issue moved beyond allegations of risky recruitment when Kenyan authorities pursued a trafficking case. In February 2026, a Kenyan recruitment-agency director was charged with trafficking 25 Kenyans to Russia for exploitation through deception. According to the prosecution information reported by Reuters, 22 potential victims were rescued in Kenya before departure, while three who had already reached Russia reportedly ended up at the frontline and returned injured. The reported experiences of Kenyan recruits illustrate why deceptive labour recruitment can become a trafficking pathway even when the initial offer appears to be a legitimate employment opportunity. Reuters reported that some Kenyan recruits were allegedly promised civilian employment and subsequently found themselves involved in military operations[24].

> Tak Province, Thailand, October 2025. A person who fled the KK Park compound in Myanmar holds a Kenyan passport while speaking with Thai officials after crossing the Moei River. More than 1,000 people reportedly crossed into Thailand following a Myanmar military raid on the compound, described as a major scam centre. Photo credit: Sarot Meksophawannakul via Thai News Pix/AFP/Getty Images.





> *Lugari, Kenya, February 2026. Family members look at photographs of their son, who reportedly died fighting in Ukraine after being recruited into the Russian military. Reports describe Kenyan recruits being promised lucrative civilian jobs but later placed in combat roles, raising concerns about deceptive recruitment. Photo credit: Brian Ongoro via AFP/Getty Images.*

CASE STUDY 2: DECEPTIVE RECRUITMENT

“Before leaving Kenya, Peter and Abdalla (not their real names), were looking for employment and were reportedly recruited for jobs as security guards in Russia.

Their situation reflects a wider recruitment pattern reported in 2025–2026 in which Kenyan men were offered civilian jobs in Russia but were subsequently pushed into military service. For young Kenyans facing unemployment and limited opportunities at home, promises of overseas employment and high salaries can be powerful. Some recruits paid money to recruitment agents and travelled believing they were going to work, not fight in a war. Kenyan Members of Parliament later raised the cases of Peter and Abdalla**,** stating that the two men were forced to sign military contracts after arriving in Russia[25].

For some recruits, the exploitation became clear only after they arrived in Russia. One Kenyan survivor interviewed by the Washington Post said he paid USD 390 to a recruitment company for what he understood would be civilian work. He travelled to St. Petersburg with other Kenyans who had been told they would work as security guards. Instead, they were taken through processes associated with military recruitment and later transported to Russian-occupied Ukraine for training.

The survivor reported that he and others were told they had to fight, despite having expected civilian employment.

Some recruits reportedly resisted and were threatened with arrest before eventually being forced to comply. Once deployed, they faced mines, drones, artillery and the possibility of death[26].

These individuals tried different ways to get out once they understood what was happening. One Kenyan survivor deliberately tried to make his commanders believe he was mentally unwell after several of his friends were killed. He was taken to a military hospital, where he eventually gained access to a phone and contacted his family. His family helped create a story that his wife and children had died in a car accident so that he could request permission to leave. He was eventually able to reach the Kenyan Embassy and return to Kenya**.** His experience shows the extreme lengths people may go to when they are trapped in a situation they did not knowingly agree to enter. It also demonstrates why safe recruitment, verification of overseas job offers and government oversight for migrant workers are critical”[27].

HOW CAN THIS RELATE TO FORCED LABOUR?

It is important to note that not every foreign national who joins a military is necessarily a victim of trafficking or forced labour. The concern arises where recruitment involves deception, coercion or abuse of vulnerability, followed by exploitation or compelled service.

What these emerging trends tell us

These developments show that forced labour in Kenya should no longer be understood only through traditional locations such as farms, homes, and construction sites. Recruitment is increasingly digital, transnational and connected to criminal economies, migration, and conflict. Three important trends stand out:

Recruitment is becoming more sophisticated.

Traffickers increasingly use social media, WhatsApp, online employment advertisements, recruitment agencies and personal networks to establish trust and attract people.

Exploitation can happen far from the place of recruitment.

A person recruited in Nairobi may be exploited in another Kenyan county, the Gulf, Asia, Europe or another destination.

Forced labour can involve activities that appear to be employment or even criminal activity.

People can be trafficked into domestic work, agriculture, sexual exploitation, online scams or, in emerging cases, military-related activities. The critical questions are how the person was recruited, whether they consented freely, what happened after recruitment, and whether they can safely refuse or leave.

KEY MESSAGE

Be vigilant! Scam centres and recruitment into wars are not "job opportunities."

Criminal networks increasingly use deceptive recruitment to move people into scam centres, where some are forced to conduct online fraud through threats, confinement, debt and violence. Similarly, people can be deceptively recruited or coerced into armed conflict and other criminal activities.

The Bible encourages protecting vulnerable people from harm and ensuring that those facing hardship are treated with care and fairness.

Biblical Scripture: *Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."*

Psalm 82:3–4

The Quran encourages verifying information before acting on it, helping to prevent misinformation from causing unjust harm to others.

Islamic Scripture: *"O believers! If an evildoer brings you any news, verify it, so you do not harm people unknowingly…"*

Quran 49:6

Mahabharata reflects the principle of respecting the dignity and wellbeing of others. The teaching encourages communities to treat every person with dignity and protect people from abuse.

Hindu Teaching: *"Let no man do unto another that which would be repugnant to himself."*

Mahabharata, 5.1517

CALL TO ACTION

Government must strengthen and enforce existing regulation on recruitment and labour migration.



> *Nakuru, Kenya, February 2023. A worker cuts roses inside a greenhouse in Njoro. Kenya is a major producer of cut flowers, exporting much of its harvest to European markets. There have been allegations of exploitation among female workers in the cut flower industry. Photo credit: James Wakibia via SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images.*

What drives forced labour?

Forced labour grows where vulnerability meets opportunity for exploitation. Economic hardship, unemployment, climate stress, school dropout, unsafe migration, informal work, weak labour inspection, social normalization, corruption, and inadequate services combine to create conditions in which exploiters can control people's labour.

Key drivers

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT: When people have limited income or cannot find decent work, they may accept jobs without carefully checking the conditions or negotiating their rights. This can increase their vulnerability to unfair or coercive working conditions.

> ***Example:*** A young person from Kakamega who has been unemployed for several months may accept a job in a restaurant in Kilifi after being promised a good salary. On arrival, the employer may pay much less than agreed, withhold wages and insist that the worker continues working because they have nowhere else to go.

CLIMATE SHOCKS AND DISPLACEMENT: Droughts, floods and other climate shocks can destroy livelihoods and force people to move in search of food, income and safety. Displaced families may have fewer resources, documents, social networks or employment options, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.

> ***Example:*** A family affected by prolonged drought in northern Kenya may move to an urban centre such as Isiolo or Nairobi in search of work. Without stable income or accommodation, a family member may accept poorly paid domestic, casual or agricultural work where wages are withheld or working hours are excessive.

WEAK LABOUR INSPECTION: When labour inspection is limited, particularly in informal, domestic and hard-to-reach workplaces, employers may violate workers' rights without being detected or held accountable. Workers may experience long hours, unpaid wages, unsafe conditions or restrictions on their ability to leave employment.

> ***Example:*** A domestic worker living in an employer's home may work from early morning until late at night, receive little or no pay and have no regular access to labour officers. Because the workplace is a private home, labour violations can remain hidden and difficult to address.

CORRUPTION AND INADEQUATE SERVICES: Corruption can weaken enforcement of labour laws and allow employers or intermediaries who violate workers' rights to avoid accountability. At the same time, limited access to legal aid, social protection, reporting mechanisms and labour services can leave workers without practical ways to seek help.

> ***Example:*** A casual construction worker whose wages have been withheld may report the matter but struggle to access timely assistance because of limited labour services. If an employer or intermediary uses personal connections to avoid accountability, the worker may feel that reporting the violation will not lead to any meaningful action.

UNSAFE MIGRATION: Moving to another county or country for employment can increase risks when workers do not have verified contracts, reliable information or access to support. Recruitment fees, debt, unclear employment terms, withholding of documents and isolation can make it difficult for workers to challenge unfair conditions.

> ***Example:*** A Kenyan worker travels to the Gulf after being promised a well-paid domestic job. At the destination, the actual salary is lower than promised, the worker's passport is taken and they are required to work extremely long hours. Being far from family and unfamiliar with available support services can make it difficult to seek help.



> *Kajiado, Kenya, August 2025. People tend to their livestock in a drought-affected area. Climate change and irregular rainfall have worsened drought conditions across Kenya, threatening agriculture, water supplies, and livelihoods. Dwindling water resources are placing further pressure on local communities that depend on livestock for their survival. Photo credit: Gerald Anderson via Anadolu/Getty Images.*

KEY MESSAGE

Poverty and vulnerability must never become a licence to exploit people.

Poverty, unemployment, unsafe migration, debt, discrimination, lack of decent work and weak protection can make people more vulnerable to forced labour, while exploiters take advantage of these circumstances for profit and control.

The Bible calls for justice that does not discriminate against people because of poverty or vulnerability. It warns against taking advantage of people with fewer resources and emphasizes accountability for those who exploit or deprive others of what is rightfully theirs.

Biblical Scripture: *"Do not deprive the poor of justice, because they are poor; for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life of those who rob them."*

Proverbs 22:22–23

The Quran encourages fairness and genuine consent as important principles in economic dealings. It rejects taking another person's resources through deception coercion.

Islamic Scripture: *"O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly, but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent…"*

Quran 4:29

Hindu teachings encourage communities to uphold respect for another person's property and livelihood and rejects taking advantage of others for personal gain.

Hindu Scripture: *"Let no one take what belongs to another."*

Manusmriti 8.316

CALL TO ACTION

Stakeholders must expand access to decent work, social protection and work closely with communities and survivors to identify and sanction exploitative practices.

What are the consequences?

Forced labour can cause serious and lasting harm to survivors, families, communities and the wider economy. Survivors may experience physical injuries, psychological trauma, loss of income, debt, social isolation, loss of dignity and difficulty rebuilding their lives after exploitation. Families may lose an important source of income and face additional care and financial burdens, while children may drop out of school or become exposed to further exploitation.

Communities can experience increased poverty, mistrust, family separation and the normalisation of abuse when exploitation is tolerated. At the economic level, forced labour deprives people of fair wages and decent work, enables businesses and criminal networks to profit from exploitation, undermines labour standards and reduces productivity. At the societal level, it weakens respect for human rights and the rule of law and can perpetuate cycles of poverty, inequality and exploitation across generations.

PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE: Forced labour can expose people to beating, sexual abuse, threats, humiliation and other forms of violence. When someone depends on the person controlling their work for food, shelter, money or permission to leave, they may feel they have no safe way to resist or report the abuse.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: A person who leaves home to look for work may end up being beaten, sexually harassed or threatened by the very person who promised them a job. Because they fear losing their only source of food, shelter or income, or fear what will happen if they try to leave, they may remain silent. The harm does not end when the person escapes; injuries, fear and shame can remain for a long time.

TRAUMA AND ISOLATION: Forced labour can leave people feeling afraid, helpless, ashamed and alone. Long working hours, threats, insults, violence and being separated from family can make a person lose confidence and stop trusting others.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: Imagine a young woman from a rural county who moves to Nairobi or another country for work. She may stop calling home because she is afraid of what her employer will do if she talks about her situation. After months of being shouted at, threatened or controlled, she may begin to believe that nobody will help her. Even after returning home, she may avoid people, struggle to talk about what happened or find it difficult to trust another employer. This can also affect families. Relatives may wrongly ask, *"Why didn't you just leave?"* without understanding that the person may have been frightened, watched closely, without money, or physically prevented from leaving.

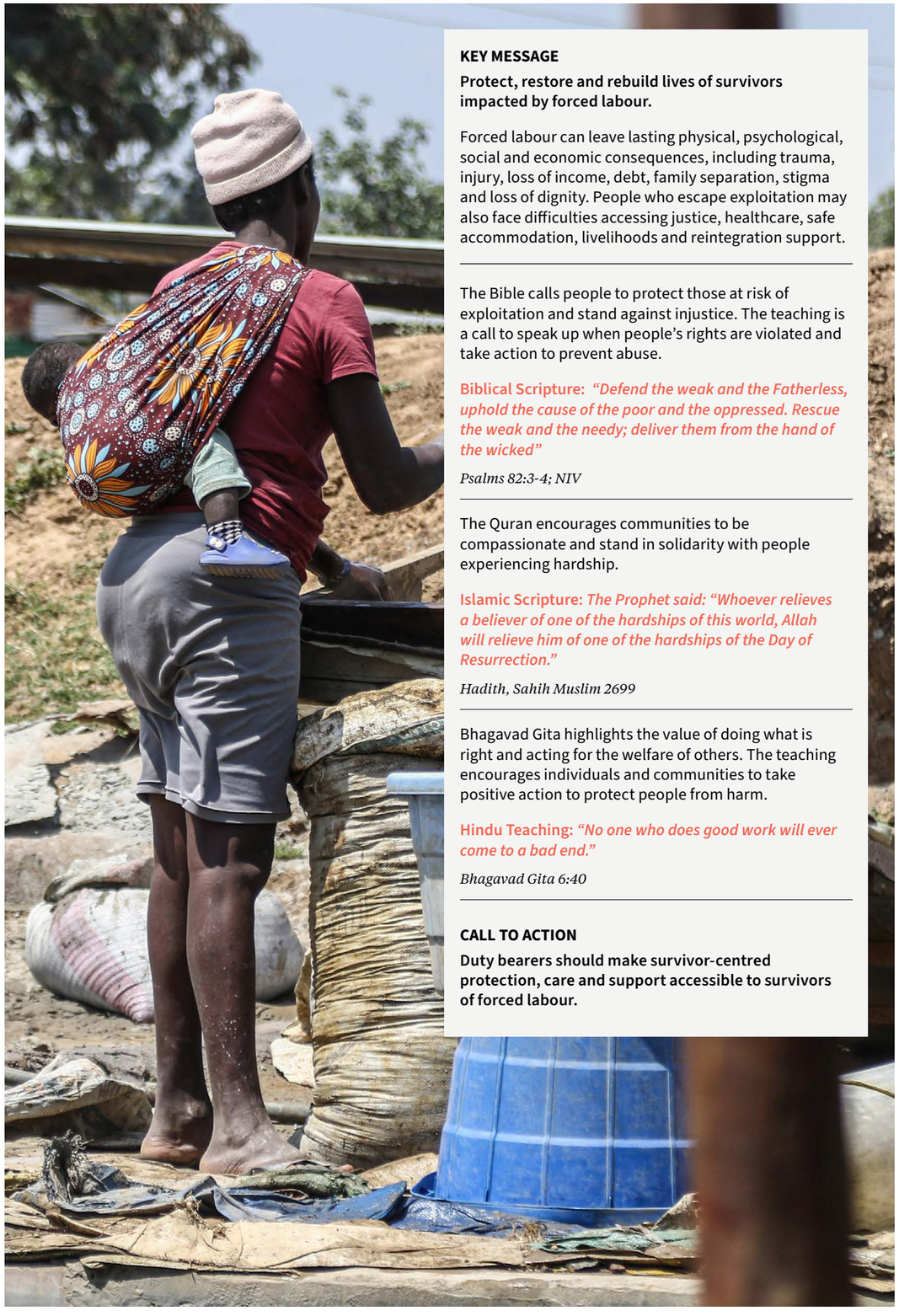
SCHOOL DROPOUT: Forced labour can take children and young people away from school, learning and other opportunities. When a child spends most of the day working, they may be too tired to attend school, complete homework, or keep up with other children. In communities where children are taken into domestic work, agricultural work, herding or other income-generating activities because their families are struggling financially, a child may start by missing school for a few days to help the family. If the situation continues, the child may stop attending completely. Once the child begins earning or becomes dependent on the employer for food and shelter, returning to school can become even harder.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: A parent may think, *"At least my child has found work and is bringing something home."* But if the child is working from morning until night, the short-term income may come at the cost of their education. A child who leaves school at 13 or 14 to work may later have fewer choices and may become dependent on low-paying and unsafe work. This can continue the same cycle of poverty that pushed the child into work in the first place.

DEBT AND INCOME LOSS: Forced labour can leave a person poorer. Workers may be promised a good salary but receive little or no pay. Others may be told that they must first repay recruitment fees, transport costs, loans or other debts before they can leave.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: Someone may leave home expecting to earn KSh 30,000 a month and use the money to pay school fees, rent, food or a loan. Instead, the employer may withhold the salary or keep deducting money to repay debts. After several months, the worker has nothing to send home and may actually owe more money. The family then suffers too. School fees may go unpaid, rent may fall behind, loans may not be repaid and the family may have to borrow again. The person went to work to escape poverty but ends up deeper in poverty.

> *Nyanza, Kenya, July 2022. A woman carries her young baby on her back while working at a crushed ore concentrator in a gold mining village. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining supports thousands of livelihoods in western Kenya, but the sector remains largely informal. The use of hazardous chemicals in gold processing poses risks to workers' health, local communities, and the environment. Photo credit: James Wakibia via SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images.*



KEY MESSAGE

Protect, restore and rebuild lives of survivors impacted by forced labour.

Forced labour can leave lasting physical, psychological, social and economic consequences, including trauma, injury, loss of income, debt, family separation, stigma and loss of dignity. People who escape exploitation may also face difficulties accessing justice, healthcare, safe accommodation, livelihoods and reintegration support.

The Bible calls people to protect those at risk of exploitation and stand against injustice. The teaching is a call to speak up when people's rights are violated and take action to prevent abuse.

Biblical Scripture: *"Defend the weak and the Fatherless, uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked"*

Psalms 82:3-4; NIV

The Quran encourages communities to be compassionate and stand in solidarity with people experiencing hardship.

Islamic Scripture: *The Prophet said: "Whoever relieves a believer of one of the hardships of this world, Allah will relieve him of one of the hardships of the Day of Resurrection."*

Hadith, Sahih Muslim 2699

Bhagavad Gita highlights the value of doing what is right and acting for the welfare of others. The teaching encourages individuals and communities to take positive action to protect people from harm.

Hindu Teaching: *"No one who does good work will ever come to a bad end."*

Bhagavad Gita 6:40

CALL TO ACTION

Duty bearers should make survivor-centred protection, care and support accessible to survivors of forced labour.

Myths and misconceptions of forced labour

Persistent myths and misconceptions surrounding forced labour can obscure the true nature and scale of the problem and undermine efforts to prevent and address it. Misunderstandings about what constitutes forced labour can lead to the normalisation of exploitative practices and prevent affected workers from seeking support. Faith leaders and frontline workers have an important responsibility to raise awareness, challenge harmful beliefs and practices, and help communities recognise and respond to forced labour.

MYTH 1: "Forced labour means someone is physically locked up or chained."

FACT: Forced labour does not require physical confinement. A person may be technically able to leave a workplace but remain unable to do so because of threats, debt, withheld wages, confiscated documents, fear of violence, threats against family members or other penalties.

MYTH 2: "If someone agreed to take the job, it cannot be forced labour."

FACT: Initial agreement does not automatically mean that all subsequent work is voluntary. A person may accept a job because they were deceived about the work, wages or conditions and later discover that they cannot leave without facing a penalty.

MYTH 3: "If the person is being paid, it cannot be forced labour."

FACT: Payment does not automatically make work voluntary. A person can receive wages and still be in forced labour if they are working under a threat or penalty and cannot freely leave. Conversely, withholding wages can itself become a means of coercion when used to keep someone working.

MYTH 4: "Only employers can impose forced labour."

FACT: Forced labour can be imposed by individuals, recruiting agencies, employers, criminal networks, intermediaries and, in some circumstances, state authorities. It can also occur at different points in the recruitment and employment process.

MYTH 5: "Forced labour only happens in illegal or underground businesses."

FACT: Forced labour can occur in both formal and informal economies and across many sectors. It can therefore occur in domestic work, agriculture, fishing, construction, manufacturing, hospitality, mining, transport, informal businesses and migrant employment.

MYTH 6: "Forced labour is the same as human trafficking and modern slavery."

FACT: These concepts are closely connected but not identical. Forced labour refers specifically to work or service imposed through coercion and without genuine voluntary consent. Human trafficking is a broader offence involving specified acts, means and an exploitative purpose, with forced labour being one possible purpose of trafficking.

MYTH 7: "The victim is partly responsible because they should have known better."

FACT: Responsibility for forced labour rests with the person or persons using coercion and exploitation—not with the person being exploited.

KEY MESSAGE

Re-examine cultural practices that legitimize exploitation.

Harmful practices can be normalised as tradition, mindset or social behavior making forced labour difficult to recognise and challenge. Communities, elders, parents, faith leaders and local leaders have a shared responsibility to examine practices that may involve coercion, exploitation, child labour, debt or the denial of a person's freedom to choose and leave work.

The Bible encourages people to question harmful norms and choose actions based on what is right rather than simply following accepted practices. This scripture reminds communities that harmful behaviors should not be accepted as normal because they are common or longstanding.

Biblical Scripture: *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

Romans 12:2

The Quran challenges the idea that tradition or social acceptance makes harmful behavior acceptable

Islamic Scripture: *"And when they commit an immorality, they say, 'We found our fathers doing it, and Allah has ordered us to do it.' Say, 'Indeed, Allah does not order immorality.'*

Quran 7:28

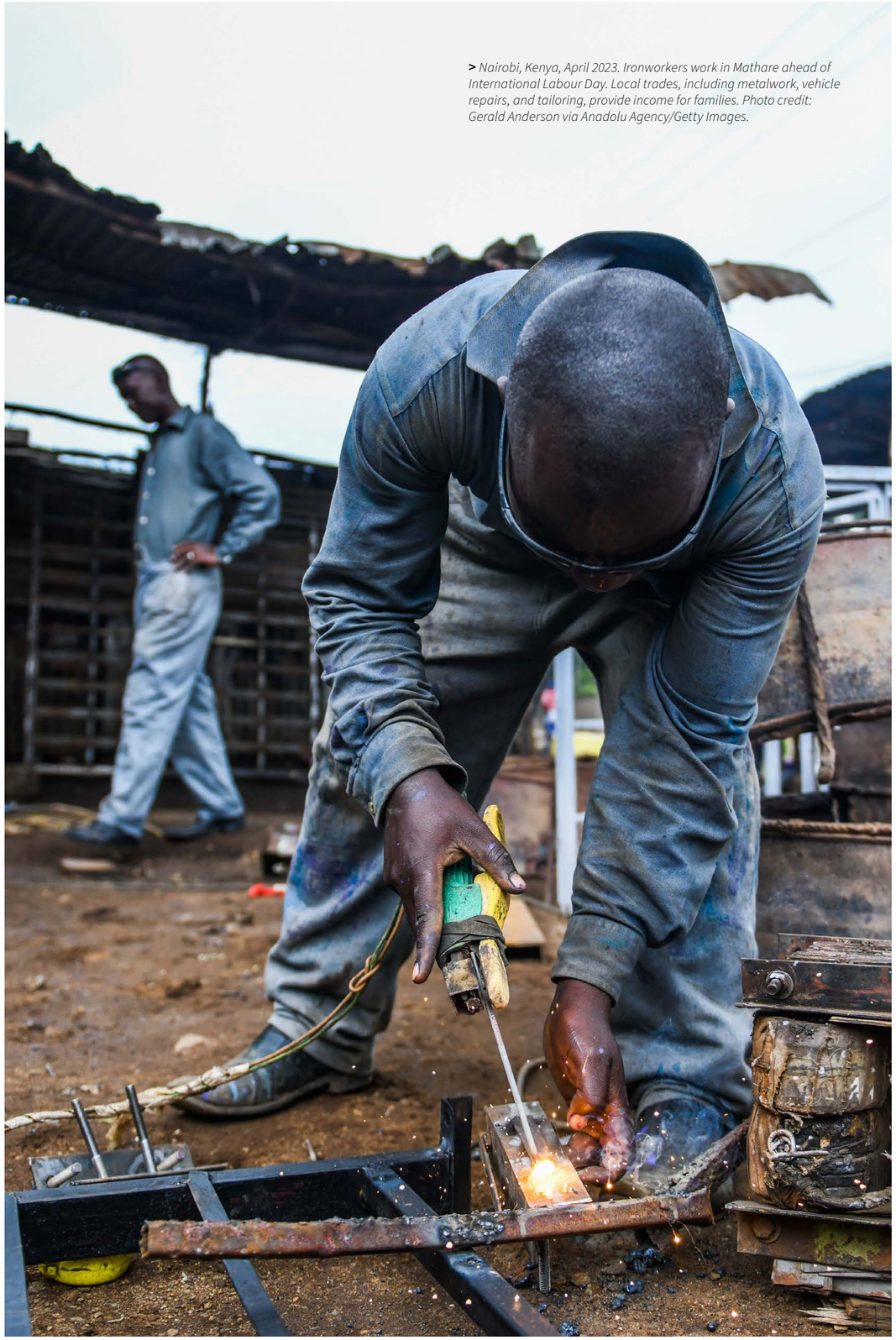
Hindu teachings encourage people to reflect on whether actions are ethically right rather than accepting them simply because they are customary or widely practiced.

Hindu Teaching: *"Therefore, let the scriptures be your authority in determining what should be done and what should not be done."*

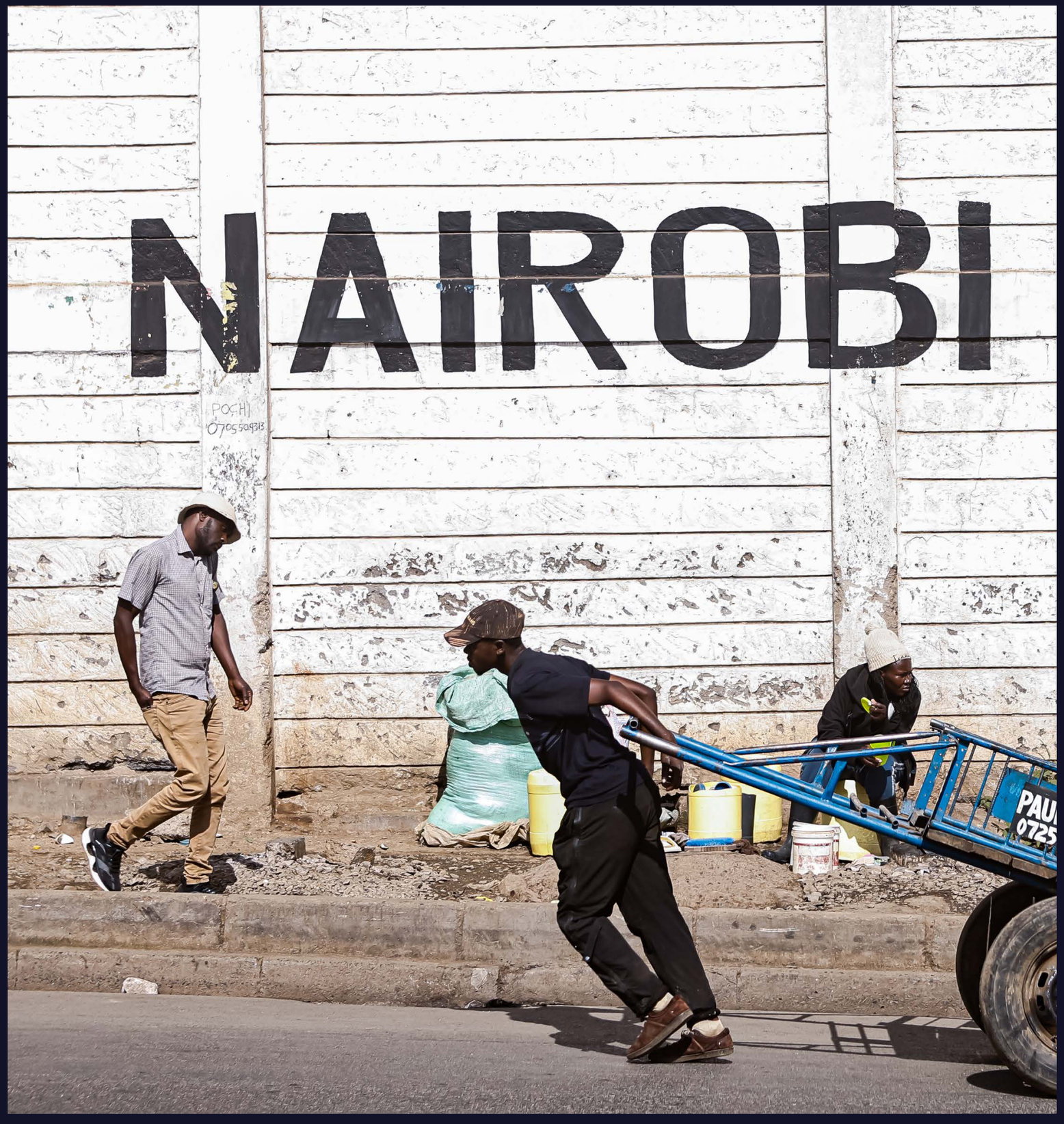
Bhagavad Gita 16:24

CALL TO ACTION

Speak up against harmful practices that exploit or control others.



> *Nairobi, Kenya, April 2023. Ironworkers work in Mathare ahead of International Labour Day. Local trades, including metalwork, vehicle repairs, and tailoring, provide income for families. Photo credit: Gerald Anderson via Anadolu Agency/Getty Images.*



Section B:

LAWS, GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

> Nairobi, Kenya, November 2025. A mkokoteni (handcart) puller travels to a market to collect farm produce for delivery around the city. Kenya's jua kali informal economy includes cart pulling, metalwork, repairs, recycling, and small trading, but workers can face difficult conditions and gaps in labour protections. Photo credit: Boniface Muthoni via SOPA Images/LightRocket/ Getty Images.

KENYA'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FORCED LABOUR

Kenya has a substantial legal foundation for addressing forced labour, but the framework remains fragmented and implementation gaps continue to limit prevention, identification, protection and accountability. Internationally, Kenya has ratified the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), as well as the ILO Conventions on Minimum Age and the Worst Forms of Child Labour (Nos. 138 and 182). Kenya has also ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, which provides an important framework for addressing trafficking for forced labour and other forms of exploitation[28].

However, Kenya has not ratified the 2014 Protocol to ILO Convention No. 29 (P029), which specifically requires stronger prevention, protection, remedies and enforcement measures. P029 remains an identified ratification priority under Kenya's current Alliance 8.7 Country Roadmap. Kenya has also not yet ratified ILO Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers or Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment, both of which are particularly relevant to protecting domestic workers and addressing abusive working environments[29].

At the regional level, Kenya is bound by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. The ACRWC is particularly relevant because Article 15 requires protection of children from economic exploitation and hazardous work across both formal and informal sectors, while Article 29 requires action against child trafficking and the use of children in begging. Kenya ratified the Maputo Protocol in 2010, providing additional obligations relevant to the protection of women and girls from exploitation and harmful practices[30].

At the East African Community (EAC) level, the EAC Labour Migration Policy provides a regional opportunity to strengthen governance and protection of migrant workers, although the policy has been under development rather than functioning as a dedicated forced labour instrument[31]. Importantly, there is currently no dedicated African regional treaty specifically addressing forced labour comparable to ILO P029; this makes effective implementation of existing human-rights, child-protection, trafficking and labour frameworks particularly important.

Key national laws and frameworks

Constitution of Kenya (2010)

Article 30 expressly prohibits slavery and servitude and states that no person shall be required to perform forced labour. This establishes forced labour as a fundamental rights issue and provides a constitutional basis for prevention, protection and accountability.

Employment Act, 2007

The Act prohibits forced or compulsory labour and provides the principal employment law framework for protecting workers, including provisions concerning contracts, wages, working conditions and labour inspection. It provides an important basis for labour officers to identify and respond to exploitative employment practices.

Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010

The Act criminalises trafficking and establishes a framework for prevention, prosecution and protection of victims. Because forced labour is one of the purposes for which people may be trafficked, the Act is an important part of Kenya's response to forced labour. The 2025 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, however, noted continuing weaknesses in implementation, including limitations in national trafficking data and coordination.

The Alliance 8.7 Kenya Country Roadmap 2025–2030

Provides an important national framework for addressing forced labour, human trafficking, modern slavery and child labour. For forced labour specifically, the Roadmap identifies five important priorities: establishing a national forced labour data and information-management system; strengthening labour inspections in target sectors; increasing accountability of private recruitment agencies; developing policies on forced labour; and ratifying the 2014 Protocol to the ILO Forced Labour Convention (P029).

Gaps in law and policy implementation

This section highlights key gaps in Kenya's legal, policy and implementation framework for addressing forced labour and identifies practical opportunities for advocacy. It focuses on the actions that faith leaders and frontline workers can take to influence government to strengthen policies, improve implementation and coordination and ensure greater accountability for forced labour.

Table 3: Gaps in laws and policy implementation

Law / Legal instrument	Key gaps / challenges	Proposed advocacy solutions
Constitution of Kenya, 2010 – Article 30: Slavery, servitude and forced labour Article 30 provides a fundamental rights protection by stating that no person shall be held in slavery or servitude and that no person shall be required to perform forced labour.	The constitutional prohibition is broad, but Kenya does not have a stand-alone policy on addressing forced labour.	• Advocate for stronger public education and legal literacy on Article 30, particularly among workers, communities, faith leaders, labour officers and frontline responders. • Develop clear advocacy messages and policy recommendations calling on the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to finalise and adopt a National Forced Labour Policy and Action Plan.
Employment Act, 2007 – Section 4: Prohibition against forced labour Section 4 prohibits any person from using or assisting another person in recruiting, trafficking or using forced labour.	The law provides a direct prohibition, but advocacy concerns include limited awareness and application of the provision. The relatively low maximum penalty should be questioned in relation to serious and organised forms of forced labour.	• Advocate for review of Section 4 and related penalties to ensure that sanctions are sufficiently deterrent and proportionate to serious forced-labour offences. • Advocate for targeted labour inspections in sectors and workplaces at higher risk of forced labour, including domestic work, agriculture, construction, hospitality and informal work.
Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010 – forced labour as exploitation The Act defines exploitation to include slavery, practices similar to slavery, involuntary servitude, forced labour, child labour and sexual exploitation, among others.	The Act provides an important trafficking-based response, but forced labour does not always occur through trafficking. This creates a need for stronger understanding of the distinction and relationship between forced labour, trafficking and other forms of exploitation.	• Advocate for practical guidance and training on distinguishing forced labour from trafficking while recognising situations where the two overlap. • Advocate for improved collection and publication of disaggregated data on forced labour cases, investigations, prosecutions, convictions and survivor assistance.
National Employment Authority Act, 2016 Establishes the National Employment Authority and provides an institutional framework for employment management, including employment services and a database of people seeking employment.	The employment-service framework can contribute to safer recruitment, but there is a need to strengthen its use as a prevention mechanism against fraudulent recruitment and forced labour, particularly for people seeking employment through informal channels and overseas recruitment.	• Advocate for stronger integration of forced labour prevention and safe-recruitment information into public employment services. • Advocate for better coordination between the Authority, labour inspectors, recruitment agencies, police and migrant-worker protection mechanisms.

Existing policy opportunities for advocacy

There are several immediate opportunities for faith leaders and frontline workers to influence policy rather than waiting for new laws to be enacted. First, the proposed development of Kenya's National Policy on Forced Labour and its National Action Plan provides an opportunity to ensure that forced labour and other hidden forms of exploitation receive explicit attention. The government has already indicated that the revised national policy on elimination of child labour should address root causes and sectors contributing most to child labour[32]. Faith leaders and frontline workers can use community evidence to advocate for clearer definitions of exploitative child domestic work, stronger county implementation, community-based monitoring and referral systems, and dedicated resources.

Second, Kenya's Alliance 8.7 Country Roadmap 2025–2030 provides an unusually direct policy advocacy entry point. The Roadmap identifies the development of a national forced labour policy and national action plan, stronger labour inspections in sectors prone to forced labour, improved forced-labour data systems, greater accountability of private recruitment agencies and ratification of P029 as specific interventions[33]. Faith leaders and frontline workers can therefore frame their advocacy around commitments the government has already identified, asking: *What is the implementation timeline? Who is responsible? What resources have been allocated? How will counties and communities participate?*

KEY MESSAGES

Laws and policies only protect people when they are effectively enforced and implemented.

Kenya has laws and commitments addressing forced labour and trafficking, but gaps in enforcement, coordination, resources and implementation can leave people vulnerable to exploitation, while county-level responses may not adequately address local risks.

The Bible presents justice as a continuous responsibility rather than an occasional act. It encourages communities and institutions to challenge systems that enable abuse, demand accountability, and ensure that people affected by exploitation can access justice.

Biblical Scripture: *"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."*

Amos 5:24

Quran teaching emphasise trustworthiness, fairness and impartial judgement. The teachings encourage those with responsibility or authority to make decisions that do not favour perpetrators or disadvantage those seeking protection and justice.

Islamic Scripture: *"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice."*

Quran 4:58

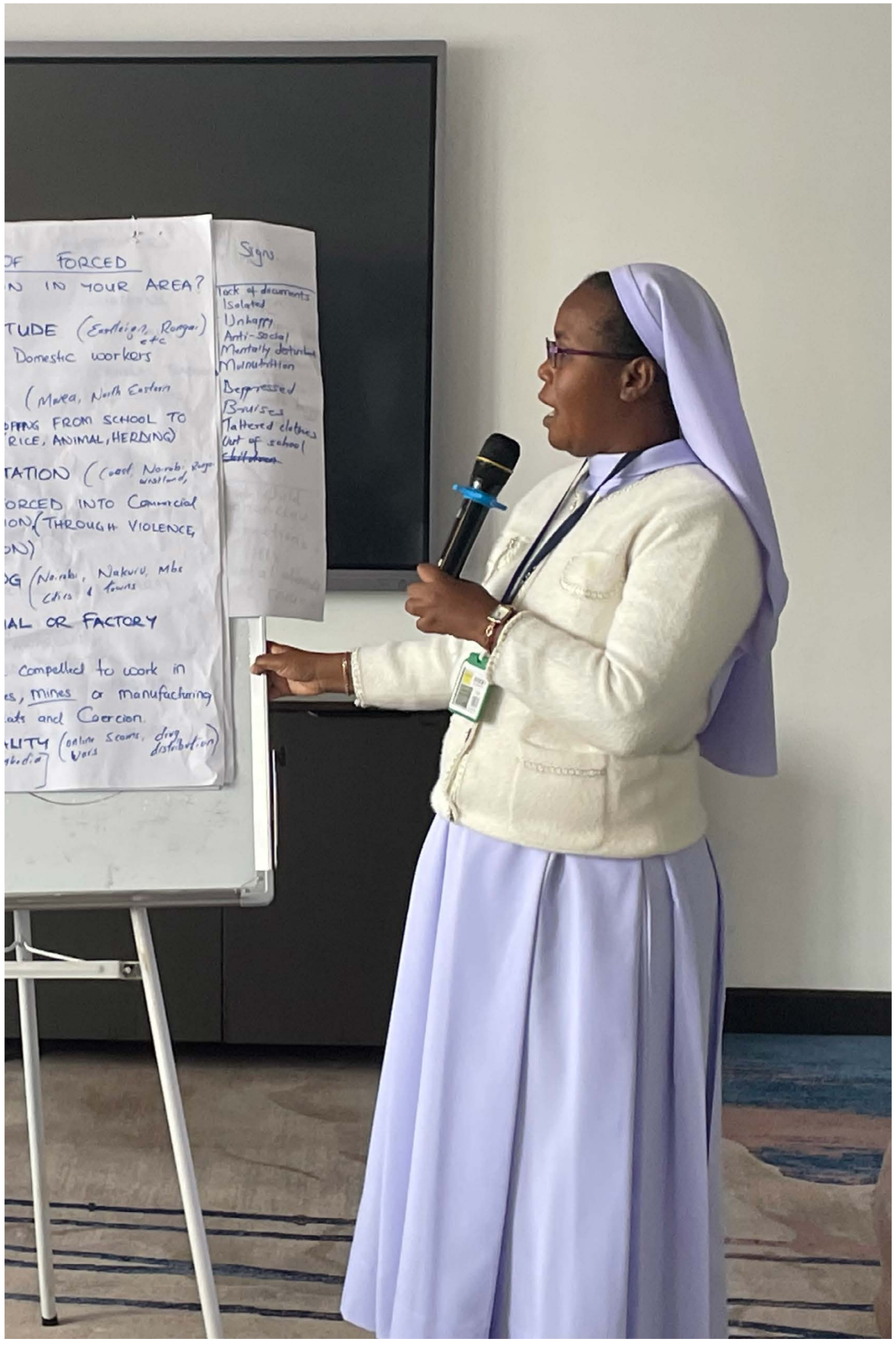
Hindu teachings encourage communities to prevent harm and protect the wellbeing of others by challenging practices that violate human dignity and promote conditions where everyone can live free from exploitation.

Hindu Teaching: *"Righteousness was declared for restraining creatures from injuring one another. Therefore, that is Righteousness which prevents injury to creatures."*

Mahabharata, Shanti Parva 12.109.2a

CALL TO ACTION

Enforce and implement existing laws and policies that protect people from forced labour.



> *Nairobi, Kenya, July 2026. Sr Mercy Mwayi, FSJ, program director of Talitha Kum International – RAHT Kenya, takes part in the Forced Labour Guidelines Co-Creation Workshop, bringing faith and frontline perspectives to the development of practical guidance. Photo credit: Walk Free.*



Section C:

ADVOCACY STRATEGIES FOR FAITH LEADERS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS

> *Nairobi, Kenya, July 2026. Participants take part in a workshop to help develop practical guidelines on forced labour, sharing their knowledge and experiences. Photo credit: Walk Free*

THE ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS

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. Together, they can help communities recognise forced labour, challenge harmful attitudes and practices, and demand effective action from government, employers and other responsible actors.

Strategies for faith leaders and frontline workers

The strategies below provide practical areas of action for faith leaders and frontline workers. They can be adapted to different contexts;

- Use sermons, community education, workplace outreach, schools, training sessions and frontline interactions to explain what forced labour is, challenge myths and harmful attitudes, and help people recognize indicators such as deceptive recruitment, debt bondage, withheld wages or documents, threats and restriction of movement.
- Convene outreaches involving faith leaders, survivors, employers, recruiting agencies, local administrators, youth, womens groups and other community actors to discuss local forms of exploitation and available reporting and referral pathways.
- Use Facebook, WhatsApp, radio, TikTok and other accessible platforms to share simple, locally relevant messages on forced labour, workers' rights, reporting pathways and survivor-centred responses.
- Document emerging patterns and use evidence to identify gaps in enforcement and services and to strengthen advocacy for better policies, programmes and resource allocation.
- Translate community evidence and survivor experiences into specific demands directed at national and county governments, Parliament, county assemblies, labour institutions, law enforcement and other duty bearers.
- Involve survivors from the beginning in identifying advocacy priorities, developing messages, designing community interventions, generating evidence, engaging policymakers and monitoring progress.

Importance of survivor engagement in advocacy

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. They can help faith leaders and frontline workers understand how people are recruited, controlled and exploited; why victims may not recognise or disclose exploitation; how stigma, poverty, dependency and fear affect their choices; and where existing protection, referral and justice systems fail. 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.

For faith leaders and frontline workers, however, survivor engagement must go beyond asking survivors to tell their stories. Survivors should have genuine opportunities to influence priorities, advocacy messages, programme design, policy recommendations, community education and monitoring of responses. Participation should be voluntary and informed, with survivors able to decide what they disclose, whether their identity is shared and when or whether they participate. It should also be trauma-informed and accompanied by appropriate safeguarding, confidentiality, psychosocial and other support to prevent re-traumatisation, stigma or retaliation. Ultimately, meaningful survivor engagement shifts advocacy from doing things *for* survivors to working *with* survivors and recognising them as rights-holders, experts and agents of change.

How to conduct advocacy

Effective advocacy against forced labour requires more than delivering messages to communities or calling for stronger laws. Faith leaders and frontline workers need to follow a clear and continuous advocacy process that begins with understanding the problem, identifies who has the power to influence change, develops evidence-based messages, mobilises communities and survivors, engages decision-makers, and follows up to ensure that commitments translate into action. The following steps provide a practical sequence that faith leaders and frontline workers can adapt to their local context.

1 Understand and define the problem

Start by identifying what forms of forced labour are occurring, who is affected, where risks exist and what enables the exploitation to continue. Use community observations, survivor experiences, frontline cases, existing research, government information and local consultations.

2 Engage survivors and affected communities from the beginning

Before deciding what the advocacy campaign should focus on, ask people with lived experience what they consider important. Survivors should have opportunities to influence the problem analysis, priorities, messages and proposed solutions. Community members should also be consulted because they understand local practices, attitudes and risks.

3 Identify the change you want to achieve

Convert the problem into a specific advocacy objective. The objective should describe the change you want to see in behaviour, practice, policy, resources or institutional response. Advocacy objectives should be realistic enough to influence within a defined period.

4 Identify who can make or influence the change

Map the decision-makers, duty bearers, influencers and allies relevant to the issue. Different advocacy objectives require engagement with different actors.

For each target, ask: *Who has the authority to make the change? Who influences them? Who can help us create pressure or support?*

5 Develop evidence and advocacy messages

Use the evidence gathered to develop simple, credible and targeted messages. Messages should explain the problem, why it matters, what needs to change and who needs to act.

A useful structure is: Issue → Evidence → Who must act → What we are asking → Change required

6 Build community awareness and mobilisation

Once the issue and advocacy messages are clear, mobilise people around the desired change. Faith leaders can use sermons, religious gatherings, counselling and community forums, while frontline workers can use outreach, training, schools, workplaces and existing community structures.

7 Use strategic communication and social media

Take the advocacy messages beyond physical meetings through radio, WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, community media and other accessible platforms. Use stories, short videos, survivor-informed messages, myth-and-fact content and practical information on where people can seek help.

8 Engage decision-makers and duty bearers

Move from public awareness to direct advocacy with people who can influence change. Arrange meetings with government officials, legislators, county assemblies, employers, recruiting agencies and other relevant actors. Present evidence and survivor/community perspectives and make clear, specific requests.

9 Build alliances and collective advocacy

Advocacy is stronger when different actors coordinate around common demands. Faith leaders and frontline workers should build relationships with survivor-led organisations, civil society, workers' organisations, government actors, media, researchers and responsible employers.

10 Follow up, monitor commitments and hold duty bearers accountable

Advocacy does not end when a meeting is held or a commitment is made. Follow-up turns advocacy into change.

Track: *What was promised; Who committed to action; When action should occur; What resources were allocated; Whether policies or programmes were implemented; Whether survivors and affected communities experienced any improvement.*

Advocacy tools and approaches

Advocacy should always have a clear purpose and intended change.
Before using any tool or approach, faith leaders and frontline workers should ask:
What problem are we trying to change?
Who has the power to make that change?
What evidence do we have?
What action are we asking for?
What will we do if there is no response?

Community outreaches

A dialogue can bring together different actors, including survivors, workers, employers, recruiting agencies, youth, women, parents, community leaders, local administrators, faith leaders and frontline service providers. Faith leaders and frontline workers can then help participants identify practical solutions and assign responsibility for follow-up. The important shift is from "talking about the problem" to "agreeing what we will do about it."

Interfaith dialogue and joint advocacy forums

Instead of each religious institution addressing the issue independently, faith leaders can establish interfaith forums that bring together leaders from different denominations and faith traditions to develop common messages and collective advocacy priorities. Interfaith forums are particularly useful for building legitimacy and collective pressure.

Social media and digital advocacy campaigns

Faith leaders and frontline workers can use WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, X, Instagram, community radio platforms and other channels to share short and accessible messages about what forced labour is, common warning signs, safe recruitment and available support.

Policy briefs

A policy brief is a short advocacy document that translates evidence into a clear policy problem, practical recommendations and a call for action. It is particularly useful when engaging government officials, Members of Parliament, county assemblies, ministries, departments, policymakers and other decision-makers who may not have time to read a long research report.

Memoranda and written submissions

A memorandum is a formal written submission used to communicate a position and can be particularly useful when Parliament, a county assembly, government ministry, task force or other institution is considering legislation, policy, regulations, budgets or a particular issue. Faith leaders and frontline workers could prepare a joint memorandum and submit during a public participation process, setting out the changes they want included in a policy, law, budget or programme.

Petitions and collective public demands

Faith leaders and frontline workers can build support for a petition through community meetings, interfaith forums, civil society networks and social media. They should explain the issue before asking people to support the petition so that signatures represent informed participation rather than simply numbers. The petition can then be formally submitted to the relevant authority, accompanied by a meeting or public event where representatives explain the demands.

Survivor engagement and participation

Survivor engagement should be treated as an approach that cuts across all advocacy tools, rather than as a separate activity. Faith leaders and frontline workers should move beyond inviting survivors to tell their stories. Survivors can participate as advisers, trainers, researchers, advocates, peer educators, policy contributors or members of advocacy committees, depending on their interests and capacities.

CALL TO ACTION FOR FAITH LEADERS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS

- **Change harmful traditions and social norms**: Question practices, cultures, norms and traditions that place people in exploitative work
- **Strengthen prevention and reporting:** Learn to recognise signs of forced labour and create trusted, confidential pathways for people to report exploitation.
- **Push for stronger policies and resources**: Advocate for the development and implementation of a comprehensive National Policy on Forced Labour and stronger county-level policies and action plans addressing forced labour and exploitation.
- **Put survivors at the centre:** Engage survivors meaningfully in advocacy, policy development, awareness campaigns and programme design not simply as beneficiaries or storytellers.
- **Demand accountability and sustained action:** Engage government, employers, recruiting agencies, law enforcement and other duty bearers to address identified gaps, investigate exploitation and protect affected people.

Biblical Scripture: *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." — **Proverbs 31:8–9***



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



Section D:

SURVIVOR CARE AND SUPPORT

> *Nairobi, Kenya, July 2026. Participants take part in a workshop to help develop practical guidelines on forced labour, sharing their knowledge and experiences. Photo credit: Walk Free.*

WHY SURVIVOR CARE MATTERS IN FORCED LABOUR ADVOCACY

People who experience forced labour may need support to recover from the harm they have experienced and to rebuild their lives. Faith leaders and frontline workers have an important role in helping survivors reach the right services safely and respectfully. Their role is not to investigate the case or provide every form of support themselves. Instead, they should listen without judgement, identify immediate safety and support needs, explain the available options, and help the survivor connect with appropriate service providers. Referrals should, wherever possible, be made with the survivor's informed consent and in a way that protects their privacy, dignity and safety.

Survivor care is an important part of advocacy because advocacy should not stop at speaking about the problem—it should help improve people's lives.

When survivors cannot access safety, healthcare, counselling, legal assistance or livelihoods, they may remain vulnerable to further exploitation or be forced to return to unsafe work because they have no other option.

Survivor care also strengthens advocacy. Survivors who are safe, supported and respected can choose whether and how they want to contribute their experiences to efforts for change. Their experiences can help communities, faith leaders and decision-makers understand what forced labour looks like in real life and what needs to change. However, survivors should never be expected to share their stories in order to receive support or to prove that forced labour exists.

For faith leaders and frontline workers, the key message is simple: listen, protect, connect and respect. A survivor should leave every interaction feeling safer, respected and better connected to the support they need, not blamed, exposed or re-traumatised.

Types of support and care

Survivors may need different types of support depending on what they have experienced and their individual circumstances. These may include:

- **Immediate safety and protection**: Help to move away from an unsafe workplace or person, access safe accommodation, or develop a simple safety plan where there is an immediate risk of harm.
- **Medical care**: Access to health services for injuries, illness, exhaustion, sexual and reproductive health needs, or other health concerns resulting from unsafe or abusive working conditions.
- **Psychosocial and emotional support**: Counselling, peer support, safe spaces, support groups and other forms of care that can help survivors cope with fear, stress, trauma, isolation and loss of confidence.
- **Legal support**: Assistance to understand their rights, report abuse where they choose to do so, recover unpaid wages, pursue justice and understand available legal options.
- **Shelter and basic needs**: Safe accommodation, food, clothing, transport and other immediate assistance, particularly for survivors who have left an unsafe situation without resources.
- **Family and community support**: Support to safely reconnect with trusted family members or community networks, where this is in the survivor's best interest and with their consent.
- **Livelihood and economic support**: Assistance with skills development, employment, income-generating opportunities, financial planning or access to other livelihood programmes to reduce the risk of returning to unsafe work.
- **Education and skills support**: For children and young survivors, support to return to school, access vocational training or continue their education.
- **Documentation and practical assistance**: Help to replace lost or withheld identification documents, access services, travel safely, or address other practical barriers to rebuilding their lives.

Reporting and referral pathways

Reporting: Faith leaders and frontline workers should take every report seriously, listen calmly and privately, and avoid blaming or questioning the person repeatedly. Record only the basic facts needed (what happened, where, when, who may be involved, and any immediate safety concern) and do not promise secrecy if the person or a child is at risk. Cases can be reported to the police or a labour officer, while suspected trafficking cases can be linked to Kenya's National Referral Mechanism. For children, the Child Helpline 116 provides 24-hour support and referrals across all 47 counties.

Referral: The priority is the person's safety and immediate needs, not collecting evidence. With the person's informed agreement, connect them to the appropriate service such as medical care, psychosocial support, shelter, legal assistance, police or labour authorities. Do not confront the suspected employer or recruiter yourself, as this could put the person or others at greater risk. Follow up to check whether the person actually received help and, where necessary, make another referral. Kenya's National Referral Mechanism provides guidance on identification, initial risk assessment, protection and referral of people affected by trafficking.

How faith leaders and frontline workers can make referrals

When someone discloses that they may be experiencing forced labour:

1 **Listen first.** Give the person time to speak and avoid blaming, judging or repeatedly asking them to describe what happened.

2 **Check immediate safety.** Ask whether they are currently safe and whether there is an immediate risk of violence, retaliation or being forced to return to the workplace.

3 **Explain the available support**. Tell the survivor what services may be available and what will happen if a referral is made. See details of available support in Appendix 1.

4 **Respect their choices.** Where the survivor has the capacity to decide, seek their informed consent before sharing personal information or making a referral, except where mandatory reporting or immediate protection requirements apply.

5 **Connect them to the right service.** Refer according to their needs—for example, a health facility for medical care, a qualified counsellor for psychosocial support, a legal service provider for legal assistance, or the appropriate government authority for protection and reporting.

6 **Protect confidentiality**. Only share information that is necessary for the referral and with the appropriate service provider. Do not discuss the survivor's situation publicly or with people who do not need to know.

7 **Follow up safely.** Where appropriate and with the survivor's agreement, check whether they received the support they needed and whether additional assistance is required.

DO NOT INVESTIGATE BEYOND YOUR ROLE

Faith leaders and frontline workers should identify risk, document safely and refer. They should not conduct undercover investigations, publicly accuse suspected traffickers without a safety plan, or pressure survivors to disclose details repeatedly.

Islamic Scripture: *"Do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction…"*

Quran 2:195

KEY MESSAGE

Encourage survivors to report cases of forced labour.

A person experiencing forced labour may feel trapped, afraid and unsure where to turn. One trusted person who listens, believes them and connects them to the right support can make a real difference. Faith leaders and frontline workers can be that bridge to safety, care and recovery.

The Bible encourages people to stand alongside those experiencing hardship rather than leaving them to cope alone.

Biblical Scripture: *"Hide the outcasts; do not betray the fugitive; let the outcasts of Moab sojourn among you; be a shelter to them from the destroyer."*

Isaiah 16:3–4

The Quran encourages communities to show kindness and care for people in vulnerable circumstances.

Islamic Scripture: *"O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives."*

Quran 4:135

Mahabharata presents compassion as an active responsibility towards those experiencing suffering. For survivors, it supports a response centred on protection, care and restoration, where people help reduce suffering and create an environment in which survivors can feel safe and supported.

Hindu Sacred Text: *"That man who is devoted to compassion and who behaves with compassion towards others, has no fear to entertain from any creature."*

Mahabharata, Anushasana Parva 13.116.2b

CALL TO ACTION

Establish safe spaces that encourage survivors of forced labour to share their experiences and connect them with appropriate care and support.

APPENDIX 1: TOOLKITS AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

Tool 1: Referral directory template

Every church, mosque, temple, and frontline team should maintain an up-to-date referral directory. Review and update it quarterly, verifying contact numbers by phone. Never share survivors' personal information through WhatsApp groups or public prayer chains.

Service	When to use
Children's Officer	Child labour, child trafficking, abuse, school withdrawal
Labour Officer	Wage withholding, forced labour indicators, abusive employment
Police/DCI/AHTCPU	Immediate danger, trafficking crime, cross-border exploitation
Medical facility	Injury, sexual violence, exhaustion, urgent health needs
Psychosocial support	Trauma, fear, shame, survivor support
Legal aid	Documents, compensation, case follow-up, migration claims
Shelter/Safe accommodation	Unsafe home/worksite, returnee support, emergency protection
Long term support	Reintegration, economic empowerment and rehabilitation

National Referral Mechanism Kenya

Tool 2: Safe Migration and Ethical Recruitment Protocol

1. Verify agency

Use NEA-accredited recruiters and keep copies of registration details.

2. Verify job offer

Check employer, contract, country, duties, pay, deductions and working hours.

3. Refuse illegal fees

Do not accept debt bondage disguised as placement costs.

4. Prepare documents

Keep copies of passport, contract, emergency contacts and next-of-kin details.

5. Attend orientation

Pre-departure guidance should include rights, complaint channels and embassy contacts.

6. Plan return support

Faith communities should welcome returnees and connect them to services.

Tool 3: Community dialogue plan

Phase	Guiding questions	Outputs
Prepare	• Which local sectors are risky? • Who must be invited? • What referral contacts are safe?	Agenda, facilitator, referral handout, safeguarding protocol.
Open with faith teaching	• Which scriptures or stories speak to dignity, justice and protection?	Common moral frame and ground rules.
Map local risks	• Where do children disappear? • Where do recruiters operate? • Which households employ domestic workers?	Local risk map without naming victims publicly.
Identify actions	• What can the faith community do this month? • What needs county or national action?	Action plan with responsible people.
Follow up	• Were commitments delivered? • Were cases referred? • Were children re-enrolled?	Follow-up meeting and accountability notes.

Tool 4: Advocacy planning worksheet

Use this worksheet to prepare a public participation submission, county meeting, interfaith statement or institutional policy reform proposal.

Question	Your notes
What forced labour issue are we addressing?	
Which evidence source supports the concern?	
Who is affected and what safety risks exist?	
Which law or policy creates a duty to act?	
Who is the decision-maker or duty-bearer?	
What is our concrete ask?	
Which faith message will frame the ask?	
What coalition partners will join?	
What follow-up date will we set?	

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> *Nairobi, Kenya, July 2026. Faith leaders take part in a workshop to help develop practical guidelines on forced labour, drawing on their knowledge and experience. Photo credit: Walk Free.*

