

Kenya still caught up in Russia's expanding mercenary drive

A new report shows Russia has recruited at least 27,000 foreign nationals from more than 130 countries, including Kenya since 2022 when it invaded Ukraine.

BY MERCY SIMIYU

Russia is still relying on foreign fighters and private military companies to sustain its war in Ukraine and expand influence across Africa and the Middle East, according to recent reports that reveal a growing global recruitment network targeting vulnerable populations.

A report by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Truth Hounds, and the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law says Russia has recruited at least 27,000 foreign nationals from more than 130 countries since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The report states that Moscow shifted to large-scale foreign recruitment after suffering heavy battlefield losses and seeking to avoid another politically unpopular mobilisation of its citizens.

"After suffering massive battlefield losses during the first year of its 2022 aggression against Ukraine, the Russian leadership faced a strategic dilemma: how to maintain its military campaign without resorting to another highly unpopular 'partial mobilisation'," the report states.

Researchers say the Kremlin responded by building what they describe as "institutionalised recruitment system" targeting economically vulnerable populations from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

According to the report, many recruits were promised civilian jobs, educational opportunities, or non-combat military roles before being deployed to dangerous front-line operations in Ukraine.

"Within weeks of signing their contracts, they are sent to the front lines and assigned to extremely dangerous combat missions, with a high probability of death or serious injury," the report says.

The findings estimate that between 1,700 and 4,000 African nationals have joined Russian forces, while recruit-



Russian soldiers ride on top of an armoured vehicle in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region. Some Kenyans have been recruited to fight for Russia in Ukraine. PHOTO/REUTERS

ment from Africa has become a major pillar of Moscow's strategy since 2024.

In March, Kenya's Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi visited Moscow to discuss the recruitment of Kenyans. Officials in Moscow, he said, had agreed to stop deploying Kenyans to the battlefield. But Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also said that those with active contracts will have to serve them in full. Weeks later, however, more Kenyans died on the battlefield, suggesting they had been deployed despite Russian promises to stop.

Speaking in Parliament, Prime Cabinet Secretary and Foreign Affairs CS Musalia Mudavadi admitted that the Kenyan government has limited capacity to fully account for or assist Kenyans recruited into the Russian military amid the Russia-Ukraine war.

Mr Mudavadi said many of those in-

volved enlisted voluntarily through unofficial channels, making tracing and intervention difficult. "The government is unable to confirm the number of Kenyans recruited into Russian military operations," he said.

The government estimates that about 252 to 291 Kenyans have been recruited into Russia's Special Military Operations. Of these, 19 are reported dead, 42 are injured or hospitalised, 44 have returned home, while others remain active in the conflict zones.

Last October, Kenyan police rescued dozens of Kenyans in a house on the outskirts of Nairobi. Security agencies believed the men were preparing to travel to Russia. A Russian national initially arrested with the group was later deported, although the Russian Embassy claimed he had been freed to leave on his own.

Researchers say several recruits signed military contracts written entirely in Russian despite not understanding the language. "Contracts were presented in Russian to individuals who did not read or understand the language, often without any explanation and in circumstances that made refusal impossible," the report says.

Once deployed, several foreign fighters reportedly ended up in high-risk "meat assaults", which are large-scale frontal attacks associated with heavy casualties.

KENYAN RECRUITS

The Ruto administration estimates that about 252 to 291 Kenyans have been recruited into Russia's Special Military Operations. Of these, 19 are reported dead, 42 are injured or hospitalised, 44 have returned home, while others remain active in the conflict zones.

BRIEFLY

ANGELES

Search on for over 20 trapped after building collapses

More than 20 people are trapped under the rubble of a building under construction in the Philippines that collapsed on Sunday, officials said, as rescue efforts continued. Five people were confirmed trapped, including two in contact with rescuers, and 18 more were feared under the rubble, officials said. "We have five confirmed trapped victims, and we have a figure of 18 workers from the list of construction workers on duty today, but no feedback yet from their families. This brings the estimated number of trapped victims to 23 as of today," Ms Maria Leah Sajili, the information officer at the regional Bureau of Fire Protection, told a press briefing.

QUETTA



Railway staff work at the site yesterday. PHOTO/REUTERS

At least 24 killed in train blast claimed by militants

A bomb blast yesterday hit a shuttle train carrying Pakistani security personnel and their families in the southwestern province of Balochistan, Pakistani officials said, in the latest major attack claimed by separatist militant group Baloch Liberation Army, or BLA. The explosion killed at least 24 people and injured around 70, according to three provincial government and security officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. BLA, in a statement, said it carried out the attack.