



KENYA: CHILD DOMESTIC WORK

Annual report 2025-2026



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, the Not Invisible Anymore (NIA) hotspot program operated at the intersection of acute economic pressure and a challenging global and national context in its effort to address exploitative child domestic work. The program and its targeted beneficiaries were further impacted by constrained funding environments, including reductions in official development assistance across a number of major donor countries, which affected service delivery capacity in some contexts.

During the year, as Kenya grappled with rising inflation and the hidden implementation costs of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) transition – both of which heightened the risk of school dropout and entry into exploitative domestic work – NIA and its 12 partners across Busia, Kakamega, Kisumu and Nairobi navigated these challenges through a holistic, survivor-centred approach combining national advocacy, evidence strengthening and community-level interventions.

On the front lines, the program's impact was both tangible and transformative. The program directly reached more than 10,000 Kenyans, with 7,659 children, survivors and caregivers experiencing improved well-being and protection, 450 children and youth accessing education and training opportunities, and 2,966 community members strengthening resilience through Freedom Groups. Additionally, 170 families benefited from economic empowerment initiatives, 754 caregivers were trained in positive parenting and livelihoods, and 26 cases received legal support, contributing to strengthened prevention, protection and access to justice outcomes. The successful hosting of the East Africa CDW Convening in Nairobi further solidified NIA's role as a movement builder, elevating survivor voices into regional strategic dialogues

Most notably, NIA partners – including the African Institute for Children Studies (AICS), ICS SP and ChildLine Kenya – were instrumental in shaping national consultations for the ratification of the International Labour Organization's Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) and the Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) to ensure decent work protections and a violence-free work environment for domestic workers. By coordinating with a broad coalition of partners, the program ensured that the unique vulnerabilities of child domestic workers were integrated into the national labour reform agenda. These efforts were reinforced at the county level, with Busia County launching a landmark Children's Policy that explicitly targets child labour and trafficking, and Kisumu County formally assenting to its own Child Protection Policy.

As NIA enters its next phase, the integration of data-driven Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) tools and the collective power of the Joint Community of Practice (CoP) between NIA and Survivor Leadership Fund (SLF) partners provide a scalable blueprint for shifting power to frontline leaders, building stronger survivor-led movements and dismantling the structures that enable child domestic servitude in Kenya.

Illustrations by Njung'e Wanjiru for the Freedom Fund



OPERATING CONTEXT

Poverty remains the primary driver of child domestic labour. Compounding this challenge, persistent fiscal pressures throughout 2025 – including inflation fluctuating above 4% and the implementation of the housing levy – have squeezed household purchasing power. These cumulative financial strains are reducing the disposable income of low-income households, particularly in the informal settlements of Nairobi and Kisumu, forcing families to rely on child labour as a survival mechanism. This economic strain coincided with the ongoing transition to the CBC. In 2025, the government reported near-universal transition rates, with 97 % of Grade 6 learners moving on to junior secondary school.¹ While intended to reform education, the transition introduced “hidden costs” – such as specialised learning materials

and digital requirements – that placed an unsustainable burden on vulnerable parents. Reports from the field indicate that these costs, paired with resource gaps in public schools, have led to a spike in dropout rates, effectively creating a recruitment pool for exploitative domestic work.

The residual effects of the severe flooding from mid-2024 continued to destabilise the NIA program’s targeted counties well into 2025. In Nairobi’s informal settlements, the destruction of homes along riparian zones led to mass displacements and evictions, leaving thousands of children without stable shelter or school access. In Western Kenya (Busia and Kisumu), flooding disrupted local livelihoods and destroyed school infrastructure, heightening the risk of child trafficking as displaced families sought help through informal care arrangements.

In 2025, the State Department for Children Services was moved under the Ministry of Gender, Culture and Children Services, aligning child protection more closely with gender and social welfare priorities. While this created some short-term coordination challenges, it also offers an opportunity for more integrated and effective responses to child labour and child domestic work. Unlike the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, which focuses on enforcement of labour laws, the new ministry can address the underlying vulnerabilities that drive child domestic work, including poverty, gender inequalities and lack of social support, while coordinating preventive and protective interventions across education, health and community programs. Reducing child domestic work effectively will require collaboration between both ministries, combining holistic child protection with labour enforcement.

The operationalisation of the Court Justice Information Management System (CJIMS) across 124 court stations has revolutionised the tracking of child justice cases. CJIMS is viewed as a progressive tool that enables real-time monitoring of case backlogs and ensures that children’s matters are no longer lost in the system. By assigning specific offense columns for child-related crimes, the system allows for more accurate data collection on the prevalence of domestic servitude cases, ultimately enabling faster legal recourse for survivors and a more coordinated multi-agency response.

1 See <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2026-01-18-state-records-strong-progress-on-school-transition>.



PROGRAM OUTCOMES

In 2025, the program directly impacted 13,774 people, including children in domestic work, survivors and caregivers. The hotspot portfolio takes a holistic, survivor-centred approach. At the national level, partners drive research and strategic behaviour change communication, policy advocacy, strengthening of data systems and evidence on child domestic work, access to justice, and nationwide sensitisation, thereby shaping Kenya's legal and social environment for children. At the community level, partners provide shelter, psychosocial support, vocational and life skills training, leadership development and livelihood programs, while also leading community mobilisation, case identification and support for child domestic workers (CDWs), at-risk children and survivors. Across the portfolio, partners use trauma-informed, child-centred practices and collaborate to maximise collective impact, creating a cohesive, forward-looking portfolio that strengthens prevention, protection and survivor leadership across the four counties.

Partners also coordinate with a range of actors, agencies and stakeholders, and leverage existing community structures including *Nyumba Kumi*, local chiefs, sub-county advisory committees, to support effective, community-led interventions and strengthen local referral and protection systems.

Direct impact in communities affected by modern slavery

As a result of targeted interventions in 2025, 7,659 vulnerable children, CDWs, survivors and caregivers experienced enhanced well-being and protection through psychosocial counselling, emergency food assistance, protective shelter, healthcare, legal aid, positive parenting training and family reunification support. These interventions strengthened resilience, safety and coping capacity, contributing to more supportive family and community environments.

At least 450 out-of-school children, including survivors and those at risk of child domestic work, gained access to formal and non-formal education, vocational training, apprenticeships and community-based learning initiatives. These opportunities enhanced their skills, knowledge and prospects for safer, more sustainable livelihoods, supporting long-term protection and resilience.

Through participation in Freedom Groups, 2,966 community members – including child domestic work survivor networks, alumni groups, multisectoral committees, self-help financial groups and *Nyumba Kumi* neighbourhood security committees – strengthened community resilience, advocacy and economic empowerment, resulting in more effective protection for children and vulnerable households.

Economic empowerment interventions reached 170 families, supporting them to launch micro-enterprises, increase household income and reduce reliance on child labour. Additionally, 754 caregivers (652 women and 72 men) were trained in positive parenting, climate-smart agriculture, entrepreneurship and agribusiness as a preventive strategy to strengthen household resilience and reduce children's vulnerability to harm. By equipping parents and caregivers with practical skills and livelihood opportunities, the intervention supported more stable and protective home environments while reinforcing family and community-based care that help keep children safe. Throughout the program, a total of 26 cases were assisted through legal representation and legal aid services.

Foster systems change to shift power

Building on this momentum, the NIA hotspot program has made significant progress in influencing the policy and legal environment for child domestic work at both national and county levels. In December 2025, AICS, in partnership with Childline Kenya, We Reach, ICS SP and several non-hotspot partners, led public participation forums in Kisumu and Kakamega to support Kenya's first nationwide consultations on the ratification of ILO Convention No. 189 and No. 190. The process has advanced to the development of gap analysis and cost-benefit analysis reports, marking the furthest progress to date toward strengthening protections for CDWs, with anticipation of official ratification in 2026.

The cost-benefit analysis – presented by the National Treasury – concluded that the benefits of ratification outweigh the costs. The analysis highlighted that ratification would not only provide a legal shield for the estimated two million domestic workers in Kenya but would also stimulate economic productivity by reducing the high costs associated with workplace violence, harassment and the loss of human capital.

The post-ratification implementation of the ILO conventions in Kenya presents a transformative opportunity for the NIA program. The gap analysis identifies specific entry points to dismantle exploitative child domestic work, such as:

- **Strengthening labour inspectorates:** Building the capacity of the Ministry of Labour to proactively audit household wage records and enforce standards in private residences, where child domestic work is currently “invisible.”
- **Judicial recourse:** Establishing a dedicated, low-cost Small Claims Court track for domestic labour disputes, ensuring children and survivors have effective access to justice (C189, Art. 16).
- **Policy harmonisation:** Aligning the Children's Act and the Employment Act to create a unified legal framework that explicitly prohibits the exploitation of minors in domestic settings.

With the process now awaiting Cabinet approval, the NIA program is uniquely positioned to leverage this new legal architecture to move from

community-level protection to a nationwide enforcement of decent work standards for all.

Progress at the national level was mirrored by localised policy breakthroughs that transitioned protection from a moral plea to a legal mandate. Busia County officially launched its Children's Policy in June 2025, a critical intervention given the county's status as a high-risk transit point for cross-border trafficking. With an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 children currently engaged in various forms of child labour across Busia, the policy's explicit clauses on domestic servitude provide the necessary legal teeth for local authorities to move beyond public spaces and intervene directly in private households. Similarly, Kisumu County has made strides in integrating child protection directly into its County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), where child labour is treated not merely as a social issue but as a critical budgetary and developmental priority. The policy aims to transition children from labour back into the classroom. Given the county's high school dropout rates that are linked to economic desperation, the implementation of this policy – supported by stronger enforcement and education access – is expected to drive a 15% to 20% increase in school re-enrolment among vulnerable adolescent girls in the targeted sub-counties.

In July, Freedom Fund partner Azadi hosted the inaugural East Africa Child CDW Convening in Nairobi. The convening brought together a diverse coalition of survivors, civil society partners and government representatives from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Rwanda. This platform moved beyond traditional dialogue to focus on actionable, cross-border solutions for combating the systemic exploitation of children in domestic work.

A central tenet of the event was the meaningful inclusion and leadership of survivors, who moved from the periphery to the centre of the child domestic work agenda. By sharing firsthand experiences and technical insights, survivors directly guided the identification of regional program and policy priorities. This survivor-led approach ensured that the strategies developed were grounded in the lived realities of those most affected by modern slavery and trafficking.

The convening served as a critical foundation for sustained regional influence, resulting in several high-priority follow-up initiatives:

- **Joint policy advocacy:** The development of a Joint Regional Policy Brief is currently underway, designed to translate the convening's insights into unified recommendations for policymakers across the five participating nations.
- **Establishment of a regional movement:** A formalised regional network has been established to influence ongoing discourse on child domestic work, ensuring a consistent and representative voice in high-level debates.
- **Strategic alliances:** Azadi is actively lobbying for the inclusion of child domestic work within the Kenya Road Map Alliance 8.7 under the modern slavery cluster, bridging the gap between national commitments and grassroots realities.
- **Future scaling:** Serving as a precursor to a broader African Regional Anti-Trafficking Conference, the convening has laid the groundwork for a larger continental movement in partnership with the Global Learning Community (GLC) and Praxis.

This achievement demonstrates the power of multi-stakeholder engagement in shifting power to frontline leaders and survivors, effectively elevating child domestic work from a hidden private issue to a visible regional priority.

Invest in the strengthening of civil society organisations and movement

An early result of the Freedom Fund's strategy to integrate the SLF into hotspot countries was the initial five-day workshop that served as a transformative platform where 15 SLF partners and 13 NIA hotspot partners dismantled traditional organisational silos to co-create a "Joint Community of Practice." Beyond identity formation, the workshop achieved a comprehensive systemic challenge mapping, identifying shared root causes of exploitation across different regions. Partners developed a strategic action roadmap that prioritised peer-led capacity building in sustainable fundraising, rigorous monitoring and evaluation, and trauma-informed safeguarding. A significant output was the collective design of a CoP governance framework, ensuring the movement remains agile, inclusive and survivor-centred.

The momentum from February was further solidified during a virtual CoP listening session in July 2025, co-facilitated by Development Dynamics. This session acted as a reflective touchpoint to validate the organic collaborations

that had emerged in the intervening months. The findings revealed a vibrant tapestry of cross-county engagement and practical partnership:

- **Peer-to-peer referrals and joint interventions:** Partners like Africa Nalia and Haki Mashinani reported significant growth in their ability to navigate complex legal and protection cases by leveraging the specialised expertise of other CoP members.
- **Knowledge exchange and visibility:** The session highlighted how visibility and voice had increased for smaller, survivor-led organisations through their association with the broader NIA network, facilitating access to national technical working groups.

By integrating these reflective loops, the NIA program has moved beyond simple networking toward a robust, interdependent ecosystem. This Joint CoP model now serves as a scalable blueprint for how survivor-led movements can collaborate with established hotspot programs to amplify their collective influence on national policy and protection systems.

In addition, the Freedom Fund provided organisational capacity support to seven implementing partners, offering assessments and targeted assistance in financial management, human resources and MEL frameworks, reinforcing their ability to deliver frontline work more effectively.



STRATEGIC AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

In 2025, the hotspot program undertook a participatory strategy review process that actively engaged partners to reflect on progress, align priorities and shape the next phase of implementation. Through a series of consultations and collaborative workshops, partners co-identified key strategic areas of focus, including strengthening engagement with CDW employers within programming and deepening integration and collaboration with survivor-led organisations to centre lived experience in interventions.

The review process also facilitated consensus on scaling up proven approaches in the next program phase, with a deliberate emphasis on going deeper in existing counties rather than expanding into new geographies. Partners further reaffirmed the importance of maintaining both national and local advocacy efforts, with a shift toward more partner-led advocacy to enhance ownership and sustainability. Additionally, the process prioritised improving coordination, strengthening referral pathways and advancing joint case management approaches, thereby fostering a more cohesive, responsive and impact-driven partnership model.

To support effective implementation and learning, the program has also strengthened its foundation through the development of a MEL framework and a communications strategy, both of which are intended to enhance accountability, knowledge sharing, visibility and evidence-based decision-making across the portfolio.



CASE STUDY

Strengthening access to justice for CDWs

In January 2025, a Nyumba Kumi elder in Kasarani, Nairobi County, raised concerns about a 14-year-old girl engaged in domestic work. This alert triggered a coordinated response involving children's officers, the police and the AMKA Africa Justice Initiative, a Freedom Fund implementing partner, to address suspected child exploitation and protection risks.

The adolescent had experienced multiple and compounding vulnerabilities. Prior to her mother's passing in December 2024, she had been subjected to ongoing sexual abuse within her home. Following this loss, her situation in the home worsened and she was eventually left without adequate care or protection and subsequently displaced from the household.

Alone, pregnant and without support, she was later taken in by a community member. While the intention was to help her, the arrangement resulted in her engagement in domestic work without formal reporting or appropriate child protection safeguards, further increasing her vulnerability and limiting access to timely support services.



AMKA Africa Justice Initiative led a coordinated, survivor-centred response:

Rescue and safe placement

The child was safely removed and placed in a protective shelter, ensuring immediate safety and access to structured care and support services.

Legal and justice pathways

The case was formally reported and legal processes were initiated, including police documentation and medical assessment. Recognising the complexities associated with delayed reporting, AMKA Africa Justice Initiative supported evidence-building processes, including planned DNA testing, to strengthen accountability and the pursuit of justice.

Psychosocial and health support

The adolescent is receiving ongoing counselling and has shown gradual improvements in emotional wellbeing, particularly in rebuilding trust. She is also accessing essential prenatal healthcare services.

Community engagement and prevention

The household that had taken her in was engaged and sensitised on child protection responsibilities and reporting mechanisms, contributing to increased awareness of the risks associated with informal care arrangements and child domestic work.

The adolescent is now in a safe and supportive environment and is actively receiving comprehensive care as legal proceedings continue. Strengthened coordination between actors has enabled a more timely and holistic response, while community-level engagement has contributed to improved awareness of child protection mechanisms and reporting pathways.

This case underscores how intersecting risks, violence, bereavement and informal care arrangements can heighten children's vulnerability to exploitation and delay access to justice. It highlights the critical role of early community reporting, coordinated multi-agency response systems and sustained, survivor-centred support in enabling access to justice and protection. Additionally, it highlights the importance of strengthening community awareness and formal referral pathways to prevent well-intentioned responses from inadvertently placing children at further risk.

VISION

Our vision is a world
free of slavery.

MISSION

We invest in frontline organisations
and movements to drive a measurable
reduction of modern slavery in high-
prevalence countries and industries.

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