



IMAGENU

Policy Brief

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Partnership and labour migration: Ugandans in the Middle East

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Executive summary

Despite media reports and public debates on the challenges faced by Ugandan domestic workers in the Middle East, there is a rising trend in youth migration due to factors like population growth, youth unemployment, and demand for labour. This policy brief focuses on female domestic workers, exploring how working in the Middle East shapes their lives and expectations of the future. The research emphasises both economic and non-economic motives. Findings reveal that migration offers opportunities for financial independence, challenges traditional gender roles, and addresses the needs of female-headed households. Recommendations include intensifying efforts to prevent illegal migration, enhancing pre-departure training, strengthening bilateral agreements, and recognizing migrants' skills and experiences. Addressing gender conflicts and acknowledging women's roles as providers in households are crucial for fostering positive change.

Introduction

This brief addresses the growing labour migration industry between Uganda and the Middle East (ME). It is aimed at young men and women searching for jobs outside Uganda, the private companies who export labour from Uganda and the Uganda Government that benefits from remittances of labour exports. It is based on a study carried out under the Imagining Gender Futures in Uganda (IMAGENU) Project, a collaborative research project carried out by researchers from Gulu, Aarhus and Copenhagen Universities.

Despite media reports highlighting the brutal treatment of domestic workers in the ME, the number of young Ugandans seeking employment in the region continues to rise. Factors driving this trend include high population growth, youth unemployment, low wages in Uganda, and demand for labour in destination countries. While economic drivers are

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Conclusion: Looking beyond exploitation and abuse

Undeniably, several of our interlocutors have experienced suffering and severe challenges. A look beyond this, however, tells another side of the story. Experiences of bravery, resilience and perseverance – a search for freedom and independence of oneself before, while or after pursuing relationships with partners or the fathers of their children. Migrating to the Middle East tells a story about the challenges facing Uganda as a country, but also about how individuals struggle to overcome these challenges.

Recommendations

- Government through the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development needs to intensify efforts to prevent women from engaging in illegal migration which increases their vulnerability. This can be done through expanding and strengthening bilateral agreements.
- Labour export companies should implement comprehensive pre-departure training programs for migrants, educating them about their rights and working conditions in host countries.
- Ugandans should also recognise the positive skills and enriching experiences migrants bring back, challenging the negative perceptions of work in the ME.
- Families and traditional institutions should tackle gender conflict resulting from changing gender roles by fostering discussions and new ways of thinking about provider roles and expectations between men and women. Women's roles as breadwinners and heads of households should enter discussions in schools and family settings.
- More research can be done to understand the experiences of Ugandan male labour migrants in the ME.