

**WOMEN'S LABOUR MIGRATION ON
THE AFRICA-MIDDLE EAST CORRIDOR:
EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS FROM UGANDA**

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The contents of this report is the responsibility of the authors and not of GAATW.



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ACRONYMS

DSW	Domestic Service Worker
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPAR	Feminist Participatory Action Research
GAATW	Global Action Against Traffic in Women
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HTS-Union	Uganda Hotels, Food, Tourism, Supermarkets and Allied Workers' Union
IDWF	International Domestic Workers Federation
ILO	International Labour Organization
MDW	Migrant Domestic Worker
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAERA	Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To gain a better understanding of the labour migration processes and trends, and experiences of Ugandan women working as domestic workers in the Middle East, the Uganda Hotels, Food, Tourism, Supermarkets and Allied Workers' Union (HTS-Union) conducted a research between November 2018 and June 2019. This research was undertaken in partnership with the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) and the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), two international organisations that are committed to end the abuse and exploitation of workers at home and abroad. The research applied the Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) framework.

This study was part of a regional research project conducted by IDWF affiliates in six locations in East and West Africa. In Uganda, the field research was led by a HTS-Union staff member with support from a returnee migrant domestic worker. As part of the research, HTS Union interviewed 22 respondents including eight migrant domestic workers, a domestic workers' representative, two representatives from the Uganda association of external recruitment agencies (UAERA) and the UAERA-run Distress Centre for returnee migrants, a respondent from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD)'s Employment Services Externalisation department, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Internal Affairs Prevention of Trafficking in Persons department, the media, local NGOs working with migrant domestic workers, and Parliament.

The research found that there has been an increase in demand for cheap labour from Uganda in the Middle East, particularly in the last five years. This is especially the case in the domestic work sector, which is made up mostly of women. The employment of Ugandan low-skilled migrant workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other Middle Eastern states is governed by the *kafala* system, an employer-led immigration process which requires migrant workers to have sponsors (employers) before acquiring work permits and which give employers considerable employment, legal and financial control over migrant workers.

While the exact figures of Ugandan migrant workers in the Middle East is not known, the MGLSD established a database in 2016 which indicates that it is rising every year. According to an article in the Daily Monitor from May 2019, while the official figure for Ugandan citizens who migrated to the Middle East for work between 2016 and 2018 was 31,859, the total number of Ugandan migrant workers in the Middle East in the last decade could be over 100,000.¹ Discussions with an official from the ministry revealed that between 2016 and early 2019, there were 21,716 Ugandan migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia and Jordan alone: 17,597 in Saudi Arabia and 4,119 in Jordan.

¹ Mufumba, I. (2019)

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, adolescent girls and young women (aged between 15 and 29 years) face a number of hurdles in the labour market, including higher unemployment rates and low wages. Unemployment and underemployment are therefore the top push migration factors for Ugandan migrant domestic workers, many of whom, as this study found, are young women. While migration has provided employment opportunities and improved the living conditions of many Ugandans and their families, in recent years there have been media reports of harm and exploitation experienced by Ugandan migrant domestic workers at the hands of their employers in the Middle East, including sexual and physical abuse, withholding of salaries, and overwork.

As a reaction to these media reports, the Ugandan government between 2015 and 2016 repatriated over 200 domestic workers from various Middle Eastern countries. In January 2016, the government placed a ban on the migration of Ugandan domestic workers to Saudi Arabia – almost a year after the two governments signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU). On March 10th 2017, the migration ban to Saudi Arabia was lifted following the introduction of measures to promote the safety and rights of Ugandan domestic workers in Saudi Arabia. These measures include: improved communication between various government ministries and agencies such as Immigration, Labour and internal security (police); mandatory pre-departure orientation for all migrant workers; a clearance process for prospective migrant workers by the Ministry of Labour; a four-party contract between the employee, the employer, the recruitment company in Uganda and in the receiving country to ensure joint liability for any breach in a worker's contract; and the establishment of an emergency fund to offer legal aid, medical assistance and emergency repatriation for migrant workers in need of assistance. Besides the MOU with Saudi Arabia, Uganda signed a bi-lateral agreement with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in November 2016 to regulate the labour migration of domestic workers from Uganda to Jordan. Currently, the government is pursuing negotiations of agreements with other Middle East countries where migrant domestic workers migrate or are trafficked including Oman, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon and Iran.

However, even with the introduction of these reforms and the existence of a labour migration regulatory framework, Ugandan domestic workers are still getting job placements and migrating through unregistered recruitment agencies. Many of these agencies disregard legal requirements, and charge exorbitant recruitment fees - between UGX 210,000 (\$57) and UGX 2,500,000 (\$677) - even though the law requires that the recruitment process for migrant domestic workers to Saudi Arabia and Jordan be free. Some recruitment agencies also do not provide migrant domestic workers with employment contracts and pre-departure training as per the law. Additionally, the study identified challenges around the enforcement of migrant domestic workers' employment contracts. Even when issued with employment contracts, the salary outlined on the contract is not necessarily what is paid to the domestic worker. For example, the employment contract of one respondent provides for a salary of 900 Saudi Riyals (\$240) a month but she is actually paid 600 Riyals (\$160). Often, a Ugandan migrant worker's employment contract is a redundant document which is difficult to enforce: Ugandan recruitment agencies usually have no direct link or relationship with the employers in the Middle

East and have to rely on their partner recruitment agencies in countries of destination. Additionally, both local and foreign recruitment agencies perpetrate violence, harassment and abuse against migrant domestic workers before and after migration.

Furthermore, the researchers also found that there are Ugandan domestic workers working in Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Kuwait even though Uganda has no bilateral agreements with these countries. Interviews with the MGLSD officials revealed that the government is aware of domestic workers migrating to Oman under tourist visas and eventually overstaying and thereby becoming irregular, but they cannot be arrested for fear of jeopardising diplomatic relations between Uganda and Oman. Due to these labour migration dynamics – the use of unregistered employment agencies or brokers, migrating to countries that have no bilateral agreements with Uganda, and traveling on visitors' visas and overstaying – Ugandan migrant workers find themselves in situations where they are highly vulnerable to mistreatment, violence, enslavement, isolation and even murder. In fact, a recent report by the Ministry of Internal Affairs highlights that trafficking of migrant workers to the Middle East is on the rise, with 110 reported cases of trafficking perpetuated by illegal recruitment agents and brokers in 2018 and the number of women who were trafficked internationally rising from 197 in 2017 to 287 in 2018.

In addition to the exploitation that Ugandan migrant workers suffer at the hands of recruitment agencies and brokers, this study found that migrant domestic workers face violence, harassment, exploitation, racism, physical and psychological abuse in the countries of destination. Instances of exploitation and abuse cited by migrant domestic workers included: withholding of salaries, inadequate or no meals, long working hours, working in multiple houses, lack of privacy including no private bedroom, sexual harassment and abuse, confiscation of mobile phones, salary deducted to pay for Wi-Fi use and personal items like Vaseline, soap and clothes, destruction of travel documents, no or inadequate medical treatment, salary stolen by the employer, verbal abuse and discrimination.

To address the above-mentioned challenges, the research participants and researchers make the following recommendations to the Ugandan government, trade unions, recruitment agencies and prospective migrant domestic workers:

- Mass awareness creation on the existing labour migration laws, policies and regulations by the government, trade unions and other stakeholders to inform aspiring and current migrant workers on safe migration and on the rights of migrant workers.
- Review of the existing labour migration framework and ratification of ILO Convention 189 (decent work for domestic workers) to enhance the protection of local and migrant domestic workers. Review of worker-related legislation like the Employment Act 2006, the National Social Security Fund Act, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act 2017 to include provisions that protect domestic workers from exploitation and harassment, including provisions for minimum wage and social protection. As the government is in the

process of negotiating bilateral labour agreements with a number of countries in the Middle East, MGLSD should negotiate a standard minimum wage for Ugandan migrant domestic workers.

- Establishment of a tripartite committee constituting the MGLSD, trade unions, and recruitment agencies to handle or inspect pre-departure orientation training for migrant domestic workers and employment-related disputes. It is also proposed that Uganda opens embassies in the countries of destination to ease the process of assisting migrant workers. These embassies should have shelters to provide support to migrant domestic workers.
- Close collaboration between HTS-Union and other trade unions working with migrant domestic workers on one hand, and UAERA to ensure that these stakeholders create common ground on how best to represent migrant domestic workers and how to enforce the implementation of migrant workers' employment contracts.
- HTS-Union has a role to play in advocating for the review of the standard employment contracts for domestic workers to ensure that these contracts align with the terms in the ILO Labour Standards as well as the labour protections under Uganda's laws including annual leave, social protection and overtime.
- Trade unions and other agencies should enhance migrant domestic workers' ability to better manage their finances, and protect their hard-earned money from misuse by relatives. Recruitment agencies should encourage and support prospective migrant domestic workers to open individual bank accounts into which their salaries would be transferred during migration.
- Finally, recruitment agencies should play a more active role in maintaining contact with migrant domestic workers in countries of destination, in order to better understand their work-related problems and challenges. Together with the government, recruitment agencies should be able to intervene or assist migrant domestic workers who find themselves in risky or abusive situations.

1. BACKGROUND

Uganda is a landlocked East African country that borders Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. It is a member state of the East African Community (EAC), African Union and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) regional bodies. The country has a population of 45.71 million, 77% of whom are youth and children under the age of 30 years.

Thanks to its friendly refugee policies, Uganda is currently home to the largest refugee population on the continent. As of February 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that over 1.2 million refugees mainly from DRC, South Sudan and Burundi were residing in Uganda. Besides refugees, Uganda also hosts a small population of economic migrants including temporary contract-based workers, diplomats, non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers, and business owners primarily from India (38.6%), China (14.9%), the United States of America (6.1%), and Kenya (5.5%).² Many of these labour migrants in Uganda are attracted by the country's growing economy, and developments in the infrastructure and oil sectors.

In addition to being a destination country for refugees and asylum seekers, economic migrants and students, Uganda is also a source country for migrants. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), there were 628,845 Ugandans living abroad in 2013, a majority of whom were living in neighbouring countries specifically Kenya (271,149), South Sudan (120,808) and Rwanda (106,501). The IOM however argues that there could be as many as three million Ugandans living in the diaspora. Ugandans are increasingly migrating to neighbouring countries and beyond for economic reasons. While Ugandans have a long history of migrating to the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States for employment, in recent years there has been a growing trend of migrating to the Middle East. Due to the high demand for domestic labour in the GCC and other Middle Eastern states, a great percentage of Ugandan migrant workers in the Middle East are women working as domestic workers. A study by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) indicates that between 1990 and 2017 there was a significant and consistent rise in the number of African migrants in the GCC. According to ITUC, 12% of the 28.1 million migrant workers in the GCC in 2017 were African, with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE hosting almost 90% of these African migrant workers, a reflection perhaps of the fact that these three GCC countries have the largest economies in the region.

Key push factors for labour migrants from Uganda to the Middle East include a large population, particularly among the youth. As the country with the second youngest population in the world, Uganda has a considerable labour force which has been expanding: the Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimates that the country's working population rose from 14 million in 2012/2013 to 15 million in 2016/2017 while a recent report by Uganda's National Population Council highlights

² International Organisation for Migration (2013)

that the proportion of working females in paid employment was lower than that of working males.³ Similar to its East African neighbours, Uganda is not producing enough economic opportunities to meet job demands for its labour force. Youth unemployment rates – especially in rural areas where most of Uganda’s youth reside – are some of the highest on the continent.⁴ Given that Ugandan girls and women are less likely to enrol and complete their education compared to their male counterparts, the unemployment rate for girls and women is more than double than that of boys and men. According to the National Population Council, men (46%) and urban residents (51%) are more likely to be in paid employment than their female (28%) and rural (31%) counterparts.⁵ While the agricultural sector employs a majority of Uganda’s young working people (57%), youth still struggle to attain ownership of land and other natural resources as traditionally, ownership of natural resources is restricted to older generations. All these interrelated issues cause Ugandans and particularly rural youth and young women to leave the country in search for greener pastures. As the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour in the GCC and other countries continues to grow, more and more Ugandans are migrating to work as security guards, construction workers, cleaners and domestic workers.

In recent years, there have been stories in local and international media on the experiences of low-skilled Ugandan migrant workers in the Middle East. An article published in the New Vision in 2017 highlighted that there were over 70,000 Uganda migrant workers in the Middle East and they were making significant contributions to the local economy by remitting over \$400 million annually.⁶ The growing number of migrant workers to the Middle East has also contributed to job creation in Uganda: there are now 151 private recruitment agencies which are accredited by the Ministry of Labour and offering services to the public. Media reports of the abuse that is meted out to Ugandan migrant domestic workers at the hands of their employers and recruitment agencies in the Middle East are on the rise. Stories of long working hours, restrictions of movement and communication, physical and sexual abuse, torture and sometimes death are rife. A 2015 Migrant Rights article for instance, details the death of two Ugandan migrant domestic workers who died in Dubai, one at the hands of the government following her imprisonment after she escaped from her employer’s home, and a second at the hands of her employer.⁷

In 2016, in reaction to such media reports, the government banned its citizens from taking jobs as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia. This came after Uganda had already signed a bilateral labour agreement with Saudi Arabia in 2015. According to media reports, the ban did not necessarily stop Ugandans from migrating to the Middle East in search of work: instead, migration was driven underground and rates of irregular migration increased. The Ugandan government lifted the ban in early 2017 after signing an amended bilateral agreement with Saudi Arabia and introducing new measures to strengthen the protection of migrant domestic. Under these measures the

³ The Republic of Uganda (2018)

⁴ According to the 2014 National Population and Housing Census that was carried out by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, youth unemployment between the ages of 15 and 24 years was 83%

⁵ Supra note 3, Pp. 46

⁶ Waiswa, J. (2017, April 30)

⁷ Kakande, Y. (2015)

government has only officially approved the recruitment of its citizens as domestic workers to the two countries it has so far signed bilateral agreements with: Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The section below analyses Uganda's labour migration regulatory measures in greater detail.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK: LABOUR MIGRATION

Compared to its East African neighbours, Uganda has in place progressive policies that govern migration and labour. The country's Refugees Act has often been compared to Kenya's refugee law, which employs an encampment policy and restricts refugees' freedom of movement and right to work. On the other hand, Uganda's Refugees Act 2006 and Refugee Regulations 2010 grant refugees freedom of movement and ensure that they can access land resources and social services like health and education.

As relates to labour migration, Uganda is party to international conventions and frameworks that guard the rights of migrant workers, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and the Supplementary Provisions of the ILO Migrant Workers Convention. At the national level, the Ugandan government has been working to strengthen its labour migration regulatory framework. Uganda's Employment Act promotes equal opportunities for migrant workers and members of their families who legally reside in Uganda, and several visas are available to foreign nationals wishing to invest or to seek employment in the country. Policies to protect the rights and enhance the safety of Ugandan migrant workers include the Guidelines on the Recruitment and Placement of Ugandan Migrant Workers Abroad 2015 and the Employment (Recruitment of Ugandan Migrant Workers Abroad) Regulations 2005.⁸

The Regulations govern the recruitment of migrant workers and require private recruitment agencies that place migrant workers to be licensed. The Regulations also require migrant workers to undergo a medical examination and pre-departure orientation, and to be issued with employment contracts prior to their departure. Article 61 of the Regulations states that the full cost of the migrant workers' travel 'may' be assumed by their employers, implying that employers in countries of destination are not bound to cover the migrant workers' travel costs. Migrant workers are also entitled to the following under these Regulations: guaranteed wages for regular working hours, overtime pay, and free emergency medical and dental treatment. In addition to these two labour migration policies, the government of Uganda has signed bilateral labour agreements with Saudi Arabia (2015, later amended in 2017) and Jordan (2016). The agreements with these two countries which, according to the Ministry of Labour hosted a total of 21,716 Ugandan migrant domestic workers between 2016 and early 2019, focused on the labour protections of domestic workers.

While Uganda has made major migration-related policy achievements, its labour migration legislation has been criticised for being fragmented. A comprehensive national labour migration policy is therefore required. Additionally, the official requirement that Ugandan domestic

⁸ See for the full text of the Regulations: <https://ulii.org/ug/legislation/statutory-instrument/2005/200562>

workers only migrate to Jordan and Saudi Arabia has not stopped citizens from searching for employment in countries like Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Bahrain, UAE and Iraq which have no formal labour agreements with Uganda. This remains a major policy gap, primarily because migrant workers who go to other Middle Eastern countries are usually classified as undocumented and cannot receive legitimate assistance from the government. At the same time, the terms in the bilateral agreements between Uganda and Jordan and Saudi Arabia are not necessarily enforced effectively. For instance, recruitment agencies still charge prospective migrant domestic workers 'recruitment fees' although the government has made it clear that this is not a requirement. In addition, public awareness on the labour migration regulatory framework is insufficient.

Under the Immigration and Citizenship Control Act, the Ugandan government is required to keep records of its nationals living abroad and migrants residing in the country. The Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration manages points of entry, including the issuance of visas and entry permits. Furthermore, Ugandan nationals living abroad are required to register with the nearest Ugandan embassy, not only to enable government record-keeping but also to ensure that Ugandan citizens can access support from their government as required. However, Uganda has established only one embassy in Saudi Arabia which currently serves all countries in the Middle East. This makes it impossible for vulnerable migrant workers in the other countries to receive timely assistance from their government.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

To better understand the experiences of Ugandan migrant domestic workers, HTS-Union, in collaboration with the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) and the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), carried out a qualitative research in Uganda between November 2018 and June 2019. This was part of a multi-country research in six locations in East and West Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania-Mainland, Tanzania-Zanzibar, Ethiopia and Ghana) that sought to better understand the processes, trends, challenges and opportunities around labour migration from select African countries to the Middle East for domestic work. This report presents the findings of the research conducted by HTS-Union in Uganda.

ABOUT HTS-Union, GAATW AND IDWF

An affiliate of IDWF, the Uganda Hotels, Food, Tourism, Supermarkets and Allied workers' union (HTS-Union) is a registered trade union that represents the interests of workers in the domestic services, hospitality, and supermarket sectors. IDWF is a global, membership-based organisation of domestic and household workers. GAATW is a global network of 84 non-government organisations that promote and defend the human rights of migrants and trafficked persons.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To gain an in-depth understanding of labour migration trends and patterns as well as the experiences of African women migrant domestic workers in the Middle East, the study applied a qualitative feminist participatory action research (FPAR) methodology.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is carried out under the premise that ‘when people are directly involved in an analysis of their situation, they are often stimulated to find answers to these problems’.⁹ PAR therefore aims both to produce an analytical description of a complex issue and to radically change it. The researcher is involved in the social setting being studied as both observer and participant and works together with research participants not only to analyse and interpret their social reality but to transform this reality with rather than for them. The research process is made more powerful when the researchers are individuals directly affected by or working to address the social issue under study. For this research, the lead researcher in Uganda was a trade unionist working with HTS-Union and her co-researcher was a returnee migrant domestic worker and a member of the union, while the primary research participants were women migrant domestic workers. The researchers were appointed to carry out the study due to their grasp of the issue under investigation through their lived experiences and their work. Due to this experience, the researchers were well-placed to refine research questions, mobilise research participants, undertake field research, and work with migrant domestic workers and other stakeholders to identify solutions that would bring about change. In addition the researchers leveraged their professional and social networks to recruit migrant domestic workers to participate in this study. Some of the respondents, for instance, were known to the co-researcher while she worked as a domestic worker in the Middle East while others were returnees that HTS-Union had supported in one way or another.

In order to generate information on the experiences of migrant domestic workers before, during and after migration, we held in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and telephone interviews with domestic workers currently working in the Gulf Countries, returnee migrant domestic workers and their families, prospective migrant domestic workers, government ministries involved in labour migration governance (MGLSD as well as the Ministry of Internal Affairs - Office for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons), external recruitment agencies, NGOs that have worked with returnee migrant domestic workers, and Trade Unions which represent local and migrant domestic workers. Additionally, we spoke to the Workers’ Member of Parliament, who was key in sharing information about laws and policies that the legislature is currently considering to counteract the challenges faced by migrant domestic workers. Interviews with officials at a distress centre that provides shelter and rehabilitation support to returnee domestic workers in Uganda was useful in better understanding the experiences of returnees. The research was undertaken in three locations: Kampala (Central region), Gulu (Northern region), and Busia

⁹ Boesveld, M. and Boontinand, J. ‘Practicing Feminist Participatory Action Research Methodologies’. GAATW Newsletter, January 1999, pp14-17

(Eastern region) which sits on the border between Uganda and Kenya which is known as a transit point for human trafficking and irregular migration.

Ugandans often associate the migrant domestic sector with sexual harassment, a product quite possibly of negative media portrayal. Interviewing workers from a sector that has such negative public perceptions proved to be difficult, particularly in focus group settings. The researchers observed that returnee migrant domestic workers did not want to be publicly associated with the sector and those who were willing to participate in this research were reserved and unwilling to discuss their experiences openly in focus group settings. For this reason, the lead researcher cancelled the focus group discussions for returnees and interviewed them individually. In the end, the researcher only set up one FGD for migrant domestic workers currently living in the Middle East, which she conducted through video chatting platform. While technology provided an opportunity for the lead researcher to interview Ugandan migrant workers in the Middle East in a cost effective manner, the FGD with these migrant domestic workers had to be spread out over a period of four days to factor in the workers' availability (discussions had to be held between midnight and 2.00 a.m. after the respondents had completed their duties) and privacy (the respondents were only comfortable in participating in the FGD when their employers were asleep).

Despite these challenges, the lead researcher was able to collect detailed information from in-depth interviews and observation, and additionally, to establish good working relationships with relevant labour migration stakeholders such as the association of external recruitment agencies and its member recruitment agencies.



Image 1: Distress Centre for Returnees in Kampala

3. FINDINGS

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that 11.5 million people worked as migrant domestic workers as of 2015. In the Middle East, domestic workers constitute 18% of all migrant workers, with a large majority of them (82%) being women. Most of these women live in their employers' residences, performing duties ranging from child and elderly care, cleaning, laundry, cooking, gardening and caring for pets. This section examines the lived experiences of such migrant domestic workers, who leave Uganda to work in the Middle East.

PATTERNS AND TRENDS

Eight Ugandan women migrant domestic workers were interviewed for this research. Out of these, four were currently in the Middle East (three in Saudi Arabia and one in Oman), and four were returnees (one had worked in both UAE and Oman, one worked in UAE, and two had worked in Oman). In addition, the researcher interviewed a prospective migrant domestic worker hoping to migrate to Jordan, Saudi Arabia or any other Middle Eastern country. All nine respondents were between the ages 20 and 40 years at the time of the interviews (January – March 2019). Six of them had children, and two were married. This confirms the statement made by the recruitment agencies that participated in this research that Saudi Arabia and Jordan only request for women domestic workers between the ages of 20 and 45 years.

The researcher also interviewed stakeholders operating in the labour migration sector including two respondents from the Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies (UAERA) and the UAERA-run Distress Centre for returnee migrant workers, one respondent from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development's Employment Services Externalisation department, two respondents from Ministry of Internal Affairs' Prevention of Trafficking in Persons department, one respondent from IDWF, one respondent from the media, two respondents from NGOs, and one respondent who is a workers' Member of Parliament.

The migration patterns show that Ugandan domestic workers migrate to the Middle East either legally or irregularly due to the high demand for labour in the domestic sector. Other categories of Ugandan migrant workers in the Middle East as per MGLSD data include cleaners and security guards who migrate to Iraq, Afghanistan, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. The demand in Saudi Arabia and Jordan's domestic labour market is for female Ugandans, and that so far no Ugandan man has migrated to the two Middle Eastern countries to work as a domestic worker.

OFFICIAL LABOUR MIGRATION PROCESS

MGLSD has put in place Guidelines on Recruitment and Placement of Uganda Migrant Workers Abroad, 2015, to regulate the external recruitment agencies and to guard against the exploitation of migrant workers. All migrant workers – including individuals who are recruited directly and through agencies - are required to register with the ministry responsible for labour and employment by submitting valid passports, employment contracts, visas and work permits, certificates of medical fitness, copies of air tickets and other relevant documents. Additional

procedures are required of agent placed migrant workers not limited to orientation and vetting of applicants for the registered workers.

Three out of the four current migrant domestic workers in the Middle East who participated in this research followed the recruitment procedure as per the migration policy. None of the four returnees followed the recruitment procedure at the time of their migration. The prospective migrant domestic worker revealed that while she was aware of the official labour migration procedure due to the fact that her relative works for a registered recruitment agency, her decision to follow the official process or use an unofficial broker was dependent on the turnaround time. The researcher's observation was that this prospective migrant domestic worker and one of the returnees who had previously worked in Oman and was hoping to re-migrate would rather use unofficial brokers because of the short turnaround time they offer.

The MGLSD official acknowledged that although the law is very clear on the recruitment process of workers abroad, migration through irregular channels continues primarily due to the lack of information about the regulations. The Ministry is however working with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to 'put tight measures at the border to arrest and prosecute perpetrators, and to sensitise the public about the evils of human trafficking'. Uganda is a member state of the East African Community (EAC) Common Market Protocol, which allows for the free movement of persons and labour across the borders of other member states. This, according to research respondents, has influenced the irregular migration of Ugandans who cross the porous borders to Kenya and Tanzania and move on to the Middle East.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS

At the time of the research, recruitment agencies were, by law, only required to recruit and place domestic workers in two Middle Eastern countries: Saudi Arabia and Jordan, with which Uganda has signed bilateral agreements. This recruitment process is free of charge (no charges should be made for recruitment or passport fees) as stipulated in the bilateral agreements. However, three out of the four current migrant domestic workers who participated in this research had paid fees to agencies to cater for passport application, Interpol letter, medical check-ups and yellow fever certificate related expenses. Candidates owning passports would be charged less fees compared to those without passports. This is a reflection of agencies taking advantage of the migrant workers' ignorance and extorting money from them even when these costs are already paid for by the employer in the receiving country.

The Employment (Recruitment of Uganda Migrant Workers Abroad) Regulations 2005 also require that all prospective migrant workers undergo mandatory pre-departure orientation training. The researchers believe that the recruitment agencies have a role to play in informing prospective migrant domestic workers on this requirement, and advising them on where to access the training. Orientation is carried out by training institutions accredited by the MGLSD and without a training certificate, migrant domestic workers cannot be issued with a visa. The pre-departure orientation is required to cover as a minimum the following topics: living in a foreign country, self-defence, how to operate and use household appliances, such as washing

machines, dress code in the Middle East, domestic workers' duties, and basic Arabic language skills. Interviews with recruitment agencies revealed that some agencies provide financial literacy training to prospective migrant workers with a focus on saving, investing and opening bank accounts.

Three of the four current migrant domestic workers who participated in this research confirmed that they had received pre-departure orientation and this was provided by the agencies that had facilitated their employment in the Middle East. However, all of them felt the training was insufficient and there were some issues that the training did not cover, including financial literacy and how to deal with employers' hostility and/or exploitation. This affected their ability to transfer their salaries to their own personal bank accounts in Uganda and knowledge of how and where to seek redress in case they experienced abuse at the hands of their employers. The researchers observed that recruitment agencies hesitate to invest time in providing pre-departure information to prospective migrant domestic workers because there is no profit to be made from this service, given that the law requires that it is offered free of charge.

The Ugandan government is supposed to supervise the provision of this pre-departure orientation. The researchers see this as a gap and believe that the Ugandan government should play a more active role and as is the case in countries like Ethiopia, take on the provision of pre-departure training as one of its primary duties. To ensure that this pre-departure training is accessible to prospective migrant workers in different regions and that it addresses migrant workers' information needs, the Ministry of Labour should provide this training in collaboration with trade unions that work with domestic workers as well as with recruitment agencies.

A trend that was observed during the research was that of licensed recruitment agencies placing Ugandan women domestic workers in Middle Eastern countries that have no bilateral agreement with Uganda. Two government officials who participated in this research acknowledged that they were aware of domestic workers migrating to Oman using visitors' visa, stating that the government could not stop such women from migrating for fear of jeopardising diplomatic relations between Uganda and Oman.

EXPERIENCES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Pull and push factors

Low wages, unemployment, family responsibilities and personal aspirations were key factors identified by migrant domestic workers that pushed them to seek employment in the Middle East. It is worth noting that one of the respondents was a graduate and a secondary school teacher who earned UGX 200,000 (\$54) a month as a full time teacher, a salary that was not paid on time. When the opportunity to earn 700 Riyal (\$187) per month as a migrant domestic worker in Saudi Arabia came, it was attractive enough to quit her teaching job. Another respondent had completed a Diploma in Development Studies but could not find employment in Uganda. A job as a migrant domestic worker presented an opportunity to pay off her school loan. Another

respondent who had dropped out of school after the death of her father, migrated in order to earn higher wages, with the plan of saving enough to enable her to resume her studies.

Four of the nine prospective, current and returnee migrant domestic workers who participated in this research were single mothers who were raising and providing for their children independently. The job opportunities in the Middle East therefore allowed them to adequately provide for their children. Two of the nine respondents were married, and even they found it important to seek opportunities in the Middle East so as to supplement their husbands' incomes as it was not sufficient to cover their families' needs. One of the respondents who was single with no children had a job in Uganda that earned her enough money to sustain her but the idea of working abroad and earning in foreign currency was so tempting that she quit her job in order to work as a domestic worker in the Middle East.

However, as was discovered during discussions with returnee and current migrant domestic workers, this form of employment is full of deception. What most of the women had anticipated is not necessarily what they received or experienced. For instance, one respondent was promised to migrate to the UAE, earn UGX 2,000,000 (\$542) per month as a supermarket cashier and live a 'high-status life'. Instead, she found herself in Oman working as a domestic worker and earning less than a third of that amount. Another respondent migrated with the belief that she was going to work 8 hours a day as a live-out domestic worker, and earn UGX 2,500,000 (\$677). This was not realised: she is instead a leave-in domestic worker, working in more than one household and not earning even half of what she was promised.

Migration process

The migrant domestic workers who participated in this research were recruited either by licensed recruitment agencies or by unofficial brokers. The respondents however did not necessarily follow the official recruitment process prescribed under law.

All respondents who were recruited by licensed agencies, including those who migrated to work in Saudi Arabia, were required to pay recruitment fees even though the bilateral agreement between Uganda and Saudi Arabia requires that recruitment fees are covered by the employer. Since the respondents were recruited by different agencies, the recruitment fees they paid differed: one respondent who already owned a passport was charged UGX 210,000 (\$57), while two respondents without passports were charged UGX 340,000 (\$92) and UGX 900,000 (\$244). Although migrant domestic workers are required to sign an employment contract before departure, one respondent never signed an employment contract and left Uganda without knowing what her salary would be. Other than what has been outlined above, other recruitment guidelines such as the vetting of prospective migrant workers were followed in accordance with the law. All respondents who were recruited by licensed agents confirmed that they boarded a flight at Entebbe International airport and on arrival at their respective destinations in the Middle East, they were taken to the foreign recruitment agents' offices where their new employers picked them.

The second group of respondents was recruited by unofficial brokers who never followed the official recruitment procedure and charged recruitment fees of UGX 2,000,000 (\$541) on average. Out of these, only one respondent signed an employment contract. All respondents whose employment was facilitated by brokers travelled by road to the Busia border then crossed over to Kenya and travelled to Nairobi where they boarded flights to Oman, the UAE and other destinations in the Middle East. On arrival in the Middle East, a driver waited for them and took them to the foreign agency's office to await pick-up by their employers. Since most of the respondents whose travel was facilitated by the brokers never signed an employment contract, all terms and wages were negotiated with the employer upon arrival.

Employment contract

A comprehensive employment contract should clearly stipulate the working relationship between employer and employee, the employment terms and conditions, as well as the employee's salaries and other benefits and entitlements. The law requires migrant domestic workers to sign an employment contract prior to their departure. The contract should contain the employer's names, residential address and telephone contact and should be signed by the employer before the domestic worker receives it. Employment contracts for domestic workers who migrate to the Middle East are required to be in English, Uganda's official language, and Arabic to suit the foreign employer and the placement/recruitment company.

However, even these comprehensive requirements have their limitations. Some of the migrant domestic workers who participated in this research had not completed primary level education and had low levels of literacy. Although they were provided with employment contracts, they struggled to read them and fill in their details on the contract in English. The researcher recommends that the employment contract reflects the languages best understood by migrant domestic workers: the contracts could for instance, contain an additional page in Luganda, a language that is widely spoken all over Uganda. Another challenge identified from discussions with migrant domestic workers was that after they had signed their employment contracts they received no copies of it and had therefore nothing to refer to when they got to the countries of destination, which was especially necessary in times of violations of the employment terms and conditions by the employers. Additionally, even the presence of a signed contract was no guarantee that the domestic worker's rights would be respected: one of the respondents, for instance, was paid an amount much lower than what was stipulated in the contract.

Email :	ويشار إليه فيما يلي بصاحب العمل وتمثله في المملكة العربية السعودية وكالة الاستخدام السعودية.
Hereinafter called the Employer, Represented in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by Saudi Recruiting Agency:	Almadf Recruitment Office : الاسم
Name : Almadf Recruitment Office	3801457 : رقم الترخيص
License no : 3801457	00966500016116 : رقم الهاتف
Telephone : 00966500016116	العنوان
Address	Riyadh - Esthalla _ Imam Abdullah Street : الشارع
Street : Riyadh - Esthalla _ Imam Abdullah Street	Riyadh : المدينة
City : Riyadh	matmadf@gmail.com : البريد الإلكتروني
Contact No :	
Email : matmadf@gmail.com	
ب. العامل المنزلي / العاملة المنزلية	
B. Domestic Service Worker:	HAJARA NANZIRI : الاسم
Name : HAJARA NANZIRI	House Maid : الوظيفة
Position : House Maid	NATETE : العنوان
Address : NATETE	Single : الحالة الاجتماعية
Civil Status : Single	+256704473604 : رقم الاتصال
Contact No : +256704473604	B1232378 : رقم الخوازل
Passport No : B1232378	KAMPALA : مكان إصداره
Place of Place : KAMPALA	2015-07-09 : تاريخ إصداره
Date of Issue : 2015-07-09	WAMANI JOHN : أقرب الأقربى
Next of kin : WAMANI JOHN	FATHER : العلاقة
Relationship : FATHER	+256702281775 : رقم الاتصال
Contact No : +256702281775	KASUBI : العنوان
Address : KASUBI	يسمى فيما يلي بالعامل المنزلي/العاملة المنزلية وتمثله/تمثلها في بلده/بلدها وكالة الاستخدام الخارجية

Image 2: Sample Employment Contract for Ugandan Migrant Domestic Worker

Other challenges associated with these employment contracts include protection gaps for migrant domestic workers and the conflict between the provisions of the contracts and what is stipulated by Uganda's national labour laws. For instance, while migrant domestic workers are entitled to rest and the employment contracts that the researcher reviewed included stipulations that migrant domestic workers were entitled to rest for up to nine hours a day, these contracts did not outline what the employees' entitlements were when rest hours are limited. The contracts should provide for overtime, and the hourly rate for this overtime should be clearly outlined. While Uganda's Employment Act, 2006 provides for a 60-day probation period, the migrant domestic workers' employment contracts reviewed by the researcher provided for a 90-day probationary period. Such a long probation period leaves the migrant domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation: HTS-Union has in the past recorded cases of employers in the Middle East sending the migrant domestic workers back to the offices of the placement/recruitment agency after the 90-day period, and sometimes, this cycle goes on and on. Uganda's Employment Act also provides annual leave entitlement after completing 12 consecutive months of service. This annual leave entitlement was not included on the migrant domestic workers' contracts.

Ugandan migrant domestic workers' contracts are also not consistent with the ILO Labour Standards provision for workers' entitlement to social protection.

The recruitment agencies who participated in this research identified the enforcement of migrant domestic workers' contracts as the biggest challenge facing not only migrant domestic workers but also recruitment agencies. Discussions revealed that employers in the Middle East were not respecting the terms on the workers' contracts. Some employers, according to recruitment agencies, did not bother to read the employment contracts and were therefore largely ignorant of the terms. There were also employers who deliberately chose to ignore these terms and conditions and went as far as tearing the contract pages that outlined the migrant domestic workers' entitlements, including pages containing information on salary, hours of work, and medical support, depending on what the employer was unwilling to provide. This gesture was aimed at ensuring that migrant domestic workers did not demand their rights.

As a union that represents workers, HTS-Union acknowledges that more needs to be done by the MGLSD and other domestic workers' organisations to address the above-mentioned inconsistencies in migrant domestic workers' contracts, including entitlements to gratuity and social welfare/protection, a uniform minimum wage for live-in migrant domestic workers, annual leave, probationary period, pay for overtime, a surcharge for working in another house. Uganda's Ministry of Labour also has a role to play in ensuring that placement agencies that are based in the Middle East and work closely with Ugandan recruitment agencies review the employment contract with the domestic workers' employers to ensure that they are better implemented.

Salary

Migrant domestic workers' salaries largely depended on the workers' individual bargaining power, leaving them at the mercy of their employers and highly vulnerable to exploitation. To address this, a standard minimum wage for migrant domestic workers in the Middle East is urgently needed. In addition to setting a more standardised wage for its migrant domestic workers, the Ugandan government should also address the issue of gratuity or repatriation fees. This is because few Ugandan migrant workers are paid gratuity or repatriation after completing their employment contracts and this affects their financial security.

WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Pre-migration perceptions and expectations

Prior to their migration, domestic workers who participated in this study had high expectations of their lives in the Middle East. One respondent, Jane,¹⁰ was made to believe that domestic workers in Saudi Arabia do not live with their employers. This respondent was not a first-time

¹⁰ All names have been changed.

migrant: she had worked in Oman and had specifically made a request for a live-out work arrangement because of her negative experiences as a live-in domestic worker in Oman. The Ugandan recruitment agency had also promised Jane that she would get a salary of UGX 2,000,000 (\$541) a month and work for only 8 hours a day. On arrival in Saudi Arabia, Jane discovered that she was expected to work as a live-in domestic worker, earning much less than what she had agreed upon with the agency. Because she had not signed an employment contract prior to her departure, there was no basis for any of her claims.

Another respondent, Nantale, a first time migrant in Saudi Arabia, left Uganda expecting her employment terms and conditions to be what was outlined on her employment contract: 8-hour work days, having a rest day which she had hoped would be used do her personal shopping, access to medical treatment, use of her mobile phone as and when she wanted, going to bed by 10:00 p.m., access to a private bedroom, provision of proper meals, and perform the duties that were outlined on the contract. Upon arrival in her employer's home however, she was surprised to discover that the reality was very different: her duties as outlined in the contract did not include cooking, so when Nantale refused to undertake this work her employer beat her up.

One respondent had been promised work in a supermarket in the UAE. Instead, she found herself in Oman working as a live-in migrant domestic worker cleaning, cooking and nursing an elderly lady.

There were positive outcomes too. Abbo left for Saudi Arabia expecting the worst. She had read and heard of stories in the media about migrant domestic workers being beaten, raped and left hungry. This however, has not been her experience: she has enough meals, gets enough rest, and compared to her fellow migrant domestic workers who participated in the research, her duties are quite light and only involve house cleaning and laundry.

Working conditions

Long working hours, working in multiple households and limited rest were some of the common complaints made by migrant domestic workers who participated in this research. One respondent who is currently working abroad shared that after her arrival in Saudi Arabia she first worked for a family of two adults and two children. Later, her work was split between two homes: every week she worked four days at her employer's house then went to her employer's mother's house the remaining days where she would clean the house, wash utensils, do laundry, and feed the children. Even with this heavy workload, the domestic worker is not paid on time and often she has to follow up with her employer in order to receive her wages. Sometimes she has to take drastic measures because even after following up the employer still delays paying her: at such times, she refuses to perform her duties until she is paid. Her employer usually deducts the cost for her personal items such as body lotion, soap or sanitary towels from her monthly wage. The respondent usually sends money to Uganda every two months though Western Union. Her landlord, who is her children's caretaker, receives this money following which he deducts her children's rent and meals, and reserves the rest for their school fees.

One respondent who worked in Oman and had signed a contract was made to work in two households. After some time she protested the increased workload and refused to be taken to her employer's mother's house. Her employer reacted by withholding her wages for one month, following which the respondent requested to be returned to the foreign recruitment agent's office. Her employer agreed to do so but withheld her passport, stating that she had not completed her contract period. Eventually, the agent found her a job with a different house where, she came to discover, six men lived. Given the heavy workload in this new home, the respondent successfully negotiated with her new employers for her salary of 65 Omani Rial (\$169) to be increased to 75 Omani Rial (\$195). The savings that she made following this salary increment were sent to her brother.

Terry was trafficked to Oman to work as a migrant domestic worker, having been promised by the recruitment agency in Uganda that she would work as a supermarket attendant in the UAE. The heavy workload, limited rest hours and minimal wages as a domestic worker in Oman finally got to her and she decided to leave her job. Fearing her employer's reaction, she came up with a story that her mother was suffering from cancer and about to die so she had to travel back to Uganda. Her employer did not want to lose her and agreed to increase her salary and to hire a nurse to care for her elderly ailing mother, a responsibility that Terry had initially been charged with. Terry stayed on in this job and was able to save enough money to take care of her parents and purchase cows as a form of investment.

One respondent worked for six months in four different homes in the UAE without being paid a single cent: all her wages at the time were paid to the agent. She returned to Uganda without completing her contract and without any money. However, upon her return, HTS-Union assisted her to claim for a refund from the Ugandan recruitment agency that had facilitated her travel.

One respondent was a second-time migrant, having previously worked in the UAE before migrating to Oman. While in Oman she worked in two households and also nursed a bedridden diabetic patient. In the first house she worked from 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. then shifted to the second house where she would work for 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. then return to the first home to nurse the patient. This tired the respondent leading her to fall sick and become insomniac. Because she could no longer perform her duties properly, her employer sent her back to the agent's office. The agent locked her in a room on the 4th floor and deliberately left the cooking gas cylinder on, with the intention of suffocating her in order to avoid covering her costs of return to Uganda. The respondent fought for her life, and one day fell off the window while attempting to call for help from a police vehicle that was driving past the building. She broke her backbone and twisted her ankle, and the police that she called out to took her to hospital. The police requested the agent to cover the costs for her treatment. The agent refused to do so and instead moved her from the hospital back to the agent's office, from where the respondent solicited for assistance from her relatives back in Uganda. Her relatives purchased her flight ticket back to Uganda and she returned, her back still broken and her ankle still twisted.

Living conditions

All respondents worked and lived in their employers' homes. Most had access to private sleeping quarters, although some, like one current migrant domestic worker in Saudi Arabia and a returnee who had worked in the UAE, shared bedrooms with their employers' children. This limited their privacy: in the case of the returnee, she could only sleep after the four-year old boy that she shared a room with fell asleep. The migrant worker in Saudi Arabia works for a family of two adults and two children – she shares a room with one of the daughters, whose regular smoking affects the respondent's health.

“The house [is] too small so I do not have my own room. I was made to share [a room] with one of the daughters who [smokes] drugs. Since the room [is] not well ventilated whenever she smokes it would affect me. I could not breathe [properly] since I have a sinus problem. One night I fainted and had to be rushed to hospital.”

- Ugandan migrant worker in Saudi Arabia

Other respondents confirmed that although they had private rooms, beddings are of very poor quality and are usually made up of old clothes. Some employers provide bed sheets in place of mattresses. There was limited privacy in the domestic workers' bedrooms, and anyone could walk in at any time. Some employers specifically required that the workers' bedroom doors be kept open at all times.

Few of the respondents received health attention from a doctor when they fell ill: in most cases their employers provided them with pain killers regardless of ailment. One respondent who dislocated her thumb while working in Oman was never taken to the doctor and instead she was asked to wear an arm re-strainer to keep the thumb in position. This did not stop the pain. When the situation worsened, she asked to go back to Uganda.

Abuse and exploitation

By nature, domestic work takes place inside private spaces and is excluded from the public. This is especially the case in the Middle East where women are not often involved in community activities and spaces. This makes them vulnerable to abuse and harassment with little or no recourse.

All eight current and returnee migrant domestic workers who participated in this research acknowledged that they had experienced violence and harassment while performing their duties. For example, one returnee's passport was destroyed and wages of one month withheld by her employer for refusing to work in a relative's household. All the four returnees said that they had been forced to work while sick, and one was beaten for refusing to work when sick.

“My employer shouted at me: ‘You are not allowed to fall sick! We have paid a lot of money for you to come and work so you have to pay it back by working.

Get up!”

- Returnee migrant domestic worker, Uganda

In addition to employers, the research found that recruitment and placement agencies are perpetrators of violence and harassment. Some agencies ‘give permission’ to employers to beat up migrant women who question them. Employers will often return Ugandan migrant women to the agencies’ offices whenever the domestic workers have an issue with the working conditions, are too ill to work or if the employers are simply unhappy with the worker. In such cases, respondents observed that agents will beat up the domestic workers and sometimes rape them before forcing them to return to their employers’ homes without resolving the issues.

One respondent witnessed an agent in the country of destination beating up a domestic worker. Another respondent's employer warned her that the agent would beat her if the employer ever returned her; this scared her enough to keep working in harsh conditions with nowhere to seek redress. A respondent who is currently working as a domestic worker had her mobile phone confiscated by her employer, upon orders from the agent, who argued that by calling the authorities and the Ugandan embassy to complain about the poor working conditions, she was misusing the phone. One of the returnees spoke of witnessing the rape of girls and women who had been returned to the agent's office. The agent warned her that the same fate would befall her if her employer ever sent her back to the office. This hit her so hard that when she left the agency for her employer's house she vowed to do all she could to ensure that she would not be returned to the agency, forcing her to tolerate working in an abusive environment.

HIDING MONEY IN BRASSIERES: HOW MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS COPE

For many girls and women leaving Uganda to work as domestic workers in the Middle East, their trip serves as their first experience to travel out of the country. At first, life in the Middle East for these girls and women can be very challenging due to the culture shock from the climate, cultural and food differences between Uganda and countries in the Middle East.

The respondent who had been promised a job as a supermarket attendant in the UAE was shocked when she was asked to wear a *hijab*. The food portions offered by her employer were small, and meals lacked nutrition. She was also surprised that her employer required her to clean

her aging mother's wounds without medical gloves. Due to the type of meals she was fed she started suffering from mineral deficiencies and getting wounds. She adapted by using the medical ointments used for the old lady's wounds and started to steal food like vegetables which she hid away in her bedroom and also increased her food portions whenever the family was away.

Two respondents in Saudi Arabia confirmed that they usually steal medication from their employers' cabinets. These cabinets are usually locked and the domestic workers can only access them whenever their employers ask them to clean them. This is a survival strategy brought about by the fact that employers refuse to take the domestic workers to hospital whenever they are ill, leaving them with no choice but to self-medicate. The domestic workers are aware how dangerous self-medicating is, and to ensure they do not take the wrong medication or dosage, they use Google to identify the medication and the right dosage.

One respondent used to be beaten by her employer's relative who visited the family home regularly. Her employer had spoken up against this abuse, which gave the domestic worker confidence to one day return a slap after the relative had once again beaten her. Because this had happened in a secluded room, there was no evidence that the domestic worker had retaliated. So when the relative reported no one could believe her and at that point the relative never visited again.

The respondents worked long hours – an average of 18 hours a day – with little to no rest allowed. To cope with this inadequate rest, one of the current migrant domestic worker who is based in Oman usually takes naps in the toilet or at the sink outside the main house pretending to be fetching water or watering the grass.

All eight current and returnee migrant domestic workers confirmed that their employers had at some point withheld their salaries, with some keeping these wages for over three months. The risk does not end there: when the domestic workers are finally paid their wages, their employers, employers' children and other relatives search the domestic workers' luggage in a bid to steal the workers' money. The solution, as shared by the respondents, is to keep the money hidden in their undergarments and elsewhere on their bodies until time comes for the workers to send the money to their families in Uganda.

RETURN AND RE-INTEGRATION

At the time this research was being conducted, over two years had passed since the lifting of the labour migration ban that barred domestic workers from migrating to Saudi Arabia. Domestic workers who participated in this research therefore did not return to Uganda because of the ban but because of a myriad other reasons often related to the poor living and working conditions in the countries of destination. Those who returned to Uganda before completing their two-year contracts gave the following reasons for their return: overwork including working long hours and in more than one home, and sickness. A second category of returnees went back to Uganda after completing their contracts, particularly girls and women who had travelled irregularly and to

countries that have yet to sign bilateral agreements with Uganda – specifically Oman, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait.

On arrival back to Uganda, returnee migrant domestic workers are faced with a myriad challenges ranging from illness, chronic fatigue, isolation, and financial difficulties. HTS-Union has for years been providing support to migrant domestic workers in the Middle East. This assistance ranges from remote informational and psychosocial support to migrant workers, and where possible organising for the domestic workers' return. Upon their return HTS-Union provides counselling, makes claims on the behalf of migrant domestic workers' whose salaries were withheld, provide migrant workers them with information about safe migration and also enhance the domestic workers' financial literacy. Immigration and security officials at the airport also sometimes play a role in referring returnees who appear ill or otherwise to be struggling to the distress centre set up for returnees in Entebbe.

The centre was recently set up by the Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies (UAERA) whose officials confirmed that the centre has so far handled 70 returnee migrant domestic workers and it provides counselling services, rehabilitation and medical treatment to the returnees. If a case requires psychiatric treatment then it is further referred to Butabika psychiatric medical centre. Returnees who are not ready to integrate into the community or re-join their families are given shelter at the centre until they feel comfortable to leave. The Association provides medical assistance, counselling, first aid treatment although returnees with serious medical ailments are referred to Victoria Medical Centre for further and detailed diagnosis. All costs related to assistance inside the centre and at partner medical facilities are covered by UAERA.

The Overseas Workers Voice Uganda, a local migrants' rights and anti-trafficking NGO, also provides support to returnee migrant domestic workers. Officials from the NGO participated in this research and confirmed that the organisation offers the following types of support to returnee that it has assisted a number of migrant domestic workers return and have provide legal aid, counselling and medical care. They are considering beginning a program to support returnees join school and further their education.

4. CONCLUSION

While there have been studies to assess the labour migration trends and other issues related to women domestic workers from Uganda to the Middle East, we believe that this study offered a unique perspective not only because it was led by a Ugandan female trade unionist and a returnee migrant domestic worker, but also because it delved deeply into the lived experiences of Ugandan migrant domestic workers in the Middle East and also assessed the perspectives of their families as well as the organisations and agencies that support them. The summary

conclusions of the research findings below serve to make a contribution to what might be missing from the existing literature.

- Local and foreign recruitment agencies often play a central role in perpetrating violence and abuse against migrant domestic workers, either by directly misinforming, exploiting and physically and sexually abusing the domestic workers or by requesting employers to exploit and abuse the workers. As was observed by research respondents, sometimes recruitment agencies advise employers to withhold salaries, confiscate their mobile phones, disconnect Wi-Fi, and beat the workers. The research respondents told us that this would usually happen whenever they would complain about their employers not respecting their contracts' terms and conditions.
- This research disproved the general perception that all Ugandan migrant domestic workers in the Middle East are raped. None of the current and returnee migrant domestic workers who participated in this research spoke of sexual abuse, although they all admitted to being extra alert and vigilant in the presence of male employers and/or while working in male-dominated households. However, since the research sample was so small, it is impossible to make a conclusion on the prevalence of sexual violence against Ugandan migrant domestic workers.
- It was surprising to discover that even very low income families found ways to pay inflated recruitment fees to unofficial brokers and agents so their daughters could travel to the Middle East for work. A mother to one of the migrant domestic workers for instance, makes her living by washing laundry in different homes. Yet, she was able to raise UGX 5,000,000 (\$1,354) to enable her daughter to travel to Nairobi, Kenya and migrate to Oman thereafter.
- The Employment (Recruitment of Ugandan Migrant Workers abroad) regulations, 2005, and Guidelines on Recruitment and Placement of Uganda Migrant Workers Abroad have made it easier for the Ugandan government to regulate labour migration. In particular, the requirement that all external recruitment agencies are registered and licensed has reduced smuggling and human trafficking-related incidents and encouraged safe migration for domestic workers. Evidence of this can be seen by the rise in the number of migrant domestic workers who migrate to the Middle East countries in accordance with the Ministry of Labour's official process within the last four years. While the process of vetting prospective migrant workers' documentation has also proven to be effective, the researchers believe that the Ministry of Labour should use the vetting process as an opportunity to verify, by communicating directly to the migrant workers, whether these workers received pre-departure training or signed a contract.
- The researchers believe that the existence of an association of foreign recruitment agencies (UAERA) has been crucial in providing centralised information to all member agencies. The association keeps its membership grounded in the principle of providing

employment for Ugandans abroad in an ethical manner. If a domestic worker is exploited by an agent, she can easily report such issues to the association's office for redress.

- While the researchers laud the government's efforts in ensuring that only registered and licensed recruitment agencies offer recruitment services to migrant domestic workers, the registration process is slower than the registration demand from recruitment agencies: at the time of writing this report, the Ministry of Labour had completed the registration of 151 agencies, up from 130 agencies in April 2019. Based on data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs' 2018 Performance Report on Countering Trafficking in Persons in Uganda, the researchers can only conclude that there still exists a large number of unregistered and unlicensed agencies and brokers operating in the labour migration sector. The Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated that 110 illegal recruitment agents obtained money through false pretences and promises of getting jobs for Ugandan citizens in foreign countries, and that the number of female adult victims of transnational trafficking went up from 197 in 2017 to 287 in 2018. In addition to strengthening the registration process for recruitment agencies, there remain gaps in government monitoring of the licensed agencies, a challenge that exacerbated the abuse and exploitation meted against migrant domestic workers. As was observed in this study, even the licensed recruitment agencies in Uganda are guilty of exploiting and misinforming migrant workers. Active monitoring by the Ministry of Labour would therefore go a long way in ensuring that instances of abuse and exploitation are reduced.
- The mandatory provision of employment contracts has assisted migrant domestic workers to identify their employer and foreign agency which has placed them. Names, addresses and telephone numbers for the three parties (employer, agency, and employee) are recorded onto the contract, which also outlines the domestic worker's wages. The mandatory introduction of employment contracts has therefore contributed to ensuring migrant domestic workers' rights are better protected because domestic workers now have a reference point in case disputes arise. However, more needs to be done by the government of Uganda to ensure that the terms and conditions in migrant domestic workers' employment contracts are respected and enforced by the employers. Otherwise as migrant domestic workers in this study noted, the contract will remain a redundant document.

RECOMMENDATIONS

GOVERNMENT

- The government should take on the pre-departure training as one of its primary roles and not just have the role of supervising recruitment agencies. The government should partner in this with trade unions as the legitimate representatives of the workers.

- The governments of destination countries should require foreign agencies to orient employers on the terms and conditions in the contract to ensure its implementation. Destination countries should be responsible for the implementation of contracts.
- Expedite agreements with UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman because domestic workers are travelling on visitors' visa and working in these countries without papers, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.
- Improve efforts to prosecute human traffickers.
- A tripartite committee (comprising MGLSD, labour unions, and recruitment agencies) should be constituted to handle or inspect pre-departure orientation of MDWs and handle placement disputes.
- The Government should open up Embassies in all countries which have diplomatic relations with Uganda to ease the process of assisting migrant workers, including domestic workers. Shelters can be set up to provide assistance to victims.
- The Government should ratify ILO Convention 189 (decent work for domestic workers) to protect local and migrant domestic workers.
- MGLSD should review the Employment Act, 2006 along with other regulations, for example, on sexual harassment, to include and provide for domestic workers who are vulnerable and hidden.
- The Government should put in place a minimum wage for all employment sectors to avoid exploitation of local and migrant domestic workers. The reason there is high demand for Ugandan workers is because they accept any amount of salary which is not the case with Kenyans who stand their ground and bargain based on their country's minimum wage.
- The Government should review the National Social Security Act to provide for single workers. This will enable domestic workers' employers to save for them with the National Social Security Fund.
- The Government should run awareness campaigns on safe migration.
- The Government should curtail corruption in the security agencies in order to stop human trafficking; most traffickers are dealing with the security agencies at the border points.
- The Government should classify recruitment agencies as employers since they recruit, interview, negotiate employment contracts, negotiate salary/wages, and have the right to hire and fire. This will assist workers representatives to represent all migrant workers.
- MGLSD should ensure that migrant domestic workers are not charged recruitment fees as is stipulated in the agreements with Jordan and Saudi Arabia.
- MGLSD should negotiate for a standard/uniform salary for domestic workers migrating to the Middle East to guard them against exploitation.

TRADE UNIONS

- Trade unions in sending countries should pursue agreements with sister trade unions in the receiving countries to facilitate organising of migrant workers for effective representation and protection.
- HTS-Union should have an understanding with UAERA of how best to represent migrant domestic workers and how to enforce the implementation of the employment contract.
- HTS-Union should advocate for the ratification of ILO Convention 189, review of the employment act, 2006 and other related laws.
- HTS-Union should advocate for the review of the standard employment contract for domestic workers to align with the terms in the ILO Labour standards as well as those of the sending country including annual leave, social protection and overtime.

RECRUITMENT AGENCIES

- Agencies should ensure that MDW have their own bank account to avoid relatives misusing their remittances for personal benefit.
- Agencies should keep in touch with migrant domestic workers to understand their work-related problems and challenges.
- Agencies should be able to intervene or assist migrant domestic workers immediately, especially for abusive or risky situations such as denial of meals, phone confiscation and withholding of salaries.
- Recruitment agencies should explain in detail the terms of employment contracts in a language the domestic worker can easily understand.

ASSOCIATION OF EXTERNAL RECRUITMENT AGENCIES

- Ensure all licensed recruitment agencies are members of the association for better monitoring of the agencies actions and penalising.
- UAERA should take fore front position to create awareness on safe migration on radio, places of worship, universities and colleges to ensure that fresh graduates are not talked into trafficking as they try to find new job opportunities because of unemployment.

WOMEN ASPIRING TO MIGRATE FOR DOMESTIC WORK

- Prospective migrant domestic workers should visit HTS-Union to discuss and have a better understanding of the migration process and requirements.

- To better manage their finances, women who aspire to migrate to the Middle East to work as domestic workers should open individual bank accounts in which their salaries would be transferred.

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