

SITUATION ANALYSIS REPORT: UGANDA VS. PHILIPPINES MIGRANT WORKERS WELFARE SYSTEMS & PROPOSED WAY FORWARD.

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BY MIGRANT WORKERS' VOICE.

1. Introduction

Uganda's education and labor market realities paint a vivid picture of both promise and pressure. Each year, about 700,000 young Ugandans reach working age, but the economy struggles to create enough quality jobs, especially for the nearly 500,000 annual graduates from both academic and vocational tracks. High secondary school dropout rates estimated at around 25% mean many youths lack the skills needed for formal or industrial employment, and even those who graduate often face a mismatch between their training and the demands of the job market. As a result, most young people end up in low-paid, informal, or subsistence agriculture, with only about 20% of workers in waged employment and the rest self-employed or unpaid family workers.

This jobs deficit and skills gap have fueled a surge in labor migration: recent years have seen between 50,000 and 70,000 Ugandans leaving annually for work abroad through regular channels, while thousands more use irregular means, often risking exploitation and abuse in search of better opportunities. These migration flows highlight the urgent need for Uganda to reform its migration policies, protect its workers, and critically accelerate industrialization and job creation at home. Raising wages, investing in skills training, and building a more robust industrial base are essential not just to stem the outflow of talent, but to offer Uganda's youth a future of decent work and shared prosperity.

Uganda vs. Philippines: Labor Market & Migration Statistics (2023–2024)

Indicator	Uganda	Philippines	Comments/Analysis
Unemployment Rate (Total)	2.8% – 2.9% (2023)	4.5% (Jan 2024)	Uganda's official rate is lower but masks high underemployment and informal work. Philippines has higher formal unemployment.
Youth Unemployment Rate	4.2% – 4.5%	13.7% (2023)	Youth unemployment is significantly higher in the Philippines, reflecting labor market entry challenges.

Indicator	Uganda	Philippines	Comments/Analysis
Labour Force Size	~21 million (2023 estimate)	~45 million (2023 estimate)	Philippines has a larger labor force due to bigger population and urbanization.
Employment by Sector (%)	Agriculture: ~65% of employment Industry: ~10% Services: ~25%	Agriculture: 24% Industry: 23% Services: 53%	Uganda is heavily agrarian; Philippines has a diversified economy with a dominant services sector.
Minimum Wage	UGX 130,000/month (~\$35 USD) (2025)	PHP 570/day (~\$10.50 USD) (Metro Manila, 2024)	Philippines' minimum wage is roughly 3x Uganda's monthly wage on a daily basis, reflecting higher living costs.
Annual Graduates (Tertiary & Vocational)	Approx. 500,000 (2023)	Approx. 1.3 million (2023)	Philippines produces more graduates, supporting its service and industrial sectors.
Secondary School Dropout Rate	~25% (latest estimates)	~7% (latest estimates)	Uganda faces higher dropout rates, limiting skilled labour supply.
Industrial Employment Capacity	Estimated <10% of labour force employed in manufacturing and industry	~23% employed in industry (2023)	Philippines has a more developed industrial base.
Average Industrial Worker Wage	Approx. UGX 4,000–6,000/day (~\$1–1.5 USD)	PHP 400–600/day (~\$7.50–10.50 USD)	Philippine industrial wages are significantly higher, reflecting

Indicator	Uganda	Philippines	Comments/Analysis
			productivity differences.
Labour Migration (Number Abroad)	~150,000 Ugandans in Gulf countries (2024)	~2.2 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) (2024)	Philippines has a much larger, more established labor migration sector.
Annual Remittances	>\$1 billion USD (2023)	\$38.5 billion USD (2023)	Remittances are a critical economic pillar for both; Philippines' remittances are vastly larger in scale.
Human Capital Index (World Bank)	0.39 (2023)	0.54 (2023)	Philippines has a higher human capital score, indicating better education and health outcomes.
GDP Growth Rate	6.2% projected (FY 2025)	5.6% (2024 estimate)	Both countries show strong growth, Uganda slightly higher due to emerging sectors like oil.

Analytical Summary

- Uganda** remains predominantly agrarian with a large informal sector and low minimum wages. Despite relatively low official unemployment, underemployment and skills shortages are major challenges. The country produces fewer graduates and suffers from high dropout rates, limiting its ability to industrialize or expand skilled employment. Labour migration is growing but still small compared to the Philippines, with remittances providing important but modest economic support.

- **Philippines** has a more diversified economy, with a strong services and industrial base, higher wages, and a larger skilled workforce. Its labour migration sector is highly developed, with millions of workers abroad and remittances forming a significant part of GDP. The Philippines also invests more in education and has a lower dropout rate, resulting in a stronger human capital foundation.

2. Comparative Institutional Frameworks for Migrant Worker Protection: Philippines vs. Uganda

2. Comparative Institutional Frameworks		
	Philippines' System	Uganda's System
1.	Legal Basis: Operates under RA 11641 (2022), which established the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) as a standalone ministry, and RA 8042 mandating worker protections.	Relies on bilateral agreements (2017/2023) and oversight by the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD).
2.	Physical Presence: Maintains 3+ Migrant Workers Offices (MWOs) in Saudi Arabia with shelters (FWRCs), legal teams, and 24/7 repatriation support.	One labor attaché under the Saudi embassy until 2023; no Ugandan-managed shelters until recently.
3.	Funding: Allocates \$1M/month from a dedicated welfare fund and Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) contributions.	No dedicated fund; dependent on irregular government budgets and donor support.
4.	Pre-Departure: Requires a mandatory 4-day Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) covering cultural norms, legal rights, and crisis protocols.	Voluntary sessions with generic content; a proposed FEBRRiC [Final Exit Briefing Return and Reintegration Center] program aims for mandatory airport-based briefings by the federation FUMWA.
5.	Data Systems: Centralized digital registry with real-time tracking and a national hotline.	Fragmented records; FEBRRiC seeks to integrate data but remains unimplemented and

		unwelcomed by the line ministry.
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3. Critical Gaps in Uganda's System

A. Structural Deficiencies

Single Labor Attaché: One officer serves ~200,000 workers in Saudi Arabia, compared to the Philippines' 15+ specialized staff per MWO [Migrant Workers Office].

Shelter Shortages: Until 2023, Uganda relied on Saudi facilities, exposing workers to trafficking risks and contract poaching by internal migrant networks and national locals.

Jurisdictional Overload: Workers are dispersed across Saudi Arabia's 13 regions, limiting access to consular services.

B. Legal & Procedural Weaknesses

BLA Enforcement: The 2023 bilateral agreement lacks penalties for Saudi agencies violating contracts.

Orientation Gaps: No mandatory last-minute briefing on Gulf cultural norms or labor laws, leaving workers unprepared.

Vetting Failures: 500/700 Saudi recruitment agencies were approved without Uganda-led audits.

C. Data & Advocacy Shortfalls

No Central Registry: Unclear numbers of detained, deceased, or abused workers.

Grassroots Advocacy: While Migrant Workers' Voice exists, it lacks the funding and reach of the Philippines' Migrant International which plays a big role of government policy and industry oversight by advocating strongly for the welfare and rights migrant workers.

4. Case Studies of Migrant Worker Support Operations: Philippines' MWO in Riyadh vs. Uganda's Labor Attaché Model

	Case Studies: Operational Models
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	Philippines' MWO in Riyadh Services: Contract verification, legal aid, shelters, and repatriation flights 24/7.	Uganda's 2023 Labor Attaché Role: Limited to documenting complaints; no authority to manage shelters or negotiate directly with employers repatriations are at the mercy of Saudi government via deportations.
	Funding: Receives \$12M/year for Saudi operations, enabling rapid crisis response.	Challenges: Understaffed, no independent budget, and constrained by embassy protocols.

5. Proposed FEBRRiC Model by FUMWA [Federation of Uganda Migrant Workers Associations] vs. Current Programs

Current Uganda Programs: Voluntary pre-departure sessions weeks before travel, led by IOM/MGLSD, with generic risk information.

Proposed FEBRRiC: Mandatory Final Exit airport briefings hours before departure, covering, patriotism, GCC-specific laws, contract verification, and Interpol-led background checks.

Philippines' PDOS: Mandatory 4 days-8hours pre-deployment Orientation seminars, with country-specific modules and legal workshops.

6. Recommendations for Uganda

Immediate Reforms (0-2 Years)

Expand Presence: Open MWOs in Jeddah and Dammam, and replicate FWRC Filipino Workers Resource Center shelters with IOM/UN funding.

Legal Upgrades: Amend bilateral agreements to impose \$10k+/violation fines on abusive agencies and enact a Ugandan Migrant Workers Act mirroring RA 8042 of Philippines to back up your BLAs in terms enforcement.

FEBRRiC Launch: Implement mandatory airport briefings with contract verification and biometric registration through a PPP MOUs with the federation as it proses its good FEBRRiC program.

Medium-Term (2-5 Years)

Funding Mechanisms: Levy a 1% fee on recruitment agencies for a Migrant Welfare Fund alongside the mandatory workers contribution as the baseline is for Philippines OWWA fund contribution by the Filipino workers themselves and negotiate Saudi cost-sharing for repatriations.

Capacity Building: Train 50+ English, Arabic/Swahili-speaking labor attachés using ILO's ethical recruitment curriculum. Include welfare Officers to support and work hand in hand with labor attaches especially in regards to follow up on workers welfare issues.

Long-Term (5+ Years)

Labor Market Diversification: Secure quotas in healthcare and construction for 2034 World Cup projects.

Tech Integration: Develop an e-MWO portal for contract tracking and link biometric IDs to NIRA for real-time monitoring.

7. Strategic Priorities

Legal: Transition from bilateral-dependent policies to a standalone Migrant Workers Act with enforceable penalties.

Operational: Shift from embassy-based services to decentralized MWOs with shelters and specialized staffs such migrant welfare officers.

Pre-Departure: Replace voluntary programs with mandatory, culturally specific Orientation.

Funding: Move from Ad-hoc budgets to a 1% agency levy alongside mandatory migrant workers welfare membership contribution and international cost-sharing with host states and this should be well captured in the BLAs.

Data: Upgrade from fragmented records to a centralized, real-time registry starting from the Exit point to the final day of return.

8. Why Labor Migration Remains Essential for Uganda"!?

Labor migration has become an inevitable reality for many Ugandans, driven by the country's ongoing economic and structural challenges. Every year, around 700,000 young people enter the workforce, but Uganda's economy struggles to create enough decent jobs to absorb this growing labor supply. Most young Ugandans find themselves stuck in low-paid, informal work or subsistence agriculture, while only a small fraction secure formal employment. High dropout rates and a mismatch between skills taught and those needed in the job market further limit opportunities at home. In this context, seeking work abroad becomes a natural and often necessary choice for many.

Each year, between 50,000 and 70,000 Ugandans leave the country through official channels in search of better-paying jobs, with thousands more taking irregular routes despite the risks involved. Labour migration offers these individuals a chance to earn a living wage, support their families, and gain valuable skills that are often unavailable domestically. While this migration

brings important remittances that bolster Uganda's economy, it also highlights the urgent need for stronger migration policies and better protection for workers abroad.

At the same time, labour migration is a temporary solution not a permanent fix. Uganda must urgently focus on creating more quality jobs through industrialization, improving education and skills training, and reforming wage policies to raise incomes locally. By investing in these areas, the country can reduce its reliance on labour migration and offer its youth a future where they can thrive at home. Until then, labour migration remains a vital lifeline for many Ugandans, helping to bridge the gap between limited domestic opportunities and their aspirations for a better life.

9. Conclusion

Labour migration will continue to be a vital lifeline for many Ugandans facing limited job opportunities at home, but making it safer and more effective requires urgent changes. Uganda needs to bring together government, recruitment agencies, and workers in a strong partnership to better protect migrants. Expanding the country's presence abroad by opening more Migrant Worker Offices, providing shelters, and staffing labor attachés and welfare officers will give Ugandan workers the support they deserve. At the same time, laws must be strengthened to hold employers and recruiters accountable, with mandatory pre-departure training to prepare workers for what lies ahead. Building a centralized system to track and respond to migrant issues in real time, and empowering grassroots organizations with funding and training, will help shift Uganda's approach from reacting to problems to preventing them. By focusing on these practical steps, Uganda can not only safeguard its 200,000 workers abroad but also create a foundation for long-term job growth and economic resilience at home—giving its youth hope for a better future, whether here or abroad.

Sources: IOM Reports (2023), HRW (2024), Philippines DMW Guidelines, Uganda MGLSD Policies.

Compiled by: MWV.ORG

Feedback Email: migrantworkersvoice@gmail.com