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# Written contracts for domestic workers protect employers too

BY GEOFFREY OYET OKWERA

You have two choices. You can ignore the new law, continue with verbal agreements, and hope no dispute ever arises. Or you can spend ten minutes writing a simple contract.

Magdalene Akwi used to believe that a good employer was a matter of luck. If the madam was kind, you earned, if she was not, you left with nothing. Today, Akwi works in a private home in Iganga, earning Shs80,000 per month plus meals and accommodation. Her employer has been fair, paying her on time and treating her with dignity. But Akwi now knows something she did not know when she arrived from Soroti last year. She now knows the law is on her side.

"If I was sick, I prayed not to cough too loudly," Akwi says. "If I made a mistake, I expected to be sent away. That is how we lived, but now I am told there is a new law that protects us and I am very relieved."

The law Akwi is referencing is the Employment (Amendment) Act, 2025, recently signed by President Yoweri Museveni.

## What the law says

For the first time in Uganda's history, domes-

tic workers are fully recognised as employees. The same legal protections that apply to bank tellers and factory workers now apply to nannies, house girls, casual labourers, and piece workers.

Augustine Obilil Idoot, a partner at Kampala Associated Advocates, explains the three most powerful shifts:

First, homeowners cannot fire a domestic worker because she falls sick. Sick leave is now a legal right. Second, annual leave is mandatory. Domestic workers are entitled to paid time off. Third, any casual worker who stays in a home for more than six months must be given a formal written contract, signed by both parties with witnesses.

"This law creates a more structured and accountable employment system," Idoot says. "It extends to domestic workers and casual labourers in ways it never did before."

## What the law means for employers

For homeowners, the new law may feel intimidating. But legal experts argue that formalising domestic work actually protects employers as well. A written contract prevents misunderstandings. It sets clear expectations for hours, duties, pay, and leave. If a worker steals or breaks rules, the termination process is documented rather than explosive.

"The law is not against homeowners," Idoot clarifies. "It is against exploitation. A good employer who pays fairly and treats workers with dignity has nothing to fear."

Joel Kato, a parent in Kampala, agrees. He once rescued a nanny who had been thrown out without pay. "The law is a positive step," he says. "It will help curb exploitation."

However, Kato also notes a challenge: "Some

homeowners will, as usual, fail to provide contracts, leaving no legal basis for arbitration case of disputes."

## Employers are worried

Not all reactions have been positive. Some homeowners say the new entitlements are too expensive. Suzanna Lakot from Gulu is honest. "I cannot afford to hire someone under the new requirements," she admits. She says she will now rely on relatives instead.

Sharifah Kulabako in Kampala is even blunter. "Very few people will be able to hire domestic workers under this law. I will simply agree with my house help on what to pay, as usual."

These reactions reveal a tension. The law raises standards, but if many households cannot meet them, some domestic workers may simply lose their jobs.

Jackline Akello offers a different view. She believes the law has finally created a platform for arbitration. "Before these legal protections, many domestic workers were left vulnerable and uncertain about where to seek help. Employment in private homes felt like a gamble."

## The missing piece: Minimum wage

The new law is powerful, but it does not solve everything. Uganda's minimum wage remains stuck at Shs6,000 per month, a figure set in 1984. A 2019 bill proposing an increase to Shs136,000 stalled after President Museveni declined to assent. This means that while a domestic worker can now demand a contract, the amount on that contract could still be shockingly low.

## How to write a simple domestic work contract

You do not need a lawyer or a printed form. You need only a piece of paper, a pen, and two witnesses. Include these six elements:

Write the names of both parties. Start by writing your full name and the worker's full name.

State the start date. Write down the exact day the worker will begin working for you.

Set the salary and payment date. The monthly salary is Shs80,000. Pay this amount every 30th day of the month.

List the duties. Clearly describe what the worker must do. For example: wash clothes, cook lunch, and sweep the compound.

Explain leave entitlements. Tell the worker how many sick days and annual leave days they get per year, and confirm that public holidays are included as days off.

Write the termination notice period. State that either side can end the agreement by giving one week of notice.

Both you and the worker must sign the paper. Then, two adults who are not family members must also sign as witnesses.