Uganda to send engineers, doctors, nurses to Saudi Arabia

BY VICKY WANDAWA

Unemployed Ugandan professionals stand a chance of getting jobs in Saudi Arabia following a new bilateral labour agreement between the Government of Uganda and that of Saudi Arabia.

In a statement released by Janat Mukwaya, the minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development, the agreement between the two countries was signed on December 31, 2017 and now paves way for Ugandan-licensed companies to recruit professional workers, such as doctors, nurses, engineers, drivers, carpenters, welders and domestic workers, among others.

In the past, the only labour agreement Uganda had with Saudi Arabia was to export domestic workers.

"We also signed off the amended Labour Agreement on Domestic Workers, earlier signed in 2015, to specifically streamline the operations of the labour externalisation sector with focus on fighting against trafficking and violation of workers' rights," Mukwaya revealed.

Pius Bigirimana, the permanent secretary at the gender ministry, said the Saudi Arabian embassy in Kampala is expected to resume issuing visas for workers destined for the Arab state, following the new agreement.

"The embassy stopped issuing labour export visas when we imposed a ban on export of domestic workers on January 22, 2016 in response to reports



THE MINISTER FOR GENDER, LABOUR AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Janat Mukwaya last year, said the ban has been lifted after the Government put in place measures that would promote the rights of Ugandan workers abroad.

of violation of their rights. The purpose of the ban was to stop migrant workers from getting into hostile domestic working conditions," Bigirimana said.

Two years ago, the Government imposed a ban on the externalisation of workers following reports of hostility Ugandans working abroad were facing. The concern was that domestic workers who were exported to work in foreign countries, especially in the Middle East and far East of Asia ended up in sexual slavery, were tortured and dehumanised.

Consequently, the agencies, through their umbrella body, Uganda Association for External Recruitment Agencies, said the ban was doing more harm than good in as far as recruitment of people is concerned because many people were unemployed.

Last year, Mukwaya said the ban has been lifted after the Government put in place measures that would promote the rights of Ugandan workers abroad. She added that those seeking to go abroad for work are expected to sign a four-party employment contract to be signed both in Uganda and recipient country among other conditions.

In an interview with *Saturday Vision* Enid Nambuya, the executive director of Uganda Association for External Recruitment Agencies, said the agreement is an improvement from the previous one that restricted labour externalisation to domestic workers and hence an opportunity for more Ugandans to get employment.

She further confirmed that the opportunities for professionals in Saudi Arabia are immense.

"Saudi Arabia has got more jobs than people working there, from the oil industry, hospitality, medical and many others," she said.

Nambuya said all the companies need now is information to learn about which recruiting companies in Saudi Arabia are licensed, opportunities available and the qualifications required, among others, then they will deliver the skilled labour.

She said that already, a number of doctors are employed in Saudi Arabia.

"Now that the doors have been opened, we need specifics so as to supply the relevant labour force, for example, what degrees are needed and is one degree enough? We need to be mindful because it is now going to be a competition with the whole world," she notes.

Gordon Mugyenyi, the managing director at Middle East consultants, one of the licensed companies in Uganda that export labour confirmed that Saudi Arabia has numerous opportunities for the professionals, especially construction.

"That is one country that has massive construction projects going on and so engineers and architects can always get opportunities," he said.

According to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Uganda earns $35 million (sh125.8b) per month out of the remittances of workers from the Middle East. This accounts for about 40% of the remittances worldwide. Currently, 65 companies are licensed to export labour

CamScanner