POLICY SHIFT

The move followed a major policy shift under the $2.3b (about sh8.2 trillion) Uganda-US health cooperation agreement signed on December 10, 2025, which committed the Ugandan government to gradually absorb all health workers previously funded through USAID programmes. Write **John Musenze** and **Martin Kitubi**.

GOVT KICKS OFF RECRUITMENT OF 18,100 HEALTH WORKERS

Agatha Bombi, who had served in her capacity for 13 years under the Medical Team International, one of the institutions that was supported by the US government, could not believe that she had become jobless in a snap.

"It has not been easy for most of us who were laid off when president Donald Trump announced a stop-work order last year. The US government was paying for our salaries through partners and we lived a decent life. Then boom, we were out of employment and they closed the only tap to income we had," she said.

Byombi is not alone. There are 18,104 other health workers like Byombi, who served at the different health facilities spread across the country, but were affected by the stop-work order by the Trump Administration.

However, hope has been restored. The US and Uganda have launched a process to re-employ all health workers who were affected by the US adjustment.

The US government has agreed with Uganda to ensure that all health workers who were affected are absorbed by government.

Under the plan, the US has committed to paying salaries and benefits of the affected staff for about two years, on condition that Uganda will finally take over the responsibility in a period of five years.

As part of the process, the Ugandan government, through the Health Service Commission, has embarked on the process to validate health workers who were affected.

The validation exercise, which is underway at the 16 government regional referral hospitals, will see at least 3,600 health workers re-employed in the first phase.

Currently, the validation is ongoing at the regional referral hospitals of Arua, Yumbe, Masaka, Kabale, Fort Portal, Moroto and Gulu, which will be concluded on March 13, 2026.

The validation will then go to Lira, Soro, Mubende, Mbale, Jinja, Hoima and Entebbe Regional Referral Hospitals, which will be held between March 23 and April 2, 2026.

According to Dr Henry Mwebesa, the chairperson of the Health Service Commission, the list of the validated health workers will then be sent to Dr Diana Atwine, the Health Ministry Permanent Secretary, for further action.

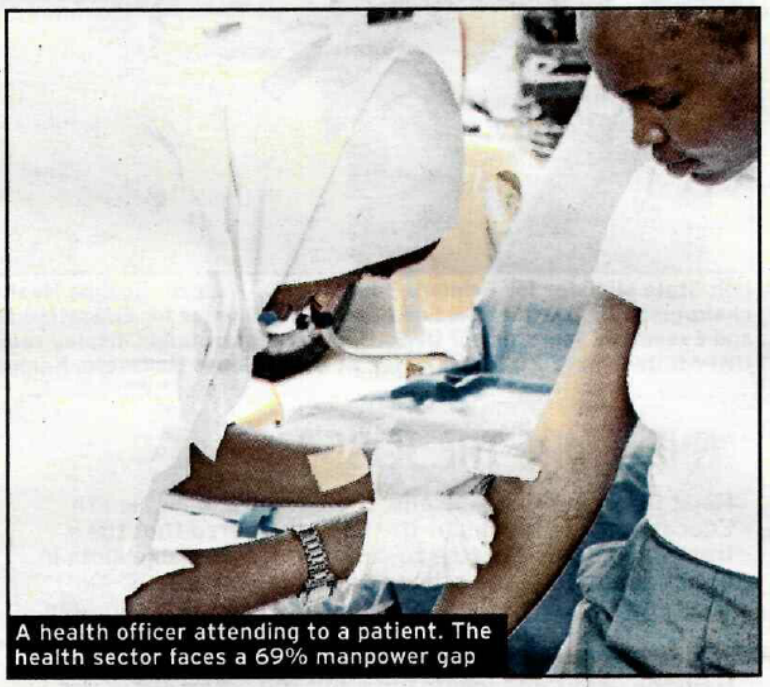
"I want to thank both the government of the US and our government for signing a Memorandum of Understanding which had a critical human resource component of re-employing the affected health workers," he said.

The move followed a major policy shift under the $2.3b (about sh8.2 trillion) Uganda-US health cooperation agreement signed on December 10, 2025, which committed the Ugandan government to gradually absorb all health workers believed to be 3,000 under previously funded through donor programmes.

Under the five-year agreement, frontline health workers supported by US implementing partners are expected to be progressively transitioned into government structures within the first year.

Under the framework, the partners committed to invest in the training, recruitment and retention of health workers to ensure that health facilities across the country have adequate staff to deliver essential services. The initiative aims to build a resilient workforce capable of sustaining programmes that will address HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other priority health needs.

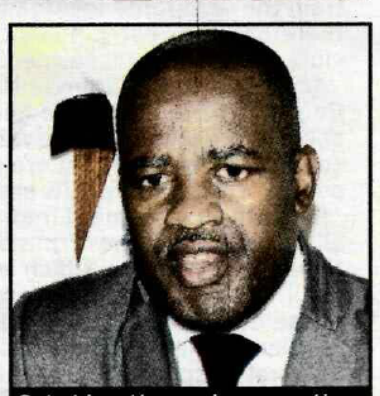
Government data shows that the public health sector currently has 106,077 unfilled positions.



A health officer attending to a patient. The health sector faces a 69% manpower gap

STAFFING GAP

An October 2025, report by the Ministry of Public Service on the state of human resources in the public service revealed that the health sector had an approved establishment of 154,190 positions.



Sebahire, the senior executive consultant, Fort Portal Hospital

However, only 48,113 positions were filled, representing a staffing level of 31% and leaving a vacancy rate of 69% across the country.

The report indicated that the shortages were driven by a combination of factors, including inadequate wage funding, delayed recruitment processes and difficulties in attracting specialised medical professionals.

Between 2020 and 2024, the sector recruited 9,482 health workers, with the majority, about 85%, deployed to primary health care services, while 15% were posted to referral hospitals.

On January 29, 2026, Parliament approved an additional sh132.6b requested by the Ministry of Health to support the hiring of 16,963 health workers after lawmakers reviewed the 2026/27 National Budget Framework paper. Presenting the budget committee's report to Parliament, the committee's vice-chairperson, Remigio Achia, said Uganda's health sector continued to struggle with severe human resource gaps that were undermining healthcare delivery.

MORE APPROVALS

Beyond recruitment, Parliament also approved several additional funding requests aimed at strengthening service delivery and emergency response across the health system. Lawmakers approved sh20b to support public health facilities that had recently been upgraded to higher levels but had not yet received corresponding budget increases.

The House also approved sh8.598b to operationalise Uganda's organ transplant programme and sh7.4b to support the establishment and functioning of the Organ Donation and Transplant Council.

RECRUITMENT AT REGIONAL REFERRALS

At Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital, where the recruitment launch took place yesterday, administrators confirmed receiving additional funding that would enable the recruitment of a full roster of specialists before the end of the year.

Dr Archbald Newton Sebahire, a senior executive consultant at the facility, said the funding would facilitate the recruitment of specialists in key areas, including orthopaedics, paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, surgery, anaesthesiology, radiology and psychiatry.

According to hospital administrators, the facility has long struggled with critical staffing gaps that forced many patients to travel to distant hospitals in Mbarara or Kampala for specialised treatment.

Uganda Medical Association president Dr Frank Asiimwe welcomed the ongoing recruitment of health workers, but urged authorities to ensure the exercise becomes a sustained effort rather than a one-off intervention. He said the move could significantly improve staffing levels across the country if it is followed by consistent annual hiring.

Dr Asiimwe said newly recruited health workers should be deployed across all levels of the health system, starting from Health Centre IIIs and IVs, district general hospitals, regional referral hospitals, national referral hospitals and specialised national facilities.

However, Asiimwe warned that Uganda's health workforce crisis cannot be solved through a single recruitment exercise.

ADVERTISED POSTS

The Health Service Commission e-recruitment portal already has dozens of jobs advertised mainly under the Ministry of Health and regional referral hospitals, where eligible candidates have up to March 17, 2026, to apply.

The positions advertised on the platform include health educator, which requires a bachelor's degree in health education or public health and involves developing health education materials, planning interventions and conducting health promotion activities. Others include nursing officer, senior clinical officer, assistant medical records officer, enrolled midwife, principal medical laboratory technician, associate consultant (intensive care), as well as associate consultants for general surgery, orthopaedic surgery, and ophthalmology.

The vacancies are applied for online through the HSC e-recruitment portal, where applicants must create an account and submit their credentials electronically.

The portal normally lists new jobs posted within the last seven days and each vacancy has its own application deadline specified in the detailed job notice once the applicant logs into the system.

Additional reporting by Jonan Tusingwire

TRANSPARENCY

Dr Robert Kalyesubula, a health worker, asked the Government to be broader in recruitment for infectious and non-communicable diseases because the burden of these diseases is high.

"The Government is trying to fill the gap that was left by the closure of the US funding cuts, especially after the closure of USAID. Taking them up is good because of their experience, but the health system has been integrated to accommodate not just HIV AIDS... because many of these professionals were providing services for communicable diseases, but also non-communicable diseases. So, there is a need to recruit clinicians," Kalyesubula noted.