

Women, like men are more than able to thrive in private security. Support them

For decades, security was framed as a man's terrain, a field defined by physical dominance and guarded by the assumption that only brute strength could guarantee protection. Women were subtly and sometimes loudly told that they did not belong. The belief that they were physically unfit for the demands of the job became a convenient barrier reinforced by culture rather than competence. Fortunately, time has a way of exposing fragile assumptions, and the narrative around women in private security is steadily being rewritten.

As Uganda continues to urbanise and infrastructure expands, demand for professional security services is rising. According to the World Bank, Uganda maintains one of the highest female labour force participation rates in Sub-Saharan Africa, with over 76 percent of women of working age actively engaged in the labour market. Furthermore, women constitute nearly half, at 48 per cent, of the country's total active labour force, a level of participation that underscores their central role in the national economy. This reality makes the case for gender inclusion in private security not just a social goal, but a logistical necessity.

Beyond traditional guarding roles, women are venturing into executive protection, surveillance operations, technical assistance, risk assessment, investigations and control room management. In executive protection, some prominent leaders are opting for female bodyguards not as symbolic gestures but as a reflection of professional confidence. Once witnessed in action, these professionals dismantle the stereotype that women in security are less prepared for high-risk assignments.

Beyond operational value, expanding female participation has clear economic benefits. Limiting recruitment to one gender narrows the talent pool and constrains productivity, while inclusive hiring increases capacity, eases staffing pressures and strengthens service delivery.

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Winnifred Akello
Inclusivity

Security today demands more than physical presence. Emotional intelligence, behavioural awareness and de-escalation, areas where many women have demonstrated strong competence, have become central to modern security practice. The ability to read subtle cues, detect rising tension and defuse situations early is critical to preventing incidents. As threat environments grow more complex, particularly at large public events and high-profile operations, these skills are not supplementary, they are strategic.

In Uganda, where private security personnel frequently support public events, religious gatherings and cross-border operations, cultural sensitivity and professionalism are indispensable. Female officers play a critical role in conducting searches on women in compliance with human rights standards. They are often better positioned to engage vulnerable populations and manage sensitive situations involving children and survivors of violence.

Progress, however, has not been without friction. For many women in private security, entry is only the first hurdle; proving competence often becomes a continuous expectation. While men are frequently presumed capable until proven otherwise, women must repeatedly demonstrate their readiness in environments where gender skepticism persists.

Workplace structures have also lagged behind recruitment gains. Long and unpredictable shifts, inadequate facilities and policies that overlook gender-specific needs can disproportionately affect women's advancing professional and caregiving responsibilities. Subtle biases in promotion pathways, where leadership is still unconsciously linked to male authority, further limit advancement. These structural barriers, rather than capability gaps, remain the primary obstacle to full inclusion.

Despite these realities for some, progress continues. Some security companies have intentionally mapped a clear pathway for women to advance their careers. Further, women undergo the same rigorous training and meet identical performance benchmarks, and in many instances, exceed them. A growing number are pursuing certifications in VIP protection, CCTV surveillance systems and risk management, strengthening their technical credibility in an evolving security landscape. Representation matters. When young girls see women in uniform managing security checkpoints, overseeing control rooms or escorting high-profile clients, perceptions shift quietly but powerfully. Authority begins to be understood not as a function of gender, but of preparation and professionalism.

The debate should therefore move beyond whether women belong in private security, since evidence already answers that question. The more urgent issue is whether the industry is prepared to dismantle remaining structural constraints and fully capitalize on the gains inclusion offers.

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