

National News

BY IBRAHIM KHALIL MANZIL &
BUSEIN SAMILU

President's Labour Day gifts to workers

KAMPALA. A casual or informal worker who will be engaged for more than six months will now be eligible to be converted into a contract staff, a new law to guarantee worker's job protection states.

This is part of the many elements contained in the Employment (Amendment) Act, 2025, which President Museveni signed into law on Wednesday, only two days to the International Labour Day.

Uganda marks this year's workers day under the theme, "Safeguarding Uganda's Progress: Empowering the Workforce and Promoting Decent Work for Competitive Enterprises."

The new law, which is seen as a Labour Day gift to Ugandan workers, now awaits the Labour, Gender, and Social Development minister to come up with regulations that will enable its implementation.

The law also caters for breastfeeding employed mothers and demands employers to provide nursing breaks of 30 minutes every two hours or reduced work hours for 60 days for breastfeeding mothers following maternity leave.

The Act strengthens rights for vulner-

able categories, including domestic labourers, by bringing them under formal employment definitions.

The new law now requires all employers to establish safety and health committees for all workplaces, removing the previous 20-worker threshold, and also introduces mental health support as a mandatory workplace safety requirement.

Some of the other key reforms include expanded sexual harassment coverage, and stricter occupational health and safety regulations, though a new national minimum wage remains unresolved.

Mr Usher Wilson Owere, a labour rights advocate and former chairman general of the National Organisation for Trade Unions (Notu), welcomed the development and described it as timely.

"This will help many, including factory workers, who can work for more than 10 years but remain casual workers... it will strengthen the powers of employees, give them a voice and a strong bargaining power," he said.

Mr Owere, who is also the chief labour

Challenges.

Many individuals create jobs within their homes or small enterprises and employ workers without

the knowledge of authorities, making it hard to track and regulate wages. Some employers are paying workers peanuts under conditions they themselves would not tolerate. This must change if we are to achieve decent work for all,"

– Ms Esther Davinia Anyakun, the State Minister for Labour, Employment and Industrial Relations

affairs officer at the External Labour Power House, added, "I call upon the government to ensure the law is implemented by strengthening the powers of district labour officers who must inspect all these work places to ensure the law is implemented. I implore the workers to also join trade unions so their voices are heard."

Challenges

Ms Esther Davinia Anyakun, the State

Minister for Labour, Employment and Industrial Relations, said, "Uganda's labour market is largely informal, employing nearly 88 percent of the workforce. Therefore, these are in vulnerable employment with limited protection," she said.

She said the government is taking steps to address the underpayment problem, but noted that enforcement remains difficult due to the prevalence of informal employment arrangements.

She explained that many individuals create jobs within their homes or small enterprises and employ workers without the knowledge of authorities, making it hard to track and regulate wages.

The minister criticised such employers for exploiting workers through low pay.

"Some employers are paying workers peanuts under conditions they themselves would not tolerate. This must change if we are to achieve decent work for all," she said.

She added that labour productivity remains below regional and global averages, with Uganda's GDP per worker

significantly trailing both Sub-Saharan Africa and global figures.

Despite these challenges, the minister said the government has made progress towards middle-income status, citing reduced poverty levels and expanded economic activity.

She highlighted ongoing programmes such as the National Apprenticeship Programme, youth skilling initiatives, and efforts to expand social security coverage.

The minister also acknowledged the persistent challenges in Uganda's labour market, including high youth unemployment, informality, and low productivity.

Ms Anyakun said Uganda's youthful population presents both an opportunity and a pressing demand for job creation.

She cited the 2024 National Population and Housing Census, noting that more than 73 percent of Ugandans are below 30 years.

The 2025 Labour Market Survey, shows the working-age population stands at about 26.4 million, with unemployment at 12 per cent and labour force participation at 43.2 percent. Youth exclusion remains a concern, with 42.6 per cent of young people not in employment, education or training.