

# International Migration Opportunities for Youth in Uganda

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## Executive Summary

With millions of Ugandan youth unemployed and underemployed, it is no surprise that many have taken to migration to solve this problem. To date, remittances from Ugandans in the diaspora contribute very significantly to Uganda's GDP annually. The Government of Uganda has maintained open migration policies that make out-migration and in-migration possible for many. Ugandans in the diaspora, however, are usually at the mercy of their recipient countries. Ugandan embassies in these countries have an important role to play in supporting these migrants to facilitate their smooth stay and work in these recipient countries.

### Introduction

It is no secret that migration has greatly shaped the current global demographic patterns, whether voluntary or forced, through-out the past centuries. The world has thrived on migration which brings together people from diverse backgrounds in one geographical location. Each of these people then has to contribute their work, effort and resources to the community in order to survive, leading to growth and development.

Globally, the number of international migrants has grown from over 71 million people in 1960 to over 243 million people in 2015 (World Bank n.d.). This steady upward trend indicates that there are good reasons for people to migrate to other countries. Reasons for such resettlement could include seeking better employment opportunities, study and political reasons (wars, asylum seekers).

Michael Clemens argues that if all the countries had no migration restrictions and people were free to move to whichever country they wanted, the global GDP growth rate would astoundingly rise to between 50% to 150% every year (Clemens, n.d.).

Migration is generally understood as the movement and re-settlement of people in places different from their origin. Migration can take the form of permanent or temporary resettlement.

Regional migration is migration within the country whereas international migration happens across borders.

Emigration (out-migration): These consist of the stock of nationals who leave their country to settle either temporarily or permanently in other countries. Whereas immigration (in-migration) refers to the foreigners who come into a country to work, study or who come in as political refugees.

### Uganda's Case on Emigration

Like many other developing countries, Uganda faces more emigration than immigration because nationals are eager to look for better economic opportunities. Many youth in Uganda are attracted to the better prospects of life that come with living in developed countries: more fulfilling or better paying work, the study opportunities there, or simply better standards of living.

With Uganda's population predominantly consisting of youth and children, at 78% as of 2020 (National Population Council 2020), and with the current unemployment rates in Uganda at 2.9% as of 2020 (Statista 2021), it is worth noting that many young people trot the

proverbial streets every day in search for greener pastures. To complicate matters, a considerable portion—13% as of 2015, of these youth are not fully educated and are thus able to do only informal work (UNESCO n.d.).



The limited opportunities for youth in Uganda encourage Ugandans to think outside the borders and consider the opportunities yonder. As a result, emigration has allowed many youths to find jobs in developed countries, with the majority of Ugandans working abroad in the Middle East, Europe and the USA, South Sudan, Kenya, South Africa, among others (IOM 2018). These same emigrants are responsible for the billions of dollars that stream into Uganda every year as remittances. The yearly remittances Uganda receives have grown tremendously, growing to over 1.4 billion US\$ as of 2018 (World Bank 2018).

Emigration, therefore, serves two purposes in Uganda: relieving the unemployment burden—as emigrants reduce the competition for employment opportunities available to those who stay within the country and, increasing the inflow of monetary resources into the country as remittances. Emigration makes migrants a more valuable stock to Uganda because they contribute a highly significant share of money towards the Ugandan economy through remittances, much more than they would have contributed if they had stayed in Uganda unemployed or under-employed.

The issue of underemployment in Uganda is worth exploring as well. The majority of Ugandans suffer poor living standards because of the highly exploitative wage structure in Uganda. Lucky domestic workers earn about Shs 100,000 a month while the average salary range of office workers in Uganda is from 549,000Shs to 2,159,187Shs (Paylab n.d.). Many casual labourers in Uganda would earn so much more in a foreign country doing the exact same work. These emigrants would actually much more doing casual work in foreign countries than white-collar workers in Uganda earn at their desk jobs. This is the reality that defeats the brain drain argument. Despite the arguments that Uganda is losing its brain resources through brain drain, the same emigrants have proved to serve Uganda more through their remittances than they would if they stayed in Uganda. If conditions in Uganda were better than they are abroad, curiosity and experience would be the leading reasons for emigration.

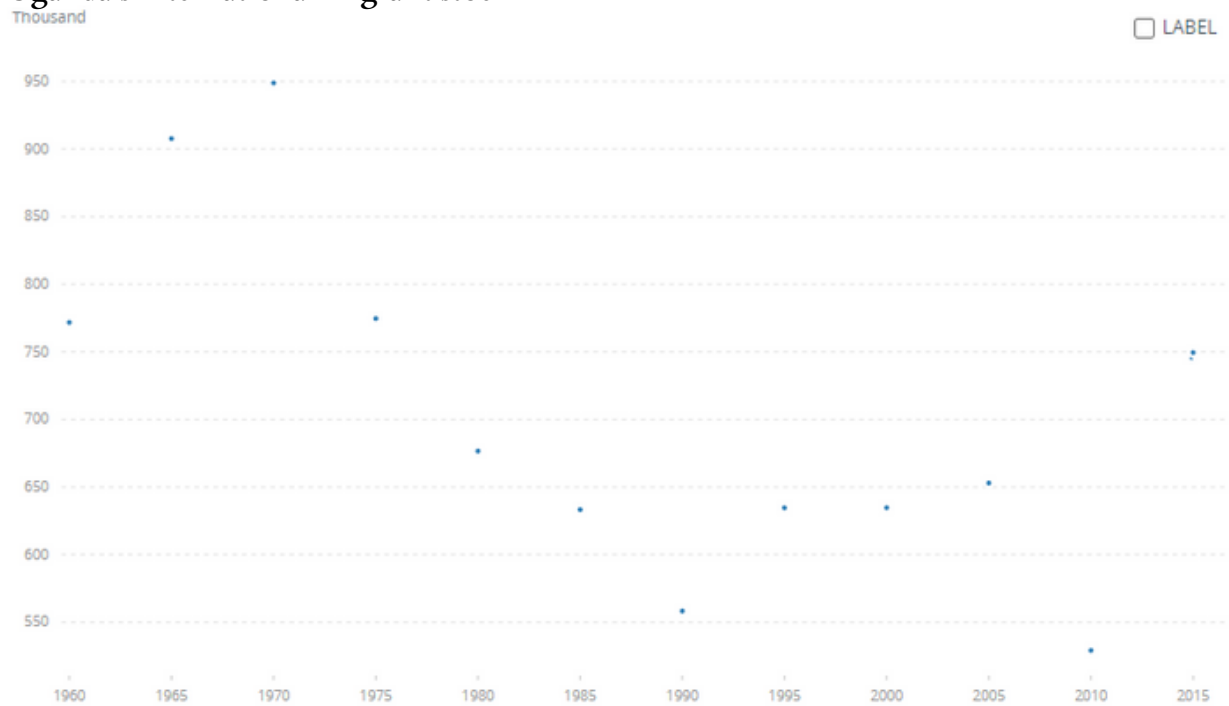
### **Uganda's case on Immigration**

Immigration in Uganda is fairly commonplace. Uganda is home to many immigrants from African countries. Many come to work, study, or find refuge.

Uganda has continually freely allowed asylum seekers to find a home within its borders making Uganda the largest host country to refugees in Africa, and second-largest in the world (Momodu 2019). Uganda has received the majority of its refugees from neighbouring countries like South Sudan, Rwanda, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (IOM 2018). Political instability in these aforementioned countries causes nationals to flee to neighbouring countries like Uganda in search of peace. South Sudan, for example, has suffered civil war since 2013 that has seen millions of South Sudanese both internally displaced and externally resettled in the diaspora (Mercy Corps 2019).

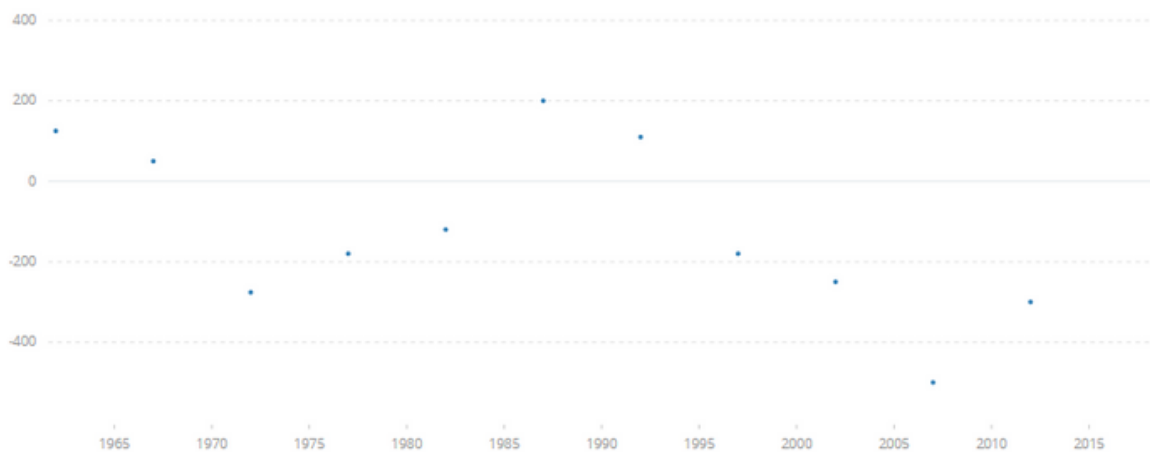
The in-migration of investors has been very beneficial to Uganda. The investor stock has contributed significantly to Uganda's economic progress through job creation, infrastructural development and the provision of goods and services. Uganda is now home to many foreign investors, many of whom have lived in Uganda long enough to attain Ugandan citizenship (IOM 2015). Southeast Asians are the majority of investors in Uganda. Most of them invest in retail stores or industries. Caucasian immigrants are usually expatriates while African immigrants are usually white-collar workers or political refugees.

## Uganda's international migrant stock



Source: World Bank

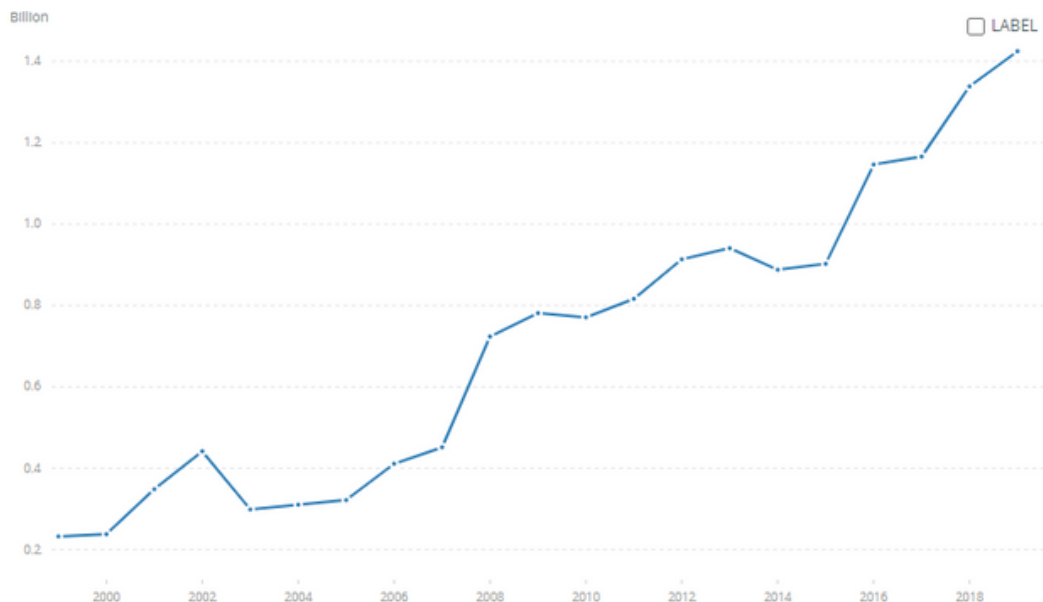
## Net migration in Uganda (in thousands)



Source: World Bank

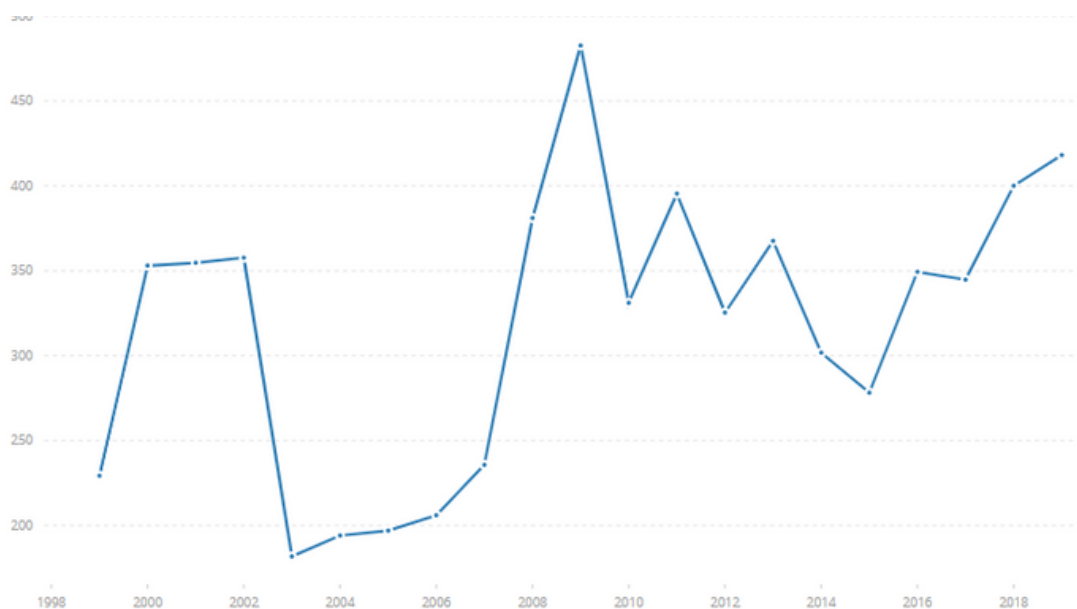
The net migration data shows that Uganda is losing more people than it is gaining through its borders. More people are leaving than are coming in to settle in Uganda.

### Personal remittances received in Uganda (current US\$)



Source: World Bank

### Remittances paid out from Uganda (in Million US\$)



Source: World Bank

As the data above shows, monies remitted out of Uganda to support emigrants are less by far (in millions of dollars) than the monies received into Uganda from emigrants (in billions of dollars).

Research done on the use of remittances in Uganda found that households with family members abroad were more likely to receive remittances than those without any family members abroad (Mushomi, Ntozi, and Rutaremwa 2017).

### Policy Recommendations

Uganda has kept open migration policies through the years. Several Labour Externalization initiatives have been put in place with the guidance of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD 2019). This has been helpful in boosting Uganda's tourism industry among others. Uganda also has no control over other countries' migration policies. These can only be influenced by the internal and external forces at play in these countries. However, Uganda can play a role in ensuring that Ugandans working abroad are safe and able to thrive. To achieve this, we make the following policy recommendations:

*Provide regular safety checks for migrant workers abroad, especially in the Gulf countries which are notorious for mistreating workers. This can be done through the Ugandan Embassies in or near those respective countries.*

*Form partnerships with some countries for education exchange programs and provide scholarship schemes to support such arrangements as need arises.*

*Reduce and regulate the costs of remittances so that even more money can be sent into Uganda.*



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