

► Policy Brief

MAY 2026

Assessment of the registration, licensing and inspection mechanisms of private employment agencies in Tanzania

► 1. Executive summary

Labour migration in Tanzania has increased steadily over the past decade, with growing numbers of Tanzanians seeking employment opportunities abroad, particularly in the Middle East and within the East African Community (EAC). While the overall scale of overseas deployment from Tanzania remains less than that of regional peers such as Ethiopia and Uganda, labour migration plays an increasingly important role in household livelihoods and income diversification, particularly among youth and women.

Key destination countries for Tanzanian migrant workers include Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Japan and the United Arab Emirates. Migration flows are influenced by economic factors such as youth unemployment, low domestic wages and limited formal job opportunities, alongside sustained demand for domestic workers, service-sector employees and low-skilled labour in destination countries. Zanzibar represents a distinctive migration corridor, with deep historical, cultural and linguistic ties to Oman that contribute to sustained labour mobility.

In recent years, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania has undertaken regulatory reforms to strengthen the governance of labour migration, most notably by issuing the 2025 Guidelines for Private Employment Agencies (PrEAs). These reforms have improved procedural clarity and institutional coordination. However, significant challenges remain in enforcement capacity, data consolidation, protection of overseas workers and coordination between Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar, limiting the effectiveness of the overall system.

► 2. Migration context and trends

Labour migration in Tanzania is driven by a combination of structural and economic factors. Youth unemployment remains high, particularly among secondary and tertiary graduates entering a labour market with limited formal employment opportunities. For many young Tanzanians, overseas employment is perceived as a viable pathway to income generation, skills acquisition and social mobility.

Migration flows are moderately gendered. Women are predominantly employed in domestic work and caregiving roles, particularly in Oman and Saudi Arabia, whereas men are more commonly employed in construction, security, hospitality and service-sector jobs across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Intra-regional migration within the EAC also remains significant, particularly in agriculture, trade and informal services.

Zanzibar presents a distinctive migration context within the Union. Longstanding historical ties with Oman, dating back to the nineteenth century, have resulted in enduring cultural and familial links, linguistic familiarity and employer preferences for Zanzibari workers. As a result, labour migration from Zanzibar, particularly from Unguja, remains disproportionately oriented towards Oman. Workers from Pemba typically access overseas employment through PrEAs based in Unguja, reflecting geographic and administrative centralization.

Despite the existence of formal regulatory frameworks, irregular migration persists, particularly where jobseekers lack access to licensed agencies or timely information. Although not systemic, reliance on informal intermediaries remains in some localities, highlighting the need for continued public awareness and enforcement.

► 3. National legal and institutional framework

3.1. Core legislation

The labour migration governance framework of Tanzania operates within a **dual legal system**, reflecting the constitutional division of powers between **Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar**, where labour and employment are **non-Union matters**. Each jurisdiction therefore maintains its own legal and regulatory framework governing labour migration and the operation of private employment agencies (PrEAs).

Mainland Tanzania

In Mainland Tanzania, PrEAs and labour migration are regulated primarily through the National Employment Promotion Services Act, No. 9 of 1999 (Cap. 243), and the Employment and Labour Relations Act, 2004 (Cap. 366), supported by the Labour Institutions Act (Cap. 300) and the Non-Citizens (Employment Regulation) Act, No. 1 of 2015, together with the Non-Citizens (Employment Regulations), GN No. 331 of 2016. Additional regulatory instruments include the Employment and Labour Relations (Code of Good Practice) Rules, 2007; the National Employment Services (Private Employment Promotion Agency) Regulations, 2014; and the Employment and Labour Relations (General) Regulations, 2017.

Collectively, these instruments establish registration and licensing requirements for PrEAs, prohibit unauthorized recruitment fees, regulate access to foreign employment and provide broader standards for employment relations, labour administration and enforcement.

The **Guidelines for Private Employment Agencies (2025)** provide detailed operational procedures for registration, licensing, inspection, training coordination and reporting. While the guidelines significantly enhance procedural clarity, they are administrative instruments and do not introduce binding sanctions or financial security mechanisms.

Zanzibar

In Zanzibar, labour migration governance is administered under a **separate constitutional and legal framework**, in line with the **Constitution of Zanzibar**. Key instruments include the **Employment Act, 2005 (Zanzibar)**, the **Employment Policy, 2009 (Zanzibar)** and the **Labour Institutions Act**, which together regulate employment services and recruitment activities.

Recruitment-related abuses and exploitation are covered by the **Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2008**, which criminalizes trafficking, forced labour and deceptive recruitment practices. This framework is particularly relevant given the overlap between informal recruitment and trafficking risks affecting women and young people. The Government of Zanzibar is currently reviewing its Employment Act to align it with recent institutional changes and to strengthen recruitment oversight.

3.2. Institutional actors

Once registered as a business, a PrEA operating in Mainland Tanzania must apply for a recruitment licence from the Prime Minister's Office – Labour, Employment and Relations (PMO-LER) in Dodoma, which is responsible for licensing PrEAs on the Mainland. In Zanzibar, PrEAs apply for recruitment licences through the Ministry of Labour and Investments under the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, in line with Zanzibar's autonomous authority over labour and employment matters.

The Employment Services Unit (ESU) of PMO-LER supports labour market coordination, employment facilitation and the administration of the Employment Services Management Information System (ESMIS). The ESU also coordinates pre-departure training and public employment initiatives.

In Zanzibar, labour administration is overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Investments, which operates under the Employment Policy (2009) and the Employment Act (2005). Although labour matters are not Union matters, coordination with Mainland institutions occurs through Union frameworks, creating both opportunities and administrative complexity.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation (MOFA) leads diplomatic engagement, consular support and negotiations on bilateral labour agreements. Social partners, including the Tanzania Recruitment Agencies Association (TRAA), trade unions, employers and civil society organizations, contribute to stakeholder engagement, awareness-raising and advocacy.

Despite clearly defined mandates, coordination challenges persist, particularly in data sharing, overseas protection and complaint handling.

► 4. Regulation of private employment agencies

4.1. Licensing and inspection

Once registered as businesses, PrEAs must apply to PMO-LER for recruitment licences. Licensing requirements include certificates of incorporation, tax compliance documentation, business plans, proof of office facilities and bank guarantees. Licences are issued for one year and are subject to renewal upon demonstrated compliance.

As of 2024, 21 PrEAs are registered in Zanzibar, primarily in Unguja, while Mainland Tanzania hosts 116 licensed agencies. Inspection mechanisms include pre-licensing inspections, routine monitoring, spot checks and renewal inspections. However, inspection capacity remains constrained by limited staffing and resources, resulting in a largely reactive enforcement model.

4.2. Business environment

PrEAs in Tanzania operate within a constrained business environment characterized by modest deployment volumes, high operating costs and limited access to affordable financing. Smaller agencies often struggle to achieve economies of scale, with some deploying only a small number of workers each month.

Regulatory compliance costs, tax obligations and administrative procedures impose additional burdens, particularly on newer agencies. In response, the Government, in collaboration with financial institutions, has introduced targeted measures, including the Ughaibuni Fund, coordinated with CRDB Bank and supported by TRAA guarantees, to improve access to credit and strengthen agency sustainability.

► 5. Informal intermediaries and unethical recruitment

Although Tanzania maintains an established regulatory framework for recruitment, isolated cases of informal intermediaries, commonly known as *Agent Bubu*, have been reported. These actors typically operate outside formal systems, particularly in areas with limited access to licensed PrEAs.

The government continues to strengthen oversight, enforcement and public awareness in order to promote lawful recruitment channels. While informal brokerage does not represent the norm, its persistence underscores the need for sustained enforcement and information dissemination.

► 6. Pre-departure training and worker preparedness

Pre-departure training has long been a component of the labour migration framework of Tanzania. Since 2024, delivery has been supported through collaboration with Community Health and Social Welfare Africa (COMHESWA), while curriculum development efforts involve the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) and the National Institute of Transport (NIT).

Despite these efforts, training provision remains uneven. Training duration, content and assessment standards vary across providers, and there is no fully standardized national curriculum with enforceable minimum requirements. To address this gap, a government-led task force is developing a national pre-departure orientation curriculum, which started being implemented from February 2025.

► 7. Complaints handling and protection abroad

Complaints-handling mechanisms remain fragmented. Migrant workers typically seek assistance through Tanzanian embassies, family networks, or direct contact with PMO-LER or the ESU. Although Tanzania does not maintain designated labour attachés, Ministry officers are deployed to selected destination countries, including Oman and Saudi Arabia, to support case handling and liaison with employers.

Limited staffing and the absence of a formal attaché system continue to constrain systematic monitoring and timely responses to cases of abuse. Repatriation and emergency assistance often depend on ad hoc coordination, underscoring the need for structured protection mechanisms and clearer institutional roles.

► 8. Bilateral labour agreements

Tanzania has concluded bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) with Saudi Arabia (covering domestic and regular workers) and Qatar, and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with the United Arab Emirates and Oman. These agreements were developed through consultative processes involving relevant institutions and stakeholders.

Implementation challenges centre on monitoring, follow-up and enforcement rather than on agreement formulation. Limited embassy capacity and the absence of systematic compliance tracking reduce the effectiveness of BLAs as protection tools.

► 9. Key gaps and challenges

- Limited inspection and enforcement capacity PrEAs
- Fragmented coordination between mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar
- Uneven quality of pre-departure training
- Weak overseas protection and complaints handling
- Limited deployment data and digital integration

► 10. Priority recommendations

10.1. Operationalize the 2025 Guidelines through enforceable instruments

PMO-LER should translate the 2025 Guidelines into binding operational instruments, including standard operating procedures, compliance benchmarks and graduated sanctions. Enforcement actions should be recorded in ESMIS.

10.2. Strengthen inspection capacity and risk-based oversight

Inspection capacity should be expanded through the recruitment and training of inspectors. Risk-based inspections, informed by ESMIS data, should complement routine monitoring.

10.3. Introduce financial accountability mechanisms

Tanzania should explore proportionate financial guarantee mechanisms, such as pooled protection funds or insurance schemes, to support workers' compensation and repatriation.

10.4. Regulate informal intermediaries and strengthen awareness

Enforcement against unregistered intermediaries should be strengthened, alongside public awareness campaigns and recruiter verification tools.

10.5. Standardize pre-departure training

A national curriculum should be finalized with a defined duration, assessment standards and digital certification linked to ESMIS.

10.6. Enhance overseas worker protection

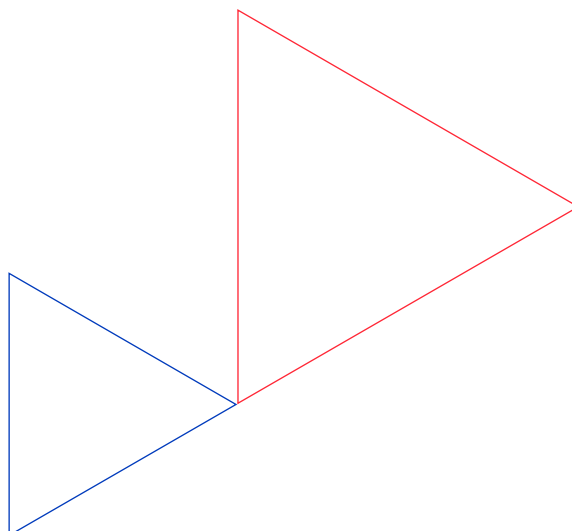
Labour focal officers should be designated in key embassies, supported by structured coordination between PMO-LER and MOFA.

10.7. Improve BLA implementation monitoring

A multi-stakeholder mechanism should track BLA implementation, review compliance data and inform renegotiation.

10.8. Strengthen coordination between Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar

Joint data-sharing protocols, harmonized inspections and coordinated enforcement between Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar should be institutionalized.



► 11. Annex

Recommendation area	Key actions	Responsible entity	Timeline
Digital governance (ESMIS)	Develop standard operating procedures; strengthen reporting; train users	PMO-LER, ESU	12–24 months
PrEA inspections	Recruit inspectors; digitize inspections	PMO-LER	12–36 months
Broker regulation	Enforce licensing; conduct public awareness campaigns	PMO-LER, police	12–24 months
Pre-departure training	Develop standard curriculum; ensure accreditation	PMO-LER, VETA, NIT	6–18 months
Overseas protection	Designate labour focal officers	MOFA, PMO-LER	12–36 months
Financial protection	Develop protection fund or insurance scheme	PMO-LER	18–36 months
BLAs	Monitor implementation; publish agreements	MOFA, PMO-LER	Ongoing
Coordination between Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar	Develop joint protocols; share data	PMO-LER, Zanzibar MoYEE	12–24 months

► 12. Conclusion

Tanzania has made meaningful progress in strengthening labour migration governance, particularly through the issuance of the 2025 Guidelines for Private Employment Agencies and increased institutional coordination across Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar. These measures have improved procedural clarity, reinforced fair recruitment standards and signalled the commitment of the government to protecting Tanzanian migrant workers while facilitating access to overseas employment opportunities.

Despite these advances, key structural and operational gaps persist. Enforcement and inspection capacity remains limited, financial accountability mechanisms for recruitment agencies are underdeveloped, and overseas protection arrangements rely heavily on ad hoc interventions rather than on structured systems. The distinct governance arrangements between Mainland

Tanzania and Zanzibar further underscore the need for stronger coordination, harmonized data sharing and joint oversight mechanisms. In addition, while bilateral labour agreements provide an important foundation for cooperation with destination countries, their impact is constrained by weak monitoring of implementation and limited embassy-level capacity.

Moving forward, the priority for Tanzania lies in operationalizing existing frameworks rather than introducing new ones. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, standardizing pre-departure training, enhancing digital governance through ESMIS and expanding overseas worker protection capacity will be critical to improving outcomes for migrant workers. With targeted investments in implementation, coordination and accountability, Tanzania is well-positioned to consolidate recent reforms and build a more effective, transparent and worker-centred labour migration governance system.



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