

A YOUTH CRIME REPORT

YOUTH AND JUVENILE
OFFENDING IN UGANDA

NOVEMBER
2025



United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime



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Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
CID	Criminal Investigations Department
CRC	Child Rights Convention
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DPP	Directorate of Public Prosecutions
JLOS	Justice, Law and Order Sector
LC(s)	Local Council(s)
PSWO	Probation and Social Welfare Officer
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPF	Uganda Police Force
UYDEL	Uganda Youth Development Link

Definition of Key Terms

1. **Age of Criminal Responsibility:** The minimum age at which a child is considered legally capable of committing a crime and can be held responsible under the criminal justice system. In Uganda, this age is 12 years (Children's Amendment Act, 2016)
2. **Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS):** A sector-wide government program in Uganda that brings together institutions responsible for administering justice, maintaining law and order, and promoting human rights, with the aim of ensuring coordinated, effective, and efficient service delivery.
3. **Juveniles:** Young persons who are not yet legally adults. In Uganda's justice system, this generally refers to children below 18 years who come into conflict with the law.
4. **Recidivism:** The tendency of a convicted offender to relapse into criminal behavior and reoffend after having been sanctioned or undergone intervention.
5. **Victimization:** The process of being harmed, exploited, or treated unfairly as a result of crime, abuse, or other forms of injustice.
6. **Youth Crime:** Refers to illegal acts or offences committed by individuals who are in their adolescent or young adult stages, typically defined within the age range of 12-30 years (though this range may vary by country or legal framework). It encompasses behaviours that violate the law and are punishable under criminal or juvenile justice systems
7. **Youth in Uganda:** According to the Uganda National Youth Policy, youth are persons aged 18-30 years.

Preface

This report provides a national overview of youth and juvenile crime in Uganda (2017-2024), highlighting key trends, causes, and responses. It reveals rising youth involvement in theft, drug abuse, and violent crime, driven by factors such as; poverty, unemployment, and weak social support. The report also highlights justice system efforts being undertaken to address youth crime, including diversion, rehabilitation, and community policing. It offers recommendations to prevent juvenile and youth crime.

The first of its kind, the report consists of the most desired information on youth and juvenile crime in Uganda. This report which is intended to provide the current national youth and juvenile crime status, is a summation of reliable data compiled from JLOS, Police crime reports and other data collection systems. It provides insightful views on offending youths, their victims and what happens when they enter the justice system.

The report gives insight to policy makers and other stakeholders, and hold youth accountable to live productive and responsible lives in Uganda. The Justice and social system must have accurate and reliable information in order to intervene where youth lives are in conflict with the law. The report covers the period 2017-2024 and can be accessed for use at both local and national levels.

UYDEL appreciates all institutions and individuals who tirelessly contributed to the compilation of this report, to all of them, we say thank you. Special thanks go to UNODC Kampala Office and the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Uganda who supported this exercise as part of the initiative titled “Strengthening Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Uganda”. Special regards to Haji Abdu Katende, the Executive Director of CIID, Dr. Umaru Serunjogi from Makerere University, Ms. Gertrude Nsonga, Dr. Rogers Kasirye, Mr. Rogers Mutaawe and Ms. Barbara Nakijoba (UYDEL Team) for leading this invaluable work.

Executive Summary

Youth and Juvenile Crime in Uganda (2017-2024)

Uganda continues to grapple with a complex and evolving landscape of youth and juvenile crime, shaped by deep-rooted social, economic, and structural vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect young people. With over 72% of the population aged below 30, youth remain both the country's greatest demographic opportunity and a group at heightened risk of involvement in criminal behaviour. This Executive Summary provides an integrated synthesis of crime trends from 2017-2024, highlighting key patterns, emerging risks, justice system challenges, and opportunities for evidence-based intervention and policy reform.

Overview of Youth Crime Trends (2017-2024).

Youth crime has remained a persistent and multifaceted challenge over the eight-year review period. Offences commonly committed by youth include theft, burglary, narcotics and drug-related offences, assault, robbery, homicide, and a range of sex-related crimes. While crime levels fluctuate year-to-year, the trendline demonstrates a significant involvement of youth in both petty and serious offences.

The period 2019-2021, marked by the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, saw notable spikes in crime. School closures, rising unemployment, shrinking household incomes, and psychosocial stress contributed to higher youth engagement in theft, break-ins, domestic violence, and drug abuse. These fluctuations underscore the strong relationship between national economic shocks and youth vulnerability to crime.

Patterns in Major Crime Categories:

1. **Theft and Break-ins:** Theft dominates youth crime, driven largely by poverty, low opportunities for decent work, and the survival demands of young people living in informal settlements.
2. **Assault and Violence:** Assault cases involving youth are frequently linked to alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and neighborhood conflicts. Limited access to conflict-resolution skills, mental health support, and safe recreational spaces exacerbates violent behavior among both in-school and out-of-school youth.

3. **Sex-Related Offences:** Sexual offences remain among the highest-reported categories, affecting youth both as perpetrators and victims. Many offenders have themselves experienced childhood sexual abuse, neglect, or early exposure to harmful sexual practices.

4. **Narcotics and Drug-Related Crimes:** Drug use and trafficking continue to rise among young people. Factors such as peer influence, unemployment, the proliferation of local substances (marijuana, khat, fuel inhalants, local brews), and gaps in enforcement contribute to drug-related offences.

5. **Robbery and Homicide:** Youth involvement in capital offences, including robbery with violence and homicide remains a critical concern. These offences are often committed by socially disconnected, unemployed males living in high-risk urban environments.

Structural Drivers and Vulnerabilities: The underlying drivers of youth crime are deeply structural and interconnected, including unemployment, poverty, limited education access, family breakdown, substance abuse, weak social support systems, psychosocial stressors, and weak law enforcement.

Youth Charged vs. Convicted: Justice System Gap: Across the eight-year period, the number of youths charged greatly exceeds those convicted. This mismatch reveals persistent challenges within the justice system, including poor investigations, insufficient forensic capabilities, case backlogs, lost files, and gaps in legal representation.

Victimization and the Victim-Offender Overlap: A critical insight is that many youth offenders have first been victims of poverty, neglect, exploitation, or violence. Their involvement in crime often emerges from early traumatic experiences, sexual abuse, exposure to domestic violence, and substance dependency.

Emerging Issues:

Capital Offences, Violent Extremism, and Juvenile Crime: Capital offences involving youth remain a significant concern. Risks of violent extremism are rising, especially among unemployed urban youth. Juvenile crime involving children below 18 requires specialized child-friendly justice processes, diversion, and rehabilitation.

Institutional Challenges: Uganda's crime-prevention and justice-response systems face multiple bottlenecks, including low staffing, incomplete digital crime records, inadequate facilities, overcrowded detention centers, and weak reintegration mechanisms.

Role of Civil Society: Civil society; particularly Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL), plays a pivotal role in prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration through drug prevention, vocational training, psychosocial support, safe spaces, mentorship, and community outreach.

Key Policy Recommendations

- Develop a national crime prevention strategy to establish a clear, coordinated framework for preventing crime by all stakeholders.
- Increase awareness on crime prevention in the most at-risk communities including schools and tertiary institutions
- Expand youth livelihood and social protection programmes.
- Strengthen school retention and peacebuilding programmes.
- Modernize digital crime data systems.
- Expand restorative justice and community-based rehabilitation.
- Strengthen family and community support.
- Improve justice chain coordination.
- Increase access to substance-use prevention and treatment services
- Scale up reintegration support to reduce recidivism.

Conclusion

Youth crime in Uganda is a multidimensional challenge requiring a coordinated national response. Sustainable crime prevention hinges on addressing root causes; poverty, unemployment, weak social support, and psychosocial distress, while strengthening justice systems and expanding rehabilitation services.

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

1.1 Background and Youth Crime in Uganda (2017-2024).

Youth crime remains a critical challenge and growing concern in Uganda. It encompasses a wide range of offenses committed by young people, typically between the ages of 12 and 30 years. While youth crime is a global issue, its prevalence is disproportionately higher in developing countries. Uganda being one of them. Between 2023 and 2024, crime reports indicate a surge in offenses involving youth, ranging from petty theft to serious crimes such as robbery, assault, and homicide.

According to the Uganda Police Annual Crime Report, 2023, young offenders have been involved in crimes such as theft, burglary, drug and substance abuse, assault, murder, robbery, manslaughter, arson, shoplifting, rioting, phone snatching, and sexual violence. These crimes are often symptomatic of deeper, systemic issues affecting young people in both urban and rural settings. In Kampala, for instance, several slums report increasing numbers of adolescents involved in phone theft, drug trafficking, and gang activity indicative of a broader social and economic crisis including poverty and unemployment (Kalungi, 2024).

Though Africa has since independence registered tremendous gains in combating youth crime, considerable challenges still face the continent especially from youths aged 15-24 who in 2015 were 226 million and expected to increase by 42% by 2030 (UN Youth demographic overview, 2015). There is need to utilize the youth population and turn it into a demographic dividend. The challenges facing Uganda's youth are not different from the rest of the countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Uganda National Population and Housing Census 2024, reveals that an astounding 72.3% of Uganda's population is aged 30 years and below, representing over 33 million people out of the total 45.9 million. According to O'Higgins (2000), the leading cause of youth engagement in crime is unemployment.

The consequences of youth unemployment such as social exclusion, drug abuse, crime and social unrest can damage society as a whole. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics

(UBOS) 2017 Statistical Abstract, the national youth unemployment rate in 2015 stood at 6.2%, with Kampala recording a rate three times higher (15%). In this context the largest number of Children in Conflict with the Law are socio-economic victims, denied of their rights to education, health, shelter and protection, hence predisposing them to acts of offense. This is coupled with the fact that some of these children come from dysfunctional families, with family characteristics including poor parenting practices as well as child abuse. The Violence against Children Survey in Uganda, 2018 highlighted that homes and the community were one of the major environments for child abuse. This has a great link to juvenile delinquency, explaining the increased numbers of children in conflict with the law. The whole situation for children in conflict with the law is aggravated by the fact that most of them have little or no chance of gaining access to justice, as they are unable to afford the services of a paid lawyer or bail and are therefore alienated from mainstream justice. This in essence is a violation of the children's right to liberty and to a fair and speedy trial. In addition, they may not have supportive environments in the family and the communities, when they are resettled or reintegrated.

Juveniles too, are vulnerable to committing crime and need to be assisted to reform. Before colonization, when children offended, they were treated as special cases and given light punishment. The collapse of the traditional system caused partly by colonization meant the introduction of new legal procedures to address wrongs committed by children in society.

There is therefore need for all stakeholders to undertake early intervention to prevent youths and juveniles from embarking on a life of crime. Greenwood. P (pg 1, 2008) writes:

“Preventing youth and juvenile crime not only saves young lives from being wasted, but also prevents the onset of adult criminal careers and thus reduces the burden of crime on its victims and on society”

1.2 Objectives of the Report

This report is intended to achieve the following objectives;

1. Providing a current national overview of youth and juvenile crime in Uganda (2017-2024) giving considerable attention to both serious (capital) and minor offences.
2. Highlighting key trends and causes of youth crime in Uganda.

3. Highlighting efforts undertaken to address youth and juvenile crime in Uganda.
4. Making recommendations that are required to address youth and juvenile crime in the country.

1.3 Scope of the Youth Crime Report

1.3.1 Content Scope

The Youth Crime Report focuses on children and young people (juveniles and youth) who are in conflict with the law as accused persons. These are individuals whose actions result in the breaking of criminal law and thus come into contact with the criminal justice system. Importantly, this report excludes children or youth who interact with the law as victims of crime. In compiling this report, the team considered a juvenile an individual over the age of 12 and under the age of 18 while a youth as an individual aged between 18 and 30.

The primary objective is to provide insight into the magnitude and trends of youth crime, disaggregated by age, gender, and type of offence. The report gives considerable attention to both serious (capital) and minor offences, offering a balanced perspective on the scope and nature of youth crime.

Additionally, the report highlights the emerging patterns of youth crime and provides thoughtful considerations for prevention strategies. It underscores the importance of proactive approaches in addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour among young people. We extend our appreciation to the Justice sector stakeholders, particularly the Uganda Police Force, for their contribution to data collection and provision.

1.3.2 Time Scope

The report covers the period 2017-2024.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The report employed 3 theories, the Strain theory, the Social-learning theory and the Control theory. These 3 theories were chosen because of their ability to illuminate the different aspects of youth and juvenile crime in Uganda.

1.4.1 Strain Theory (Robert Merton) 1938

Strain Theory, a sociological and criminological framework developed by Robert K. Merton in 1938, is particularly relevant in the Ugandan context, where high youth unemployment, poverty, and inequality create significant barriers to achieving success through legitimate means. Many young people, especially those living in urban slums and rural areas, experience frustration and disillusionment due to a lack of economic and social opportunities. This resulting “strain” often compels them to engage in criminal activities such as theft, drug trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation as alternative survival strategies. For instance, youth involved in phone snatching or boda-boda (motorcycle) theft rings frequently cite unemployment and lack of income as their primary motivations.

1.4.2 Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura, 1977)

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in 1977, posits that criminal behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and interaction with others, particularly peers and environmental influences. In Uganda, peer influence plays a significant role in shaping youth behaviour, especially in areas with high levels of gang activity and limited economic opportunities. For example, in Kampala’s informal settlements such as Katwe and Kisenyi, many young people become involved in peer groups engaged in drug use, petty theft, or other delinquent activities. Bandura’s theory helps explain the effectiveness of interventions that focus on peer education and positive role modelling. Programs like those run by the Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) leverage this approach by using trained peer educators and mentors to promote pro-social behaviour and reduce youth involvement in crime.

1.4.3 Control Theory (Travis Hirschi) 1969

Control Theory, developed by Travis Hirschi in 1969, argues that individuals are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour when they have strong social bonds to family, school, and broader society. In the Ugandan context, many youth offenders come from broken or unstable households and lack consistent parental supervision, school engagement, or community support. The absence of these social bonds increases the likelihood of delinquent behaviour. Programs that strengthen family structures, reintegrate school dropouts, and promote mentorship such as school-based initiatives or church-led outreach programs have shown promise in reducing youth crime. Control Theory underpins many rehabilitation and

reintegration efforts employed by juvenile remand homes and probation services, which aim to restore or build these critical social ties.

These theories help us understand crime in Uganda by linking criminal behaviour to structural challenges like poverty, unemployment, and weak family systems. They show that youth often turn to crime due to frustration (strain), negative peer influence (social learning), or lack of strong social bonds (control). Understanding these root causes enables policymakers and social workers to design targeted interventions that address both individual behaviour and broader social conditions.

1.5 Root Causes of Youth and Juvenile Crime in Uganda

Youth and juvenile crime in Uganda stem from a complex mix of long-term and immediate factors. No single cause can fully explain juvenile delinquency; and youth crime rather, it results from an interplay of influences at individual, family, community, and societal levels. Here below are some of the root causes of youth and juvenile crime in Uganda.

1.5.1 Poverty and unemployment.

Poverty and unemployment are major factors that drive youth and juvenile to crime in Uganda. Much as Uganda's poverty rate has declined from 56.4% in 1992/93 to 20.3% in 2019/20 (UBOS 2021) the country's poverty levels remain high and progress has stagnated over the past decade, with fluctuations and minimal improvements. The World Bank Document: Strengthening Resilience to Accelerate Poverty Reduction (2022) estimates the poverty rate to be 42% in Eastern region and 40% in Northern region, where most rely on subsistence agriculture. Key drivers of persistent poverty include low agricultural productivity, limited economic transformation, and unequal access to basic services. Urban poverty has also risen, exacerbating youth vulnerability. As opportunities remain scarce, particularly for unskilled young people, many face unemployment and hopelessness.

This economic strain contributes to youth involvement in crime, as some turn to illegal activities to survive. Limited education, poor infrastructure, and weak job markets heighten this risk. Poverty often drives youth into criminal activity as a means of survival. In Kampala slum areas such as Katwe and Bwaise. Some young people engage in theft or drug selling simply to earn daily income.

1.5.2. Broken families and lack of parental guidance.

Dysfunctional homes, domestic violence, and absent parenting contribute significantly to deviant behaviour. Without proper role models, many youths turn to peer groups and gangs for support and identity.

1.5.3. Narcotics/Drug and substance abuse.

Drug abuse in Uganda is on the rise, with the 2024 Police Crime Report recording over 2,500 narcotic-related cases (likely an underrepresentation). Commonly abused substances include cannabis, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine (Ice), ecstasy, marijuana, alcohol, and synthetic drugs like "kuber" and aviation fuel (jet fuel sniffing). Other substances include smokeless tobacco, benzene-derived alcohol, and prescription drugs with high ethanol content. Drug barons increasingly target youth in schools, universities, and out of school, with access facilitated by peers, dealers, and online platforms. The Uganda Anti-Narcotics Police and Forensics Directorate lead efforts to disrupt supply chains and support prosecutions. However, challenges such as limited funding, corruption, weak community support, and delays in prosecution hinder progress. Moreover, enforcement of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (2024) remains weak due to lack of regulations and financial resources.

1.5.4 Synthetic Drugs

The issue of synthetic drugs in Uganda is a growing public health, economic, and national security threat. These substances artificially manufactured using chemicals are often more potent than natural narcotics. While globally recognized as a challenge, Uganda has limited data on their prevalence, though studies suggest an alarming rise in usage (Kwagala, 2022; Sekamatte et al., 2023).

However, as highlighted in the previous case of drug and substance abuse, challenges such as limited funding, corruption, weak community support, and delays in prosecution hinder progress. Moreover, enforcement of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (2024) remains weak due to lack of regulations and financial resources.

Findings from a rapid Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) study conducted in July 2024 as part of a regional US-Fulbright Humphrey Fellows Alumni project which focused on Uganda, Nigeria, and Togo, showed that while public health professionals had strong awareness of synthetic drugs and their risks, many youth users, though aware of these dangers,

continued using them mainly in social settings like parties and clubs. The most frequently mentioned substances included codeine-based cough syrup, tramadol, and various opioids like morphine, fentanyl, and oxycodone. Locally known stimulants such as “Ice” (methamphetamine), omulondo, and energy-enhancing herbal mixtures were also widely used.

1.5.5 Urbanization and overcrowding.

Rapid urban growth without corresponding infrastructure and social services leads to slums, joblessness, and idle youth. For example, Kampala’s informal settlements are breeding grounds for gangs and organized youth crime (Kamara, Namugambe, Egessa, Kamanga & Renzaho, 2019).

1.5.6 Peer pressure and negative adult influence.

Young people often engage in crime under the influence of peers or adults who exploit them for criminal activities (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Murray et al., 2022). Peer pressure to prove oneself within a group is a key motivator, especially among adolescent boys.

1.5.7 Lack of education and recreation opportunities.

Many youths drop out of school due to lack of fees or interest, leaving them idle and vulnerable to criminal behaviour. A lack of recreational facilities also means fewer positive outlets for their energy.

1.5.8 Weak law enforcement and corruption.

Delays in prosecution, poor investigations, and bribery within the justice system make it easier for youth to commit crimes with little fear of consequences.

1.5.9 Psychosocial factors.

Mental health issues, trauma, feelings of emptiness and hopelessness, and lack of purpose drive some youths toward destructive behaviour. The stigma surrounding mental health also prevents many from seeking help.

1.5.10 Cultural and moral decline.

A weakening of religious and traditional norms, coupled with exposure to violent or materialistic content on social media and television, has influenced youth behaviour. In many urban areas, crime is glamorized among peer groups.

1.5.11 Ignorance of the Law.

The criminal code provides that ignorance of the law by a person who commits an offense is not an excuse for committing that offense (Penal Code Act, Cap. 120). However, in reality, there are many youths in Uganda who commit offenses out of ignorance of the law.

1.5.12 Inability to measure the consequences.

Some youths commit crime because they lack awareness of the consequences of the crimes they are committing.

1.5.13 Disrespect of the Law

Some youths commit crime knowing very well that what they are doing is against the law but all the same go ahead to do it out of disrespect of the law (Nduggwa, 2015; Nuwohirwe, 2022)

1.5.14 Exposure to violence.

Exposure to violence for example through the media and an unstable family or neighbourhood environment is a significant factor contributing to youth crime in Uganda since it can lead to negative consequences like substance abuse, mental health and aggressive behaviour.

1.5.15 Influence of self-seekers.

This involves self-seekers who may manipulate or incite youth into crime for their selfish political or economic gains.

1.6 Emerging Trends, Capital Offences, Violent Extremism and Juvenile Crime

1.6.1 Capital offences involving youth

Uganda has recorded a worrying rise in capital offenses involving youth (The Uganda Police Force's Annual Crime Report, 2024). These include serious crimes such as murder, aggravated robbery, and defilement. Many of these crimes are committed under the influence of drugs, during gang activity, or as a form of retaliation. For instance, in 2023, the Uganda Police reported multiple incidents of mob justice and youth led gang attacks in Kampala and Wakiso districts, often resulting in fatalities. Some young offenders involved in these crimes are below the age of 18, complicating prosecution and rehabilitation.

1.6.2 Violent Extremism and Youth Radicalization

Another emerging threat is the growing involvement of youth in violent extremism. Although Uganda has not experienced the level of radicalization seen in some neighbouring countries, there are signs of extremist ideologies taking root among vulnerable youth. Some are recruited through online platforms or lured by promises of purpose, identity, or financial and material support. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and other radical groups have reportedly targeted unemployed and uneducated youth in rural and urban communities for radicalisation and recruitment (BRICS, 2019). In response, Uganda has initiated counter-extremism campaigns, including peace education and community-based surveillance, but the reach is still limited.

1.6.3 Juvenile Crime and Delinquency

In Uganda, juvenile offenders also referred to as children in conflict with the law are individuals under the age of 18 who come into contact with the justice system due to suspected or accused criminal activity (The Children Act, Cap 62).

Children and adolescents under the age of 18 are increasingly being implicated in criminal behaviour. Juvenile offenders are often neglected by society and fail to receive adequate rehabilitation support. Common crimes among juveniles include pickpocketing, burglary, assault, and drug trafficking. Some are also used as pawns by adult criminals. Juvenile justice institutions, such as remand homes and rehabilitation centres, are underfunded and overcrowded, often failing to address the underlying needs of young offenders. For example, The Uganda Human Rights Commission Report, 2021 cited Naguru Remand Home in Kampala for holding minors beyond the legal time limits, often in poor conditions. Without quality education, counselling, or reintegration programs, many of these young offenders become repeat criminals (recidivisms), further fuelling the crime cycle.

1.7 Legal and Institutional Structure

- **Age of Criminal Responsibility:** A child below 12 years cannot be held criminally liable. However, those 12 years and above can be prosecuted for criminal acts (Children Act, Cap 59)

- **Juvenile Justice System:** Uganda follows international juvenile justice principles, ensuring that children are treated differently from adults in legal proceedings (UNICEF Uganda, 2019; Uganda UNCRC Report, 2021).
- **Detention & Rehabilitation:** Juvenile offenders are typically placed in remand homes or rehabilitation centers, such as Naguru Remand Home and Kampiringisa Rehabilitation Centre, rather than adult prisons.
- **Court Process:** Juvenile cases according to the Children Act, Cap. 59 are handled by Family and Children Courts, which prioritize rehabilitation over punishment.
- **Legal Protections:** The Children Act, Cap. 59 emphasizes child-friendly procedures, including access to legal representation and efforts to reintegrate juveniles into society.

Uganda's juvenile justice system emphasizes a child-centred, rights-based approach, aligning with international standards like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The Children Act, as amended in 2016, underscores the principle that detention should be a last resort, with a focus on rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

1.8 Recidivism.

Is the tendency of a previously convicted person to re-offend (Langan & Levin, 2002; Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In juvenile detention, it refers to minors committing crimes again after release. Reports show that the rates of recidivism for youth and juvenile offenders in Uganda are high. For example, the UBOS report (2021) indicated that 37% of released juvenile offenders returned to criminal activities between 2017 and 2018. The causes for this situation are many and varied and include social-economic factors (e.g. poverty, unemployment and lack of parental care), ineffective rehabilitation programs and weak institutional frameworks among others.

1.9 Consequences of Youth Crime

The impact of youth crime is far-reaching, affecting not only the offenders but also families, communities, the social fabric and national development. The ripple effect of crime can cause emotional, psychological and social disruptions. Key consequences include:

1.9.1 Increased crime rates

Youth crime can lead to a higher likelihood of youths to continue to indulge in criminal and gang activities contributing to a higher crime rate in the community (BRICS, 2019).

1.9.2 Disruption of economic stability of families and communities.

Victims of crime may experience economic strain due to property loss, injury, hospital bills, loss of a family member among others leading to financial insecurity, debts and poverty.

1.9.3 Loss of trust between community members

A community with high crime rate may face loss of trust between its community members leading to social isolation and break down of families. Also, community members may resist to engage in community initiatives resulting into disconnectedness between them.

1.9.4 Psychological consequences

Youth crime (and crime in general) can lead to psychological consequences resulting into emotional, cognitive and behavioural reactions including anxiety, depression, fear, psychiatric illness and trauma-devastating impact on the overall well-being of the youth involved in crime and their communities in general (UYDEL PCVE Youth Training Manual, 2025).

1.9.5 Effects on trade and commerce

According to the UYDEL PCVE Youth Training Manual, 2025, youth crime and its resultant consequences including insecurity, violence and uncertainty have undermined the country's economic sector leading to closure or loss of businesses, increased cost of doing business, scaring away local and foreign investors; and tourists thereby increasing the levels of poverty and unemployment and loss of foreign currency earnings.

1.9.6 Increased government expenditure on security and other related activities.

Youth crime (and crime in general) has forced government to divert its meagre resources away from provision of crucial services to its citizens like health care, quality education and infrastructure development to funding activities geared towards increased security measures

causing anger in the population and feeding into cycle of crime in the country (UYDEL PCVE Youth Training Manual, 2025).

1.9.7 Violent young generation

Youth crime in Uganda has nurtured a violent young generation that considers crime as normal and feel happy to engage in crime.

1.9.8 Threat to peace, security and safety.

Youth crime in Uganda poses a big threat to the peace, security and safety of communities in the country. Youths have engaged in crimes such as murder, rape, theft and assault among others thereby disrupting peace, security and safety of people in the country and leading to a decline in their quality of life.

1.9.9 Health and behavioural consequences.

Youth and juvenile crime can lead to emotional instability, paranoia, hallucinations, insomnia, increased risk of suicide and self-harm and physical symptoms like nausea, vomiting, and increased heart rate.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Method of Compiling the Report

The preparation of this report was informed by data obtained from credible institutional sources, which were systematically analysed to ensure accuracy, reliability, and relevance. The team adopted mixed convergent methods of data collection, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Notably, the report primarily utilized quantitative methods, as it relied heavily on numerical and statistical analyses to interpret trends and patterns. The data sources included:

- Records from the Justice and Law Sector on juvenile crime (2017-2024);
- Publications from the Institute for Criminal Policy Research;
- Uganda Police Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024); and
- Selected reports from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS).

The compilation team recognizes and appreciates the invaluable contribution of these institutions for their continued commitment to data collection and dissemination, which made the development of this report possible (See reference notes and links).

2.2 Challenges

a) Inconsistency in capturing youth data.

A key limitation noted during the process of compiling this report is that some official data and reports the team came across were general and not categorized by age and gender. For example, some police reports omit age and gender information, which poses a challenge for drawing clear conclusions and planning effective interventions.

However, the current status of the available data reveals room for improvement; especially in areas such as location-specific crime trends, and detailed age categorization. Enhanced data quality will support more robust and actionable analysis in future.

b) Deviations in the age of a Youth

The team faced a challenge of deviations in official documents about the age of the youth. For example, the National Youth Council Act identifies a youth as an individual aged between 18 and 30; the National Youth Policy identified a youth as an individual aged between 15 and 30; while some police reports identified a youth as an individual aged between 18 and 35. These deviations presented a challenge to the team while interpreting the data.

c) Incomplete data

Many crime reports the team came across in the process of compiling this report present figures of those arrested, charged and convicted but omit data on cases that are either withdrawn, discontinued or dismissed. Thus, the trends/picture remain incomplete.

d) Data for the year 2021 unavailable

Despite enormous efforts, the team failed to access police crime data for the year 2021. This has presented great challenges to the team in its data analysis. However, the team has optimally used the available data to compile this report.

Chapter Three: Current Interventions to address Crime among Youths

3.0. Interventions that have Attempted to Address Crime among the Youth in Uganda.

Uganda has implemented various strategies (legal, social and a few other economic and PVE efforts to address youth crime, including:

3.1 Government interventions in Addressing Juvenile and Youth Crime

3.1.1 Uganda Police Force

The Uganda Police Force (UPF) is the national law enforcement agency, established in 1962 at the time of Uganda's independence. It is mandated under the 1995 Constitution and the Police Act to protect life and property, preserve law and order, prevent and detect crime, and maintain internal security.

- Community Policing Programme.

The Government of Uganda, through its security agencies particularly the Police has actively promoted community policing, which has contributed to a reduction in crime. Community policing focuses on building strong, collaborative relationships between the police and the public, emphasizing trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility. The programme specifically targets youth crime by fostering mutual trust, encouraging public involvement in crime prevention, and promoting early reporting of suspicious activities. Key strategies include public education, neighbourhood watch schemes, and community patrols. Unlike traditional policing models that may cause feelings of mistrust and marginalization, community policing engages citizens as partners in maintaining safety. It empowers communities to work alongside law enforcement to prevent crime and improve public security. The Police Annual Crime Report, 2022 reveals that this approach has proven effective in reducing youth involvement in crime and is increasingly recognized by the government as a valuable strategy for early crime detection and sustainable peace. The initiative continues to gain support across Uganda.

- Investigating and detecting crime, arresting suspects, and supporting the prosecution process

The Uganda Police play a vital role in maintaining law and order through a range of core functions. These include investigating and detecting crime, arresting suspects, and supporting

the prosecution process during court trials. Police officers gather evidence, interview witnesses, and ensure that cases are properly documented to support successful prosecutions and convictions. Their collaboration with prosecutors helps strengthen legal proceedings and promotes justice.

Beyond law enforcement, the police also play a preventive role by engaging with communities to deter crime. Through these combined efforts, the Uganda Police contribute significantly to public safety, justice delivery, and the rule of law

- Diversion to reform children in conflict with the law

In 2019, Uganda launched new Diversion Guidelines to reform how children in conflict with the law are treated, especially those who commit petty offences. Introduced by the Uganda Police Force in partnership with UNICEF, the guidelines aim to provide child-friendly justice services and reduce the negative effects of formal judicial proceedings on minors. Instead of going to court, children under 18 who commit minor offences will be rehabilitated through alternative, non-judicial methods such as counselling and reconciliation with the victims.

This approach seeks to prevent re-offending and reduce the burden on the formal justice system. For serious offences, however, cases will still be referred to a magistrate or judge. The guidelines align with the Children (Amendment) Act 2016, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. UNICEF emphasized the importance of building a justice system that is both responsive and respectful of children's rights, calling the guidelines a major step forward in protecting vulnerable youth. Although Uganda's national diversion rate stands at 76.3%, many police officers are still unfamiliar with the concept.

3.1.2 The Role of the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) in Reducing Crime and enhancing security in Uganda

This report draws on data and progress made under the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS), a sector-wide approach adopted by the Government of Uganda to coordinate the efforts of institutions responsible for upholding the rule of law, human rights, and the administration of justice. JLOS serves as a critical pillar in Uganda's national development framework, with a core mandate of strengthening justice systems, reducing crime, and enhancing public security across the country.

JLOS Uganda brings together a broad range of institutions including the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs (MOJCA), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Judiciary, Uganda Police Force (UPF), Uganda Prisons Service (UPS), Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Uganda Law Reform Commission (ULRC), Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (Probation and Juvenile Justice), among others. This integrated approach fosters greater coordination, efficiency, and collaboration across justice-related institutions, enabling more comprehensive and responsive interventions to address crime and promote legal reform.

A key contribution of JLOS is the enhancement of the criminal justice system, ensuring that investigations, prosecutions, and judicial processes are conducted in a timely and professional manner. This has contributed to the reduction of case backlogs, improved conviction rates, and a strengthened deterrent against criminal behaviour. Efforts have also been made to promote access to justice, particularly for vulnerable populations, including women, children, and persons with disabilities.

Additionally, JLOS emphasizes offender rehabilitation and reintegration through the Uganda Prisons Service, helping reduce recidivism and supporting the successful return of ex-offenders to society. Community policing, legal education, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms have been deployed to resolve conflicts at the community level, reducing the escalation of violence and building trust between citizens and the justice system.

Through ongoing legal reforms, institutional capacity building, and commitment to human rights and accountability, JLOS continues to promote a culture of lawfulness in Uganda. By ensuring that justice is both accessible and equitable, the sector plays a pivotal role in creating a safer, more secure, and just society for all Ugandans.

3.1.3 Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in supporting children in conflict with law

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) plays a central role in supporting children in conflict with the law. Through the Department of Youth and Children Affairs; formerly the Department of Probation and Social Welfare, the Ministry oversees probation services and remand homes across the country.

- Probation and Social Welfare Services

Probation and Social Welfare Officers (PSWOs), guided by the Probation Act, Cap. 132 and Children Act, Cap.59 supervise children at risk or in conflict with the law. They support Family and Children Courts (FCCs) by preparing Social Inquiry Reports and recommending appropriate interventions. In urgent situations, a PSWO can place a child in a safe environment for up to 48 hours before they must appear before an FCC or Local Council Court (LCC).

PSWOs also work with local leaders to identify at-risk children and strengthen community-based child protection systems. Their reports help courts and prosecutors understand the child's background and make informed decisions.

- Juvenile Remand Homes and Rehabilitation

MoGLSD (2018) indicates that the MOGLSD manages seven juvenile remand homes located in Kampala, Mbale, Arua, Masindi, Fort Portal, Gulu, and Kabale districts, as well as the Kampiringisa National Rehabilitation Centre in Mpigi district. These facilities serve children aged 12 to 17 who are admitted through court orders.

Key services offered at Remand homes and Rehabilitation Centre include:

- ☐ Counselling and psycho-social support
- ☐ Vocational training (e.g. tailoring, carpentry, gardening, poultry)
- ☐ Recreational activities and spiritual support
- ☐ Family tracing and reintegration
- ☐ Social workers in remand homes facilitate the reintegration of children into their families and communities, addressing factors that may have contributed to offending.

3.1.4 Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP)

This is a government initiative launched in 2013/14 aimed at addressing youth crime in Uganda. The programme supports unemployed youth aged 18-30 through interest-free

revolving funds and skills training. It promotes self-employment and income generation, helping reduce poverty and youth related crime (3ie Independent Evaluation, 2019).

3.1.5 Ministry of Education and Sports

The Ministry of Education and Sports has undertaken several initiatives aimed at addressing youth and juvenile crime in Uganda. These include:

- Universal Education

To improve access to education and reduce crime among youth and juvenile, the government of Uganda introduced Universal Primary Education (1997) and Universal Secondary Education (2007). These programmes have increased literacy and provided more youth with opportunities to build a stable future.

- Teachers' Role in Youth and Juvenile Crime Prevention

Teachers are critical in identifying and responding to signs of abuse, neglect, or vulnerability. As mandated reporters, they are required to follow child protection procedures and cooperate with authorities. Positive relationships with teachers also provide emotional support and stability, helping reduce the likelihood of youth and juvenile getting involved in crime.

3.1.6 Security Efforts

Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development. (2025). *Budget Speech FY 2025/26* noted that the government also invests in national security through training and equipping agencies like the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), the Uganda Police Force (UPF) and Internal Security Organization (ISO) among others, to maintain public safety and deter crime and subsequently help to reduce the level of crime among them.

3.1.7 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

Civil societies normally act as a vital "first line of defence" in preventing youth crime by implementing community-based initiatives and collaborating with government and other stakeholders to address the challenge of youth crime.

In Uganda, a few CSOs are directly involved in youth crime prevention, though several support juvenile justices. Legal Aid Service Providers (LASPs) like, LASPNET, FIDA-U and the LDC

Legal Aid Clinic assist children in conflict with the law. FIDA-U handles numerous child maintenance cases, while LAC represents juvenile offenders. The Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN) unites child-focused organisations that advocate for the rights of children in the country. CSOs like Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) contribute to awareness on crime prevention, research, documentation and rehabilitation of affected young people. Other CSOs also help align national policies and practices with international child protection standards.

Save the Children has been at the forefront, advocating for child-friendly justice systems, supporting diversion programs, and strengthening child protection mechanisms. Other notable organizations include Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF), which provides legal aid and promotes access to justice for vulnerable youth; Platform for Labour Action (PLA), which works to protect young people from exploitation and legal vulnerabilities. Raising Voices, known for its violence prevention work targeting youth through community mobilization; and Justice Defenders, which supports youth-led initiatives and monitors human rights abuses, including in the juvenile justice sector.

Case: Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL)

Currently Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) is implementing a five-year Strengthening Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme with support by UNODC and The Government of Netherlands. The project achieved significant milestones from 2024, advancing efforts to build safer communities through youth crime and drug, violent extremism prevention and empowerment.

Training of Trainers (ToT) in the application of the Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) manual in Kampala, Namayingo, and Bugiri, reaching 129 participants (77% male, 23% female). Trainees acquired skills in crime and drug, violent extremism.

Community Policing Sessions were facilitated across Bugiri, Namayingo, Iganga, Kampala and Lira districts, engaging 2,516 participants (75% male, 25% female). These sessions strengthened collaboration between communities and law enforcement, enhancing grassroots interventions to combat crime, violent extremism, and drug abuse.

Youth Consultations were held in Kampala, Namayingo, and Bugiri, involving 202 youth (54% male, 46% female). The participants gained leadership skills, knowledge in peacebuilding, and a better understanding of their roles in preventing violent extremism. Empowered youth are now active peace ambassadors within their communities.

The Youth peace ambassador events across Wakiso, Namayingo, and Bugiri, training reached 1,004 youth (60% male, 40% female). The participants were equipped with practical skills in drugs, crime and violent extremism and also to address radicalization and extremism at the grassroots level, creating peace and stability within their communities. At the end of the sessions, all the youths were recruited as Youth Peace Ambassadors, the first ever youth peace ambassadors in Uganda. All these were awarded certificates and this appeared to be a very innovative approach.

Through Vocational skills livelihood training targeted 50 at-risk youth (70% male, 30% female) in hairdressing (9 participants: 8 females, 1 male), electronics (15 males), plumbing (10 males), motorbike repair (7 males), and catering (9 participants: 7 females, 2 males). In addition, these young people were provided psychosocial support, engaged in sports, life skills and resilience building, crime prevention, drug abuse, and violent extremism. All these had a history of drug use, crime and arrests, trafficking, homeless, gangs, sexual exploitation. The youth gained employable skills, enhancing their self-reliance and reducing their vulnerability to criminal behavior. Psychosocial support was also offered to aid reintegration and mental well-being. These were resettled, reintegrated and attached to internship placements for job opportunities.

3.1.8 Legal Framework

Uganda's legal framework includes the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Control Act (2024) and the National Drug Authority Act (1993). Agencies like Uganda Revenue Authority, Police Forensic Laboratory, and Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) which are tasked with regulating and monitoring synthetic drug importation, distribution, and use. However, coordinated enforcement and community-level awareness remain limited. Urgent action is needed to bridge the gap between awareness and behaviour, improve data collection, and implement youth centred interventions.

3.1.9 Sports, Music and Drama Participation.

The government of Uganda together with other stakeholders have made efforts to promote the engagement of youths in sports and drama in order to occupy them and to prevent idleness or possible conscription into criminal activities. Sports and drama have also been earmarked as alternative sources of employment and income generation for many unemployed youths in the country.

The UNODC for example, emphasizes the role sports can play to address the root causes crime and diverting the youth from violence and drug use and empowering them as agents of positive social change. It advocates for the use of sports as a tool for crime prevention by engaging youths through structured programs like “Line Up, Live Up”, which help to build essential life skills, foster resilience, promote social inclusion and tolerance and strengthen community ties and ultimately help to prevent crime among the youth. Here is a link for further reading about the Line Up Live Up Programme (<https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/sports/lineupliveup.html>)

3.1.10 Peacebuilding, Crime Prevention and Counter-Extremism Education Programmes.

Several efforts have been made by both government and other stakeholders like CSOs, educational, religious and cultural institutions; families; and local communities to educate the youths about the dangers of involvement in crime. Through educational, awareness' raising and counselling programmes, the youth are also imparted with knowledge and skills about leadership, self-esteem, conflict resolution, civic responsibility, dealing with mental and physical strains, and building cultures of peace and non-violence. These programmes have

helped to keep many youths away from crime. Also, in schools, curriculum, seminars and awareness programmes.

3.1.11 Use of Technology and the Media. (Television, Radios)

These have been utilized in Uganda to prevent crime among the youth. These offer opportunities for education, awareness and community engagement. For example, digital platforms such as U-Report are used to engage youth in awareness campaigns about drug abuse, crime prevention and personal development. Also, the government and other stakeholders have installed CCTV cameras in high-risk areas to prevent and detect crime.

3.2 UN Agencies and International bodies

In Uganda, there are several UN Agencies and international bodies that are playing vital roles in addressing crime among youth and juveniles. These include:

- **The Role of UNODC in addressing crime and enhancing Justice in Uganda**

The role of international bodies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in strengthening Uganda's criminal justice system and addressing youth crime cannot be overstated. UNODC has played a pivotal role in promoting access to justice, enhancing institutional capacity, and supporting crime prevention efforts, particularly among vulnerable youth populations through private and public engagement.

In Uganda, UNODC has actively supported the government in implementing programs aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable institutions. A key component of this work involves capacity building for law enforcement, judicial officers, and community-based organizations, including youth-focused NGOs working to prevent crime rehabilitate and reintegrate young offenders.

UNODC has also facilitated resource mobilization to help civil society organization strengthen grassroots interventions and has promoted multistakeholder partnerships with civil society, academic institutions, and government actors involved in crime prevention. These collaborations aim to enhance early intervention, legal aid, and prisons programs. Through technical assistance, policy support and advocacy. UNODC continues to be a crucial ally in

Uganda's journey toward a more just and secure society; where youth are protected, empowered, and given meaningful alternatives to crime.

Additionally, with support from partners such as the Kingdom of the Netherlands Embassy, Uganda has made strides in preventing violent extremism, managing extremist prisoners, and improving access to justice in underserved communities. These efforts contribute to reducing recidivism and addressing the root causes of crime, including poverty, marginalization, and lack of opportunity.

- **UNICEF's role in strengthening Juvenile Justice in Uganda**

UNICEF has been a key partner in promoting and safeguarding the rights of children in Uganda, with a strong focus on juvenile justice reform. Working closely with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, UNICEF has supported a range of initiatives aimed at improving the treatment of children in conflict with the law and strengthening child protection systems nationwide. A critical area of UNICEF's engagement has been the capacity building of the Police Child and Family Protection Unit, helping to equip officers with child-sensitive investigation skills, diversion practices, and protocols that align with international standards. UNICEF has also been instrumental in strengthening probation and social welfare services, supporting training programs for probation officers and enhancing their ability to assess, monitor, and rehabilitate juvenile offenders. Moreover, UNICEF has supported the development of alternative care models, such as diversion programs and community-based rehabilitation, to reduce the over-reliance on custodial sentences. These interventions aim to ensure that children are treated in a manner consistent with their dignity and developmental needs.

In partnership with other stakeholders, UNICEF has also implemented special projects focused on access to legal aid, psychosocial support, and reintegration programs for children affected by conflict, exploitation, and abuse.

Through this work, UNICEF contributes directly to advancing child-friendly justice systems in Uganda, aligned with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Uganda's national policy frameworks.

Some children in conflict with the law need prevention and support services, not punishment. While often seen as offenders, many are victims of abuse, neglect, or vulnerability. Instead of arrest and conviction, interventions should focus on protection, rehabilitation, and restoring them as responsible members of society.

Chapter Four: Juvenile Crime Trends in Uganda, 2017-2024.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of patterns and developments in juvenile crime across Uganda over the period 2017-2024. It provides an evidence-based overview to inform policy, planning, and interventions within the justice and law enforcement sectors.

Juvenile Crimes in Uganda (2017-2024)

Table 1: Juvenile crimes in Uganda (2017-2024)

Crime Categories	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	Total
Homicide	3	3	1	4	0	1	3	14
Economic Crimes	5	15	12	1	8	4	1	46
Sex Related Offences	174	240	188	160	58	103	48	971
Child Related Offences	3	4	9	2	4	7	2	31
Breakings	68	85	118	53	60	117	82	583
Thefts	409	375	415	154	209	405	186	2153
Robberies	9	24	17	16	17	28	8	119
Assaults	112	60	45	35	21	24	22	319
Other Crimes in General	128	128	105	172	75	158	51	817
Terrorism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Political/Media Offences	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	3
Corruption	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Narcotics/Drugs	18	27	56	9	29	15	18	172
Other Laws**	20	73	27	17	48	68	37	290
TOTAL	1035	993	993	623	531	930	458	4563

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports, and JLOS (2017-2024), Author's analysis

Juveniles convicted by offence categories (2017–2024)

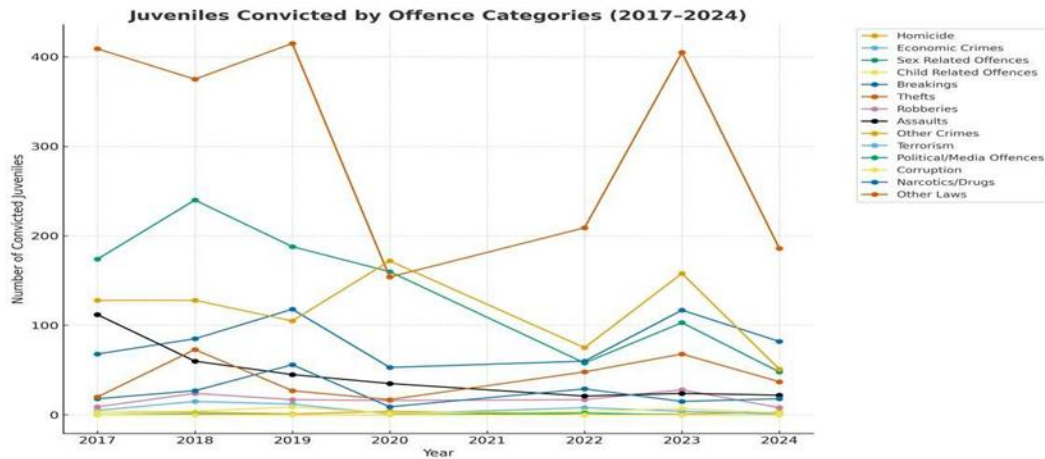


Figure 1: Juveniles convicted by offense categories (2017-2024)

Insights and key observations

The chart shows that thefts and sex-related offences dominate juvenile crime across the years. A significant dip occurs in 2020, likely linked to COVID-19 disruptions. Narcotics/drug-related offences rise sharply in 2019 and again in 2024, signalling growing risks. Breakings, assaults, and robberies also remain consistent, though lower than thefts. Lesser categories like corruption, political/media offences, and terrorism appear sporadically, showing limited but notable occurrences.

General juvenile trend analysis shows that between 2017 and 2024, juvenile crime trends in Uganda reveal persistent dominance of thefts and sex-related offences, reflecting economic vulnerabilities and exploitation risks. Breakings, assaults, and robberies show fluctuating but steady presence. The decline in crime in 2020 across categories highlights how external shocks like the COVID 19 pandemic disrupt crime dynamics. The resurgence of narcotics-related cases signals a new wave of concern requiring urgent attention in prevention and rehabilitation.

Juvenile crime in Uganda fluctuated but declined overall between 2017 and 2024. Charges fell from 2,513 to 2,268, and convictions fell from 949 to 458. The juvenile share of all convictions dropped from 5% to 2%, indicating increased diversion and alternatives to custody, alongside continuing gaps in case preparation and child protection.

Crimes committed by Juveniles categorized by gender 2017-2024

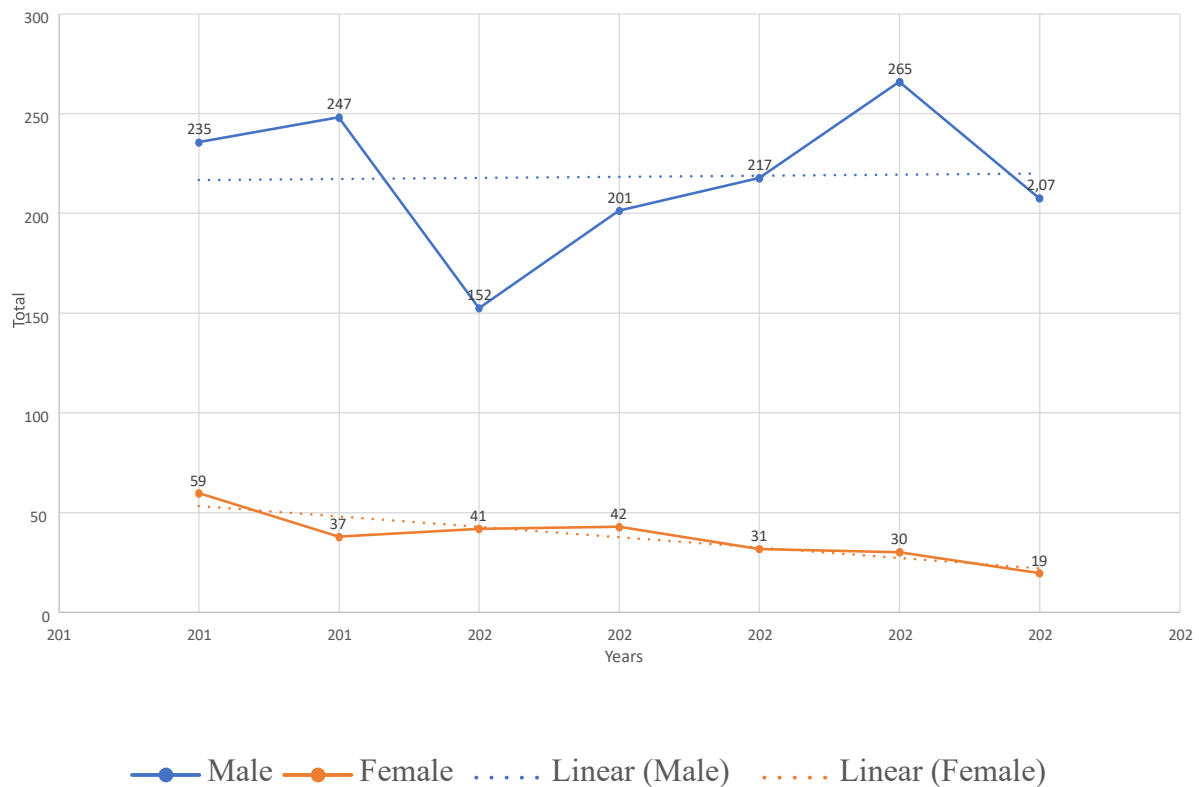


Figure 2: Crimes committed by Juveniles categorized by gender 2017-2024

4.1.1. Juveniles charged-Capital offences

Juveniles charged with capital offences represent a small but critical segment of the youth justice system, highlighting the intersection of serious criminal behaviour and the need for targeted interventions. Understanding trends in these cases is essential for effective prevention and rehabilitation strategies.

Table 2: Juvenile Offenders (charged) by Capital Crimes.

Crime categories	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024
Homicide	43	40	38	38	30	27	45
Sex related Offences	445	545	547	479	443	520	299
Robberies	68	112	142	88	118	168	140
Terrorism	0	0	0	0	0	12	0
Narcotics/Drugs	54	96	146	30	137	64	131

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports, and JLOS (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

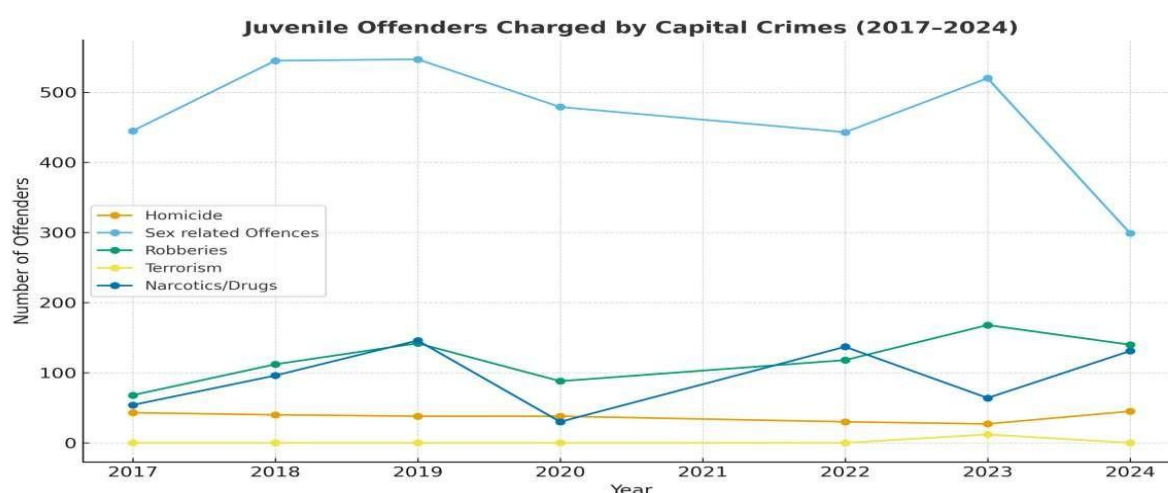


Figure 3: Juvenile offenders charged by Capital Crimes (2017-2024)

Juvenile crime is dominated by sex-related offences, Sex-related offences remain the highest but show decline after 2020, but recent decline in 2024 signals potential for progress. Robberies and drug-related crimes show fluctuating trends peaking in some years, highlighting ongoing risks for youth. Homicide cases stay relatively low, with small spikes in 2020 and 2024. Sustained prevention efforts are needed to curb high-risk behaviors and address root causes driving juvenile offences.

4.1.2 Juveniles Charged vs Convicted: Narcotics/Drugs

Cases involving juveniles charged with narcotics or drug-related offences reveal patterns in youth substance involvement and the justice system's response. Comparing charges versus convictions helps assess enforcement effectiveness and highlights areas for prevention and rehabilitation.

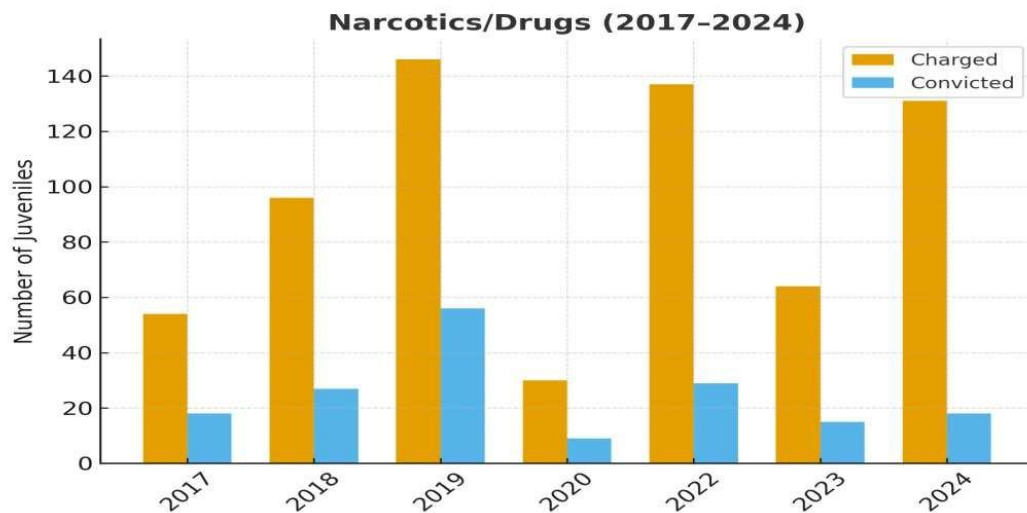


Figure 4: Narcotic/drugs (2017-2024)

4.1.3: Juveniles charged - Breakings

Breakings dipped in 2020, then rose in 2023, reflecting changing economic pressures and mobility.

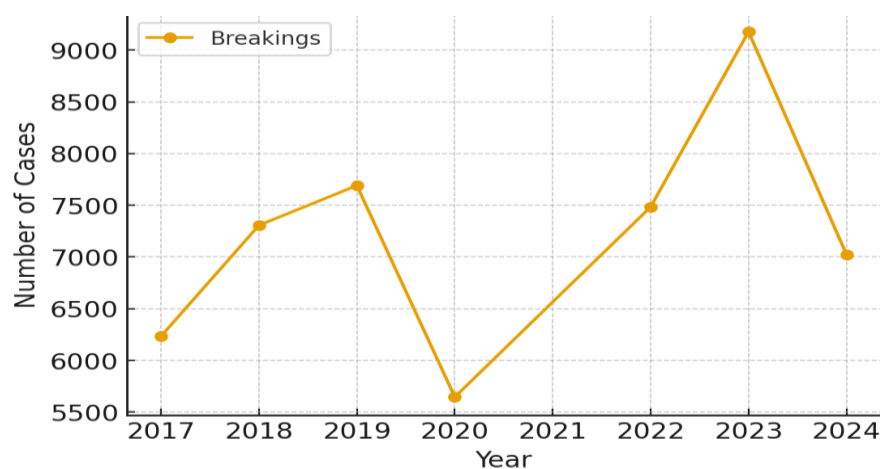


Figure 5: Breakings-Juveniles charged (2017-2024)

4.1.4: Juveniles charged Vs convicted: sex related crimes (2017-2024)

Sex-related offences dominate juvenile crime, but very few cases end in conviction underscoring weaknesses in the justice system and the urgent need for victim protection, evidence handling, and juvenile justice reforms. (Which has improved in recent times at JLOS sector and conviction rates are now higher). Prevention in and out of schools needs to be scaled up by the Ministries of Gender, Labour and Social Development; and Education and Sports.

Addressing Sex-Related Crimes

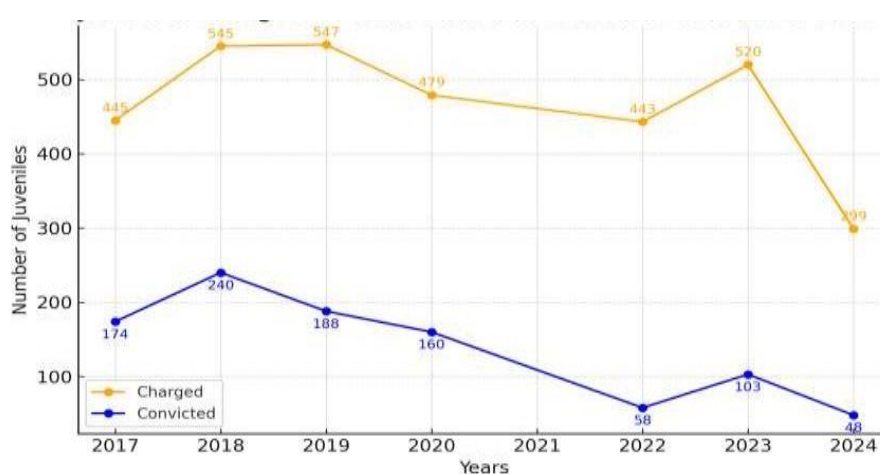


Figure 6: Juveniles charged vs convicted: sex related crimes (2017-2024)

- Strengthen case handling and evidence management by improving forensic capacity, survivor support, and witness protection to reduce case collapses and increase convictions.
- Enhance juvenile justice reforms to ensure fair, timely, and effective handling of cases involving minors.
- Train prosecutors, police, and probation officers in child-sensitive approaches for effective prosecution while safeguarding rights.
- Address root causes through awareness campaigns, school programs, and community interventions.
- Involve the Ministries of Gender, Labour and Social Development; and Education and Sports to integrate youth-related activities and crime-prevention content into school curricula.

Table 3: Diversion of Children from the Criminal Justice System (2017-2024)

Year	Diversion Rate (%)	Male	Female	Total
2017/18	75%	549	147	696
2019/20	72%	590	150	740
2021/22	71%	593	167	760
2022/23	71%	—	—	—
2023/24 Target	75%	—	—	—
2023/24 Actual	77%	709	170	879

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports, and JLOS (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

Key Highlights

- **Consistently High Diversion Rates:** Diversion rates have remained above 70% since 2017/18, peaking at 77% in 2023/24.
- **Steady Growth in Cases:** The total number of diverted cases increased from 696 in 2017/18 to 879 in 2023/24, showing continuous improvement in diversion practices.
- **Gender Distribution:** Males consistently account for the majority of diverted cases, though female representation has gradually increased.
- **Positive Progress:** The data indicates improved diversion outcomes and sustained commitment to child-friendly justice processes, despite ongoing gender disparities.

4.1.5: Comparative Trends -Thefts, Sex-Related offences, and Narcotics (2017-2024)

This section highlights the comparative trends of the three most significant juvenile crime categories in Uganda: Thefts, Sex-Related Offences, and Narcotics/Drugs between 2017 and 2024.

Figure 2: Comparative Trends – Thefts, Sex-Related Offences, and Narcotics (2017-2024)

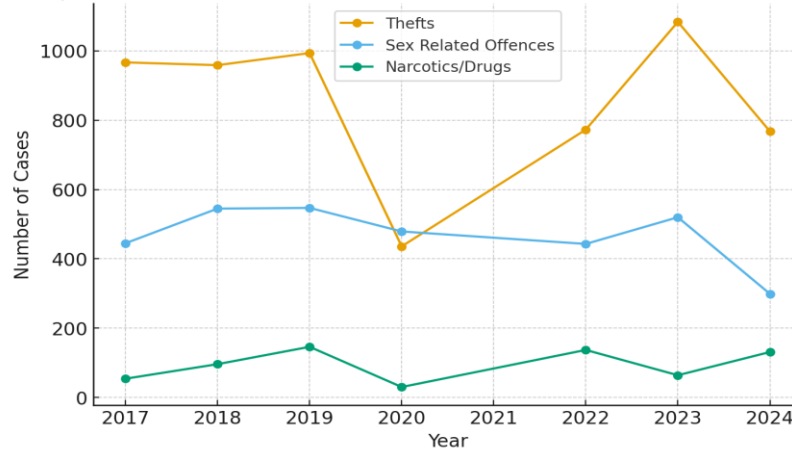


Figure 7: Comparative Trends-Thefts, sex related offences and narcotics (2017-2024)

Insights

- Thefts remain the most prevalent offence, peaking in 2023 with over 1,000 cases before declining in 2024.
- Sex-related offences, while consistently high, show a gradual decline after 2019, though they remain a critical concern due to their social and psychological impacts.
- Narcotics/Drugs offences demonstrate a sharp rise in 2019 and a resurgence in 2024, signalling increased availability and youth involvement in drug use and trafficking.
- These comparative trends highlight the urgent need for targeted prevention, rehabilitation, and legal reforms.

General Analysis on Juvenile Crimes in Uganda

From 2017-2024, Uganda recorded a downward trend in juvenile charges and convictions with a pronounced 2020 disruption.

The declining juvenile share of total convictions (5% to 2%) hints at greater use of diversion and alternatives, yet the charges–convictions gap remains, implying shortcomings in investigations and prosecution readiness.

Thefts, assaults, and other general crimes account for the largest juvenile volumes, while sex-related and narcotics trends demand strategic attention due to harm and growth.

A comprehensive approach blending prevention, protection, and proportionate accountability is required.

Suggestions for addressing major Juvenile crimes

Based on the comparative trends of thefts, sex-related offences, and narcotics/drug cases among juveniles in Uganda (2017–2024), the following suggestion are proposed to strengthen prevention, justice, and rehabilitation responses:

1. Scale up community-based interventions and vocational training to reduce economic vulnerability and curb theft-related offences.
2. Integrate comprehensive sexuality education, child protection measures, and survivor-centered services to prevent and respond to sex-related offences.
3. Expand drug prevention programs in schools and communities, while strengthening rehabilitation and treatment services for adolescents already involved in narcotics.
4. Enhance coordination between police, probation officers, and child protection actors to ensure timely diversion and restorative justice for juveniles.
5. Invest in early-warning and surveillance systems to track emerging crime patterns and respond proactively to shifts in juvenile offending.
6. Strengthen child protection and victim/survivor-centered pathways for sex-related cases (medical–legal, shelters, psychosocial support).
7. Scale adolescent drug prevention and treatment referrals; link schools and communities to services for early intervention.

8. Integrate Police–DPP–Courts case-tracking for juveniles, improving data quality and time-to-disposal metrics.
9. Expand school/faith/CSO prevention: life skills, mentorship, vocational skilling, and family strengthening.

Chapter Five: Youth Crime in Uganda, 2017-2024

5.1. Introduction.

Youth crime has become an issue of growing concern in Uganda, reflecting wider social, economic, and cultural challenges facing the country. With over 70% of Uganda's population under the age of 30, young people form the largest segment of society, yet they are also the most vulnerable to poverty, unemployment, limited access to education, and weak social support systems. These conditions often contribute to their involvement in risky behaviors, including criminal activities.

Youth crime in Uganda, spanning the years 2017 and 2024 presents persistent and evolving challenges. The data highlights both rising trends and systemic gaps, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive and preventive approaches that integrate rehabilitation, and justice reforms and also on addressing root causes such as poverty, exclusion, and lack of opportunities.

This chapter therefore examines the nature of crime, rates of convictions, offences, narcotics, homicides among others. It seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the authors analysis based on the available data from official publications. The table below shows youth charged by nature of crime over the years 2017-2024.

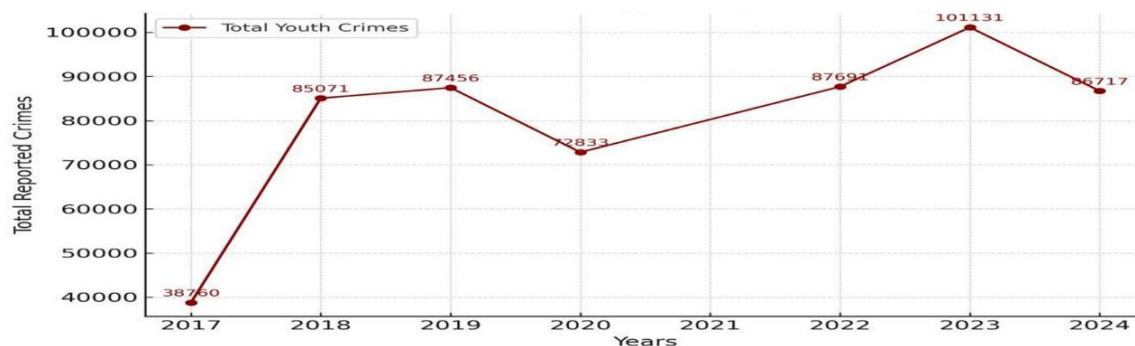
5.2 Youth charged by nature of crime over the years (2017-2024)

Table 4: Youth charged by nature of crime over the years (2017-2024)

Crime categories	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024
Homicide	28	47	44	32	1	41	0
Economic Crimes	854	992	1007	498	324	1216	282
Sex Related Offences	569	794	896	750	166	952	125
Child Related Offences	206	243	279	153	76	257	45
Breakings	1540	1901	1938	1569	847	2689	650
Thefts	7822	9008	9198	5644	4691	12548	4084
Robberies	227	404	361	305	117	545	136
Assaults	2231	2717	2714	1912	1018	2695	941
Other Crimes in General	5318	6744	5729	8282	3901	7235	3226
Terrorism	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Political/Media Offences	9	26	8	112	12	7	0
Corruption	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Narcotics/Drugs	806	1287	1327	633	842	1681	925
Other Laws**	2377	2497	2232	1274	2382	3123	1276
TOTAL	38760	26660	25735	21165	14377	32989	11690

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

Trends and totals by year.



Although yearly fluctuations exist, the overall trend reveals a steady rise in youth crime, underscoring ongoing challenges in prevention and enforcement.

Figure 8: Youth crime in Uganda (2017-2024)

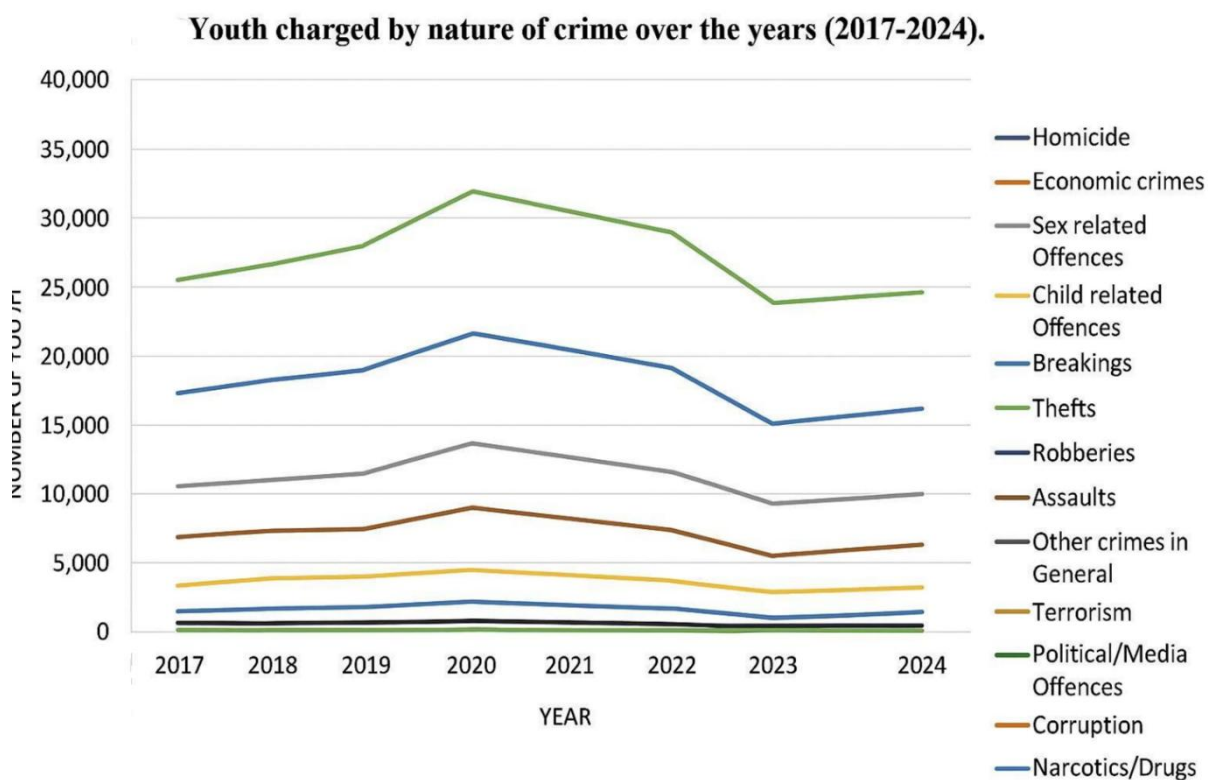


Figure 9: Youth charged by nature of crime over the years (2017-2024)

5.3 Youth charged vs convicted

This section compares the number of youths charged with offences to those ultimately convicted, highlighting trends in the justice process and outcomes.

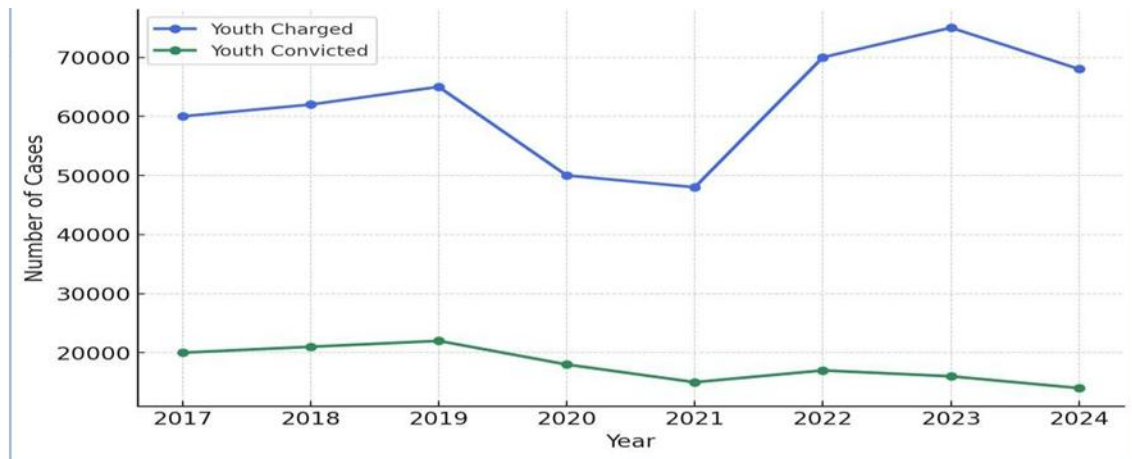


Figure 10: Youth charged vs convicted (2017-2024)

Insights.

- Charges remain consistently higher than convictions, pointing to gaps in case follow-up across the justice chain from investigations to court processes and the need for improved coordination.
- Many cases are discontinued, withdrawn, or dismissed; if captured, they would reduce the gap between charges and convictions.
- The gap also reflects challenges in prosecution, evidence handling, and delays in justice delivery.

System implications of the Justice Gap-cases charged Vs convicted can lead to Prison congestion and subsequent rising costs. Increased recidivism due to lack/limited efforts of rehabilitation and lastly staff burnout (police & prison officers) and put pressure on justice institutions and reduced public trust in the institutions.

5.4: Youth Capital Crimes

In Uganda, youths aged 18-35 are increasingly implicated in capital offences, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions and preventive strategies.

In Uganda, youth offenders constitute a significant portion of individuals in conflict with the law, and a concerning number are implicated in capital crimes. Capital crimes, under Ugandan law, include serious offenses such as murder, aggravated robbery, defilement, rape, and treason which offenses are punishable by death or life imprisonment. The data below highlights key capital crimes as analysed from the publications.

Table 5: Youth offenders categorized by Capital crimes (2017-2024)

Crime Categories	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	Total by Case
Homicide	1,620	1,787	1,921	1,891	1,192	1,714	1,108	11,233
Sex Related Offences	4,941	6,034	6,257	6,352	5,224	6,035	5,216	40,059
Robberies	2,176	2,670	2,890	2,147	3,051	3,701	3,112	19,747
Terrorism	53	4	7	0	11	21	37	133
Narcotics/Drugs	2,210	3,464	3,592	1,641	4,681	3,655	5,608	24,851
Grand Total	22,000	27,918	29,334	24,062	28,318	30,252	30,162	192,046

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

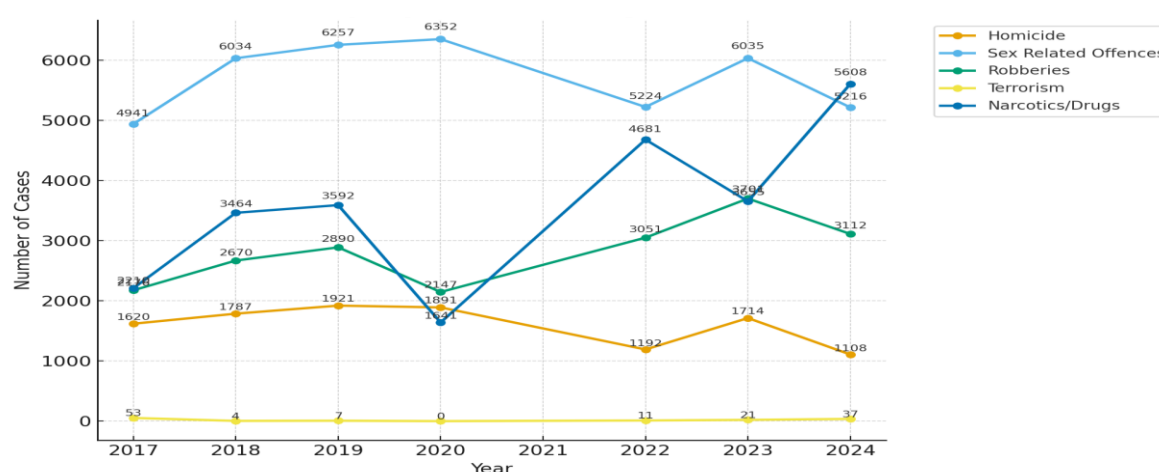


Figure 11: Youth offenders categorized by Capital crimes (2017-2024)

Insights.

- Sex-related offences dominate among capital crimes, consistently recording the highest numbers and remaining above 5,000 cases each year. This highlights persistent vulnerabilities of young people to sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Narcotics-Drug-related offences show a sharp increase in 2024 (5,608 cases), making them the second-highest category. This reflects the growing involvement of young people in drug use and trafficking.
- Homicides and robberies remain significant but lower compared to sex-related offences. Robberies steadily increased until 2023, while homicides have declined since 2019.
- Terrorism cases remain very low, though a slight rise is noted in 2024 (37 cases), suggesting emerging risks of extremist recruitment.
- Loss of cases tampering of evidence due to delays in closure of cases.

Overall, the data underscores the urgent need for specialized interventions; stronger protection measures against sexual offences, effective drug prevention and rehabilitation programs, and targeted strategies to address violent youth crime.

5.5 Comparison of youth offenders in fastest-growing capital crimes in Uganda

This section examines the distribution and growth of youth offenders in key capital crimes, offering insights into changing crime patterns and the need for stronger prevention and rehabilitation measures.

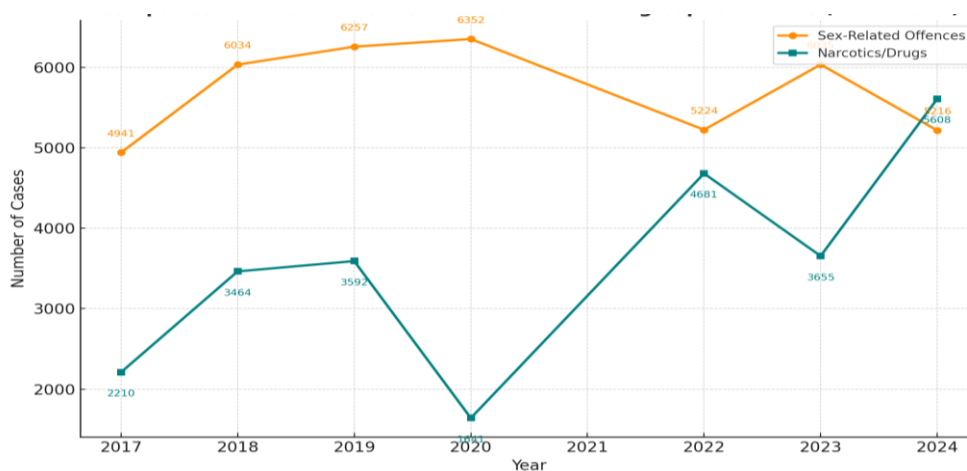


Figure 12: Comparison of Fastest-Growing Capital Crimes

Overall, the trends in capital offences illustrate not only the persistence of high-risk behaviors (sexual and use of drugs) but also the changing nature of youth criminal involvement.

5.5.1. Youth on Minor Offences

Examining the categorization of youth on minor offences is important to understand trends in low-level criminal behaviour, identify risk factors, and design effective early intervention and rehabilitation programs. This approach helps prevent escalation to more serious crimes and supports positive youth development in Uganda. Youth charged for Minor offences (2017–2024)

5.5.2: Youth charged for Theft (2017-2024) by Gender

Male youth consistently dominate theft-related charges, highlighting gender disparities in offending patterns. Female involvement is much lower and shows a steady decline, while male trends fluctuate but remain high. Overall, theft charges remain significant, pointing to persistent socio-economic drivers that need targeted prevention programs.

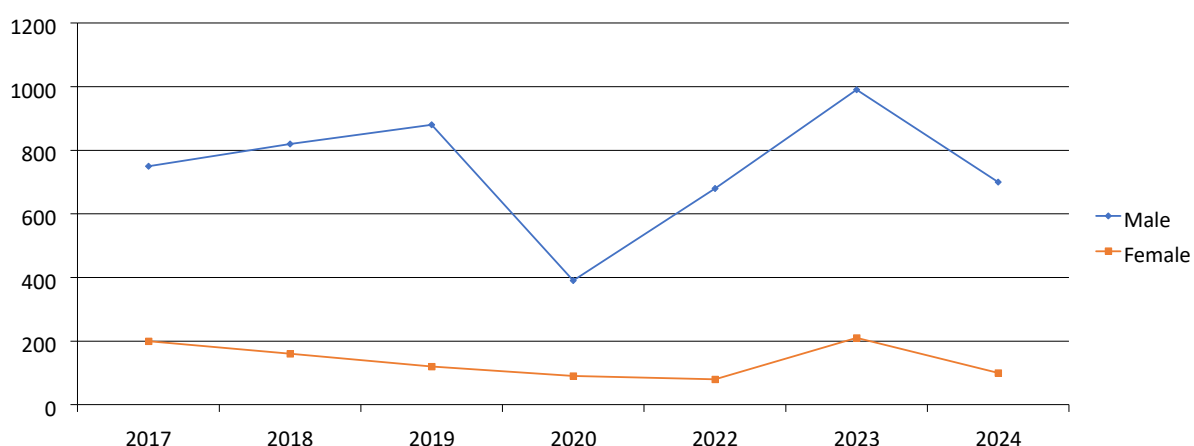


Figure 13: Youth charged for theft (2017-2024) by Gender

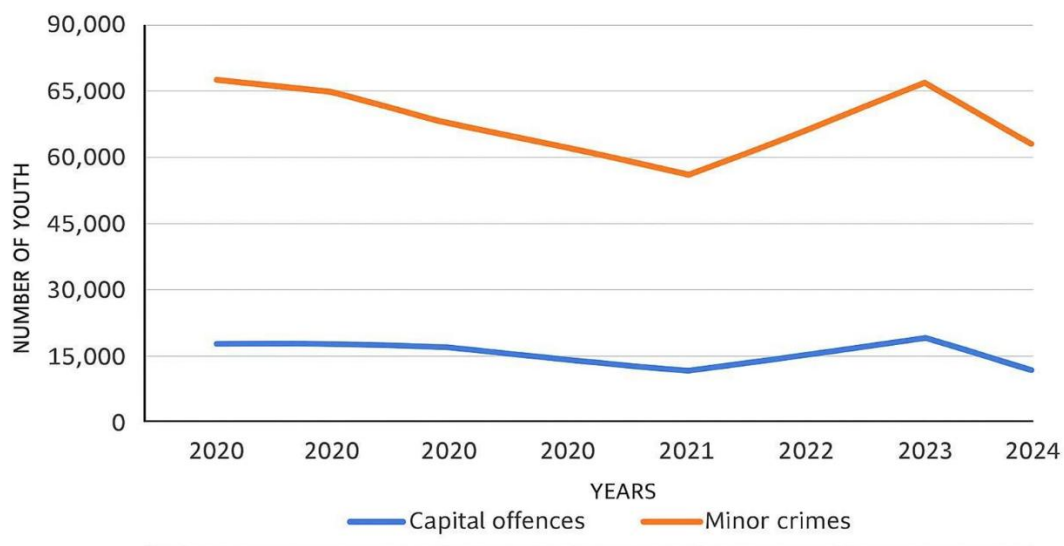
Insights on Minor offences (2017-2024)

- Minor offences such as breakings, assaults, and 'other crimes in general' remain consistently high, driving youth crime statistics.
- While some offences (e.g., corruption, political/media crimes) remain minimal, categories like breakings and assaults show persistent upward trends.

- Fluctuations in 2020-2022 suggest possible external influences (COVID-19 restrictions, enforcement shifts).
- Overall, minor offences continue to strain the Justice system and call for preventive community interventions.

5.5.3: Comparison on capital and Minor crimes amongst the youth

This section compares the distribution of youth charged with capital offences (such as murder, aggravated robbery, and defilement) and minor offences (including theft, assault, and drug possession). The analysis highlights how youth involvement spans both severe and petty crimes, revealing underlying social, economic, and behavioural factors influencing offending patterns across Uganda.



TAKEAWAY: Youth are far more frequently charged with minor crimes. While capital charges decline, minor crime charges rise and fall but remain dominant overall.

Figure 14: Youth charge by nature of crime over the years (2017-2024)

5.5.4: Comparison of Youth Charged vs Convictions.

Comparison of youth charges versus convictions in Uganda is important because it reveals the justice gap between arrests and successful prosecutions. It highlights systemic issues such as weak evidence handling and delayed adjudication. Understanding this gap guides reforms to strengthen accountability, fairness, and restorative approaches for young offenders.

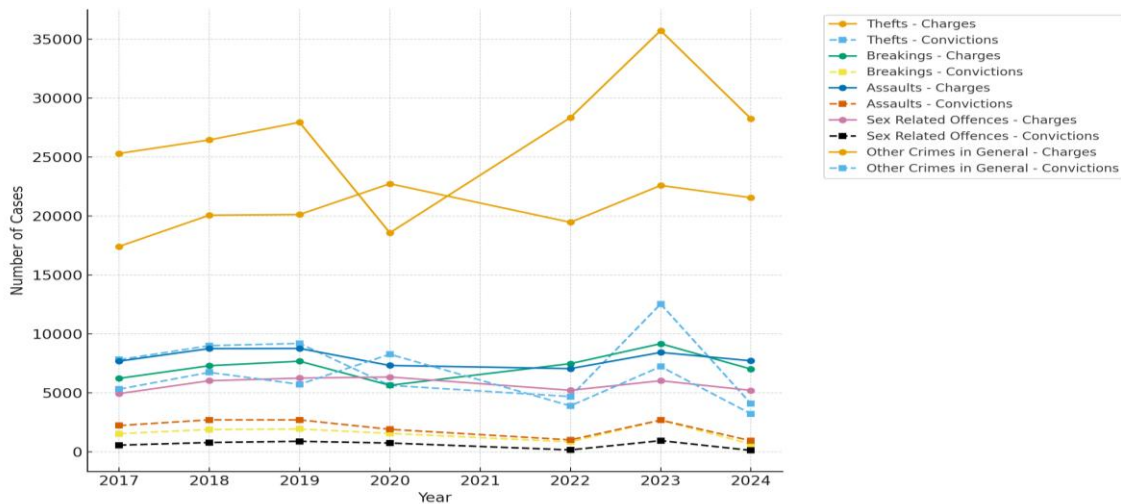


Figure 15: Comparison of Youth Charged vs Convictions.

Insights and comparative observations.

Key insights and key observations on youth crime

1. Convictions are significantly lower than charges across all crime categories, highlighting a justice gap. For instance, theft convictions dropped to 4,084 in 2024 compared to over 28,000 charges.
2. Thefts and Breakings dominate convictions, but both show steep declines in 2024, suggesting possible case withdrawals, diversions, or systemic weaknesses in case follow up.
3. Sex-related and child-related offences record very low conviction numbers rarely exceeding 30% relative to charges, raising concerns over investigation capacity, evidence gaps, and victim protection.
4. Drug-related convictions peak in 2023 (1,681) but decline in 2024, though they remain a growing area of concern.
5. Homicide convictions fluctuate sharply and reach zero in 2024, which could reflect delays in adjudication or shifting categorization of cases.
6. Overall, the mismatch between charges and convictions underscores systemic challenges in Uganda's criminal justice process, calling for reforms to strengthen investigations, prosecution, and restorative justice approaches.

System implications of the data Justice Gap-Cases charged vs convicted

- Prison congestion and rising costs due to high numbers of remanded youth without timely convictions.
- Increased recidivism linked to limited rehabilitation opportunities for those not effectively processed through the Justice system.
- Possibility for staff burnout among law enforcement officers such as police and prison officers caused by excessive workloads and unresolved cases.
- Pressure on Justice institutions, eroding efficiency and reducing public trust in the rule of law.

It's important to note that strengthening data systems is crucial to capture cases that are discontinued, withdrawn, or dismissed, to ensure a complete understanding of justice outcomes and systemic challenges.

5.5.5: Sex Related Crimes

Tracking youth convictions for sex-related crimes in Uganda (2017–2024) is essential for understanding patterns of sexual violence, accountability, and justice delivery. While the number of charges remains high, convictions provide insight into how effectively the justice system protects survivors and deters offenders. Examining these trends helps identify gaps in investigations, prosecutions, and victim support services, while also informing strategies for prevention, community awareness, and policy reforms.

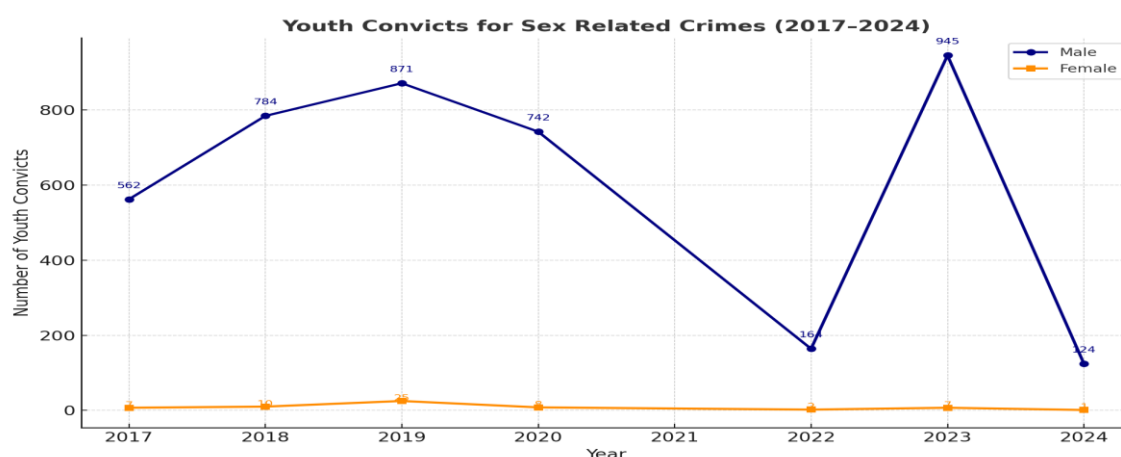


Figure 16: Youth convicts for sex related crimes in Uganda (2017-2024)

Insights

- The data shows that male youth convictions for sex-related crimes consistently dominate, peaking at 945 cases in 2023. However, we note that there was a dramatic decline in 2024 to just 124 cases, which could reflect underreporting, delayed prosecutions, or changes in case management.
- Female convictions remain very low, with a notable spike in 2019 (25 cases), before dropping to only 1 case in 2024.
- The overall downward trend, especially after 2020, suggests we need to do more prosecution led investigations and challenges in securing convictions.
- This highlights the urgent need for improved evidence collection, survivor protection, and stronger judicial follow-through to ensure justice for victims of sexual crimes.

5.5.6: Narcotics Crimes among youth

This subsection presents data on youth involvement in drug-related crimes, emphasizing the urgent need for prevention, treatment, and alternative livelihood strategies to curb substance abuse and its link to crime. Crimes related to narcotics among youth in Uganda (2017–2024) as enshrined in the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act, 2024 are critical to monitor because they reveal both the growing scale of drug abuse and its broader social implications. Rising narcotics cases highlight vulnerabilities among young people, including unemployment, peer pressure, and exposure to trafficking networks.

These offences fuel other crimes such as theft, violence, and sexual exploitation, placing further strain on families, communities, and justice institutions. Addressing youth narcotics cases is therefore central to reducing overall crime, protecting public health, and ensuring Uganda's social and economic stability.

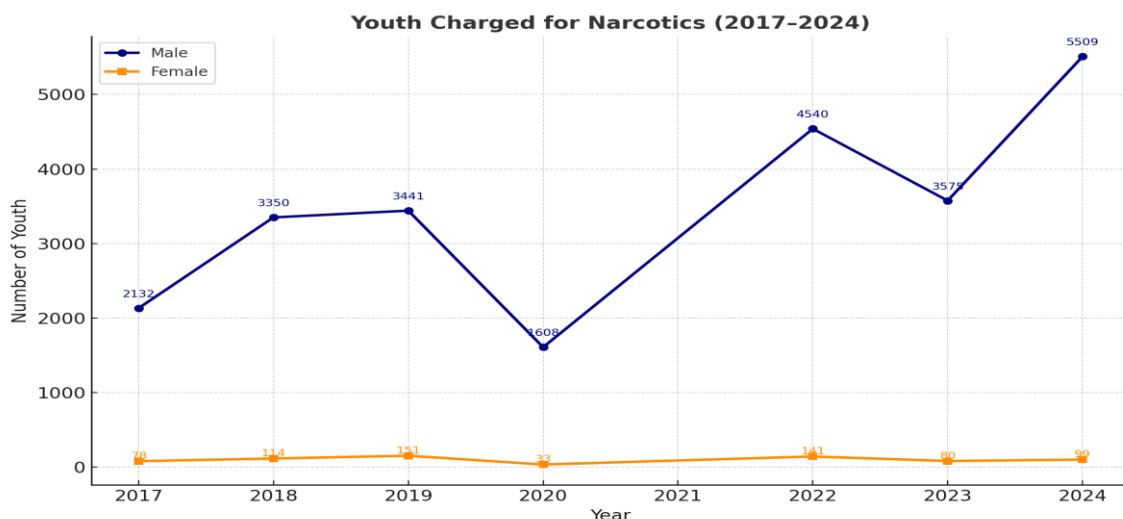


Figure 17: Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

Insights

- The data reveals a significant rise in narcotics-related charges among youth in Uganda between 2017 and 2024, with male offenders consistently dominating the numbers.
- Male cases rose sharply from 2,132 in 2017 to 5,509 in 2024, while female cases remained relatively low, peaking at 151 in 2019. The 2020 dip reflects COVID-19 restrictions, followed by a rebound in subsequent years.
- The persistent upward trend among male youth highlights the urgent need for targeted prevention, rehabilitation programs, and community sensitization to address drug abuse and trafficking risks. Female involvement, though lower, indicates increasing vulnerabilities requiring tailored interventions.
- These findings underscore the importance of strengthening Uganda's drug prevention strategies, expanding rehabilitation services, and enhancing cross-sector collaboration to reduce youth involvement in narcotics.

5.5.7: Youth Convictions for Homicide (2017-2024)

This section presents trends in youth Homicide convictions highlighting gender differences and shifts over time.

Homicide among Ugandan youth is a grave concern that reflects social breakdown, poverty, and weak protection systems. With young people forming the largest share of the population and prison statistics, their involvement in violent crime threatens community safety and

stability. Many offenders are also victims of unemployment, drug abuse, and exploitation, highlighting the need for prevention and rehabilitation.

Addressing youth homicide ensures justice for victims, offers young offenders reintegration pathways, and strengthens trust in justice systems. Beyond crime control, tackling homicide is a development and public health priority requiring coordinated action by JLOS, NGOs, schools, churches, and communities.

Table 6: Youths convictions for homicide in Uganda (2017-2024)

Year	Male	Female	Total
2017	320	40	360
2018	350	50	400
2019	400	55	455
2020	310	45	355
2022	180	25	205
2023	290	40	330
2024	210	30	240

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024), Author’s analysis

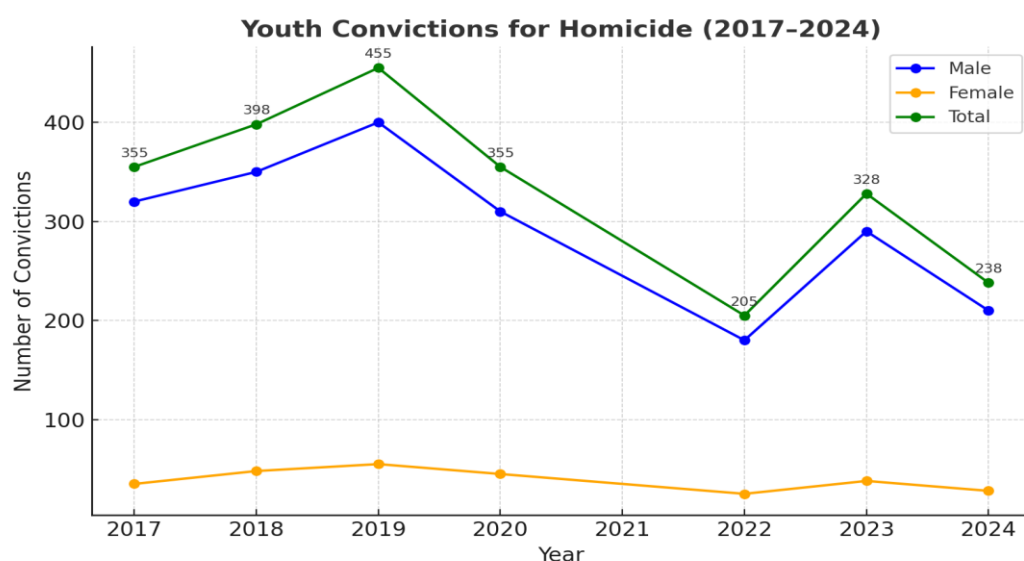


Figure 18: Youths Convictions for Homicide in Uganda (2017-2024)

Insights

Conviction data for youth homicide cases from 2017 to 2024 shows consistently lower figures compared to charges, illustrating the justice gap between prosecution and final outcomes. Male convictions dominate, peaking at around 400 in 2019, while female convictions remain below 60 annually.

Between 2017 and 2019, youth homicide convictions in Uganda rose steadily, peaking at more than 450 cases in 2019. This increase points to growing concerns around violent behavior among young people during that period, reflecting wider societal challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and peer influence that drive youth into violent crime.

The decline in 2024 (210 male, 30 female) highlights systemic challenges such as, delays in prosecution and limited victim/witness protection. Strengthening court efficiency and scaling up restorative justice mechanisms could help address these gaps.

From 2020 onwards, convictions declined sharply, dropping to around 240 cases by 2024. Several factors may explain this reduction: improved law enforcement strategies, diversion programs, or disruptions to the justice system during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, while male youth consistently accounted for the majority of convictions, female convictions, though much smaller in scale, remained steady across the years.

Overall, the trend suggests progress in managing youth involvement in homicide, but persistent numbers still pose a challenge. Continued investment in community-based prevention, restorative justice, and rehabilitation programs, especially tailored to at-risk young men—remains essential to reducing youth violence sustainably.

5.5.8: Youth minor offences amongst youth in Uganda

Minor offences among Ugandan youth between 2017 and 2024 remain widespread, often driven by poverty, peer influence, and unemployment, highlighting the urgent need for preventive measures and community-based rehabilitation.

Table 7: Youth offenders categorized by Minor crimes (2017-2024)

Crime Categories	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	Total by Case
Economic Crimes	3,004	3,419	3,612	2,331	2,837	3,918	2,727	21,848
Child Related Offences	752	824	860	665	699	1,083	718	5,601
Breakings	6,233	7,306	7,690	5,646	7,483	9,177	7,023	50,558
Thefts	25,314	26,461	27,958	18,583	28,358	35,742	28,264	190,680
Assaults	7,696	8,762	8,776	7,329	7,062	8,436	7,728	55,789
Other Crimes in General	17,423	20,072	20,134	22,746	19,474	22,599	21,563	144,011
Political/Media Offences	70	258	110	1,011	106	97	49	1,701
Corruption	6	2	7	4	0	2	2	23
Narcotics/Drugs	2,210	3,464	3,592	1,641	4,681	3,655	5,608	24,851
Other Laws**	3,664	4,008	3,642	2,487	7,513	4,951	3,562	29,827
Grand Total	66,372	74,576	76,381	62,443	78,213	89,660	77,244	524,889

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

Insights.

The data indicates that minor crimes constitute the majority of offences committed by youth in Uganda.

Thefts dominate the category, consistently surpassing 25,000 cases annually, with a peak of 35,742 cases in 2023. Breakings, assaults, and economic crimes also contribute significantly, highlighting the link between poverty, unemployment, and youth involvement in crime. Other crimes in general remain persistently high. These crimes amongst youth may be driving youth crime statistics. And strain the justice system (investigation and dentation) and call for a preventive community intervention.

The overall totals peaked in 2023, followed by a decline in 2024, suggesting both shifting patterns in crime and possible underreporting. Addressing minor crimes is crucial, as they often serve as entry points into more serious criminal activity if left unchecked.

5.5.9: Capital vs Minor offences.

The distinction between capital and minor offences among Ugandan youth is vital for understanding the scope and severity of crime between 2017 and 2024. While minor offences such as theft, assaults, and breakings dominate in volume, capital offences though fewer carry greater social and legal consequences, including homicide, robbery, and sex-related crimes. Examining these patterns reveals not only the scale of youth involvement in crime but also the systemic gaps in prevention, rehabilitation, and justice delivery.

Table 8: Youth Offenders: Capital vs Minor Offences (2017-2024)

Year	Capital Offences	Minor Offences
2017	11,000	66,372
2018	13,959	74,576
2019	14,667	76,381
2020	12,031	62,443
2022	14,159	78,213
2023	15,126	89,660
2024	15,081	77,244
Grand Total	96,023	524,889

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

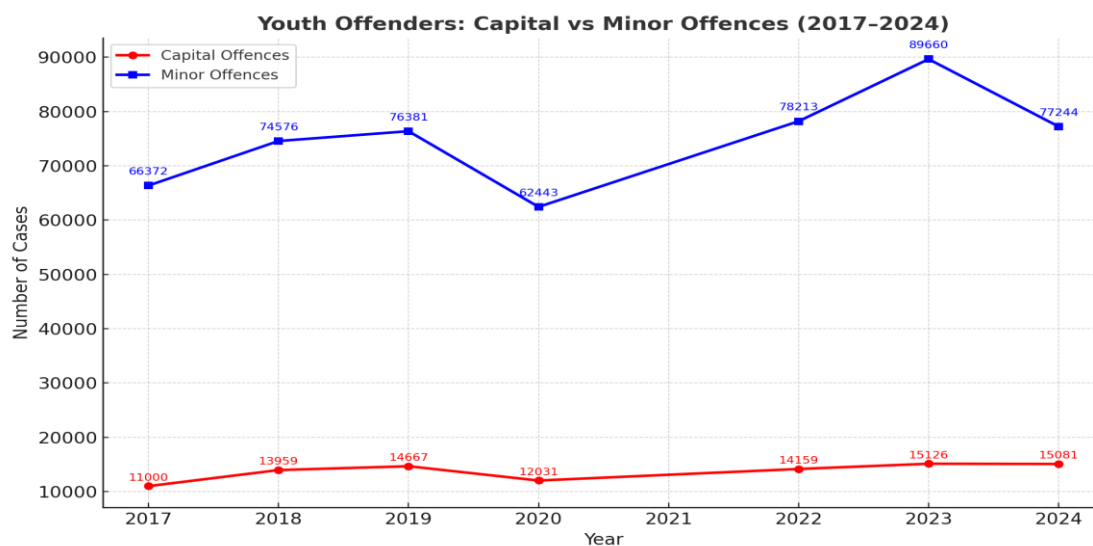


Figure 19: Youth Offenders: Capital vs Minor Offences (2017-2024)

Observations

The comparison between capital and minor offences shows that minor crimes consistently outnumber capital crimes among youth in Uganda. Minor offences such as thefts, breakings, and assaults dominate the crime landscape, often exceeding 70,000 cases annually, with a peak in 2023.

In contrast, capital crimes, while fewer in number, remain serious, with sex-related offences and narcotics driving most cases. The steady rise in narcotics offences across both categories reflects growing drug involvement among youth. Overall, these trends highlight the need for comprehensive strategies: prevention and rehabilitation to reduce minor crimes, and strong law enforcement and protection mechanisms to address serious capital offences.

5.5.10: Youth conviction rates for capital offences vs minor crimes

Youth convictions for capital offences versus minor crimes (2017-2024) provide critical insight into the scale, severity, and justice system response to youth crime in Uganda. This comparison highlights how minor crimes dominate in volume, while capital offences, though fewer, pose greater risks and demand specialized justice and prevention strategies.



Figure 20: Youth Convictions: Capital vs Minor Offences (2017-2024)

Insights

The data shows that minor offences dominate youth convictions in Uganda, far exceeding capital convictions across all years. Thefts and breakings drive the bulk of minor convictions, peaking in 2023, while assaults remain consistently high.

Capital convictions, led by sex-related crimes and narcotics, remain comparatively low, with notable declines in 2024. This gap indicates that while minor crimes are more prevalent, capital offences though fewer require specialized attention due to their severity.

The overall decline in convictions in 2024 suggests systemic challenges in prosecution and adjudication, highlighting the urgent need for improved evidence management, survivor protection, and a balanced approach combining law enforcement with preventive interventions.

5.5.11. Cases taken to Court vs Cases Dismissed

This section analyzes overall trends in cases taken to court versus cases dismissed in Uganda between 2017 and 2024. While the number of cases taken to court steadily increased, dismissals remained comparatively low, rarely exceeding 12,000 annually. This shows improved case handling, but persistent dismissals still highlight weaknesses in investigations, evidence management, and prosecutorial follow-up. Monitoring these trends is vital for justice sector reforms.

Table 9: Court Cases Vs Dismissed Cases

Year	Cases Taken to Court	Cases Dismissed	% Dismissed
2017	66,626	9,613	14.4%
2018	73,035	11,121	15.2%
2019	74,810	11,472	15.3%
2020	56,651	3,754	6.6%
2021	65,008	3,789	5.8%
2022	68,405	213	0.3%
2023	84,907	10,096	11.9%
2024	81,750	10,333	12.6%

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

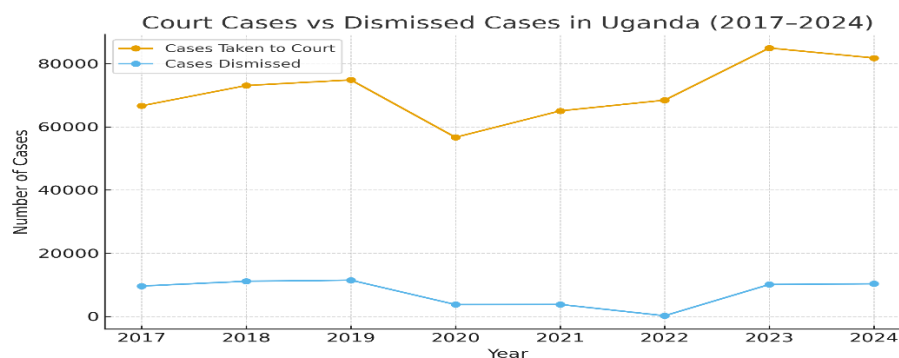


Figure 21: Court cases vs Dismissed cases in Uganda

Insights

Between 2017 and 2024, cases taken to court rose from 66,626 to 81,750, showing the courts are handling larger caseloads. While the total number of cases taken to court has steadily increased since 2021, dismissed cases show significant fluctuations, dropping sharply in 2020–

2022 (likely due to COVID-19 disruptions and procedural delays) before rising again in 2023–2024, reflecting renewed court activity and possible case backlog clearances.

The overall low dismissal rate points to better judicial efficiency, though consistent monitoring is still needed to sustain improvements.

5.5.12. Community Servicing Punishment Trends (2017-2024)

Community servicing punishment trends in Uganda are relevant because they show how the justice system is adopting non-custodial sentences to ease prison congestion and promote rehabilitation (Community Service Act, Cap 115). They also highlight the shift toward restorative justice, offering young offenders a chance to reform while still being accountable to their communities.

Table 10: Community Servicing vs Total Convictions (2017-2024)

Year	Cases Convicted	Community Service Sentences	% Community Service
2017	18961	3278	17%
2018	22263	4373	20%
2019	22105	3718	17%
2020	15657	3752	24%
2022	22263	2179	10%
2023	27125	5341	20%
2024	26328	2212	8%

Source: Uganda Justice and Law order sector Reports (2017-2024), Author's analysis.

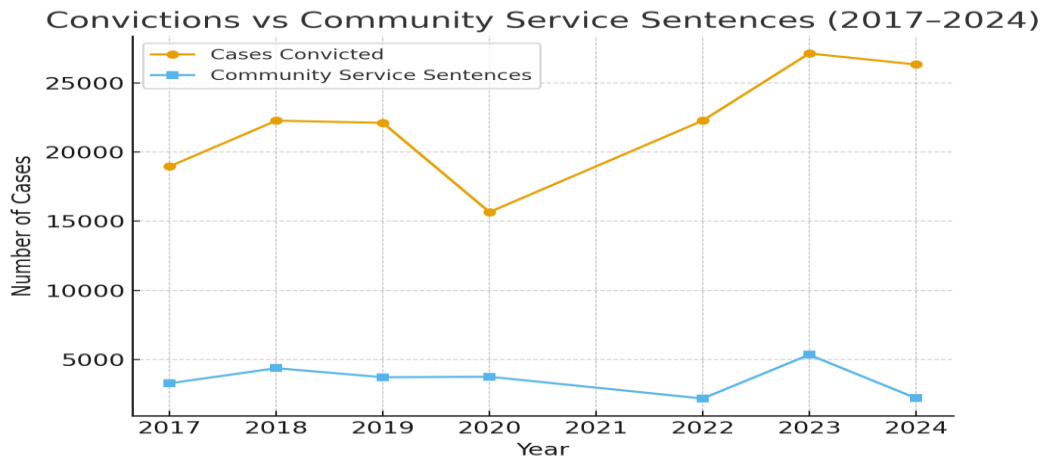


Figure 22: Percentage of Community Service Sentences

Insights.

Community service as a sentencing option has shown fluctuations between 2017 and 2024. The highest proportion was recorded in 2020 at 24%, likely reflecting COVID-19 restrictions on prison operations.

While total cases rose in 2023 to over 27,000, community service sentences also peaked at 5,341. However, by 2024, use of community service declined sharply to just 8% of convictions, suggesting a shift back to custodial sentences.

Narcotics-related offences consistently saw higher application of community service compared to robberies, showing a preference for non-custodial measures in drug cases.

Overall, expanding community service could help reduce prison congestion, especially for non-violent crimes like thefts and minor assaults.

5.5.13: Recidivism & Youth and Juvenile crime in Uganda (2017-2024)

Recidivism the repeated commission of crime remains a key indicator of Uganda's justice system effectiveness. By the end of 2024, 3,266 repeat offenders had been registered nationwide. This pattern reveals both progress and gaps in rehabilitation. While declines during 2020 reflected limited court operations and mobility, increases from 2022 onward underscore post-pandemic challenges such as unemployment, drug abuse, and urban stress.

Juvenile offenders (12-18 years) often engage in minor survival-related crimes like theft and assault, while youth (18-35 years) dominate in narcotics, robbery, and sex-related offences. Persistent reoffending among both groups highlights weak aftercare, limited psychosocial support, and societal stigma upon release. Without sustainable reintegration opportunities, prisons risk becoming revolving doors rather than reform centers.

Table 11: Recidivism cases (2017-2024)

Year	Repeat Offenders
2017	360
2018	410
2019	520
2020	290
2022	480
2023	610
2024	596

Source: Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Reports, and JLOS (2017-2024), Author’s analysis.

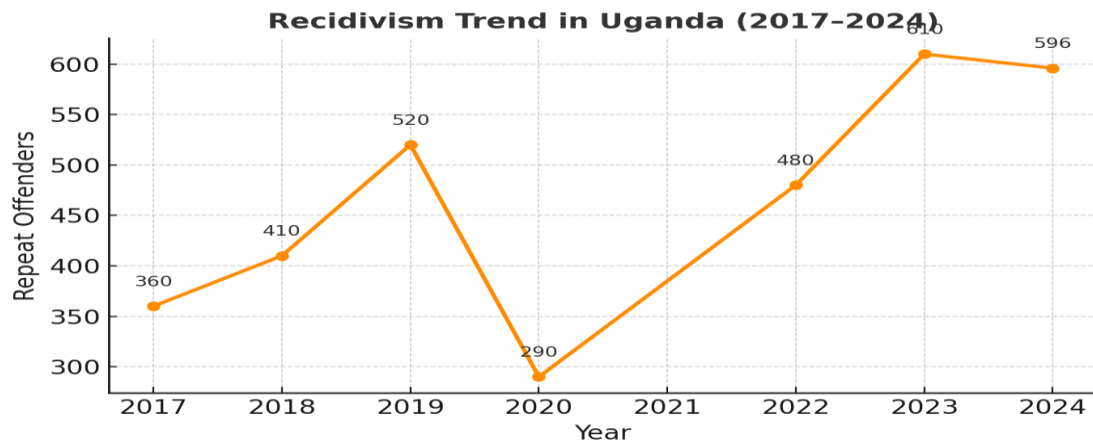


Figure 23: Source: Uganda Prisons Service, JLOS, and Uganda Police Annual Crime Reports (2017-2024).

Insights

- Recidivism peaked in 2019 and again in 2023, reflecting recurring social-economic pressures.
- Male youth account for most repeat offences, often driven by unemployment and drug use.
- Community rehabilitation efforts in 2024 led to a slight decline, showing positive outcomes of NGO and local initiatives.
- Persistent reoffending highlights the need for reintegration programs, mentorship, and skill-based rehabilitation.
- Strengthening restorative justice and reducing custodial sentences for minor offenders remain essential to breaking the cycle.

Conclusion. Youth and juvenile recidivism in Uganda underscore the intersection of crime, poverty, and limited opportunity. Reducing reoffending requires more than punishment, it demands education, psychosocial care, and access to livelihood skills. A coordinated strategy involving government, justice actors, NGOs, and communities is crucial to transforming young offenders into productive citizens.

Chapter Six: Prison Population Data Analysis in Uganda

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of Uganda's prison population with emphasis on age, gender, and broader policy implications. The findings show that youth dominate incarceration rates, while women, though a small proportion, are steadily increasing. These trends highlight systemic challenges and the urgent need for prevention, rehabilitation, and justice reforms.

6.2 Prison Population and incarceration Rate for youth in Uganda.

Analysing the prison population and incarceration rates provides critical insights into the scale and dynamics of crime, the effectiveness of the justice system, and the impact of sentencing policies in Uganda

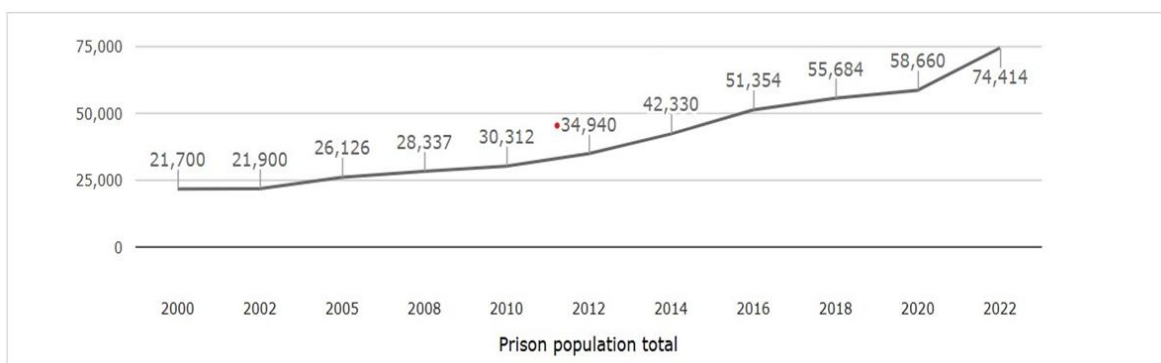


Figure 24: Prison population total

Percentage Distribution of Prisoners by Age Group (only in 2024)

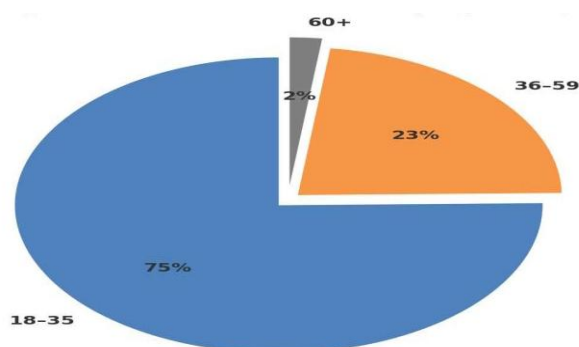


Figure 25: Percentage Distribution of Prisoners by Age Group (2024)

- Youth (18-35) make up 75% of all prisoners, showing high involvement of young people in crime.
- Middle-aged group (36-59) represents 23%, a much smaller proportion.
- Elderly (60+) are only 2%, showing very low involvement in crime.

Policy implication. The justice system and rehabilitation efforts should focus strongly on the youth population.

6.3: Female Prison Population in Uganda

UGANDA

Year	Number of female prisoners	Percentage of total prison population	Female prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)
2005	901	3.4%	3.2
2008	1,070	3.7%	3.4
2010	1,296	4.3%	3.9
2015	2,033	4.5%	5.1
2020	2,388	4.1%	5.1
2025	3,896	4.9%	7.5

Figure 26: Female prison population in Uganda.

Source: Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 2025

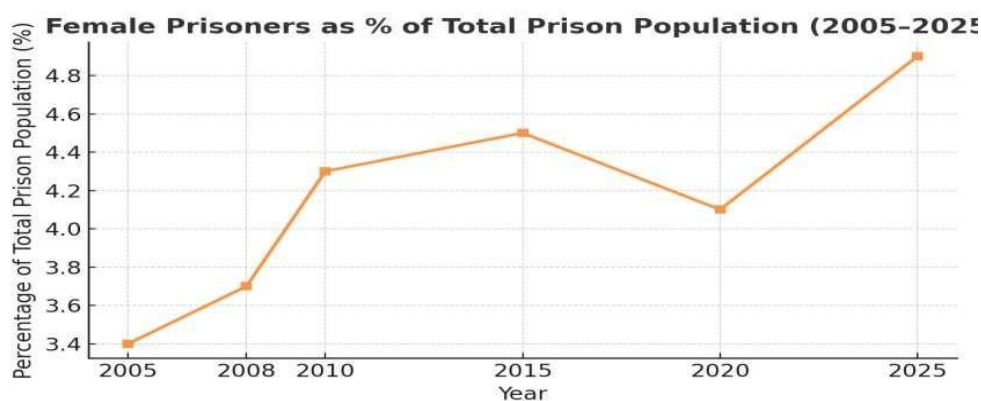


Figure 27: Female Prisoners as % of Total Prison Population (2005-2025)

Insight. While numbers rose sharply, women remain under 5% of the total prison population, showing men still dominate incarceration.

Policy Action. Address root causes of women's offending through social protection, economic empowerment, and legal aid services (LASPNET and others).

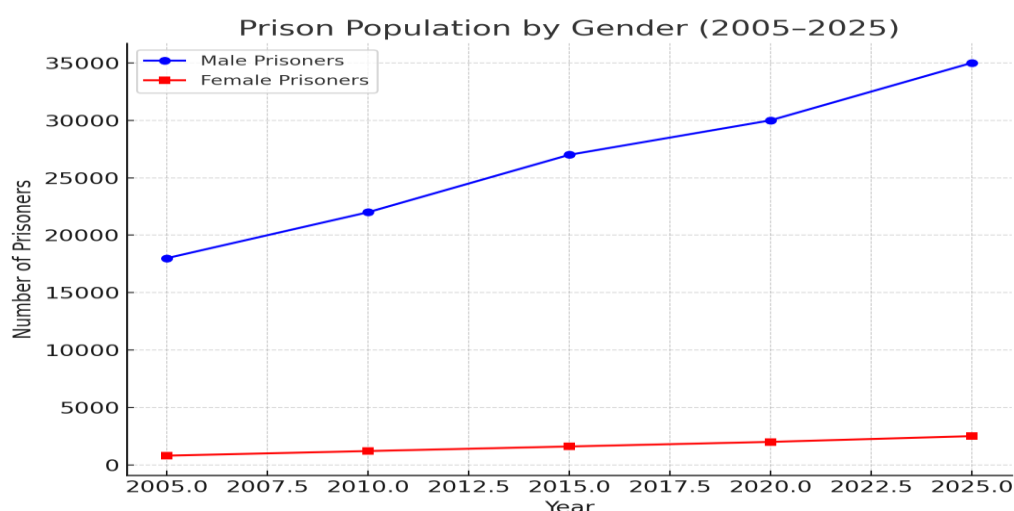


Figure 28: Prison Population by Gender (2005-2025)

Insights.

Gender. While men overwhelmingly dominate Uganda's prison system, the number of women in prison has steadily risen from 2005 to 2025.

Although the female account for less than 5% of the prison population, their growth reflects shifting vulnerabilities, particularly linked to economic exploitation and survival crimes.

6.4: Policy and Intervention Recommendations

- Uganda's prison population trends highlight the need for a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach. Justice actors should expand diversion and restorative justice programs, and develop alternatives to imprisonment, particularly for youth and women. Civil society, faith-based institutions, and schools should play a stronger preventive role, addressing unemployment, drug abuse/homicide crime, and peer influence.
- Uganda's prison data reveals a justice system under pressure, with youth forming the majority of inmates. Men continue to dominate, but the gradual increase of female inmates signals new social challenges. Strengthening prevention, reintegration, and community-based rehabilitation remains critical to reducing reliance on incarceration.
- Donors and partners can support by funding rehabilitation, capacity building, and evidence-based policy reforms.

Chapter Seven: Discussions, Recommendations and Conclusion

7.1 Discussion

With regard to juvenile crime, the data shows a slight overall increase in crimes committed by male juveniles over the years. However, a notable decline occurred in 2020, likely due to the lockdowns and restricted movement during the Covid pandemic. In contrast, crimes committed by female juveniles have shown a gradual decline throughout the period.

When examining capital offenses, most juvenile offenders are charged with sex-related crimes such as rape and defilement. Encouragingly, these cases have gradually decreased over the years.

Homicide offenses among juveniles also show a slight decline, particularly among males, whereas robberies committed by juveniles have been gradually increasing. It is worth noting that no juvenile terrorism-related offenses have been recorded in Uganda during the studied period.

Theft remains the most common charge among juvenile offenders. Although there was a general downward trend, a sudden drop occurred between 2019 and 2020, followed by a significant increase from 2020 to 2023. Offenses related to break-ins have been on a steady rise, while corruption and political/media-related crimes remain minimal or absent among juveniles.

Gender-specific trends reveal that male juveniles are more frequently charged across all crime categories, including homicide, sex-related offenses, drug abuse, and theft. While the rate of male juveniles charged with theft and homicide has either remained constant or slightly declined, the number of female juveniles charged with these crimes has remained low and is gradually decreasing. Drug abuse offenses among male juveniles are increasing, while female rates remain constant and low.

Among youth offenders, a gradual increase in robbery charges is observed over time, while homicide charges show a decline. Sex-related crimes remain prevalent, with a slow upward trend in overall numbers. A gendered analysis reveals that male youths are disproportionately

charged with sex-related crimes, although recent years have seen a rapid increase in female involvement particularly a notable spike in 2024.

Gender dynamics remain pronounced, with male youths more frequently involved in serious offenses, though female participation is growing, especially in sex-related and theft crimes. The persistence of youth crime correlates strongly with socio-economic instability and poverty, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. This highlights the urgent need for targeted policy interventions focusing on poverty reduction, youth empowerment, and community-based rehabilitation programs. Holistic approaches that address the root causes of crime such as lack of education, unemployment, and social support—are essential for reversing these trends and fostering long-term national development and stability.

Categorizing juvenile crime by type; sexual, violent, property, or drug-related, enables tailored interventions that address root causes such as trauma, substance abuse, peer influence, or economic hardship. For sex-related cases, specific criminogenic factors like exposure to pornography, inadequate parenting, or prior abuse demand specialized therapy, psychological assessments, and trauma-informed processes involving families and trained professionals. Structured categorization further improves risk assessment, resource allocation, fair sentencing, and restorative justice. Integrating such evidence-based approaches into Uganda's juvenile justice system will strengthen rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and enhance community safety

Victimisation

Youth involved in crime in Uganda often face double victimization initially as victims of poverty, abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and subsequently through punitive and stigmatizing encounters with the criminal justice system. Many of these young people engage in crime or substance abuse as a result of structural vulnerabilities, such as broken families, unemployment, poor education, and lack of social protection. Unfortunately, instead of receiving support, they are frequently treated solely as offenders.

Youth charged with sex-related crimes present a complex challenge requiring justice responses that balance accountability with rehabilitation. Protecting victims and

communities is essential, but punitive approaches alone risk limiting opportunities for reform, education, and reintegration.

The Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) in Uganda recognizes this gap and has prioritized juvenile justice reform, child protection, and victim-sensitive approaches. Institutions under JLOS, including the Police, Prisons, and Probation Services, are increasingly working to ensure that children and youth in conflict with the law are treated with dignity and provided with access to psychosocial support, legal aid, and rehabilitation. Strengthening diversion programs and community-based responses is essential to breaking the cycle of victimization and promoting youth reintegration.

Conclusion. The data illustrates a complex and evolving landscape of youth and juvenile crime in Uganda. While certain offenses, such as homicide and sex-related crimes are showing a decline or stabilization, others like robbery, theft, and break-ins are on the rise.

7.2 Key recommendations

7.2.1 Policy Level

- Develop a national crime prevention strategy to establish a clear, coordinated framework for preventing crime by all stakeholders.
- Increase awareness on crime prevention in the most at-risk communities including schools and tertiary institutions
- The Judiciary should establish drug courts to divert drug offenders into drug treatment programmes helping them overcome addiction through therapy, counselling and psychosocial support services.
- Address social-economic challenges (e.g. poverty, unemployment and drug abuse) for example through implementation of poverty alleviation programs and targeted social protection and economic empowerment initiatives for vulnerable households, especially those with youth, to address the root causes of crime.
- Enhance youth engagement and education. Increase access to quality education, vocational training, and life skills development to provide alternative pathways for at-risk youth.

- There is need for the Ministry of Education and Sports to integrate peace education and crime prevention in the curricula of schools and tertiary institutions.
- Raise the age of minimum age of criminal responsibility from 12 to 14 years and align it to international recommendations. The country should have a more rehabilitation focused approach to promote restorative justice.
- Future research should measure youth victimization to challenge delinquency stereotypes, reveal underlying structural inequalities, and highlight the victim–offender overlap that can reshape policy responses.
- Address recidivism by strengthening rehabilitation and psycho-social counselling using latest techniques.
- Utilization of alternatives to incarceration programs: There is need to increase and utilize alternative to incarceration programs like diversion programs and community-based sentencing for minor crimes to reduce overcrowding in prisons, remand homes and rehabilitation centres.

7.2.2 Institutional Level

- There is need for consistent enforcement of laws and improvement in prosecution and case handling to close justice gaps.
- Need for the police and judiciary to digitalize crime records to improve case monitoring and management.
- There is need for the police, judiciary and the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs to build youth crime data base according to age, gender and region.
- Since crime keeps changing, there is need for regular training and improved welfare and facilitation for law enforcement personnel to help them perform their duties efficiently and to enhance crime prevention.
- Efforts should be made to improve coordination between the police and other stakeholders involved in youth crime prevention including the office of the DPP, the judiciary, JLOS, CSOs, local councils, general public and other sister security agencies like the UPDF, UPS, ESO and ISO; as well as local and international organizations.
- There is need to take police services closer to the people, for example, through strengthening the Sub- County policing model which aims to deploy 18 police officers at every sub-county, municipality and town council to enhance police efficiency, community engagement and crime response times.

- Efforts should be made to expand and strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration programs.
- There is need for the academia and research institutions to conduct regular crime mapping and research. This will help in identifying crime patterns and inform strategic planning, decision making and policy development.

7.2.3 Community Level

- Expand community-based crime prevention. Support local programs that involve police; CSOs; families; schools and other institutions of learning; and religious, cultural and community leaders in early identification, participation in diversion programs and rehabilitation of potential youth and juvenile offenders.
- Improve gender-sensitive interventions. Design and implement crime prevention strategies that address the specific needs and trends among male and female youth offenders.
- Enhance community awareness, education and sensitization campaigns about youth crime for example through radio and television talk shows; neighborhood watch; and school outreach and village campaigns. These will equip communities with knowledge of potential threats and prevention techniques, foster community vigilance and build strong partnerships between the public and law enforcement agencies.
- There is need for CSOs and other stakeholders to offer psycho-social support to communities. This will help to address risk factors at the individual and community levels, offer therapy and trauma healing, foster mental wellbeing and sensitize parents in positive parenting.
- Provision of safe spaces to youths: There is need to provide youths with safe spaces to air out their grievances and to exchange ideas. All these can help them to build resilience against crime.
- Promotion of positive youth development: There is need to create more opportunities for youths to engage in activities like sports, music and dance which can help to provide them with constructive outlets for youth energy and idleness.

7.2.4 Role of Private Sector

The private sector can play a crucial role in addressing youth crime by creating and offering stable employment to young people, supporting community initiatives and collaborating with government and other stakeholders to address the root causes of youth and juvenile crime such as poverty and unemployment.

7.2.5 Donors and Development Partners

Donors and development partners can enhance prevention of youth and juvenile crime by supporting capacity building for justice institutions, civil society, law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders. They are also very crucial in the areas of funding research, diversion and preventive initiatives.

To reduce youth involvement in crime in Uganda, the report recommends strengthening nationwide cyber safety awareness and digital literacy among young people. Schools, universities, and community centres should integrate practical cybersecurity education, establish Digital Safety Clubs, and disseminate youth-friendly materials that help young people safely navigate online spaces. Expanding community outreach, particularly in rural and underserved areas, will equip youth with the knowledge to avoid online recruitment into criminal networks, exposure to harmful substance-use content, and other cyber-enabled risks.

Improving institutional and law enforcement capacity is essential for Uganda to respond effectively to emerging forms of youth crime. The report encourages investment in digital forensic units, specialised cybercrime training for police and prosecutors, and stronger coordination with the Financial Intelligence Authority to detect crypto-related offences. Establishing early-warning systems, improving case-handling procedures, and enhancing collaboration between district-level authorities and national cybercrime units will close gaps that currently allow youth-targeted online crime to flourish.

Combatting online drug trafficking and substance-use promotion requires stronger partnerships with telecom companies, internet service providers, and social media platforms operating in Uganda. These partnerships should support rapid removal of harmful content, monitoring of online drug markets, and improved digital reporting channels for youth and communities. Uganda should adopt advanced monitoring tools and strengthen its regulatory

framework to limit media that glamorizes drug use while expanding preventive communication campaigns across radio, schools, youth centres, and digital platforms.

Addressing the root causes of youth crime in Uganda also requires gender- and age-responsive social services. The report recommends investing in youth-friendly mental health facilities, community recreational hubs, and 24/7 psychosocial support hotlines. Expanding social protection, particularly for young mothers, displaced youth, and youth with disabilities is vital. Additionally, scaled-up vocational, digital, and entrepreneurship training, paired with micro-grants and mentorship, will help address unemployment and economic vulnerabilities that drive young people into crime.

Finally, reducing youth crime in Uganda demands inclusive governance and stronger reintegration structures for at-risk youth. Establishing youth advisory committees at district and national levels, promoting leadership opportunities for young women, and strengthening community mentorship programmes will enhance youth participation in safety and development processes. Reintegration services for street-connected youth, trafficked victims, and youth emerging from conflict or detention should combine counselling, skills development, and livelihood support. Expanding national safety nets; such as scholarships, food assistance, and emergency support, will further reduce the structural pressures that push Ugandan youth toward crime.

7.3 Conclusion.

Youth crime in Uganda is a growing concern, reflected in rising juvenile delinquency, capital offences, and the threat of violent extremism. These trends reveal underlying socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, limited access to education, and weak family support systems. While current interventions such as community policing, diversion programs, and rehabilitation services are commendable, they remain insufficient without stronger national investment in youth empowerment, mental health, and justice reform.

Addressing youth crime requires a holistic, multi-sectoral approach grounded in prevention, inclusion, and community resilience. Uganda must recognize that youth are not merely offenders but untapped agents of change. With the right support, they can contribute meaningfully to society.

Government strategies include the Youth Livelihood Programme, remand and rehabilitation services through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, and diversion guidelines introduced by the Uganda Police. Universal education and vocational training also help reduce youth vulnerability. NGOs such as UYDEL, Save the Children, ASF, and Raising Voices, alongside international partners like UNICEF and UNODC, play key roles in prevention, reintegration, and justice reform.

A coordinated national holistic response is essential bringing together government, civil society, and communities to build a safer, more inclusive Uganda where all youth can thrive.

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Data Sources

- Official documents from websites;
- Justice Law and Order Sector
- Uganda Police
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics
- Population Prison Brief
- Institute for Criminal Policy Research

List of Source Documents (with Links)

-  [Annual Crime Report 2017](#)
-  [Annual Crime Report 2018](#)
-  [Annual Crime Report 2019](#)
-  [Annual Crime Report 2020](#)
-  [Annual JLOS Report 2020–2021](#)
-  [Annual Crime Report 2023](#)
-  [Annual Crime Report 2024](#)
-  [Prison Population by Category – UBOS Report 2015–2020](#)
-  [Crimes by Category – UBOS Report 2017–2020](#)
-  [Number of Crimes by Category 2017–2020](#)
-  [Crime Rate – UBOS Report 2015–2020](#)
-  [Annual JLOS Report 2021–2022](#)
-  [Annual JLOS Report 2016–2017](#)
-  [Annual JLOS Report 2023–2024](#)

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