

A total of 46,385 prisoners in this age bracket are behind bars.

BY JANE NAFULA

**M**ore than half of Uganda's prison population consists of young people, a trend experts say reflects deepening social and economic vulnerabilities among the country's youth.

Quoting the latest prison statistics, Mr Milton Tiyo, the Assistant Commissioner General of Prisons, revealed that as of November 25, youth aged 18 to 30 made up 58.3 percent of the 79,563 inmates.

"As of yesterday (November 25), I locked up 79,563 prisoners, of which 46,385 are youth, of which 44,112 are males, and 2,273 are females," he said in Kampala on Wednesday.

Mr Tiyo said 46,385 prisoners in this age bracket are behind bars—44,112 males and 2,273 females. Of these, 24,028 are convicts, 22,302 are on remand, while 56 are detained as debtors.

#### Capital offences dominate

According to Mr Tiyo, 20,342 youth are incarcerated for capital offences. These include: aggravated defilement (6,827 cases), murder (5,518), aggravated robbery (4,878), rape (2,361), trafficking of children (619), kidnap with intent to murder (54), terrorism-related offences (34), aggravated homosexuality (19), treachery (30), and treason (2).

For non-capital offences, theft, break-ins, and burglary lead with 5,399 youth as convicts and 4,934 on remand.

Cattle theft follows with 1,014 convicts and 1,985 on remand, while non-aggravated defilement accounts for 958 convicts and 1,729 remand cases.

Other offences include firearms related offences (666), causing grievous harm (937), stealing vehicles (1,082), cattle rustling (390), threatening violence (818), attempted murder (551) robbery (843), malicious damage (575), manslaughter (266), escape (233), National Drug Authority-related cases, (412),

# 58% of prisoners are young people - report



Members of Parliament during a visit to Luzira prison in 2016. The prison authorities have reported of congestion at the facility over the years. PHOTO/FILE

trafficking in persons (310), arson (320), wildlife-related offences (228), criminal trespass (348), false presence (283), corruption, fraud, forgery and embezzlement (125), possession of suspected stolen property (233).

In a related development, a new report dubbed 'A Youth and Juvenile Offending in Uganda' compiled by Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime shows that theft remains the most prevalent offence among youth between 2017 and 2024.

Further in the report presented by UYDEL Executive Director Rogers Kasirye, the number of youth charged with theft increased from 7,822 in 2017 to 12,548 in 2023, before falling to 4,084 in 2024.

Juvenile crime trends similarly reflect a dominance of theft and sex-related offences.

Between 2017 and 2024, juveniles committed 4,563 crimes, of which 2,153 were thefts, 971 were sex-related offences, 583 were break-ins, 319 assaults, 119 robberies, and 817 were miscellaneous offences

The report notes that break-ins, assaults, and robberies show a "fluctuating but steady presence".

#### Systemic weaknesses

Findings show a persistent gap between charges and convictions, pointing to challenges across Uganda's justice chain—from investigations to prosecution. For instance, theft convictions dropped to 4,084 in 2024, compared to 28,000 charges filed.

Sex-related and child-related offences showed particularly low conviction rates, rarely exceeding 30 percent of

## 79,563

**Numbers.** As of November 25, the number of prisoners was 79,563, of which 46,385 are youth.

charges. Drug-related convictions rose significantly in 2023, reaching 1,681 cases.

"The mismatch between charges and convictions underscores systemic challenges in Uganda's criminal justice process," the report states, calling for improved investigations, better coordination, and enhanced restorative justice.

#### Rising offences

The report highlights a surge in narcotics-related charges, particularly affecting male youth. Male drug-related cases rose from 2,132 in 2017 to 5,509 in 2024.

Mr Kasirye warned that youth crime in Uganda is escalating amid rising juvenile delinquency, capital offences, and threats of violent extremism.

"These trends show underlying socio-economic challenges—poverty, unemployment, limited access to education, and weak family support systems," he said. "Current interventions are commendable but insufficient without stronger investment in youth empowerment, mental health, and justice reform."

Ms Sharon Lesa Nyambe, the head of UNODC Uganda, stressed that addressing youth crime must be at the centre of national planning in a country where three-quarters of the population is under 35.

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