

# Gaming regulator wants higher penalties for betting violations

Proposed reforms aim to curb illegal gambling, promote responsible play, and strengthen oversight of the fast-growing industry.

## Gaming.

RACHEAL NABISUBI

The gaming regulator has proposed tougher penalties for violations of gaming laws as it steps up efforts to promote responsible gambling in a rapidly expanding industry.

The National Lotteries and Gaming Regulatory Board (NLGRB) says it has drafted amendments to the Gaming Act aimed at more than doubling existing fines, which have remained capped at 48 currency points since 2017.

Under the proposals, penalties would rise to 100 currency points, a move the regulator says reflects the industry's rapid evolution and the need for stronger deterrence.

"We are considering raising penalties to 100 currency points, reflecting the industry's evolution and the need for stricter compliance," said Alicia Atukunda, NLGRB's senior manager for licensing and responsible gaming, during the rollout of the Responsible Gaming Directives.

Atukunda said the proposed amendments will soon be submitted to Cabinet for approval, signalling a tougher stance against illegal operations while reinforcing responsible gaming practices.

Each currency point is equivalent to Shs20,000, meaning the current maximum fine of 48 currency points stands at about Shs980,000. If approved, the new penalties would rise to Shs2 million.

The proposals come at a time when Uganda's gaming industry is experiencing rapid growth. Last week, the NLGRB rolled out Responsible Gaming Directives designed to balance industry expansion with public health concerns.

Introduced in November 2025, the directives mark a turning point for a sector that has shifted from small betting halls to predominantly online platforms.

Atukunda said the directives were prompted by explosive industry growth, increased access to gambling through digital platforms, and a rise in gambling addiction cases.

"We are seeing more players coming



In November 2025, NLGRB introduced directives, marking a turning point for a sector that has shifted from small betting halls to online platforms. PHOTO / FILE

forward with gambling issues, some even requesting to have their accounts closed," she said, noting that the directives require operators to embed responsible play tools into their systems to protect both players and the industry. Under the new rules, operators must demonstrate how they de-

tect problem gambling, integrate safeguards into their platforms, and provide support for vulnerable players.

The directives also introduce stricter age verification measures that block access to anyone under 25, as well as a three-tier limit system covering deposits, spending, and losses.

Atukunda said these measures empower players to set boundaries and encourage gambling within their means.

"By compelling operators to adopt responsible play tools, NLGRB hopes to reduce addiction cases, protect vulnerable groups, and ensure sustainable growth in a sector that continues to attract new players daily. Compliance is no longer optional; it is now the cost of doing business," she said.

Uganda is the first country in East Africa to introduce comprehensive responsible gaming directives.

The gaming industry has grown exponentially, with NLGRB reporting a six-fold increase in annual revenue, from Shs50b in the 2019/20 financial year to Shs323b by June 2025. Industry turnover has also surged from Shs500b in 2021/22 to Shs8 trillion by June 2025, driven largely by the expansion of online platforms.

Currently, about 52 companies operate in Uganda's gambling and betting sector. According to the World Health Organisation, industry analysts estimate that global gambling revenue will reach \$700b by 2028, with increased smartphone use in low- and middle-income countries expected to drive much of this growth.

Betting consultant Rogers Barungi said the directives largely reinforce existing guidelines rather than introduce entirely new rules.

"We have lived with these directives for quite some time. As people in the business, yes, we are looking for money and revenue for government, but we also recognise that betting must be controlled," he said, emphasising the importance of age restrictions and personal spending limits.

"If you earn a salary, first invest or save your money. Only use a small portion for betting. This is entertainment, not a path to riches," he cautioned.

Barungi added that betting shops employ trained personnel to advise clients on responsible gaming and promote self-exclusion programmes for those struggling with addiction.

While enforcement has not always been consistent, he welcomed the renewed emphasis.

### Key figures

Shs20,000

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Shs2m

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