

“SIX CENTRES OPERATING BEYOND RECOMMENDED CAPACITY”

OVERPOPULATED, OUTDATED

The Auditor General's 2025 findings reveal that the juvenile detention centres are riddled with several challenges, undermining the effectiveness of the national rehabilitation programme, writes **Mary Karugaba**

OVER 5,000 JUVENILES STUCK IN REMAND HOMES OVER MISSING REPORTS

Child-related offences

The 2024 annual crime report indicates that 4.3% of the reported cases were child-related offences. Among these, children/ juveniles were direct targets/ victims of crime in 9,408 cases, compared to 10,741 cases reported in 2023, which is a 12.4% decrease in the registered crimes.

By the end of 2024, out of the total cases of child-related offences reported to the Police, 862 cases were taken to court, 4,183 were not proceeded with, while 4,363 cases are still under inquiry.

Accordingly, out of the total cases taken to court, 207 ended in convictions, while 97 were dismissed. A total of 66 cases ended in acquittals, while 492 cases are still pending in court.

Efforts to get a comment from the state minister for gender, labour and social development in charge of children and youth, as well as the Police were unsuccessful.

The assistant commissioner of children's affairs, Franco Tolea, said the ministry had already submitted its responses to the auditors.

Thousands of juveniles arrested across Uganda are spending weeks and, in many cases, months in remand homes, not due to complex or serious cases, but because a critical document that determines their fate is simply missing.

The Auditor General (AG), Edward Akol, in his 2025 report, revealed that 5,757 out of 9,204 juvenile offenders sent to remand homes and rehabilitation centres over the last three years are stuck there because of a lack of social inquiry reports.

In the report, Akol said in some cases, children accused of minor offences had spent more than three months in custody, while others facing capital offences exceeded the six-month legal limit.

“From a sample of 82 juveniles with minor offences, 34, representing 41%, had been remanded for more than the recommended three months, contrary to Section 94(5) of the Children's Act, Cap 62. Similarly, 20 out of a sample of 44 juveniles on capital offences, representing 45%, had been remanded for more than six months,” the AG report read.

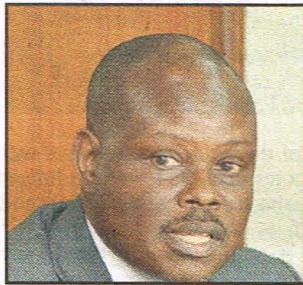
AG'S CONCERNS

Akol said for children already considered most vulnerable, their stay has led to overcrowding in already stretched facilities and their education has suffered, leading to emotional distress. They also have diminished chances of successful reintegration into society.

Under Uganda's Children Act, every child who comes into contact with the justice system must be assessed by a probation and social welfare officer.

The Children's Act, Cap 62, defines juveniles as individuals under the age of 18 who come into contact with the justice system due to suspected or accused criminal activity.

Uganda has seven remand



The Auditor General, Akol

homes and one national rehabilitation centre dedicated to the protection and reintegration of juvenile offenders.

“These facilities face significant challenges, including overcrowding, ageing infrastructure, inadequate health facilities/sickbays, lack of access to education and inadequate rehabilitation services, among others.

“In light of the above challenges, the Office of the AG undertook a value for money audit to assess and provide insights into the management of remand homes and the rehabilitation centre in the period 2022/23 to 2024/25,” the report revealed.

REINTEGRATION PROCESS

Preparing a single social inquiry report requires multiple steps: Interviewing the child, tracing family members, conducting home visits, consulting schools and local leaders and compiling findings for courts. The process can take several days – sometimes weeks – especially when families live in remote areas.

According to the report, reintegration efforts were equally weak, with delays in the resettlement of juvenile offenders who had completed their committal orders.

He said at the time of audit (October 2025), out of 413 juveniles at the centres, 115 (29%) had completed their committal orders, but had not yet been reintegrated.

All 971 children released over three years have received no start-up support or follow-



Naguru, one of seven children remand homes in the country. The Auditor General's report gives recommendations for improving the juvenile rehabilitation programme

WHAT ARE SOCIAL REPORTS?

Social inquiry reports, or probation reports, are detailed assessments prepared by probation officers or social workers to assist courts in sentencing convicts after a guilty plea or verdict.

The report is meant to help courts determine whether a child should be released on bail, sentenced to community service, reunited with family or placed under rehabilitation.

They help courts understand the offender's background, evaluate risk to the community and determine appropriate sentences, such as community service or probation, rather than just imprisonment.

They also provide comprehensive background information on an offender's personal, social and economic circumstances to the courts.

Without the reports, magistrates have little or no background information about the child, often resulting in prolonged detention and delayed justice.

up monitoring, increasing the risk of reoffending.

“Without a social inquiry report, courts are effectively making decisions in the dark. The child becomes just a case number, not a person with circumstances that need understanding,” David Kamba, a child protection officer, said.

A review of eight facilities found that six centres (75%) were operating far beyond

their recommended capacity, with occupancy rates ranging from 110% to 229%.

Akol named Fort Portal and Mbale as among the most affected, holding populations of up to 129% and 122% above their individual recommended holding capacities of 45 each.

Akol said all eight centres lacked resident medical personnel, which violates legal requirements.

“While some homes rely on nearby government health facilities for support, the absence of dedicated staff leaves many children vulnerable.”

The audit revealed that although staffing levels are described as critical, one probation or social welfare officer was handling an average of 37 juveniles, far above the recommended 1:8 ratio.

Most facilities also lacked adequate playgrounds, educational services and modern vocational equipment.

At Kampiringisa National Rehabilitation Centre, only 35 out of 140 juveniles who had expressed interest in formal education were accessing it. Outdated tools hampered several skills-training programmes, some dating back to the 1950s, the audit revealed.

Auditors further noted the absence of clear operational regulations, poor co-ordination among justice institutions and a lack of structured oversight for the centres' management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The review recommends equipping local council leaders, police officers and

district probation officers with training to handle minor cases through mediation rather than court processes.

He encouraged parents and guardians to take a more active role in court proceedings so as to speed up bail applications and strengthen support for affected children.

To further cut delays, Akol advised the Judiciary to introduce virtual court hearings for juvenile cases and fast-track matters involving school-going children.

Akol also urged the Government to expand and renovate remand homes, in addition to completing ongoing construction in Kabale and Masindi. Additionally, the AG advised that a regular maintenance policy to ensure facilities meet health and safety standards be developed.

He also recommended that the Government establish education facilities within centres, introduce vocational and skills-based training for those not pursuing formal education and partner with technical institutes to provide market-relevant skills such as carpentry, tailoring and metal fabrication.