

Rising child crime should concern us all

That Uganda has one of the world's youngest populations is no longer news. It is, however, a constant reminder that attention must be paid to the well-being and general livelihood of the said section of the population. That is why it is concerning that the number of children and young adults coming into conflict with the law is rising.

Figures from the justice sector indicate that the remand home population rose from 1,111 in the 2023/2024 financial year to 5,426 in the 2024/2025 financial year, according to the 2025 annual police crime report. A total of 3,303 juveniles were involved in crime, up from 2,268 cases recorded in 2024. Speaking at the 2026 National Performance Review Conference on Uganda's development agenda last week, the Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Mr Norbert Mao, said cases involving juveniles have increased, and this is putting pressure on remand homes.

The minister linked the rising number to poor parenting, delays in resettling children, and systemic gaps in handling juvenile offenders. A story published in our April 20 edition titled, "Teens among main suspects in Kampala gang crackdown", lends credence to the number of young criminals roaming our streets.

The story, a recount of a joint security operation carried out recently on criminal gangs along Nakivubo channel in Kampala, revealed that most of those arrested were aged between 12-20 years.

It is not the first time that raids of this kind are happening, and needless to say, will not be the last. The cycle of young people running away from home to live on the streets and, in most cases, end up as perpetrators of crime is an old and ongoing one.

Many have been through the system, through remand homes and rehabilitation programmes, but some still fall through the cracks. It would be prudent to reinvent that

wheel by honestly identifying the gaps that need to be plugged and, more importantly, how. We appreciate the circumstances that lead some of these young people into crime, but also acknowledge the urgent need to stop the cycle.

The question is, how do we decongest remand homes? How do we work towards reducing the number of children that end up having to go to remand homes?

Minister Mao offers some pointers. In his address, he said the Judiciary is being supported to deploy judicial officers to remand homes to conduct special juvenile court sessions, aimed at speeding up case disposal. He mentioned collaboration with development partners and establishment court spaces within remand homes, and promoting diversion programmes that redirect children who commit minor offences away from the formal justice system.

This sounds like a great plan; however, more should be done. Not only by the government, but by every stakeholder. The minister mentions parental neglect. This is not to be ignored. It all starts at home. We can nip it in the bud right there before it escalates to the streets and remand homes.

Let's fight for our young people by genuinely interrogating our parenting and making the necessary changes at the various levels.

The issue:

Child crime

Our view:

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