



CHILD-FRIENDLY JUSTICE

REPORT ON CHILD-FRIENDLY JUSTICE AND DIVERSION SESSIONS CONDUCTED WITH THE UGANDA POLICE FORCE

**Under the
Iko-Divert Program**

25/03/2026

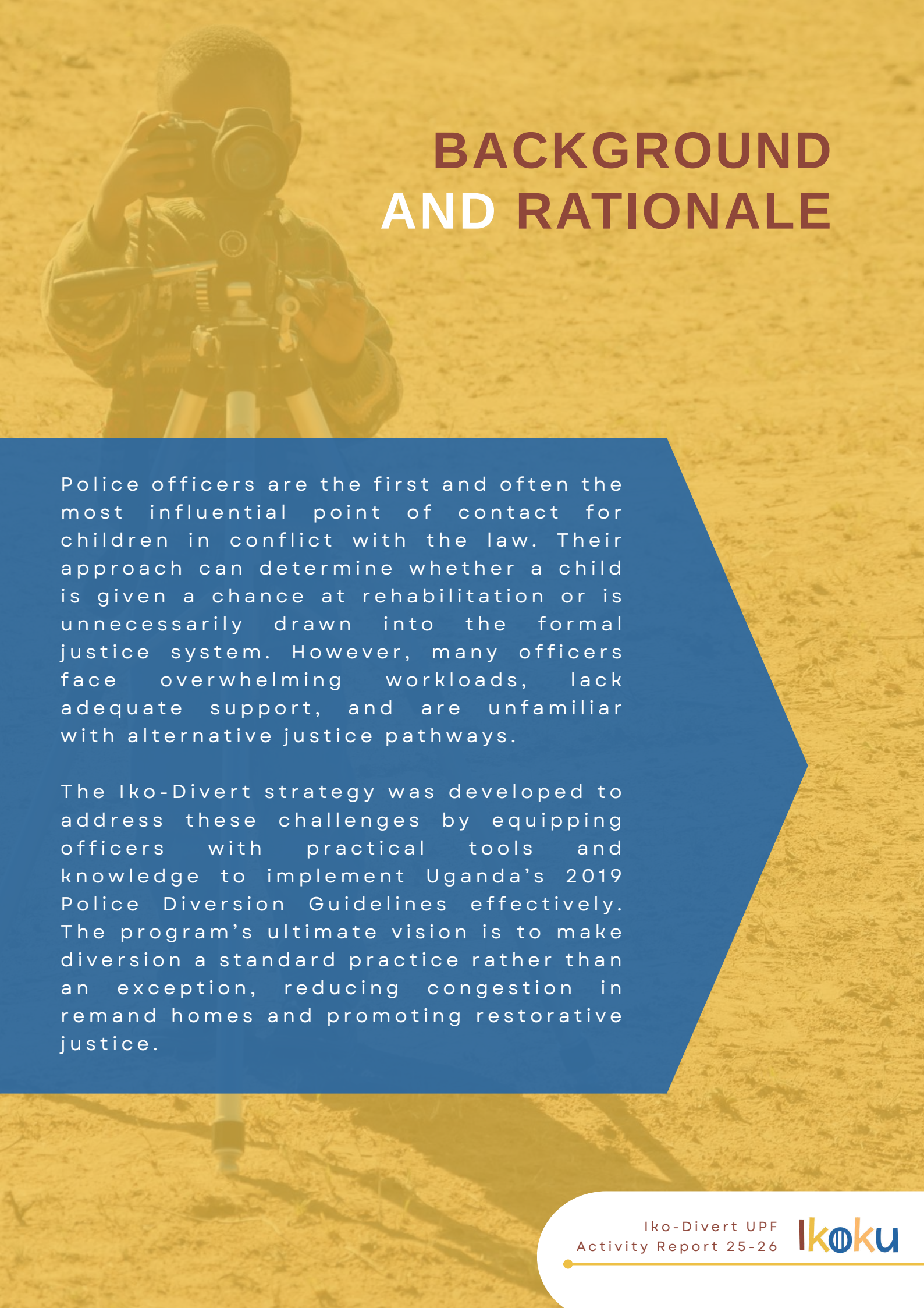
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between February-April we conducted a series of focused sessions under the Iko-Divert program across six police stations in Kampala Metropolitan Area. The sessions aimed at strengthening the understanding and practical application of child-friendly justice procedures and diversion among officers, particularly those in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU).

In 2025, we engaged 93 police officers in total (51 females, 41 males). The sessions revealed critical gaps in knowledge and practice but also demonstrated a strong willingness among officers to embrace child-centered approaches.

This month, we conducted our second training session at Wandegaya Police station, building on the foundation laid during our first engagement. The session focused on enhancing officers' understanding of child-friendly justice procedures and their role in supporting children at the first point of contact. We met (21f, 14m)

Through these interactions, we laid the groundwork for a more systematic adoption of diversion as an alternative to prosecution for children in conflict with the law. We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure that child protection becomes a lived reality within policing.

A child is standing in a dry, sandy landscape, holding a camera on a tripod. The child is wearing a dark jacket and is looking through the camera's viewfinder. The background is a vast, open, and arid area with some sparse vegetation. The overall tone of the image is warm and golden, with a blue geometric shape on the right side containing white text.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Police officers are the first and often the most influential point of contact for children in conflict with the law. Their approach can determine whether a child is given a chance at rehabilitation or is unnecessarily drawn into the formal justice system. However, many officers face overwhelming workloads, lack adequate support, and are unfamiliar with alternative justice pathways.

The Iko-Divert strategy was developed to address these challenges by equipping officers with practical tools and knowledge to implement Uganda's 2019 Police Diversion Guidelines effectively. The program's ultimate vision is to make diversion a standard practice rather than an exception, reducing congestion in remand homes and promoting restorative justice.

PARTICIPANTS AND ENGAGEMENTS

Police Station	Female	Male	Total
Kabalagala	2	5	7
Central Police Station	11	7	18
Katwe	8	12	20
Jinja Road	9	6	15
Mukono	10	5	15
Wandegeya (2025)	8	6	14
Wandegeya (2026)	21	14	35
Mubende	4	0	4
TOTAL	73	55	128



KEY FOCUS AREAS COVERED



Legal and policy frameworks supporting child-friendly justice

Including an overview of international standards (e.g., UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), the Children Act, and the 2019 Children Diversion Guidelines for Police Officers



The importance of diversion and its benefits to children and the community.

Emphasizing restorative justice principles, reduction of child detention rates, and positive reintegration outcomes.



Practical steps in identifying cases eligible for diversion

How to assess minor offenses, first-time offenders, and the best interests of the child criteria.



Proper documentation and record-keeping for diverted cases

Techniques for accurate completion of diversion forms and maintaining clear case records to support transparency and accountability.



Building effective referral networks for psychosocial support and rehabilitation services

Including mapping available community services, NGOs, and shelter homes.



KEY FOCUS AREAS COVERED CONTD.

◆ **Communication and interviewing skills with children**

Approaches to create a safe, non-threatening environment when interviewing child suspects or witnesses.

◆ **Child rights and protection principles in policing practice**

Understanding non-discrimination, participation, and the right to be heard et cetera.

◆ **The role of the Family and Child Protection Unit (CFPU) and Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in child cases**

Clarifying specific mandates and practical coordination in handling children's matters.

◆ **Alternatives to detention and restorative justice approaches**

Exploring community service, mediation, family conferencing, and other non-custodial measures.

◆ **Psychosocial needs of children in conflict with the law**

Recognizing trauma and stress indicators, and the importance of mental health support in the justice process.

◆ **Ethical considerations and safeguarding when working with children**

Including confidentiality, informed consent, and preventing secondary victimization.

METHODOLOGY

Interactive role plays and scenario-based exercises to demonstrate practical application of diversion and child-friendly interviewing.

Distribution of copies of the 2019 Police Diversion Guidelines to support officers' continued reference and application after the sessions.

Q & A SESSION

Interactive lectures and case scenarios.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

During these sessions, several consistent challenges emerged:

- ◆ **Overwhelming workloads:** Officers frequently cited limited time and high caseloads as barriers to thorough handling of juvenile cases.
- ◆ **Limited awareness of referral pathways:** Many officers were unaware of where to direct children for shelter, psycho-social support, or vocational training.
- ◆ **Inadequate documentation skills:** Difficulty in correctly filling out diversion forms and maintaining proper records remains a major challenge.
- ◆ **Gaps in understanding diversion:** Some officers lacked clarity on when and how to apply diversion, resulting in missed opportunities to prevent unnecessary prosecutions.
- ◆ **Limited knowledge of the 2019 Police Diversion Guidelines:** Despite being a key tool, these guidelines are not widely known or internalized at the station level.

FEEDBACK AND OFFICER RESPONSE



Officers expressed appreciation for the practical approach and shared their desire for continued support, including refresher sessions and ongoing mentorship. Many indicated that they felt better equipped to handle cases involving children and were eager to see more concrete collaboration with external service providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

◆ Introduce a mandatory “Diversión first” screening step at intake

Institutionalize a simple, mandatory checklist at the point of first contact requiring officers to assess diversion eligibility before opening a formal case file.

This could include:

- A one-page screening tool attached to the police file
- Clear yes/no criteria (minor offence, first-time offender, consent, best interest)
- A requirement for supervisors to sign off where diversion is not applied

This shifts diversion from being optional to procedurally expected.

◆ Establish station-Level Diversión Focal Persons

Exploring community service, mediation, family conferencing, and other non-custodial measures.

◆ Refresher and follow-up sessions

Regular capacity-building workshops to reinforce knowledge, update officers on policy developments, and address emerging challenges encountered in practice.

◆ Station-level resource materials

Develop and distribute easy-to-use reference guides summarizing diversion procedures, child-friendly interviewing techniques, and relevant legal frameworks.

ACTIVITY GALLERY



The logo for 'Ikoku' is centered within a white diamond shape. The word 'Ikoku' is written in a sans-serif font, with the 'I' in brown, 'k' in yellow, 'o' in blue, and 'ku' in orange. The diamond is set against a background of blurred, colorful lights in shades of purple, blue, and orange.

Ikoku

THANK YOU