

Justice Needs and Satisfaction in **Uganda** 2024

Legal problems in daily life



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This study was financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of The Netherlands and conducted with assistance from Research World International (RWI).

Hiil is grateful to the Judiciary of Uganda for the technical cooperation and contributions through the JNS Reference Group.

Hiil is grateful to the Governance and Security Programme (formerly JLOS) Secretariat and the JLOS JNS Reference Group for their technical support throughout this project.



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Executive summary

Capturing the voices of 6,300 randomly selected Ugandans, this Justice Needs and Satisfaction (JNS) study tells us about the legal problems Ugandans experience in daily life, the impact of these problems, and what they do to try to resolve them. It is the third time such a study has been conducted in Uganda, with previous JNS studies published in 2016 and 2020. The survey explicitly builds upon these previous studies, adding to a robust evidence base to inform policies and implementation while keeping an eye on developments over time. It also provides a detailed examination of demographic and regional differences, adding further depth to the picture of justice needs in Uganda.

Around 95% of Ugandans have experienced at least one legal problem in the past year, with many of them reporting more than one problem. This is consistent among different demographic groups and all regions. In 2016, we found that 88% of adults had experienced at least one legal problem, whereas in 2020 it was 84%. Simultaneously, this time problems are assessed, on average, as less serious

than four years ago, suggesting that people reported more legal problems they might not have reported four years ago.

The resolution rate of legal problems has increased, after already improving between 2016 and 2020. Around 55% of all problems are completely or partially resolved, compared to 48% and 40% in the previous studies. Although this might in part be the result of recording more problems that are less serious in nature, it is a promising sign about the ability of Ugandans to resolve their legal problems. At the same time, this also means that 45% of all problems have not (yet) been resolved, with around 29% of the problems still ongoing and 16% abandoned.

Looking at both prevalence and seriousness, the four most serious problem categories are land problems, family problems, crime, and domestic violence. Neighbour disputes are also very common, however, they are generally assessed as less serious. The most common problem categories have mostly remained the same over the last eight years.

Each problem category consists of a number of specific legal problems that people experience. The specific types of land problems people experience are very diverse, but disputes over boundaries and land grabbing are most often seen as the most serious. The most common specific type of crime is much more pronounced, with theft accounting for around 60% of crimes people experience. This is followed by cybercrime and online fraud (11% of all crimes). The most serious family problems are disputes over child support and problems related to divorce or separation, while the most serious forms of domestic violence are physical abuse and emotional abuse.

Different demographic groups are more likely to experience certain types of problems, although this by no means implies that only people with such a profile experience these problem types.

- Land problems are more common among men, older people, people with no or only primary education, and people who say they can cover their basic needs. Land problems are especially common in the Northern region, and to a lesser extent in the Central region.
- Family problems are more common among women, people with no or only primary education, and people who say they cannot cover their basic needs. Family problems are most common in the Western region.
- Crime is pretty much equally common for all demographic groups. Crime is most common in the Eastern region.
- Domestic violence is more common among women and young people (18-24 and 25-39). Domestic violence is also most common in the Eastern region.



Nearly everyone (98%) who experiences a legal problem faces negative consequences due to their most serious problem. The three most common negative consequences are loss of money, stress-related illness, and loss of time. Other relatively common negative consequences are experiences of violence as well as harm to family members. These are very similar to the most commonly reported consequences in 2020.

Around 93% of people who experienced at least one legal problem take some form of action to try to resolve their most serious problem. This is significantly more than four years ago, which was 80%. For those who did not take any action, the most common reason is that they did not expect a positive outcome. This was the most common reason in 2020 as well, although this time even more people gave this answer.

When people take action they can either talk directly to the other party in the dispute or engage the help of a third party. Around 85% of people with a legal problem talked to at least one third party, while 64% engaged one or more third parties outside of their social network. Women, younger people, and people with a lower education level and less financial

means are generally less likely to engage a third party outside of their social network, resulting in a lower likelihood of resolving their most serious problem.

When engaging a third party, personal networks are the most common source of help. Family members (41%) are a particularly high common source of help, but friends (23%), neighbours (10%), and colleagues (8%) are also regularly engaged. Outside of people's social networks, two actors stand out: the police (24%) and local council courts (LCCs) (26%), with roughly one in four people turning to each of these actors. Compared to four years ago, around twice as many people now go to LCCs with their most serious problems. Cultural and traditional leaders are engaged by around 13% of people who take action, while around 10% of people who take action seek the help of a lawyer and/or end up in a formal court of law. Although this is not an insignificant percentage, it does show that nine out of ten legal problems are dealt with mostly outside of the formal justice sector.

Whereas women are more likely to engage a family member, friend, or neighbour; men are more likely to engage any third party outside of their social network. This includes LCCs, the

police, cultural and traditional leaders, lawyers, and formal courts. Looking at age categories, a similar division is visible, with younger people more often relying on family and friends, while older people more often seek help from justice providers outside of their social network.

People with a lower education level are significantly more likely to go to an LCC or ask for help from a cultural or traditional leader. The difference is less pronounced in terms of financial status, with financially better-off people going slightly more often to LCCs. Only 4% of people with no or primary education and people who say they cannot cover their basic needs engage a lawyer to resolve their most serious problem; between 5% and 6% go to a formal court. Meanwhile, higher educated people and people with more financial means are three times more likely to enlist the services of a lawyer and go significantly more often to formal courts.

Part of these demographic differences are the result of regional differences, as people in rural areas and in the Northern region generally have a lower education level and are more likely to say they cannot cover their basic needs. LCCs and cultural and traditional leaders are much more

commonly engaged in rural areas than in urban areas. Whereas the LCCs are a popular source of help in all regions, cultural and traditional leaders are especially engaged by people in the Northern region. On the other hand, sources of help affiliated with the formal justice system - such as the police, lawyers, and formal courts - are engaged more often in urban areas.

Around 72% of all sources of help were deemed either helpful or very helpful, illustrating the value of third parties in helping people resolve their legal problems. Looking at some of the most common sources of help, lawyers (84%) are most often seen as helpful, which makes sense considering they are usually specifically hired by people to represent their side. Family members (82%) and friends (79%) are also often found helpful, but it is likely that relatively low expectations play a role in this. LCCs (69%) and cultural and traditional leaders (68%) score just below the average in terms of helpfulness, but considerably better than the police (64%) and formal courts (62%).



1

Introduction

This report is about Ugandans' legal needs and experiences with the justice system. During September - October 2023, we talked to 6.300 randomly selected adults in Uganda. Together with Research World International (RWI), we visited people in all regions and asked them whether they had experienced any legal problems in the last year, what they did to try to resolve their problems, and how they perceived the resolution process and outcomes. The result is a unique people-centred understanding of the justice needs of people in Uganda.

At HiiL (The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law), we are devoted to making justice more accessible through the development of people-centred services. We call this user-friendly justice: justice that is easy to access, easy to understand, and effective. Our goal is to ensure that by 2030, 150 million people will be able to prevent or resolve their most pressing legal problems. To achieve this, we stimulate legal innovation and scaling of the innovations that work best. But all of this starts with the collection of data on people's legal needs and their justice journeys.

HiiL has been active in Uganda for more than ten years, publishing a wide range of research. Our first Justice Needs and Satisfaction (JNS) study was published in 2016, followed by a second study four years later in 2020. In between we launched several deep dive reports into specific problem categories, such as land problems, divorce and separation, and crime. In 2021 and 2022 we also published two studies into the legal needs of Ugandans at the time of the COVID-19 crisis.¹ As research is only one pillar of HiiL's approach to people-centred justice, we have also organised several rounds of dialogues with justice leaders, organised a justice innovation lab, published a Family Justice Catalogue developed with national experts, trained stakeholders to train others on how to use this guideline, and supported numerous justice innovators working to prevent and resolve the most serious legal problems.²

This current report serves to inform policy makers, service providers, innovators, and other justice stakeholders about the most pressing justice problems in Uganda, how these

affect lives, where people go for help, and whether they can find resolutions. It explicitly builds on the existing body of justice research previously conducted in Uganda, comparing the data where possible to the findings of the JNS 2016 and 2020. As such, it further adds to an already strong body of evidence in Uganda on justice needs, while also highlighting developments and trends over time. Furthermore, we explicitly look at both demographic and regional differences, thus providing an in-depth assessment of access to justice beyond the general picture.

The report is structured as follows: Chapter 2 discusses the methodology, explaining how we conceptualise, operationalise, and measure justice needs and satisfaction, as well as how we arrive at findings and implications. It also describes the implementation of the study, including some key statistics of the sample of 6.300 Ugandans. Chapters 3 to 5 discuss the analysis of the data on the justice gap (chapter 3), the impact of legal problems (chapter 4), and the resolution of legal problems (chapter 5). Chapter 6 completes the report by highlighting the main findings and implications of the study.

¹ For an overview of all research conducted by HiiL in Uganda, see <https://www.hiil.org/research/justice-needs-and-satisfaction-in-uganda/>

² To learn more about HiiL's activities in Uganda, see <https://www.hiil.org/programmes/uganda/>



Uganda National Planning Retreat



2

Methodology



Effective resolutions of legal problems put people's needs and their experiences at the centre of justice services. They prioritise solutions that people need most and have proved to work best in their daily lives. To do so, understanding people's demand for justice services from the bottom-up is key. HiiL's JNS methodology is designed to do just that: mapping the justice needs and satisfaction from the perspective of the people.

Justice innovation is about the re-design and improvement of people's justice journeys. If we know what journeys people take in their attempts to resolve a legal problem, we will be able to design better and more responsive justice services. This iterative process has the potential to deliver more justice to the people of Uganda, and elsewhere. There are no small legal problems. Every injustice that is prevented or resolved fairly contributes to the legal empowerment of citizens as well as the country's development.

HiiL's methodology corresponds to the legal needs survey guidelines, as defined by the OECD¹. HiiL's Justice Needs and Satisfaction survey is specifically designed to measure legal needs in societies based on the premise of people-centred justice. To date, we have applied this methodology in 19 countries. The survey contains questions about people's justice journeys, addressing all aspects of justice in people's daily lives.

In addition to information about justice needs and resolution processes, we also collect a number of relevant demographic indicators. The findings can therefore be disaggregated for relevant groups and locations, providing deeper insights in the legal problems and justice journeys of Ugandans. This helps policymakers, justice providers, legal innovators, and donors to set priorities and focus their attention on improving access to those justice services that are most beneficial for people and society.

¹ OECD/Open Society Foundations (2019), Legal Needs Surveys and Access to Justice, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/g2g9a36c-en>.

Methodology adaptation

In each country, we start with a standardised methodology and adapt key elements to the local reality of the country. To that end, we create a reference group composed of diverse expert stakeholders from the justice sector, which also contributes to ownership of the process and results. In August 2023, together with the Governance and Security Programme (formerly JLOS) Secretariat we conducted a workshop with members of a reference group made up of experts and practitioners in the justice and legal sectors in Uganda. The objectives and structure of the study were discussed at length and adapted to the socio-political and legal specifics of Uganda.

The experts provided feedback on the adaptation of the questionnaire, to ensure it provides valid and relevant answer choices for the respondents. In that way, the reference group exercised close supervision over the methodology.

Following the completion of data collection, the reference group came together again in December 2023 to discuss the preliminary results of the survey. The session discussed the key data points of the survey and encouraged debates on the most poignant issues to arrive at possible explanations.

Workshop with members of the reference group



Operationalising access to justice

Measuring the justice gap

At HiiL, we refer to the difference between the justice solutions people need and the solutions that people actually receive as the 'justice gap'. To measure this gap, we first ask people if they have experienced one or more legal problems in the previous four years. If yes, we ask them what legal problems they have had. Respondents can choose up to ten problems from a list of one hundred legal problems that are classified into broader problem categories, such as land disputes, family problems, and crime. The sum of all selected problems results in an overview of the most common problems experienced by Ugandans.

To measure the justice gap, we then ask people whether each problem they experienced has been resolved or not. Comparing the reported number of legal problems experienced and the number of legal problems resolved, we can approximate the size of the justice gap. As selected demographic indicators are recorded for each respondent, the justice gap can be

disaggregated for relevant groups and locations of people, producing what we call an 'epidemiology' of legal problems and justice needs.

People are also asked to indicate how serious each of the problems were that they experienced. Based on a combination of the prevalence and seriousness of legal problems, we establish the three most important justice needs of people in Uganda. Such a focus on the main legal problems allows for prioritisation of resources and efforts in improving needs-based access to justice.

Measuring the impact of legal problems

Not all legal problems affect people's lives in the same way. To understand the impact of legal problems, we ask people to rate the seriousness of each problem on a scale from 1 to 10. We also ask respondents who experienced multiple legal problems to indicate which one was the most

serious one. This most serious problem, and people's attempts to resolve it, is then explored in-depth in the rest of the survey. For example, we ask respondents whether their most serious problem led to certain consequences, such as a loss of income, harm to family relationships, or even the death of a relative.

Measuring the justice journey

Justice services can be improved and made more accessible by designing them from a user's point of view. The JNS survey offers an in-depth analysis of what people need to enjoy efficient, accessible and satisfactory justice mechanisms. We call the series of steps people take towards resolving problems 'justice journeys'. This includes both formal and informal steps. This justice journey begins when a person first takes action to try to resolve their problem and typically ends when a neutral third party makes a decision, when the parties come to an agreement, or when the person pursuing justice gives up.

We ask people what sources of help they engaged when faced with a legal problem. Do they first consult with a family member, involve a formal or

informal authority, or turn straight to court? What did those sources of help do for them? Were they helpful? And what kind of interventions work for people in their attempts to resolve a legal problem? By mapping these journeys, we can show which services people do, and do not, use. We also gain insight into which services are considered most helpful in resolving people's most serious legal problems.

Finally, we ask people to assess their legal capabilities: the knowledge or skills people possess in order to effectively resolve their legal problems.² We do this by asking people to think about the most serious problem they experienced, or, if they have not experienced any legal problems, one that they are asked to imagine. Through a set of four questions, we measure the extent to which they feel that they know their rights and responsibilities, know where to go to get information, advice, and expert help, and are confident in their ability to achieve a fair outcome. The answer categories are organised as a Likert scale from one to five, and the average score of these four questions produces what we refer to as the legal capability score. We make a distinction between people with a lower (below 4) and higher (4 or above) legal capability score.

² Ann-Katrin Habbig & Ingrid Robeyns (2022), Legal Capabilities, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 23:4, 611-629, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2022.2082392>.

Limitations

Despite its strong research design – which brings together desk research, quantitative survey data, and input gathered from local experts – our study has some inevitable limitations.

Although the overall sample is large, some of our findings are based on a relatively small number of people. This is especially the case when a problem category or justice provider with a low prevalence rate is analysed in depth. A reliable detailed analysis of people's experiences with specific justice journeys would require different and larger samples, focussing for example

on one particular legal problem or one particular justice provider. It is also important to keep in mind that certain legal problems tend to be underreported due to their sensitivity, such as domestic violence or sexual offences. Cultural norms, shame, and fear might all impact people's – and particularly women's – willingness to report these problems. Enumerators sometimes talked to women who seemed to have experienced domestic violence, but did not perceive it as a (legal) problem. This should be considered when interpreting the findings in this report.

Implementation and study sample

To implement this JNS survey, we worked with a data collection partner who conducted quantitative interviews using the JNS Survey questionnaire. Prior to the start of data collection, we conducted a workshop to train enumerators from the Ugandan company Research World International (RWI). The training covered both the substance of the questionnaire and the practicalities of the face-to-face interview process. Following the training, a pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire and gather feedback from the enumerator on the research tool.

In September and October 2023 enumerators from RWI conducted face to face interviews with 6,300 adult individuals throughout the country. The sample is based on a randomised selection of households, reflecting the population in terms of gender, age categories, and urban-rural divisions. HiiL supervised the data collection process and conducted intermittent quality control checks, as well as of the final dataset. HiiL also met regularly with the RWI team to provide feedback and recommendations.

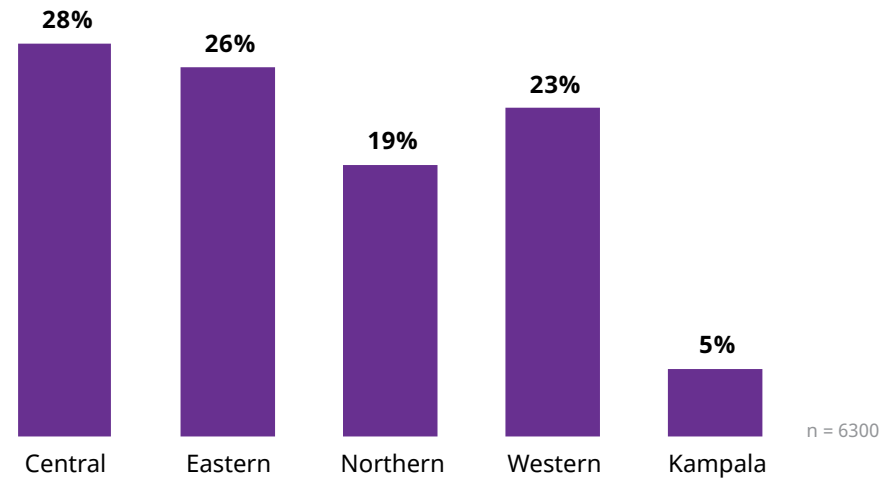


Data collection

Sample composition

The sample consists of an equal distribution between men (50%) and women (50%). The majority of interviewees is located in rural areas (72%), rather than urban areas (28%),

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION



The overall mean age of the sample group is 41 years old, with the mean age of male participants being 44 and the mean age of female participants being 39. The majority of respondents are between 25 and 64.

reflecting the actual population distribution. This is also reflected in the regional distribution of the sample, whereby only 5% of respondents are located in Kampala. Within each region there is an equal gender split of 50% men and 50% women surveyed.

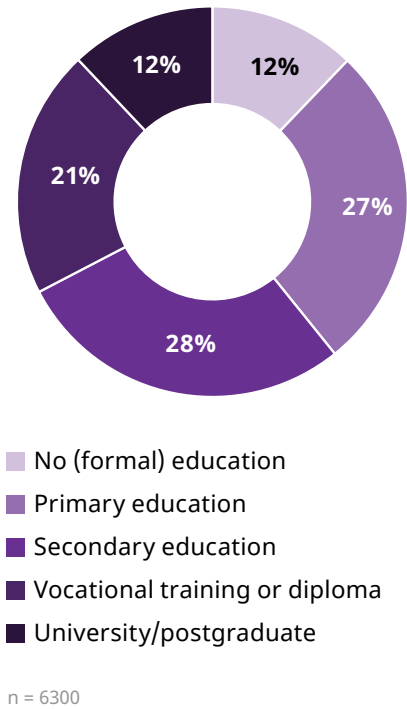
Youth (18-24)	6%
Young adults (25-39)	45%
Middle adulthood (40-64)	42%
Seniors (65 and above)	6%

Education level

Around 12% of respondents have received no formal education, while the majority completed either primary education (27%) or secondary education (28%). Older people are less likely to have received a higher level of education.

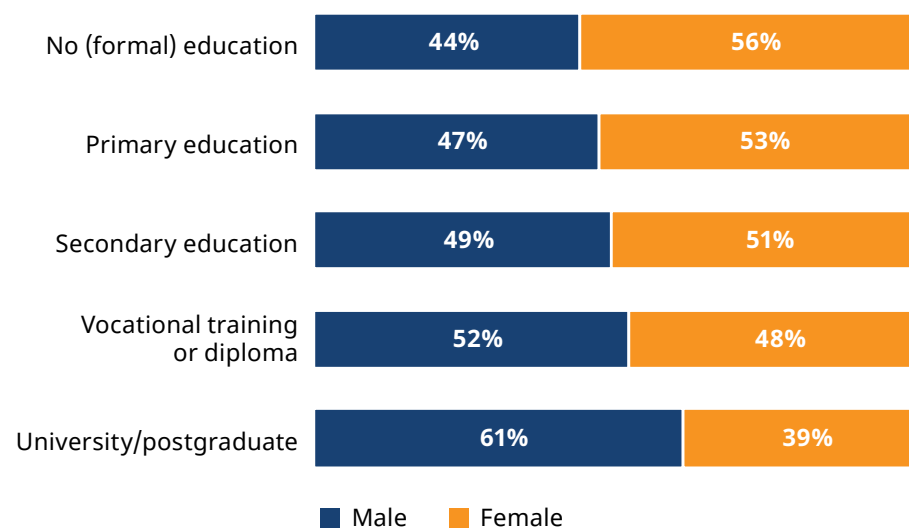
For analytical purposes, in this report we divide this group in two: having received no or only primary education (39%) or having received secondary education or higher (61%). However, where relevant we will make a distinction between people with no formal education and people with primary education.

HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL



Women are less likely to have received a formal education than men. Men are especially a lot more likely to have attended university than women, although this difference is smaller for younger people.

HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL
by gender

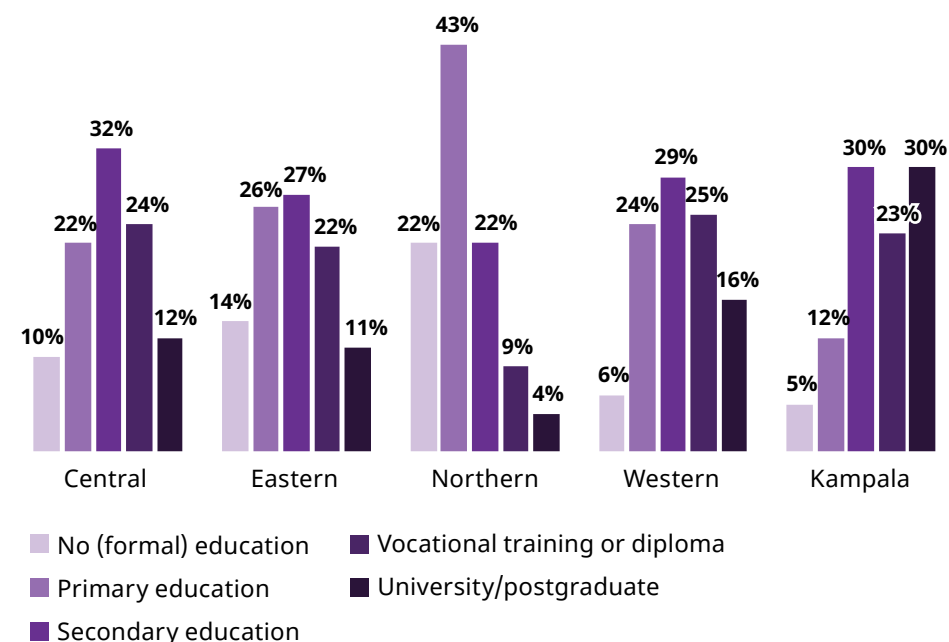


n = 763 (no ed) / 1700 (primary) / 1767 (secondary) / 1294 (vocational) / 756 (university)

Within the regions there is a relatively even distribution of people having completed primary education, secondary education, and vocation training. The main exception is in the Northern region, where by far the majority of people reported completing

only primary education. This region also has the lowest percentage of people with university education. Kampala has the highest rate of university education and the lowest percentage of people with no formal education or only primary education.

HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL
by region



n = 1733 (central) / 1624 (eastern) / 1198 (northern) / 1446 (western) / 299 (kampala)

Financial situation

Instead of asking about absolute incomes (which means very different things in different places), people told us their subjective income level, based on a four-point scale that includes: (1) We do not have enough money for basic needs; (2) We are able to buy what is necessary; (3) We are able to buy more expensive goods; and (4) We can afford almost whatever we want.

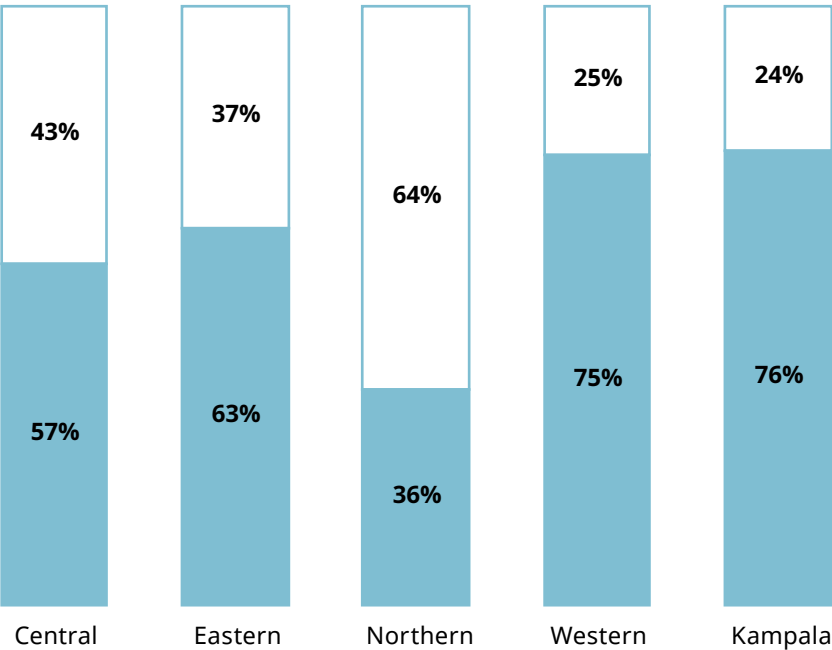
Given that 93% of the sample is concentrated in the first two answer options, we re-coded the variable into two categories: cannot cover their basic needs (option 1) and can afford basic needs and more (options 2-4). Around 40% of people fall within the first group, with 60% falling into the second group.

A higher percentage of women reported not being able to afford their basic needs (56%) in comparison to men (44%). Across the age groups, the majority in every age group reported being able to cover their basic needs, except among the 18-24 year old category. 59% of the 18-24 year olds surveyed are not able to cover their basic needs.

In almost all regions the majority of people are able to cover their basic needs. The only exception is in the Northern region where only 36% of people reported being able to cover their basic needs.

A strong correlation exists between education level and financial situation. As education levels increase, the percentage of people who can cover their basic needs also increases.

FINANCIAL SITUATION
by region



☐ Cannot cover basic needs
☒ Can cover basic needs

n = 1729 (central) / 1612 (eastern) / 1169 (northern) / 1438 (western) / 297 (kampala)





3

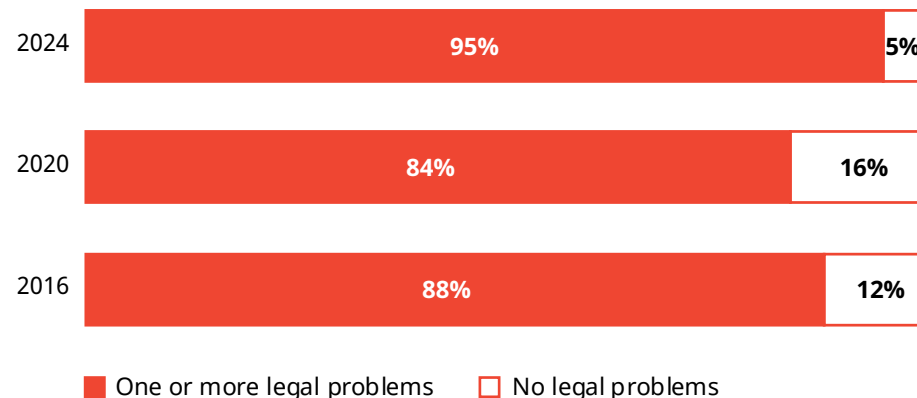
Justice gap

Legal problems remain very common in Uganda...

Prevalence of legal problems has always been relatively high in Uganda. In 2016, we found that 88% of adults had experienced at least one legal problem, whereas in 2020 it was 84%. This time the percentage of people with at least one legal problem is even higher than in previous studies, at 95%. Some possible reasons for this increase

might be the effects of the Covid-19 crisis and subsequent economic downturn. The increase might also reflect methodological improvements, an increased awareness of the legal nature of everyday problems, and improved willingness to share these problems with strangers.

PREVALENCE OF LEGAL PROBLEMS
year on year



The high prevalence of legal problems is consistent among different demographic groups. For example, there are no significant differences between people in urban and rural areas or based on financial wellbeing or education level. There are also almost no differences between different regions¹ or between men and women². The only exception is age categories, where the youngest cohort (18-24) is less likely to have experienced a legal problem than all other age groups (86% versus 94%-98%).

¹ North 98%, East 96%, Central 94%, West 95%, Kampala 97%

² Men 97%, Women 94%

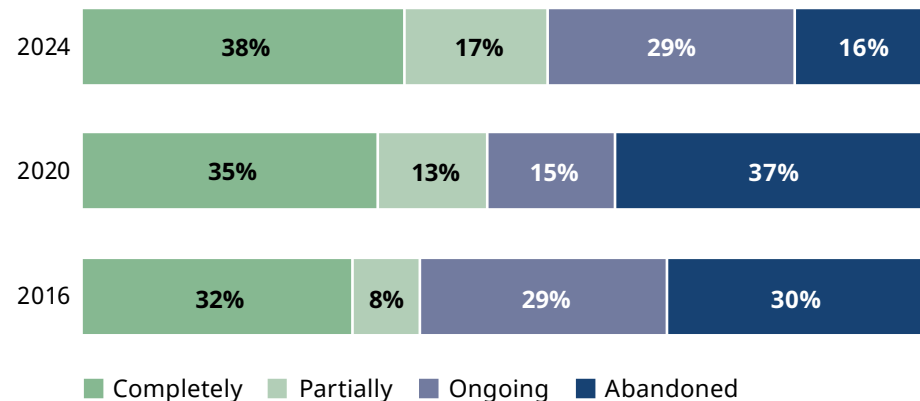


...but resolution has improved

Although the increase in the number of people experiencing legal problems is reason for concern, the good news is a lot of the problems get resolved. The number of legal problems being resolved has been steadily increasing over the last 8 years. In the current study, more than 55% of all problems have been resolved at the time of the interview, compared to 48% in 2020 and 40% in 2016.

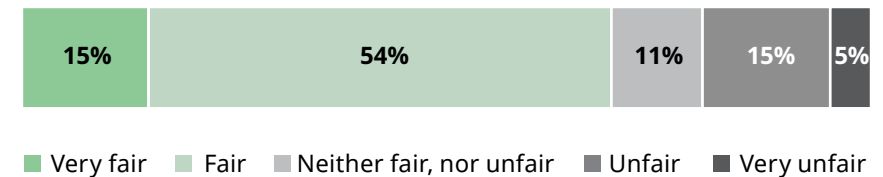
Especially notable, the number of abandoned problems has decreased compared to previous studies, meaning Ugandans are not giving up easily when trying to resolve their problems.

RESOLUTION STATUS
year on year (all problems)



Moreover, 69% of these resolutions are considered fair or very fair by people. This is also higher than in previous years (47% in 2020, in 2016 we did not collect this data). These results are a very positive development of the justice sector in Uganda, showing that although people experience many legal problems, they also increasingly find ways to resolve them.

FAIRNESS OF THE RESOLUTION



n (problems) = 14199

Most people experience more than one legal problem

According to the study, most people experience more than one legal problem. The average number of legal problems, among people who experienced at least one problem, is 4,3 problems. Often this is two or more interrelated problems within the same category; for example, someone experiencing domestic violence reports both emotional abuse and physical abuse. However, 82% of people who experience at least one legal problem, reported problems in multiple categories. These can be either linked to each other, for example, unfair dismissal from work leads to subsequent housing problems, or completely independent from each other. On average, people experience problems in three different categories.

While there are no major demographic differences between the likelihood of experiencing at least one legal problem, there are some differences when it comes to the number of problems people report. People aged 25-39 and 40-64 report a higher number of problems than people aged 18-14 and 65 and older. However, there are no differences between men and women or based on education

level or financial situation (all groups report 4,3 problems on average), again illustrating how experiencing legal problems is something affecting all Ugandans.

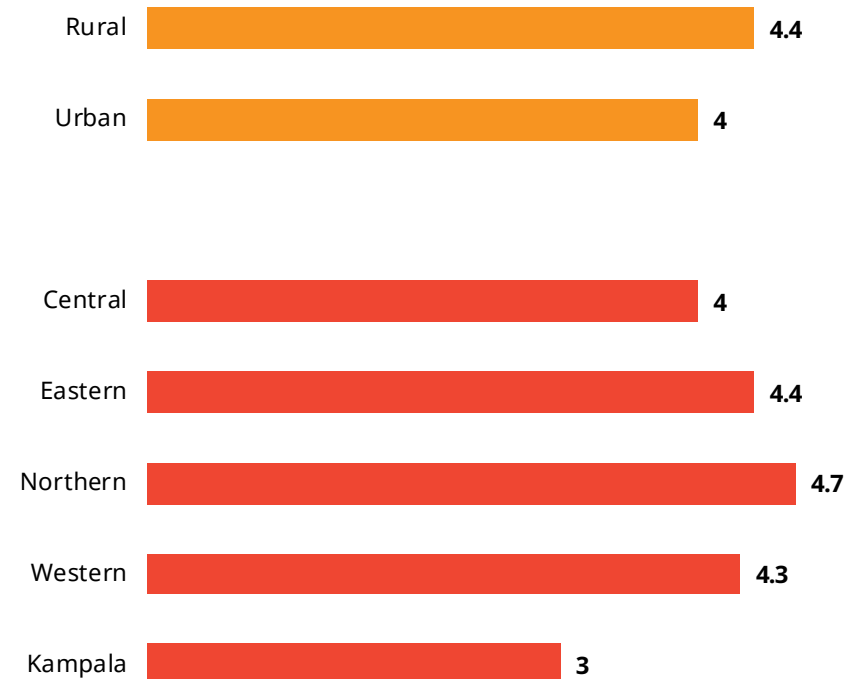
There are also significant regional differences in the number of problems people experience. People in the Northern Region report the highest number of legal problems (4,7 on average), while people in Kampala report the lowest number of legal problems (3 on average). This suggests that Ugandans living in the Northern region are more likely than Ugandans elsewhere to experience a multitude of problems at the same time. This also has an effect on the difference between people living in rural areas and people living in urban areas, with the former experiencing on average more legal problems than the latter.

4,3

Average number of legal problems for people who experienced at least one problem

AVERAGE NUMBER OF LEGAL PROBLEMS

regional differences (by people experiencing at least one legal problem)



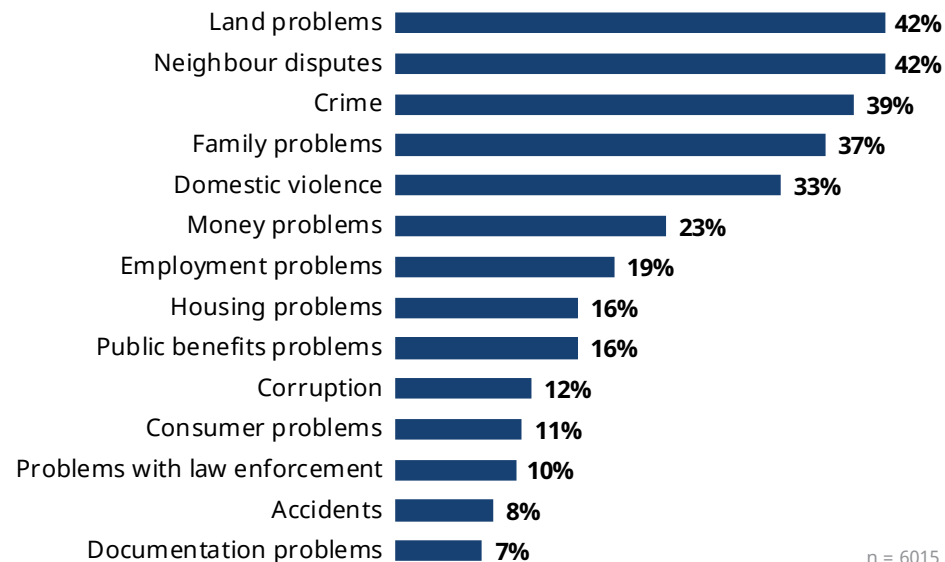
n = 4301 (rural) / 1714 (urban) / 1626 (central) / 1553 (eastern) / 1170 (northern) / 1375 (western) / 291 (kampala)

Five problem categories account for two thirds of all legal problems...

Looking at the types of problems people experience, there are five problem categories that together make up two thirds of all legal problems experienced by Ugandans. These are land problems, neighbour disputes,

crime, family problems, and domestic violence. These are very similar to what we found in previous JNS survey in Uganda, although the order of prevalence has shifted somewhat over the years.

MOST COMMON PROBLEM CATEGORIES
as % of people with problems



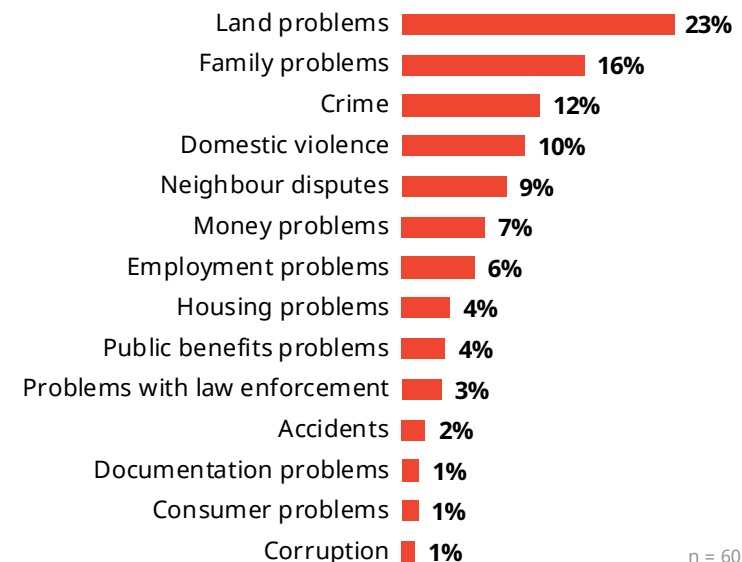
n = 6015

...but land and family problems are considered the most serious problem categories

When people report more than one legal problem, we ask them to select the most serious one (for people with only one problem, it is automatically considered as the most serious one). The selection of these most serious problems gives a good indication of what the most pressing justice needs of Ugandans are.

The five most common problem categories remain the same, but their order changes. For around 23% of Ugandans who experienced at least one legal problem, a land problem is their most serious problem, followed by 16% for whom it is a family problem. Neighbour disputes, despite being very common, are less often seen as the most serious legal problem (9%) than crime (12%) and domestic violence (10%).

MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM CATEGORIES



n = 6015

As explained in the methodology section, each problem category actually consists of multiple specific problems that people report. Looking at these specific problems illustrates the wide diversity of legal problems Ugandans experience and helps understand why land problems are so common.

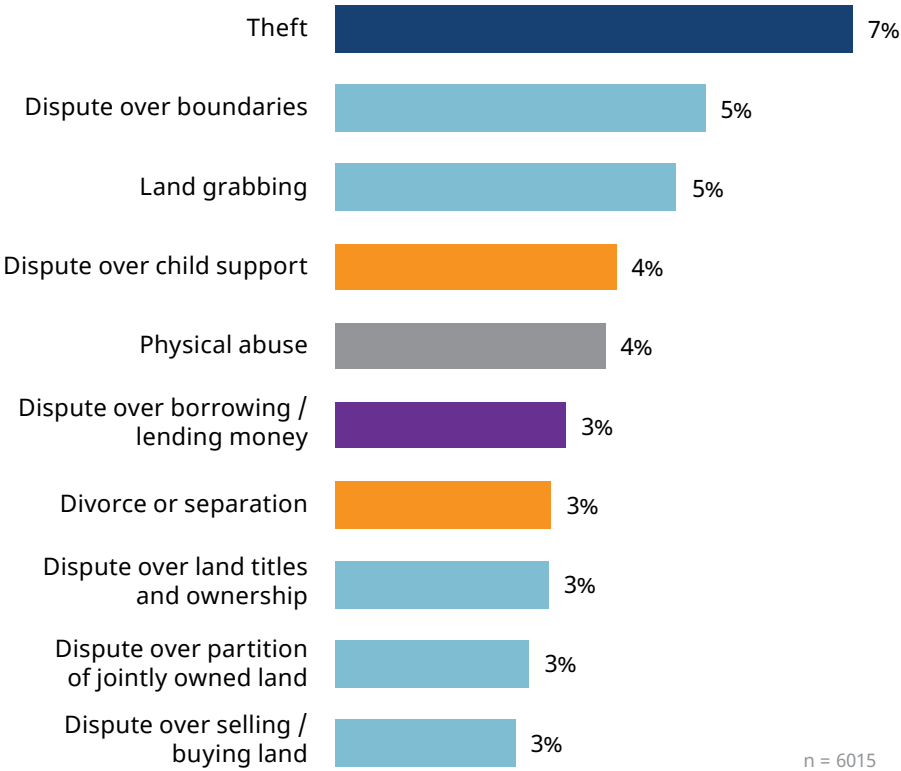
The specific types of land problems people experience are very diverse, but disputes over boundaries and land grabbing are most often seen as the most serious one. Unlike land problems, the most common type of crime is much more pronounced, with theft accounting for around 60% of crimes people experience, making it the most serious specific problem overall. This is followed by cybercrime and online fraud (11% of all crimes), showing Ugandans are not immune to the ongoing development of crime moving online.

The most serious family problems are disputes over child support and problems related to divorce or separation. Physical abuse is most often experienced as the the most serious form of domestic violence, although in absolute terms emotional abuse is slightly more common.

Despite being very common, no specific neighbour problems are among the ten most serious specific problems. The most common neighbour problems are related to disputes over animals owned or kept by neighbours, trespassing by neighbours, and regular and excessive noise by neighbours. However, these are rarely selected as the most serious problem. The first two of these have a distinct land-related side to it, further emphasising just how common disputes around land matters are.



MOST SERIOUS SPECIFIC PROBLEMS



n = 6015

- Crime
- Land problems
- Family problems
- Domestic violence
- Money problems

The most serious problems Ugandans experience are mostly stable over time

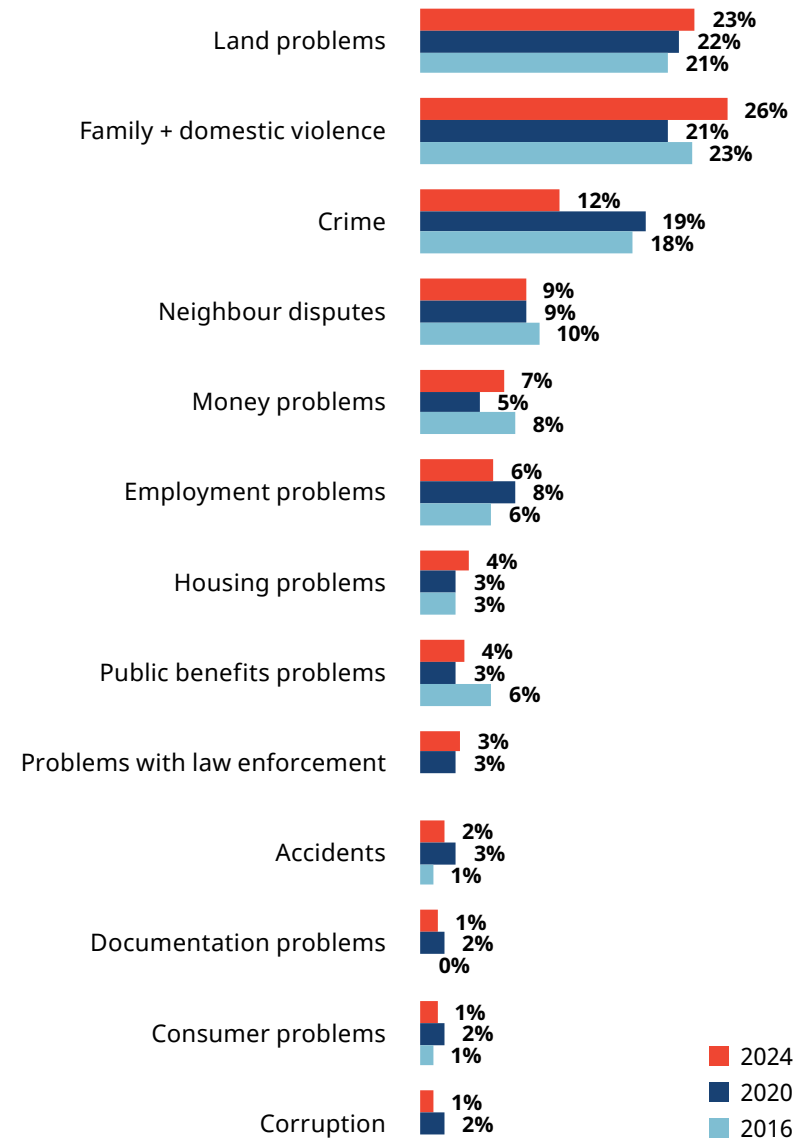
Compared to our previous two JNS studies in Uganda, the most serious problem categories only show small percentage fluctuations.³ Land problems show a slight increase over time, as do family problems and domestic violence. Especially family problems have increased significantly compared to four years ago.

Most other problem categories show only small changes, with the exception of crime. Despite a similar percentage of people experiencing a crime as in previous studies, fewer people indicate a crime was their most serious legal problem.

³ The categorisation of problems has slightly changed over the course of these three studies. The 2016 study had a problem category on children and no separate category for domestic violence. Instead, domestic violence was categorised within family problems (and was only one specific problem). There was also a category related to business problems and a category for social welfare and public services as well as a category for business problems, but no category related to corruption. All these problem categories were relatively minor; the main problem categories have been captured in all three studies.

After a major revision of the JNS methodology, the JNS Uganda 2020 saw an update of the problem categories. The categories used in the 2020 report are similar to those used in this report (although a few specific problems have been added to some of the categories following recommendations from expert stakeholders during the reference group meeting). For the purpose of this graph, we keep domestic violence and family problems together. For the 2016 data, we merged family problems and problems with children, as well as problems with public services and social welfare.

MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM CATEGORIES year on year



The most serious problem categories are different for different demographic groups

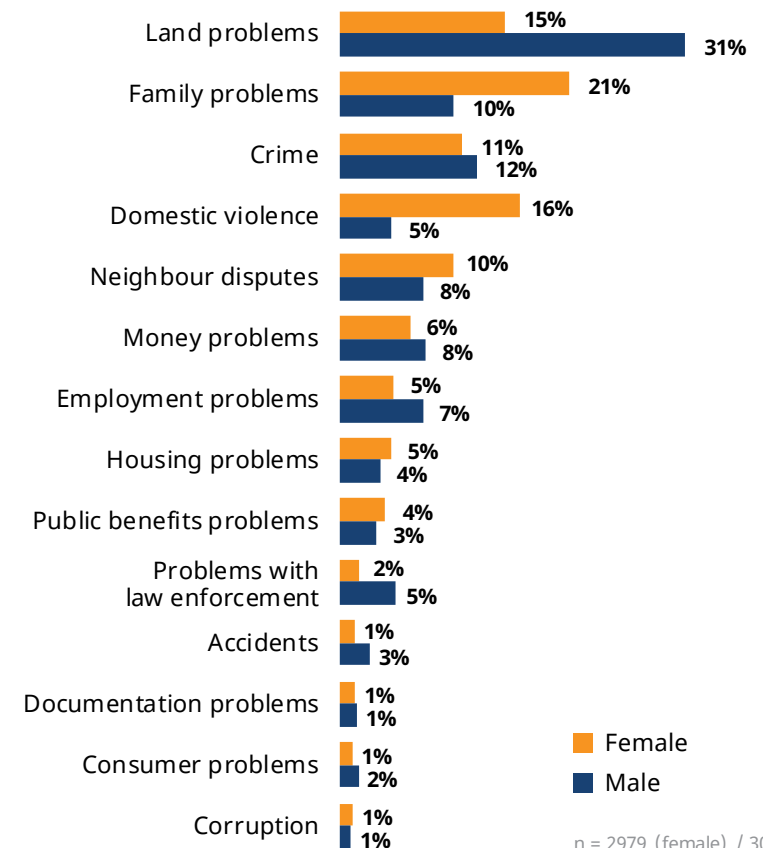
There are significant demographic differences between the different problem categories, the majority of them not unexpected. The only problem category that shows very little variation between different demographic groups is crime. Whether it is theft of cattle or theft of your motorbike: the experience of crime seems to be a unifying experience for Ugandans.

Women mostly experience family problem and domestic violence

The gender differences in the prevalence of legal problem categories are mostly as expected. Land problems, employment problems, and problems with law enforcement agencies are more common among men than women. For almost one in three men their most serious problem is a land problem, making it by far the most common serious problem category. Indeed, although theft is the most serious specific problem for men, this is followed by four specific land problems.

Family problems, neighbour disputes, and especially domestic violence are significantly more common among women. Indeed, the two most serious problem categories for women are family problems and domestic violence, before land problems. The most serious specific problem for women is disputes over child support, even before theft. The third most serious specific problem is physical abuse (domestic violence). This highlights the very different justice needs of men and women in Uganda.

MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM CATEGORIES by gender



n = 2979 (female) / 3036 (male)

Physical and sexual abuse against women within the household context

Around 41% of Ugandan women who report at least one legal problem have experienced some form of domestic violence in the last year; This translates to roughly 39% of Ugandan women.⁴ In other words, four out of ten Ugandan adult women have experienced some form of domestic violence in the past year.

HiiL's definition of domestic violence is deliberately broad, including non-physical forms of domestic violence, such as emotional or psychological abuse, economic deprivation, intimidation, and other forms of domestic violence. The data in this study shows that 53% of women reporting domestic violence in the past year have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. This translates to 21% of all Ugandan adult women (compared to 8% of men) and is in line with previous research into domestic violence in Uganda.⁵

Physical and/or sexual abuse within the household affects women throughout Uganda, but is more common in rural areas (22%) than in urban areas (18%).

Younger women are most commonly affected: 24% of women aged 18-39 report being the victim of physical and/or sexual abuse in the past twelve months. Women who have not completed their secondary education and women who say they cannot financially cover their daily needs are slightly more likely to experience physical and/or sexual abuse, but the differences are rather small (22% versus 20%).

Regionally, physical and/or sexual abuse against women within the household is most common in the Northern region (29%), followed by Eastern (23%), Western (19%), Kampala (16%), and Central (15%). Previous research found that residents in the Northern and Eastern regions are significantly more likely to believe that it can be justified for a man to physically discipline his wife than people in the Central and Western regions.⁶

Women experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse within the household are significantly more likely to also report family problems and neighbour problems. Although causality cannot be demonstrated with the current study design, it is highly likely that these are interrelated legal problems.



Land problems are more common among older people

In terms of age, land problems are significantly more common as the most serious problem among older people than among younger people. Especially people over the age of forty often indicate their most serious problem is a land problem. Other problem categories that are more common as the most serious problem among older people are neighbour disputes and problems related to public benefits. The latter category mostly comprises problems related to pensions.

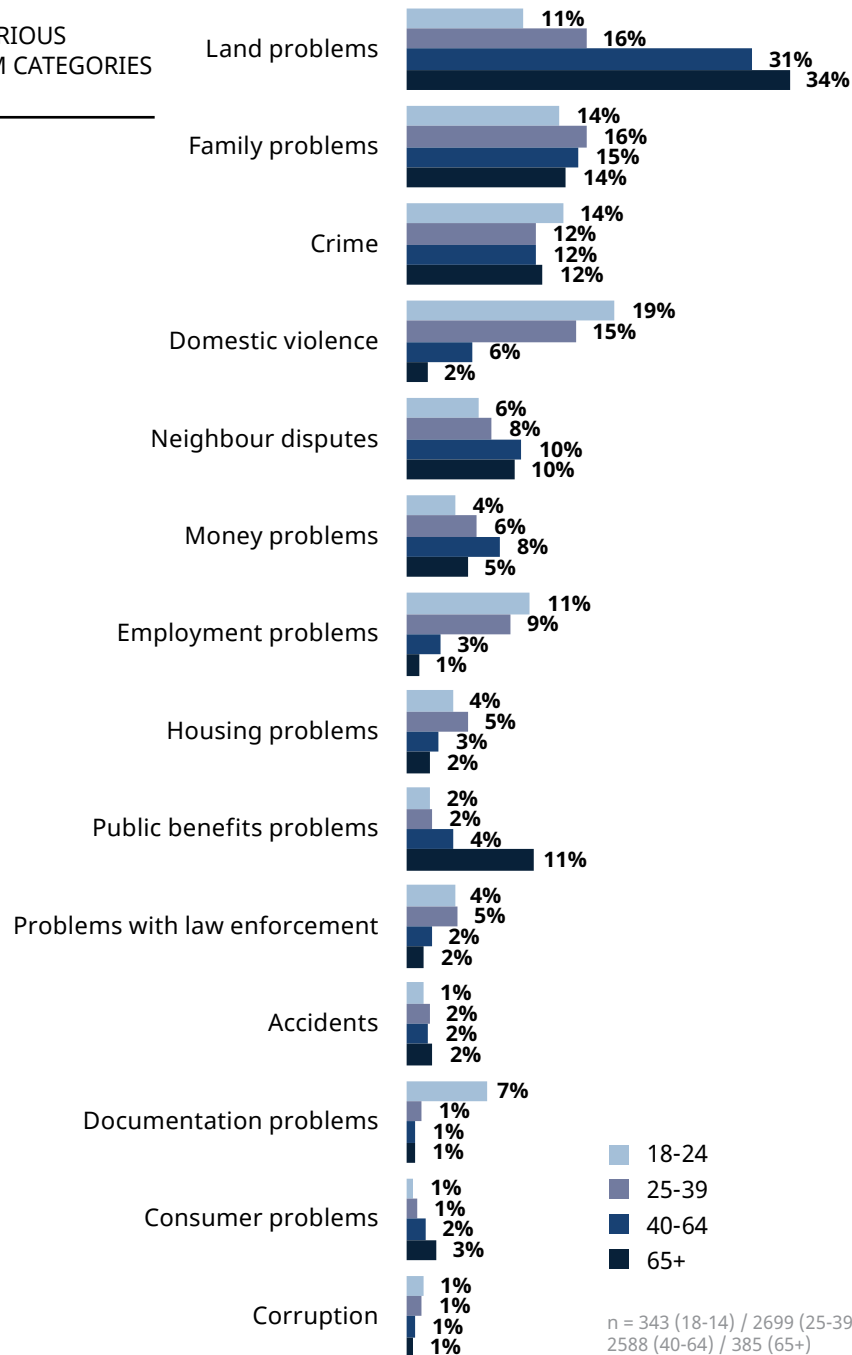
Family problems do not show a clear difference between age groups, but domestic violence stands out for being significantly more common among people under the age of forty. Other problem categories that are more common among younger people are employment problems and problems related to official documents. The latter are almost all problems related to obtaining identification documents. Problems with law enforcement actors are also more common among younger people, although the overall number remains low.

⁴ Around 94% of women report at least one legal problem and 41% of them experience domestic violence. Extrapolating this means that around 39% of all women (41% of 94%) face domestic violence.

⁵ <https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Africa/Attachments/Publications/2021/12/UBOS%20VAWG%20Report%207122021.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/AD593-Majority-of-Ugandans-see-domestic-violence-as-a-private-matter-Afrobarometer-17jan23.pdf>

MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM CATEGORIES by age

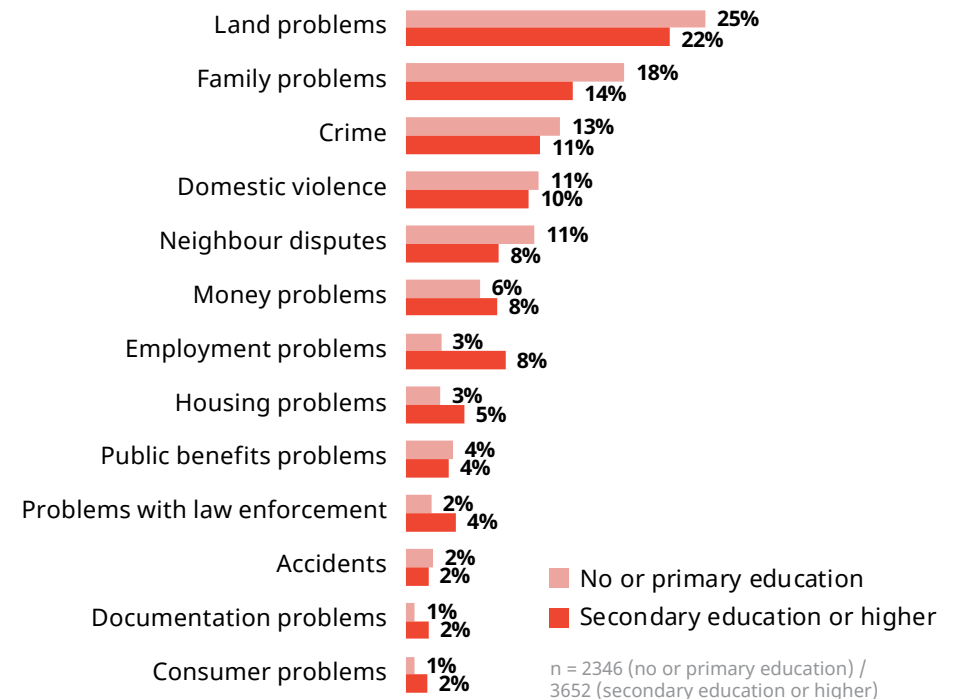


Ugandans with less education and financial means are more likely to experience family problems

Looking at education level, it is interesting that the five most serious problem categories are all more common among people with no or only primary education. Whereas the differences for land problems, crime, and domestic violence are relatively small, they are more significant for neighbour disputes and family problems.

On the other hand, problem categories such as employment problems, housing problems, consumer problems, and corruption are more common among people who have completed at least a secondary education. The difference in employment problems is especially large, reflecting the higher likelihood of being employed when someone has a higher education level.

MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM CATEGORIES by education level

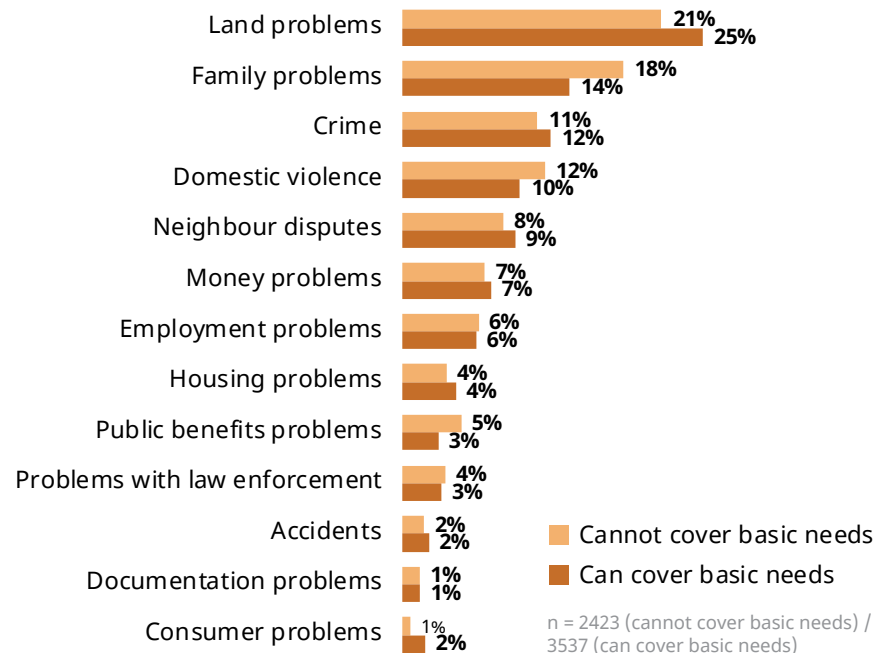


Despite the strong correlation between education level and financial situation, the relationship of each with the most serious problem categories is not exactly the same. In particular, the differences are less pronounced when it comes to financial situation.

Most problem categories show only small differences between people with different financial situations.

However, the two most common most serious problems do show significant differences based on financial situation. Land problems are significantly more common among people who say they can cover their basic needs, whereas family problems (and to a lesser extent domestic violence) are more common among people who say they cannot cover their basic needs.

MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM CATEGORIES
by financial situation



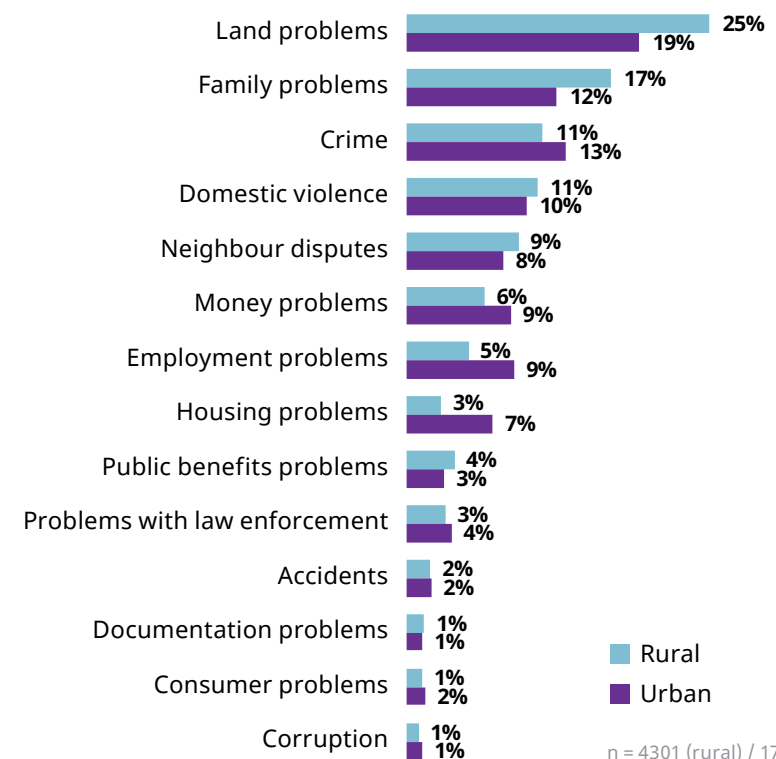
The most serious problems differ per region

The most serious problem categories differ between rural and urban areas. Not surprisingly, land problems are more common in rural areas; so are family problems.

On the other hand, in urban areas people are more likely to indicate their most serious problem is a money problem, housing problem, or

employment problem. People in urban areas are more likely to be employed and rent their house, thus increasing the likelihood of experiencing serious legal problems in those areas. Crime, domestic violence, and neighbour disputes only show marginal differences between rural and urban areas.

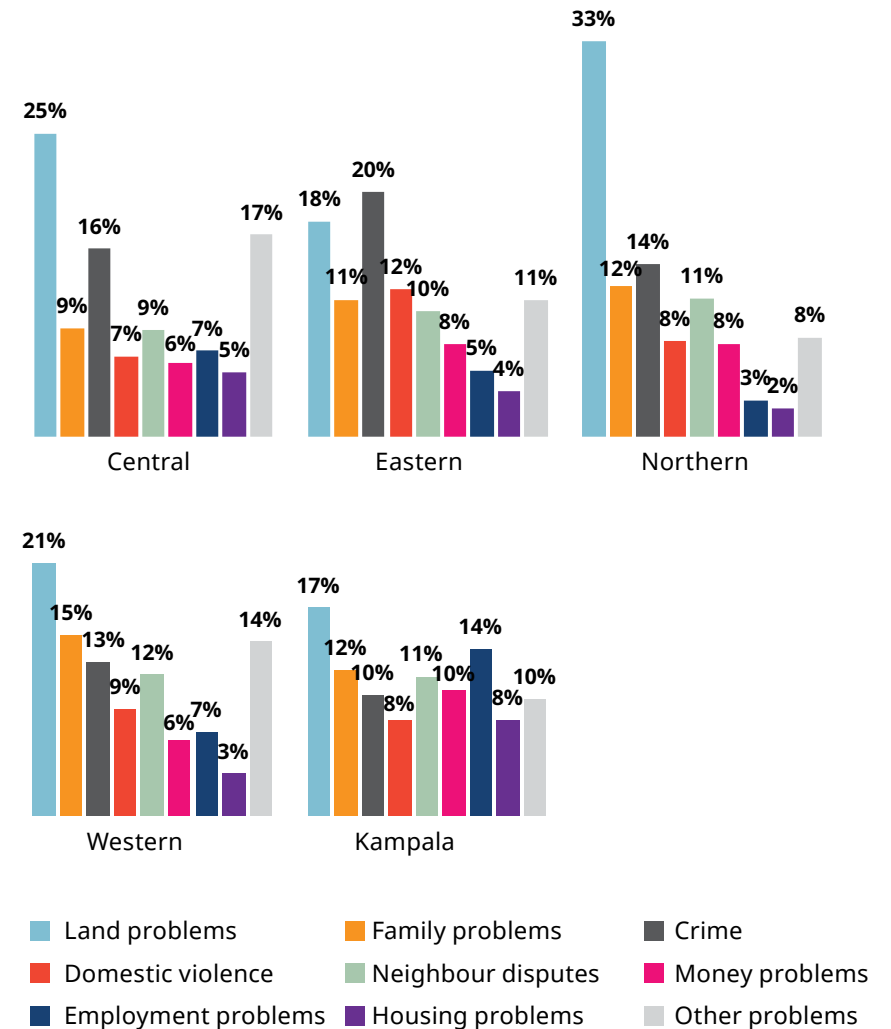
MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM CATEGORIES
by location



There are significant regional differences when it comes to problem categories. In all regions land problems are the most serious problem category, except for the Eastern region, where it is crime. Land problems are especially common in the Northern region, where it is the most serious problem for roughly one in three people, and in the Central region.

Family problems are most often the most serious problem in the Western region, although they are common throughout the country. Domestic violence is most often experienced as the most serious problem in the Eastern region, even though in absolute terms it is more common in the Northern region. Finally, typical urban problems such as money problems, employment problems, and housing problems are most often the most serious problem in Kampala.

MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM CATEGORIES by region



n = 1626 (central) / 1553 (eastern) / 1170 (northern) / 1375 (western) / 291 (kampala)

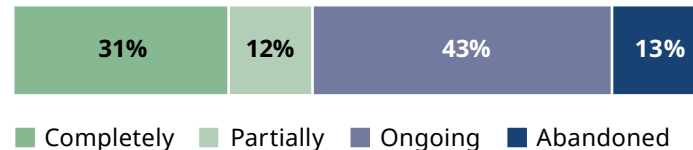


A lack of education and financial means make it more difficult to resolve your most serious problem

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, many legal problems in Uganda are resolved relatively quickly: at the time of the survey interview, 38% of all legal problems were considered completely resolved and another 17% partially resolved. This means more than half of all problems were already concluded one way or another. Looking

at the most serious problems only, this percentage is slightly lower: 31% is completely resolved and another 12% partially resolved, while 43% is ongoing. As we will explain in the next chapter, more serious problems are less likely to be resolved and more likely to be ongoing.

RESOLUTION STATUS most serious problems only



n = 6015

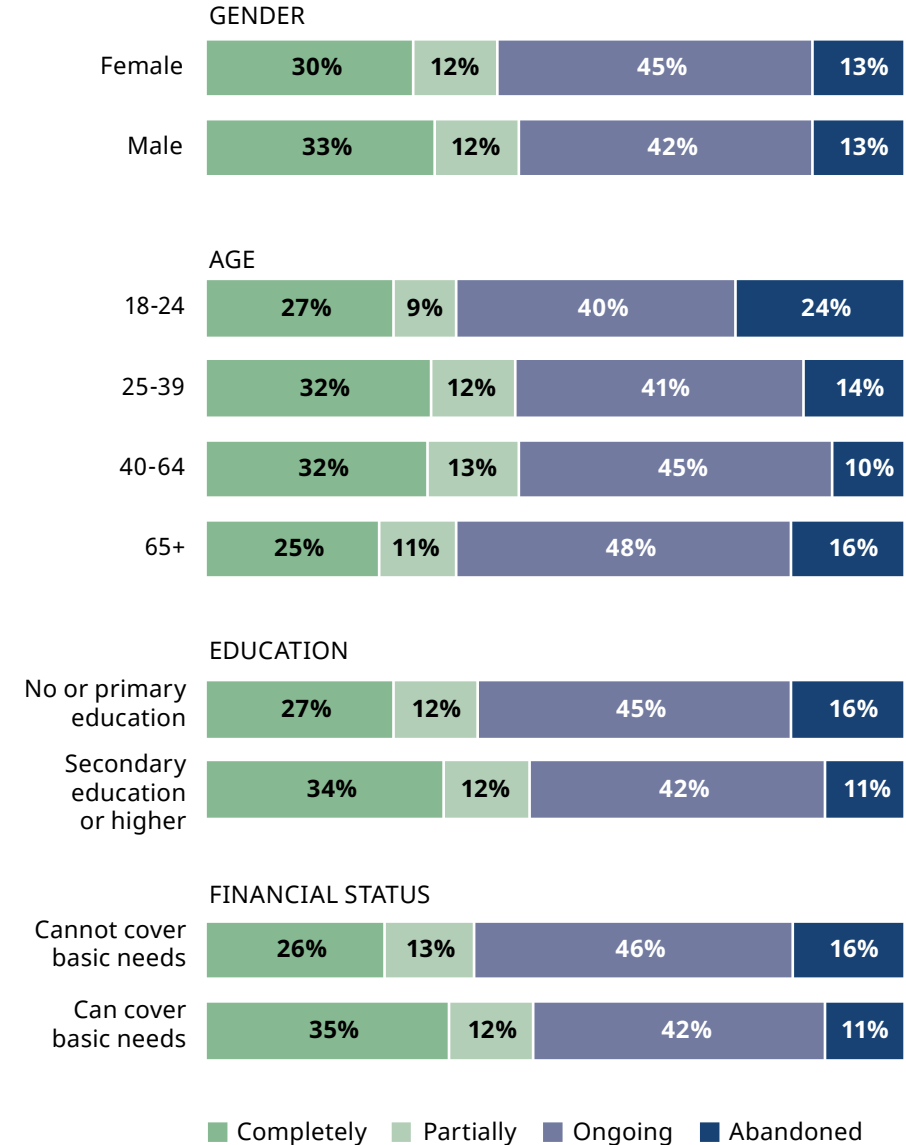
There are important demographic differences in the likelihood of people resolving their most serious problems

Men are slightly more likely than women to have resolved their most serious problem, while people in the middle age groups (25-39 and 40-64) are more likely to resolve their most serious problem than the youngest and oldest age cohort. Especially people below the age of 25 relatively often give up on trying to resolve their most serious problem.

Some of the most pronounced differences are in the area of education level and financial means. People with a lower education level and people with less financial means are significantly less likely to resolve their most serious problems, highlighting potentially important barriers to accessing justice.



RESOLUTION STATUS
demographic differences (most serious problem)



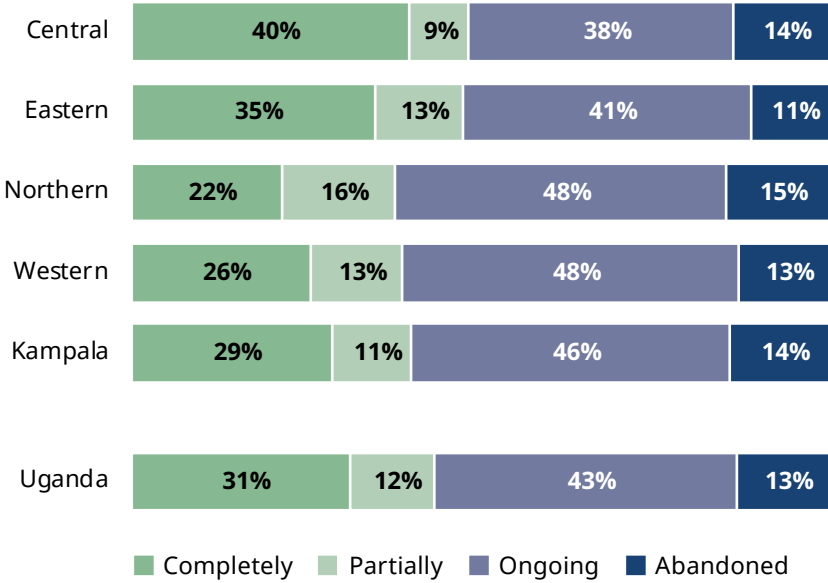
n = 29179 (female) / 3036 (male) / 343 (18-24) / 2699 (25-39) / 2588 (40-64) / 385 (65+) / 2346 (no ed) / 3652 (sec ed) / 2423 (cannot) / 3537 (can)

Ugandans in the Central and Eastern regions are most likely resolve their most serious problem

There are no significant differences between people in rural areas and urban areas when it comes to resolving the most serious problem. However, there are significant differences in resolution rates between the different regions.

The highest resolution rates are found in the Central and Eastern regions, where nearly half of all people have completely or partially resolved their most serious problem. The Northern and Western regions, as well as Kampala, have significantly lower resolution rates.

RESOLUTION STATUS
by region (most serious problem)



n = 1626 (central) / 1553 (eastern) / 1170 (northern) / 1375 (western) / 291 (kampala)

Among the most common problem categories, family problems and crime have the lowest resolution rate

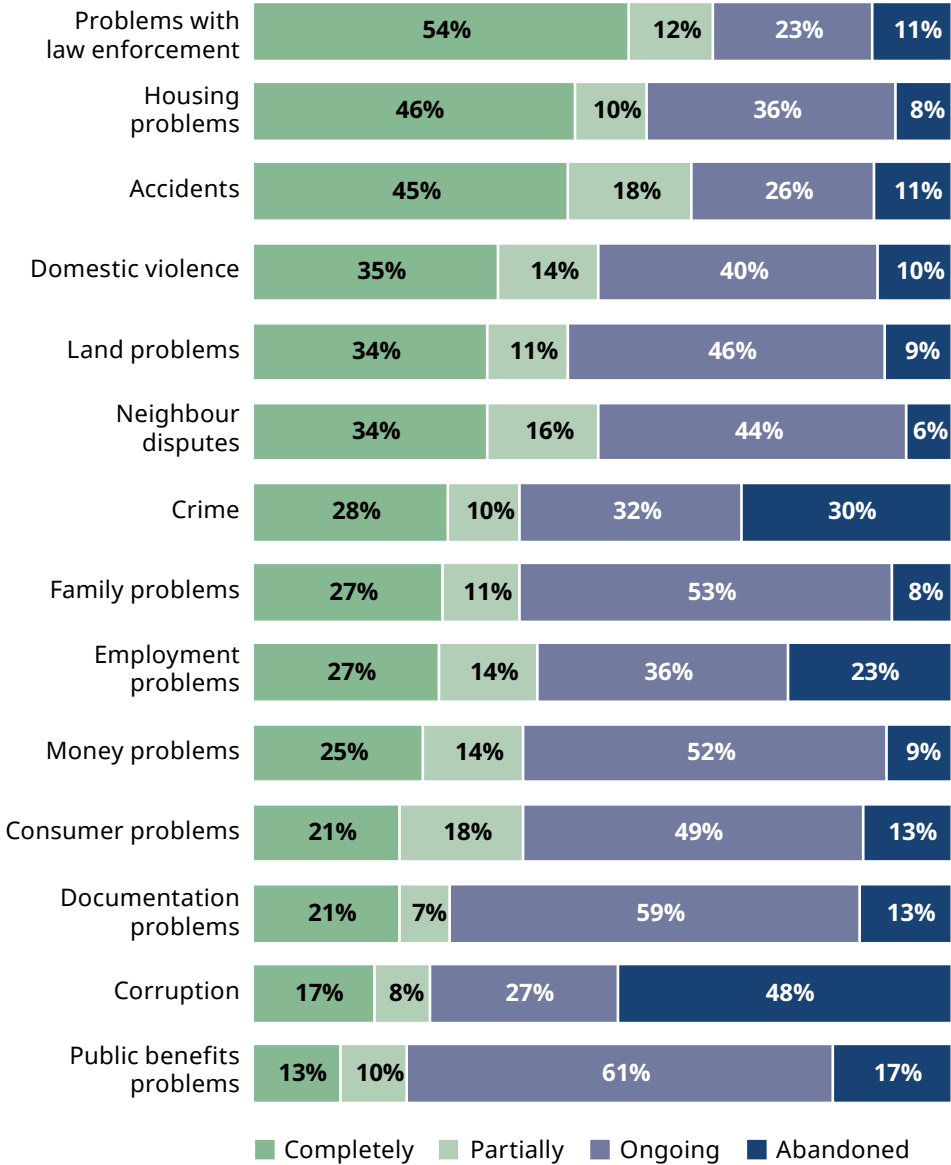
Some problem categories are more easily resolved than others. Among the most common problem categories, family problems and crime have the lowest percentage of completely or partially resolved problems. Crime especially has a high percentage of abandoned problems. This is likely because crime is more often a one-off problem instead of a problem that keeps lingering over time, such as land problems or family problems. The latter two problems categories have a

high percentage of ongoing problems, meaning people are still trying to resolve the problem. It also shows that many crimes simply go unresolved and people have little means to do anything about it.

The two problem categories with the highest percentage of ongoing problems are problems related to public benefits and problems related to official documents, both problems where the other party is usually the state. On the other hand, the problem that is most often abandoned is corruption, followed by crime.

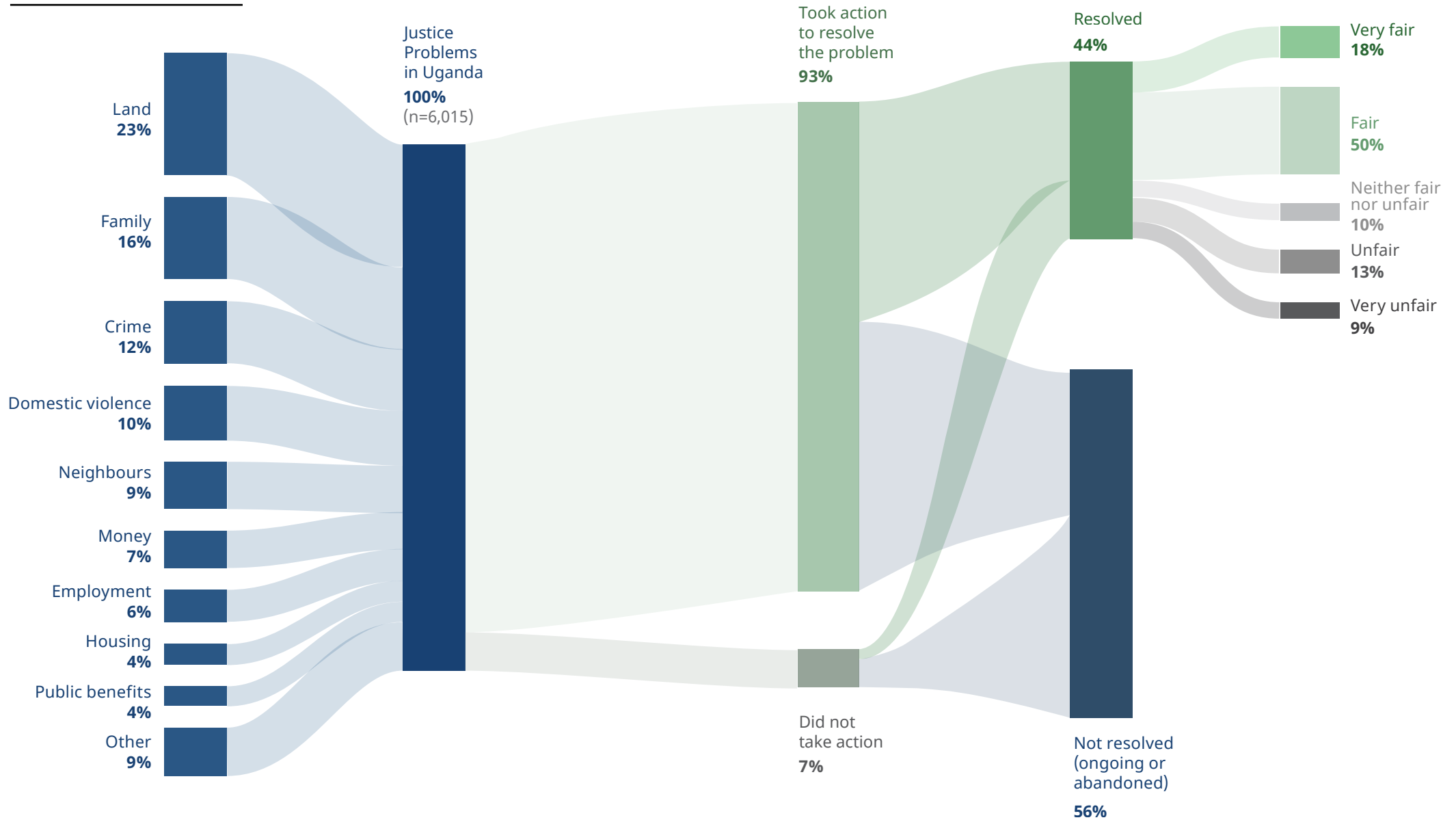


RESOLUTION STATUS
by problem category (most serious problem)



n = 200 (law enforcement) / 244 (housing) / 119 (accidents) / 631 (domestic violence) / 1402 (land) / 533 (neighbours) / 708 (crime) / 936 (family) / 370 (employment) / 423 (money) / 80 (consumer) / 85 (documentation) / 63 (corruption) / 221 (public benefits)

JUSTICE JOURNEYS IN UGANDA





4

Impact

Ugandans report more problems, but rate them as less serious

7,06

Average seriousness score of legal problems

The legal problems Ugandans face have impact and consequences in their daily lives. For every reported problem, we ask people to assess its seriousness on a scale from one to ten, with ten being the most serious. On average, people rate their legal problems with a seriousness score of 7,06. Not surprisingly, the problems people selected as the most serious ones also have a much higher seriousness score, on average 9.

While this score indicates that people view their problems as particularly grave, the good news is that this score is lower than in the 2020 study, where the average rating was 7,9.¹ It is possible that overall awareness and knowledge of legal problems among Ugandans has increased, thus resulting in people sharing more legal problems with the interviewers, even when they are considered less serious.

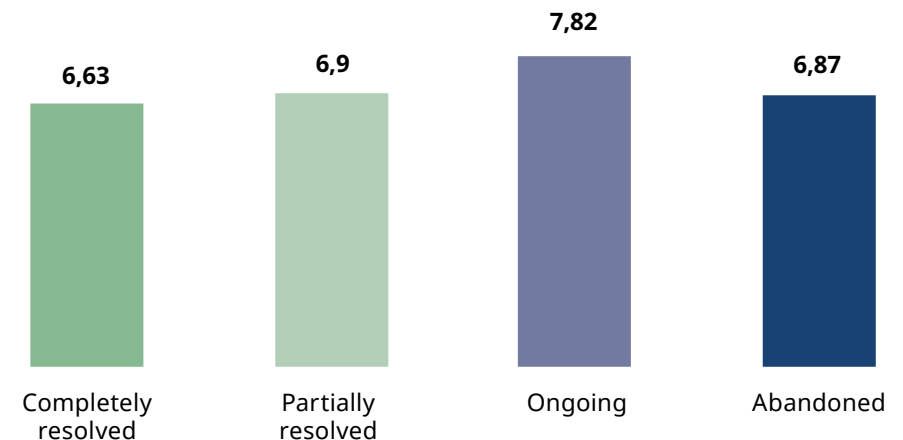
¹ In 2016 we did not collect data in the form of a seriousness score. Instead we calculated an impact score which is not comparable here.

More serious problems tend to be ongoing

Problems that are ongoing are reported as more serious than problems that are resolved, or even problems that are abandoned. The same result is found when looking at the most serious problems only, although the differences are smaller.

The exact causal relationship between these findings is not immediately apparent. It is possible that when a problem is more serious for a person, they will go to greater lengths to resolve it and will not abandon the problem as easily. However, this could also be explained in the other direction: because someone is still currently trying to resolve the problem, it has a greater impact on their life.

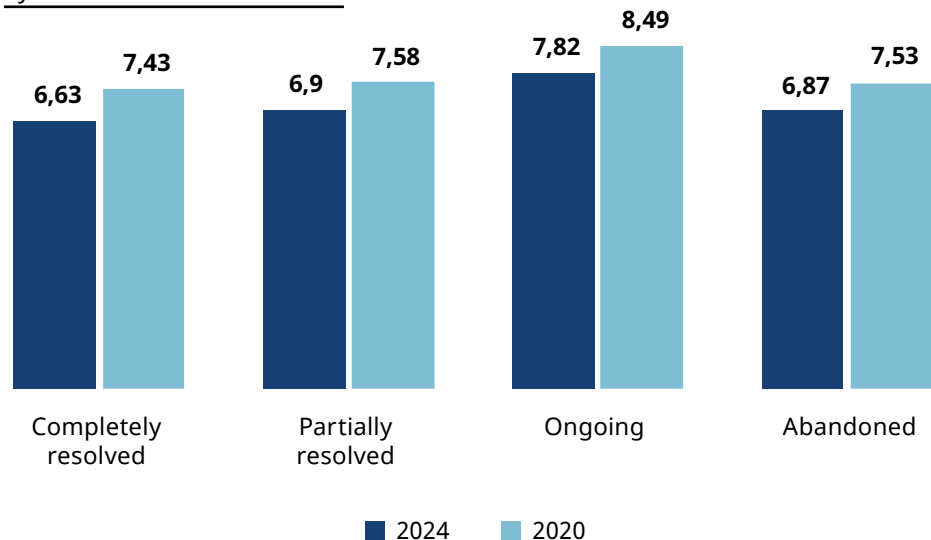
AVERAGE SERIOUSNESS SCORE
by resolution status



n (problems) = 9833 (completely) / 4366 (partially) / 7500 (ongoing) / 4062 (abandoned)

This trend of ongoing problems being rated as the most serious is also reflected in the 2020 survey, with the main difference being the overall higher seriousness ratings given for every resolution status in 2020.

AVERAGE SERIOUSNESS SCORE
by resolution status



People in urban areas assess their problems as more serious than people in rural areas

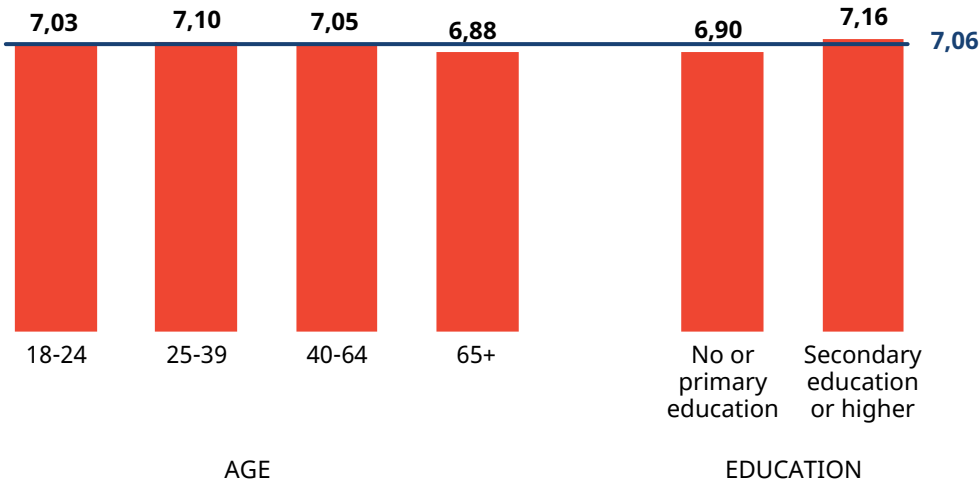
Amongst the various demographic groups surveyed, there are generally no large differences in their assessments of seriousness. For example, there are no significant differences between men and women or based on financial situation, with all groups having a seriousness score close to the average.

We do see a slight difference between different age categories, with especially the oldest cohort (65+) rating their problems as significantly less serious than younger people. Differences also exist between people who have none or only primary education and people with secondary education or higher. People with less education tend to rate their problems slightly lower than the average (6,9), while people with more education tend to rate their problems slightly higher than the average (7,16).



AVERAGE SERIOUSNESS SCORE
demographic differences

— Average



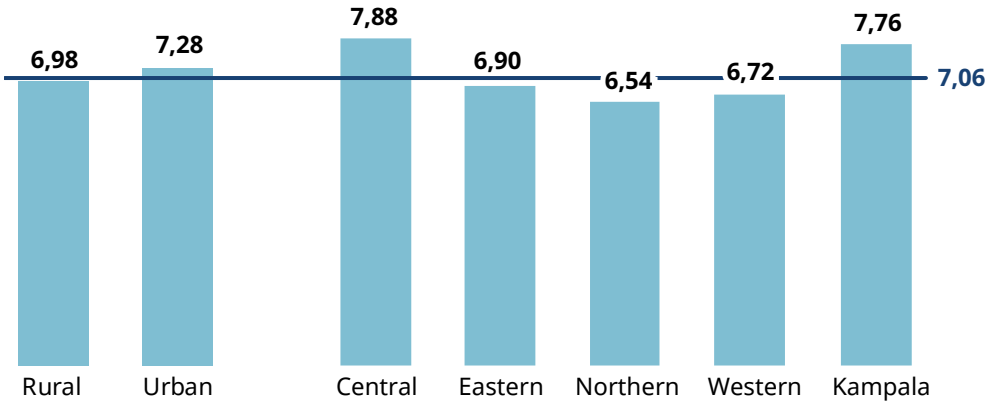
n (problems) = 1248 (18-24) / 11360 (25-39) / 11584 (40-64) / 1569 (65+) / 10117 (no ed) / 15571 (sec ed)

There is also a notable difference between rural and urban populations. People living in urban areas (7,28) rate their problems as more serious than people in rural areas (6,98). This difference is also reflected in the seriousness ratings by region. People in Kampala and the Central region

(which are more urban) tend to rate their problems as more serious than people in the other three regions. It is possible that people in these groups may have a greater understanding or more awareness of the gravity of the problems they are facing, and as a result rate them as more serious.

AVERAGE SERIOUSNESS SCORE
by location / region

— Average



n (problems) = 18863 (rural) / 6898 (urban) / 6566 (central) / 6893 (eastern) / 5543 (northern) / 5900 (western) 859 (kampala)



Land and family problems are considered the most serious problem categories

There are some stark differences between the seriousness ratings of the different problem categories. Land problems prove to be not only very common, but also considered the most serious category. Among the most common problem categories, family problems are also considered more serious than average. As shown in Chapter 3, these two categories are also most often selected as the most serious problem, despite family problems being less overall less common than neighbour disputes and crime.

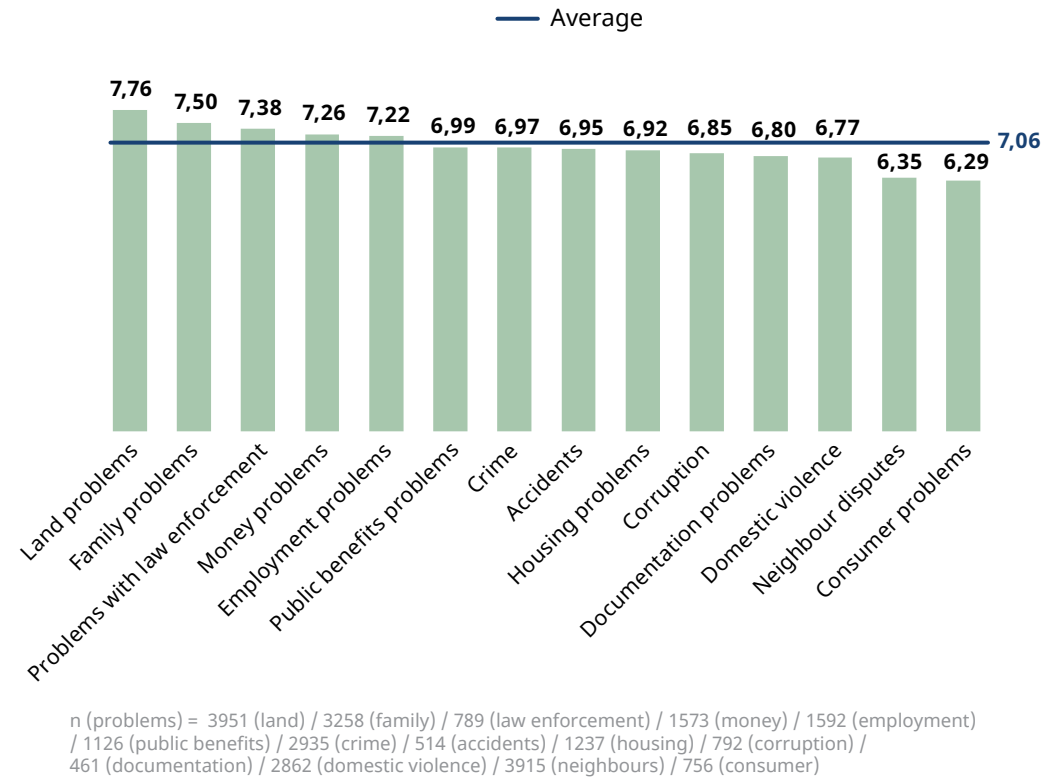
Other problem categories that are considered more serious than the overall average are problems involving law enforcement agencies, money problems, and employment problems. The latter two help explain why people in urban areas rate their problems as more serious than people in rural areas.

Crime and domestic violence, which are also among the top five most commonly reported problems, are considered slightly less serious than the average.

Less surprising, neighbour disputes are some of the least serious types of problems. This helps explain why, despite it being the second-most common problem category overall, it was only the fifth most common problem category when looking at most serious problems only.

The relatively low seriousness score of domestic violence requires some nuance, as the problem category shows some remarkable demographic differences when it comes to seriousness. If we only look at women, the seriousness score of domestic violence is 6,93, higher than the average for domestic violence amongst all respondents. Looking at the sub-categories of physical violence and sexual violence, the seriousness scores are 7,24 (compared to 6,5 for men) and 7,29 (compared to 5,51 for men), respectively. When comparing only the problems selected as the most serious ones, the seriousness score of domestic violence sits around the average.

AVERAGE SERIOUSNESS SCORE
by problem category

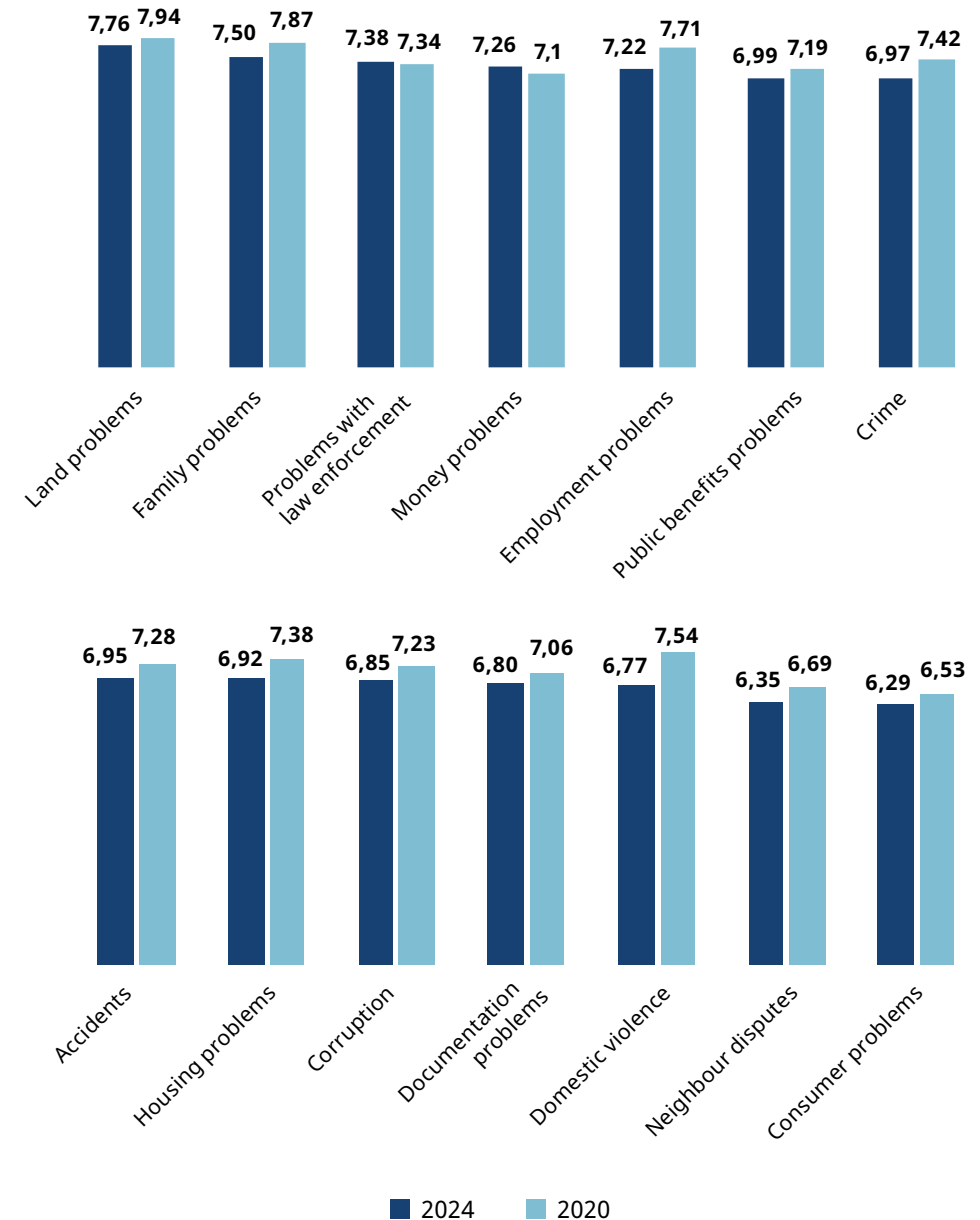




The 2020 data demonstrated similar trends, with land and family problems rated as the most serious, while neighbour disputes and consumer problems were rated as the least serious. A striking difference here is the rating of domestic violence, which was rated as much more serious in 2020.

Besides the demographic differences already outlined above, it is also possible people's understanding and knowledge of the various forms of domestic violence has increased, leading to increased reporting of less serious forms of domestic violence.

AVERAGE SERIOUSNESS SCORE
by problem category (year on year)



Legal problems nearly always have negative consequences

Pretty much everyone (98%) who experiences a legal problem faces some negative consequences because of their most serious problem. On average, people experience 2,9 consequences, showing how legal problems affect multiple aspects of people's lives.

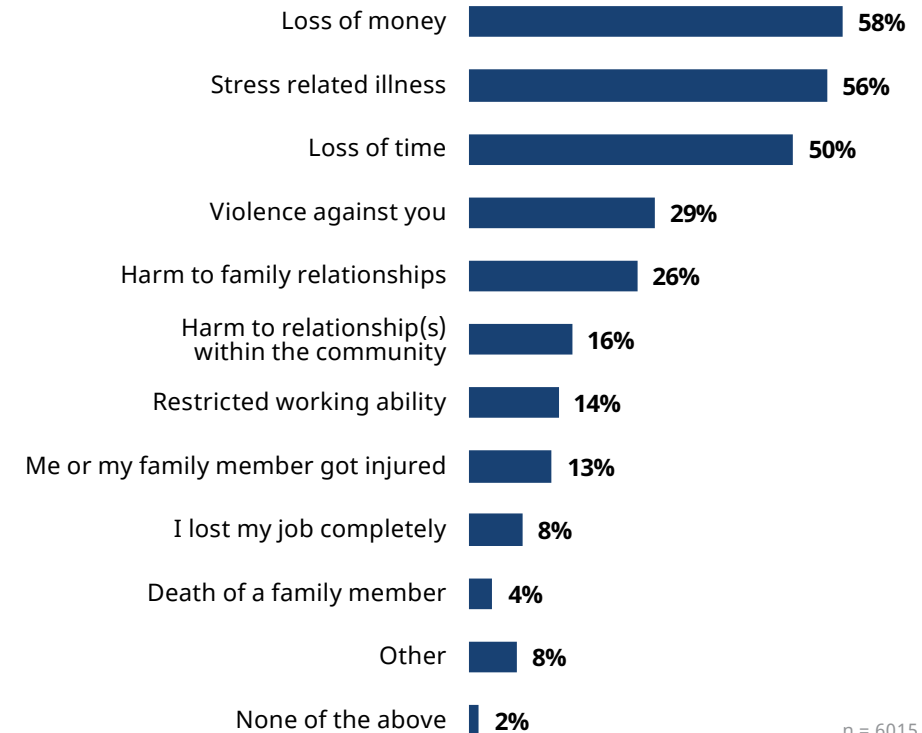
The three most common negative consequences are each experienced by more than half of the people with a legal problem, revealing just how widespread they are. These are loss of money, stress-related illness,

and loss of time. Other relatively common negative consequences are experiences of violence and harm to family members.

There are no significant demographic differences when it comes to the number of negative consequences people experience, except when it comes to the regions. People in the Northern region report experiencing on average over 3,18 negative consequences as a result of their most serious legal problem. This is higher than all of the other regions.²

2 Northern: 3,18; Eastern: 2,72; Western: 2,68; Central: 2,68; Kampala: 2,74.

MOST COMMON CONSEQUENCES



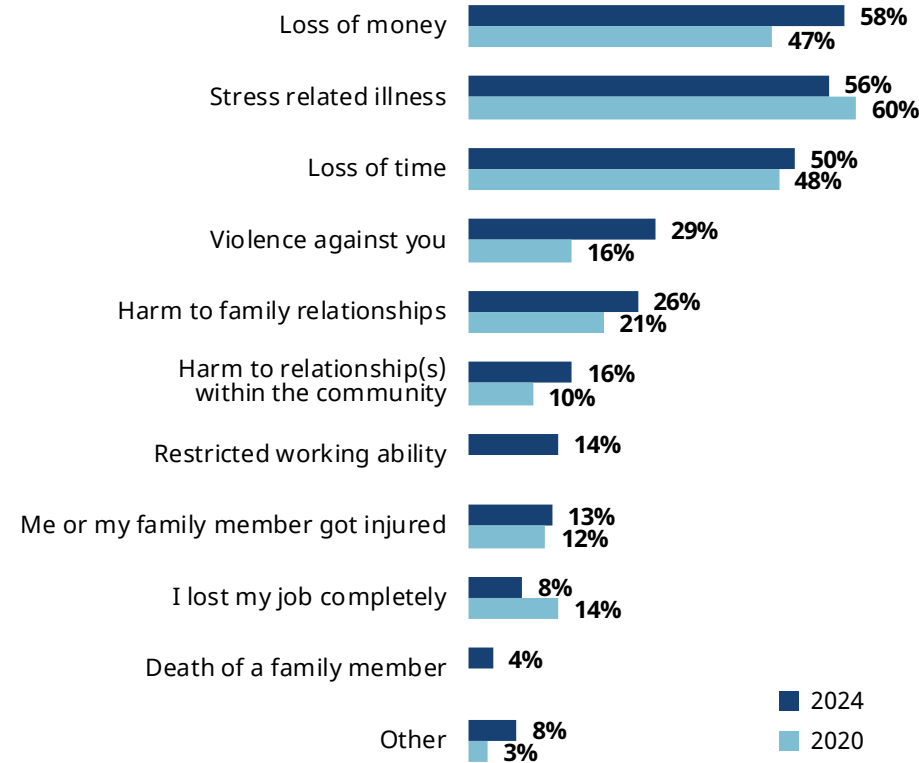
n = 6015



There are also few differences between the most commonly reported consequences reported from 2020 to 2024. In 2020 people most often reported experiencing stress-related illness, followed by loss of money, a reverse order of those most commonly

reported in 2024. The main increase has been in the people who say they experienced violence because of their most serious problem, a potentially worrisome trend that deserves monitoring.

MOST COMMON CONSEQUENCES
year on year



Finally, the type of consequences a person experiences are also related to the type of legal problem. For example, people experiencing domestic violence problems more often report stress related illness and violence against them as consequences of the problem. Meanwhile, loss of money is a very common consequence for people who have reported crime, consumer problems, accidents, money problems, problems with law enforcement, and corruption. It is also of note that problems with law enforcement seem to produce more consequences of a greater variety in people's daily lives.



	Loss of money	Stress related illness	Loss of time	Violence against you
Land problems	64%	53%	61%	37%
Domestic violence	35%	66%	32%	51%
Housing problems	55%	58%	45%	33%
Neighbour disputes	43%	44%	40%	35%
Employment problems	47%	63%	46%	11%
Family problems	48%	67%	52%	29%
Public benefits problems	58%	64%	53%	7%
Crime	78%	46%	49%	16%
Consumer problems	90%	39%	36%	6%
Accidents	77%	41%	46%	8%
Money problems	74%	56%	53%	16%
Problems with law enforcement	74%	59%	62%	54%
Corruption	75%	48%	48%	14%

	Harm to family relationships	Harm to relationship(s) within the community	Restricted working ability	Me or my family member got injured	I lost my job completely	Death of a family member	Other
	31%	24%	14%	15%	4%	6%	4%
	44%	9%	15%	30%	8%	3%	6%
	9%	10%	11%	5%	3%	0%	5%
	10%	45%	11%	9%	1%	2%	11%
	15%	2%	21%	14%	38%	1%	5%
	55%	9%	11%	9%	6%	6%	6%
	10%	4%	10%	5%	3%	7%	8%
	9%	10%	14%	10%	9%	2%	20%
	6%	16%	13%	3%	3%	6%	6%
	10%	4%	36%	53%	30%	9%	4%
	16%	17%	17%	1%	5%	1%	7%
	25%	19%	14%	18%	27%	0%	6%
	6%	10%	5%	0%	14%	0%	2%

Less common consequence



More common consequence



5

Dispute resolution

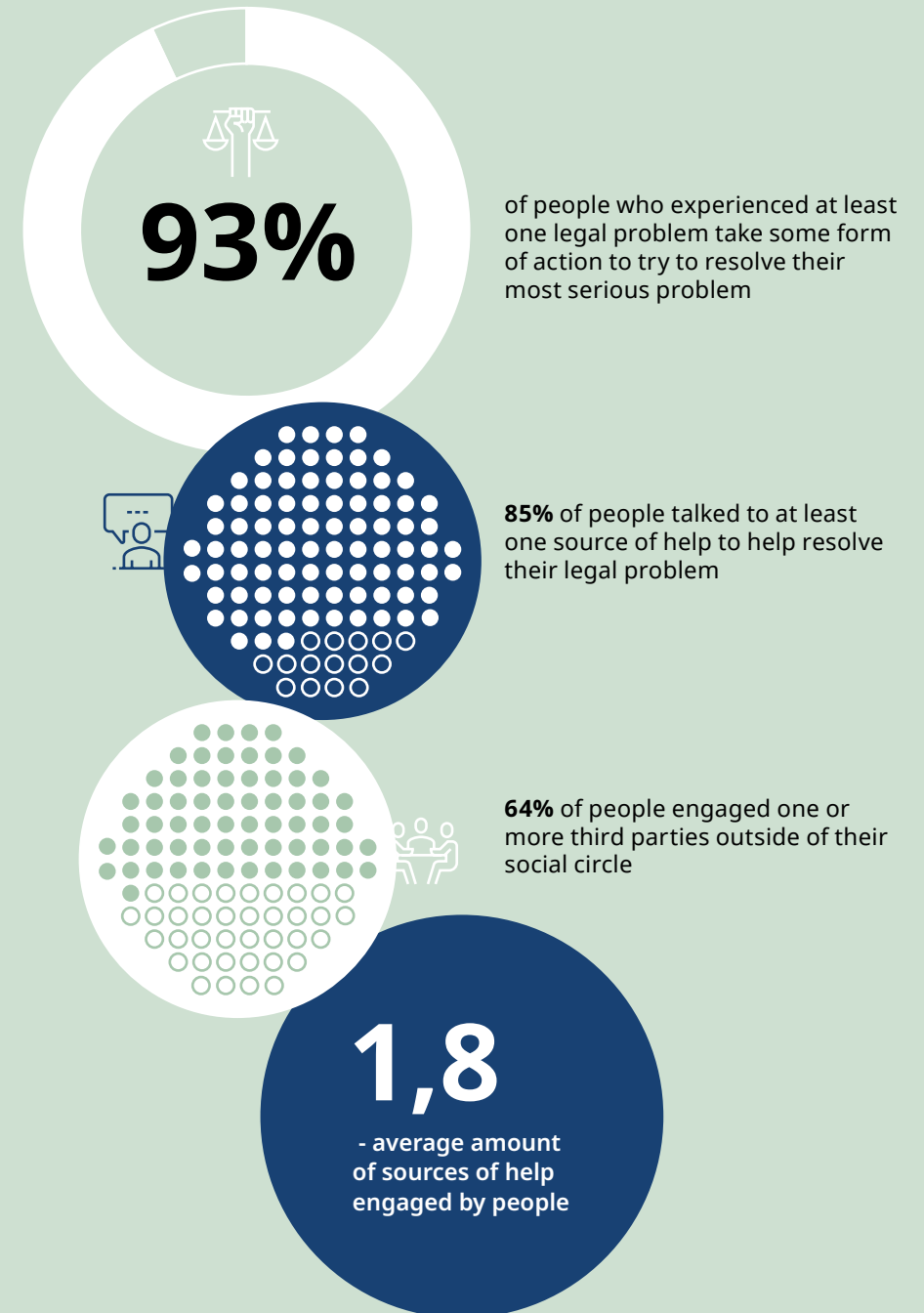
Ugandans are highly motivated to resolve their most serious legal problems...

Ugandans do not just sit and wait for their legal problems to disappear, but take active steps to attempt to address the issue. To resolve their most serious problem, people can either talk directly to the other party in the conflict and/or engage a third party. We call such third parties 'sources of help', and they can either come from people's social network (such as family and friends) or can be a more distant and sometimes more professional actor (such as the police, a local council court (LCC), or a lawyer).

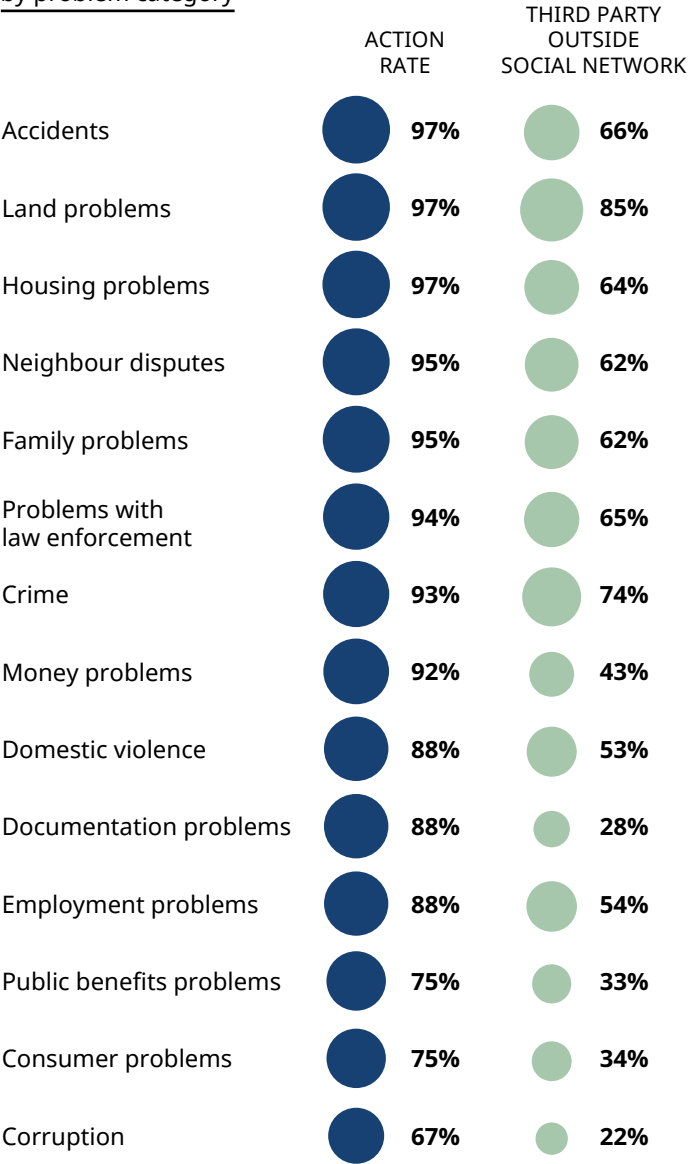
Around 93% of people who experienced at least one legal problem take some form of action to try to resolve their most serious problem. This is significantly more than four years ago, when it was 80%. Around 85% of people talked to at least one source of help to help resolve their

legal problem and 64% engaged one or more third parties outside of their social circle. On average, people who take action engage 1,8 sources of help.

The likelihood of people taking action to resolve their most serious problem differs per problem category. Some of the most common and serious legal problem categories, including land problems and family problems, have the highest action rate. Especially people experiencing land problems very often engage a third party outside their social network. On the other hand, problems where the other party is usually the state, such as corruption and problems related to public benefits, have rather low action rates and some of the lowest rates of engagement of third parties outside people's social network.



ACTION RATE
by problem category



n = 119 (accidents) / 1402 (land) / 244 (housing) / 533 (neighbours) / 936 (family) / 200 (law enforcement) / 708 (crime) / 423 (money) / 631 (domestic violence) / 85 (documentation) / 370 (employment) / 221 (public benefits) / 80 (consumer) / 63 (corruption)

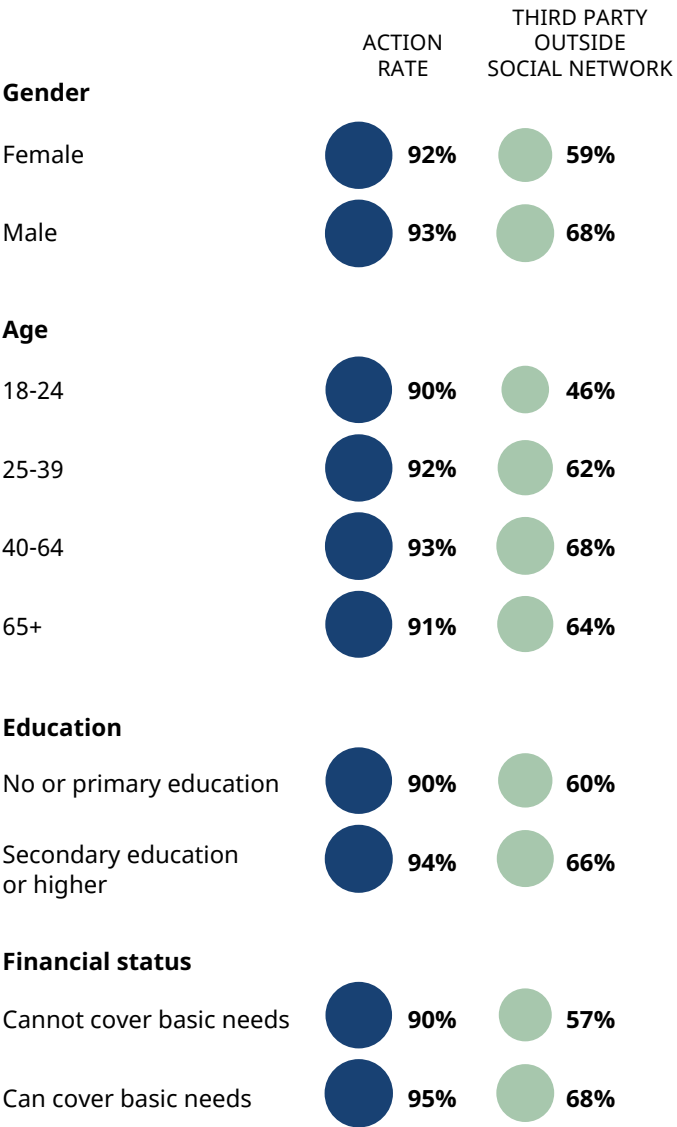
...but not everyone has the same opportunities



There are also important demographic differences when it comes to how people go about resolving their most serious legal problem. Although there are only small demographic differences when it comes to involving any third party, these differences become more significant when looking at third parties outside of people’s social network.

Men, older people, and people with a higher education level and better financial situation are more likely to engage such third parties, suggesting that it is easier for them to obtain the help they need to resolve their most serious legal problem. Below we provide further details which third parties are more often engaged by which demographic groups. As we will also see, all these groups are significantly more likely to resolve their most serious legal problem.

ACTION RATE
demographic differences



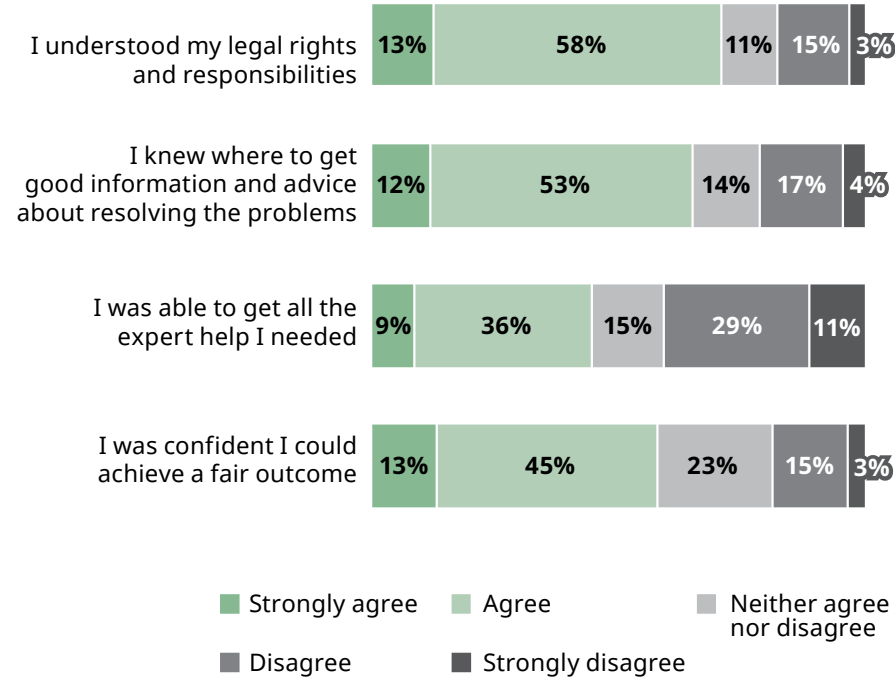
n = 3036 (female) / 2979 (male) / 343 (18-24) / 2699 (25-39) / 2588 (40-64) / 385 (65+) / 2346 (no ed) / 3652 (sec ed) / 2423 (cannot) / 3537 (can)

Legal capabilities form an important predictor of people’s ability to resolve their legal problems

As explained in Chapter 2, we use a set of four questions to assess the extent to which people feel capable of dealing with a (real or hypothetical) legal problem; here we focus on people who have experienced a legal problem and were asked about their most serious one. Their average legal capability score (from 1-5) is 3,42. Although a majority of respondents agree with three out of the four statements, only 45% agree that they were able to get all the expert help they needed.

Around 38% of people have a legal capability score of 4 or higher, meaning they generally agree with all four statements. Interestingly, this percentage is significantly higher for people who have not experienced a legal problem (48%) than for those who have experienced at least one legal problem (37%). This suggests that people become more aware of how challenging it can be to achieve justice when they are personally dealing with a legal problem.

THINKING ABOUT YOUR MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM, TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

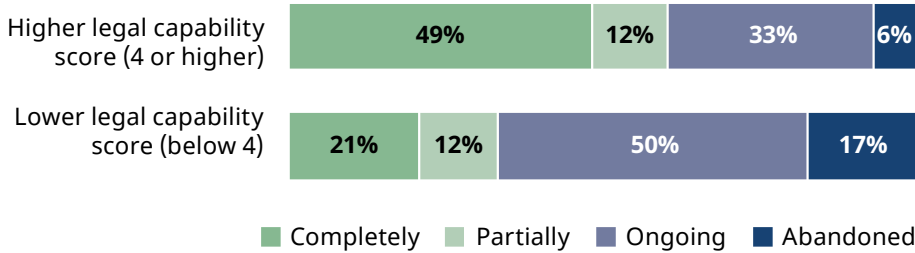


n = 6015

People with a higher legal capability score are more likely to take action to resolve their most serious problem.¹ Crucially, they are also more likely to engage a third party outside of their personal network.² As a result, a higher legal capability score is positively associated with resolving the most serious problem.

Among people with a legal capability score below four, 33% either completely or partially resolved their most serious problem. Meanwhile, among people with a legal capability score of four or higher, this increases to 61%. This is despite the fact that people with a higher legal capability score assess their most serious problem as more serious (9,1 compared to 8,9), which usually means a lower likelihood of problem resolution.

ACTION RATE
demographic differences



n = 2250 (higher legal capability score) / 3762 (lower legal capability score)

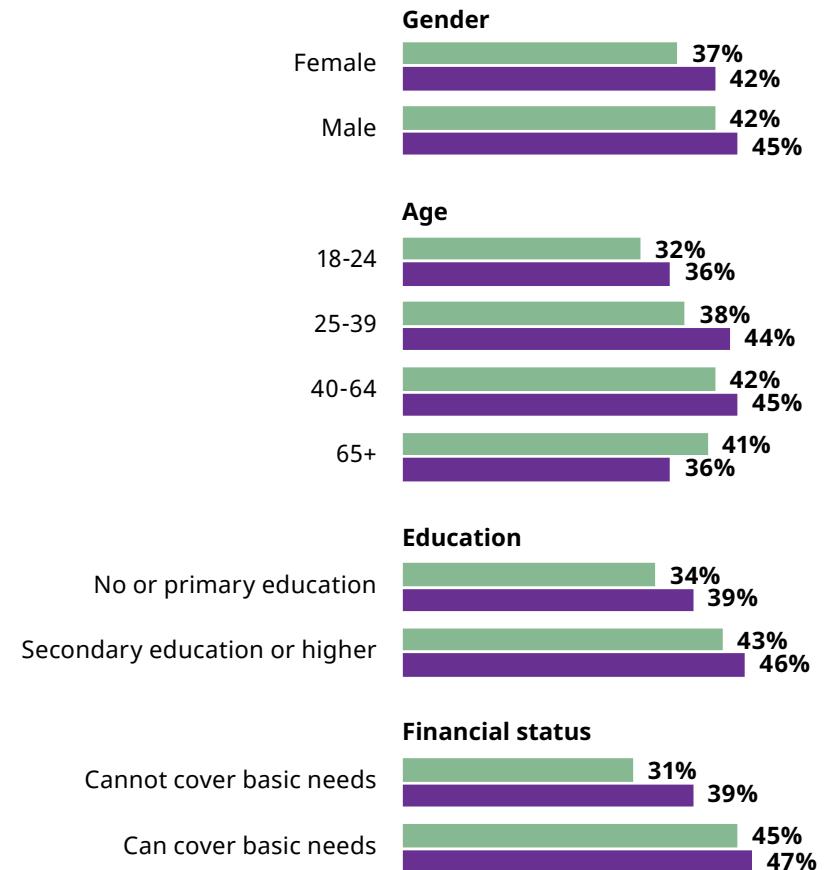
¹ 98% of people with a legal capability score of four or higher take action, compared to 89% of people with a legal capability score below four.
² 76% of people with a legal capability score of four or higher engage a third party outside of their social network, compared to 57% of people with a legal capability score below four.

Education level and financial situation are important predictors of people's legal capabilities



The relationship between legal capabilities and resolution rates is also visible in demographic differences, illustrating inequalities when it comes to accessing justice. In particular, women, younger people, and people with a lower education level and less financial means are generally less positive about their legal capabilities. They are also less likely to take action and engage a third party outside of their social network (see above), resulting in a lower likelihood of resolving their most serious problem.

LEGAL CAPABILITIES AND RESOLUTION RATE demographic differences



■ Higher legal capability score (4 or higher)

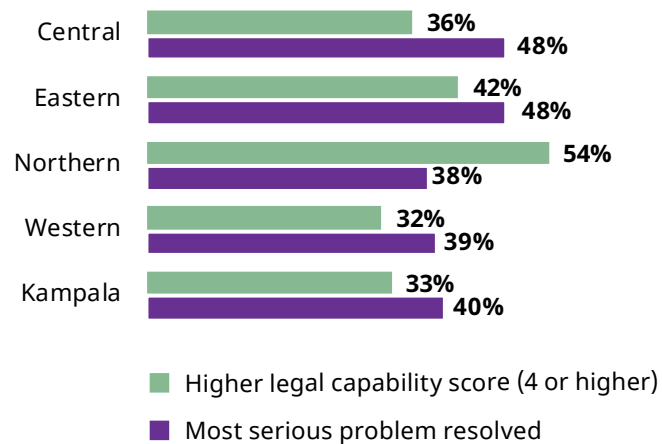
■ Most serious problem resolved

n = 3036 (female) / 2979 (male) / 343 (18-24) / 2699 (25-39) / 2588 (40-64) / 385 (65+) / 2346 (no ed) / 3652 (sec ed) / 2423 (cannot) / 3537 (can)

Although there are no significant differences between people in rural and urban areas, there are important regional differences when it comes to legal capabilities and resolution of the most serious problem. This follows the same pattern as above: higher legal capabilities is higher likelihood of having resolved your most serious problem, with the highest capability scores in the Eastern and Central regions and the lowest scores in Kampala and the Western region. This is despite the fact that there are no significant regional differences in the likelihood of engaging a third party outside of the personal network.

However, the Northern region is a marked deviation from this relationship. Despite having the highest legal capability scores of any region, with people in the Northern region answering more positively to all four statements, it has the lowest resolution rate for their most serious problems. Cultural differences, the types of problems (see Chapter 3), and the differences in sources of help people engage (see below) could potentially help explain this, but further research would be needed to really understand this phenomenon.

LEGAL CAPABILITIES AND RESOLUTION RATE
by region



n = 1626 (central) / 1553 (eastern) / 1170 (northern) /
1375 (western) / 291 (kampala)

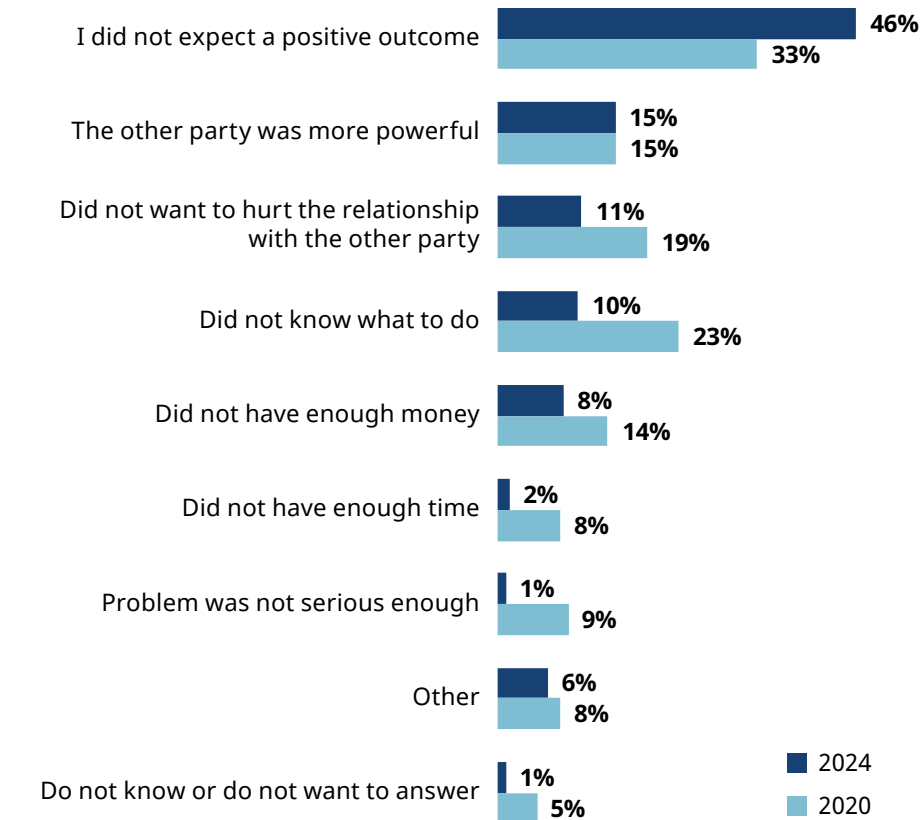
The main reason for taking no action is not expecting a positive outcome



As noted above, very few people do not take any action to try and address their most serious problem. For those who did not take any action, the most common reason is that they did not expect a positive outcome. This was the most common reason in 2020 as well, although this time even more people gave this answer.

Other, much less common reasons to not take action are the other party was more powerful; not wanting to hurt the other party; not knowing what to do; or not having enough money. Compared to four years ago, significantly less people indicate they did not know what to do or did not have enough money or time. Combined with the higher action rate, this suggests Ugandans know more than ever how to go about trying to resolve their most serious legal problems.

MAIN REASON FOR NOT TAKING ANY ACTION
year on year

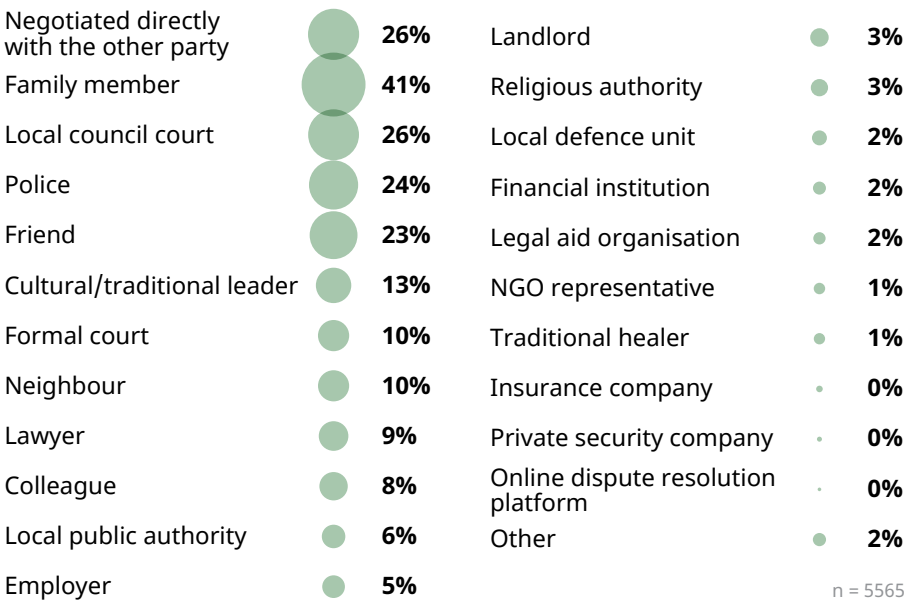


Few legal problems reach the formal justice system

The 93% of Ugandans who take action to resolve their most serious problem embark on a wide range of different justice journeys that are influenced by the type of legal problem, the region

they live in, and their democratic characteristics. Yet despite the fact that each justice journey is unique, there are overall trends that emerge and some justice providers that are widely engaged.

MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP
as % of people who take action



Roughly one in four people who take action talk directly to the other party in the dispute. Naturally, this percentage is higher for problem categories where the other party is known and near to the person experiencing the legal problem (such as neighbour problems).

When engaging a third party, personal networks are the most common source of help. Family members (41%) are especially a highly common source of help, but friends (23%), neighbours (10%), and colleagues (8%) are also regularly engaged by people who take action. Outside of people’s social networks, two actors stand out: the police (24%) and LCCs (26%), with roughly one in four people turning to each of these actors. After that, cultural and traditional leaders are engaged by around 13% of people who take action.

Around 10% of people who take action seek the help of a lawyer and/or end up in a formal court of law. Although this is not an insignificant percentage, it does show that nine out of ten legal problems are dealt with outside of the formal justice sector. Below we provide further details which demographic groups are more likely to seek help in the formal justice system.

A wide range of different actors are engaged by a minority of people, in some cases primarily for a specific category of problems (such as landlords for housing problems or employers for employment problems). Finally, although there have been some first steps towards the development of online dispute resolution platforms, currently very few make use of them to address their most serious problem. It will be interesting to see whether this will become a more common strategy to deal with legal problems in the upcoming years.

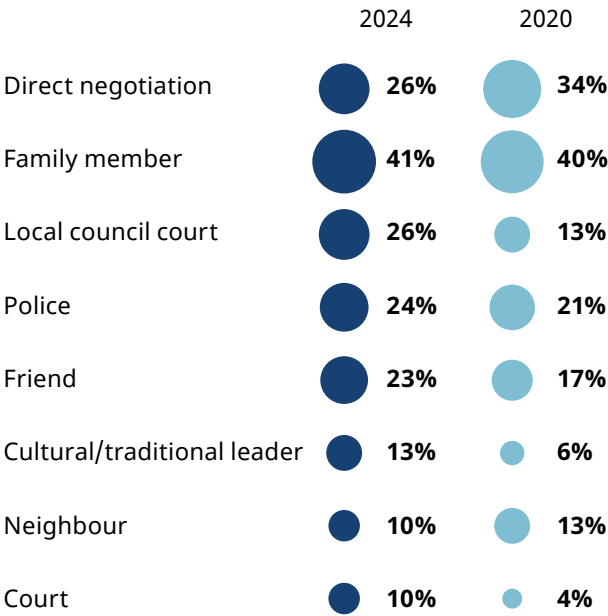


There has been a significant increase in people going to local council courts

Compared to four years ago, and looking at the most common sources of help, shows that engagement of some sources has significantly

increased.³ Engagement of family members is pretty stable, whereas engagement of friends increased and involvement of neighbours decreased.

MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP
as % of people who take action



³ In 2020, we asked people separately about sources of legal advice (although providing advice was also one of the options for justice providers).

The key role of local council courts in providing access to justice in Uganda

Outside of social networks, involvement of the police has only slightly increased, whereas engagement of LCCs has increased significantly. Compared to four years ago, around twice as many people now go to LCCs with their most serious problems. It is possible that this finding four years ago was an anomaly, as the current percentage is more similar to our findings in 2016. Regardless, it shows the key role LCCs play in providing affordable access to justice to many Ugandans.

Finally, there has also been an increase in the engagement of formal courts. This might have been a result of the increase in magistrates in different parts of Uganda and is an interesting trend to continue following.⁴

Local council courts (LCCs) are one of the main avenues for people in Uganda seeking justice. The 2006 Local Council Courts Act provides for the establishment of Local Council Courts at the village (LC I), parish (LC II), and town, division, or sub-county level (LC III). They act under the supervision of the Chief Magistrate on behalf of the High Court and are linked to the formal justice system through a system of appeal options. LCCs are composed of elected members and are specifically meant to handle cases of people who cannot afford the costs associated with the formal justice system.⁵

The JNS data highlights the key role LCCs play in the administration of justice in Uganda. Around 26% of people who experienced a legal problem and take action to resolve it, go to an LCC. As such, they take on significantly more cases than the formal court system (10%). Men (29%) are more likely to go to an LCC than women (23%), as do older people. Whereas 31% of people aged 40-64 and 35% of people above the age of 64 went to an LCC, this is only 21% of people aged 25-39 and 18% of people aged 18-24.

Education level and financial situation do not show a straightforward picture. People with no or primary education (30%) are more likely to go to an LCC than people with secondary education or higher (24%), showing the key role of LCCs in providing access to justice for all. However, people who say they are able to cover their basic needs (27%) are actually slightly more likely to go to an LCC than people who say they are not able to meet their basic needs (24%). Indeed, the percentage is highest among people who say they can afford almost everything they want (34%).

Considering the nature of the institution, it is not surprising that people in rural areas (29%) are significantly more likely to go to an LCC than people in urban areas (19%). But although there are some differences between the four Ugandan regions, in all of them more than 20% of people who take action go to an LCC, showing the importance of LCCs throughout the country. The highest percentage is in the Western region (31%), followed by the Eastern (27%), Northern (25%), and Central region (24%).

The JNS data shows people go to LCCs with a wide range of legal problems. The problem categories brought most often to LCCs are land problems and neighbour disputes. Around 46% of people with a land problem who take action, go to an LCC. For neighbour

disputes, this is 36%. Other problem categories that are often brought to LCCs are crime (29%), domestic violence (21%), and family problems (20%). These are also the five most common problem categories in Uganda, helping to explain the high engagement of LCCs overall.

Around 69% of people who make use of the services of an LCC find it helpful or very helpful. There are no significant differences in this assessment between men and women or between different age groups. However, there are significant differences in terms of education level and financial situation. Only 63% of people with no or primary education level assess the LCC as helpful or very helpful, compared to 74% of people with secondary education or higher. Similarly, only 59% of people who say they cannot cover their basic needs assess the LCC as helpful or very helpful, compared to 75% of people who can cover their basic needs. Although these differences also exist for other justice providers, it is particularly pronounced for LCCs.

Clearly a key actor in the Ugandan justice system, existing research into the LCCs is nonetheless relatively scarce. More research would be needed to better understand why people prefer to take their legal problems to LCCs (or why not) and how they assess the help they receive.

4 <https://judiciary.go.ug/files/downloads/Press%20Release%20Deployments%20and%20Transfers%20June%202023.pdf>

5 <https://dashboard.hiil.org/publications/trend-report-2021-delivering-justice/case-study-local-council-courts-in-uganda/>

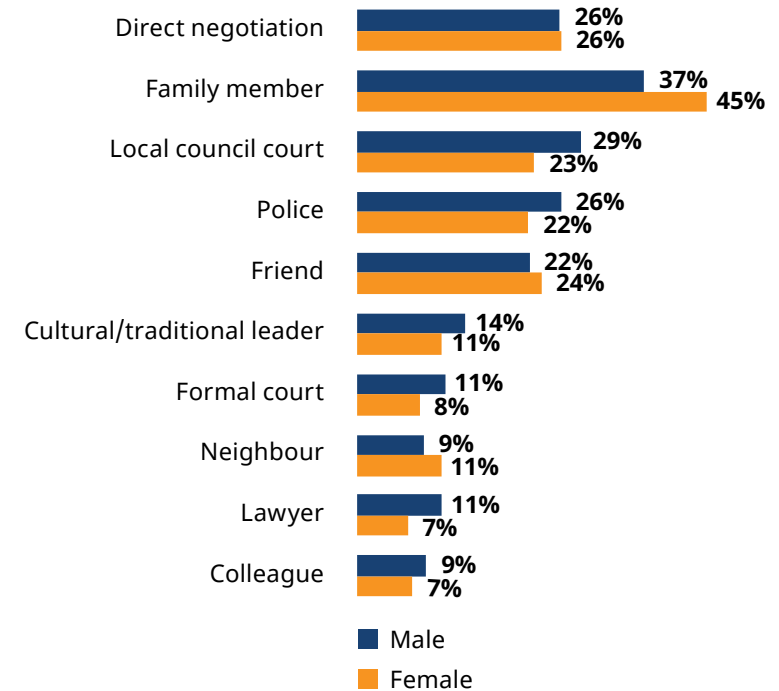
Access to the formal justice system is not the same for everyone

As already shown above, not everyone has equal access to justice providers outside of their social network. Looking at demographic differences in the engagement of various sources of help provides a more in-depth understanding of the various experiences of accessing justice in Uganda.

Men are more likely to engage all third parties outside of their social network than women

Men and women are equally likely to talk directly to the other party in a conflict, but when it comes to third parties there are some notable differences. Whereas women are more likely to engage a family member, friend, or neighbour, men are more likely to engage any third party outside of their social network. This includes LCCs, the police, cultural and traditional leaders, lawyers, and formal courts. This striking difference suggests that women struggle more than men to access dispute resolution mechanisms.

MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP by gender (as % of people taking action)



n = 2709 (female) / 2814 (male)



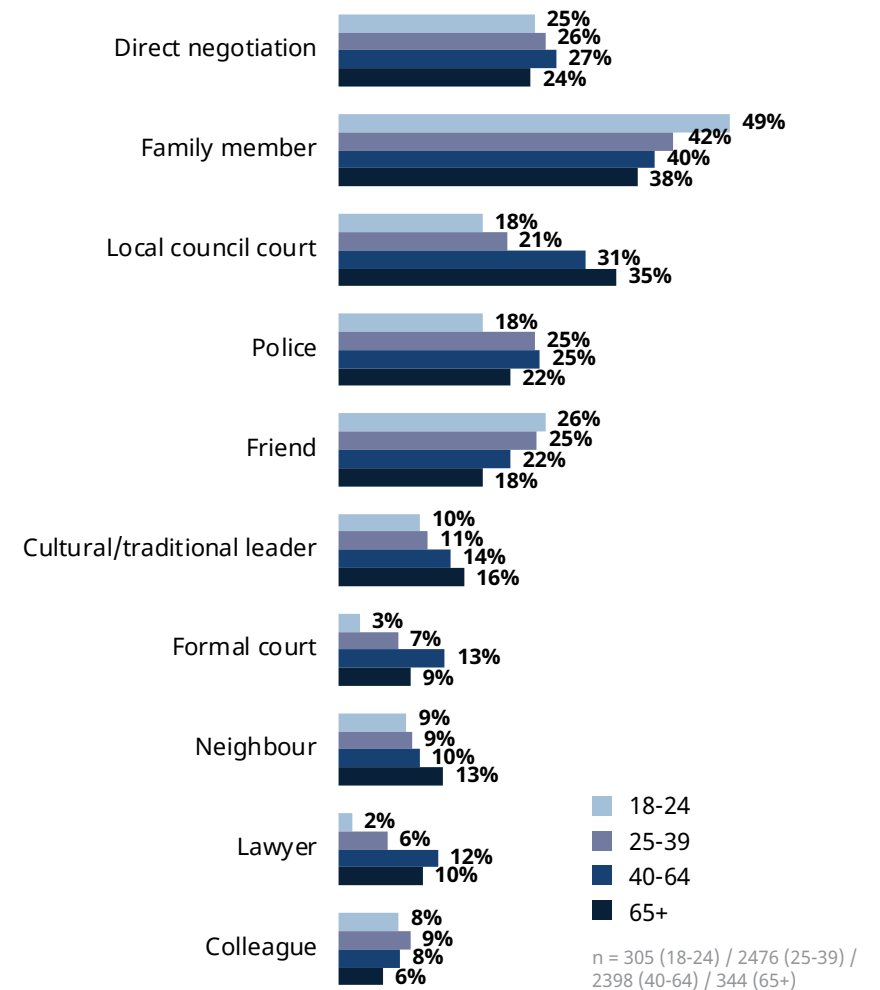


Younger people especially rely on family members and friends

Looking at age categories, a similar division is visible, with younger people more often relying on family and friends, while older people more often seek help from justice providers outside of their social network.

Lawyers and courts are most commonly engaged among those between 40 and 64 years of age. However, LCCs and cultural and traditional leaders are most often engaged by people above the age of 65. This raises the question of the role these actors will play in the future, as the large number of young population of Uganda start coming of age.

MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP by age category (as % of people taking action)

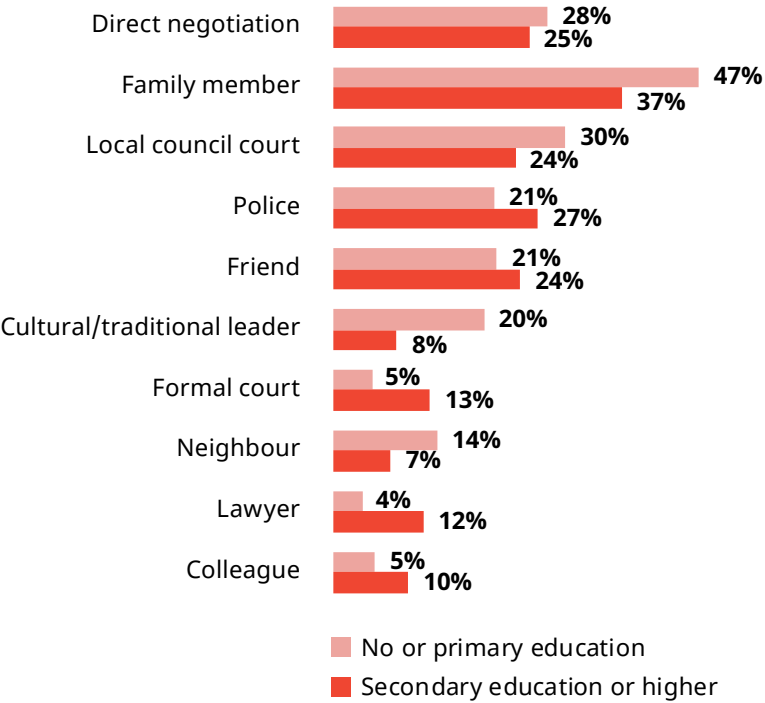


A lack of education and financial means are key barriers to accessing the formal justice system

Due to their strong internal correlation, education level and financial situation mostly have a similar influence on the sources of help people engage to

resolve their most serious problem. The most common source of help for all groups is a family member. However, people with a lower education level and less financial means are significantly more likely to talk to a family member than people with a higher education and more financial means. The latter are more likely to turn to a friend.

MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP
by education level (as % of people taking action)



n = 2104 (no or primary education) /
3403 (secondary education or higher)

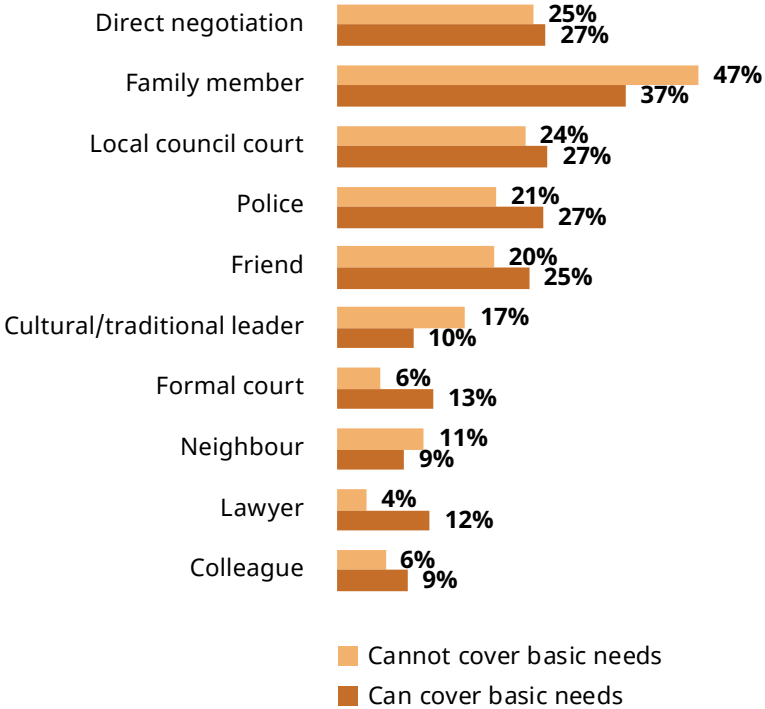
Outside of their social network, a large difference exists when it comes to accessing the formal justice sector. Only 4% of people with no or primary education and people who say they cannot cover their basic needs engage a lawyer to resolve their most serious problem; between 5% and 6% go to a formal court. Meanwhile, higher educated people and people with more financial means are three times more likely to enlist the services of a lawyer and go significantly more often to formal courts. This shows that (a lack of) education and financial means are key barriers to accessing the formal justice system.

The engagement of more informal justice providers shows a different picture. People with a lower education

level are significantly more likely to go to an LCC or ask for help from a cultural or traditional leader. The difference is less pronounced in terms of financial status, with better-off people actually going slightly more often to LCCs. Having less financial means does make it more likely someone seeks help from a cultural or traditional leader, but this is mainly a regional effect: cultural and traditional leaders are primarily engaged in the Northern region, where people are significantly more likely to say they cannot cover their basic needs. These differences remain significant when correcting for differences between urban and rural areas, showing the key role of financial means in accessing the formal justice system.



MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP
by financial situation (as % of people taking action)



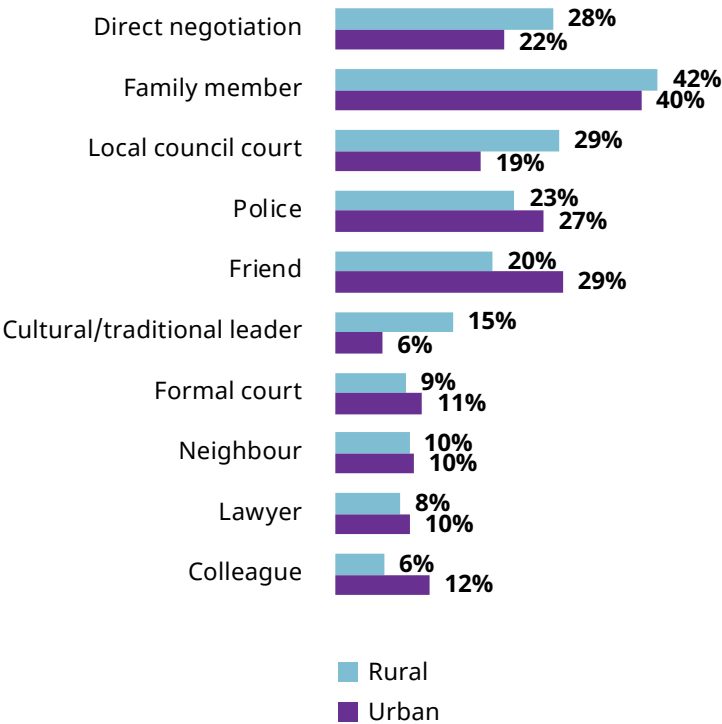
n = 2158 (cannot cover basic needs) /
3320 (can cover basic needs)

Informal justice mechanisms
are most popular in rural
areas

LCCs and cultural and traditional leaders are much more commonly engaged in rural areas than in urban areas. However, whereas the LCCs are a popular source of help in all regions, cultural and traditional leaders are especially engaged by people in the

Northern region. Here, they are the second-most common source of help, only after family members, and well before any other third party, showing the important role customary justice systems play, especially in this region.

MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP
by location (as % of people taking action)



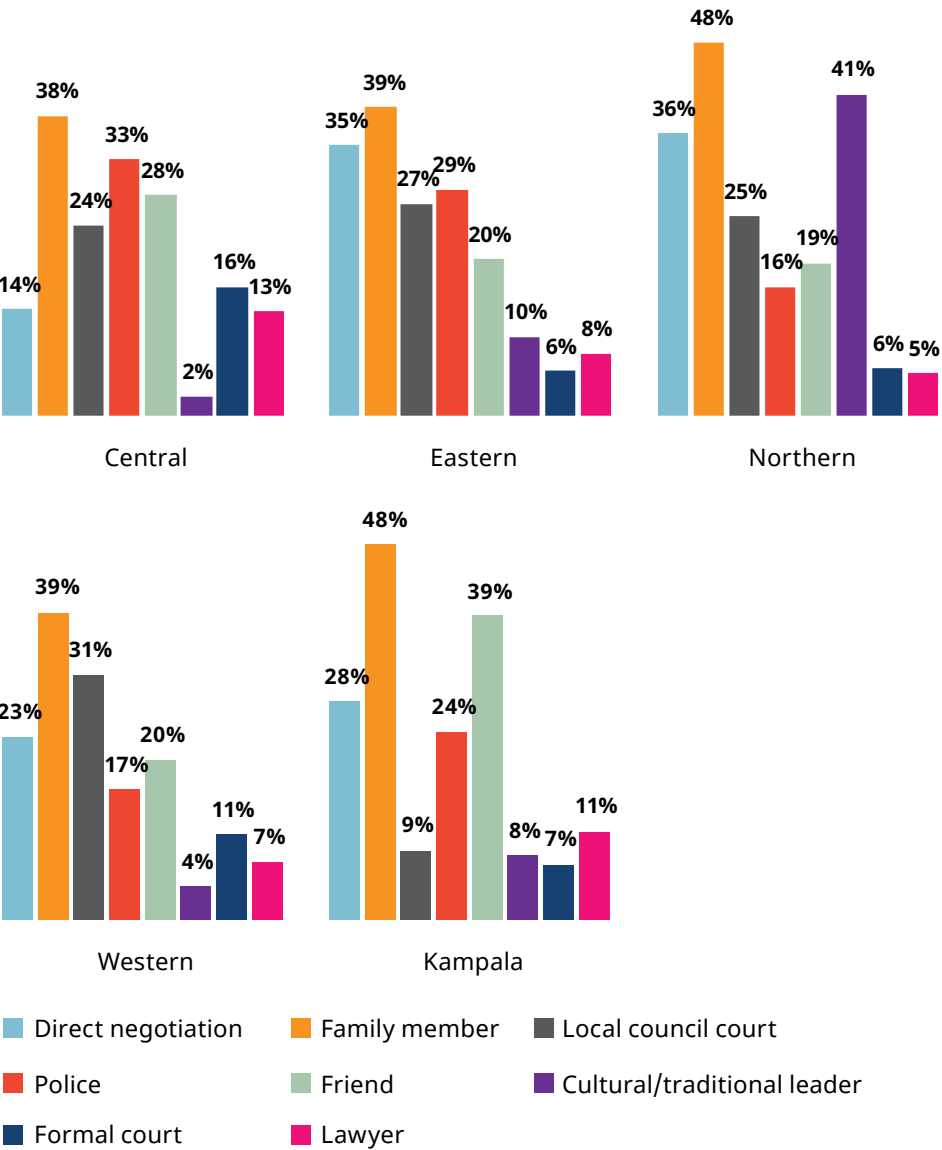
n = 3919 (rural) / 1604 (urban)

Sources of help affiliated with the formal justice system - such as the police, lawyers, and formal courts - are engaged more often in urban areas than in rural areas. Lawyers are most often engaged in Kampala and the Central region, and least often in the Northern region. The police are a regular source of help in Kampala, the Central, and the Eastern region, but are engaged a lot less in the Northern and Western regions.

Finally, people go most often to formal courts in the Central Region, followed by the Western region. Somewhat surprisingly, it is a lot less common to go to a formal court in Kampala. Engagement of formal courts is lowest in the Eastern and Northern regions.



MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP
by region (as % of people taking action)



n = 1473 (central) / 1424 (eastern) / 1090 (northern) / 1294 (western) / 284 (kampala)

Land problems and neighbour disputes are most likely to end up at a local council court

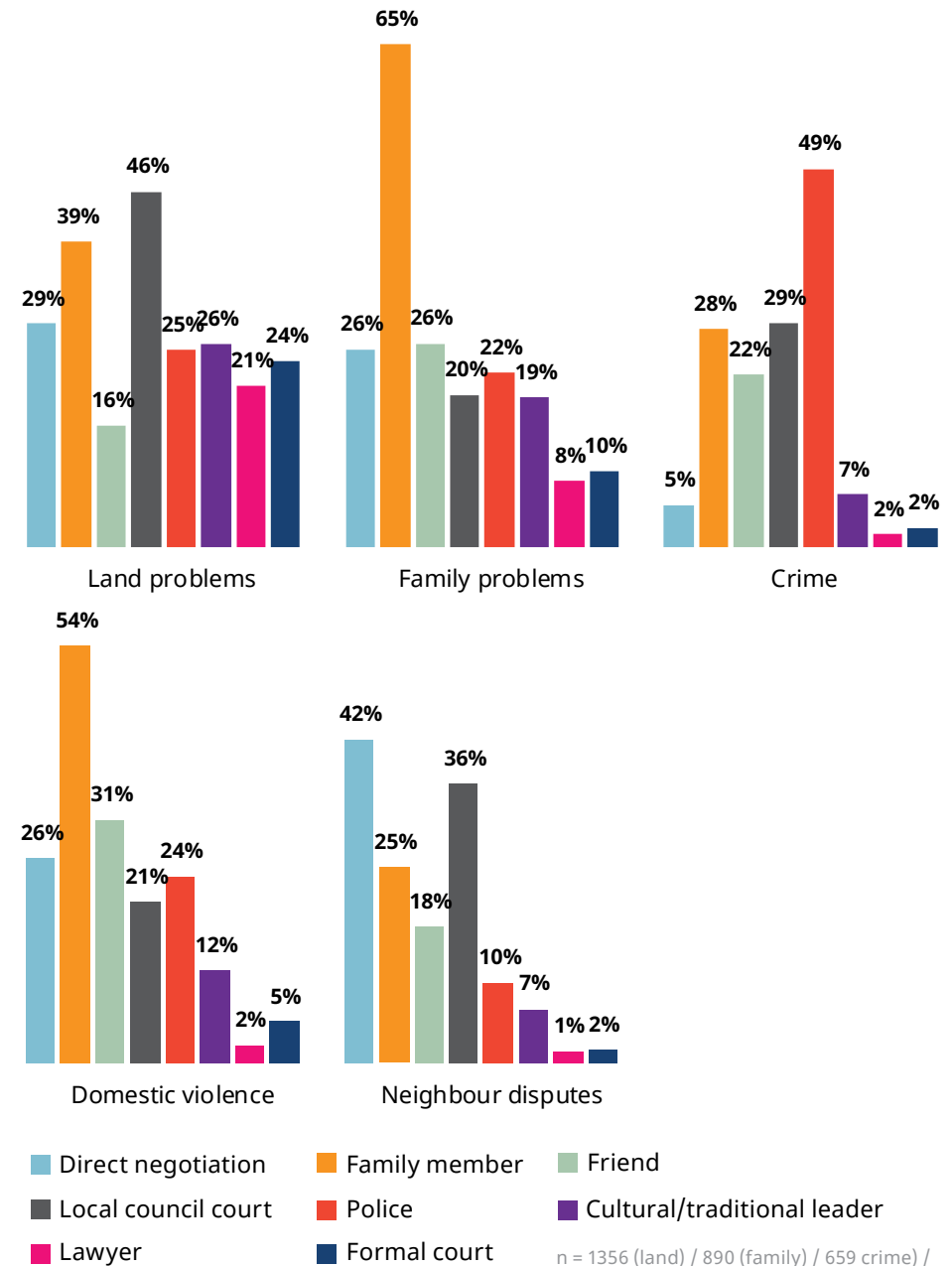
People engage different sources of help depending on the type of problem they are trying to resolve. Looking at the most serious problem categories, for land problems a rather diverse array of sources of help are engaged, including a wide range of different actors outside of people's social networks. The most common justice providers people turn to with their land problems (even before family members) are LCCs. Almost half of the people whose most serious problem is a land problem and who take action to resolve it go to an LCC.

There are some regional differences: in the Western region 57% of people with a land problem go to an LCC, while in the Central region it is 48%, in the Eastern region 45%, and in Kampala only 31%. In the Northern region only 38% of people with a land problem engage an LCC. Instead, 67% of people with a land problem in this region seek help from a cultural or traditional leader.

Lawyers and formal courts are relatively frequently engaged for land problems, but here too there are important regional differences. Around 35% of people with a land problem in the Central region engage a lawyer, while in Kampala this is even higher at 43%. Meanwhile, in the other regions it is significantly lower (17% in the Eastern region, 14% in the Western region, and 12% in the Northern region). A similar regional division is apparent with engaging formal courts for land problems (39% in Central region, 33% in Kampala, 25% in the Western region, 16% in the Eastern region, 13% in the Northern region).

Compared to land problems, the engagement of sources of help outside of the social network is lower for family problems. Instead, two out of three people involve one or more other family members in trying to resolve the matter. The police, LCCs, and cultural or traditional leaders are each engaged by about 20% of people with family problems. Around 10% of people involve a lawyer and/or go to a formal court. The regional differences are similar to those for land problems.

MOST COMMON SOURCES OF HELP
by problem category (as % of people taking action)



n = 1356 (land) / 890 (family) / 659 (crime) / 557 (domestic violence) / 508 (neighbour)

When it comes to crime, the police are the most common source of help. Nearly one out of two people whose most serious problem is a crime go to the police. Another 29% of people go to their LCC. Involvement of family members is generally lower for most crimes, as is involvement of the formal justice system: lawyers and formal courts are only engaged in 2% of the cases.

The types of actions people take for domestic violence are similar to family problems. Family members are by far the most common source of help, followed by friends. Around 24% of people turn to the police and 21% go to an LCC. Involvement of cultural or traditional leaders is lower for domestic violence than for family problems. Additionally, fewer people involve a lawyer or go to a formal court.

Neighbour disputes have the highest percentage of people who talk directly to the other party. Involvement of family and friends is generally lower for this problem category, but the involvement of LCCs is actually higher than the average of all problems. Neighbour disputes very rarely make it to the formal justice system: only 1% of people with a neighbour dispute involve a lawyer and 2% go to a formal court.



Most sources of help offer advice, followed by mediation

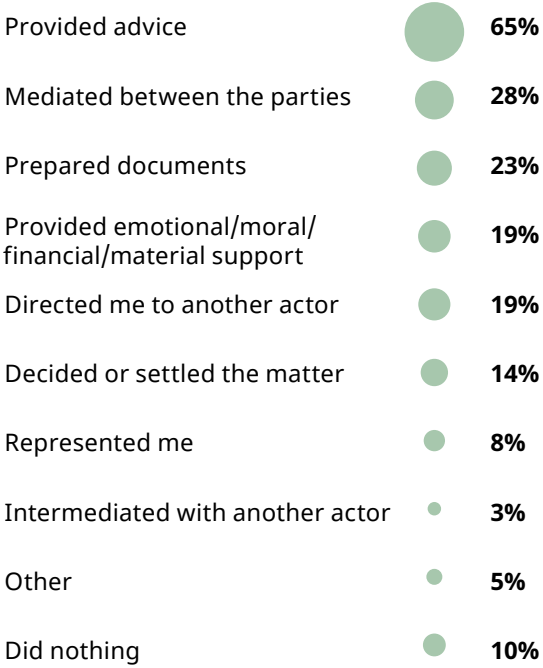
The sources of help people engage offer a number of different services, which we refer to as interventions. The most common intervention is providing advice, offered by 65% of sources of help. This is followed by mediation (28%), preparing documents (23%), providing support (19%), and directing someone to another actor (19%). Only a small percentage of sources of help decided or settled the problem (14%) or represented the person seeking help (8%), reflecting the limited number of people engaging lawyers or going to formal courts and showing that many problems are resolved in other ways.

Although it is not possible to isolate these interventions to assess their effect on resolution rates, it is possible to get a slight indication by looking at how often people resolve their most serious problem depending on

the interventions they receive. The only intervention that really stands out is deciding or settling the matter, which has an associated resolution rate of 83%, compared to an average resolution rate of 45% for the most serious problems. Moreover, people that engage a source of help who decides or settles the dispute are more likely to say the resolution is fair or very fair (83% of cases compared 72% on average).

Providing advice and mediation each have an associated resolution rate of 46%, whereas preparing documents has an associated resolution rate of 49%. For all of these interventions people say the resolution is fair 71%-73% of the time, so more or less in line with the average. Unsurprisingly, doing nothing has the poorest resolution rate at only 23%.

MOST COMMON INTERVENTIONS
as % of sources of help



n (sources of help) = 10584

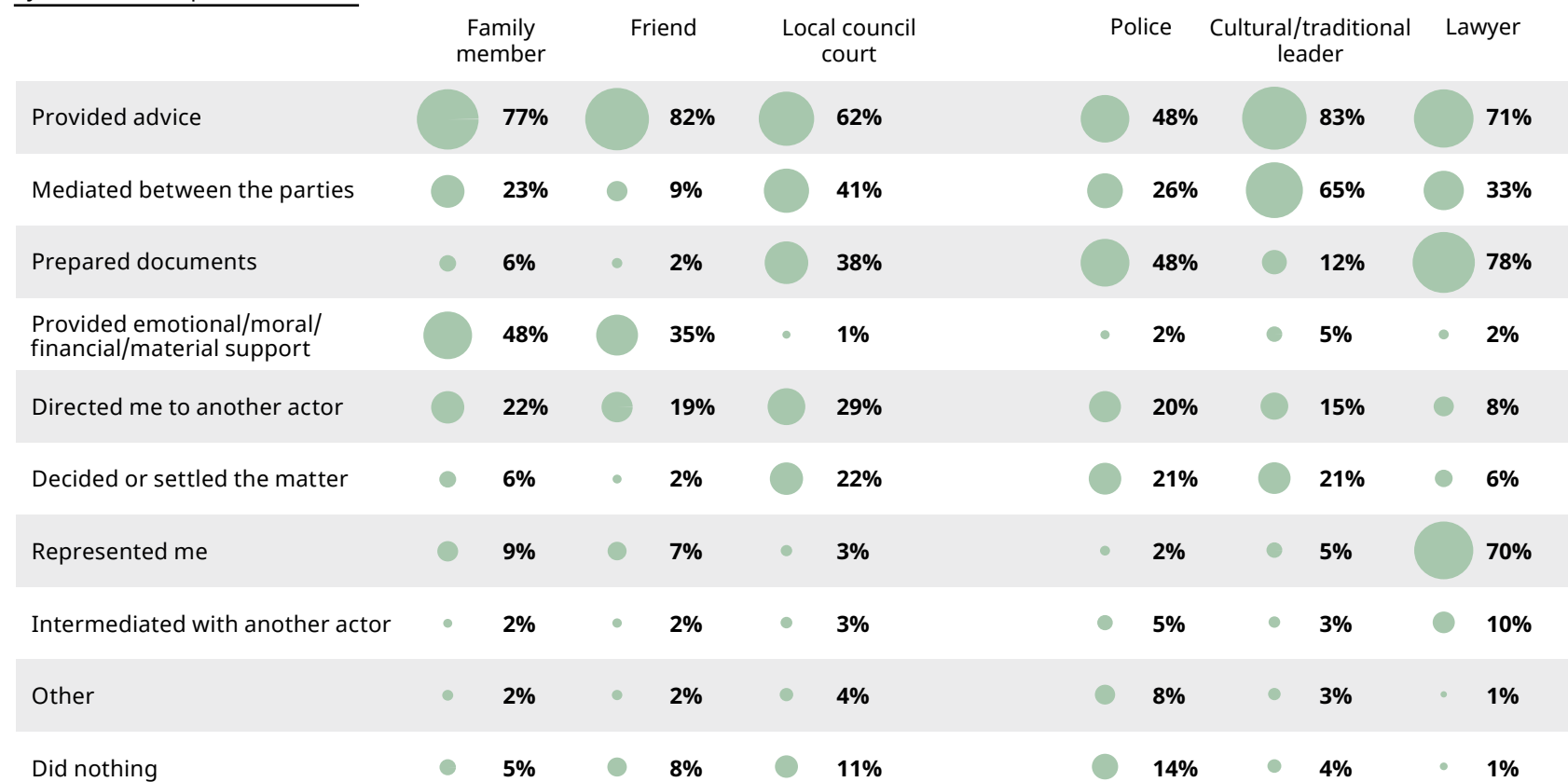


The types of interventions offered differ strongly between sources of help. Family members and friends mostly provide advice and different forms of support. To a lesser extent, they also direct people to other sources of help, and family members also relatively often provide mediation.

Providing advice is also a very common intervention for sources of help outside of people's social network, but these third parties also help in other ways. LCCs most often mediate between the parties, prepare documents, or direct people to another actor. This is somewhat similar to cultural and traditional leaders, although they provide mediation more often and less often prepare documents or direct people to another actor. Both actors only settle disputes in just over 20% of all cases, significantly less than formal courts (37%), showing the diverse ways in which justice can be achieved.

The police most often prepare documents and to a lesser extent mediate, direct people, or decide on the matter. They are also most often said to do nothing, slightly more often than LCCs. Finally, besides providing advice, lawyers most often prepare documents and represent people. In one third of the cases, they also provide mediation between the parties.

MOST COMMON INTERVENTIONS by sources of help



n (sources of help) = 2272 (family member) / 1274 (friend) / 1439 (local council court) / 1345 (police) / 698 (cultural/traditional leader) / 488 (lawyer)

Third parties tend to be helpful, but some more than others

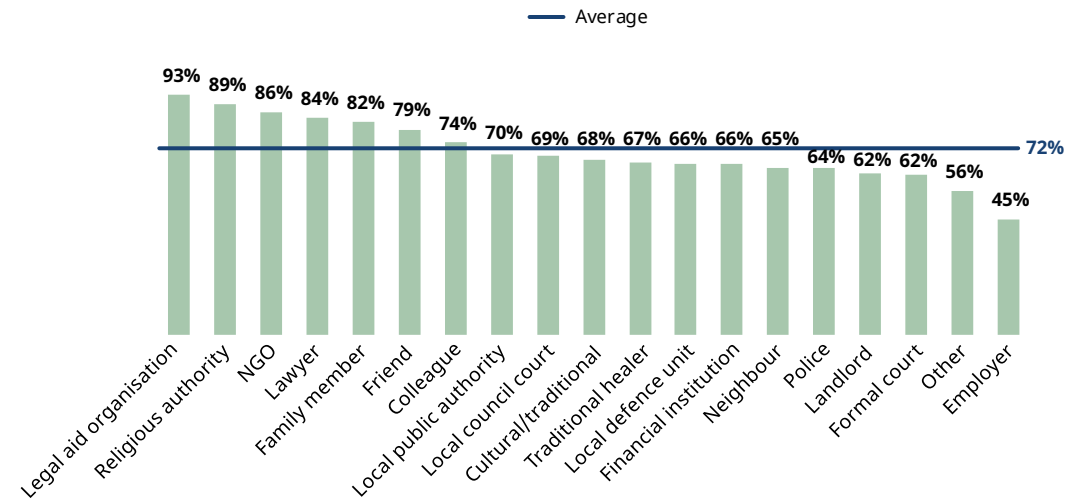
For every source of help people engaged we asked them how helpful that person or institution was, ranging from very unhelpful to very helpful. Around 72% of all sources of help were deemed either helpful or very helpful, illustrating the value of third parties in helping people resolve their legal problems. However, there are large differences between sources of help.

Although only a very small number of people engage a legal aid organisation (84 people or just over 1% of all people who take action), they overwhelmingly find this helpful or very helpful. While it is not possible to draw conclusions based on such a low number of respondents, it is an initial indication

that these kinds of services can be very helpful to people trying to resolve their most serious legal problems.

Looking at some of the most common sources of help, lawyers are most often seen as helpful, which makes sense considering they are usually specifically hired by people to represent their side. Family members and friends are also often found helpful, however, it is likely that relatively low expectations play a role in this. LCCs and cultural and traditional leaders score just below the average, but considerably better than the police and formal courts. As noted above, the police are also said to do nothing more often than other sources of help.

SOURCE OF HELP WAS HELPFUL OR VERY HELPFUL
by source of help



n (sources of help) = 84 (legal aid org) / 166 (religious authority) / 73 (NGO) / 488 (lawyer) / 2272 (family member) / 1274 (friend) / 448 (colleague) / 308 (local public authority) / 1439 (local council court) / 698 (cultural/traditional leader) / 71 (traditional healer) / 124 (local defence unit) / 94 (financial institution) / 540 (neighbour) / 1345 (police) / 190 (landlord) / 542 (formal court) / 97 (other) / 286 (employer) - insurance company, private security company, and online platform did not have enough observations





7

Findings and implications

The JNS Uganda looked at the legal problems and justice journeys of Ugandans, by asking them directly about their experiences and perceptions. The result is a picture of justice that is truly people-centred, providing unique data about legal needs in daily life. The Ugandan voices captured in this study provide clear indications of where justice leaders' focus should be going forward. There are bright spots and unique opportunities to start closing the justice gap in Uganda, but business as usual falls short. A more people-centred approach is needed to bridge the gap between justice demand and supply.

The study explicitly builds upon similar studies conducted in Uganda in 2020 and 2016, adding to a robust evidence base to inform policies and implementation while keeping an eye on developments over time. This time we have also adopted a more in-depth regional approach, illustrating how justice needs sometimes differ greatly even within Uganda. Moreover, by disaggregating the data by gender, age categories, education level, and financial situation, we show which demographic groups struggle more to obtain justice for their most serious legal problems than others.

The data shows that more than nine out of ten (95%) Ugandans have experienced at least one legal problem in the past year, with many of them reporting more than one problem. At the same time, these problems are on average assessed as less serious than four years ago, suggesting people reported more legal problems they might not have reported four years ago. This could be the result of increased awareness around legal problems.

The resolution rate of problems has increased, after it already improved between 2016 and 2020. Around 55% of problems are completely or partially resolved, compared to 48% and 40% in the previous studies. Although this might partly be the result of recording more problems that are less serious in nature, it is a promising sign about the ability of Ugandans to resolve their legal problems. At the same time, it also means that 45% of all problems have not (yet) been resolved, with around 29% of the problems still ongoing and 16% abandoned. To address this justice gap, a number of steps should be taken that together can ensure more Ugandans manage to access justice and live in a fair and just society.

In this final chapter, we take stock of the main findings of the study and their implications for Ugandan policymakers, justice providers, and legal innovators looking to achieve access to justice for all. We do so by focussing on the five pillars of people-centred justice: working from data, applying best practices, supporting and scaling gamechangers, creating an enabling environment, and strengthening the movement.





Continue collecting people-centred justice data on a regular basis

The availability of people-centred justice data is crucial to understand the justice gap and know what to focus on to improve the availability of high-quality justice services. Uganda has long been on the forefront of this, with two JNS studies published in 2016 and 2020 as well as various research pieces exploring specific legal problems or particular justice providers.

The current study builds on this impressive body of work and provides up-to-date data about the legal needs and resolution experiences of Ugandans. It can be used by policymakers, justice providers, and legal innovators to increase access to justice by focusing on the most burdensome legal problems, strengthening the most effective justice services, and supporting legal innovations that can fill important gaps.

Because of ongoing social change, people-centred justice data should be regularly updated to reflect current realities as closely as possible. This way it can also be used to monitor progress and evaluate new policies and practices. Gathering people-centred

justice data at regular intervals will not only show how people's justice needs evolve over time, but also which services are actually working to help people resolve their most serious legal problems. This will help to allocate resources in an efficient and evidence-based way and improve transparency and accountability.

Ideally, Ugandan justice sector decision makers establish their own mechanism for the regular collection of people-centred justice data. International donors should support the Ugandan authorities to build and sustain this data collection capacity, while HiiL will offer its expertise to help build this capacity.

Besides regular quantitative data collection on people's justice needs and justice journeys, such surveys can also inform more in-depth follow-up research. For example, the current study has shown the key role of LCCs (together with other actors) in providing accessible justice in Uganda, but many questions remain. A logical next step would therefore be conducting a more in-depth study into the reasons why people decide to take their legal problems to the LCCs and how they evaluate the process and outcome. These kinds of questions are more suitable for a mixed method research approach, combining qualitative research with survey data.



Prioritise preventing and resolving the most serious legal problems

In order to make effective use of limited resources, it is important to focus prevention and resolution efforts on the legal problems that place the biggest burden on Ugandan society and people. This increases the likelihood that a growing number of people will be able to prevent or resolve their most serious legal problems. The current study provides important indicators that can help determine these most burdensome problem categories.

Looking at both prevalence and seriousness, four problem categories stand out: land problems, family problems, crime, and domestic violence. Moreover, these four categories have remained the most common and most serious problem categories throughout the last eight years. This illustrates these problem categories are not just prevalent today, but are highly persistent over time.

Allocating resources to increase the number of fair resolutions for these problem categories will therefore give a big boost to closing the justice gap. It will likely also have the additional benefits of preventing related types of problems, in particular money problems.



Adapt prevention and resolution mechanisms to the target population

Not everyone is equally likely to experience legal problems, but the demographic differences are very small. Perhaps more importantly, not everyone is equally likely to experience the same types of legal problems. Gender, age, education level, and financial situation are important determinants of the types of legal problems people experience as well as the likelihood of managing fair resolutions. Besides such demographic differences, there is also significant variety between rural and urban areas and between the different regions in Uganda. Taking into account these kinds of differences when designing policies and services is crucial to ensure that they are actually serving the people who need them most.

For example, land problems are most common among older men and particularly widespread in the Northern region. On the other hand, women experience significantly more family problems and domestic violence, the latter especially when they are younger. This means that improving prevention efforts and increasing the number of fair resolutions reached by people facing these types of problems might require different approaches.

Keeping in mind such demographic differences when designing solutions is key to their success. Ideally, such solutions are designed taking a people-centred design approach, using the data in this report and directly consulting the people with these problems as experts.



Strengthen the link between customary and informal justice actors and the formal justice system

Almost all Ugandans take some form of action to try to resolve their most serious legal problem. Together they manage to resolve millions of legal problems every year. This means there are many successful justice journeys that lead to resolved problems and ensure people can move on with their lives. Understanding what these successful journeys look like, and which justice providers and interventions are most likely to resolve legal problems, is fundamental to further closing of the justice gap.

Currently, LCCs and cultural and traditional leaders are the main justice providers at the community level reaching a substantial number of people, mostly in rural areas and especially when it comes to land problems. They do important work in ensuring access to justice in communities located far away from modern justice institutions, in the process also limiting the backlog at the formal justice institutions. This provides both opportunities and challenges.

One challenge lies in ensuring that these actors provide processes and outcomes that are fair and equal, without favouring certain demographic groups. Men and older people are more likely to engage LCCs than women and younger people. Although there might be a variety of reasons for this, and follow-up research could provide more insight in this,

it is important to ensure that such a key player in the justice delivery system is equally accessible to all and that all users are satisfied with their interventions. Another challenge is enforcement of their decisions and possibilities of appeal.

Further improving the current system of cooperation between LCCs and the formal justice system, with the judiciary playing an active supervisory role, could help address both of these challenges. A combination of mediation and decision-making at the community level, combined with opportunities to take the more serious and complicated legal problems to the formal court system, is highly likely to ensure easily accessible and speedy justice delivery to the majority of Ugandans. This will require commitment of national resources to test out these interlinkages between the formal and informal justice systems.



Pay specific attention to improving access to justice for vulnerable groups

There are important demographic differences when it comes to access to justice in Uganda. This starts with the number and types of problems people experience and continues with the sources of help they engage and the likelihood that they manage to resolve their most serious legal problems.

Some of the most important demographic differences are along the lines of gender, age, education level, and financial means. In particular, women, younger people, and people with less education and financial means are less likely to feel they are capable of getting all the help they need to deal with their most serious legal problem. This translates into significantly lower resolution rates, illustrating how certain groups face bigger obstacles to justice than others.

Women are significantly less likely than men to engage a third party outside their social network; this includes LCCs, the police, cultural and traditional leaders, lawyers and formal courts. A similar gap exists between the youngest people in our study (18-24) and older age groups. A



Apply best practices to help justice providers work evidence-based

lack of education and financial means primarily prevent access to the formal justice system (police, lawyers, formal courts), but not to LCCs and cultural and traditional leaders.

It is important to pay particular attention to improving access to justice for these vulnerable groups and design policies and implement services that take these demographic differences into account. It is equally important to monitor justice data and outcomes with a specific focus on these different groups. Prioritising access to justice for women, young people, people with no education, and people with less financial means will help millions resolve their most serious legal problems and gain agency over their lives.

Ugandans engage a variety of justice service providers, from cultural and traditional leaders to lawyers. One of the most common sources of help, regardless of people's demographic characteristics or the region they live in, are the LCCs. Engaged by around one in four people to help them with their most serious problem, these courts deal with a large number of the legal problems experienced by Ugandans. Investing in improving the performance of these LCCs, but also other justice service providers, is therefore likely to be an effective way of increasing the number of fair resolutions reached by people across the country.

Guidelines are an important tool to improve the interventions offered by justice providers. Based on academic research and expert insights, they provide recommendations about actionable interventions that have proven to work. HiiL has developed several such guidelines with best practices on how to prevent and resolve the most common types of legal problems, providing practitioners and users with evidence-based information on what works.



Create an enabling environment for innovative justice services

More general guidelines can be adopted to specific countries by a group of local experts. A good example of this is the Family Justice Catalogue developed and published by HiiL in close consultation with national experts.¹ It combines identifiable best practices with evidence about 'what works' in the area of family justice. The first edition of the catalogue was released in two versions, one for family justice providers (such as LCCs, community leaders, police, social workers, judges and lawyers) and a version for users. Such guidelines should also be developed for other problem categories.

The vast majority of legal problems in Uganda are dealt with outside the formal institutions and without the actors commonly associated with the justice system. Instead, most Ugandans turn to someone in their personal network, especially family members. After that, it is most common for people to engage the police (more often in urban areas) or LCCs (especially in rural areas). In the Northern region, cultural and traditional leaders are the most common source of help. This goes to show that informal justice providers meet a large part of the demand for justice in Uganda.

Although lawyers and formal courts clearly have their role in the Ugandan justice system, it is unlikely that there will ever be enough that are accessible and affordable to have a serious impact on closing the justice gap. Instead, a justice landscape consisting of a range of diverse delivery service models would be the best way to really improve access to justice for millions

¹ <https://www.hiil.org/research/uganda-family-justice-catalogue/>

of Ugandans. Formal legal institutions will need to co-exist and cooperate with both traditional and novel justice providers.

Hiil has identified seven types of justice innovations that have the potential to increase access to justice for as many people as possible.² By ensuring that the regulatory environment for legal services is conducive to these types of justice innovations, the Ugandan authorities can make an important step towards closing the justice gap. Such innovations do not need to compete with the formal justice system, but would rather complement them, with strong potential for collaboration between private actors and the public sector. Uganda already has a thriving justice start-up ecosystem, but more is needed to fulfil its potential.



Join the movement for people-centred justice

The access to justice challenge in Uganda is significant, but it also represents important opportunities. Merely making minor adjustments to the current supply of services and legal systems will not suffice in addressing the needs of millions of people with unmet justice needs. What is required is a transformation that prioritises the Ugandan people and their justice needs. What is required is a people-centred approach to justice.

As outlined above, this approach entails collecting data on legal needs, identifying successful interventions, introducing and scaling innovative solutions, creating an environment that fosters progress, and ensuring accountability. These components have been tested and implemented in various countries, including Uganda, where the Family Justice Catalogue and a range of young innovators

are promising steps towards better access to justice for all. However, comprehensive system-wide reforms are necessary to address justice problems effectively on a large scale. These reforms need not be expensive, and the social and economic benefits would outweigh the costs.

Around the world, a global movement towards people-centred justice has gained momentum as more and more countries are adopting policies and services that prioritise the needs of the people. A great example from the region is the recently launched ten-year strategic blueprint in Kenya themed Social Transformation through Access to Justice, with an explicit people-centred approach to closing the justice gap and a focus on evidence-based working and innovation.³ These developments present an opportunity for Uganda to join this movement and continue working towards transforming its justice system into one that is more inclusive and effective in serving the people.

2 These are 1) Community justice services, 2) User-friendly contracts and other legal documents, 3) Platforms offering mandatory one-stop dispute resolution, 4) Problem-solving courts for crime, 5) Claiming services helping people to access vital public services, 6) Prevention programmes or services, 7) Online information, advice, and representation.
See for more: <https://dashboard.hiil.org/the-gamechangers>

3 <https://www.judiciary.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SOCIAL-TRANSFORMATION-THROUGH-ACCESS-TO-JUSTICE.pdf>

About the JNS

Justice is not just about the number of reported crimes. Nor is it about courts and laws. It is about common people. Their daily lives, their pain and frustration – and the justice outcomes that they get or do not get.

That is why we listen to people in each country to measure their satisfaction. We collect the voices of thousands with our Justice Needs & Satisfaction Survey (JNS) tool. It is the state of play that reveals people's actual legal problems, experiences and access to justice.

Adjusted to the specific context of the country it provides in-depth understanding for people working in the justice sector.

We also make the data available to policy-makers through clever interfaces, so they can work with the findings. The responsible use of this data leads to knowledge, creates empowerment, and builds accountability.

The countries we have worked in since 2014 include Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Iraq, Mali, Morocco, the Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Ukraine, and the United States. In 2024, we plan to publish reports on Burkina Faso, Colombia, Honduras, Niger, Nigeria, Tunisia and Uganda.

For more information, data, and insights, visit:
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