

Fight against drug abuse: ECOWAS Mission holds key talks in Monrovia

The ECOWAS parliamentary awareness mission on drug abuse and mental health, currently in Monrovia, Liberia, held discussions with ministerial authorities, including Foreign Affairs, Health, Education, Gender, Children and Social Protection, Youth and Sports, and the Mayor of Monrovia, on Monday, August 4, 2025. This meeting was part of the mission's efforts to raise awareness about the escalating challenges posed by substance abuse and mental health disorders in West Africa. In her speech, a member of the ECOWAS Parliamentary mission, Hon. Veronica Kadie Sesay, emphasized the gravity of the situation, stating "The dangers of drug abuse and its associated public health and socio-economic consequences are alarming. We must take urgent action to combat this menace." Her statement underscored the urgency of addressing the issue to mitigate its far-reaching impacts on the community. The deliberations stressed the dangers of drug abuse and its associated public health and socio-economic consequences. Stakeholders reaffirmed their commitment to an uncompromising fight against drug trafficking networks.

Orlando Pereira Dias, Chairman of the ECOWAS Committee on Health, stated, "We advocate for strengthened efforts in the three-pronged approach: prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation." This approach aims to tackle the issue from multiple angles to ensure a comprehensive response. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to create employment opportunities for youth to steer them away from the grip of drug addiction. Hon. Sesay added, "Particular emphasis must be placed on empowering our youth through job creation, giving them alternatives to the grip of drug addiction." By focusing on youth empowerment, the mission aims to address one of the root causes of drug abuse and provide young people with positive pathways to pursue. The mission's engagement with Liberian authorities demonstrates the ECOWAS Parliament's commitment to addressing substance abuse and mental health issues across West Africa. Through such initiatives, the parliament seeks to foster a regional response to a problem that transcends national borders.

ECOWAS Injects \$516, 000 to Aid Human Trafficking Survivors in West Africa

The ECOWAS Commission, through its Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs (DHSA), has reaffirmed its commitment to eradicating human trafficking in West Africa as it joined the global community in commemorating the 2025 World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. This year's theme, "Human Trafficking is Organized Crime – End the Exploitation," underscores the systemic and transnational nature of trafficking networks that continue to thrive in the region. Despite regional progress, West Africa remains highly vulnerable to trafficking due to worsening economic hardship, armed conflict, gender inequality, political instability, and rising unemployment. Victims—many of them women and children—suffer severe physical, psychological, and emotional trauma, often with lifelong consequences. In its latest intervention, ECOWAS disbursed \$516,000 in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support over 1,100 trafficking survivors across Member States. The funds, distributed between August 15, 2024, and February 15, 2025, provided access to vital services including shelter, medical aid, legal assistance, psychosocial counseling, vocational training, and reintegration support. Women and girls represented the majority of beneficiaries, making up nearly 69% of recipients, with minors accounting for 47%. Victims received empowerment kits, educational materials, and support for income-generating activities, reflecting ECOWAS's comprehensive and rights-based approach to rehabilitation and prevention.

As part of its sustained regional coordination, ECOWAS also convened several high-level engagements: The 15th Annual Meeting of the Regional Network of National Focal Institutions Against Trafficking in Persons Plus (RNNI-TIP+) in Accra, Ghana (July 2023), where members recommitted to legislative reform and extended the ECOWAS Plan of Action to 2028.

The 16th Annual Review Meeting in Monrovia, Liberia (October 2024), co-hosted with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), resulted in the adoption of Model Guidelines for National Task Forces, validation of a Regional Referral Mechanism (RRM), and the launch of a comprehensive TIP+ Strategy integrating responses to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and Violence Against Children (VAC). These initiatives reflect ECOWAS's strategic emphasis on prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership, while fostering knowledge exchange and harmonized responses among Member States. The ECOWAS Commission has called on governments across the region to intensify the implementation of national and international legal frameworks aimed at combating trafficking in persons. The Commission also urged civil society organizations to continue serving as critical advocates and support systems for survivors.