

TITLE: FROM REPRESSION TO PROTECTION: TRANSFORMING LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES THROUGH ON-SITE HARM REDUCTION TRAINING IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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Background:

Côte d'Ivoire recently adopted a progressive drug law grounded in human rights and explicitly recognizing harm reduction (HR) as a public health strategy. Article 6 exempts HR actors from criminal liability. However, limited awareness of this provision among Judicial Police Officers (JPOs) has resulted in continued violence during policing operations and persistent stigma toward people who use drugs (PWUD). Bridging the gap between legislative reform and frontline enforcement practices is essential to ensure safe access to health and HR services.

Description of model of care/intervention/program:

Espace Confiance developed and implemented an innovative on-site workplace training model targeting JPOs. Conducted in partnership with the National Police, the Ministry of Defense, the Interministerial Drug Control Committee, and PWUD representatives, sessions were delivered directly within police districts and gendarmerie brigades. The methodology included a pre-test assessment, interactive case-based discussions, and testimonies from PWUD to foster empathy and operational understanding. A post-test and reflective commitment exercise assessed immediate learning outcomes and intended practice change.

Effectiveness:

Fifteen security units (10 police districts and 5 gendarmerie brigades) were reached, and 261 JPOs were trained using limited resources. Following the training, 88% of participants committed to adopting non-stigmatizing approaches and facilitating referrals to HR services. During the implementation period, nine arrested PWUD were referred to the Addiction Care and Support Center operated by Espace Confiance, demonstrating rapid translation of knowledge into practice.

Conclusion and next steps:

On-site HR training that directly involves PWUD is a feasible and cost-efficient strategy to operationalize legal reform. This model reduced stigma, strengthened referral pathways, and aligned law enforcement practices with public health objectives. It provides a scalable framework for similar reform-oriented contexts.