Empowering Marginalized Drug-Affected Youth through Innovative Local Initiatives

Applied Research Project 2024-2025
May 16, 2025

Research Team, Master's Students in International and Development Studies at the Geneva Graduate Institute (IHEID)

Evangelos Athanasiadis (Mobilities, Migrations, and Boundaries),
Sana Horikawa (Human Rights and Humanitarianism),
Shuhei Sasayama (Sustainable Trade and Finance)

Executive Summary

In the post-COVID-19 era, drug consumption rates have been rising dramatically across the globe. While the international community and states are adopting policies and measures ranging from prevention to harm-reduction to address this issue, local actors are developing alternative bottom-up approaches to foster the social inclusion of marginalized drug-affected youth into society. As part of this collective effort, this research attempts to showcase and analyze good practices of exemplary innovative initiatives in empowering marginalized drug-affected youth in Monrovia, Geneva, and Berlin. This is a population that is especially vulnerable yet also possesses great potential to contribute to their communities and promote peace. Building on the accumulation of findings by the four preceding Applied Research and Capstone Projects carried out by Master's students at the Geneva Graduate Institute in collaboration with Angie Brooks International Centre for Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security, this year's project was launched to study how local initiatives empower marginalized drug affected youth. For this purpose, data was collected through semi-structured interviews/written correspondence with various relevant actors, fieldwork, literature review, and analysis of other secondary data, including news articles.

The research identifies three categories of innovative activities implemented by initiatives, namely: a) workshops and skills training; b) mental and social support; and c) sports, arts, and cultural activities. While the first two categories have a significant impact on the target population, sports, arts, and cultural activities are particularly effective in approaching the marginalized drug-affected youth for their wide range of positive functions. By spending joyful moments with peers outdoors, such activities provide youth with an opportunity to discover an alternative way of living, beyond "stuck" environments of drug-trafficking or use marked by prevailing hopelessness. They also serve as a relatively cost-efficient way for initiatives to reach out to a broader population of youth, build trust, and raise awareness about drugs. Furthermore, youth can develop agency by organizing events themselves, while fostering personal growth as they wish to improve their performance, whether in sports or the arts.

Findings from primary and secondary sources were analyzed in a cross-sectional manner to better grasp the organization and management of the selected initiatives. The themes that emerged include gender, funding, partnerships, involvement of youth, trust-building, role of initiatives in reducing violence, and empowerment.

- Regarding gender, only a few initiatives offered programs specifically for women, though most explicitly or implicitly considered gendered aspects of the challenges faced by marginalized youth.
- Initiatives face a varying degree of anxiety in regard to the recent public funding cuts. This is leading to a gradual shift towards private funds, alongside the pursuit of innovative means for funding or income generation.
- Initiatives' multi-layered partnerships can be categorized into three groups: horizontal cooperation with other initiatives, delicate relationships with public authorities, and engagement with communities to which the youth belong.

- Involvement of youth is crucial for most initiatives, as it develops the youth's agency, extends the initiatives' impact through role modeling, and facilitates the initiatives' trust-building process with the target population.
- Initiatives foster trust-building with the youth through the way in which they directly approach them, as well as the types of partnerships they form with the police and other influential community actors.
- Innovative initiatives play a key role in reducing violence in communities by creating spaces where marginalized youth can feel connected, valued, and belong to a community, particularly fostered by sports, arts, and culture.
- Initiatives empower the youth's assets, agency, contribution, and environment, in line with the Positive Youth Development framework.

To conclude, the report evaluates five key topics: i) the importance of a holistic approach and involvement of youth; ii) the complex perspectives on multi-layered partnerships; iii) new approaches developed to ensure financial sustainability; iv) the significance of community-building and initiatives' roles in it; and v) the impact of sports, arts and cultural activities. Furthermore, practical ideas for the way forward are suggested as a starting point for discussion, including the potential collaboration with the public sector and other community-led initiatives, and the organization of "fun" activities involving the youth. Finally, the report outlines several areas for further research.

Table of Contents

Glossary and List of Acronyms

<u>Glossary</u>

Crack:	"A smokable form of cocaine that is less expensive than powder cocaine" (GI-TOC, 2024).
Drug-affected:	For this project, emphasis is placed on excessive consumption of drugs, which is often associated with marginalization and affects public health and security (Chermack & Blow, 2002; Moore et al., 2007).
Kush:	A drug originating from Sierra Leone, rapidly spreading across West Africa, typically containing psychoactive ingredients that consist of either synthetic opioids or synthetic cannabinoids (GI-TOC, 2025).
Marginalized:	"People (who) are excluded from active participation in the economic, political, social, and cultural life of their communities and plus to the opportunity to fulfill their dreams and achieve their full productive potential" (World Bank, 2013).
Youth:	People between the ages of 15-35 in Monrovia (African Union, 2006), and people between the ages of 15-24 in Berlin and Geneva (UN, 2010).[1]

<u>Acronyms for organizations</u>

ABIC:	Angie Brooks International Centre for Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security
ARP:	Applied Research Project (formerly called the Capstone Project) at the Geneva Graduate Institute
Gangway e.V.:	collectively refers to Gangway Mitte City and Gangway Sports
GCDP:	Global Commission on Drug Policy
GI-TOC:	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
GYA:	Gardnersville Youth Alliance
LDEA:	Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency
NEPI:	Network For Empowerment Progressive Initiatives
NASCOL:	National Student Command of Liberia
UN:	United Nations
UNODC:	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

---

[1] This project adopts the relevant regional definitions of youth to reflect the reality of each target city. For the context of Liberia, the age range is wider, as this is when people complete their transition to stable work and become independent (Akwetey, 2006; Honwana 2012; Fortune et al., 2015).

A.   Introduction

Drug consumption rates have been rising dramatically post-COVID-19, affecting communities across the globe and exacerbating challenges to public health and security (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2024; Dossen et al., 2024). Alongside the increase in synthetic use, there has been a rise in hospitalizations and fatalities related to Kush*[2] in West Africa and crack* cocaine in Western Europe, particularly in marginalized* communities (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2024; UNODC, 2024). These trends are coinciding with shifts in the global drug trade routes, in which West Africa is becoming increasingly integrated (UNODC, 2023; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), 2024; GI-TOC, 2025). Moreover, the continued rise of new drug consumption methods, such as vaping, is raising concerns about the risks of lasting brain development damage in youth,* a group with the highest susceptibility to drug use (UNODC, 2024; Olawole-Isaac et al., 2018; Schramm-Sapyta et al., 2009).

Faced with these global challenges, there have been two predominant drug policy frameworks: the punitive approach on one side of the spectrum and a growing decriminalizing approach on the other. Over the years and accumulated research, the prohibitionist international drug policy framework has not only proven ineffective in addressing drug problems but sometimes even the direct cause of drug-related harm (Bewley-Taylor & Tinasti, 2020). A variety of governments, civil society actors, and United Nations (UN) agencies are advocating for reform (Global Commission on Drug Policy (GCDP), 2024; GI-TOC, 2025). In this context, a number of governments are shifting their approach to addressing drug issues following Switzerland's groundbreaking four-pillars policy that places human rights, harm reduction, and public health at the core of drug policy. Today, at least 93 countries have needle and syringe programs, 94 countries have opioid agonist therapy, and 18 countries have drug consumption rooms (Harm Reduction International, 2024). Furthermore, the importance of a community-based approach is emphasized in tandem with the harm reduction framework in providing aid to drug users (GCDP, 2024; UNODC, 2024).

In view of the aforementioned global trends, and by building on the four preceding Applied Research Projects (ARP) and Capstone Projects reports written in collaboration with Angie Brooks International Centre for Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security (ABIC), this project aims to provide the partner with concrete best practices by various local initiatives that are contributing in empowering marginalized drug-affected* youth as further detailed in the following sections.

I.   Research Objectives

In the context of a growing understanding that drug-related issues require local pragmatic solutions, preceding ARPs have identified the role of local initiatives, particularly in Monrovia, Geneva, and Berlin that are actively working on the

---

[2] Asterisks ("*") refer to the terms provided in the glossary when they appear in the text for the first time.

empowerment of marginalized populations that often include drug-affected youth, to facilitate their reintegration into society (Belvedere et al. 2024; Elder & Trang, 2022). While youth is the age group with the most potential to positively contribute to the broader society (Ghebrehiwet et al., 2020), their drug consumption rates are increasing, particularly after COVID-19 (Marchand et al., 2022).[3] As analysis of a wide range of community-based initiatives that address such issues remained limited in the previous ARP reports, this project aims to further explore innovative local initiatives that socially, politically, and economically empower marginalized drug-affected youth (Belvedere et al. 2024; Elder & Trang, 2022). With ARP 2023/24's view on football and sports as an "alternative promising avenue," this year's project particularly delves deeper into initiatives with strong efforts in organizing activities related to sports, arts, and culture, and creating a network of partnerships. Moreover, in light of the deteriorating global funding situation, the project also focuses on the initiatives' financial sustainability. Additionally, the participation of female drug-affected youth in initiatives and their implications will be analyzed, in consideration of their increased vulnerability given their heightened marginalization and stigmatization, as indicated by preceding ARPs (Belvedere et al., 2024; Stringer & Baker, 2018). Finally, this project aims to explore these local initiatives' role in empowering marginalized communities to reduce drug-related violence and cultivate positive peace. The key question explored is: *What evolving initiatives exist to socially, politically, and economically empower marginalized drug-affected youth in the three selected cities?* (more details in Appendix 1).

II.   Methodology

In order to address the research gaps and explore the key question, a mix of primary and secondary data collection was conducted in Monrovia, Geneva, and Berlin (see Table 1). Inductive research was employed, where generalizations and themes were developed from specific observations in the data collection and analysis process.

As for primary research, in-person and online semi-structured interviews, fieldwork, and participant observation were conducted by the research team. In order to maintain the quality of interviews and their interpretations, the attendance of two, if not all three, members of the research team was ensured. Oral consent for utilizing information shared for academic purposes was provided in all forms of research.

City-level officials working on drug-related issues and innovative non-profit local initiatives focusing on empowerment efforts in the three cities were contacted via email and social media outreach. Snowball sampling was simultaneously conducted. While it was intended to focus the scope of research on innovative initiatives on marginalized drug-affected youth, the specificity of such a target required the broadening of the scope of initiatives and relevant interlocutors selected to those who worked with one or two of the relevant target: the marginalized, the drug-affected, and the youth (see Table 2).

---

[3] Olurishe (2019) also states that "In most parts of the world youths constitute the majority of persons with drug related problems, and this is usually irrespective of ethnicity or geographical location."

Forty-one people and organizations were contacted, resulting in fourteen 30-75 minutes long semi-structured interviews (in-person/online via Zoom or WhatsApp call) with ten organizations (more details in Appendices 2 and 3).[4] Written correspondence via email was also conducted. Interlocutors included initiative founders, board members of initiatives, social workers, a volunteer, and a medical doctor formerly involved in harm reduction. Additionally, the research team conducted fieldwork in Geneva, including a physical visit and informal conversations with shopkeepers and employees in Les Grottes, near the harm reduction site Quai 9, as well as in Bateau Lavoir. The team also observed Quai 9 from the outside. Finally, a member of the team conducted participant observation through her monthly volunteering at Jardin de Montbrillant in Geneva.

As for secondary data, these were primarily conducted through the analysis of governmental and organizational resources on national and policy trends, as well as news articles, in addition to academic literature. Additional information on organizations was gathered through published activity reports. An interview with Pierre Maudet, Geneva Council of State from the Department of Health and Mobility, conducted by the ARP 2023/24 team in French, was also analyzed.[5]

Some methodological limitations are to be noted. Firstly, all interviews conducted by the current research team were in English, in which none of the interlocutors or interviewers were native speakers of. This language barrier may have limited participants' ability to fully express their thoughts, adding nuance to both questions and responses. Secondly, the sample may be skewed due to a relatively low response rate and the fact that some initiatives declined interviews or selected specific interlocutors based on their English proficiency. Thirdly, frequent connection issues in online interviews with Monrovia participants disrupted the flow of conversation, affecting the quality and depth of some responses. It is also important to be aware of the research team's positionality as Master's students of European and East Asian backgrounds, from a Western institution, who have limited exposure to the African context and culture.

The analysis is divided into two sections. The first will focus on the initiatives' activities themselves. The second will explore the common themes observed across three cities, highlighting the significance of such themes and their relevance in the initiatives' operations, as well as their relationship to empowerment.

---

[4] The research team contacted Karuna Drugstop and Bateau Genève through multiple channels, including personal outreach by the previous ARP team via existing contacts, as well as individually through emails and volunteering inquiries. However, no positive responses were attained, prompting the outreach to alternative initiatives across the three cities.

[5] Quotations referring to Pierre Maudet will be based on the research team's translation from French to English.

Table 1: Overview of Methodology[6]

City	Organization	Methodology	Title	Interviewees	Date
Berlin	Gangway Mitte City	Online semi-structured interview	Social Workers	Kolja Reichert; Felix Schlippenbach	01/04/25
	Gangway Sports	Online semi-structured interview	Social Workers	Marcel Ramin; Saffi Sahid	15/04/25
	Karuna Drugstop	Secondary data			
Geneva	Conseil d'Etat	Secondary data (semi-structured interview conducted by ARP 2023/24)	Conseiller d'Etat, chargé du département de la santé et des mobilités; former Mayor of Geneva (2011-2012)	Pierre Maudet	2024
	Bateau Genève	Online semi-structured interview	Former Volunteer	Kevin Belvedere	03/04/25
		Secondary data			
	Bateau Lavoir	Visit and informal conversation			
	Café Cornavin	Written correspondence	Director	Glenn Benoudiz	04/05/25
		Secondary data			
	Happy City Labs	Online semi-structured interview	Founder	Dan Acher	12/05/25
	Jardin de Montbrillant	Volunteering (monthly)			
	Quai 9	In-person semi-structured interview	Former Medical Doctor	Vinh-Kim Nguyen	05/05/25
		Participant observation			
	Stop Suicide	In-person semi-structured interview	Project Manager	Thibaut Gogniat	29/04/25
	+ team's physical visit to Les Grottes: visit and informal conversations				
Monrovia	Angie Brooks International Centre	Online semi-structured interview	ABIC Establishment Coordinator	Yvette Chesson-Gibson	22/11/24
		Online semi-structured interview	Senior Programme Officer	Hilary Gbegeah	14/03/25 (2025a)
		Online semi-structured interview	Former National Project Coordinator	Archie Collindious Gbessay	08/04/25 (2025b)
	Gardnersville Youth Alliance	2 online semi-structured interviews	Executive Director	Christian Williams	25/03/25; 06/05/25
	National Students Command of Liberia	2 online semi-structured interviews	President	Jesse Windor	02/04/25; 09/04/25
	Network for Empowerment & Progressive Initiative	Online semi-structured interview	Liberia Specialist/Resource Person Member of Board of Directors	William F. Saa	09/04/25 (2025a)

Table 2: Intersection of Marginalized Drug-Affected Youth
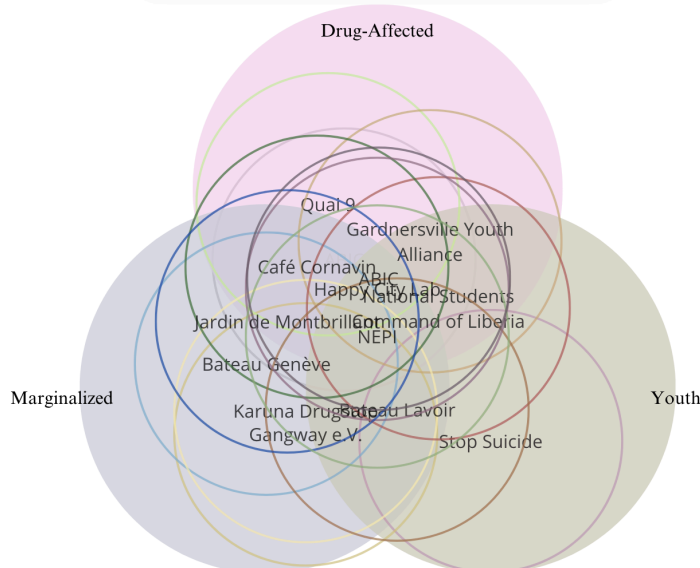
B.   General Trends: Drug Trends and Policy Reactions

Alarming drug situations are observed in Liberia, Switzerland, and Germany (Belvedere et al., 2024). This section intends to provide an update on each country alongside a summary of the drug and policy landscape, which will serve as the basis for the main findings and discussions of this report.

---

[6] All information gathered from the interviews will be cited with the name of the organization and date of interview, based on this table.

I.   Liberia

In Liberia, drug issues are rooted in the two civil wars the country experienced from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, when child soldiers were systematically forced to consume drugs excessively to blur their moral compass (Ani et al., 2025; ABIC, 2024). With the absence of comprehensive policies and rehabilitation policies in the country tailored to address drug addiction after the end of the Second Liberian Civil War (1999-2003), drug addiction has not only remained as an issue for ex-combatants but has also affected the wider population including the succeeding generation who grew up in households where drug use was a norm (NEPI, 2025a; ABIC, 2024; Kanata, 2016). In line with this increased number of drug-affected youth, the term *zogos,* which originally referred to child soldiers and ex-combatants, is now used to generally describe youth involved in drug consumption, who often live on the fringes of society, predominantly residing in ghettos (Banks, 2023; Kane, 2023). Many suffer economic hardships, limited access to education, high unemployment, and psychological aftermath of the civil war, confining them in the vicious cycle of drug consumption habits (Banks, 2023; Kane, 2023; Kanata, 2016). Indeed, it is estimated that there are 100,000 drug users in Monrovia only (Global Action for Sustainable Development, 2023), and 80% of people with substance use disorder in Liberia were unemployed youth aged 20-39 in 2017 (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), n.d.). Furthermore, despite these underlying historical and social factors, in which they are victims of systemic neglect, *zogos* are nationally perceived as a security threat. Their growing population, involvement in direct violence, and exploitation by the government and politicians for violent and disruptive activities—allowing the state to maintain plausible deniability for such actions— in addition to drug users' tendency to commit petty crimes, have further cemented this perception (Nebo, 2022; ABIC, 2024). The entrance of Kush to the Liberian drug market from Sierra Leone around 2019 (GI-TOC, 2025) has made the situation for these marginalized drug-affected youth even more dire (NASCOL, 2025; NEPI, 2025a; GI-TOC, 2025). Under the influence of this drug, users face effects like loss of consciousness, skin lesions, sores, and significant limb swelling, with overdoses often killing them (GI-TOC, 2025). As put by NASCOL, in Liberia, "young people are perishing" (NASCOL, 2025).

In view of these circumstances, President Boakai declared a public health emergency and commenced the "Kush Must Go" anti-drug campaign, a key initiative aimed at combating illicit drugs and substance abuse in the country (Women Voices Newspaper, 2024; Agence France, 2024), while strengthening the Liberian Drug Enforcement Agency's (LDEA) collaborations with drug authorities of other countries in the region such as Sierra Leone (Ogunade, 2024). However, in the draft recast budget submitted to the legislature in September 2024, there has been a huge budget cut from what was originally announced in the Kush Must Go Campaign (Women Voices Newspaper, 2024; Koinyeneh, 2024), and while LDEA has been successful in arresting several drug dealers, the situation seems to have only deteriorated with the increasing number of dealers involved in the trade (Buta, 2025; Johnson, 2024).

II.   Switzerland

Switzerland has positioned harm reduction at the center of its drug policy since 1991 in response to the heroin epidemic of the 1990s, setting a new international model

for addressing drug use (Confédération Suisse, 2017a). Prioritizing the reduction of drug-related harm and negative consequences for users and society, rather than its criminalization or abstinence, the Narcotics Act of 2008 enshrined the four-pillar drug policy of prevention, therapy, harm reduction, and repression in law (Confédération Suisse, 2017b). Complemented by the collaboration with direct-service organizations, Swiss drug policy has been formalized and recognized internationally for its integrated approach. This remains present in the current landscape, as Pierre Maudet, Geneva Council of State from the Department of Health and Mobility, explains the allocation of resources to address the drug situation, particularly of crack, requiring to bridge "security, health, and social aspects" in a "cross-cutting" and "multidisciplinary" way and work with "police officers, doctors and social workers" (Maudet, 2024). He claimed there is a broader political consensus from "the extreme right to the extreme left" among the Grand Conseil in Geneva to address the drug situation. This was evident when the three-year action plan against crack cocaine (2023), grounded in the four-pillar policy, was presented and faced only minimal debate given the shared and strong impetus (Maudet, 2024).

Despite its successes, however, Switzerland also faces persistent challenges. Among Western European nations, it reports some of the highest drug consumption rates in youth under 18 years of age, with 22.3% of 15-year-olds having used cannabis at least once in their lifetime (Delgrande et al., 2019). Moreover, adolescents who are in a critical period to initiate substance use, which peaks between the ages of 18 to 25, are less likely to receive support from harm reduction practices (Stowe et al., 2022). The lack of institutions and services tailored to their needs, in addition to their vulnerability to access resources for their dependence on adults, highlights the existing marginalization that is largely unaddressed in drug-related policies (Harm Reduction International, 2022; Stowe et al., 2022).

While such general shortcomings of the harm reduction policy should be noted, the Swiss model is still proving to be effective on the ground (Nguyen, 2025). Furthermore, despite the crack situation remaining a pressing issue, Geneva's Quai 9 observed a stabilization in the number of regular consumers of the drug in the end of 2024, particularly due to the Geneva three-year action plan, as well as involvement of Quai 9 and preventive and repressive activities of police (Swissinfo.ch, 2024).

III. Germany

Germany is considered to have a progressive model regarding drug policy, incorporating harm reduction as a pillar in its national strategy. Following the enactment of its generally preventative National Strategy on Drug and Addiction Policy in 2012, Germany has integrated Switzerland's pioneering four-pillar approach to drug use: prevention, counseling and treatment, harm reduction, and supply reduction and law enforcement (Pfeiffer-Gerschel et al., 2017; Commissioner of the Federal Government for Drug and Addiction Policy, 2024). Germany's legalization of cannabis possession and cultivation for recreational purposes under the Cannabis Act 2024, following the legalization of cannabis flowers for medical purposes in 2017, signals the country's evolving progressive stance in drug policy (Manthey et al., 2024).

However, these policies have not significantly improved the drug situation. The government has been facing public criticism for a response perceived as ineffective to the increasing emergence of crack (Witting, 2025; Hildebrandt & Magro, 2025), coupled with a further rise in cocaine consumption following the legalization of cannabis (Schöbel, 2025). Indeed, in April, the President of the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), Holger Münch, warned of a "cocaine surge" (Witting, 2025). Moreover, a worrisome observation expressed by Gangway Sports in Berlin (2025) is the increase in racial profiling of drug consumers in Germany. Finally, the recent entrance of fentanyl in German black markets signals a looming threat of a synthetic opioid epidemic in Europe (GI-TOC, 2024; Nguyen, 2025).

C.   Innovative Activities

As noted in the Methodology section, marginalized drug-affected youth are situated at the intersection of multiple social issues and target groups, which deepens their vulnerability. Nevertheless, organizations implement innovative activities aimed at empowering and supporting them holistically. While many activities and initiatives overlap in approach, they can generally be grouped into three categories: workshops and skills training; mental and social support; and sports, arts, and cultural engagement.

I.   Workshops and Skills Training

The purpose of activities organized by initiatives can be categorized into those for education/awareness raising and for employment.

1.   Education and Awareness Raising

Initiatives carry out specific workshops and skills training with the aim of educating and raising awareness as detailed below:
● National Student Command of Liberia (NASCOL):
  o National enhancement classes provide academic support for students preparing for the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination, held every Saturday from February to May;
  o Drug awareness campaigns consist of workshops and campus visits focused on the impact and prevention of drug use.
● Gardnersville Youth Alliance (GYA) visits Monrovian schools and ghettos to present actual substances and explain the effects of drugs, how to "Say No To Drugs", and how to stay away from substances, in collaboration with the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA).
● Stop Suicide provides 90-minute in-person workshops to students and aims to combine these with other activities such as theatrical plays in Switzerland's French-speaking parts.
● Monrovia's ABIC provides entrepreneurship-related workshops.

Education and awareness-raising are essential, especially given that peer pressure is one of the major drivers of drug use among youth (Ani et al., 2025; Lange et al., 2018; Olurishe, 2019; Ghebrehiwet et al., 2020). Moreover, NASCOL's approach linking formal education with drug consumption highlights their close relationship in the Liberian context. In other words, raising awareness about drugs through workshops

serves not only as a preventive measure but also as a means of keeping students engaged in formal education, particularly in Monrovia for some organizations.

NASCOL's activities, alongside GYA's, are particularly innovative as they directly involve the youth in designing and operating these activities in Monrovia. Students who have participated in awareness-raising activities join the team and grow a sense of responsibility and investment as they are directly engaging in informing other students about drug issues that affect their communities. This helps prevent drug use, while also reintegrating people who are already drug-affected by fostering a sense of belonging to a socially driven team (NASCOL, 2025; GYA, 2025).

However, it is to note that conducting workshops with the objectives of educating and awareness-raising is not a stand-alone approach. Rather, it forms part of a holistic one, which is complemented by other forms of empowerment, including medical, mental, and social support, and being engaged in sports, arts, and culture, as also confirmed by Stop Suicide's activities in Geneva (Stop Suicide, 2025).

2. Employment

Bateau Genève and Bateau Lavoir provide internships and professional training to contribute to the operations of their cafe/bar, a social enterprise run by Geneva's marginalized people. Their aim is to enable marginalized people's long-term employment, independence, and socio-professional reintegration (Bateau Lavoir, 2024; Belvedere et al., 2024).

II. Mental and Social Support

Mental and social support is provided from varying angles across initiatives. The Network For Empowerment Progressive Initiatives (NEPI) does so specifically through their activities in Liberia, while some incorporate it through the way in which they operate. Furthermore, mental and social support is indirectly provided through efforts in reintegrating youth into their communities and building trust with them.[7] Additionally, ABIC promotes youth engagement by encouraging their direct participation in communities to prevent electoral violence and support inclusive, democratic and peaceful elections through the Women Situation Rooms in the Liberian context (ABIC, 2024).

1. Support Through Program Activities

NEPI (2025a) explicitly provides mental and social support as part of their activities, as their target is specifically isolated ex-combatants of the Liberian Civil War. They employ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, which evaluates their thoughts and emotions about themselves and their experiences and reflects on the effects of war. Marginalized drug-affected youth are also provided with simple daily tasks such as visiting banks and supermarkets, in which they can receive structured guidance, with the objective to foster skills of self-control and discipline (NEPI, 2025b).

---

[7] *See also*, Section D.IV.

2. Support Embedded in Organizational Operations

Several initiatives, including ABIC, Gangway Mitte City, GYA, and NEPI, employ a street work approach. This involves identifying their target in public spaces and visiting them in their own environment, with the objective of "getting to know them, establishing trustful relationships, and understanding and answering their needs and talents" (Segulin et al., 2019). The target's needs are assessed, and information is added to an archive for future reference and support (Gangway Mitte City, 2025; NEPI, 2025a). As part of street work, these organizations also refer youth to further specialized support such as mental, social, and juridical institutions, in order to maximize the mental and social support accessed (Gangway Mitte City, 2025; NEPI, 2025a).[8] Café Cornavin also offers to accompany marginalized people when making such visits (Café Cornavin, 2024). Working in an ethics-driven approach that is centered in respect and tolerance for "the most excluded populations," indirectly fosters and implements social support (Giraldi & De Boevé, 2008; De Boevé & Toussaint, 2012).

III. Sports, Arts, and Culture

Following ARP 2023/24's call for further research on football and other sports in the empowerment of marginalized drug-affected youth (Belvedere et al., 2024), this project places special focus on sports, in addition to arts and culture, as tools for empowerment and social inclusion. Studies have found that sports play a significant role in social health —well-being that comes from connection and community— by increasing social interaction and enhancing self-esteem, stress relief, social connectedness, social support, and peer bonding (Eime, 2010; Eather et al., 2023). Particularly with marginalized communities facing lower access to healthcare and social resources, sports' role in social health and general social outcomes makes them a critical tool for their empowerment. Literature demonstrates its potential to foster social networks, enhance community cohesion by breaking down barriers, facilitate cross-cultural interaction, and support personal development and growth (Karstensen et al, 2024).

Alongside sports, engagement in artistic activities offers platforms for authentic storytelling and self-representation, enabling participants to reclaim agency and reshape public perceptions (Jeffers, 2012; Bhimji, 2015). Moreover, collective art practices foster a sense of belonging and solidarity, as seen in Muñoz-Bellerín and Cordero-Ramos's (2021) work, arguing that theater allows participants from marginalized groups to reclaim their voice and assert themselves at the heart of the public sphere, and reconstruct their identity as full-fledged members of society. Across literature, arts-based participation emerges not just as a tool for self-expression but as a form of agency and community-building.

In order to delve deeper into activities involving engagement with sports, arts, and culture to empower marginalized drug-affected youth in all three cities, the following innovative initiatives are studied:
- Gangway Sports:

---

[8] *See also*, Section D.III.

- o Daily street-level sports activities are organized in different marginalized neighborhoods across Berlin, inviting local youth to join and play;
- o The Hoop Life Project is a 13-year-long monthly street basketball event organized in different parts of the city, open to young people of all skill levels, accompanied by DJ sets and barbecues;
- o The Street League is a football competition in small neighborhood courts;
- o They make connections with sports clubs to lower the barriers of marginalized youth for continued engagement, by negotiating with them to give youth priority in waiting lists and reduce participation fees;
- o Excursions are organized to other cities in Germany and abroad;
- o Graffiti-writing, street painting, and textile-making are carried out.
- GYA:
    - o Large football competitions in Monrovia's ghettos are organized annually;
    - o Choirs and singing competitions for religious young people are organized in cooperation with churches;
    - o Sports events are organized, using the occasion to raise awareness of drugs and their effects.
- Stop Suicide:
    - o Theater plays by professional actors on sensitive topics of mental health difficulties are carried out, following workshops where participants get trained practically on these issues and how to deal with people who are struggling mentally across French-speaking Switzerland;
    - o They participate in and organize football activities and tournaments to reach a wider target (e.g., asylum seekers).
- Café Cornavin:
    - o Chill-out activities are where Geneva's marginalized people listen to music, view films, and go swimming;
    - o They facilitate engagement with culture through museum visits and attending concerts and theater performances.
- Happy City Lab:
    - o Artistic installations are placed in urban public spaces in collaboration with cities worldwide, though based in Geneva.

1. Fun as a Way Out of "Stuck" Situations

With youth living increasingly sedentary lives, those in marginalized neighborhoods often grow up in households affected by drug use or drug trafficking, finding themselves trapped in "stuck" environments with limited opportunities to break out of them (see, for example, Gangway Sports, 2025; ABIC, 2024). Football and other sports, in addition to art and culture in Monrovia, Geneva, and Berlin, allow youth to engage in easy and fun activities. This engagement enables fostering relationships with their peers, increasing movement, and exploring an outdoors life outside of their often drug-affected households, as they are provided time and physical distance from their marginalization, and from drug consumption in the case of marginalized drug-affected youth (Gangway Sports, 2025; GYA, 2025; Café Cornavin, 2025. See also, Kanata, 2016). Similarly, excursions and the discovery of other cities and countries facilitated by organizations provide an opportunity to explore the world outside of the socio-spatial bubbles in which they are constrained (Gangway Sports, 2025). Moreover, these

creative activities are a way to easily motivate the youth to participate and be physically present where the activities are organized. As a result, the initiatives can strategically be in direct contact with a larger number of youth and increase their awareness of the target population's situation by relying on their consistent participation and physical observations (Gangway Sports, 2025; Stop Suicide, 2025).

Geneva's Stop Suicide (2025) additionally enhances engagements in digital platforms by working with graphic designers to make their website and materials for workshops appealing. In doing so, they aim to engage with more youth in a consistent and fun manner, to address taboo topics in a relatable and interactive way.

2.   An Opportunity to Raise Awareness

Initiatives in all three cities were identified to use the occasion of sports tournaments and competitions, as well as arts and cultural activities, to raise awareness about drugs, their effects, and how to seek help for those coping with addiction, in a warm and positive setting. Whereas in Monrovia, the GYA (2025) has formal presentations before sports games, showing participants the drugs and demonstrating their mental and physical effects, in Berlin, Gangway Sports (2025) uses sports events as an occasion to informally approach youth that seemingly cope with drug issues, providing them advice and information on how to seek support. Despite the topics being focused on suicide prevention in Switzerland, Stop Suicide (2025) complements workshops with theater plays to raise awareness on mental health, seeking support, or helping loved ones struggling with difficulties; always with young actors, for participants to identify with them. This innovative and engaging way to discuss stigmatized topics can be replicated to inform audiences about drug issues. Currently, the organization is also developing a video game as an alternative approach for the same purpose. Furthermore, public art also has the potential to raise awareness about taboos and difficult topics to the general public by installing them in large spaces and making people unable to "escape" from seeing and thinking about them (Happy City Lab, 2025).

Singing at the church or the mosque has another kind of awareness-raising effect, i.e., religious self-awareness. GYA (2025) mentioned that when youth sing together at their religious institutions in Monrovia, they are mentally brought back to the times when their families took them to worship, when they lived a religiously moral life following the teachings of the Bible or the Qur'an. In turn, this pushes them to reflect on the "bad things" they have been doing, including the use of drugs, which is discouraged by religious leaders and prohibited by the state (GYA, 2025). This process was explained to motivate the youth to drop "bad habits" and return to what is considered a "moral life" by their religion and change their behaviors.

3.   Form of Agency and Self-expression

According to Gangway Sports (2025), sports and arts have a profound impact on fostering participants' connection to themselves, as they explore their bodies and increase their physical capabilities. The Berlin-based organization highlights how young people have limited opportunities to do so when remaining in closed spaces and resorting to their mobile devices for escape (Gangway Sports, 2025). Moreover, artistic

activities including rap sessions, street painting, and writing graffiti on walls enable the youth to express themselves, connect to their voice, and share their feelings, passions, and thoughts with the outside world (Gangway Sports, 2025). This self-expression through art develops their agency, empowering them. Finally, the opportunity for youth to organize sports events themselves, such as the football matches observed with Monrovia's GYA (2025), is another important channel for youth to practice their agency, developing their capacity to independently initiate activities with peers in their neighborhood. In a similar manner, youth could also be given the opportunity and skills to carry out theater plays themselves.[9]

4. Sense of Personal Growth

By engaging in sports and choir groups, the youth embark on a quest to improve their performance. For this to be achieved, many are motivated to make a conscious effort to improve physically and emotionally, leading them to consume less drugs over time (Gangway Sports, 2025; GYA, 2025). Eventually, these activities become hobbies, or an alternative way of life, being exposed to, becoming part of, and creating new social circles that tend to be less affected by drugs, encouraging a distance from drug-affected environments. As youth improve, some of them are then connected to other sports clubs or choirs, giving young people a dream for a new life to aspire to (Gangway Sports, 2025).

5. Public Art as a Way to Foster Social Inclusion and "Togetherness"

Dan Acher, founder of Geneva-based Happy City Lab, explained that he uses artistic public installations to create occasions for people to come together and develop a sense of belonging beyond the individual. According to him, art has a unique function in connecting attendants to one another as well as to the physical space, by bypassing the brain's cognitive, judgmental, and analytical filters to reach people's emotions (Happy City Lab, 2025). Furthermore, placing large-scale artistic installations in deprived areas attracts people from diverse backgrounds, bringing the audience in touch with areas and fellow inhabitants that they would not have likely met otherwise. Such events encourage social mixing and cultivate both a sense of unity and pride among local residents and the marginalized neighborhood, as well as a feeling of being seen and respected, as visitors and media gather in their spaces to appreciate art (Happy City Lab, 2025).

D. Cross-Sectional Analysis

I. Gender

Preceding ARPs indicate that female drug-affected youth are more marginalized and less likely to seek treatment due to heightened stigmatization compared to their male peers (Belvedere et al., 2024. See also Stringer & Baker, 2018). While most initiatives recognize the importance of considering gender differences and approaches, only a few have activities specifically targeting women. For example, NEPI in Monrovia solely focuses on ex-combatants, primarily men. Gangway Mitte City in

---

[9] Its success and feasibility can be noted referring to youth-led theater initiated to raise awareness on HIV-AIDS in Uganda (Frank, 1996).

Berlin and Stop Suicide in Geneva, on the other hand, equally target men and women,[10] while having certain specific gender considerations. Gangway Mitte City (2025) avoids situations where two male staff members approach a woman on the street at night; Stop Suicide (2025) encourages sharing feelings, especially emphasizing that this is not a sign of weakness for young boys. Along this line, a notable exception is ABIC, which gives specific attention to encourage the quantity and quality of active participation in the activities, and to provide training, role models and mentorship for leadership roles of young women in their communities, particularly through their Women's Situation Room initiatives.

Gender is a complex issue, particularly when initiatives engage in sports activities (GYA, 2025; Gangway Sports, 2025). While GYA (2025) notes some female participation in baseball events, football matches are attended only by male youth, with young women often joining as spectators. Similarly, Gangway Sports (2025) reports that latter hesitate to play basketball alongside the former, as they would not be perceived or treated as equals, leading them to organize female-only matches to ensure a safer space.

II.   Funding

With funding to civil society organizations plummeting globally, especially after the election of President Donald Trump in the U.S. (Erasmus & Glencorse, 2025) and Chancellor Friedlich Mertz in Germany (Braun & Griera, 2025), several non-profit initiatives working on the empowerment of marginalized drug-affected youth are facing unprecedented financial realities (Boampong & Hallberg Adu, 2025). The concerns about the present and future funding are especially prevalent in Berlin and Geneva, where organizations have demonstrated higher dependency on public funding, compared to those working in the Liberian context. According to the Berlin-based Gangway Sports (2025), the reduction in public money suggests a pivot towards private money, entering new and unexpected forms of cooperation with actors like multinational corporations, posing new considerations and concerns, and indicating "a complete different game" that they need to navigate through. This was exemplified by a funding proposal from Amazon.com, Inc., which, while needed for sustaining Gangway e.V.'s operations, raised internal concerns over the inclusion of corporate branding on the organization's platforms: a situation perceived as risky for "social washing" that would compromise Gangway's values and identity. Eventually, the organization negotiated an agreement with Amazon.com that allowed cooperation without displaying the company's logo (Gangway Sports, 2025). Additionally, Happy City Labs received a similar funding proposal by a private corporation for an art installation project, which it rejected on the grounds that adding the company's logo would contribute to social washing, contradicting the organization's values (Happy City Labs, 2025).

To respond to these new challenges, Gangway e.V. is refocusing its attention on developing competent fundraising teams in their attempt to adapt to "this scary but real changing situation," as put by their Sports team (2025). This search for funding beyond public sources was also identified in cases of organizations that are not receiving cuts,

---

[10] In the case of Stop Suicide, this is a conscious choice of not having a gender-specific activity because it will reproduce harmful gender stereotypes.

yet are diversifying their resources. This includes Stop Suicide's effort in scaling up their attendance in philanthropic events where they advocate their work to individual philanthropists (Stop Suicide, 2025).

Innovative strategies to increase private funds have been developed as well. NASCOL's one-dollar micro-donation fundraising campaign mobilizes support from often Monrovia's low-income communities with contributions of minimal amounts, as donors are invested in their communities' flourishing (NASCOL, 2025). Moreover, multiple initiatives in the city demonstrate relative resilience to changes in external funding, as they operate largely volunteer-based with minimal financial resources (GYA, 2025; NASCOL, 2025). Their activities often require little to no budget, relying instead on the drive and motivation of community members who participate not for compensation, but out of a shared commitment —motivated by "humanity"— to see their communities thrive, as expressed by Windor from NASCOL (2025).

Other initiatives in Geneva, such as Bateau Genève and Bateau Lavoir, operate as social enterprises, generating income through the management of restaurants or bars (Bateau Genève, 2025; Bateau Lavoir, 2024). Additionally, Stop Suicide (2025) generates additional income by charging the institutions involved in organizing events for their theatrical plays, to balance their costs for other activities. While these models present promising avenues for financial sustainability, most initiatives examined have not yet developed or explored such income-generating strategies.

III. Partnerships

Partnerships are essential for initiatives to effectively carry out their activities and bring about impact (Belvedere et al., 2024), as was confirmed by the interviews and initiatives' cooperation with diverse actors. Their partners can be divided into four categories[11] based on their function and relationship, namely: a) other organizations working in relevant fields; b) public authorities (particularly the police and drug authorities); c) community to which the youth belong to; and d) financial partnerships.

1. Other Organizations Working in Relevant Fields

Horizontal partnerships with other organizations are key to holistically supporting youth, by complementing the initiatives' activities. As aforementioned,[12] many adopt a street work approach, referring individuals to organizations better equipped to meet specific needs. Particularly in Monrovia, youth struggling with severe addiction are connected to medical or rehabilitation services when they are unable to participate effectively (GYA, 2025; NEPI, 2025a). Initiatives also collaborate to amplify their reach and maximize their impact: Stop Suicide works with an organization supporting queer people to connect with a wider audience and deliver workshops and theater (Stop Suicide, 2025), Monrovia's GYA and NASCOL maintain close communications to

---

[11] These categories are not meant to be exhaustive, since the interlocutors were not sharing every and all partners they have. Rather, the category is aimed to give the reader a better understanding of the key actors and their nature, and not a mapping of the network surrounding these initiatives.

[12] *See*, Section C.II.

share experiences (GYA, 2025; NASCOL, 2025), and Gangway teams partner internally and with other non-profit organizations supporting marginalized populations (Gangway Mitte City, 2025).

2.   Public Authorities

Initiatives' relations with the police or drug agencies vary between Liberia and the two European cases. In Monrovia, while police and the LDEA seem to be a source of insecurity and fear to drug users, as confirmed by one interlocutor (GYA, 2025), initiatives seem to be more cooperative with public authorities than in the other two cities. For example, ABIC has engaged with the police to ensure security when marching on the streets, and GYA organizes education sessions and sports events for drug-affected youth in collaboration with the LDEA. In contrast, European initiatives show caution in their engagement with the police. Specifically, Gangway e.V. has a clear "no cooperation with police" policy (Gangway Mitte City, 2025; Gangway Sports, 2025), while Geneva's Quai 9 creates a medically (Maudet, 2024) and emotionally safe place that the police will avoid intruding, given their trust and respect towards the organization (Nguyen, 2025).[13]

3.   Community to Which the Youth Belong To

In their efforts to reach their target population, initiatives in all three cities identified (institutionalized or non-institutionalized) communities that youth belong to as points of contact. However, the specific approach to them varies depending on the initiatives' purposes and the nature of these communities, shaped by their social, cultural, and geographical context. For example, initiatives often collaborate with schools to collectively speak to youth for educational purposes (GYA, 2025; NASCOL, 2025; Stop Suicide, 2025). Moreover, Gangway Mitte City (2025) identifies the homeless community (also referred to as the "camp") and ABIC (2025a) the gangs, as initial contact points to engage the youth. In addition, it is noteworthy that religious institutions such as churches and mosques were highlighted in both Monrovia and Geneva as key outreach spaces, considering the leaders' influence on the behavior of religious youth, especially in Monrovia (GYA, 2025; NASCOL, 2025; Stop Suicide, 2025). Finally, although the importance of engaging community leaders, including religious figures, was acknowledged across all three cities, initiatives in Monrovia seemingly place greater emphasis on their role than their counterparts in Europe.

In this approach to communities, two distinctions could arguably be drawn between larger, institutionalized organizations and smaller, community-based/youth-led initiatives. On the one hand, the latter initiatives, like GYA and NASCOL, seemingly perceived communities that youth belong to (such as gangs, religious institutions, and the "camp"), as stakeholders and potential collaborators. On the other hand, established institutionalized organizations in all three cities, such as ABIC, Gangway e.V., and Stop Suicide seemingly tend to view such communities more as target groups to approach (as

---

[13] Nguyen's observation is based on his experience as a former medical doctor in Quai 9 from over two years ago. This was supported by the team's observations when conducting a physical visit. *See also*, Section D.V.

opposed to partnering with communities); a distinction that may derive from differences in the origin, organizational nature, and size of respective initiatives.

Furthermore, communities can be created by the initiative and the youth themselves, utilizing the organization's physical space and/or through sports, arts, and cultural activities. This could be observed by the sense of community that has emerged among the drug-affected people in Quai 9 in Geneva (Nguyen, 2025).

IV.   Involvement of Youth

In the academic domain, the concept of youth participation is considered to be controversial in relation to empowerment theories (Kamruzzaman & White, 2018,) with some emphasizing its necessity (Iwasaki, 2016; Diraditsile 2020,) while others criticize the voidness of participation (Kamruzzaman & White, 2018; Ile & Boadu, 2018). Nonetheless, there is a general agreement that participation and involvement are key aspects also for the youth to effectively gain control over their lives and/or the community they live in, or in other words, exercise all three layers of empowerment for youth: individual, organizational and community (Israel et al., 1994). Furthermore, this research affirms that the involvement of youth in the organization of activities and management of initiatives not only empowers them but also transforms them as role models for their peers, enhancing the scope of the initiatives' efforts.

The above approach is manifested in all three cities in various ways. In Monrovia, GYA and NASCOL are initiatives created by the youth and rely on their voluntary participation, as they proactively organize activities, including sports events and awareness-raising campaigns, as key members of the initiatives. NEPI places importance on role models, by involving youth who have gone through the programs and experienced a positive change, to support young newcomers and "walk them through the steps" (NEPI, 2025b). In Berlin, Gangway Sports forms teams of paid volunteers that come from marginalized neighborhoods where they work, increasing the organization's ability to achieve higher participation and impact in its target population while providing a role model (Gangway Sports, 2025). In Geneva, Stop Suicide goes a step further in emphasizing the importance of "being young" to connect with the youth, by maintaining their staff young. Specifically, it actively recruits interns, collaborates with universities, and accepts apprenticeships, with the aim to allow emotional and mental proximity, as well as a better understanding of the broader societal contexts and issues of fellow young people (Stop Suicide, 2025).

V.   Trust-Building

Building trust with the youth that the initiatives work with is key to meaningfully engaging them in activities and having an impact on their lives. Speaking to young people with "respect" and "transparency," maintaining a consistent presence, and showing commitment to listening, are widely understood as foundational values for establishing a solid and trusting relationship, especially with marginalized people, who often do not feel heard by other members of society (NASCOL, 2025). Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section, adopting a peer-to-peer approach is also central to building trust, as peer workers are often seen as "one of us" by the target group and become easier to relate to at a personal level. For example, Stop Suicide's staff

composition of young people allows the target group to better associate with and relate to them, making it easier to open up to them (Gangway Sports, 2025; Stop Suicide, 2025).

The partnerships that organizations select also play a role in the trust-building process with target populations. One of the key actors in this regard is the police. Based on the descriptions provided by the organizations interviewed, distance from the police is used as a strategy to develop trust with youth, as the police are widely perceived as a threat to the marginalized population in Berlin and Geneva. More specifically, Gangway e.V. maintains a policy of "no cooperation with police" as they acknowledge that marginalized populations are often antagonized by authorities for occupying Berlin's public space, in order to make young people feel safe and supported (Gangway Mitte City, 2025; Gangway Sports, 2025). With their clear "no cooperation with police" policy, Gangway e.V. builds trust among those who might otherwise avoid engagement.

On the other hand, in Monrovia, while police and drug agencies are similarly perceived as a threat by drug-affected youth, all organizations maintain closer relations with these authorities. GYA, in particular, works actively with the LDEA. Recognizing the fear that many youth feel toward their role in enforcing the law, GYA overcomes this by introducing LDEA officers in a more "friendly" way, expressing that they are "here like a team, and the officers are your friends" (GYA, 2025).

Awareness of influential and trusted members at a community level and partnering with them is also another strategy by which initiatives not only build trust with the youth and their communities but also seem to legitimize their activities. For instance, GYA collaborates with churches for drug awareness campaigns. Religious leaders are widely respected and viewed as legitimate moral authorities who can "speak to their members' conscience," thereby strengthening trust in the initiative through their partnership (GYA, 2025). A similar approach was described by Stop Suicide (2025), partnering with churches in different cities to share relevant resources and expand their outreach to religious youth in Switzerland.

VI.   Role of Innovative Initiatives in Reducing Violence

The importance of transforming youth into agents of change, or peace ambassadors, is a key area that ABIC focuses its work on, particularly through Women Situation Rooms and ABIC's 'Peacepreneurs' initiatives (ABIC, 2024; ABIC, 2021). With drug-affected communities often being key sites where violence takes place, the empowerment of youth from these communities is pivotal to reducing violence and promoting peace. Creating space for joy, connection, and movement—through sports, arts, and everyday activities—can effectively foster belonging and offer youth meaningful alternatives to hopelessness and isolation, ultimately promoting peacebuilding within marginalized communities.

1.   Peacebuilding through Sports, Arts and Culture

Sports and arts play an essential role in building peace in various ways. In the work of Gangway Sports and GYA, sports activities in marginalized communities of Berlin and Monrovia attract children from families that are often drug-affected or even

involved in drug trafficking (Gangway Sports, 2025; GYA, 2025). As Gangway Sports (2025) shared, as they grow older, many of these children find an easy way to make large profits by helping with "family business", with relatives asking them to move drugs around their neighborhoods. In this context, sports play an important role in keeping youth outside of "stuck" drug-affected environments. By engaging in sports, young people develop new (i.e., less drug-affected) social circles and adopt healthier and more social ways of living that revolve around sports, which as a result would increase the potential of youth to gradually move away from these drug-trafficking networks as they grow older (Gangway Sports, 2025). By taking part in such activities, youth then become role models for other members of their community, showing peers that a way out of family-linked drug-trafficking is possible and within reach, having a positive spillover effect in marginalized neighborhoods.

2. Fun as a Pathway Out of Hopelessness

According to interlocutors at NEPI (2025a), many young people that face marginalization in Monrovia turn to drugs as a way to cope with hopelessness, and "the best way to cope with that sense of hopelessness is [...] (to) take drugs," leading youth to remain in a self-perpetuating cycle and inflict violence on their communities. In this context, creating space for fun activities with collective engagement can combat the hopelessness that youth have towards drug use. For example, participation in sports tournaments offers youth an immediate alternative to boredom and social isolation in the aforementioned "stuck environments" (GYA, 2025). Singing competitions, football tournaments with barbecues and music, or even simply playing games with peers outdoors, provide meaningful activities to the daily lives of the youth from marginalized environments. According to Monrovia's GYA (2025), being part of a team and experiencing the positive reinforcement of collective achievement, such as the pride of winning a football game, motivates participants to reconsider their habits, reduce drug intake, and seek healthier routines, for the benefit of the team, triggering self-reflection. This process often begins with small, personal commitments, such as cutting back on substance use or choosing to spend more time with peers involved in sports. Over time, consistent engagement in these activities helps youth distance themselves from violence and crime, replacing harmful behaviors with structured and socially meaningful alternatives.

Even in settings such as the Quai 9 consumption site, a sense of lightness and shared experience was observed, with people sharing coffee, playing board games, showing intimacy and friendly feelings. As Dr. Nguyen (2025) noted, whereas drug consumption sites in North America tend to be dominated by despair, often affected by violence, the fun atmosphere that is developed in Geneva's, makes it a site of peace, improving not only the social conditions but also the health outlooks of the people, suggesting that it is not drugs but the surrounding culture that "kill" people.

Taking part in such fun, low pressure activities, in turn, plays a key role in community-building and bringing people together. By participating in choirs and tournaments, social bonds are built within communities, across people from different segments. This cultivates a sense of unity and fosters a feeling of belonging that not

only is an antidote to isolation and hopelessness but also builds stronger and peaceful relations within the drug-affected population (GYA, 2025).

3.   Cultural Interventions in Marginalized Urban Spaces

Happy City Lab founder Dan Acher described how artistic interventions, such as light installations and "city rituals" that are accompanied by public dance events, can transform urban spaces and individual behavior by bringing "light" and positive energy to marginalized areas (Happy City Lab, 2025). These events foster unity and connection among socially isolated residents, promoting peacebuilding by creating shared public experiences. Similar efforts at Café Cornavin, where Geneva's marginalized youth gather to play games, share meals, enjoy music, or watch films, further support a sense of belonging and peace among marginalized people (Café Cornavin, 2025).

VII. Empowerment

The understanding of the concept of empowerment reflects each initiative's approach to its target group, the nature of its activities, and their underlying objectives. Given that the initiatives' responses reflect the basis of Positive Youth Development (PYD), which perceives youth as an asset rather than an issue, this framework will be applied to analyze the initiatives and their perception of empowerment. The PYD refers to an approach that "aims to build the competencies, skills, and abilities of youth that they need to grow and flourish throughout life" (Hinson et al., 2016). This framework identifies four key aspects for a successful PYD program: assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment (Hinson et al., 2016; Chowa et al., 2023). All four components emerged in the organizations' understanding of empowerment, highlighting the diversity in approaches to uplift, support, and develop youth.

While the understanding of empowerment can reflect initiatives' activities' purposes and approaches, it is to note that for many of them, conducting activities particularly related to sports, arts, and culture, their primary and initial aim is to offer time and a temporary mental and physical distance from drugs and the negative stigma surrounding them. The development of agency and cultivation of individual will to foster skills and gain independence may be considered as the ultimate objective and a long-term outcome that is rather an effect or result of taking part in these activities.

1.   Assets

Assets refer to the skills and resources youth should have to achieve the desired outcomes (Hinson et al., 2016; Chowa et al., 2023). This is reflected in how ABIC practices livelihood skills training and NASCOL aims to foster hard and soft skills to have Monrovian youth engaged in activities outside drug consumption (ABIC, 2025a; NASCOL, 2025). As depicted in the purpose of workshops, the attainment or strengthening of skills is emphasized as they facilitate employment, which eventually leads to independence and reintegration into their communities, an assumed common desired outcome of drug-affected youth, especially in Monrovia.

Stop Suicide (2025) believes that the youth already have this capacity within themselves, expressing that empowerment is "putting the emphasis on what the people

are already doing that is good and trying to reduce what is bad." Hence, the initiative provides youth with guidance on how to manage certain situations, rather than having the mindset to practically teach a completely new value or skill. This reflects the PYD framework, as this was founded to emphasize youth's strengths, seeing them as assets to be developed, in contrast to predominant approaches to managing "problem behaviors" through a preventative lens (Hinson et al., 2016; Chowa et al., 2023; Catalano et al., 2004).

2. Agency

Agency is defined as the youth's ability to employ the assets, make decisions, and act for their goals (Hinson et al., 2016; Chowa et al., 2023). Agency particularly correlates with Israel et al.'s (1994) theory on individual empowerment.[14] They identify three factors in the individual's ability to make decisions and have control over their personal life: i) personal efficacy and competence; ii) a sense of mastery and control; and iii) a process of participation to influence institutions and decisions.

Activities are also delivered in a way that manifests their conceptualization of empowerment by fostering a sense of agency. Practically, Gangway Mitte City (2025) supports youth and Berlin's marginalized communities to "reach a point where they can deal with their struggles by themselves," by providing relevant and/or necessary resources, as well as facilitating their accessibility to them. At a more personal level, connecting with oneself, such as their physical bodies, through movement and sports is emphasized by Gangway Sports (Gangway Sports, 2025). As a result, exploring and learning from one's own body enables youth to find and connect with hobbies and oneself. They gain a tool to express themselves, in which the arts can also become one. By expressing their voice and practicing to do so, they develop their agency.

Agency is also fostered at a conceptual and psychological level. Gangway Mitte City (2025) repeatedly underscored that their support is provided while ensuring that their decision-making with not only the public but also the organization is "always on their terms," raising awareness of and explaining the possession of their own rights. Concerned by the sense of "helplessness" and "hopelessness" the youth feel as NEPI (2025a) describes, leading to their drug consumption and consequent marginalization, empowerment also means promoting their mental and emotional health.

Fostering agency also includes demonstrating and making aware alternative ways of living and "transform(ing) their thinking [...] to help them see that life is possible" to a point where "they can stand on their own and really build upon where they're standing from without looking back again." (NEPI, 2025a). This was echoed by Gangway Sports (2025), highlighting the significance of such, especially in times of loneliness and exposure to the "completely, social media world, [...] hanging on their phones all the time." NASCOL (2025) understands empowerment and carrying out their "vision" through "self-innovation," by cultivating the tools and resources to do so. This contributes to the sense of competence and control as alluded to by Israel et al. (1994). Essentially, agency allows marginalized drug-affected youth to identify and act on what

---

[14] About the theory, *see,* Section D.IV.

they want to and can do with their gained confidence and independence, emphasized by ABIC, NEPI, and Gangway Sports.

Regardless of the activities provided, as Gangway e.V. and GYA explicitly mention, the youth's agency is to be respected. Gangway Mitte City (2025) aims to empower marginalized Berliners to the extent that they recognize their agency and have the capabilities to act upon it, and GYA acknowledges that the Monrovian youth themselves are the ones who make the final decision to stop or abstain from their drug consumption (Gangway Mitte City, 2025; GYA, 2025).

3.   Contribution

Contribution of youth concerns engagement to their own and the community's positive development (Hinson et al., 2016; Chowa et al., 2023). This form of empowerment is rather significant, as most results in this research link youth to their positive impact on themselves and on their communities. In the case of marginalized people, this first step oftentimes includes reintegrating into their communities. Geneva's Café Cornavin (2025) directly links their understanding of empowerment with the activities they carry out. They explain, empowerment is to enable "reintegration through the involvement of certain users, volunteers, individuals [...] from various state services, students, and interns in tasks related to the association's activities."

ABIC's understanding of empowerment through contribution is also portrayed. Entrepreneurship programs are intended to empower them long-term, as it allows drug-affected youth to "come up with their own ideas… [and] thoughts, while contributing to [the] society that in turn also give[s] them… income resources to maintain themselves, maintain their family" (ABIC, 2025a). Moreover, rganizing Women Situation Rooms to promote Liberian youth, especially females, to be politically involved, in addition to guiding marginalized drug-affected youth on how to gain trust in their communities,[15] depicts how they can contribute to society through political means (ABIC, 2024). As a result, they can influence their communities and reduce violence in the Monrovian context.[16]

4.   Enabling Environment

An *enabling environment* is explained as a social, normative, structural, and physical environment that encourages and recognizes the youth as well as promotes their social and emotional competence to thrive (Hinson et al., 2016; Chowa et al., 2023). As aforementioned,[17] community-building efforts also form a social environment where youth can gain assets, exercise their agency, and contribute to others.

Both ABIC and GYA view the creation of supportive structural and institutional environments for youth to be sustainably employed to then become independent and self-sustaining as a key form of empowerment. GYA (2025) stresses the significance of providing youth with the time and physical distance from drug-affected environments,

---

[15] *See also*, Section C.II.

[16] *See also*, Sections D.IV and D.VI.

[17] *See*, Section D.VI.

allowing them to gradually shift their lifestyles. In contrast, ABIC (2025a, 2025b) envisions a more transformative change by promoting entrepreneurship in Monrovia's marginalized neighborhoods as a way to instill structure, stability, and self-reliance. Stop Suicide (2025) has also emphasized the creation of safe spaces where taboo subjects can be openly discussed, stigma is removed, and transition to social acceptance happens, ultimately describing empowerment as "being free from stigmas, being free from preconceived ideas."

E.   Discussion and Conclusion

This research has intended to shed light on local innovative initiatives that aim to directly or indirectly empower marginalized drug-affected youth by exploring the question: *What evolving initiatives exist to socially, politically, and economically empower marginalized drug-affected youth in the three selected cities?* In this report, the global trends on drug and governmental response in the target cities were first set out, followed by showcasing innovative activities categorized into three: a) workshops and skills training; b) mental and social support; and c) sports, arts and culture, with a particular focus on the third category. Initiatives and their activities were then thematically analyzed, comparing the good practices of each: a) funding, b) gender, c) partnerships, d) involvement of youth, e) trust-building, f) reduction of violence, and g) empowerment.

I.   Key Takeaways

The research's key takeaways can be summarized into five points:

a.   It is crucial to have a holistic approach to marginalized drug-affected youth that includes skills training and medical and social support, involving youth in the management of the initiatives, as well as in the design and implementation of their activities.

b.   Multi-layered partnerships are forged in all three cities, including collaborations with other initiatives and communities the youth belong to, with the aim of building trust and holistically supporting youth. This at times requires managing delicate relationships, particularly with public authorities, which vary according to the local context and initiatives' positionality.

c.   Initiatives are exploring new ways to ensure financial sustainability, such as developing models for income generation or involving communities for both raising funds and reducing expenses. Moreover, they seek private funding, resulting in the confrontation of new challenges and considerations such as the risk of contributing to "social-washing."

d.   Community-building can foster and highlight the youth's potential to enhance peace and security in their communities. Local initiatives often serve as a hub and a safe space that brings people together and fosters a sense of belonging.

e.   Sports, art, and cultural activities offer youth hope by taking them out of "stuck" situations, such as drug-affected homes, fostering a sense of belonging. These create physical and social spaces for community-building and provide them with tools and activities to express their voice and develop their agency, through which they enjoy a sense of self-improvement and personal growth. Moreover, the

activities are a low-cost and effective way for initiatives to reach out to youth, facilitating their communication and serving as a tool for awareness raising.

II.   The Way Forward: Practical Ideas

The discussion above leads to the pivotal question of *how these findings on good practices can be put into practice, particularly in the case of Monrovia*. While acknowledging the limited direct contact with the local context of Monrovia, the following outline of potential activities and suggestions of an alternative way forward can be presented, with the hope that these will serve as a starting point for reflection and dialogue for the project's partner organization, ABIC.

In relation to partnerships, further collaborations with the public sector may reinforce the effectiveness of the initiatives. While the public sector has developed prevention and/or harm-reduction expertise, the persistence of the marginalization of the drug-affected youth calls for an alternative approach that empowers them through collaboration with private/non-profit initiatives that have on-the-ground knowledge and direct human-level contact with young populations (Johnson, 2024; Ogunade, 2024).

Another type of partnership to be explored includes cooperation between institutional initiatives like ABIC and strongly community-led initiatives such as Monrovia-based GYA and NASCOL. While institutional initiatives may have more resources and a wider range of experience, these ground-level initiatives, holding stronger and closer ties with the community, could offer deeper insights into the precise situation and needs. They are often better positioned to influence, mobilize, and engage youth effectively. In a similar vein, partnerships with local artists who can lead social art activities (e.g., street art, public installations) can be considered. These activities would consist of community members co-creating art in their neighborhoods and bringing change to their physical and social environment, including in the ghettos. Partnering with community-led initiatives and local artists is a means to involve the community, rooted in their own will and desire to transform the drug-affected environment. This can also be achieved through avenues besides partnerships, such as voluntary participation or realistic, smaller contributions by the community (as seen in NASCOL's one-dollar fundraising campaign).

Simple and fun activities such as sports tournaments and theater plays can also be organized by the youth themselves with the initiative's support to involve youth. Other activities that can be potentially further explored based on the research team's members' individual field experiences working in local initiatives include the following:
● Excursions to discover their country and nature;
● "Women's time" activities where participants sing, dance, and put makeup on one another;
● Photo shooting activities where youth can dress up and be taken a photo of their "best selves";
● Simulation activities where they can try out different professions.

Such activities would explore and experience alternative ways of living, develop the youth's agency, and spark a sense of hope by taking them out of "stuck" situations, while equipping them with skills and confidence in tandem with realizations of their

own capabilities. In turn, these activities could prepare them for more practical and intense workshops like Slum Peacepreneurship Hubs that provide skills training with the goal of enabling an independent life.

III. Looking Forward: Areas for Further Research

This research focuses on local innovative initiatives that socially, politically, and economically empower marginalized drug-affected youth in Monrovia, Geneva, and Berlin. This is not to sideline medical dimensions of drug use, including its varying forms, effects, and treatments, as well as the role of the public sector, particularly in stakeholder coordination, funding mechanisms, and political decision-making processes, in addition to the coexistence of prevention, repression, and harm reduction strategies. In contrast, this should form part of a holistic approach that addresses local drug-related challenges.

In light of the findings and the limitations of this project, further research can be conducted on the following:

- The mapping and analysis of the entire network of partnerships, focusing particularly on the collaboration between institutional and ground-level/grassroots initiatives;
- The role of art in public spaces and how it shapes behavior, especially in drug-affected environments;
- The collection of primary data on the short-term and long-term impacts of sports, arts, and culture activities from the participants' perspective;
- The potential and required steps to practically implement the suggestions provided and/or proposed by ABIC, reflecting Monrovia's local context and its changing landscape.

This report seeks to bridge the prevailing pessimism surrounding the worsening drug situation with the optimism and hope found in youth empowerment. As hopelessness remains a persistent driver of drug consumption, this research highlights how "fun" —through creative and community-based activities— can serve as a powerful antidote, fostering agency, resilience, and connection among marginalized drug-affected youth.

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Research Questions

1. [BACKGROUND QUESTION] What are the obstacles faced in the city-level implementation of drug policy objectives? The objective is to showcase locally implemented initiatives that empower drug-affected and marginalized youth (considering the gender aspect), with the foundation of the preceding 5 ARP reports' findings.
   a. What issues do target cities face concerning drug-affected youth, particularly in public health, local security, and positive peace?
   a. What are policies implemented to address these issues?
   a. What factors prevent implementation on the ground?
2. [KEY QUESTION] What evolving initiatives exist to socially, politically, and economically empower marginalized drug-affected youth in the three selected cities?
   a. What efforts are taking place by initiatives to reintegrate marginalized drug-affected youth in society (who is driving them, how have the initiatives evolved, what are their activities' key elements)?
   a. How are marginalized drug-affected youth socially empowered?
   a. How are marginalized drug-affected youth economically empowered?
   a. How do initiatives create channels for marginalized drug-affected youth to be politically integrated and empowered to make their voices heard?
   a. What is required to sustain these initiatives (including financial sustainability)?
   a. To what extent do women participate in these initiatives? How do initiatives reach out to women?
2. How can marginalized drug-affected youth actively contribute to reducing violence and promoting peace and security?
3. How are the approaches used and lessons learned applicable, adaptable and/or transferable?

Appendix 2: List of Interview Outreach and Responses

Response rates:
- Monrovia: 47% (7/15); interviews conducted with 6 out of 7 initiatives due to a delayed response.
- Geneva: 31% (5/16); interviews conducted with 4 out of 5 initiatives due to a delayed response.
- Berlin: 20% (2/10).

City	Organization	Name(s)	Title	Status
Monrovia	Angie Brooks International Centre	Yvette Chesson-Gibson	ABIC Establishment Coordinator	Interview conducted
		Hilary Gbegeah	Senior Programme Officer	Interview conducted
		Archie Collindious Gbessay	Former National Project Coordinator	Interview conducted
	Bomi County	Samuel Y. Koenig	County Education Officer	Contacted, no response
	City of Monrovia	John-Charuk S. Siafa	Mayor of Monrovia	Contacted by ABIC, delayed response
	Gardnersville Youth Alliance	Christian Williams	Executive Director	Interview conducted
	Global Action for Sustainable Development	James Koryor	Executive Director	Contacted, no response
	Insights Liberia	Michael T.	Journalist	Contacted, no response
	Liberia Council of Churches Youth Desk			Contacted to organization's email, no response
	Liberia Union of Civil Society Against Drug and Mental Disorders	Michael A. Johnson	Executive Director	Contacted, no response
	National Students Command of Liberia	Jesse Windor	President	Interview conducted
	Network for Empowerment & Progressive Initiative	Ossannie S.C. Pannah	Field Team Supervisor	Interview cancelled due to interviewee's emergency, no response to followup
		William F. Saa	Liberia Specialist/Resource Person Member of Board of Directors	Interview conducted
	Press Union	Danicius Kaihenneh Sengbeh	Former Secretary General	Contacted, delayed response

City	Organization	Name(s)	Title	Status
Geneva	Bateau Genève	Kevin Belvedere	Former Volunteer	Interview conducted
				Contacted to organization's email, volunteering attempted, timeline did not align
	Bateau Lavoir			Contacted to organization's email, no response
	Café Cornavin	Glenn Benoudiz	Director	Written correspondence
	Ciao.ch	Elsa Baader	Psychologist and project manager	Contacted, delayed response
	Conseil Administratif de Genève	Christina Kitsos	Mayor of Geneva; Conseillère administrative; Vice-présidente, chargé du département de la cohésion sociale et de la solidarité	Contacted, no response
	Conseil d'Etat	Pierre Maudet	Conseiller d'Etat, chargé du département de la santé et des mobilités; former Mayor of Geneva (2011-2012)	Interview conducted by ARP 2023/24; contacted by ARP 2024/25, no response
	Conseil Administratif de Genève	Marie Barbey-Chappuis	Conseillère administrative, chargé du département de la sécurité et des sports	Contacted, no response
	Conseil d'Etat	Thierry Apothéloz	Président du Conseil d'Etat, chargé du département de la cohésion sociale	Contacted, referred to Pierre Maudet
	Grand Conseil	Mauro Poggia	Conseiller aux Etats	Contacted, no response
	Happy City Labs	Dan Acher	Founder	Interview conducted
	Hospice Géneral			Contacted to organization's email, no response
	Nuit Blanche			Contacted to organization's email, no response
	Quai 9	Vinh-Kim Nguyen	Former Medical Doctor	Interview conducted
		Vanessa Lehmann	Coordinator	Contacted, no response
	Stop Suicide	Thibaut Gogniat	Project Manager	Interview conducted
	Tribune de Genève	Chloé Dethurens	Journalist	Contacted, no response

City	Organization	Name(s)	Title	Status
Berlin	Anonym e.V	Norbert Schäfer	Founder	Contacted by ARP 2023/24 and 2024/25, no response
	FixPunkt e.V	Astrid Leicht	Reinickendorf Team	Contacted, interview declined due to limited capacity
	FixPunkt gGmbH			Contacted to organization's email, no response
	Gangway e.V	Ahmet Sarisu	Team Kreuzberg Social Worker	Contacted, referred to Annabelle Brumm due to language of interview
		Annabelle Brumm	Communications	Contacted, no response
		Kolja Reichert; Felix Schlippenbach	Team Mitte City Social Workers	Interview conducted
		Marcel Ramin; Saffi Sahid	Team Sports Social Workers	Interview conducted
	Karuna Drugstop	Christian Geurden	Social Worker	Contacted by ARP 2023/24, no response
		Karsten Mühle	Management Advisor	Contacted by ARP 2023/24 and 2024/25, no response
				Contacted to organization's email, no response
	Transparency International EU	Nicholas Aiossa	Deputy Director/Head of Policy and Advocacy	Contacted, no response

Appendix 3: Details about Organization Activities

City	Organization	Activities
Berlin	Karuna Drugstop	- Provide individual drug advice, safe and structured daily activities, and opportunities for young people to develop their skills - "People Berlin": fashion label
	Gangway Mitte City	- Assess marginalized populations' needs and refer to relevant social services
	Gangway Sports	- Engage marginalized youth in sports activities
Geneva	Café Cornavin	- Distribute food and clothes to the drug affected and the people in difficult situations - Provide chill-out events
	Bateau Genève	- Provide socio-professional reintegration opportunities through apprenticeships and internships - Equip individuals with useful skills that aid in finding stable employment
	Bateau Lavoir	- Provide socio-professional reintegration opportunities through apprenticeships and internships - Equip individuals with useful skills that aid in finding stable employment
	Quai 9	- Supervise drug-consumption site, incorporating social activities - Ensure safe injection
	Happy City Labs	- Install artwork in public spaces of urban centers
	Stop Suicide	- Deliver workshops, modules, and theatre plays for awareness raising (focus on preventative measures)
	Jardin de Montbrillant	- Provide reception and free catering area for marginalized populations
Monrovia	Angie Brooks International Centre	- Slum Peacepreneurship Hubs: provide entrepreneurial skills training program and resources to launch ventures - Women Situation Rooms
	Gardnersville Youth Alliance	- Go to schools and teach how to "Say No To Drugs" - Do community outreach in ghettos - Promote and engage in choir and sports activities
	National Students Command of Liberia	- Engage in national enhancement classes - Lead drug awareness campaigns through workshops and campus visits - National career day: help students identify their career paths, gifts, and passions
	Network for Empowerment & Progressive Initiative	- Provide cognitive behavioral therapy and cash transfer to high-risk young men

Bibliography

<u>Academic</u>

Akwetey, E. (2006). Youth and Political Development: Deploying Youth Capacities, Confronting the Challenge. Institute for Democratic Governance, Ghana. https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/ADF/ADF5/issue paper.pdf

Belvedere, K., Klein, A. & Liu, S. (2024). Promising Ways to Help At-Risk And Marginalized Youth Out of Drug Addiction. https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/master-phd-programmes/promising-ways-help-risk-and-marginalized-youth-out-drug-addiction

Bewley-Taylor, D. & Tinasti, K. (2020). Research Handbook on International Drug Policy. *Edward Edgar Publishing Cheltenham*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687637.2021.1906847.

Bhimji, F. (2015) 'Collaborations and Performative Agency in Refugee Theater in Germany', *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 14:1, 83–103. doi: 10.1080/15562948.2015.1024813

Catalano, R. F., Berglund, M., Ryan, J. A. M., Lonczak, H. S. & Hawkins, J. D. (2004). Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programs. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 98.

Chermack, S. T. & Blow, F. C. (2002). Violence among individuals in substance abuse treatment: the role of alcohol and cocaine consumption. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 66:1, 29–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0376-8716(01)00180-6.

Chowa, G., Masa, R., Manzanares, M. & Bilotta, N. (2023). A scoping review of positive youth development programming for vulnerable and marginalized youth in low- and middle income countries. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 154, 107110. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107110

Diraditsile, K. (2020). The nexus between youth empowerment programmes and youth unemployment reduction in Africa Evidence from Botswana. *Development Southern Africa*, 39:6, 935-946. doi: 10.1080/0376835X.2021.1977111

Dossen, S. B., Mulbah, J. M., Hargreaves, A., Kumar, S., Mothersill, D., Loughnane, G., Byrd, E., Nyakoon, A. T., Quoi, J. S. & Ebuenyi, I. D. (2024). Assessing Stigma Toward Mental, Neurological, and Substance Use Disorders in Liberia: A Population Representative Study. *Am. J. Trop. Med. Hyg.*, 111(Suppl 3), 93–104. DOI:10.4269/ajtmh.24-0203

Eather, N., Wade, L., Pankowiak, A. & Eime, R. (2023). The impact of sports participation on mental health and social outcomes in adults: A systematic review and the 'Mental Health through Sport' conceptual model. *Systematic Reviews*, 12, Article 132. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-023-02264-8

Eime, R. M., Harvey, J. T., Brown, W. J. & Payne, W. R. (2010). Does Sports Club Participation Contribute to Health-Related Quality of Life? *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 42:5, 1022–1028. https://doi.org/10.1249/MSS.0b013e3181c3adaa

Elder, B. & Trang, J. (2023). Les Marginaux: An Analysis of Drug Policies and Community-driven Approaches for Rehabilitation of Drug-affected Youth in Liberia and Switzerland. https://repository.graduateinstitute.ch/record/320688

Frank, M. (1996). Theatre in the Service of Health Education: Case Studies from Uganda. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 12:46, 108–115. doi:10.1017/S0266464X00009933

Ghebrehiwet, S., Harris, B. L., Ojediran, B., Owusu, M., Augello, L. P., Durham, M. P., Henderson, D. C. & Borba, C. P. C. (2020). Using local terminology to measure substance use behaviours among youth in post-conflict Liberia: a mixed methods study. *Vulnerable Child Youth Studies*; 16:3, 279–291. doi:10.1080/17450128.2020.1838681

Honwana, A. M. (2012). The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa. Kumarian Press. ISBN: 978-1-56549-471-8

Ile, I. & Boadu, E. S. (2018). The paradox of youth empowerment: Exploring youth intervention programme in Ghana. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 4:1, 1528709. doi: 10.1080/23311886.2018.1528709

Israel, B. A., Checkoway, B., Schulz, A. & Zimmerman, M. A. (1994). Health education and community empowerment: conceptualizing and measuring perceptions of individual, organizational, and community control. *Health Education Quarterly* 21:2,149-70.

Iwasaki, Y. (2016). The role of youth engagement in positive youth development and social justice youth development for high‑risk, marginalised youth. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 21:3, 267–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2015.1067893

Jeffers, A., (2012) 'Refugees, Theatre and Crisis.' *Performance Interventions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9780230354821

Kamruzzaman, P. & White, S. C. (2018). Empowerment and Community Participation. DOI:10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea2062.

Kanata, T. & Ochiai, T. (2016). Drug Use in Post-Conflict Liberia: The Voices of Drug Users in Monrovia. *Shakai Kagaku Kenkyu Nenpo*, 2016, vol. 47.

Karstensen, V., Piskorz-Ryń, O., Karna, W., Lee, A., Neo, X. S. & Gottschlich, D. (2024). The Role of Sports in Promoting Social Inclusion and Health in Marginalized Communities. *International Journal of Sport Studies for Health*, 7(3), 41-48. http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.intjssh.7.3.6

Lange, B. C. L., Pullen, S. J., Petruzzi, L. J., Parnarouskisc, L., Dominguez, S., Harris, B., Quiterio, N., Fernandez, P. J., Lekpeh, G., Slopadoe, S. P., Henderson, D. C. & Borba, C. P.C. (2018). A qualitative investigation of the perceived role of peers influencing substance use among youth in Monrovia, Liberia. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* 2018. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2018.1425517.

Manthey, J., Rehm, J. & Verthein, U. (2024). Germany's cannabis act: a catalyst for European drug policy reform? *The Lancet Regional Health - Europe*, 42, 100929–100929. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2024.100929.

Marchand, K., Liu, G., Mallia, E., Ow, N., Glowacki, K., Hastings K. G., Mathias, S., Sutherland, J. M. & Barbic, S. (2022). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on alcohol or drug use symptoms and service need among youth: A cross-sectional sample from British Columbia, Canada. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 17:82. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-022-00508-9.

Moore, T., Stuart, G., Meehan, J., Rhatigan, D., Hellmuth, J. & Keen, S. (2007). Drug abuse and aggression between intimate partners: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28:2, 247–274. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2007.05.003.

Muñoz-Bellerín, M. & Cordero-Ramos, N. (2021) 'Citizen Art and Human Rights: Collective Theatre Creation as a Way of Combatting Exclusion.' *Social Inclusion*, 9, pp. 106–115. doi: 10.17645/si.v9i4.4372

Nebo, M. A. (2022). 23 A Critical Look at the Rehabilitation and Empowerment of the Growing Number of at-Risk Youth (Zogos) in Liberia. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 6:8. ISSN: 2454-6186

Olawole-Isaac, A., Ogundipe, O., Amoo, E. O. & Adeloye, D. (2018). Substance use among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *S Afr J Child Health* 2018, 12(2 Suppl 1), 79-84. doi: 10.7196/SAJCH.2018.v12i2.1524

Olurishe, T. O. (2019). Drug and substance abuse in Anglophone West Africa: A mini review. *West African Journal of Pharmacy*, 30:2, 1 - 12. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335590098_Drug_and_substance_abuse_in_Anglophone_West_Africa_A_mini_review

Schramm-Sapyta, N. L., Walker, Q. D., Caster, J. M., Levin, E. D. & Kuhn, C. M. (2009). Are adolescents more vulnerable to drug addiction than adults? Evidence from animal models. *Psychopharmacology*, 206:1, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00213-009-1585-5

Stowe, M. J., Feher, O., Vas, B., Kayastha, S. & Greer, A. (2022). The challenges, opportunities and strategies of engaging young people who use drugs in harm reduction: insights from young people with lived and living experience. *Harm Reduction Journal* 19:83. https://harmreductionjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12954-022-00663-z

Stringer, K. L. & Baker, E. H. (2018). Stigma as a barrier to substance abuse treatment among those with unmet need: An analysis of parenthood and marital status. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39:1, 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X15581659

Grey literature (e.g., organization reports)

African Union (2006). African Youth Charter. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf

Angie Brooks International Centre (ABIC) (2021). Project Completion Report: Entrepreneurial and Peacebuilding Interventions for Youth in Slums in Liberia against Organised Crime and Gang Violence. ABIC.

Ani, N. C., Ogunade, F. & Kamma, J. (2025). Youth gangs in Liberia: motives, structure and illicit economies. ENACT. https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/pages/1737711192308-research-paper-49.pdf

Café Cornavin (2024). Activity Report. http://www.cafecornavin.ch/test/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/RAA2024.pdf

Commissioner of the Federal Government for Drug and Addiction Policy (2024). National Strategy on Drug and Addiction Policy. Bundesdrogenbeauftragter.de.

https://www.bundesdrogenbeauftragter.de/en/themen/national-strategy-on-drug-and-addiction-policy/

Confédération Suisse (2017a). Drug policy in Switzerland. Admin.ch.
https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/strategie-und-politik/politische-auftraege-und
aktionsplaene/drogenpolitik.html

Confédération Suisse (2017b). The four-pillar policy. Admin.ch.
https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/strategie-und-politik/politische-auftraege-und
aktionsplaene/drogenpolitik/vier-saeulen-politik.html

De Boevé E. & Toussaint P. (2012). The role of group action in street work. Dynamo
International.

Delgrande, M.J., Schneider, E., Eichenberger, Y. & Kretschmann, A. (2019). La
consommation de substances psychoactives des 11 à 15 ans en Suisse – Situation
en 2018 et évolutions depuis 1986 Résultats de l'étude Health Behaviour in
School Aged Children (HBSC) (rapport de recherche No 100). Addiction Suisse.
https://www.addictionsuisse.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/DocUpload/HBSC-2018-rr
-100.pdf

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2024). European Drug
Report 2024: Trends and Developments.
https://www.euda.europa.eu/publications/european-drug-report/2024_en

Fortune, F., Ismail, O. & Stephen, M. (2015). Rethinking Youth, Livelihoods, and
Fragility in West Africa: One Size Doesn't Fit All. Fragility, Conflict, and
Violence Group, World Bank.
https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/0c3973ed-008c-
51e0-b391-237746701aa6/content

Global Action for Sustainable Development (2023). Substance Abuse Situation
Analysis, Drug abuse in Liberia.
https://wfad.se/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/drug-SITUATION-analyis-Global-Ac
tion-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf

Giraldi, M & de Boevé, E. (2008). Internacional Guide on the methodology of street
work around the world. Dynamo International.

Glencorse, B. & Erasmus, C.-L. (2025). Why businesses must step up to sustain global
civil society. World Economic Forum.
https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/02/why-businesses-sustain-global-civil-soc
iety/

Global Commission on Drug Policy (2024). Beyond Punishment: From Criminal Justice
Responses to Drug Policy Reform.
https://globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/GCDP_Report
2024_EN_forweb.pdf

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2024). European Drug Trends
Monitor.
https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Observatory-of-Organized
-Crime-in-Europe-European-Drug-Trends-Monitor-Issue-1--December-2024.v4.p
df

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2025). Kush in Sierra Leone.
https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Lucia-Bird-Ruiz-Benitez-
de-Lugo-and-Dr-Kars-de-Bruijne-Kush-in-Sierra-Leone-%E2%80%93-West-Afri

cas-growing-synthetic-drugs-challenge--and-Clingendael-Institute-February-2025.final_.pdf

Harm Reduction International (2022). Harm Reduction Services in Switzerland. The Global State of Harm Reduction. https://hri.global/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Harm-Reduction-in Switzerland_FINAL.pdf.

Harm Reduction International (2024). The global state of harm reduction 2024. https://hri.global/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/GSR24_full-document_12.12.24_B.pdf

Hinson, L., Kapungu, C., Jessee, C., Skinner, M., Bardini, M. & Evans-Whipp, T. (2016). Positive youth development measurement toolkit. A practical guide for implementers of youth programs. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PYD-Measurement-Toolkit-Final.pdf

Pfeiffer-Gerschel, T., Dammer, E., Schneider, F. & Friedrich, M. (2017). Drug Policy Germany 2018 Report of the National REITOX Focal Point to the EMCDDA. https://www.dbdd.de/fileadmin/user_upload_dbdd/05_Publikationen/PDFs/REITOX_BERICHT_2018/REITOX_BERICHT_2018_ENG/01_Policy_2018_eng.pdf

Segulin, A. M., Santos, H. L., Panušková, K., Rakovec, K., Vodeb, N. A., de Groot, N., Spruk, T., & Pavlin, V. (2019). Theoretical basis of streetwork. Zavod Bob. https://streetwork.cz/uploads/files/attachments/603e4f8dd77bf_Theoretical-basis-of-streetwork_IO1_Magic_Wand.pdf

United Nations (2010). The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf.

United Nations Development Programme. Assessment of the Social and Economic Costs and Impacts of Drug and Substance Abuse in Liberia. https://procurement-notices.undp.org/view_file.cfm?doc_id=303500

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023). Global Report on Cocaine 2023. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024). World drug report 2024, Key findings and conclusions. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR_2024/WDR24_Key_findings_and_conclusions.pdf

News Articles and Webpages

Agence France (2024). Liberia's President Declares Drug Abuse a 'Public Health Emergency'. Voice of America. https://www.voaafrica.com/a/liberia-s-president-declares-drug-abuse-a-public-health-emergency-/7462153.html

Association pour le Bateau Genève. (2015). Le Bateau Genève. https://www.bateaugeneve.ch/

Bateau Lavoir (2024). Un projet social. http://www.bateaulavoir.ch/index.php?page=un-projet-social

Banks, S. L. (2023). "Liberia 'Zogos' EPIDEMIC: The Struggle of Liberian Youth against Drug Addiction". Global News Network Liberia.

https://gnnliberia.com/liberia-zogos-epidemic-the-struggle-of-liberian-youth-against-drug-addiction/.

Boampong, M., & Hallberg Adu, K. (2025). What USAID cuts mean for youth development — and what the world must do next. World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/04/usaid-youth-development-cut-health-education/

Braun, E., & Griera, M. (2025). 'We're in danger,' NGOs say as German conservatives join far-right crackdown on civil society. POLITICO. https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-ngos-crackdown-civil-society-friedrich-merz-cdu/

Buta, G. (2025). The silent epidemic: The rise of KUSH in West Africa. The Ghanaian Times. https://ghanaiantimes.com.gh/the-silent-epidemic-the-rise-of-kush-in-west-africa/

Hildebrandt, P., Magro, G. (2025). Inside Zurich's "Consumption Rooms" — Built By The City For People To Smoke Crack. Worldcrunch. https://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/crack-zurich-drug-policy/

Johnson, O. (2024). Liberia: Nearly US$1M Worth of Kush Seized as RIA and Bo Waterside Border Remain Hotspots for Narcotics and Illicit Substances in Liberia. Front Page Africa. https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-nearly-us1m-worth-of-kush-seized-as-ria-and-bo-waterside-border-remain-hotspots-for-narcotics-and-illicit-substances-in-liberia/

Kane, C. (2023). Liberia's youth shattered by another war: Drugs. Le Monde.fr; Le Monde. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/11/24/liberia-s-youth-shattered-by-another-war-drugs_6286299_124.html.

Koinyeneh, G. C. (2024). Liberia: FPA's Review of Recast Budget Shows Gov't Proposes Major Cuts to War on Kush, Agriculture, and Roads as Ministry of State's Budget Increases. Front Page Africa. https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-fpas-review-of-recast-budget-shows-govt-proposes-major-cuts-to-war-on-kush-agriculture-and-roads-as-ministry-of-states-budget-increases/

Network For Empowerment Progressive Initiatives. (2025b). Network for Empowerment Progressive Initiatives Nepi. https://www.nepiliberia.org/

Ogunade, F. (2024). Drug trafficking / Kush takes hold of Mano River Basin youth. ENACT. https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/kush-takes-hold-of-mano-river-basin-youth

Schöbel, V. S. (2025). Handel mit Kokain in Berlin weitet sich stark aus. Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg. https://www.rbb24.de/panorama/beitrag/2025/04/berlin-drogen-mehr-kriminalitaet-mit-kokain-weniger-mit-cannabis-freigabe.html

Swissinfo.ch (2024). The crack action plan is already taking effect in Geneva. https://www.swissinfo.ch/fre/le-plan-d%27action-contre-le-crack-fait-d%c3%a9j%c3%a0-effet-%c3%a0-gen%c3%a8ve/88649921

Witting V. (2025). Why is cocaine flooding Germany? Deutsche Welle. https://www.dw.com/en/germany-cocaine-drug-cartels-organized-crime-war-on-drugs/a-72333907

Women Voices Newspaper (2024). Kush Must-Go Fiasco.
https://www.womenvoicesnewspaper.org/kush-must-go-fiasco/
World Bank (2013). Integration of Marginalized Communities - a Gain for All.
https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/video/2013/12/17/integration-of-marginalized-communities-a-gain-for-all