

ALGERIA and MedNET

**MedNET: the Pompidou Group's
co-operation network on drugs
and drug addiction
in the Mediterranean region**

Council of Europe, Strasbourg

**Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe
Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse
and illicit trafficking in Drugs**



Algeria



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Cover and layout: Documents and
Publications Production Department
(SPDP), Council of Europe

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Printed at the Council of Europe

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MedNET: the Pompidou Group's co-operation network on drugs and drug addiction in the Mediterranean region

The Pompidou Group launched its activities in the Mediterranean region in Malta in 1999 with a conference on “co-operation in the Mediterranean region on drug use”.

■ Following this conference, the scale of the drug problem was studied for the first time in the region by means of surveys carried out in Algeria, Morocco and Lebanon as part of the “Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs in Schools” (MedSPAD). This project, which is an adaptation of the ESPAD school surveys conducted in Europe, provides an insight into drug use and attitudes towards drugs in the Mediterranean region.

■ In 2006, at the initiative of France and the Netherlands, the Mediterranean network (MedNET) was set up with the participation of Algeria, Morocco, Malta and Tunisia and with the involvement of the Pompidou Group in co-ordinating and managing the network. The network was set up initially for one year. An evaluation carried out at the end of that period highlighted the flexibility of its operation and the network has been active ever since.

■ MedSPAD surveys were carried out at national level in Lebanon in 2008 and Morocco in 2009.

■ In 2013, the MedSPAD survey was repeated in Morocco and a first MedSPAD survey was carried out in Tunisia, thus demonstrating the importance of this instrument as a means of assessing drug use and attitudes towards it among young people attending school. In 2015, it was Egypt's turn to launch this survey, followed in 2016 by Algeria.

■ **MedNET's objective is to promote co-operation and a two-way transfer of knowledge between European and Mediterranean countries (North-South and South-North exchanges) as well as within the Mediterranean region (South-South).**

■ **The ultimate objective is to develop and implement coherent, balanced drug policies which respect human rights and address gender equality issues, based on evidence gathered by national observatories.**

■ Activities are aimed at improving public health and the implementation of drug policies in the region while respecting human rights and the needs expressed by countries.

■ MedNET action helps to reinforce the political and democratic process in the region by promoting the right to health of drug users and supporting the necessary legislative reforms. Lebanon and Morocco were the first countries to introduce opioid substitution treatment, in 2009 and 2011 respectively, thus offering drug users the possibility of rehabilitation. Algeria decided in 2016 to introduce it into its healthcare system.

■ As part of the promotion of a comprehensive and balanced drug policy, law enforcement activities are carried out in the region through country-specific activities in response to requests from countries concerned and through regional seminars: in Lebanon in 2010, on synthetic drugs, precursors and supply indicators, and in Strasbourg in 2012, on the fight against drug trafficking in airports.

■ The MedNET countries have participated regularly since 2014 in the meetings of the Pompidou Group's "Co-operation Group of Drug Control Services at European Airports and in General Aviation" (airports group) and since 2015 in the precursors network.

■ The network has expanded regularly and now has 12 member states. Lebanon, Italy and Portugal joined in 2007, Tunisia in 2009, Jordan, Egypt and Cyprus in 2010, Greece in 2011 and Turkey in 2016.

■ In 2015, the Palestinian National Authority participated in the network's activities.

■ Some MedNET non-member countries also contribute to its activities: Belgium, Croatia, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

■ The EMCDDA has participated in MedNET's activities on a regular basis since 2012. The European Commission has participated in MedNET's annual committee meetings since 2015.

■ At a high-level conference in 2009, the MedNET countries committed themselves to setting up national observatories/resource centres on drugs and drug addiction in collaboration with the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). The first national observatory on drugs and drug addiction was set up in 2011 in Morocco. In the same year Morocco also became the first Council of Europe non-member country to join the Pompidou Group. Egypt set up an observatory in 2011 and, at the initiative of Italy, round tables on this subject were held in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia in 2013 and 2015. These were followed by the production of "country profiles" describing the drug situation, the legal and law-enforcement system, prevention and treatment and care programmes, and international co-operation.

■ **MedNET's target groups** are professionals: medical personnel, social workers, representatives of NGOs, researchers, officials responsible for prevention, health, research and law enforcement, and policy-makers.

■ **MedNET's work programme** is adopted annually by all the members of the network on presentation of national proposals for activities, including activities at regional level.

■ **Funding of the network:**

- ▶ Voluntary contributions 2006-2016, notably from France and Italy
- ▶ South Programmes I and II (2012-2017), funded by the EU and implemented by the Council of Europe
- ▶ Since 2016, funding from Norway for Morocco and Tunisia

■ MedNET is co-ordinated and run by the Secretariat of the Pompidou Group at the Council of Europe.

Added value of the network

- ▶ Adapting recognised methods and tools to the southern Mediterranean cultural context, e.g. MedSPAD
- ▶ Supporting the launch of national surveys
- ▶ Supporting the implementation of and/or changes in legislation by means of legal opinions
- ▶ Training in the health field
- ▶ Supporting the setting up of treatment and care centres
- ▶ Exchanging qualitative and quantitative information in various fields with a view to developing a comprehensive approach to the drug problem
- ▶ Playing a bridging role between the northern and the southern shores of the Mediterranean
- ▶ Exchange of experience between countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and initial assessment of the situation in each country, in the context of MedSPAD
- ▶ Supporting the introduction of different treatment and care methods, including opioid substitution treatment
- ▶ Taking account of needs expressed by stakeholders in the countries concerned when drawing up and implementing the work programme of activities
- ▶ Factoring gender into care services: women's specific needs in access to care
- ▶ Developing awareness and skills in the drugs field through multi-agency meetings bringing together the prevention, treatment and care and law-enforcement sectors
- ▶ Flexibility in programme implementation to meet emerging need
- ▶ Evaluation of MedNET activities by the stakeholders
- ▶ Cost-effectiveness

Co-operation with Algeria

■ The conference on “Co-operation in the Mediterranean region on drug use: setting up networks in the Mediterranean region” held in Malta in 1999 marked the start of co-operation with Algeria.

■ The follow-up to this conference began with Algeria joining MedSPAD and carrying out a survey in Algiers in 2005.

MedNET activities in which Algeria has been involved

2006

- ▶ First co-operation activity as part of the MedNET network
- ▶ The conference on the role of research in devising drug policies: interpretation, communication and use of results was held in Algiers in partnership with the Algerian National Office against Drugs and Drug Addiction. Experience in school surveys on both sides of the Mediterranean was compared
- ▶ Algeria’s participation as an observer in the Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group

2007

- ▶ Expert assistance in preparing the population survey in Algeria: involving the OFDT (Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies), the CENEAP (Centre national d’études et d’analyses pour la population et le développement), the Algerian National Office against Drugs and Drug Addiction and various European experts
- ▶ Visit by an Algerian delegation to various French organisations involved in the fight against drug addiction
- ▶ Theoretical training seminar on opiate substitution treatment in Morocco, held in Rabat in March: with the participation of Algerian representatives
- ▶ National conference on the role of associations in the prevention of drug abuse, held by the ONLCDT with the participation of experts from the Pompidou Group
- ▶ Participation in the Pompidou Group Conference on reaching families and prevention, Porto

2008

- ▶ Four training seminars on taking care and treating drug users. A total of 154 persons were trained. The seminars, held in Algiers, Annaba and Oran, were part of the national action plan for the care and treatment of drug users, which led to the establishment of 15 detoxification centres and 53 intermediary care centres for drug users (CISA). Copies of the proceedings in French and Arabic could be obtained from the Algerian National Office against Drugs and Drug Addiction
- ▶ Field visit to Lisbon by an Algerian delegation
- ▶ Seminar on detection and enforcement in relation to synthetic drugs, Algiers

2009

- ▶ Training in setting up projects for managers of voluntary associations
- ▶ Four training sessions with French and Algerian trainers in four regions of Algeria (Algiers, Batna, Mascara and Ghardaia) trained 150 managers from the voluntary sector
- ▶ Participation in the feasibility study on the establishment of a Mediterranean Observatory on drugs and drug addiction
- ▶ Participation in the high-level conference of the Pompidou Group's Mediterranean Network

2010

- ▶ National population survey on attitudes towards drugs and drug use
- ▶ National seminar providing information on and raising awareness of drug precursors
- ▶ Three regional training seminars for doctors and paramedical staff on the treatment and care and monitoring of drug users in Algiers, Béchar and Ouargla
- ▶ Three seminars on the application of the law on the prevention and punishment of drug use and unlawful trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substances in Algiers and Ghardaia

2011

- ▶ Use of the national population survey findings to develop a new national strategy on the prevention and the fight against drugs and drug addiction

2012

- ▶ Algeria's participation in the T-DO colloquy in Geneva on the treatment of opioid dependency
- ▶ Algeria's participation in the airports seminar held in Strasbourg

2013

- ▶ Transition year during which there were no co-operation activities with MedNET

2014

- ▶ Development of an "Algeria" country profile
- ▶ Launch of the MedSPAD survey and workshop in Paris

2015

- ▶ Field visit to Paris on data collection and processing
- ▶ Field visit to Paris on setting up a forum for associations
- ▶ Participation in two meetings of the MedSPAD committee in Paris
- ▶ Regional seminar on opioid substitution treatment, Algiers
- ▶ Field visits on opioid substitution treatments in Morocco, Belgium and Lebanon
- ▶ Participation in the Airports Group, Strasbourg
- ▶ Participation in the "precursors" network, Prague
- ▶ Participation in the Pompidou Group project on the recommendations on legislation on substitution treatment

2016

- ▶ Seminar on introducing opioid substitution treatment in Algeria, 8 and 9 March 2016
- ▶ National MedSPAD survey, April 2016
- ▶ Participation in MedSPAD committee meetings in Paris in February and Lisbon in September
- ▶ National seminar on communication around the MedSPAD school survey, 11 and 12 October 2016 in Algiers
- ▶ Training for ONLCDT staff in data collection, data analysis and prevention, autumn 2016 in Lisbon

- ▶ Autumn workshop on “prevention tools” in Algiers
- ▶ Participation in the “5^e colloque international francophone sur le traitement de la dépendance aux opioïdes” in Rabat, November 30th, 1st and 2nd December 2016

Impact of MedNET by the Algerian National Office for the Fight against Drug Abuse and Drug Addiction

■ At both bilateral and multilateral level, Algeria engages in co-operation activities with several countries and with regional and international institutions and organisations in various fields: judicial, security and health. This type of co-operation has increased in recent years in view of its importance in the fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking in drugs.

■ In this context, the National Office for the Fight against Drug Abuse and Drug Addiction has worked closely with the MedNET co-operation network since the latter was set up in 2006, and thanks to this effective mechanism for co-operation and exchange, the two partners have together achieved significant results in the various fields, such as enhancing capacities, applied research, prevention, application of the law on drug abuse and addiction, the care and treatment of drug users, etc.

■ Algeria has consolidated its experience in the field of policies and strategies to combat drug abuse and addiction, thanks in particular to the exchange and sharing of experiences with members of MedNET on both the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean.

■ Algeria appreciates and views in a very positive light its co-operation with MedNET, regarded as providing particular added value in the drug abuse and drug addiction field; it has helped considerably in improving efforts to combat and prevent drug abuse and addiction in the Mediterranean region and in achieving the objectives set out in the policies of those countries.

■ Algeria's co-operation with MedNET over the ten years it has been in existence has made it possible to carry out a multitude of activities which have had a significant impact on the various aspects of preventing and combating drug abuse and drug addiction. These include, in particular:

Enhancing capacities

■ Several activities to enhance capacities have been carried out over the ten years. We refer in particular to the training activities (for the care of drug users and treatment of persons dependent on different drugs in the Intermediate Care Centres for drug addiction and the treatment centres (CISA) (154 doctors and medical staff), the drawing up by civil society associations of drug abuse and drug addiction prevention programmes), and study and fact-finding visits to several countries in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, focusing on a variety of topics, not forgetting the meetings, colloquies and seminars attended by thousands of Algerian officials.

■ All these activities, which have afforded the opportunity to establish relationships and direct contacts between Algerian policy makers and the players on the ground with their counterparts in the MedNET member countries and to pool knowledge, information and experience, have enabled both the Algerians and their MedNET partners to improve their knowledge of the various issues relating to drug abuse and addiction in the region. This will undoubtedly have a positive impact on their action on the ground to prevent and combat drug abuse and addiction and on the care and treatment of those who are dependent on drugs.

Opioid Substitution Treatment

■ Opioid substitution treatment (OST) is available in several MedNET member countries. Thanks to co-operation with MedNET, following the Euro-Mediterranean seminar held in Algiers as part of the MedNET 2015 programme of action, and study visits carried out by groups of doctors to several countries in the region organised immediately after the seminar, OST will be officially introduced in Algeria.

■ OST is an important aspect of the overall process of treating and combating opioid addiction, particularly with regard to the risk and damage reduction policy. Accordingly, we believe that the introduction of this type of treatment is a significant development and an added value in our health system.

■ These activities are an excellent opportunity for Algeria to draw on the experiences of others in the field of OST in the region and to put in place the optimum conditions to ensure that this process goes ahead smoothly in Algeria. The introduction of OST in Algeria is a practical result and evidence of the tangible impact of the co-operation activities undertaken in the context of MedNET.

Research and data collection: MedSPAD Project

■ Research is another area in which co-operation with MedNET has a real impact. This co-operation has led to fruitful exchanges and productive consultations between the Algerian experts and their counterparts in the MedNET member countries, making it possible to apply European standards when conducting surveys, by improving sampling techniques and the questionnaires used in both the 2010 population survey and the 2016 school survey. In addition, Algeria is a member of the MedSPAD committee, which means that the Algerian experts can learn about the MedSPAD surveys carried out in the region, in particular the aspects relating to methodology, sampling, questionnaires, the various implementation phases and strategies for preventing and combating drug abuse and addiction. As a result, Algeria is becoming part of the process established to learn about and monitor developments in the drug abuse and drug addiction situation in schools in the region and to be able to compare results thanks to the regular MedSPAD surveys.

■ Furthermore, several study visits have been organised for officials from the National Office for the Fight against Drug Abuse and Drug Addiction on the collection, use and dissemination of information on drug abuse and addiction, and the development of databases. The individuals making these visits were able to learn about the experiences of others and improve their knowledge and practices in this field.

Implementation of the law on drugs; court-ordered treatment (injonction thérapeutique)

■ Law No. 04-18 on the prevention and punishment of the abuse of and trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances of December 2004 is

a key stage in the change of status of individuals dependent on drugs, which has shifted from their being seen as criminals to be punished to regarding them as sick persons needing treatment and care. It places an emphasis on court-ordered treatment as an alternative care and prevention measure to a criminal-law response. It therefore represents a significant change in Algerian legislation towards regarding drug addiction as an illness, as is the case in many countries.

■ The seminars held in the context of the MedNET co-operation network have provided the opportunity for a large number of Algerian judges to learn about the law on drug abuse and addiction in the MedNET member countries and in particular about how court-ordered treatment is implemented in those countries.

Prevention in the field and framing prevention policies

■ Since MedNET was set up in 2006, several activities relating to the prevention of drug abuse and addiction have been undertaken in Algeria and other member states of the network (training courses, meetings and seminars, study visits, etc.). A large number of association staff and officials at various levels have taken part in these activities, enabling them to learn about and exchange information on the steps taken and the means of action adopted with regard to prevention in the countries of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. These activities have had an impact on their day-to-day work and behaviour in the field.

■ The results of these activities and of the population survey carried out in Algeria in 2010 and the evaluation of the first strategy 2005-2010 have made it possible to improve the prevention action taken in the second strategy 2011–2016, which attached special importance on prevention as part of a balanced approach to drug supply and demand in Algeria.

North-South, South-North and South-South co-operation

■ When it was established, the objective of MedNET was to “foster co-operation, exchanges and two-way knowledge transfers between countries in the southern Mediterranean basin and European countries which are members of the Pompidou Group and donors (North-South and South-North), as well as between the countries in the southern Mediterranean basin (South-South).” In ten years of activity, it has shown itself to be an exemplary framework for co-operation within the region.

■ Indeed, the activities conducted on both shores of the Mediterranean throughout this period have enabled hundreds of officials to travel in one direction or another. Managers and experts from both shores have worked together, meeting up and forging lasting relationships, very often leading to friendships. The exchange and sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise have been beneficial for all, on both the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. In addition, MedNET has enabled officials and experts from the countries in the southern region of the Mediterranean to consult with each other and exchange information, experiences and expertise within their respective countries. The contribution of experts from the South to other countries in the same region has been extremely beneficial.

■ Now, everyone has much better awareness of developments in the drug abuse and addiction situation and of good practices in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. The MedNET member states derive greater benefit from the experiences and results achieved in certain of these countries, as is the case with what has been achieved in the field of school and population surveys, substitution treatment and the teaching of an addiction module in university. These developments will undoubtedly have an influence on the discussions and measures taken with regard to combating and preventing drug abuse and addiction in the countries of the region.

■ In conclusion, exchanges and co-operation in the field of drug abuse and addiction in the countries of the Mediterranean basin represent an important outcome and an added value, thanks to MedNET – a valuable and effective mechanism of exchange, consultation and action, the results of which can be clearly seen in the discussions and practices in those institutions responsible for framing and implementing drug policies in the MedNET member states.

■ Algeria welcomes the results obtained and is convinced that Euro-Mediterranean co-operation through MedNET is an appropriate response to the immense need for pooling knowledge, experience and good practices that is essential if there is to be concerted action able to address the new challenges of an evolving drug abuse and addiction situation in our countries.

■ Accordingly, Algeria expresses its determination to continue to work with its partners within this regional co-operation mechanism and will provide its support to MedNET, which we wish to see continue, strengthened and extended to other countries in the Mediterranean basin, for the benefit of our respective countries and citizens.

The Pompidou Group

The Pompidou Group provides a multidisciplinary forum at the wider European level where it is possible for policy-makers, professionals and researchers to exchange experiences and information on drug use and drug trafficking. Formed at the suggestion of the French President Georges Pompidou in 1971, it has become a Council of Europe partial agreement in 1980. In 2016, it gathers 38 countries: 36 among the 47th Member States of the Council of Europe and Morocco and Israel.

MedNET

MedNET is the Mediterranean network for co-operation on drugs and addictions of the Pompidou Group. Created in 2006, it aims to foster co-operation, exchanges and mutual transfer of knowledge between the countries on both sides of the Mediterranean Basin. It supports the development of drug policies which respect health and human rights and address gender equality issues, based on evidence gathered by national observatories. In 2016, twelve countries are members of the network.



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