

EGYPT 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



Egypt



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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 needs
- ▶ Evaluation of MedNET activities by the stakeholders
- ▶ Cost-effectiveness

Co-operation with Egypt

2009

- ▶ The co-operation with Egypt started with a visit in October to the Secretary General for Mental Health within the framework of a feasibility study carried out in four countries: Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco and Egypt about the creation of a Mediterranean Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction. This study demonstrated the wish of the countries to set up national monitoring centres

2010

- ▶ The regional seminar in Cairo on drug addiction treatment approaches and the first treatment demand indicator was the first seminar to take place in Egypt within the framework of the MedNET. In collaboration with the Mental Health Secretariat Egypt and the UNODC Regional Office from Cairo
- ▶ Since then, several projects have been launched in Egypt
- ▶ “Filling the Gap” project: meeting the needs in terms of treatment and care and treatment and care centres was inspired by a similar project carried out in Lebanon
- ▶ It started with a study-visit of Egyptian prosecutors, judges and psychiatrists working in the addiction field conducted in UK to observe a judicial system and different treatment and care modalities. It continued with a nationwide needs assessment for addiction treatment and care and proposal of amendments and changes to the 1989 law regarding addiction

2011

- ▶ This project aimed at meeting the needs of drug users and recognised the importance of understanding addiction as a healthcare issue so that people addicted to drugs should be treated as such. The project continued with a second study visit, this time to Italy organized by the Italian Department for Anti-drugs policies (Presidency of the Council of Ministers)
- ▶ Visit of the French Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction and Egypt's participation in the EMCDDA Reitox meeting

2012

- ▶ Two Egyptian representatives took part in the Pompidou Group seminar on “drugs in prisons in South-East Europe” in Skopje
- ▶ The “filling the gap” project ended up with a conference to present the results of the assessment and propose amendments to the laws. The revised law still needed to be approved by the Congress after the election of the People’s Assembly
- ▶ A new project started with the aim of offering gender-oriented social and health services to better meet the specific needs of female drug-users

2013

- ▶ A study-visit / training was held in Malta. This project had a significant impact on the awareness and two new units dedicated to the treatment and care of women became operational
- ▶ Participation in the development of a drug policy and action plan. A round table was held in Cairo

2014

- ▶ Setting up of an observatory on drugs and drug addiction
- ▶ Study visit to Norway to the SIRUS National Institute for Alcohol and Drug Research and data collection started

2015

- ▶ Development of a training programme for addiction consultants and accreditation system
- ▶ Development of a project on addiction services for adolescents with a study visit in Ireland
- ▶ Development of the National Drug Monitoring System
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee
- ▶ MedSPAD pilot in Cairo
- ▶ Round table in Cairo on the “setting up of a national drug observatory in Egypt”
- ▶ Participation in the regional seminar on opioid substitution treatment, Algiers
- ▶ Participation in the Pompidou Group’s precursors network, Prague
- ▶ Participation in the 1st European Conference on Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies, Lisbon

- ▶ Contribution to the publication on “Gender dimension of non-medical use of prescription drugs in Europe and the Mediterranean region”
- ▶ Participation in the seminar “Drugs, Women and violence” in Rome

2016

- ▶ Development / extension of the National Drug Observatory
- ▶ Development of services for care of adolescents
- ▶ Development of specialised services for pregnant women who use drugs: study visit in Malta, September
- ▶ Development of addiction services for HIV positive patients
- ▶ Study visit for accreditation, training and certification of addiction counsellors
- ▶ MedSPAD national survey
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee
- ▶ Participation to the « 5^e colloque international francophone sur le traitement de la dépendance aux opioïdes » Rabat, November 30th, December 1st and 2nd 2016

Impact of MedNET in Egypt

Professor Hisham Ramy, Secretary General of Mental Health and Addiction Treatment, Ministry of Health and Population in Egypt

Flagship action by MedNET

■ If a single project were to be chosen to represent the flagship action by MedNET in Egypt, the national drug observatory would definitely be the one. Based on the facts that it is one of the oldest running actions by MedNET in Egypt which started its technical support in 2010, its continuous upgrade and development will soon reach a full automation data entry process. We would also like to mention the growing and continuous multi-sectorial collaboration invested in this action in Egypt, and the impact of its reports in the process of policy making.

Role of MedNET in raising awareness of drug policy

■ The national drug observatory (NDO) with its recent involvement of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of justice has led to an increased effect on its reports and data included in the process of drug policy making.

Role of MedNET in the potential changes of drug law

■ “Filling the gap” project was related to drug law in a direct way, it involved several meetings with policy makers and legal counsellors who took part in many discussions about where these policies should be heading.

Role of MedNET in research, collection, analysis and interpretation of information, in the setting up, support in the national drug observatory

■ MedNET provided financial and technical support for the Egyptian National Drug Observatory and its extension to have a fully automated data entry process thus facilitating and eliminating errors. MedNET continuously supported the NDO by providing field visits and copies of reports from other countries. Also annual round tables were really helpful in exchanging experiences and how to deal with obstacles.

■ Also Egypt has recently participated in the MedSPAD study, a study MedNET has supported both financially and technically.

Role of MedNET in treatment and care in Egypt

■ MedNET helped with the development of many specialised addiction services in Egypt, like specialised adolescent services and Gender based addiction services. There is also a project aimed at developing a specialised service for pregnant females which is taking place this year.

■ The development of these services included financial and technical support by providing field visits to acquire knowledge and to get familiar with similar services in other countries.

Role of MedNET in human rights and access to treatment and care in Egypt

■ MedNET helped in developing specialised addiction services targeting vulnerable groups such as women, pregnant women and adolescents. Such vulnerable groups have a harder access to specific services.

■ Also, the 'filling the gap' project had an active role by discussing addiction laws and suggested changes with policy makers and legal counsels.

Role of MedNET in law enforcement in Egypt

■ As mentioned before, the involvement of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice in the NDO is likely to help in such domain. Egypt also participated in the Airport and Precursors control meetings which were directly targeting such areas and helped with the recommendations and exchange of experiences.

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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