

TUNISIA 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**



Tunisia



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

TUNISIA AND MEDNET

Council of Europe

The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

All requests concerning the reproduction or translation of all or part of this document should be addressed to the Directorate of Communication (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int). All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law – Pompidou Group.

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

© Council of Europe, August 2016
Printed at the Council of Europe

Contents

MEDNET: THE POMPIDOU GROUP'S CO-OPERATION NETWORK ON DRUGS AND DRUG ADDICTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION	5
Added value of the network	8
Co-operation between the Pompidou Group and Tunisia	9
IMPACT OF MEDNET IN TUNISIA	13

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 between the Pompidou Group and Tunisia

■ Co-operation with Tunisia began at the Conference on “co-operation in the Mediterranean region on drug use: setting up networks in the Mediterranean region”, held in Malta in 1999.

■ In the wake of this conference, Tunisia participated in meetings of the MedSPAD project and the Pompidou Group participated in the first scientific meeting on drug addiction in Tunis in 2005.

2006

- ▶ Visit by a Pompidou Group delegation to Tunisia to study the feasibility of a Mediterranean network for co-operation on drugs and drug addiction (MedNET): meeting with the Ministry of Health and the National Bureau of Narcotics
- ▶ Participation by Tunisia in the Amsterdam conference establishing the Mediterranean network for co-operation on drugs and drug addiction (MedNET)
- ▶ Participation by Tunisia in the first meeting of the MedNET network in Paris
- ▶ Tunisia represented at the international seminar on the role of research in drug policy development, held in Algiers

2007

- ▶ Participation by Tunisia in the Pompidou Group conference on the role of the family in prevention, held in Porto
- ▶ Participation by Tunisia in the meeting of the MedNET network in Casablanca

2008

- ▶ Participation by Tunisia in the MedNET network and in the seminar on synthetic drugs held in Algiers

2009

- ▶ Hearing of the Pompidou Group Secretariat at the Ministry of Health in Tunis
- ▶ Letter from the State Secretary to the Minister for Public Health indicating Tunisia’s wish to join the MedNET network
- ▶ Participation by Tunisia in the MedNET high-level conference in Strasbourg

2010

- ▶ Participation by Tunisia in the seminar on the different approaches to treating addiction and on the treatment demand indicator, held in Cairo
- ▶ Invitation to Tunisia to attend the Pompidou Group ministerial conference

2011

- ▶ Workshop to raise awareness of and foster a public health approach to the prevention of drug-related risks and diseases, Tunis. Workshop funded by MedNET in collaboration with Menahra and organised by MANARA (supported by ATL MST/SIDA (Tunisian Association against STDs and AIDS, Tunis section))
- ▶ Visit by the Executive Secretary of the Pompidou Group to the Ministry of Health

2012

- ▶ First national consultative seminar on drugs policy, 17-18 May
- ▶ Introduction of a post-doctoral course in addictology at the faculty of medicine in Tunis
- ▶ Study visit to the French Observatory of Drugs and Drug Addiction and to the Inter-Ministerial Taskforce on Drugs and Drug Addiction
- ▶ Study visit to Lisbon focusing on the work of the Portuguese Observatory of Drugs and Drug Addiction

2013

- ▶ First MedSPAD survey in Tunis
- ▶ Continuation of the post-doctoral course in addictology
- ▶ Study visit to Cyprus focusing on the work of the observatory of drugs and drug addiction
- ▶ Round table on the development and implementation of a drugs policy, Tunis, 16-17 April
- ▶ Study visit to Morocco on opioid substitution treatment

2014

- ▶ Training in addictology
- ▶ Study visit to Morocco on low-threshold centres
- ▶ Addiction prevention day, 26 June
- ▶ Participation in the workshop on the fight against drug trafficking in airports, Strasbourg
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD Committee meeting
- ▶ Contribution to the publication “gender dimension of non-medical use of prescription drugs in Europe and the Mediterranean region”

2015

- ▶ University diploma course in addictology
- ▶ Study visit to Malta on opioid substitution treatment
- ▶ Participation in the regional seminar on opioid substitution treatment in Algiers
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD Committee meeting and contribution to the publication “A first glance at the situation in the Mediterranean region in relation to the prevalence of alcohol, tobacco and drug use among adolescents”
- ▶ Participation in the Pompidou Group’s work on recommendations on legislation regulating substitution treatment
- ▶ Participation in the first European conference on addiction and addictive behaviour, Lisbon
- ▶ Participation in the meeting of the Airports Group (Co-operation Group of Drug Control Services at European Airports and in General Aviation), Strasbourg
- ▶ Participation in the Pompidou Group’s Precursors Network

2016

- ▶ University diploma course in addictology, February-June 2016
- ▶ University diploma course in addictology, November 2016-June 2017
- ▶ Expert appraisal of the draft law on narcotics
- ▶ Day dedicated to the national strategy, 26 June
- ▶ Specialised workshops for diploma course students

- ▶ Addictology days, October 2016
- ▶ General population survey
- ▶ Member of the MedSPAD committee
- ▶ Participation in 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 Tunisia

Professor Nabil Ben Salah, Director General,
Centre for Poison Control and Emergency Medical
Assistance, Ministry of Public Health, Tunis.

■ The year 1999, when the Conference on “co-operation in the Mediterranean region on drug use: setting up networks in the Mediterranean region” was held, marked the start of co-operation with Tunisia. The same year saw the opening, by decision of President BEN ALI, of the “HOPE centre”, the first centre to offer health care and medical treatment to drug users and, in particular, drug users from prisons.

■ Subsequently, between 2005 and 2010, Tunisia participated regularly in events organised by MedNET without this attracting any media attention.

■ **The defining event was the “national consultative seminar on drugs policy in Tunisia”, held in Tunis on 17-18 May 2012**, in which MedNET was involved. This seminar benefited from the newfound freedom of speech after 14 January 2011 and also drew on the fact that the HOPE centre had unfortunately been closed down by the disaffected staff of the spa establishment

in which it was housed, to express their complete rejection of its founder's actions. This seminar, which was widely covered by the media and brought together all relevant stakeholders, paved the way for a national strategy by putting forward recommendations after first highlighting shortcomings in the four main areas that are essential to addressing addiction issues: epidemiology, medical treatment and care, medical and social prevention, and legislation. These were the subject of four discussion workshops whose participants, including international experts invited by the Pompidou Group, agreed recommendations laying down guidelines for future actions by Tunisian decision-makers.

■ Among these actions, the reform of Law 92-52 on narcotics has proved most decisive in terms of giving a new direction to drugs policy, and a joint committee bringing together the ministers involved drew up a draft text which the Government laid before the Assembly of Representatives of the People on 31 December 2015. This draft law took account of the recommendations from the other three discussion workshops and accordingly provides for:

- ▶ The setting up of a national observatory of drugs and drug addiction under the oversight of the prime minister's office
- ▶ Recognition of addiction as a chronic, relapse-prone disease and steps to facilitate the access to care (on a voluntary basis or via a national prevention commission or regional commissions), treatment and rehabilitation of drug users. The draft law provides for costs to be covered, depending on the circumstances, by the social security funds, dedicated agencies or the Ministry of Justice (Directorate-General of Prison and Rehabilitation Services)
- ▶ The setting up of public and private treatment and care centres covering the curative, preventive and social aspects
- ▶ Introduction of the use of agonist drugs

The passing of this legislation should be the key event of 2016.

■ Other actions taken following the May 2012 seminar include:

Laying the necessary foundations for prevention and treatment and care of drug addiction by:

- ▶ Introducing in November 2012, with support from MedNET, a post-university **course in addictology** aimed at psychologists, general practitioners and psychiatrists, which was subsequently converted into a diploma course run since November 2013 by the faculty of medicine in Tunis. By June 2015, 80 students had successfully completed the course

- ▶ **Adding two further diploma courses in addictology** in the 2015-2016 academic year at the faculties of medicine of Monastir and Sfax, with 25 students enrolled at each faculty. These courses were developed on the basis of the success of the Tunis course
- ▶ **Networking public treatment and care facilities and civil society bodies dedicated more specifically to tertiary prevention:**
 - In Tunis: Two university hospital departments linked with nine reception points: ONFP (National Office of Family and Population) youth centres of Douar Hicher, Menzel Bourguiba, Menzah 8, Mellassine, Ezzouhour, Chams, Bab El Assal, Nabeul, Dar Chaabane
 - In Sousse: a university hospital department linked with the Akouda centre and the ONFP youth centre in Sousse
 - In Mahdia, a university hospital department linked with a centre in Mokinine which can be activated at short notice
 - In Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine and Gafsa, harm reduction centres linked with civil society
 - In Sfax: a university hospital department linked with the civil society-run Tyna centre (not operational at present)

■ **Establishing north-south and south-south exchanges**, especially in the following areas:

- Training: diploma course in addictology, with the participation of experts from Morocco, France, Switzerland and Lebanon
- Organisation of care: exchanges of expertise with Portugal, Malta, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Cyprus
- Carrying out of MedSPAD national surveys: expert assistance from the EMCDDA and the OFDT in the context of the MedSPAD Committee
- Legislation: participation in various MedNET working groups with Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Morocco, Lebanon and Algeria
- Setting up of the national observatory: round tables showcasing the experience of the Portuguese, French, Cypriot, Maltese and Moroccan national observatories and the EMCDDA
- Combating drug trafficking in airports: participation in the Pompidou Group's working group and exchanges with experts, notably in Spain and France

- Detection of precursors: participation in the Pompidou Group's network

■ All these actions, which have received wide media coverage, have contributed greatly to a collective awareness of the seriousness of the drug problem in our society, which had previously been a taboo subject. This has been of great help, not only in giving an impetus to the reform of Law 92-52, but also in ensuring acceptance of the carrying out of drug use surveys (MedSPAD) among the pupils of Tunisian secondary schools.

■ In future actions, however, Tunisia needs to focus on:

- ▶ Identifying the different links in the treatment and care chain for drug users
- ▶ Specifying the functions of each link
- ▶ Drawing up treatment and care protocols for each link and defining the procedures for moving from one link to the next, up to the rehabilitation phase

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.



www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE