

EGYPT and MedNET

**MedNET: the Pompidou Group's
network for cooperation
on drugs and addictions
in the Mediterranean region**

Council of Europe, Strasbourg

Pompidou Group
Council of Europe
International Cooperation Group
on Drugs and Addictions



Egypt



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EGYPT AND MEDNET

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MedNET: the Pompidou Group's network for cooperation on drugs and addictions in the Mediterranean region

MedNET is the Mediterranean cooperation network on drugs and addictions of the Pompidou Group. It promotes cooperation, exchange and reciprocal transfer of knowledge between countries on both sides of the Mediterranean, while respecting human rights and integrating the gender dimension.

■ Created in 2006 around 5 countries: Algeria, France, Morocco, Tunisia and the Netherlands, following a feasibility study carried out by France and the Netherlands, the network has undergone constant geographical and thematic development, contributing to the promotion of effective and adapted responses to the issue of addictions.

■ Prior to the creation of the MedNET network, the Pompidou Group held a conference in Malta in 1999 on "Cooperation in the Mediterranean Region on Drug Use". Several years later, in 2003, in Rabat, the MedSPAD project, an adaptation of ESPAD in Europe, was launched with the aim of conducting the first school surveys in the region that will provide an overview of drug use among young people in schools and their attitudes towards drugs.

■ This MedSPAD project has evolved, setting up a committee to share experiences between European and Mediterranean countries, revising its methodology in 2021 and adopting a new questionnaire with questions common to the ESPAD 2019 questionnaire, broadening the questions to new psychoactive substances, gambling and the use of social media with the aim of achieving, in the long term, a level of comparability between the countries conducting the MedSPAD survey but also with the countries carrying out the ESPAD survey.

■ MedNET celebrated its 10th anniversary in Rabat in 2016.

■ At present the network has seventeen countries:

- ▶ Ten member countries of the Pomicidou Group: Cyprus, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Switzerland, Turkey.
- ▶ Seven non-Pomicidou Group countries Algeria, Egypt, Spain, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine*, Tunisia.

■ The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the European Commission and the WHO participate as observers in the meetings.

■ **The objective of MedNET is to promote cooperation and mutual exchange of knowledge between Mediterranean countries (North-South and South-North) as well as within Mediterranean countries (South-South).**

■ **The ultimate goal is to develop and implement coherent policies on addictive behaviours, based on scientifically validated knowledge.**

Priorities

- ▶ Prevention of addictive behaviour
- ▶ Promotion of the collection of reliable, objective, and comparable data and creation or consolidation of national observatories
- ▶ Development of balanced national strategies
- ▶ Socio-health care of addictive behaviours and risk and harm reduction
- ▶ Law enforcement and combating drug trafficking
- ▶ Training and research

* This designation should not be interpreted as recognition of a State of Palestine, without prejudice to the position of each Council of Europe member state on this issue.

How the network works

Participation

■ Membership of MedNET is voluntary and based on mutual interest. Any country around the Mediterranean and any country interested in this cooperation can join the network. The membership procedure consists in the sending of a letter of commitment by the Minister in charge of drug policy to the Executive Secretary of the Pompidou Group and the nomination of a national representative empowered to commit on behalf of his or her government.

Presidency

■ The Presidency and the Vice-Presidency are held for a period of one or two years in turn by a country from the northern shore and a country from the southern shore. In order to ensure the continuity of the work, the country in charge of the Vice Presidency assume the Presidency the following year. The election is by consensus.

Secretariat

■ The MedNET Secretariat ensures the implementation of the work program and the smooth running of the network, ensuring synergy with the work of the Pompidou Group and other Council of Europe entities.

■ It manages the MedNET budget, composed of voluntary contributions from member countries and other funding sources (Council of Europe, European Commission, etc.).

Meetings

■ The Steering Committee, composed of representatives of the participating countries, meets at least once a year to adopt the work program based on the projects submitted by each country, to review the implementation of ongoing projects and to discuss future activities.

■ The EMCDDA participates in the steering committee and shares its expertise, particularly in data collection and analysis, and in its support for national observatories.

Working methods

■ The MedNET network facilitates the recognition, dissemination and appropriation of good practices and proven experiences in partnership with other key national and international actors working in the region. In this way,

member countries, through their representatives, share and exchange their knowledge and know-how, making available to the network the evidence collected in all the identified areas.

■ They commit themselves to raise awareness of MedNET's actions among the relevant national authorities.

■ An annual activity report presents the national and regional projects implemented.

■ All the work of the MedNET network is subject to regular in-depth evaluation.

Financing

■ MedNET participating countries commit themselves to contribute to the network's budget, either financially or by making their resources available, in order to ensure the implementation of projects.

■ Each project is funded in part by the requesting country and by a financial or in-kind contribution.

- ▶ Voluntary contributions 2006-2021, notably from France and Italy,
- ▶ South Program (2012-2021) funded by the EU and implemented by the Council of Europe
- ▶ Council of Europe Neighbourhood Policy funding since 2016 for the Morocco and Tunisia Action Plans.
- ▶ Funding from the Pompidou Group's Ordinary Budget for MedNET Steering Committee meetings

Added value of the network

- ▶ Adaptation of the methodology and recognized tools to the cultural context of the Southern Mediterranean such as MedSPAD;
- ▶ Support for the launch of national MedSPAD school surveys;
- ▶ First assessment of the situation between the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean by MedSPAD;
- ▶ Support for the implementation and/or change of legislation;
- ▶ Training in the field of health;
- ▶ Support for the creation of care centres;
- ▶ Bridging role between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean;

- ▶ Support for the introduction of different treatment modalities, including opioid substitution therapy;
- ▶ Gender mainstreaming in health care services: women's specific needs in accessing care;
- ▶ Awareness raising and capacity building in the field of drugs through meetings of different agencies from different sectors of prevention, treatment and law enforcement;
- ▶ Flexibility in implementing programs to meet emerging needs;
- ▶ Evaluation of MedNET actions by stakeholders;
- ▶ Value for money and efficiency.

Cooperation with Egypt

2009

- ▶ Cooperation with Egypt began with a visit in October to the Secretary General for Mental Health in the framework of a feasibility study carried out in four countries: Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco and Egypt on the creation of a Mediterranean Observatory for Drugs and Drug Addiction. This study demonstrated the countries' desire to set up national observatories.

2010

- ▶ The Cairo regional seminar on approaches to addiction treatment and the first indicator of treatment demand was the first seminar to be held in Egypt within the framework of MedNET. In collaboration with the Secretariat of Mental Health in Egypt and the UNODC Regional Office in Cairo, the seminar was organised by the European Commission.
- ▶ Since then, several projects have been launched in Egypt.
- ▶ The "Filling the Gap" project: addressing the need for treatment and care and treatment and care centres was inspired by a similar project in Lebanon.
- ▶ The project began with a study visit to the United Kingdom by Egyptian prosecutors, judges and psychiatrists working in the field of drug abuse to observe a court system and different treatment and care modalities. It continued with a national assessment of the needs for drug treatment and care and the proposal of amendments and modifications to the 1989 law on drug addiction.

2011

- ▶ This project aimed to address the needs of drug users and recognized the importance of understanding addiction as a health-care issue so that drug-dependent people are treated as such. The project continued with a second study visit, this time to Italy, organized by the Italian Department of Drug Policy (Presidency of the Council of Ministers).
- ▶ Visit to the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and participation of Egypt in the EMCDDA Reitox meeting.

2012

- ▶ Two Egyptian representatives participated in the Pompidou Group seminar on “Drugs in prison in South-Eastern Europe” in Skopje.
- ▶ The “closing the gaps” project ended with a conference to present the results of the assessment and to propose amendments to the legislation. The revised law still had to be approved by Congress after the People’s Assembly election.
- ▶ A new project has been launched to provide gender-sensitive social and health services to better address the specific needs of women who use drugs.

2013

- ▶ Gender-sensitive services for women who use drugs, A study/training visit was organised in Malta. This project has had a significant impact on raising awareness and two new units dedicated to the treatment and care of women have become operational.
- ▶ Participation in the development of a drug policy and action plan. A round table was organized in Cairo.

2014

- ▶ Establishment of an observatory on drugs and drug addiction.
- ▶ Study visit to Norway at the SIRUS National Institute for Alcohol and Drug Research and start of data collection.

2015

- ▶ Development of a training programme for addiction consultants and an accreditation system.

- ▶ Development of a project on addiction services for adolescents with a study visit to Ireland.
- ▶ Development of the National Drug Observatory Training and capacity building in full automation and data collection processes.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ MedSPAD Pilot Survey in Cairo.
- ▶ Round table in Cairo on the “Establishment of a National Drugs Observatory in Egypt”.
- ▶ Participation in the regional seminar on opiate substitution therapy, Algiers.
- ▶ Participation in the Pompidou Group’s precursor network, Prague.
- ▶ Participation in the 1st European Conference on Addictive Behaviour and Dependence, Lisbon.
- ▶ Contribution to the publication “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 Drugs Observatory.
- ▶ Development of services for the care of adolescents.
- ▶ Development of specialized services for pregnant women who use drugs: study visit to Malta, September.
- ▶ Development of addiction services for HIV-positive patients.
- ▶ Study tour for the accreditation, training and certification of addiction counselors.
- ▶ National MedSPAD survey.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ Participation in the “5th International Francophone Symposium on the Treatment of Opioid Dependence” Rabat, November 30, December 1 and 2, 2016.

2017

- ▶ Development / extension of the National Drugs Observatory.
- ▶ Development of addiction services for adolescents.
- ▶ Development of specialized services for pregnant women who use drugs.

- ▶ Development of addiction services for HIV patients: development of services.
- ▶ Council on Accreditation and Certification of Addiction Counselors Final Report PHASE II.
- ▶ MedSPAD National Survey, the first school-based survey conducted in Egypt.
- ▶ Continuation of the “Gender Responsive Services for women who use drugs” programme.
- ▶ Continuing to provide specialized services for women with addiction-related disorders in Egypt, with the development of specialized addiction services for pregnant women who use drugs.
- ▶ Participation in the “Listen First” campaign, “Listen First” - Listening to children and youth is the first step in helping them grow up healthy and safe.
- ▶ Study visit of an Egyptian delegation on European quality standards in drug prevention, EDQS Cyprus, 11-15 September 2017.

2018

- ▶ Further development / expansion of the National Drugs Observatory: Full automation and training in the data collection process and capacity building.
- ▶ Development of addiction services for adolescents.
- ▶ Development of specialized services for pregnant women who use drugs.
- ▶ Development of addiction treatment services for HIV-positive patients.
- ▶ Council on Accreditation and Certification of Addiction Counselors Final Report PHASE II
- ▶ Participation in the ninth meeting of the MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ Continuation of the programme “Gender Responsive Services for women who use drugs”: Development of specialised services for women with addiction disorders.
- ▶ Training and capacity building for nurses working in the field of addiction treatment.
- ▶ Development of a parenting model for parents with substance use disorders.

- ▶ Participation in the International Multidisciplinary Symposium: Gambling Addiction: Science, Independence, Transparency, June 27-29, 2018.
- ▶ Participation in the Training Executive: Evaluation of the development, implementation and impact of drug policy.
- ▶ Participation in the international seminar "Refugees and drugs: needs assessment, support practices, risk prevention", 24-25 April 2018, Athens, Greece.

2019

- ▶ Continuation of the training and capacity-building project for addiction nurses.
- ▶ Continued development of a parent training model project for parents with substance use disorders.
- ▶ Development of a community-based model of care for substance use.
- ▶ Development of a specific model of care for juveniles with addiction problems in correctional facilities.
- ▶ Development of a model of care for patients with a dual diagnosis.
- ▶ Participation in the 10th MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ Participation in the joint Pompidou Group/CICAD seminar on "Drug prevention approaches that make a difference", 25 - 26 September 2019, Reykjavik, Iceland.
- ▶ Participation in the international seminar "Refugees and drugs: needs assessment, support practices, risk prevention", 7-8 October 2019, Athens, Greece.

2020

- ▶ With the support of the Pompidou Group, the General Secretariat for Mental Health and Addiction Treatment (GSMHAT) has published an article about people who use drugs and the Covid-19 pandemic in which:
 - A series of awareness-raising video messages were posted online and broadcast by psychiatric professionals,
 - The helpline launched since 2015 was expanded in March 2020, to provide psychosocial support to the public and patients 24/7,
 - The protocol for patients with mood disorders implemented by GSMHAT includes prevention of physical distance, admission capacity and follow-up program (YouTube channel),

- GSMHAT plans to deliver medicines to patients via a community unit, offer an online service via the zoom app and a WhatsApp number receiving any consultation.
- ▶ Continuation of the project to develop a community-based model of care for addictions.
- ▶ Continuation of the project Development of a specific model for dealing with minors with addiction problems in correctional institutions.
- ▶ Preparation and implementation of MedSPAD 2020 in Egypt.
- ▶ Participation in Module I of the Executive Training - 28-31 January 2020 - Oslo, Norway
- ▶ Training and capacity building expansion phase for the development of specialized addiction services for pregnant women.
- ▶ Participation in the 11th MedSPAD meeting committee, videoconference.

2021

- ▶ Development of a program of emergency and intermediate care services for addictions.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD working group meeting.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee

Impact of MedNET in Egypt

Professor Menan Rabie, Secretary General of Mental Health and Addiction Treatment, Ministry of Health and Population in Egypt

MedNET Flagship Action

■ If only one project were to be chosen to represent MedNET's flagship action for this period in Egypt, it would be the MedSPAD extension phase in Egypt in 2020. Based on the fact that this is one of the oldest MedNET actions in Egypt which started its technical support in 2015, in which a pilot study was conducted, after 5 years the project was expanded to detect the prevalence of tobacco, alcohol and other drug use in an expanded study sample to cover all 27 Egyptian governorates, and include both government and private schools with a proposed sample size that included 30,000 students covering 1000 schools.

■ Mentioning the growing and continuous multisectoral collaboration invested in this action in Egypt, and its impact in detecting the prevalence of addictive substances in schools, which will be the main milestone of the national prevention strategy dedicated to these age groups.

MedNET's role in raising awareness on drug policy

■ The development of a specific model of care for juveniles with addiction problems in correctional facilities, with the participation of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Solidarity, has encouraged consideration of the current difficulties faced by the juvenile justice system in dealing with substance use and psychiatric co-morbidity in adolescents. This has led to the design and training of an effective model that can help reduce substance use and have a beneficial impact on adolescent mental health, and to awareness of the human rights of adolescents that directly affects the drug policy-making process.

■ The continuous exchange of information among the multiple stakeholders of the National Drug Observatory database plays a major role in the development of action plans and strategies at the national and continental levels.

■ In addition, the extension of MedSPAD to Egypt encourages cooperation between different stakeholders in the field of drug demand reduction, research and education, in order to discuss the means of implementation and the results of the survey and how they can be used in prevention policy and monitoring.

MedNET's role in potential changes to drug legislation

■ The project to develop a specific model for dealing with juveniles with addiction problems in correctional facilities was directly linked to the drug legislation. It involved several meetings with legal advisers and NGOs providing social services to juveniles in correctional facilities, who took part in many discussions on the direction of these policies.

■ In this regard, it is worth mentioning that new laws and regulations have recently been promulgated in Egypt:

- ▶ Act No. 73 of 2021 on the Conditions of Tenure or Continuance of Employment, which provides for the termination of service of an employee who uses drugs if the final test result is positive. The law is intended to protect lives, public services and state funds. It requires a sudden deduction test and, if abuse is proven, work is suspended for three months and half the salary is deducted during the suspension period.
- ▶ The Minister of Health and Population, issued Ministerial Resolution No. 640 of 2020 to include the opioid alternative treatment program in the therapeutic programs for the treatment of opioid addiction, and it is approved as one of the treatment interventions for the disease of addiction, and one of the steps to implement the harm reduction program.
- ▶ In the context of the unification of health legislation in the Arab countries, the Council of Arab Ministers of Health recommended that the Egyptian law on the psychiatric patient should be circulated to member States so that they could draw inspiration from it when drafting their national laws.
- ▶ The Ministry of Health has decided to add pregabalin and its derivatives to the third schedule of narcotics.

MedNET's role in research, collection, analysis and interpretation of information

■ MedNET provided financial and technical support to the Mediterranean School Survey on Alcohol and Other Drugs project and its extension to 2020.

■ The development of a specialized service for pregnant women encouraged the training in 2020 of health care providers involving new specialties: neonatal care, obstetrics and gynecology. After each day of training, a questionnaire on pregnant women and new-borns was distributed to all trainees for completion with patients seeking treatment, and a follow-up meeting with all trainees was held after one month to discuss the results of the questionnaires and use them as a pilot study indicating the percentage of pregnant women using drugs and new-borns affected.

MedNET's role in treatment and care in Egypt

■ MedNET has continued to support the ongoing development of many specialized addiction services in Egypt, since 2019, such as; Parenting training for parents with substance use disorders, training and capacity building for nurses working in addiction treatment, development of a model of care for patients with dual diagnosis, development of a community-based model of care for substance use, the development of a programme of emergency and intermediate care services for addictions, the development of these services included financial and technical support by providing field visits to gain knowledge and familiarity with similar services in other countries and by developing a specialised service for pregnant women.

■ As a direct impact of the project “Addiction services for HIV-positive patients: development of services”, it is worth mentioning that GSMHAT has opened virology clinics in its 19 branch hospitals, these clinics aim at screening all patients for HIV and HCV and establishing a treatment plan for patients suffering from addictions with immunodeficiency virus or liver viruses.

■ In addition to the introduction of inpatient and outpatient addiction treatment services in Upper Egypt (Sohag Psychiatric Hospital, Elwan Addiction Treatment Centre), the Red Sea Governorate (Azima Treatment Centre) and the Helwan Governorate, a specialized addiction treatment service for adolescent girls has been established.

MedNET's Role in Human Rights and Access to Treatment and Care in Egypt

■ MedNET has contributed to the development of specialized addiction services targeting special and vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and patients with dual diagnosis, as well as vulnerable groups who suffer from difficult access to specific services such as adolescents in juvenile institutions.

Participation in the International Seminar on Refugees and Drugs also provided insights into the future of providing services to refugees in Egypt.

MedNET's role in law enforcement in Egypt

■ As mentioned earlier, the continuous exchange of information with the Ministry of Interior in the framework of the NDO is likely to help in this area. The involvement of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Solidarity in the project implemented in Egypt for the development of a specific model of care for juveniles with substance abuse problems in correctional facilities has contributed to the formulation of recommendations and the exchange of experiences.

MedNET's role in training and capacity building

■ In every project supported by MedNET, training and capacity building is one of the main pillars that ensure the success of the projects, through real or virtual study visits in the following projects: training of parents with substance use disorders, training and capacity building of nurses working in addiction treatment, development of a community-based model of care for substance use, development of a programme of emergency and intermediate care services for addictions, development of a specific model of care for juveniles with addiction problems in correctional facilities.

■ In the same context, Egypt graduated the first wave of addiction counselors, which is one of the long-term achievements of the project "Development of the addiction counsellor training programme and accreditation framework".

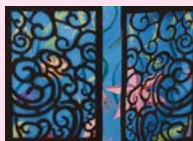
■ MedNET has also supported the continued training of the National Drug Observatory and health care providers in the development of specialized services for pregnant women, as well as the Egyptian participation in the Pompidou Group's executive training over the years.

Pompidou Group

The Pompidou Group is the Council of Europe's international cooperation group on drugs and addictions. It is a multidisciplinary forum at the wider European level where it is possible for policymakers, professionals, and researchers to exchange experiences and information on drugs and addiction. Formed in 1971 at the suggestion of the French President Georges Pompidou, it has become a Council of Europe partial agreement in 1980. In 2021, it gathers 41 countries: 38 among the 47th Member States of the Council of Europe as well as Morocco, Mexico and Israel.

MedNET

MedNET is Mediterranean network for cooperation on drugs and addictions of the Pompidou Group. Created in 2006, its objective is to promote cooperation, 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 2021, seventeen countries are members of the network.



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