

TUNISIA 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



Tunisia



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TUNISIA AND MEDNET

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All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to
All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law – Pompidou Group.

International Cooperation Group
on Drugs and Addictions
Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France
E-mail: Pompidou.Group@coe.int

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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 Pompidou Group: Cyprus, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Switzerland, Turkey.
- ▶ Seven non-Pompidou 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 between the Pompidou Group and Tunisia

■ It was during the "Conference on Cooperation in the Mediterranean Region on Drug Use: Networking in the Mediterranean Region" in 1999 in Malta that cooperation with Tunisia began.

■ As a result of this conference, Tunisia participated in the meetings of the MedSPAD project and the Pompidou Group took part in the first scientific meeting on drug addiction in Tunis in 2005.

2006

- ▶ Visit of a Pompidou Group delegation to Tunisia on the feasibility of a Mediterranean cooperation network on drugs and drug addiction (MedNET): meeting with the Ministry of Health and the National Narcotics Bureau.
- ▶ Tunisia's participation in the Amsterdam conference establishing the Mediterranean cooperation network on drugs and drug addiction (MedNET).
- ▶ Participation of Tunisia in the first meeting of the MedNET network in Paris.
- ▶ Representation of Tunisia at the international seminar on the role of research in the development of policies to combat drug addiction, in Algiers.

2007

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

2008

- ▶ Participation of Tunisia in the MedNET network and in the seminar on synthetic drugs in Algiers.

2009

- ▶ Audience of the Pompidou Group Secretariat at the Ministry of Health, Tunis.
- ▶ Letter from the Secretary of State to the Minister of Public Health indicating Tunisia's wish to join the MedNET network.
- ▶ Participation of Tunisia in the MedNET high level conference in Strasbourg.

2010

- ▶ Participation of Tunisia in the seminar on addiction treatment approaches and the first-time treatment demand indicator, in Cairo.
- ▶ Invitation of Tunisia to the ministerial conference of the Pompidou Group.

2011

- ▶ Workshop on raising awareness and promoting a health approach to risk and disease prevention, Tunis. Workshop funded by MedNET in collaboration with Menahra ** and organized by MANARA (supported by ATL MST/AIDS Tunis Chapter).
- ▶ Visit of the Executive Secretary of the Pompidou Group to the Ministry of Health.

2012

- ▶ First National Consultative Seminar on Drug Policy, 17-18 May.

** Menahra is a WHO, IHRA (*International Harm Reduction Association*) and Drosos Foundation project launched in 2007 with the aim of building a harm reduction network in the Near East and North Africa. In North Africa, the knowledge hub is in Morocco. It covers Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia and offers harm reduction actions. MedNET has funded some of these workshops since 2008.

- ▶ Introduction of a post-doctoral course in addictology at the Faculty of Medicine in Tunis.
- ▶ Study visit to the French Observatory for Drugs and Drug Addiction and the Interministerial Mission for Drugs and Drug Addiction.
- ▶ Study visit to Lisbon focusing on the functioning of the Portuguese Observatory on 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 functioning of the Observatory on Drugs and Drug Addiction.
- ▶ Round Table on Drug Policy Development and Implementation, Tunis, 16-17 April.
- ▶ Study visit to Morocco on opiate substitution therapy.

2014

- ▶ Training in addictology.
- ▶ Study visit to Morocco on low-threshold centres.
- ▶ Addiction Prevention Day, June 26.
- ▶ Participation in the workshop on the fight against drug trafficking in airports, Strasbourg.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ Contribution to the publication "gender dimension of non-medical use of prescription drugs in Europe and the Mediterranean region."

2015

- ▶ University diploma in addictology (DU).
- ▶ Study visit to Malta on opiate substitution therapy.
- ▶ Participation in the regional seminar on opiate substitution therapy in Algiers.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee and contribution to the publication "A first look at the prevalence of alcohol, tobacco and drugs among adolescents in the Mediterranean region."
- ▶ Participation in the work of the Pompidou Group on recommendations on legislation regulating substitution treatments.

- ▶ Participation in the first European Conference on Addiction and Addictive Behaviour, Lisbon.
- ▶ Participation in the Airport Group, a consultation group of drug control services of European airports and general aviation, Strasbourg.
- ▶ Participation in the Pompidou Group's 'precursor' network.

2016

- ▶ University Diploma in Addictology, February-June 2016.
- ▶ University Diploma in Addictology, November 2016 - June 2017.
- ▶ Legal expertise on the draft law on narcotics.
- ▶ Thematic day on 26 June on the national strategy.
- ▶ Specialized workshops for DU students, winter 2016.
- ▶ Addictology Days, October 2016.
- ▶ General population survey.
- ▶ Member of the MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ Participation in the 5th International Francophone Colloquium on the Treatment of Opioid Dependence, Rabat, November 30, December 1 and 2, 2016.

2017

- ▶ University Diploma in Addictology, November 2016 - June 2017.
- ▶ The Workshop, "Cognitive Behavioral Therapies in Cannabis Addiction," April 8-9, 2017.
- ▶ The Workshop, "Harm Reduction," April 26-27, 2017.
- ▶ Day of celebration on the occasion of the UN International Day on Drugs, June 26, 2017, focusing on women, violence and addictions in Tunisia.
- ▶ Seminar entitled "Addictions and Policy Choices", September 23, 2017.
- ▶ First National Addictology Congress, December 14-15, 2017.
- ▶ The MedSPAD II survey conducted in October 2017.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ Amendments to the drug bill - allow the judge to give a sentence to avoid jail, under certain conditions, to the person who uses drugs for the first time.
- ▶ Participation in MedNET and the guidelines on substitution treatment.

- ▶ Participation in the Pompidou Group Airport Seminar, Strasbourg, 6-8 June 2017.
- ▶ Participation in the General Aviation Meeting, Madrid, 26-28 April 2017.

2018

- ▶ Visit on the European Drug Prevention Quality Standards (EDPQS) training in Cypre, 14-16 May 2018.
- ▶ Celebrating the UN International Day against Drug Abuse and Trafficking on June 26, 2018 with an advocacy workshop on opioid agonist treatments.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ Participation in the International Multidisciplinary Symposium. excessive gambling: science, independence, transparency, Freiburg, 27-29 June 2018.
- ▶ Participation in the Annual Meeting of the Concertation Group of European Airport and General Aviation Drug Control Services (Airport Group), Strasbourg 6-8 June 2018.
- ▶ Participation in the General Aviation Meeting, Marrakech, 17-18 October 2018.
- ▶ Participation in the Precursors Network, Strasbourg, 26-28 September 2018.
- ▶ MedNET and the substitution treatment guidelines.
- ▶ Participation in the Executive training: Evaluation of the development, implementation and impact of a drug policy.
- ▶ Participation in the International Seminar on "Refugees and Drugs: needs assessment, practice support, risk prevention", Athens, 24-25 April 2018.

2019

- ▶ The new "Hope" centre for the prevention and treatment of adolescents.
- ▶ Wastewater analysis to determine the level of illicit drug use.
- ▶ University Diploma in Addictology by the Faculty of Medicine.
- ▶ Training in Addictology for trainers and medical staff at the University of Sfax.
- ▶ Participation in the MedSPAD committee.
- ▶ Participation in the 34th Annual Meeting of the European Airport and General Aviation Drug Enforcement Services, Strasbourg, 19-20 June 2019 .

- ▶ Participation in the 3rd Pompidou Group International Conference on General Aviation, 26 -28 November 2019, Malta.
- ▶ Participation in the seminar “Drug prevention approaches that make a difference”, 25-26 September 2019, Reykjavik, Iceland.
- ▶ Project conducted by Tunisia on the prevention and management of addictions among adolescents.

2020

- ▶ Participated in the MedSPAD committee and the MedNET steering committee and chaired the MedNET steering committee in 2020.
- ▶ Wastewater analysis to determine the level of illicit drug use.
- ▶ University Diploma in Addictology by the Faculty of Medicine.
- ▶ Training in Addictology for trainers and medical staff at the University of Sfax.
- ▶ Participation in the international MedSPAD working group to prepare the launch of MedSPAD III in spring 2021.
- ▶ Participation in the General Aviation Meeting - September 9, 2020 (Videoconference).
- ▶ Project conducted by Tunisia on the prevention and management of addictions among adolescents.

2021

- ▶ Addiction prevention project for adolescents involved in sports activities.
- ▶ Creation of a day centre for women who use drugs.
- ▶ Evaluation of illicit drug use through wastewater analysis: phase II.
- ▶ Online training (France) for psychiatrists in motivational interviewing.
- ▶ MedSPAD III.

Impact / Contribution of MedNET to Tunisia

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

The year 1999, the date of the conference on cooperation in the Mediterranean region on drug use and the setting up of networks in the Mediterranean region, marks the beginning of cooperation with Tunisia. It is also the date of the opening, on the decision of President BEN ALI, of the “ESPOIR Centre”, the first centre to offer health care and medical treatment to drug addicts, and in particular to users coming from penitentiary structures.

■ Subsequently, between 2005 and 2010, Tunisia regularly participated in the events organized by the MedNET network without being able to reflect it through the media.

■ It is necessary to wait for **the key event of 17-18 May 2012 in Tunis**, the “**national consultative seminar on drug policy in Tunisia**” in which MedNET was associated. This seminar took advantage of the liberation of languages, after January 14, 2011, and was also based on the regrettable closure of the ESPOIR centre, in an expression of rejection of the actions of its creator, by the revolted staff of the spa centre housing it. This very mediatized seminar which gathered all the actors of the theme has, indeed, marked out the national strategy by formulating recommendations after having updated the insufficiencies of the four essential axes of the addictions problem : epidemiology, medical care, medico-social prevention and legislation. These areas were the subject of four discussion workshops attended by international experts invited by the Pompidou Group, and led to consensus recommendations which set out the guidelines for subsequent action by Tunisian decision-makers.

■ Among these actions, the reform of Law 92-52 on narcotics proved to be the most decisive for the reorientation of drug policy and a joint commission bringing together the ministries involved developed a draft text that was presented by the government to the Assembly of People's Representatives on 31 December 2015. This draft law took into account the recommendations of the other three workshops of reflection thus establishing:

- ▶ The creation of a national observatory on drugs and drug addiction under the supervision of the President of the Government,
- ▶ Recognition of addiction as a chronic relapsing disease and facilitation of access to care, either voluntarily or through a national commission and regional commissions for the prevention, care and rehabilitation of drug users. The bill provides for the costs to be covered, depending on the case, by social security funds, dedicated bodies or the Ministry of Justice (Directorate General of Penitentiary and Rehabilitation Services),
- ▶ The creation of public and private centres for curative, preventive and social care,
- ▶ The introduction of the use of agonist drugs.

■ This bill, which could never pass the Chamber of Deputies, will finally serve to blow the amendment, in May 2017, of articles 4 and 12 of Law 92 - 52, which according to Law 2017 - 39 authorize the magistrate, only in case of first consumption of narcotics by the user, to make the latter benefit from extenuating circumstances, which were previously proscribed.

■ Moreover, this bill, which received wide media coverage, has triggered a process of appropriation and public awareness of the proposed concepts and mechanisms among the players involved in the prevention and treatment of addictions.

■ Other actions following the May 2012 seminar include:

1. **The establishment of the necessary foundations for prevention, harm reduction and therapeutic care for drug users by :**

- ▶ The introduction with the support of MedNET of a **postgraduate course in Addictology** for psychologists, general practitioners and psychiatrists from November 2012 which was subsequently transformed into a degree course, organized by the Faculty of Medicine of Tunis from November 2013 and having provided training for 260 candidates until June 2020.

- ▶ **The addition of two other courses leading to a diploma in Addictology**, during the academic year 2015-2016 in the faculties of medicine of Monastir and Sfax with the registration of 25 candidates per faculty. These courses were developed on the basis of the success of the Tunis faculty.
- ▶ The introduction, from February 2021, of a training cycle for trainers in motivational interviewing.
- ▶ **Networking between public care structures and civil society structures dedicated more specifically to harm reduction:**
 - In Tunis: Two university hospital services linked to nine reception points: ONFP youth centres - Douar Hicher, Menzel Bourguiba, Menzah 8, Mellassine, Ezzouhour, Chams, Bab El Assal, Nabeul, Dar Chaabane,
 - In Sousse: a university hospital service linked to the ONFP-Sousse youth centre,
 - In Mahdia, a university hospital service linked to a centre that can be quickly activated in Moknine,
 - In Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine and Gafsa RoR centres linked to civil society
 - In Sfax: a university hospital service of pneumology - tabacology linked to the rehabilitation center of Tyna, currently non-functional.
- ▶ **The establishment of North-South and South-South exchanges**, particularly in the areas of :
 - Training: DU Addictology, with the participation of experts from Morocco, France, Switzerland, Lebanon
 - Organization of care with exchange of expertise with Portugal, Malta, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Cyprus,
 - The completion of 3 national MedSPAD surveys 2013, 2017 and 2021: expertise within the framework of the MedSPAD committee with EMCDDA, OFDT
 - Legislation, by participating in different MedNET working groups with Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Morocco, Lebanon, Algeria,
 - The organisation of the setting up of the national observatory with round tables presenting the experiences of the Portuguese, French, Cypriot, Maltese, Moroccan and EMCDDA observatories followed by the creation of a national register of care requests from 2020,

- The launch of a pilot prevention project among schoolchildren aimed at helping them to spend their free time through sports, cultural and technological activities, ...
- The launch of a project to support the rehabilitation of teenagers at the Hope Centre in Jebel Oust,
- The implementation of a “day hospital unit for women drug users” within a psychiatry - addictology department of the main psychiatric hospital in the Tunis region.
- The fight against drug trafficking in airports by participating in the Pompidou Group working group and exchanging with experts, particularly from Spain and France,
- Precursor detection by participating in the Pompidou Group network.

2. The adoption by the Ministry of Health, in 2019, of a national strategy for the management of addictions based on 6 inter-regional addictology centres

■ Each centre is centred by a psychiatry-addictology service (with its addictology day hospital) and interacts with :

- ▶ A complex addiction care service (intensive care, infectious diseases, pneumology, hepatology, internal medicine),
- ▶ A reception and harm reduction centre for drug users (CARRUD) which offers various services classified in :
 - Harm reduction risk
 - Social support
 - Brief psychotherapies
 - Or group activities.

■ These centres may be attached to (or have partnerships with) front-line health structures in order to provide medical care and may be public (e.g. regional delegations of the ONFP), or belong to civil society (ATIOST, ATL MST Sida, ATUPRET) or be the seat of a collaboration between the two

- ▶ A rehabilitation and social reintegration centre like those in Jebel Oust and Tyna,
- ▶ And screening services such as basic health care centres, school and university medical centres, anonymous screening centres (CCDAG), occupational health services, social defence and integration centres (CDIS), protection centres for abused women).

3. The adoption by the Ministries of Justice and Health, on 26 June 2021, of the national strategy for the prevention, harm reduction and management of substance use disorders in the community and in prisons for the period: 2021 - 2025.

■ The preparation of this strategy involved the various governmental actors concerned as well as representatives of civil society with the support of the expertise of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), initially requested by the Ministry of Justice. The next step will be the preparation and implementation of the action plan of this strategy from autumn 2021.

■ All these advances on the approach, not legal, but rather medico-psycho-social of the problem of addictions in Tunisia, on the recognition of the weight that it represents, particularly, within the youth population, as well as on the approach leading to oppose it with a national multisectoral strategy, crystallize the impact of the cooperation of Tunisia with the MedNET network.

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 addictions. 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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