

# MedNET “10 years and beyond”

**10 years of co-operation  
in the Mediterranean Region  
on Drugs and Addiction**

**Evaluation among MedNET participants**

**Council of Europe, Strasbourg**



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# Introduction

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■ On 30 November 2016, MedNET – the Pompidou Group’s network for co-operation on drugs and addictions in the Mediterranean region – will be celebrating its 10th anniversary. Accordingly, the aim of this report is to evaluate the impact of MedNET’s actions in the Mediterranean region and to assess whether or not its core objectives – to promote co-operation, exchanges and mutual transfer of knowledge – have been fulfilled.

# Methodology

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■ In order to evaluate the impact of MedNET’s actions and activities, the Secretariat, together with consultants, designed a bilingual (English and French) questionnaire for the MedNET Correspondents and the participants in its activities. The questionnaire was multiple choice and semi-open questions were included. For the questionnaire the SurveyMonkey® platform was used. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail to approximately 300 people; almost 20% responded within the one-month deadline.<sup>1</sup> All responses were anonymous.

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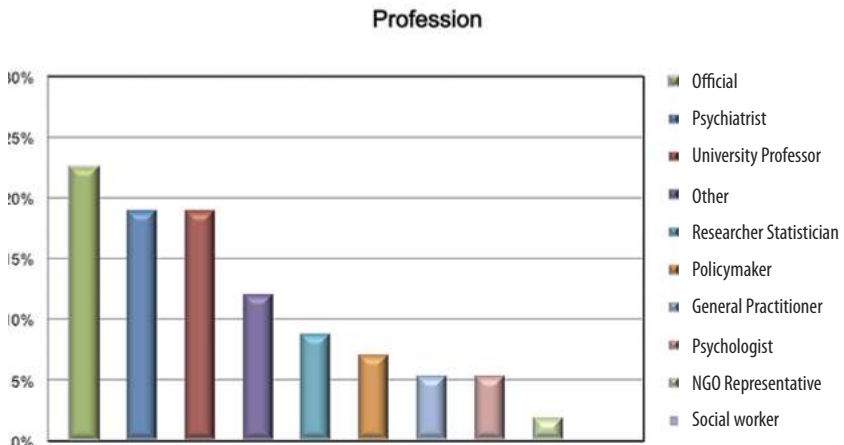
1. First delivery: 09-13 May 2016. Additionally, two reminders were sent on 23 May and on 5 June 2016.

# Analysis of results

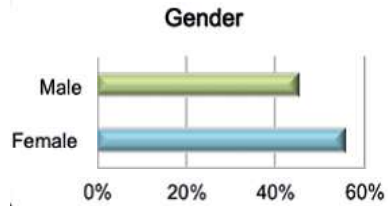
■ The analysis of the replies to the questionnaire is as follows:

■ A diverse profile of MedNET professionals. Participants and regular partners in MedNET have a diverse range of professional backgrounds. Most are officials attached to the Ministry of Health, Education, Justice, Social Affairs or Interior (working in national or local administrations) or professionals such as psychiatrists, medical staff or academics, involved in the framing, implementation and evaluation of drug policies, in care and treatment structures or in research into addictions.

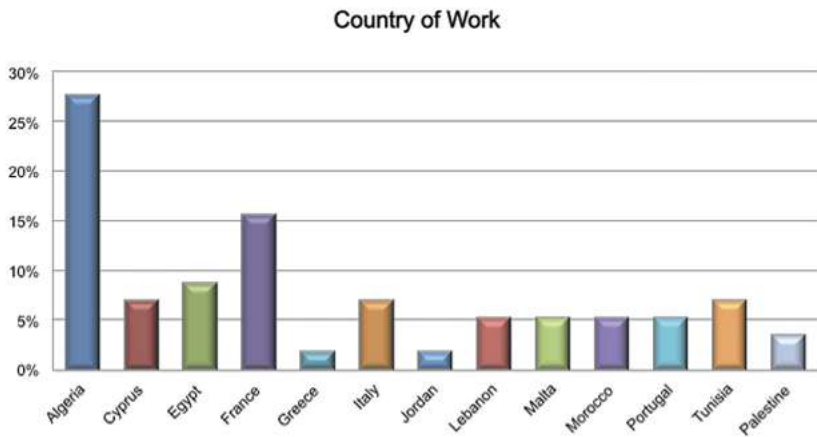
■ The variety and diversity of professional backgrounds serve to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, improve the multi-dimensional approach and encourage closer collaboration between different organisations.



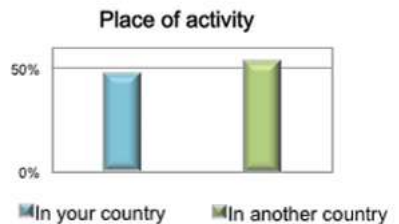
■ A gender-balanced dimension. Among the respondents, 55% were female and 45% were male. –These data could be considered as an added value for MedNET, since the promotion of gender equality through the introduction of a gender dimension in drug policies is a core value of the Pompidou Group and the Council of Europe.



■ A majority of respondents from Southern MedNET countries. 59% of respondents came from Mediterranean countries outside the European Union.

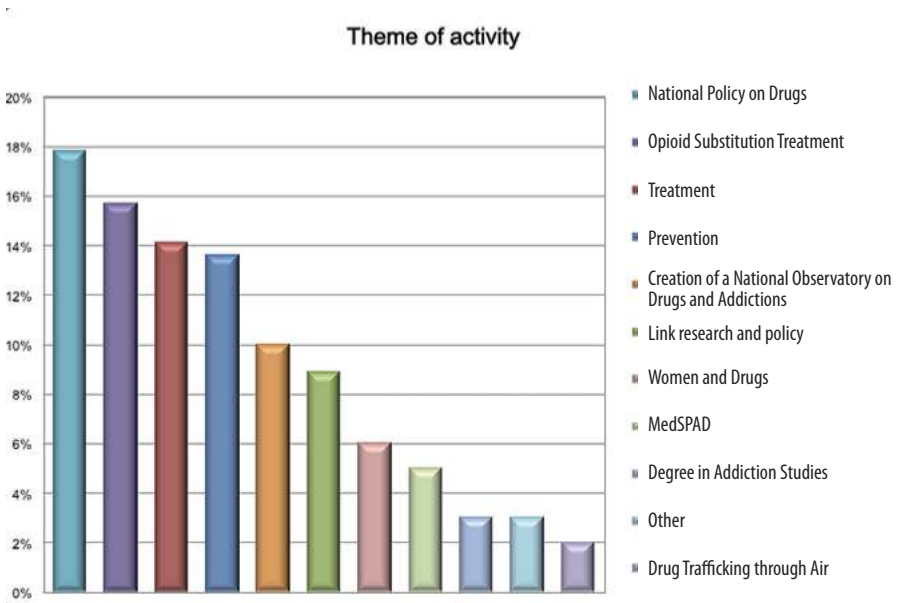


■ A steady development of the network. The majority of respondents have participated in MedNET events over the last 5 years: this indicates a rotation of participants, the fact that different people are involved in different kinds of activities, and the gradual development and expansion of the network over the years.



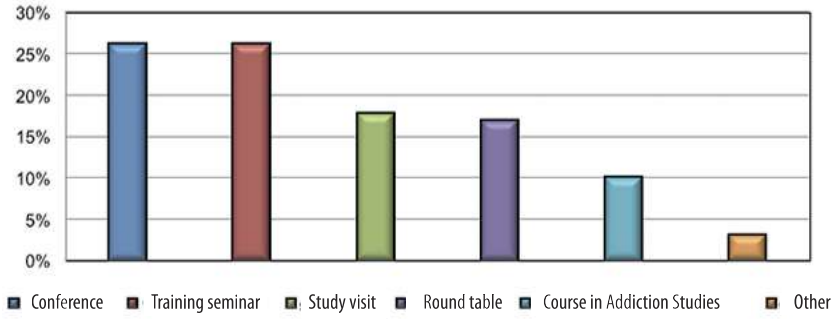


■ A diversity of topics in the activities. The respondents participated in conferences, training seminars, study visits and/or round tables on issues concerning mostly “National Drug Policy”, “Prevention”, “Treatment” and “Opioid Substitution Treatment”. Particular reference to “opioid substitution treatment” is undoubtedly due to the fact that MedNET was able to open the discussion and raise awareness on this sensitive issue – especially with the non-European Mediterranean countries.



■ A balance between national and international events. MedNET participants have had the chance to participate in activities held in their own country and in other MedNET countries. This fact enhances the exchange of knowledge in terms of policies, different cultures and contexts and working methods and constitutes an important added value for the network.

Type of activity





# Outputs/Achievements

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■ The analysis made it possible to identify some general recurrent topics.

## Developments regarding scientific observation / epidemiology

■ Drug abuse is a complex issue. Accordingly, data collection is one of the most important aspects for better assessment and monitoring of the situation. The majority of respondents made particular reference to MedSPAD (Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs) and to how their participation in MedNET had improved their skills regarding research approaches, data collection and epidemiology. It was also stated that the need to set up an information system on drug use based on the regular carrying out of epidemiological studies in schools and among the general population was extremely important for monitoring the phenomenon. Finally, it was also stated that exchanges within MedSPAD and participation in MedNET training courses were an excellent opportunity to acquire knowledge of the epidemiological situation in Mediterranean countries, epidemiological surveillance systems and prevention policies. Indeed, thanks to MedNET some countries had established national drug observatories and some were in the process of doing so. Both MedSPAD and national drug observatories are mutually reinforcing instruments for monitoring the situation.

## Developments in terms of the framing of drug policies and innovation concerning prevention

■ Participants in MedNET activities have had the chance to broaden their knowledge regarding drug policies. It seems that the exchange of views on different alternative drug policies and techniques, as well as a better understanding of culture and diversity are key factors for the framing of national and/or regional drugs policies, and have had a major influence on their general approach to drug policies. In addition, of particular significance is the fact that MedNET professionals were introduced to new prevention and harm reduction strategies. It is considered a major achievement for MedNET that prevention is now perceived as a very important and essential component of a comprehensive national drug strategy.

## Legislation

■ Respondents' participation in MedNET activities has strongly influenced their approach to drug addiction especially for issues such as drug policies, treatment and prevention, and the way in which drug users were viewed. Drug addicts were no longer viewed as criminals but rather as patients in need of treatment. As a result of this change of approach, countries have started to revise their legislation and national policy concerning drug users. This situation mainly concerns Mediterranean countries which are not part of the European Union.

■ For instance, the 2004 Law No. 04-18 in Algeria was, at the time, a major step forward as it changed the status of drug users from being considered as criminals to being seen as persons in need of treatment and care. The law also authorised the courts to order compulsory treatment. However, even today, participants from Algeria believe that they must continue to improve this legislation.

■ In Tunisia, a revision of Law No. 92-52 scheduled for 2016 should change the legal framework. In this country too, drug users should in future be considered as persons in need of treatment and care and be offered alternatives to prison.

## **The situation concerning access to treatment and care for all drug users and the specific situation taking account of the gender dimension in access to treatment and care**

■ The survey shows that a majority of people were satisfied with the activity concerning access to treatment and care for drug users. Respondents felt that this activity had enabled them to learn about new treatment and care contexts and to discover a new therapeutic approach. Exchanges with professionals and policy-makers had also enabled them to share their point of view concerning treatment and care systems in different countries. They had the opportunity to attend technical exchanges and to share their experiences of different kinds of treatment and care. MedNET has helped some countries to develop new strategies for the treatment and care of drug users.

■ Concerning Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST), MedNET has played an important role and today, many southern MedNET countries have adopted such treatments after joining MedNET. For example, after the regional seminar on OST which took place in Algiers in 2015 and several study visits, OST will be officially introduced in Algeria. In Lebanon, MedNET has also helped to increase treatment possibilities, such as OST. In Morocco, following numerous seminars and training courses, MedNET has encouraged the introduction of methadone as treatment. Many participants acknowledged that MedNET had significantly influenced their opinion on the OST issue.

■ It is important to note that respondents also welcomed the MedNET approach to the issue of “women and drugs”. In 2012, for the first time, MedNET decided to include a gender dimension in its work programme. In particular, two projects took place in Egypt, one aimed at offering gender-oriented social and health services to women drug users (2012-2014) and the other aimed at developing specialised services for pregnant women drug users (2016). It seems that this approach offered new perspectives on the issue of care and treatment for drug users. In addition, respondents felt that the need to consider gender research and specific services for women was a useful lesson to learn.

■ Finally, the work carried out as part of MedNET can be said to have influenced some professionals’ approach to addiction, care and treatment and in particular thanks to MedNET, professionals have become more aware of the differences between the problems and needs of men and women suffering from addiction.

## Exchange of experience and good practice

■ All respondents seem unanimous with regard to their evaluation of exchange of experience. For a majority of respondents, co-operation among Mediterranean countries is of the utmost importance. But in addition, exchanges between the countries of the North and the South are as important as exchanges among the countries of the South. The countries of the North can help the countries of the South by sharing knowledge. But exchanges among the countries of the South are also essential especially in sharing experiences and expertise because of the strong cultural similarities between them.

■ Such co-operation leads to a better understanding of the overall situation. Co-operation enables participants to create new contacts with people from other countries not only at official meetings but also in the margins of those meetings. It enables them to share and compare diverse experiences, treatment and care facilities and policies, and also to share their worries and difficulties and find solutions together.

■ Above all, MedNET enables participants to improve their knowledge about foreign cultures and lifestyles and to become more aware of the diversity of countries' cultural contexts.

■ Thanks to international exchanges, many people are now convinced of the need to take cultural factors into consideration and, to a larger extent, to adapt knowledge to different cultures and populations. Indeed, cultural factors have a strong influence on a country's drugs situation.

■ Some people, nevertheless, pointed out the absence of regular meetings outside the two annual meetings which bring together the MedNET correspondents or expressed a wish to see MedNET extended to other countries in the Mediterranean Region in order to develop still further the co-operation initiated by this network.

## Future challenges

■ MedNET participants were asked to answer the following question: "Do you have any suggestions with regard to the monitoring of the drug situation; drug policy development; training and knowledge exchange that you wish to be transferred via MedNET to your policymakers?" Based on the comments received (50% replies received among respondents) along with comments made on other questions, the Secretariat of the Pompidou Group had the

opportunity to collect information on the needs of professionals in each country. These data may lead MedNET to develop even more target-oriented and specific activities in the future.

■ Three major issues emerged from the analysis of the replies:

■ First of all, the need for more regular meetings, training courses and workshops was underlined. More specifically, special reference was made to training in psychiatry and consequently addictology, and to training of professionals regarding treatment and care of drug addiction.

■ Second, the need for more projects was also raised. It was felt that it was an issue of high importance for MedNET to increase the number of prevention and treatment projects. MedNET professionals suggested more projects to support prevention policies in their countries. This would improve the conditions of treatment and health care for addicts and would gradually lead to an improvement in the general well-being of the population. In addition, during the implementation phase of future projects, MedNET would have the opportunity to link research, policy and practice more effectively.

■ Third, it was emphasised that there is a need to set up a Regional Observatory for Drugs and Addictions in the Mediterranean region. This view is based on the belief that a common monitoring centre could help to standardise the methods of research, data collection and interpretation in order to assess and improve monitoring of the situation in the Mediterranean region. Furthermore, the underlying concept for the setting up of such an Observatory would be to obtain even more valid and reliable data for the region which consequently would enable policy-makers to design better and more coherent drug strategies at national and regional level. All in all, the establishment of such a regional observatory would strengthen the co-operation among the countries already put in place by MedNET.



## 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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