European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

The Reitox network

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Contents

One of the core tasks of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) is to collect, analyse and disseminate information on drugs and drug addiction in Europe. In order to fulfil the above, the EMCDDA works closely with the Reitox network.

This publication brings together some of the most frequently asked questions about Reitox, how it functions, who are Reitox members and how to participate in the network. Further details can be found via the websites and other links provided at the end of this brochure.

1. What is Reitox?

Reitox is the European information network on drugs and drug addiction created at the same time as the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. The first meeting of Reitox members was held in 1995. The abbreviation 'Reitox' stands for the French '*Réseau Européen d´Information sur les Drogues et les Toxicomanies*'.

The working language of the network is English.

2. Who are members of the Reitox network?

Members of the Reitox network are designated national institutions or agencies responsible for data collection and reporting on drugs and drug addiction. These institutions are called 'national focal points' or 'national drug observatories'. The Regulation governing the EMCDDA'S work requires that each EU Member State or other country participating in the work of the Centre shall establish or designate one national focal point. This designated national focal point then becomes a member of the network, which currently includes each of the 27 EU Member States plus Croatia, Turkey, Norway and the European Commission.

3. What is the Reitox network's main mission?

Reitox directly contributes to the EMCDDA's core task of collecting and reporting consistent, harmonised and standardised information on the drug phenomenon across Europe.

Reitox links national drug information systems and is the main way in which the EMCDDA exchanges data and methodological information on drugs and drug addiction in Europe. Data collected through the Reitox network are also utilised to monitor and support the evaluation of the outcomes of the EU drugs action plans, within its drug strategy. Furthermore, the data help guide EU drug policies and develop recommendations for appropriate national responses for organising treatment, prevention and harm reduction activities. The information gathered through the EU Early warning system for new psychoactive substances implemented in cooperation with the network makes it possible to adopt decisions for putting these under control within the EU.

4. Is there a difference between a national focal point and a national drugs observatory?

A national drugs observatory (NDO) is a generic term for an organisation that provides its country with factual, objective and comparable information concerning drugs and drug addiction and their consequences. In the European Union context, 'national focal points'

(NFPs) are effectively national drugs observatories. The term comes from Regulation (EC) No 1920/2006 of the European Parliament and the Council of 12 December 2006 on the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and is used in the EU drugs action plans to describe a set of roles and functions vis-à-vis the EU and the EMCDDA.

5. What are the functions of Reitox national focal points at European level?

The national focal points are the cornerstone of the European drug monitoring and reporting system. On an annual basis, a NFP should collect information and produce comparable and scientifically sound data on a national drug situation which will feed into monitoring the situation across Europe.

The NFPs also help improve data collection methodologies and tools, and develop relevant guidelines for their implementation.

In addition, the NFPs participate in the Early warning system and report to the EMCDDA on new trends in the use of existing psychoactive substances and/or new consumption patterns involving combinations of psychoactive substances which pose a potential public health risk.

However, in many cases the role of NFPs goes beyond their reporting obligations to the EMCDDA and they also produce information to fulfil their country's reporting obligations to other supranational and international monitoring and drug-control programmes.

The EMCDDA also requests the technical support of NFPs in the production of its different products and publications in national languages.

6. What are the functions of Reitox national focal points at national level?

The three core functions of a national focal point are:

- data collection and monitoring;
- analysis and interpretation of data collected;
- reporting and dissemination of the results at national level.

These functions are usually carried out by the NFP in conjunction with other national institutions and experts forming a national drug information network coordinated by the NFP.

Moreover, each country, which is solely responsible for setting up a NFP may also, depending on resources and data and expertise available at national level, expand the NFP's mandate and tasks in order to meet national needs.

The Reitox national focal points are asked to disseminate knowledge and best practice produced at European level and relevant for national needs to the extended community of professionals involved with drugs and drug addiction. They also support the broad dissemination of EMCDDA products and publications at national level.

7. How is Reitox managed?

Daily management of the network is entrusted to the EMCDDA's Reitox and international cooperation unit. Twice a year, the EMCDDA organises meetings for the Heads of national focal points to discuss and endorse data collection tools, reporting requirements for the upcoming reporting cycle and to further develop and consolidate the network and its members. The EMCDDA also maintains a Reitox extranet where it shares most up-to-date information on the EMCDDA's activities, reporting requirements and also training opportunities for Reitox members.

The network has a Spokesperson and a deputy; both are elected by the Heads of the NFPs. The Spokesperson has observer status on the EMCDDA's Management Board, which is the EMCDDA's main governing body, as well as on the EMCDDA's Scientific Committee. This ensures that the network members are aware of the agency's main strategic and scientific developments and that the Reitox network contributes to its decision-making process.

The Cyprus national focal point maintains an interactive, web-based Reitox Forum independent from the EMCDDA, to encourage information exchange and cooperation among the national focal points (for subscription and details, please see **www.reitoxforum.eu**).

8. How should a national focal point be structured?

There is no single model for how to organise and where to place a NFP, however national authorities must ensure that their NFP can collect and analyse data on the basis of guidelines adopted by the EMCDDA.

The structure of a NFP largely depends on how decision-making is organised in a particular country. The NFP can be placed within a national drugs coordination body or under a government department, or located in one of the ministries. In many cases, the decision is taken to place the NFP in the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of the Interior, Home Affairs or National Security or their subordinate institutions, since drug-related data collection is a part of their regular activities. A university or a non-governmental organisation can also act as a national focal point.

When discussing where to place the NFP, the main aspect to consider is how it will effectively fulfil its role and functions. The NFP has to maintain an independent status in order to report scientifically sound and credible information.

9. What types of information should Reitox members provide to the EMCDDA and when?

The European drug monitoring system is structured to cover two main areas: monitoring the situation and monitoring responses.

- The monitoring of the situation is based on five key epidemiological indicators: general population surveys and youth surveys; problem drug use; treatment demand indicator; drug-related deaths and drug-related infectious diseases.

- Monitoring responses is structured around: collection of best practice; demand reduction; interventions in the criminal justice system and national strategies; coordination mechanisms and legislation.

The monitoring system implies the collection of both quantitative data and qualitative information using three different types of standardised data collection and reporting tools:

- standard tables for quantitative data collection, reported to the EMCDDA every year;
- structured questionnaires for qualitative information, essentially monitoring responses, reported to the EMCDDA every year;
- guidelines for writing the national report on 'new developments, trends and in-depth information'. The national report provides contextual information and complements the figures reported through the other templates. The national report is also due every year.

10. How many staff members should work in a national focal point and what qualifications do they need?

The number of staff and their qualifications are closely linked to a national focal point's role and functions. Given the range of tasks of a NFP, it must have at least a manager or coordinator (usually referred to as the Head). It is desirable that the professional competence of such a person allows him/her to effectively discuss issues related to drug-related data collection at national and European level. Practice shows that the Head of the focal point should have strong general management, communication and networking skills.

Ideally, the competences of additional staff will mirror the wide range of subject areas covered by the NFP mandate. Therefore, the scientific competence of personnel should ideally cover fields such as: epidemiology, social sciences (sociology, psychology), toxicology, statistics, and criminology and drug policy. Countries with very limited resources might start with a one-person national focal point: if this is the case, some core functions in data collection, analysis and reporting should be delegated to external partners (e.g. a university).

Last but not least, all staff members should ideally be fluent in English, as this is the working language of the Reitox network.

11. How are Reitox national focal points financed?

The appointment, setting up, functioning and maintenance of a national focal point is the responsibility of the national authorities and is therefore 100 % financed by the country concerned.

However, the EMCDDA co-finances national focal points in EU Member States by means of an EC grant agreement which supports the implementation of specific activities in relation to national reporting functions and obligations in the EMCDDA's annual work programme.

Each NFP has to formally apply for a grant on a yearly basis. The EMCDDA grant agreements are fully in line with the rules and procedures used by the European Commission, and the NFPs are called upon to ensure adequate synergy with existing EC programmes to avoid overlap.

12. What is the 'Reitox Academy'?

The Reitox Academy is a training programme which addresses the training and information needs of the whole Reitox community, but also transfers knowledge and EMCDDA practices to candidate and potential candidate countries ([1]), the European Neighbourhood Policy countries (ENP) ([2]) and other third countries.

The Reitox Academy includes a wide array of courses and seminars on key EMCDDA technical tools and techniques. It aims to utilise the best expertise available in both the agency and Member States. It also addresses training needs related to setting up and developing national focal points and their expert networks.

Academies can be organised for a network of national or regional experts, for all Reitox members or for EU candidate, potential candidate and ENP countries. Occasionally and upon request, Reitox Academies are organised for third countries in the framework of EU-funded technical cooperation projects.

13. Who can benefit from Reitox national focal points' expertise at national level and how?

Providing data on the drug situation at national level and also analysing how this is viewed in relation to the broader European and international contexts is one of the NFP's functions. This means providing products for a range of audiences as follows:

- Decision-makers, who require concise, objective information in order to make the relevant policy and budgetary decisions. This audience may also require information on current trends in drug policies across Europe to feed into national debate;
- Scientists and other professionals working in the drugs field can use the NFP as their information source on ongoing research and monitoring activities across the network and also as a link for cross-border cooperation, hence enhancing data collection practices across Europe;
- As an audience, the general public needs broad information in order to gain insight into changes in the drug situation and responses at national and European level;
- For the media, focal points act as the main reference point on the drug situation, not only in the country concerned, but also in Europe. The information provided to the media thus facilitates clear and factual reporting on the drugs situation.

([1]) Candidate and potential candidate countries are: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244/99, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

([2]) European Neighbourhood Policy countries are: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

14. What is the added value in joining the Reitox network for non-EU countries?

Being involved in Reitox for non-EU countries brings first-hand experience of how drug monitoring systems operate in Europe, and at the same time broadens the view of Reitox members on the drug situation outside the EU.

Whereas Reitox members participate in the European debate on drug data monitoring and reporting tools and processes, non-EU countries are invited to take part in selected training activities and technical expert meetings on a wide range of topics related to the EMCDDA's areas of work.

By asking to join the Reitox network as explained in question 15, candidate and potential candidate countries are already fulfilling one of the requirements of the accession process. This is seen as a positive step in the process of aligning their respective national drug monitoring and reporting systems with the EU data collection processes.

15. How can my country join the Reitox network?

There are four different ways of taking part in the Reitox network:

- By becoming a member of the EU: at the end of the accession process, new EU Member States automatically become members of the Reitox network, if they were not already members before.

- By preparing for EU accession: candidate and potential candidate countries are invited to work with the EMCDDA and Reitox as part of the accession process. Technical cooperation activities are organised for these countries by the EMCDDA with the financial support of the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), so that they can familiarise themselves with the work of a Reitox national focal point.

- By establishing closer ties with the European Union in the case of neighbouring countries: the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) foresees the possibility for partner countries to participate in the work of European agencies, including the EMCDDA and its Reitox network. The countries are invited to express their interest and priorities to the European Commission, as a prerequisite to benefitting from any technical cooperation with the EMCDDA.

- By applying for a bilateral agreement to develop links with the EMCDDA: non-EU countries in general may participate in the work of the EMCDDA and the Reitox network on the basis of bilateral agreements negotiated with the European Commission on behalf of the European Union.



16. Where can I find the contact details for Reitox members?

All contact information on the current Reitox national focal points can be found at:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/about/partners/reitox-network

Additional information:

On responsibilities of the Reitox national focal points in the EMCDDA, refer to the Recast Regulation (EC) No 1920/2006 of 12 December 2006:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/about

On the EU drugs strategy 2005–12:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/policy-and-law/eu-activities

On data collection tools and reporting:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu

On the organisation, operation and main functions of national drug observatories, see EMCDDA/CICAD–OAS, *Building a national drugs observatory: a joint handbook*, 2010. Available at:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint/ndo-handbook

The publication is available in Arabic, Croatian, English, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish and Turkish.

On the European Neighbourhood Policy:
http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index_en.htm

On the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance:
http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/instrument-pre-accession_en.htm

For Frequently asked questions on the EU and the drugs phenomenon:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/joint-publications/eu-faq

Available in English, French and Russian.

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This information brochure has been produced by the EMCDDA to provide answers to the most commonly asked questions on the Reitox network of national focal points and more broadly on national drugs observatories. Compiled over several years, it is a reference tool for both EU Member States and countries further afield on the network, its members, its role and development.

About the EMCDDA

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) is the hub of drug-related information in Europe. Its mission is to provide the EU and its Member States with 'factual, objective, reliable and comparable information' on drugs, drug addiction and their consequences. Established in 1993, it opened its doors in Lisbon in 1995 and is one of the EU's decentralised agencies. With a 100-strong multidisciplinary team, the agency offers policymakers the evidence base they need for drawing up drug laws and strategies. It also helps professionals and researchers pinpoint best practice and new areas for analysis. As well as gathering information on the demand and reduction of the demand for drugs, the agency in recent years has extended its monitoring and reporting on drug supply, supply reduction and illicit drug markets.

www.emcdda.europa.eu

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