



Operating framework for the REITOX system

1. Introduction

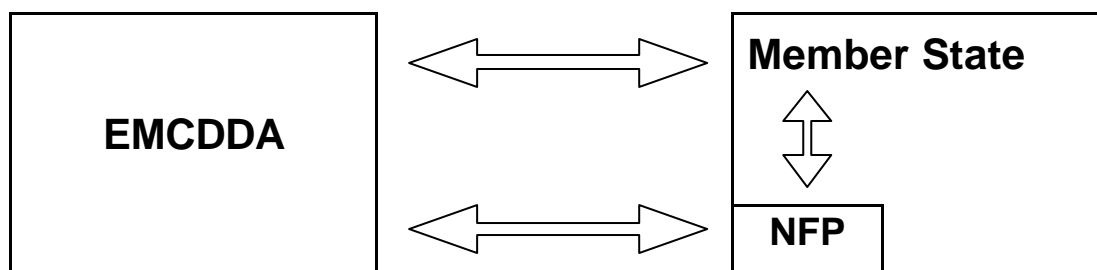
Following the conclusion, at the end of 2001, of the external evaluation of the Focal Points of the European Information Network on Drugs and Drug Addiction (REITOX), a working group composed of representatives of the EMCDDA Management Board (MB), the Scientific Committee (SC), the REITOX Focal National Points (NFPs) and the European Commission (EC) assisted the EMCDDA Executive Director in finding ways to improve the operating framework of the REITOX system.

The working group document 'Improving the National Focal Points and the REITOX system' was first discussed in the June 2002 Heads of FPs meeting, where it received a very positive feedback, and then put forward to the July 2002 meeting of the MB. The Board welcomed the document and the Chairman stressed that much stronger emphasis should be put on the responsibilities of the Member States to collect and deliver data. Nevertheless, the MB did not adopt the document since less than 2/3 of its members were in favour. It was decided by unanimity to put forward the present shorter document that summarises the most important findings of the aforementioned working group paper, which will continue to serve as a detailed background document. Where the background document proposed a 'targeted financing', including specific financing for capacity development and training, the finance chapter of the present document focuses on the EMCDDA's contribution to the financing of the work carried out (provision of data, analysis according to EMCDDA standards, participation in technical meetings) by the NFPs.

The present document follows the structure decided by the MB, as follows: the three-way relationship between the Member States (MSs), the NFPs and the EMCDDA and their respective role and responsibilities within the REITOX system; the NFPs tasking process; the NFPs' standard output requirements; the quality assurance of the NFPs' outputs; the NFPs' capacity development and training; and the financing of the NFPs.

2. Three-way relationship between the MS, the NFPs and the EMCDDA and their respective role and responsibilities within the REITOX system

The EMCDDA was created in 1993 by the MSs' unanimous approval of the founding Council Regulation. The main responsibility for assuring the well functioning of the Centre and high quality output lies with both partners: the EMCDDA and the MSs, with the NFPs playing a key role.



As far as the REITOX system is concerned, each partner has a particular role and subsequent responsibilities:

- **The MSs, through their representation in the MB, are responsible for:**
 - adopting the EMCDDA's three-year and annual work programmes (WPs);
 - adopting the binding guidelines¹ (e.g. the epidemiological key-indicators);
 - creating the conditions that allow a smooth execution of the EMCDDA's WPs;
 - creating the conditions that allow the full application of the binding guidelines at national level;
 - assuring the collection and transmission to the EMCDDA of high quality national data;
 - appointing the NFPs as well as assuring their continuity of service during the action period², according to the respective national regulations.

- **The MSs, through their representation in the SC, are responsible for:**
 - delivering an opinion on any scientific matter concerning the Centre's activities which the MB or the Director may submit to it;
 - providing an opinion on the (draft) EMCDDA three-year and annual WPs;
 - contributing to the establishment of guidelines for national reporting;
 - commenting on the quality of the EMCDDA Annual report;
 - following the work of the NFPs in the implementation of the EMCDDA's WPs, particularly with regard to the production of national reports and implementation of the five key indicators.

- **The EMCDDA is responsible for:**
 - facilitating the NFPs' production processes by providing annual guidelines;
 - analysing the data received from the NFPs and other sources;
 - assessing the quality of the NFP's inputs and providing feedback on quality;
 - improving data comparison methods;
 - producing and disseminating outputs (e.g. reports, policy briefings, etc.);
 - providing, where appropriate, targeted technical assistance;

The NFPs are the main information interface³ between the MSs and the EMCDDA and play as such a double role: first at national level, being the national authority, under MS' responsibility, for the provision of national drug information to the EMCDDA; and second at EU level, being a member of the REITOX network, which the EMCDDA has 'at its disposal' (Article 5 of the EMCDDA founding Council Regulation).

- **The NFPs, under MS' responsibility, are responsible for:**
 - collecting, harmonising and analysing national information according to EMCDDA standards and providing it to the EMCDDA;
 - monitoring and analysing national scientific, legal and policy developments;
 - coordinating and animating the national drug information network(s);
 - participating actively in the EMCDDA tasking processes;
 - executing the national REITOX WPs;
 - ensuring the production and dissemination of NFPs' outputs nationally.

¹ The decisions of the Management Board are obligatory for the EMCDDA and the national focal points and therefore 'binding'.

² The external evaluator recommends to increase the current financial and human resources of each NFP by 50% in order to cover all working areas that are in the three-year WP 2001-2003.

³ Other information providers used by the EMCDDA include: international organisations, transnational networks and EC programmes as well as national experts working in domains where the respective NFP does not dispose of enough expertise (e.g. in some cases the legal correspondents). For complementary insight the EMCDDA addresses itself to appropriate experts and institutes.

- **The NFPs, under EMCDDA guidance, are responsible for:**
- cooperating in the improvement of existing EMCDDA working areas;
 - cooperating in the conceptualisation of new key indicators and core data sets;
 - language checking and proof-reading of EMCDDA products and publications;
 - broad dissemination at national level of the EMCDDA and REITOX outputs.

The existing regulatory framework does not provide any definition of a NFP or its tasks nor does it describe the obligations of the MSs regarding the implementation of the key indicators or, more in general, the fulfillment of the tasks described in the EMCDDA work programmes. An adaptation of the EMCDDA founding Council Regulation to reflect the reality of the situation would facilitate the functioning of the REITOX system in its new framework.

3. Tasking process

The Management Board decides the EMCDDA's three-year and annual work programmes after consulting the Scientific Committee and seeking the opinions of the Commission and – for the three-year WP – of the Council. Within this framework the NFPs should be increasingly involved and consulted in the definition of three-year and annual tasks.

This chapter describes the process of translating the EMCDDA's three-year and yearly work programmes into NFPs' three-year and annual tasks.

Concerning the **three-year tasking process**, the EMCDDA sends, at an early stage, a framework paper stating the general objectives and working areas to be covered to the NFPs for consultation. Following this first consultation, work evolves in parallel between the EMCDDA and the NFPs as indicated in the table below:

Process for defining the NFPs' tasks in the EMCDDA three-year WP (period years n, n+1 and n+2)	
1 st quarter year n-1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMCDDA consults NFPs on general framework; • EMCDDA decides on the final draft of framework and sends it to NFPs;
2 nd quarter year n-1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFPs start drawing up their 3-year national REITOX WP; • NFPs consult with their national authorities & partners; • NFPs send finalised 3-year nat. REITOX WP to EMCDDA
3 rd quarter year n-1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-year nat. REITOX WPs are attached to the EMCDDA 3-year WP adopted by the MB • EMCDDA launches process for defining NFP tasks for the year n (see table below)

The **yearly tasking process** is based on the finalised three-year work programme (both the EMCDDA's and the national REITOX ones) and on the existing binding guidelines (e.g. for the key indicators). The process itself is described in the table below.

Process for defining the NFP tasks for the year n	
3 rd quarter year n-1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMCDDA consults the NFPs on the selected issues for the national reports year n (annual EMCDDA report year n+1); • EMCDDA decides on the selected issues.
4 th quarter year n-1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMCDDA consults the NFPs on the draft reporting guidelines for the year n; • NFPs and EMCDDA find consensus on the reporting guidelines (Heads of FP meeting); • EMCDDA consults NFPs on the draft WP for the year n; • EMCDDA consults NFPs of the EU Member States on the draft grant agreements⁴ for the year n.
January year n	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management Board decides the WP and the budget for the year n.
January/February year n	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFPs of the EU Member States and the EMCDDA conclude grant agreements for the year n.

Finally, the reporting guidelines for the NFPs are developed and constantly refined in a shared process involving the EMCDDA's scientific staff, the NFPs and REITOX Management.

4. Standard delivery of a NFP

The standard delivery expected from each NFP is determined by the EMCDDA's three-year and annual WPs as well as by specific technical guidelines and time schedules. NFPs participate in the development of all these fundamental documents. During the execution period of the 2001-2003 WP, the NFPs are requested to produce each year the following standard output⁵:

➤ **Information collected and analysed at national level:**

- Annual national report (once a year);
- Statistical standard tables and standard tables on responses (once a year);
- Data requested within the context of implementing the epidemiological key indicators (once a year);
- Information map regarding documentary sources (every third year);
- Data input into EMCDDA and REITOX information systems such as EDDRA, ELDD and the REITOX extranet (continuously);
- Joint action on new synthetic drugs: early warnings to the EMCDDA (without delay);
- Updates regarding national developments, e.g. operational, legal, institutional and political changes and events (as soon as available);
- Press clippings covering major national developments as well as EMCDDA and/or NFP events, e.g. launch of the Annual Report (as soon as available);
- Replies to ad hoc requests from the EMCDDA (individual deadlines).

⁴ The grant agreements include, among others, terms of reference giving a detailed description of the delivery for year n (see chapter 3)

⁵ This chapter has to be updated each time there is a new three-year WP, taking into account the impact on the resources requested.

- **Dissemination at national level:**
 - Distribution of EMCDDA reports and other products as well as their own national reports;
 - Joint action on new synthetic drugs: information from the EMCDDA to national partners (as soon as received);
 - Media relations at national level;
 - Responding to queries at national level or, where indicated, channelling such requests to the EMCDDA. Acting as the EMCDDA's 'ambassador' at national level;
 - Language checking and proof-reading of EMCDDA products.

- **Progress reports on the implementation of:**
 - the epidemiological key indicators at national level;
 - core data sets regarding the drug situation and responses at national level;
 - the EU joint action on new synthetic drugs at national level;
 - EDDRA and other EMCDDA information systems.

The details of the NFP delivery to the EMCDDA will, each year, be described in the terms of reference that are annexed to the grant agreements concluded between the Centre and each NFP of the EU Member States.

5. Quality assurance of the NFPs' outputs

The quality assurance process depends on the quality of the technical guidelines and terms of reference annexed to the grant agreements on which the EMCDDA and the NFPs agree at the end of each year (cp. to section 3. Tasking process above). The quality feedback provided by the EMCDDA comprises assessment of the NFPs' outputs, in particular, concentrating on the reliability, insight, usefulness, internal consistency and completeness of the national data provided.

The NFPs receive regular feedback on the quality of their outputs through the following process:

- the EMCDDA prepares quality assessment identifying strong/weak points and suggestions for improvement;
- the quality assessment is then discussed bilaterally with each NFP concerned;
- any major disputes or disagreements are settled through a consultation process involving if necessary the Scientific Committee and the respective MB member.

The REITOX Management at the EMCDDA is responsible for ensuring that the guidelines and quality assessment and feedback to the NFPs are produced and provided on a regular basis and in a timely manner. Accordingly, the NFPs are responsible to put in place similar quality assessment and feedback procedures with their national network partners.

The members of the Scientific Committee contribute to the establishment of the guidelines for the national reports and, subsequently, to the assessment of their country's national report and the EMCDDA Annual report (cp. to section 2. Three-way relationship above).

6. Capacity development and training

The NFPs of the REITOX system form a group of heterogeneous partners, each of them with its individual legal status and organisational structure. Furthermore, they have different levels of specialisation in the drugs field as well as of expertise and experience in domains such as data collection and harmonisation, policy analysis or dissemination. Many of them suffer from serious human resources problems such as understaffing, high turnover of staff or lack of

enough senior staff. Among the NFPs of the Candidate Countries, the heterogeneity is even greater. The progressive implementation of new working areas of the Centre will further increase the need for additional expertise and human resources at NFP level.

Efforts aimed at improving the quality of most of the up to 29 NFPs as well as of their national network partners should be made at national level. These should be accompanied by a coherent capacity-development and training programme consisting of projects in the three domains outlined below.

➤ **Development of new working areas and new/improved approaches for existing working areas**

The new working areas foreseen in the Centre's present and future three-year work programmes as well as new/improved approaches for existing working areas should be developed jointly by the partners possessing the highest level of expertise and experience in a given domain, e.g. experts/staff from NFPs, national network partners, staff from the EMCDDA, other experts. This programme module should contain the following elements:

- task forces – comprised of the most advanced partners – for conceptualising new key indicators and core data sets and for improving existing working areas;
- cluster meetings with other interested partners to discuss the feasibility of the implementation of new indicators or core data sets in less advanced Member States;
- pilot surveys in interested Member States for testing new data-collection approaches.

➤ **Exchange of expertise among NFPs, national networks partners and the EMCDDA**

Partners that have a high level of expertise and/or of experience in a given domain should support the ones that need to develop this domain. This programme module should contain the following elements:

- training sessions. Staff of NFPs, national network partners and/or the EMCDDA as well as, where appropriate, other experts should be the trainers;
- common projects as learning mechanisms;
- cluster meetings to strengthen cooperation and exchange of experience in matters of a directly operational nature. Specialised NFP and/or EMCDDA staff as well as, where appropriate, other experts to be involved in the preparation;
- exchange of staff between NFPs and the EMCDDA and among NFPs.

➤ **Specific support measures for NFPs and national networks**

NFPs that are lagging behind in certain domains as well as partners of less developed national networks should have the possibility to ask for specific support from other NFPs and/or the EMCDDA. Support projects for these poorest performers should be based on clearly defined objectives and be executed in a timeframe defined beforehand. This programme module should contain the following elements:

- specific training sessions for staff members of the respective NFP and/or national network concerned. Staff of other NFPs and/or the EMCDDA as well as, where appropriate, other experts should act as trainers;
- traineeships in other NFPs or at the EMCDDA;
- limited participation of qualified staff of other NFPs, the EMCDDA or other experts in the daily work of a poorly performing NFP.

Capacity-development and training projects should form part of the EMCDDA's three-year and annual work programmes, which are decided by the Management Board after consulting the Scientific Committee and seeking the opinions of the Commission and – for the three-year WP – of the Council. The EMCDDA's REITOX Management should coordinate their implementation. The responsibility for monitoring the execution of projects should be split between two partners: the Scientific Committee (or its subcommittees) should follow projects related to the EMCDDA programmes P1 - P4, while the Bureau of the Management Board should keep an eye on projects covering topics such as institution building, management or networking. An external contractor should evaluate the conception and execution of selected projects.

7. Financing of NFPs

The appointment, set-up and maintenance of each National Focal Point is the responsibility of each concerned Member State.

The financing of each NFP is governed by the standard EC model "Grant Agreement for an Action". The description of the Action, annexed to the Grant Agreement, has to be in line with the approved annual work programme.

Provided that the total eligible costs of the action amounts to at least 220.000 €, the EMCDDA grant will be 110.000 €. In exceptional cases where the total eligible costs of the action is less than 220.000 €, the EMCDDA grant will be 50% of the total eligible costs of the action.

It is up to each NFP concerned to formally apply for a grant from the EMCDDA. The NFPs should, each year, introduce their requests in September for the following year. Once the EMCDDA has received the requests, it will establish the grant agreements according to the rules and procedures used by the European Commission and according to the work programme and the budget for the year concerned.

All partners involved should try to make the activities and financing of the REITOX system as a whole, and the NFPs in particular, profit from synergy effects with existing EC programmes, such as the ones of DGs SANCO or RTD.

Annex: General model for National Focal Points

General model for National Focal Points

The technical competence of the National Focal Points (NFPs) should as much as possible mirror the wide range of subject areas the EMCDDA is in charge of. In domains where a NFP does not dispose of enough expertise (e.g. in some NFPs the role of the legal correspondents), it is the task of the NFP to identify another competent national partner that will, in close contact with the NFP, be in charge of a specific task. The technical and scientific know-how of the NFPs and the EMCDDA should develop in parallel and be evaluated as soon as there is a new EU Action Plan on drugs and/or a new three-year work programme of the EMCDDA. If needed, NFPs should acquire new skills, either through training or recruitment of adequate staff with the assistance of the EMCDDA through capacity development and training programmes adopted to cover a period of three years.

Each Member State should find for its NFP the structure and organisation that matches best with the EU tasks and the national context. However, structures exceedingly dispersed without a strong coordination unit should be avoided. Wherever possible, preference should be given to real National Monitoring Centres rather than to small NFPs relying often too much on external expertise and insufficiently organised national networks.

Each National Focal Point should:

- Be sure that it can rely on the national political support that is necessary for assuring stability and continuity of the NFP; e.g. through multi-annual framework agreements. At its national level each NFP should be recognised as the coordinator of the national drug information network(s) and 'the national authority' for providing drug information to the EMCDDA.
- Have at its disposal one or several national drug information network(s) allowing the collection of high quality national information and data in all areas covered by the EMCDDA's three-year WP. In countries where specific national networks do not exist they should be set up as a matter of priority.
- Have full access to all national and regional drug data relevant to the EMCDDA mandate. All data and information received by the NFP should go through a formal quality control mechanism
- Permanently have a sufficient level of staffⁱ. The team should have the necessary skills to cover all domains of the EU Action Plan and the EMCDDA's three-year WP. The main profiles could include: epidemiologist, sociologist or other social scientist, toxicologist, statistician, criminologist and policy analyst. Further skills requested concern: general management, communication and networking, editing and dissemination as well as secretarial support. At least half of the staff should have a certain degree of seniority and preferably clear scientific qualifications. All staff should have stable contracts and be fluent in English as a working language.
- Dispose of enough financial resourcesⁱⁱ to be in the position to produce the standard delivery as described in section 4 (Standard delivery of a NFP) of the 'Operating framework for the REITOX system' and as stated more precisely in the terms of reference that are annexed to the grant agreements. Each NFP should have a reliable financial medium-term planning.

ⁱ Recommendation of the external evaluator: 2 additional full time equivalents to cover the new working areas that are in the three-year WP 2001-2003

ⁱⁱ The external evaluator recommends to increase the current NFP budgets by 50% of their total financing in order to cover the working areas contained in the three-year WP 2001-2003