European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Reitox network

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 which is the agency's central conduit of data and information.

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

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More about the Reitox network:
emcdda.europa.eu/about/partners/reitox

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 abbreviation 'Reitox' stands for the French 'Réseau Européen d´Information sur les Drogues et les Toxicomanies'. The first meeting of Reitox members was held in 1995. The working language of the network is English.

2. Who are the 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' (NFPs) or 'national drug observatories' (NDO). The Regulation governing the EMCDDA requires that each EU Member State (MS) 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 EU Member States plus Turkey, Norway and the European Commission.

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

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. As an information interface between the EMCDDA and national level stakeholders, the mission of the Reitox network is as follows:

- to provide the Centre and national stakeholders with the best, most reliable, comparable, recent and comprehensive information on the drug situation;
- to meet the specific information needs of the primary customers at European and national levels, that is, decision-makers and practitioners working in the drugs field;
- to enhance the key role of evidence in European and national drug policies and responses, to further develop relevant methodologies and to represent the Centre at national level;
- to exchange knowledge and expertise among MS.

4. What are the Reitox network's main strategic objectives?

The Reitox network and its NFPs play a key role in the implementation of the EMCDDA's Strategy 2025, by being the agency's main partners in maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the national data providers and experts, as well as acting as the central conduit for structured data sets required by the Centre. To fulfil this role, the network adopted in 2017 a strategic document, entitled 'Reitox Development Framework', which set out four strategic objectives to direct its activities:

1. Maintain the Reitox monitoring system fit for purpose;
2. Strengthen the role of the NFPs in supporting decision-making and action at national level;
3. Improve the overall quality of the processes and deliverables of the NFPs;
4. Improve the coordination of, and cooperation within, the Reitox network.

5. What is a national focal point and is there a difference with a national drugs observatory?

An 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, 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 EMCDDA 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.

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

The NFPs are the cornerstone of the European drug monitoring and reporting system. On an annual basis, a NFP collects and produces comparable and scientifically sound data and information 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 EU 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. Finally, NFPs can also play a role in supporting the EMCDDA efforts to provide technical assistance to third countries, namely by sharing national and EU knowledge and methodologies in the framework of international cooperation projects managed by the agency.

7. 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 results and dissemination of information.

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.

8. How is Reitox managed?

Daily management of the network is entrusted to the EMCDDA's Reitox and external partners 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 deputy(ies); 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, the EMCDDA's main advisory body. 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. Finally, the Reitox and external partners unit and the Spokesperson's team meet regularly (monthly) through VTC to coordinate activities and exchange information relevant for the Centre and the network alike.

9. 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, covering information from health, justice and law enforcement areas. 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 potentially 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.

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

NFPs have a horizontal role, collecting and analysing, at national level, all relevant information on drugs and drug addiction as well as on policies and solutions applied, bringing together health, justice, law enforcement in cooperation with experts and national organisations active in the field of drugs policy. NFPs also contribute to the EMCDDA's key role in the detection, risk-assessment and control of new psychoactive substances in the EU. The monitoring system implies the collection of both quantitative data and qualitative information using different types of standardised data collection and reporting tools:

- standard tables for quantitative data collection, reported to the EMCDDA every year;
- guidelines for writing workbooks which provide contextual information and complement the figures reported through the other templates. This national reporting is annual.

- information on new psychoactive substances related to the detection and identification, use and patterns of use, manufacture, extraction, distribution and distribution methods, trafficking, and commercial, medical and scientific use of, and potential and identified risks posed by, those substances.

11. 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.

12. How are Reitox national focal points financed?

The appointment, setting up, functioning and maintenance of a national focal point/national drug observatory is the responsibility of the national authorities. However, the EMCDDA co-finances national focal points in EU Member States by means of a 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 institutions, and the NFPs are called upon to ensure adequate synergy with existing EC programmes to avoid overlap.

13. What is a 'Reitox Academy'?

A 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, the European Neighbourhood Policy countries (ENP) and other priority 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.

14. 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 and 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.

15. 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 may be 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 16, 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.

16. How can my country join or cooperate with the Reitox network?

There are four different ways of taking part in, or cooperating with, 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 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.
- 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.

17. Where can I find the contact details of Reitox members?

Contact information on the current NFPs:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/about/partners/reitox

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

Reitox Development Framework:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/work-programmes-and-strategies/reitox-development-framework_en

EU drugs strategy 2013-20:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/document-library/eu-drugs-strategy-2013-20_en

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

Building a national drugs observatory:a joint handbook, 2010:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint/ndo-handbook
(available in Arabic, Croatian, English, French, Italian, Potruguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish)

European Neighbourhood Policy:
https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/international-affairs/european-neighbourhood-policy_en

Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance:
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview_en

FAQs on the EU and the drugs phenomenon:
http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/joint-publications/eu-faq
(available in English, French and Russian)