

## UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS BETWEEN DRUG USE AND CRIMINALITY

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**Abstract:** *Psychotropic substances are regulated by international conventions and the national laws of states worldwide. Drugs are prohibited primarily throughout these regulations. However, narcotics' use also contributes to other forms of crime in addition to the fact that they are unlawful to possess in the first place: drug trafficking, the establishment of organized criminal networks for this purpose, drug-related crimes against individuals, crimes against property, and crimes against public road traffic safety. Since the middle of the 1960s, American sociologists and criminologists have been examining the issue of drug-related criminality. The study of the criminality brought on by drug use has garnered interest over time in other societies as well, and many specialists worldwide keep investigating the dynamics of this occurrence even today. This concern is also present at the level of national and international public authorities, whose statistics and publications, which are periodically released, provide an overview of the phenomenon. The goals of the current study are to provide a better understanding of the connection between drug use and crime and to provide a comprehensive picture of drug-related offenses worldwide, in Europe and in the last ten years in Romania, using both qualitative and quantitative methods: study of specialized literature, comparison of research findings, and methodical assessment of available statistics. The results of the study highlight that drug-related crimes are a worldwide problem. In Romania, although certain fluctuations in the trends were noted in the last ten years, this issue is still present in our country. Also, it was noted that some statistics comply with explanatory models used by theoreticians.*

**Keywords:** narcotics; criminality; illicit drugs; prison; new psychoactive substances

### 1. Short historical facts

Drug use has been part of human history since ancient times, and the narcotics we know today as illicit were originally legal and socially accepted. As specified by Antoine and Maurie Porot (1996/1999, pp. 70–140), the euphoric effects of cannabis resin were known by priests in India, who used it in religious processions. After being kept secret for a long time, it also spread to the profane world, first in India, then in the Near East (Egypt, Persia, Asia Minor). Most likely, with the Arab invasions, it was also introduced to North Africa, thereupon becoming known in Spain, and America was the last conquest of cannabis resin. There are records from the 1850s of Peruvians chewing coca leaves to increase their resistance to fatigue, hunger, and thirst. By the 1860s, the active alkaloid, cocaine, had been extracted. Sigmund Freud personally tried it in 1884 but stopped using it when he noticed its dangerous effects. In World War II, amphetamines were used by campaign armies to combat fatigue. At the same time, certain women used them irresponsibly to lose weight, as amphetamines suppressed the feeling of hunger. It should be noted that amphetamines were also prescribed to treat some forms of hyperactivity in children.

When we consider the use of opium, opiates, coca, and cocaine in the nineteenth century in America, we are looking at an era of wide availability and unrestricted advertising of these substances (Musto, 1991: 42). As history shows us, all the narcotics that we know today as illegal enjoyed, in the first phase, not only acceptance by society but also a lot of popularity, being consumed without any type of restriction. When time showed the harmful effects of these substances, they came under the law as we know it today.

Before the events of 1989, drug consumption in Romania represented an exceptional aspect, and in the few cases identified, the users were citizens of another nationality. Among other factors that led to the increase in national drug use were the tolerant laws regarding drug use in certain Western European states. Consumption was introduced to Romania by foreign citizens, who attracted Romanian citizens to this behavior. Also, Romanian citizens who initially became drug users abroad and remained with this behavior contributed substantially to the expansion of the phenomenon of narcotic use after their return to their home country (Andreescu, Iliescu, and Enuță, 2019: 73).

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Conceptual clarifications on drugs**

The French psychiatrists, Antoine and Maurie Porot (1996/1999, p. 14), well known in the medical world for their contributions in the field of drug addiction, define drug as "a natural or synthetic substance capable of leading to an addiction".

Drug addiction (or dependence) is defined by the Canadian physician specialized in drug addiction research, Harold Kalant (2001, pp. 21-27), as drug usage that a person could not consciously stop, and losing control over drinking is regarded as a crucial component of substance dependence. The focus is on how much the drug use controls the person's life, as evidenced by things like a persistent obsession with obtaining and using the substance and an unwillingness to stop using it even when its negative effects make it absolutely necessary. Drug addiction is of two kinds: psychological and physical, both referring to the imperative need to continue drug consumption, in order to obtain a state of well-being or to avoid a state of ill-health (Abraham, Cicu, Podaru, et al., 157: 2005).

Psychological dependence is characterized by beliefs: a person believes that he needs the respective substance to cope with problems. Physical dependence, on the other hand, is defined by the concrete physical changes associated with drug consumption, which may result in withdrawal symptoms and tolerance (Blume, 2005/2011: 45)

Drugs can be classified in several ways: according to their physical structure (liquid, solid, gaseous), according to their chemical structure (natural, semi-synthetic, synthetic), according to their legal status (legal or illegal) and according to their effects on the central nervous system. From the point of view of the effects that drugs have on the body, the last classification is the most revealing.

As structured by professor Howard Abadinsky (2011, pp. 7-12), according to their main effects on the central nervous system, drugs can be divided into three categories, as follows:

#### *a) Depressants*

Depressants can reduce pain by depressing the central nervous system. Alcohol is the legal substance in this category that is used the most often. The opiate derivative, heroin is the illegal substance most frequently used. Additional depressants include morphine, codeine, methadone, OxyContin, barbiturates and tranquilizers, all of which have some sort of medicinal utility. These substances can produce physical and psychological dependence, along with a craving and withdrawal.

#### *b) Stimulants*

By activating the brain functions, stimulants boost mood and foster emotions of wellbeing. The most commonly used substances in this category are coffee and nicotine, which are legal. Cocaine and amphetamines are considered prohibited stimulants.

#### *c) Disruptors of the central nervous system: hallucinogens, "club drugs," marijuana/cannabis*

Perceptual functions are altered by hallucinogens. The term "hallucinogen" has more connotations than terms like "psychoactive" or "psychedelic". The two chemically generated hallucinogens that are most frequently used are LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) and PCP (phencyclidine). Moreover, there are organic hallucinogens like mescaline, which is derived from the peyote plant.

Club drugs, including MDMA, also known as ecstasy, are psychoactive chemicals connected to dance parties or raves.

Cannabis, which is widely smoked as marijuana, exhibits some of the characteristics of depressants, hallucinogens and even stimulants. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive component of it, is only used legally to treat glaucoma and lessen some of the negative effects of cancer chemotherapy.

In addition to traditional drugs, a new category of drugs has appeared in recent world history: the new psychoactive substances. The term "new psychoactive substances" is a general one, as it refers to substances that imitate the effects of classic illicit drugs but are not controlled by drug legislation. The main categories of new psychoactive substances are: synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones, ketamine, phenethylamines, piperazines, herbal substances: Khat, Kratom, Salvia and others: phencyclidine, tryptamines, etc. (Smith, Sutcliffe and Banks, 2015: 4932).

The use of new psychoactive substances appeared in Romania in 2008, experiencing an accelerated growth in recent years, but also with decreases and returns generated by the implementation of legislative measures. The new psychoactive substances are known as "ethnobotanicals" or "legal drugs". In addition to the health problems, it can cause loss of appetite, weight loss, personality disorders, physical exhaustion, etc., after a period of time, and depending on the frequency of consumption and the routes of administration, these substances can cause the user's death (Botescu, 2011: 10-12).

Starting with 2011, Law no. 194 of November 7, 2011 regarding the combating of operations with products likely to have psychoactive effects, other than those provided by the normative acts, entered into force. Therefore, dealing with these substances has become illegal in Romania since then.

## **2.2. Conceptual clarifications on criminality**

Deviance represents everything that contradicts the public image of "normal". Therefore, no deviant behavior can be defined, except through the cultural norms of a certain society (Rădulescu, 2004: 83-84). The Romanian sociologist Dumitru Batâr (2014, p. 69) draws attention to the fact that deviance cannot be confused or identified with nonconformism, because deviance refers to a system of norms, values and traditions that belong to the entire society.

According to Talcott Parsons (*apud* Rădulescu, 2004: 83), deviance represents a failure of social solidarity, which disrupts the relationships between the social roles that unite individuals. The people in question consciously break the social rules, by their refusal to act according to the indications provided by the normative cultural model of the social group to which they belong. Deviance is, therefore, a refusal of conformity and a protest against the demands of order in the system of which the individual is a part.

The American sociologists Marshall B. Clinard and Robert F. Meier (2011, p. 112) highlight that deviant behavior also includes criminal behavior. A violation of the law, which is a specific form of norm, constitutes a crime. In reality, there are two ways to look at a crime: as a breach of the criminal law or as a violation of any law that results in state punishment. Sociologists define a crime as any action that is thought to have negatively impacted society and is punishable by the government, regardless of the severity of the punishment. On the other hand, Romanian criminologist Tudor Amza (2002, p. 32) considers that "criminality is

constituted of all crimes that occur in a certain period of time and in a well-determined place". Criminologists often group it into three main categories: street crime (property, conventional or street crimes), white-collar crime and juvenile crime (Clinard and Meier, 2011: 112).

### **3. Correlations between drug use and criminality**

In Romania, the very possession and purchase of drugs for own consumption constitutes a crime, which can result in a prison sentence, according to article 4 of Law 143/2000 on the prevention and combating of drug trafficking and illicit consumption.

The problem of drugs goes far beyond committing the crime of possession of drugs for own consumption. Compulsive drug use is a disease, not a crime, which will eventually lead to serious medical problems and most of the time, poor chances of recovery. In the social area, drug use leads to problems that are very difficult to manage, starting with school dropout, family violence, deviant behavior, and going as far as committing crimes in order to support an addiction. Working with people who are in recuperative treatment after drug addiction, has shown that behind every case of addiction there is a history that could justify the person's refuge in the world of drugs.

The drug problem is still complicated by the great diversity of substances, their effects on the central nervous system and the body, and the types of addictions that develop. There is also a strong connection between drugs and criminality, a problem infinitely more complex than the stereotype of an addicted user who commits heinous acts under the influence of drugs or in order to get money to support an addiction.

Ruth Goatly (2002, p. 392) believes that there are three ways in which drug use is related to criminality: as part of the crime (e.g.: possession of illicit drugs for personal use), as a means of facilitating the production of crimes as a result of drug use (by reducing inhibitions), or as a result of the consumption of illicit substances (to obtain drugs directly or to obtain the money necessary to procure drugs).

The results of a study carried out in the mid-1970s in U.S.A. illustrates the strong connection between heroin use and crime. Out of a total of 4,069 male opiate addicts in Baltimore, a probability-based sample of 243 addicts was selected. A detailed examination of the sample's criminal history throughout an 11-year risk period, during which they were "on the street," was conducted through interviews. These 243 heroin addicts were determined to have committed more than 473,000 offenses. The average addict committed more than 178 crimes annually and nearly 2,000 crimes in his lifetime, as determined by crime-days. Like with other criminal communities, stealing was the most common crime done by these addicts, but they were also involved in drug sales, robberies, forgeries, pimping, assaults, and murder. The authors of the study estimated that the 450,000 heroin addicts in the US commit more than 50,000,000 crimes annually and more than 819,000,000 crimes over the course of their lifetimes (Ball, Rosen, Flueck, *et al.*, 1982: 225).

The nature of the drug-criminality relationship, however, is not clear. Is the addict usually an adolescent who did not commit a crime before he/she became addicted and who was later forced to commit crimes to obtain money to support the drug addiction? In other words, does drug abuse lead to crime? These questions can go on and many aspects are still unanswered. But on one point several researchers agree: regardless of the temporal or causal sequence of drug abuse and crime, the frequency and severity of crime increases with the user's dependence. Drug abuse cannot "produce" criminal behavior, but it can increase it (Adler, Mueller and Laufer, 1995: 320-325).

Three explanatory models are used by White and Gorman (2000, p. 170) to explain the connection between drugs and crime:

- a) *substance use causes crime;*
- b) *crime causes substance use;*

*c) the association can be attributed to a number of common factors or is merely coincidental.*

In relation to the first explanatory model (substance use causes crime), according to certain research, drug use, particularly the use of heroin, contributes to crime. Certain crimes, like drug theft or shoplifting or burglary that results in money used right away to buy drugs, appear to have a direct connection to drug usage. A substantial body of research, primarily from the USA, supports this claim (Measham and South, 2012: 706-707).

The second exploratory model (crime causes substance use) has evidence from studies supporting the opposing proposition of the first model. According to certain research, those who use heroin or other dangerous drugs were likely already engaged in criminal or delinquent behavior before they started using them. According to the British sociologists Fiona Measham and Nigel South (2012, p. 706), this side makes the following claims: (a) participation in deviant/criminal-oriented subcultures or groups would be likely to expose someone to the availability of drugs distributed within that culture; (b) they'd live an unconventional lifestyle that would make it relatively easy for them to engage in drug use; and (c) they'd make money from illegal activity.

The third explanatory model used by White and Gorman is a more extended one, that allows for various interpretations. According to this model, drug use and criminal activity are not directly correlated, and the relationship between drug use and criminality is influenced by factors such as a weak social support system, academic challenges, or exposure to dysfunctional groups. Studies have shown that involvement in acquisitive crime, which primarily involves minor shoplifting, tends to occur before the initial use of heroin and crack cocaine, but involvement in more serious crimes, such as street crime, may tend to happen after regular use has been established (Allen, 2005: 356). On the other hand, the American experts David Nurco, John Ball, John Shaffer and Thomas Hanlon (1985, p. 101) highlight that drug use and crime are causally linked, with crime rising during active dependency and falling during non-dependence. This is well supported by the research. Self-reports released information that permitted reliable estimations of criminal activity and the classification of various addict subgroups. Although drug users as a group commit a lot of crime, this does not make them a homogeneous class in terms of criminal activity.

American criminologists Richard Dembo, Linda Williams, Werner Wothke and James Schmeidler (1994, pp. 1435-1436) also studied this issue and compared the association between drug use and criminality when examining adolescent offenders. They came to the conclusion that a number of factors, including familial drug and alcohol use, emotional issues, and prior juvenile arrests, all contributed to persistent drug use and delinquent behavior.

Romanian sociologists were also concerned about the study of drug and crime connection. In a study carried out in 2013 on the situation of adolescents in Romania, coordinated by the Romanian sociologist Abraham Dorel, it was highlighted the increase of criminal behavior among investigated adolescent drug users, in order to obtain income to procure doses of new psychoactive substances, given that the effects of these substances are shorter compared to other types of drugs and users have to take them more frequently, resulting in more daily doses (Abraham, Abraham, Dalu, *et al.*, 2013: 40).

In another research carried out in 2018, a number of 17 individuals who committed property crimes (aged between 26 and 30 at the time of the interview) and were sentenced to non-custodial sentences were interviewed. Of these, 9 adopted new illegal behaviors during the probation period, for which the application of custodial penalties was ordered and 8 successfully completed the probation period. All 17 participants indicated that at least at some point in their lives they had consumed alcohol or drugs in excess, and 6 of these individuals admitted to having experienced drug addiction in the past. However, what emerges from the analysis of the life stories of the interviewed persons is that the involvement in illegal acts was not governed by the need to maintain the consumption or addiction to substances. The

addiction was installed later, mainly because of the disposal of money and due to the influence of the peer group. In other words, the individuals had already started their criminal careers before the abuse of alcohol or psychoactive substances was manifested. On the other hand, four of the participants in the interviews showed that due to the daily use of drugs, which involved the disposal of quite large sums of money, in certain periods of their lives they dealt with substance trafficking, their interest being to ensure their own consumption (Gheorghe, 2018: 165-178).

#### 4. Statistical analysis of crimes related to drug use

The research method used in this study is the analysis of statistical data available worldwide, in Europe and in Romania. Sociology can make use of statistics to organize, serialize, systematize, concentrate, or correlate empirical data. Although data analysis does not replace theoretical analysis, it does provide a foundation for systematizing the meanings that are inherent in social data. Without eradicating qualitative analysis or data interpretation, statistics assisted in establishing the so-called quantitative statistics (Vlăsceanu, 1998: 94). To capture the quantitative characteristics of the facts and processes under study, sociological knowledge requires a statistical approach (Otovescu, 2009: 133).

##### 4.1. Global and European overview

Worldwide, according to The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022, p.15), in 2019, 5.6% of the general global population (aged 15-64) used at least once an illicit drug.

The Penal Reform International (2022, pp. 6-11) estimates that the global prison population consists in aprox. 11 milion individuals., of which 2.2 milion convicted for drug related crimes, representing 19,1 % of the global prison population.

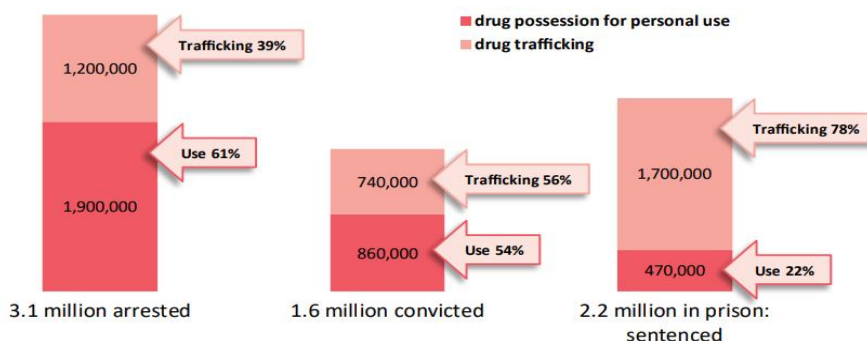
**Figure 1. Number of worldwide individuals in prison**



Source: Penal Reform International, 2022

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020, p. 56) provides an overview of the number of worldwide individuals that are in conflict with the criminal law for drug regime crimes (both drug trafficking and drug possession for personal use). Given that 61% of the 3.1 million individuals worldwide are detained for drug possession for personal use, it is clear from the amount of convictions that only 22% of those who commit this type offence receive prison sentences, with the remaining 72% being found guilty for drug trafficking.

**Figure 2. Worldwide individuals in the criminal justice system for drug-related offences (estimated number)**

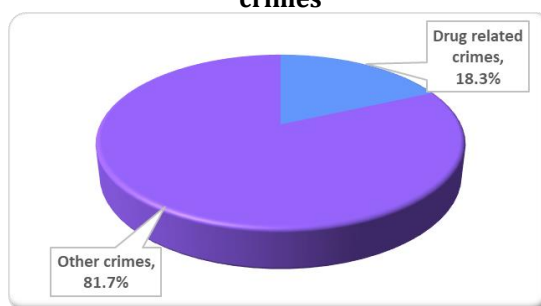


Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020: 56

At the European level, in the latest report of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2022, p.8), it is estimated that in 2020, 29% of the general European population (aged between 15 and 64 years) used at least once in their lifetime an illicit drug, this percentage corresponding to a number of approx. 83.4 million adults.

According to Aebi and Tiago (2020, pp. 50-51), on 31st January 2020, 18,3% of the prison population in Europe were convicted for drug-related crimes, as presented in Figure no. 3.

**Figure 3. Percentage of the European prison population convicted for drug-related crimes**



Source: Aebi and Tiago, 2020

In Table No. 1, it is shown how on 31st January 2020, drug-related convictions from all European countries are distributed in relation to the total prison population, Latvia having the highest percentage of these type of convictions.

**Table 1: Distribution of individuals convicted for drug crimes in Europe on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020**

Country	Total number of sentenced prisoners	Drug offences	
		Number	%
Albania	2 777	774	27.9
Andorra	30	2	6.7
Azerbaijan	17 643	5 108	29.0
Bulgaria	5 625	666	11.8
Croatia	2 190	121	5.5
Cyprus	542	148	27.3

Denmark	2 558	636	24.9
Estonia	1 984	511	25.8
Finland	2 074	425	20.5
France	49 576	9 034	18.2
Georgia	7 986	2 093	26.2
Germany	50 589	6 796	13.4
Greece	8 105	2 381	29.38
Hungary	13 165	881	6.7
Iceland	136	47	34.6
Ireland	3 218	358	11.1
Italy	41 679	13 114	31.5
Latvia	2 465	1 089	44.2
Liechtenstein	3	1	33.3
Lithuania	5 412	800	14.8
Luxembourg	327	58	17.7
Malta	564	142	5.2
Moldova	5 598	460	8.2
Monaco	9	0	0
Montenegro	727	129	17.7
Netherlands	5 541	941	17.0
North Macedonia	1 811	299	16.5
Norway	2 211	531	24.0
Poland	65 079	2 344	3.6
Portugal	10 522	1 862	17.7
Romania	18 525	829	4.5
San Marino	0	0	0
Serbia	7 862	1 921	24.4
Slovak Rep.	8 924	1 133	12.7
Slovenia	1 048	146	13.9
Spain	49 011	8 337	17.0
Sweden	4 834	1 071	22.2
Switzerland	3 669	697	19.0
Turkey	250 594	64 528	25.8
UK: Engl. & Wales	72 798	11 121	15.3
UK: North. Ireland	1 010	87	8.6
<b>Average</b>			<b>18.3</b>
<b>Median</b>			<b>17.7</b>
<b>Minimum</b>			<b>0</b>
<b>Maximum</b>			<b>44.2</b>

Source: Aebi and Tiago, 2020

#### 4.2. Drug use impact on criminal behavior in Romania

In Romania, according to the latest General Population Survey, the prevalence of any illicit drug in the general population was 10.7% over the course of a lifetime, 6% over the course of the previous year, and 3.9% over the course of the previous month (Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2020: 7).

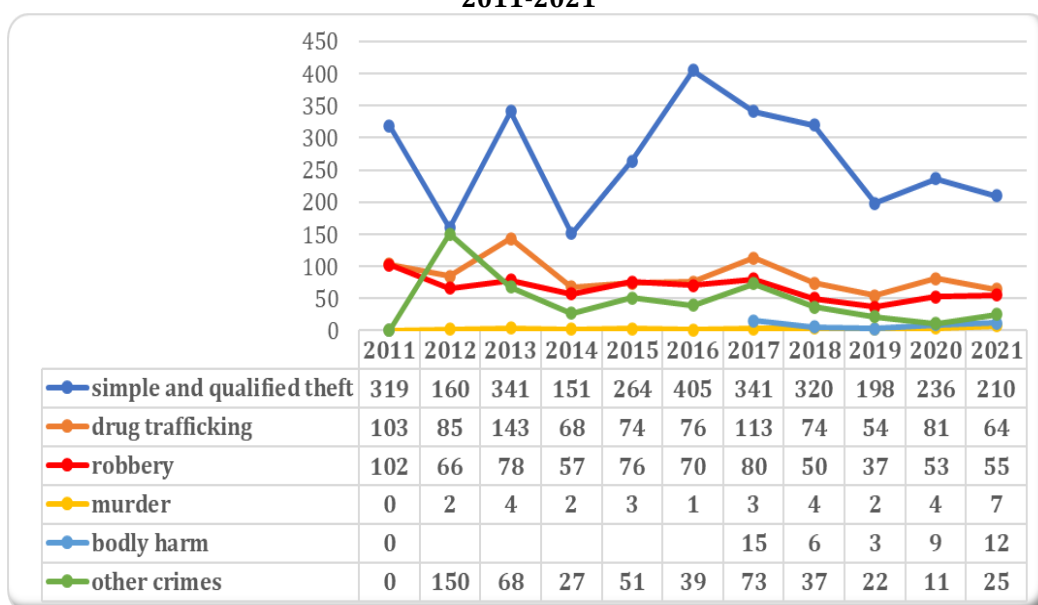
There are two types of crimes related to substance use: drug regime crimes, provided by special laws and drug related crimes, provided by the Criminal Code. Among the main crimes provided by the special laws, we find: possession of drugs for personal consumption, national and international trafficking, making available a space for consumption or for tolerating consumption, encouraging the illicit consumption of high-risk drugs (all these crimes are related Law no. 143/2003) and carrying out without right operations with products that are likely to have psychoactive effects (Law no. 194/2011). Among the main categories of drug



related crimes against the person and crimes against property, provided by Title I and Title II of the Romanian Criminal Code and crimes against traffic safety on public roads, provided by Title VII, Chapter II of the Criminal Code.

An examination of the information pertaining to those who were held in preventive detention at the level of Detention and Preventive Arrest Centers 77 of the Detention and Preventive Arrest Service under the General Directorate of Police of the Municipality of Bucharest highlights that, over time, crimes against property, particularly simple theft and aggravated theft, are the most common crimes done by those who use drugs (Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022: 225). These statistics comply with one of the explanatory models used by White and Gorman (2000, p. 170): *substance use causes crime*, in which certain crimes, like shoplifting or burglary that result in money are used right away to buy drugs.

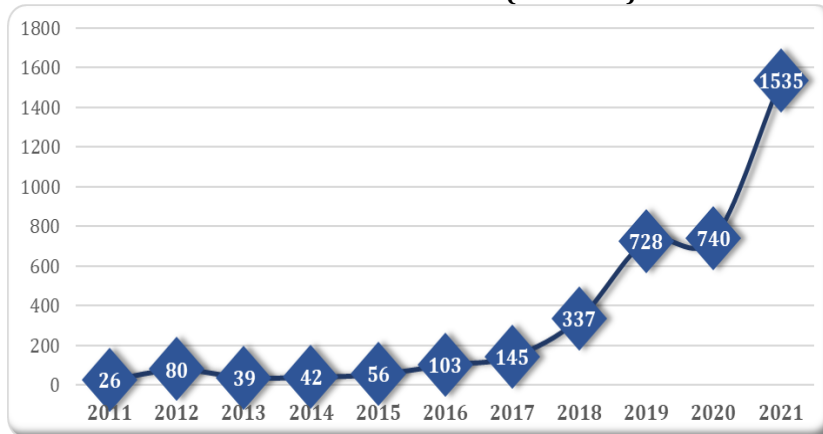
**Figure 4. Arrested persons in Bucharest who declared themselves drug users at the time of incarceration, depending on the type of crime committed, in the period 2011-2021**



Source: Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022

The number of offenses involving driving while under the influence of psychoactive substances, as defined by the provisions of article 336 paragraph (2) of the Criminal Code, shows a significant increase, from 26 in 2011, to 1535 in 2021 (Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022: 225)

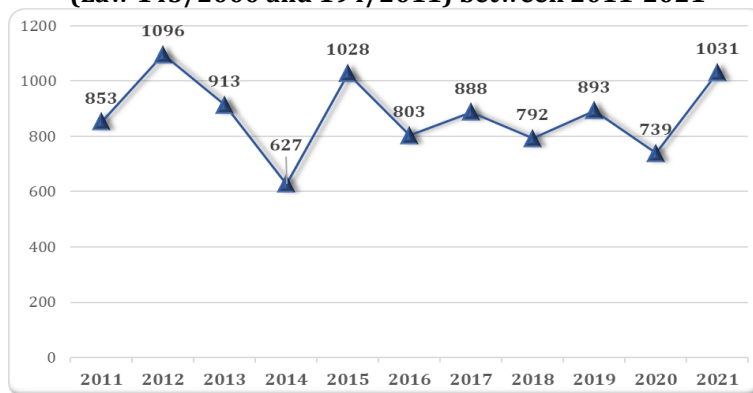
**Figure 5. Crimes involving driving while influenced by psychoactive substances between 2011 and 2021 (numbers)**



Source: Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022

According to the National Antidrug Report, in 2021, 1031 individuals were convicted for offences under the drug regime (Law no. 143/2000) and new psychoactive substances (Law no. 194/2011), compared to 739 individuals convicted in 2020. Those 1031 individuals convicted in 2021, represent 27.54% of the total number of individuals definitely convicted at the tribunal level and 3.05% at the national level (all courts) (Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022: 216). As a result, the number of people found guilty of offenses related to drug regime crimes increased by 39.51% in 2021, compared to 2020.

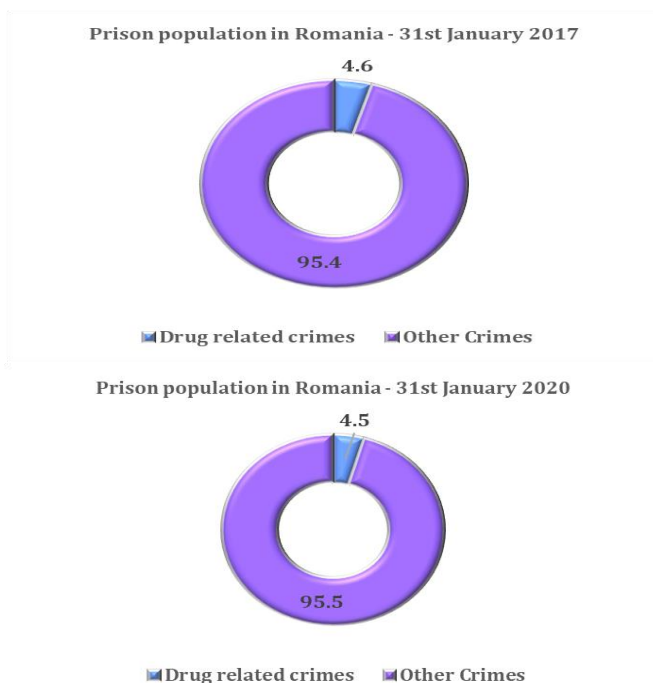
**Figure 6: Number of individuals convicted for drug regime crimes (Law 143/2000 and 194/2011) between 2011-2021**



Source: Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022

The statistical data available (Administrația Națională a Penitenciarelor, 2017, p.4; Aebi and Tiago, 2020, pp. 50-51) regarding the prison population convicted for drug-related crimes in Romania emphasize that their proportion has remained at a constant level (4.6% out of the total prison population in 2017 and 4.5% in 2020).

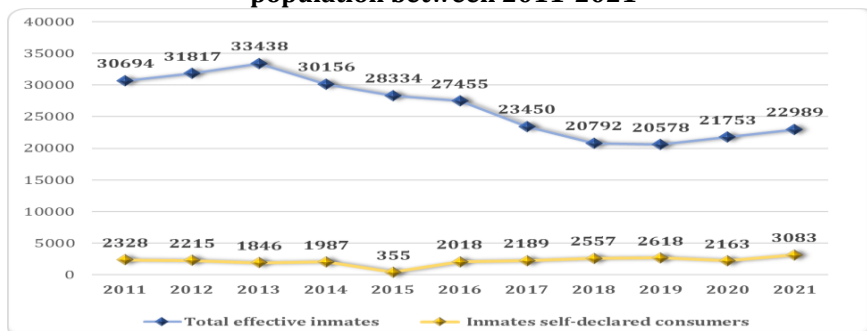
**Figure 7: Percentage of the Romanian prison population convicted for drug-related crimes (data from 31<sup>st</sup> January 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020)**



Source: Administrația Națională a Penitenciarilor, 2017; Aebi and Tiago, 2020

According to the data provided by the National Administration of Penitentiaries to the National Antidrug Agency, in 2021, 3083 persons who are convicted to custodial sentences self-declared drug users when entering the prison system (Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022: 240). Compared to the previous year, there is a significant increase of 42.6%. Regarding their proportion in the total prison population, the percentage is 13.5%, registering an increase of 3.6 percentage points compared to the previous year. The average of the last 10 years of people who, upon entering the penitentiary, declared themselves drug users reveal that they represent, between 2011 and 2021, 8.5% of the total prison population.

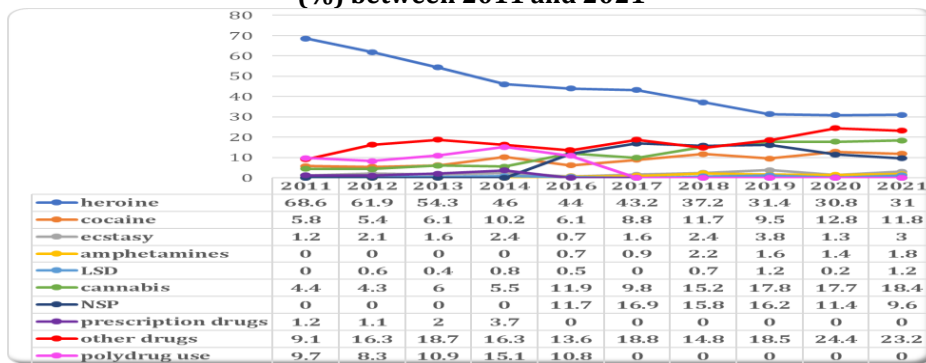
**Figure 8: Self-declared drug users compared to the country's overall prison population between 2011-2021**



Source: Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022

Between 2011 and 2021, heroin was the main used drug, as reported detainees upon entering the prison facilities, although a decrease can be observed over time. Compared to 2011, a decrease of 37.7 percentage points can be noticed in 2021. In terms of self-reported cannabis use when entering custody (18.4%), the trend remains constant from 2018 to 2021, although it should be noted that the numbers are three times higher than they were from 2011 to 2014. While cocaine is cited by 11.8% of those who self-declared drug users upon entering the jail, the NSP records the lowest value (9.6%) of the monitoring period in 2021. The use of "other substances" (23.2%), without identifying the substance, has increased over the past two years of monitoring, and in 2021 it will have doubled from what was reported in 2011 (Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022: 241)

**Figure 9. Self-declared drug users' percentage distribution by type of substance used (%) between 2011 and 2021**



Source: Agenția Națională Antidrog, 2022

## 5. Conclusions

Although it is also well recognized among sociologists and criminologists that a significant percentage of real crime (defined as all criminal acts, whether or not they are reported to the authorities) eludes researchers (Amza, 2002: 36) and even though illicit drug use is a hidden phenomenon and "the validity of social statistics is conditioned by the visibility of facts, phenomena, and processes to be recorded" (Chelcea, Mărginean, Cauc, 1998: 345), the available statistical data still gives us an overview of the proportion of criminality generated by drug use. Nonetheless, as these data only represent reality that has been reported to the authorities, they should be cautiously read.

Statistics show that 19.1% of the global prison population, respectively 18.3% of the European prison population, and 4.5% of the Romanian prison population are convicted for drug-related crimes, our country being significantly below the global and European average. This proportion of the prison population is in accordance with the 8.5% of self-declared drug users in the Romanian penitentiary system in the last 10 years, noting that they not only represent those with drug regime crimes convictions but also those with convictions for other types of offenses (e.g., theft, robbery, etc.). As can be seen, offenses against property (simple and qualified theft) are the main crimes committed by the drug users who were arrested in Bucharest.

Although being below the global and European average in the prison population convicted for drug-related crimes, certain fluctuations in trends can be noticed in the analyzed period (2011-2021). This issue is still present in Romania, and the need to implement rehabilitation programs for both drug users and individuals convicted of drug offenses is one that should not be neglected.

American sociologists and criminologists have been studying the issue of drug-related criminality since the middle of the 1960s, and many researchers from different societies have developed an interest in the study of this phenomenon over time. Certain exploratory models elaborated 20 years ago are still reflected in today's official statistics.

It should be highlighted that no theory or exploratory model is exhaustive. Some of them are complementary and, in some cases, even antagonistic to one another. When we examine criminality caused by drug use, empirical investigations and sociological research demonstrate that this social phenomenon cannot be explained by a single explanatory model. Most of the time, it is a sequence of events, where one link may play a more important role than other.

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