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Drug trafficking cases in the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) have tripled in the last decade/ Young people use drugs from 11-14 years old in secondary school (analysis)

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The National Anti-Drug Agency (ANA) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI) reported, at the request of G4Media, that in the last five years, the number of minors admitted to treatment for drug use has increased from 196 to 278, while the number of children under 15 has increased from 32 to 60. The age of onset is „13 years or younger”.

In Romanian schools and high schools, however, the phenomenon seems out of control, according to a [G4Media analysis](#). According to DIICOT activity reports, cases of drug use and trafficking have tripled in Romania, but the institution does not have statistics on the most consumed or most trafficked drug among young people or on the countries of origin for each drug entering Romania, prosecutors said in a response to G4Media.

Drugs in secondary school

DIICOT does not have statistics on the most consumed or most trafficked drug among young people, nor on the countries of origin of drugs entering Romania, the institution said in a response to G4Media.

„We would like to mention that there is no statistical data on the most commonly consumed/trafficked drug among minors or the countries of origin,” DIICOT sent. However, the extent of the drug phenomenon in Romania can be seen from the DIICOT’s activity reports over the last five years. For example, in the 2018 report, the chapter on drugs was summarized in two pages, and then details about the complexity of the phenomenon, routes and new drugs, specific elements of that year, took up three times more space in the reports.

Thus, according to DIICOT reports, in the last decade, the number of cases to be solved on drug trafficking has tripled in Romania, from around 6,500-7,000 cases 10 years ago to over 21,000 in 2022. The number of indictments has also tripled, while the number of people prosecuted has increased by 2.5 times and the number of people arrested by 1.5 times.

In terms of consumption trends, according to information provided by the DIICOT over the last five years, there is an increasing trend in the use and seizures of cannabis, which in 2022 was the „most commonly used” drug among the population, but without a clear picture of consumption among young people. However, Romania still remains below the European average in terms of consumption for most types of drugs. In terms of market value, prosecutors claim that drugs trafficked across the EU represent a source of income for criminal groups worth €30bn.

In terms of age of users, the 2022 DIICOT report shows that drugs are consumed as early as secondary school (11-14 years), compared to the 2019 report which gave the lowest age as 16 years and an average age of debut of 22.3 years.

Romanians in trafficking networks

Specific to the year 2022, is the export of drug trafficking crime, which involves the formation of trafficking networks made up of Romanian citizens and other nationalities operating in the western area of Europe. These networks mainly transport drugs and distribute them to lower-level dealers or consumers.

DIICOT also notes that in the area of cross-border drug trafficking, there are partnerships between criminal networks made up of Romanian traffickers and other European or international networks (mainly made up of Albanian and Serbian nationals, but also from countries known as traditional suppliers of drugs – South American countries for cocaine or in the Afghanistan area, Turkey for heroin, or the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany for ecstasy).

These cross-border connections facilitate access to drug supply sources, and in the context of a record availability of cocaine and methamphetamine in 2022 (as mentioned in the European Drug Report 2022 by EMCDDA), there was a massive increase in the supply of drugs on the illicit market in Romania in 2022, and there are indications that this upward trend will continue throughout 2023, according to the DIICOT report. The institution claims, however, that it does not have statistics on the main countries of origin for each drug.

According to the institution's 2020 report, there was a significant increase in the number of Romanian citizens recruited to become drug „couriers”, being preferred because of Romania's membership in the EU, with the transporters being financially motivated or coerced by various methods.

Romania, a transit country

Also specific to the last year compared to previous years is the fact that, during 2022, there were attempts to set up manufacturing facilities for amphetamine and methamphetamine pills in Romania, using mechanical presses, with the help of Colombians. In those workshops, attempts were also made to recombine cocaine crystals, previously dissociated into components that could be disguised, using physicochemical processes more easily. But prosecutors say these cases are „isolated”: „The data in our possession show that the only drug produced in the country is still cannabis, with both indoor and outdoor cultivation”.

The past year has also seen a significant increase in online orders of drugs and psychoactive substances from suppliers in Western European countries, payment via cryptocurrencies, and the use of poorly regulated couriers to bring drugs into the country.

Last, but not least, Romania has been used as a transit state along the 'Balkan route' for trafficking heroin from Turkey to Western European countries and in the opposite direction for cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamine, anti-drugs prosecutors say.

According to the 2021 DIICOT report, the Balkan routes for heroin are:

- Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey-Greece-Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia-Western European states;
- Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey-Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary and Western European countries.

As regards domestic consumption, according to the anti-drug agency, the market is polarised by consumers in Bucharest, whose numbers are relatively stable and are fuelled by criminal groups in this area with connections to the Turkish community on the import segment and to Roma clans on the street distribution segment. As a novelty, a new secondary pole of heroin trafficking and consumption is emerging in the municipality of Iasi, with data for 2021.

Drug Captures

The Director of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Alexis Goosdeel, said of 2022 that „traditional drugs have never been so accessible and new substances with very high potency continue to emerge”: „Today, almost any substance with psychoactive properties can be a drug, as the lines between legal and illegal substances are blurring”.

He also points out that new psychoactive substances (NPS) have continued to appear in Europe at a rate of „one a week”, with 162 such synthetic substances being monitored through the early warning system run by the EMCDDA.

Regarding the latest seizures, DIICOT claims that in May 2021, it seized approximately 1.42 tonnes of heroin in the Port of Constanta, the transaction is initiated and coordinated by a Greek national residing in the Netherlands under the guise of a commercial operation to import stone.

The drugs were destined for recovery in the Netherlands and Belgium, where they would arrive by road. This was the largest heroin seizure in the history of Romania’s anti-drug structures and the second largest in recent years at the European level, according to the DIICOT report of 2022.

With regard to two other seizures made in 2021, prosecutors cite 862 kg of high-risk drugs that arrived in Romania by mistake, as a result of a series of synapses and errors slipped into the plans of traffickers, who failed to retrieve the cocaine as soon as the containers in which it was hidden arrived in Europe.

What the ANA says

The National Anti-Drug Agency (ANA), the institution under the Ministry of the Interior (MAI) that is supposed to manage the drug phenomenon, explains the extent to which it has taken hold among schoolchildren by quoting Alexis Goosdeel, director of the EMCDDA, who pointed out in a report on drugs that „drugs are everywhere” and „everything can be used as a drug”.

The ANA claims that through its „network of 47 drug prevention, evaluation and counseling centers (CPECA), it carries out drug prevention activities, mainly in educational establishments, which are the main means of identifying and referring minors at risk of using psychoactive substances to specialist services,” a response to G4Media said. However, the phenomenon seems to be out of control in recent years, and the age of onset of use is falling sharply according to DIICOT reports over the last five years.

The ANA sent, at G4Media’s request, that in the single coded register of drug users, in 2018, 196 minors were admitted to treatment due to drug use, and in 2022 – 278 minors. Also, the number of minors under the age of 15 admitted to assistance in 2018 is 32, and in 2022 – 60: „We note that the figures refer to unique beneficiaries, i.e. a drug user who has been registered for treatment several times in a given year is counted only once, at the center that registered his first request,” the institution also sent.

- *Note: According to the National Anti-Drug Agency, the institution collects statistical data on these persons from public and private healthcare facilities that provide specialized assistance services for drug use. The data are reported on a monthly basis, on standard forms established by the legislation in force. Data on users*

included in the therapeutic circuit are centralized by the Romanian Observatory for Drugs and Drug Addiction, within the National Anti-Drug Agency, in the single-coded register on drug users.

When asked how many of the underage users in the ANA's records have been rehabilitated/integrated and have not relapsed into drug use in recent years, the agency said that „substance dependence is a chronic disease, so the term ‘rehabilitation’ cannot be used in this context, especially since the minors who have been referred to the program have not committed crimes but are diagnosed with ‘substance use disorder’.” „The success of the interventions offered is measured in the periods of abstinence and the level of functionality on a personal, family, school, social, etc. level. , compared to that before the onset of drug use,” the institution added.

The ANA also added that, according to the agency's most recent 2019 study (and which is conducted every 4 years), the age of early onset in drug use, reported by adolescents who were interviewed in the study, is „13 years or earlier for the use of solvents or inhalants”: „The most commonly used drug among adolescents continues to be cannabis, followed by new psychoactive substances, solvents or inhalants, cocaine, LSD or other hallucinogens, heroin, ketamine, methamphetamines and amphetamines,” the institution adds.

Context. Drugs in Europe

The latest report on drugs at the European Union level, published on 16 June by the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), shows that the growing diversity of drug supply and use is creating new challenges for Europe and its healthcare system. [here](#).

At the same time, the document also shows, organized criminal groups, are also increasingly targeting smaller ports in other EU countries, as well as countries bordering the EU, to increase traffic and, implicitly, cocaine consumption. .

While cannabis remains the most consumed drug in the European Union, cocaine was the substance most frequently associated with cases of acute intoxication registered at hospital emergency units in 2021, being mentioned in 27% of cases, the report also shows. The EU drug situation report also shows that because some drugs can be sold as powders or pills that look similar, people who use them may not know what they are taking.

Record cocaine seizures and growing concerns about the use of synthetic stimulants
In 2021, EU member states seized a record 303 tonnes of cocaine. Drugs seized in Belgium (96 tonnes), the Netherlands (72 tonnes) and Spain (49 tonnes) accounted for almost 75% of the total quantity seized. According to preliminary data for 2022, the amount of cocaine seized in Antwerp, Europe's second-largest seaport, rose to 110 tonnes from 91 tonnes in 2021, the report said.

Evidence suggests that organized crime groups are also increasingly targeting smaller ports in other EU countries as well as countries bordering the EU. Illicit cocaine manufacturing in the

EU is growing in importance; in 2021, 34 cocaine laboratories were dismantled (compared to 23 in 2020), some of which were large.

Cocaine is the most commonly used illicit stimulant drug in Europe, having been used in the past year by approximately 1.3% (3.7 million) of European adults (aged 15-64). This was the substance most frequently associated with cases of acute poisoning registered at hospital emergency departments in 2021, being mentioned in 27% of cases, according to the EMCDDA.

There are also some signs that cocaine injection and crack cocaine use are becoming more common among marginalized groups in some countries, necessitating increased harm reduction responses. An estimated 7,500 people entered treatment for crack cocaine use in 2021.

The greater variety of synthetic stimulants currently available on the illegal market increases the risks to public health. Traditionally, amphetamine was the most commonly consumed synthetic stimulant in Europe. However, there are signs that both methamphetamine and synthetic cathinones are now contributing more than in the past to the overall stimulant problems in Europe.

Translated

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