

# European Conference on Drug-Related Violence

## Focus on settings and subgroups of people who use drugs

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No conflicts of interest

## Content:

1. Epidemiology of PLP with drug use
2. Violence and prison drug markets
3. Structural violence
4. Gender-based violence

# 1. Epidemiology of PLP with drug use

# Prisons, Drug Use<sup>1,2</sup>

- Prison and substance use are intertwined in complex ways.
- A substantial proportion of people deprived of liberty (PDL) has experience of substance use and report high levels of health problems, including drug related infectious diseases, psychiatric comorbidity and specific drug-related risks, such as fatal and non-fatal overdose.
- European studies have suggested between 30 % and 75 % of people with problematic drug use have been in prison at some time in their life

<sup>1</sup> Linda Montanari, Luis Royuela, Liesbeth Vandam, Heino Stöver, Ehab Salah (2025): Addressing substance use in prison in Europe. In: WHO (ed.): Health in prisons (in print):

<sup>2</sup> EMCDDA. Prison and drugs in Europe: current and future challenges Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union; 2022.

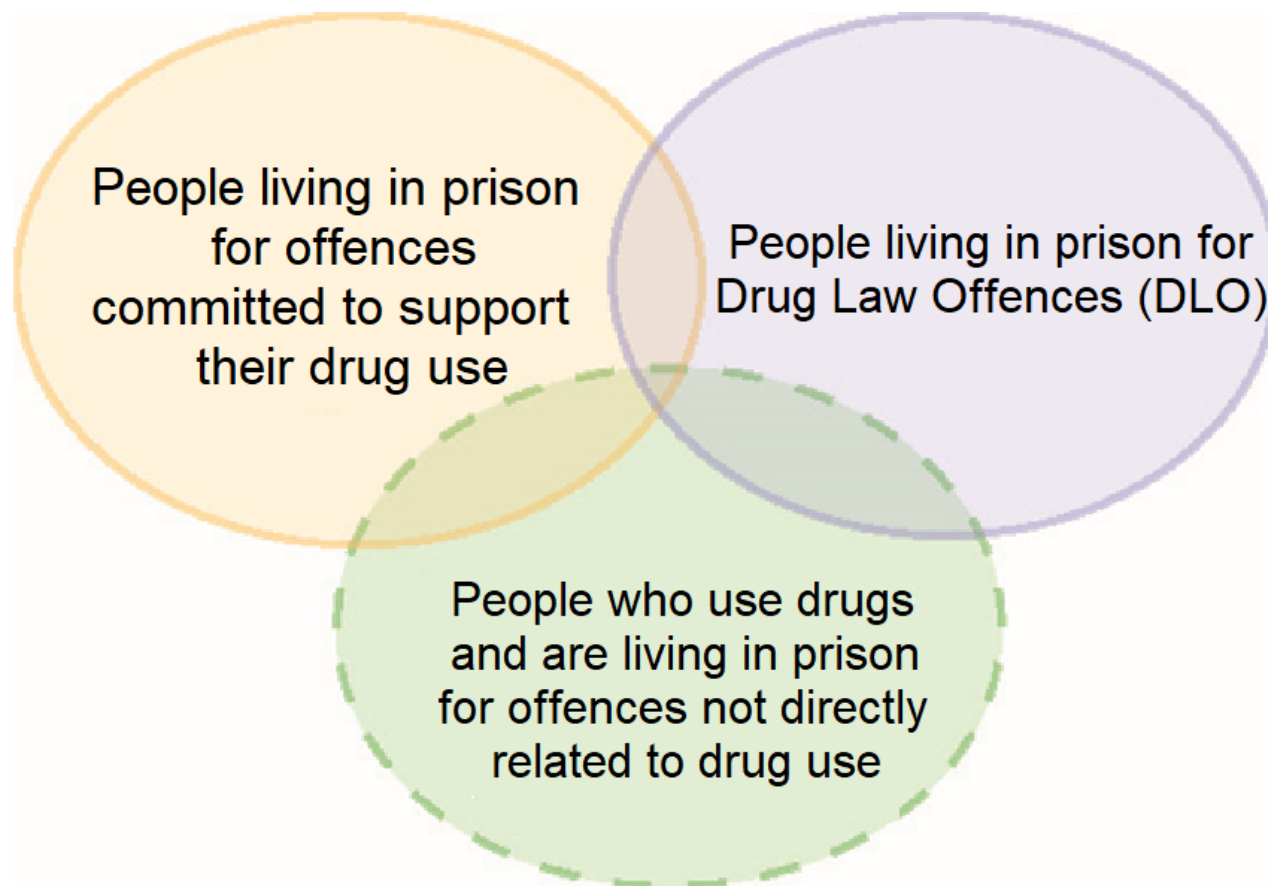
# Prison Population in Europe<sup>1</sup>

- 11 mio PLP globally
- 483,600 EU (2022)
- ~2000 prisons in EU-30
- Prison Population Rate per 100,000  
EU: 108 (2022); Russia: 475; US: 698  
EU: 5,3 % women (2022)
- 17 countries with overcrowding
- Approx. 20% foreign citizenship
- 1 / 4 prisoners no final sentence
- PLP with drug use mainly short sentences
- High recidivism
- Vulnerable and marginalised – subject to violence

# Prison prevalence of disorders in comparison to the community

Mental disorders	4 times
Suicides	up to 7 times
Physical violence	up to 27 times
Injecting drug users	70-100 times
HIV	2-50 times
HCV	20-50 times
TB/MDR-TB	up to 100 times
Covid-19	4 times

# PLP and Drug Use History<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> EMCDDA. Prison and drugs in Europe: current and future challenges Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union; 2022.



# Drug Use in prison<sup>1,2</sup>

- **Drug injecting inside prison** involves more significant health risks associated with often poor conditions, lack of hygiene and overcrowding. PWID inside prison do it because they were injecting before and/or because they need to maximise psychoactive effects of drugs in short supply or by peers' influence
- The **use of NPS**, especially synthetic cannabinoids, became an emerging issue in prisons in a number of European countries:
  - Initial undetectability of NPS in routine urine testing
  - Higher availability and easier way to conceal into prison

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## 2. Violence and prison drug markets

# Drug Markets in Prisons<sup>1,2</sup>

- Flourishing drug markets in some prisons with high availability of drugs
- NPS rising factor
- Bullying, intimidation, blackmailing
- High pressure put on people and threat to family members
- Violence because of debts
- Rigid control of drug user by prison authorities with consequences for the quality of life for all prisoners

## 3. Structural violence

# European Court of Human Rights in the case of Wenner vs. Germany

- manifest and long term dependence to opioids
- denial of opioid substitution treatment (OST) in Bavarian/German prison
- The Court found that the physical and mental strain that Mr Wenner suffered as a result of his untreated or inadequately treated health condition could, in principle, amount to inhuman or degrading treatment.
- the failure to adequately assess Mr. Wenner's treatment needs involved a violation of the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment
- **Law more powerful than science!**

# Case study of structural violence against PLP: Torture in Bavarian Prisons?!<sup>1</sup>

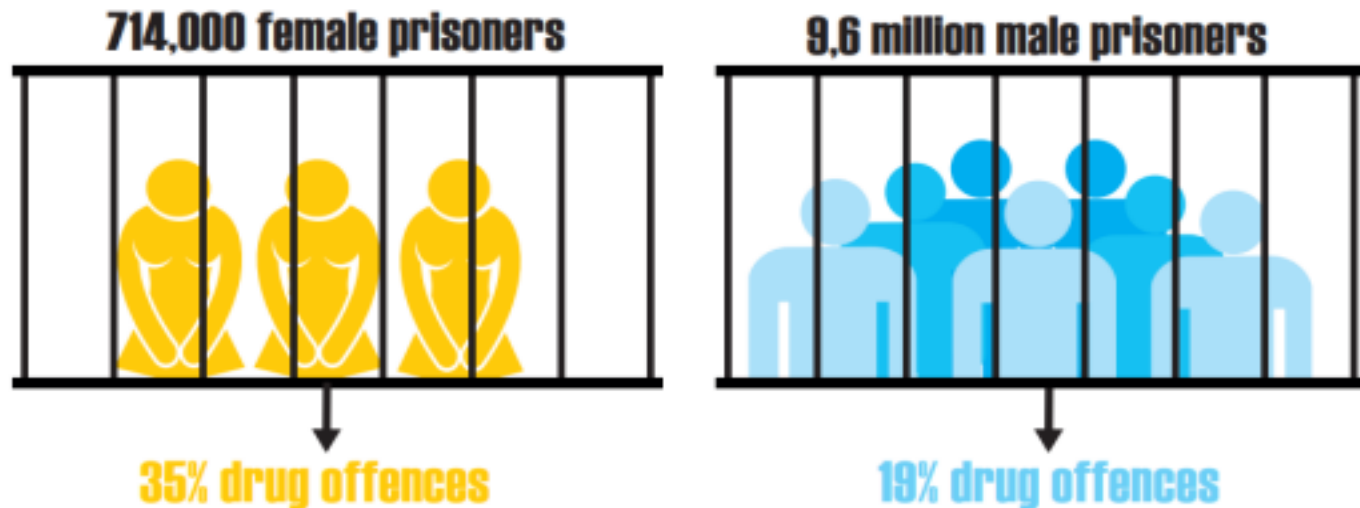
- Accusation against several staff members and prison governor: torture, degrading and inhuman behaviour, violent acts
- PLP naked without light and mattress in isolation cell
- Esprit de Corps
- Cover-up



[1 Augsburg: Ermittlungen wegen Übergriffen auf Häftlinge in JVA - Bayern - SZ.de](#)  
[Bayern: Neue Foltervorwürfe in der JVA Augsburg-Gablingen | tagesschau.de](#)  
[Kontraste: Foltervorwürfe in JVA in Bayern - hier anschauen](#)

## 4. Gender-based violence

# Gender related differences in drug offences<sup>1,2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Share of prisoners for drug offences based on 50 Member States; Source: Based on Roy Walmsley, “World prison population list”, 11th ed. (Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 2016) and Roy Walmsley, “World female imprisonment list”, 4th ed. (Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 2017). (UNODC, Special data collections on persons held in prisons (2010-2014), United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS). Is there a permission to use this picture? If not, we can remove ask Zvonimir for a simple image to show these figures and say "adapted from, usig this as a reference"

<sup>2</sup> Linda Montanari, Luis Royuela, Liesbeth Vandam, Heino Stöver, Ehab Salah (2025): Addressing substance use in prison in Europe. In: WHO (ed.): Health in prisons (in print)EMCDDA. Prison and drugs in Europe: current and future challenges Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union; 2022.



# Drug Using women in prison<sup>1,2</sup>

- Globally, the number of women and girls in prison increased by more than 50 % between 2000 and 2017, compared with a 20 % increase in men (Walmsley, 2017) (Walmsley, 2017).
- In Europe the proportion of women in prison has remained stable over the last few years (between 4.6-5.2% in the last 15 years).
- The pooled prevalence of DUDs at reception to prison among women was estimated to be 51 %, compared to 30% among men<sup>2</sup>
- In research conducted in Italy and Portugal the proportion of women in prison or drug use, possession and trafficking was over 40%, becoming almost 60% when adding the percentage of those in prison for acquisitive crimes related to their drug use<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Linda Montanari, Luis Royuela, Liesbeth Vandam, Heino Stöver, Ehab Salah (2025): Addressing substance use in prison in Europe. In: WHO (ed.): Health in prisons (in print):

<sup>2</sup> (Ravndal E, Amundsen EJ. Mortality among drug users after discharge from inpatient treatment: an 8-year prospective study. Drug and Alcohol Dependence. 2010; 108(1-2): 65- 69

<sup>3</sup> Linda Montanari (2024)#

# Vulnerable situation of drug using women in prison – gender-based violence prevalent<sup>1</sup>

- Women in prison have high rates of mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorders, depression and self-harm. They also report high rates of sexually transmitted and other infectious diseases, reproductive health problems (e.g. cervical cancer), dental problems, obesity and other non-communicable diseases.
- High prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) among women incarcerated is a common factor among women incarcerated regardless their country and cultural background and might be at the basis of several social and individual consequences.

<sup>1</sup> (Plugge, 2009)

# Conclusion

- Violence and prisons are deeply intertwined
- Violence is inherent in a total institution (Goffman) – structural violence
- Institutional violence is marked by power demonstrations (exclusion from services, non-state-of-the-art – treatment etc.)
- Drug markets in prisons are violent-related

„... Prisoners are the community. They come from the community, they return to it. Protection of prisoners is protection of our communities “

*(Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Statement on HIV/AIDS in Prisons)*

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