

Criminological Insights Into Recidivism Trends in Croatia*

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This study provides an analysis of recidivism trends within Croatia's criminal justice system, offering a comprehensive overview of the concept. It explores various forms of recidivism—such as rearrest, reconviction, and reimprisonment—while underscoring the ambiguity surrounding its definition. Additionally, the study examines key challenges associated with accurately measuring recidivism. Recidivism, while often broadly defined as a return to criminal behaviour, poses significant challenges in terms of operationalisation and consistency across different contexts. The research highlights these challenges and focuses on Croatia's specific approach to recidivism, where the term remains legally undefined, and there are no established measurement methods, with terminology often used without methodological explanation.

Using quantitative data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, qualitative insights from an expert at the Diagnostic Centre within the prison system, and prison reports from 2011 to 2023, this study examines trends in reoffending. It further explores how recidivism has been measured and interpreted within the prison system over this period. It explores key findings related to recidivism trends, particularly the steady decline in previously convicted offenders and the significance of property crimes within recidivism categories.

The study addresses both normative definitions and criminological perspectives to provide a clearer understanding of recidivism in Croatia by highlighting a significant gap: there is no clear definition of recidivism in Croatian legislation. This ambiguity not only complicates the understanding of recidivism within Croatia but also mirrors similar situations in neighbouring countries. Even when recidivism is defined in legal texts, the interpretation relies heavily on state discretion, making it impossible to compare data—despite data collection efforts—with other countries. The study underscores the necessity of evaluating rehabilitation programs,

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which is a prerequisite for enhancing the effectiveness of reintegration and rehabilitation efforts.

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Introduction

Understanding recidivism is crucial for effectively addressing and preventing repeat criminal behaviour. Despite its seemingly straightforward definition, the concept encompasses significant complexities, particularly concerning its measurement and operationalisation across different contexts. The introduction will address these complexities of the term "recidivism," highlighting the various definitions and measurement challenges associated with it. Subsequently, the focus of this work will shift to examining recidivism trends within the context of Croatia. A simplified and broad approach to recidivism characterises it as a relapse into a previous condition or mode of behaviour, which, in the context of crime, refers to criminal behaviour (Getoš Kalac & Feuerbach, 2023). Although this formulation appears relatively straightforward and understandable to many, the understanding of recidivism is much more complex (for more details see: Fazel & Wolf, 2015, p. 1; Maltz, 1984, p. 54; Ruggero et al., 2015, p. 1; Schoeman, 2010, p. 80). Unfortunately, there is no universally accepted definition of recidivism, and various reasons contributing to this complexity will be presented. Although recidivism can be viewed from various perspectives, such as criminological, penological, and normative, its meaning is fundamentally understandable. The criminological approach examines the occurrence and underlying causes of criminal behaviour, aiming to understand why individuals commit crimes and striving to uncover all instances of repeated criminal behaviours, not just the recorded ones. In contrast, the normative approach focuses specifically on legal frameworks, addressing behaviours deemed punishable under criminal law. The penological approach narrows this further by defining penal recidivism as the reimprisonment of offenders for new offences committed after completing previous prison sentences (Getoš Kalac & Feuerbach, 2023). However, issues arise when attempting to operationalise it, particularly in efforts to measure it (Maltz, 1984).

Objective

The objective of this research is to understand the complexities of recidivism, particularly regarding its definitions and measurement challenges, and to examine recidivism trends in Croatia, highlighting the various factors that influence the recurrence of criminal behaviour. Recidivism can be measured through different

methods, and there is no single "correct" way to measure it (Ruggero et al., 2015). Recidivism is a broad concept that encompasses the recurrence of criminal behaviour, which may involve various outcomes such as rearrest, reconviction, or reimprisonment (Fazel & Wolf, 2015). In literature, rearrest refers to being arrested again after a prior offence, reconviction involves being convicted for a new crime following a previous conviction, and reimprisonment denotes returning to prison either for committing new offences or violating release conditions (Getoš Kalac & Feuerbach, 2023).

Measuring recidivism is challenging due to several key factors. The characteristics of the sample studied can greatly influence recidivism rates; selecting specific subgroups—such as offenders defined by gender, age, or type of offence—may not accurately represent the entire offender population (Aebi et al., 2021). Furthermore, the length of the follow-up period plays a crucial role, as shorter durations may overlook later reoffending instances, while longer periods can capture a broader range of recidivism outcomes, however there is no universally accepted time period (Aebi et al., 2021). Additionally, the variability in defining recidivism—whether it encompasses reconviction, reincarceration, or particular types of offences—creates inconsistencies that complicate comparisons across studies or jurisdictions (Aebi et al., 2021). Collectively, these factors underscore the complexities involved in understanding and interpreting recidivism trends.

The absence of a clear definition for recidivism is not unique to Croatia; many Central European and Balkan countries with similar legal and cultural contexts encounter comparable challenges. In Poland and Slovakia, for example, terms like “habitual offenders” are used instead of “recidivists,” yet the scope of these terms varies significantly. In Poland, habitual offenders are defined as adults sentenced to imprisonment or similar penalties for intentional crimes, including those previously penalised for intentional offences or under military arrest for similar violations (Statistics Poland, n.d.). Meanwhile, Slovakia lacks a specific legal definition for recidivists, yet categorises habitual offenders as individuals who have repeatedly committed the same offence (Statistical Office of the SR, n.d.). Other countries, such as Hungary and Romania, offer more precise classifications: Hungary considers recidivists those who reoffend within three years of completing a sentence for a wilful crime, while Romanian law defines recidivism as committing a new intentional crime after a prior sentence of more than one year, or life imprisonment, before rehabilitation or the expiration of the rehabilitation period (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, n.d.; Ministerul Justiției, 2023).

In most jurisdictions, recidivism is typically mentioned in sentencing provisions rather than as a separate legal category. For instance, Article 55 of Serbia’s Criminal Code considers prior intentional offences as an aggravating factor if the individual reoffends within five years of their prior sentence (Serbian

Criminal Code, 2019). Similarly, Slovenia's Criminal Code includes recidivism under its General Rules on Sentencing in Article 41, urging courts to weigh factors such as the similarity between previous and new offences, their motives, and the time elapsed since the last conviction or sentence completion (Slovenian Penal Code and Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Criminal Code, 2023). Bosnia and Herzegovina's Article 48 of the Criminal Code also instructs courts to consider whether prior and subsequent offences are of the same type and motive, and the interval since the last sentencing or sentence served (Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2023). These diverse approaches reflect ongoing challenges in defining and operationalising recidivism within different legal systems.

Method

Given all the aforementioned challenges in measuring recidivism, it is essential to be transparent when conducting any research, especially when defining terms and sources of data that served as references. Conducting research on such a complex phenomenon in Croatia is highly challenging due to the frequent methodological inconsistencies in publicly available data (such as prison reports), limited data sources, a narrow circle of experts in the field of criminology, and a general deficit of criminologically relevant empirical and other scientific research (Getoš Kalac & Feuerbach, 2023; Kalac & Bezic, 2017).

In Croatia, there is no legal definition of recidivism or of the term recidivist. The legal system addresses recidivism only in relation to sentencing, as outlined in Article 47 of the Criminal Code (Croatian Criminal Code, 2024). This article mandates that courts consider all factors influencing the severity of a sentence, including the offender's prior life. Courts are given discretion to determine whether a previous conviction should be viewed as a mitigating or aggravating factor in sentencing. Although the prison report mentions "recidivism rates" and recidivists in the context of drug addiction treatment, the report does not present any recidivism rates, nor does it provide a methodological explanation of which group of inmates is considered recidivists (Ministry of Justice, statistical reports for various years). The closest term to recidivism, at least on a normative level, is defined by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (CBS), which categorises recidivists as adult offenders who have previously been legally convicted and CBS is responsible for collecting and reporting this data (Croatian Bureau of Statistics - Republic of Croatia, 2024).

Therefore, while some authors argue that simply counting the number of inmates who have previously been incarcerated provides a weak measure of the concept (Aebi et al., 2021), the study of recidivism in Croatia is limited to offenders who have previously been legally convicted. Although this definition

encompasses a broader concept than just prior incarceration, it does not fully incorporate all the previously mentioned elements that could be classified under recidivism in the broadest criminological sense. While this definition is more inclusive, it may still be debated whether a previous legal conviction alone is a sufficient indicator of recidivism. However, due to the practical limitations of the available data, for the purposes of the operationalisation of this research, this definition will be used as a measure of recidivism, and quantitative data from CBS will be used.

In this study, the Reports on the State and Operations of Prisons, Correctional Facilities, and Educational Institutions (hereafter referred to as the "prison reports") are also utilised as primary data sources (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, statistical reports for various years). These reports contain quantitative data and, at times, analyses that reflect the prison system's interpretation. Key indicators within the reports encompass the operations of the prison administration, the status and composition of inmates, and the staffing structure within the prison system. Data has been collected from reports spanning 2011 to 2022, with the 2022 report being the latest available, as the current year is 2024, and the 2023 report remains unavailable at the time of writing.

Through these reports, the study examines the data collected on recidivism, the manner in which this data is presented, how the prison system defines recidivism, and the implications of these definitions on the understanding of recidivism trends over time. Additionally, qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured interview with an expert from the Diagnostic Centre within the prison system. In 2022, a semi-structured interview was conducted with an expert from the Diagnostic Centre within the Croatian prison system as part of a graduation thesis. The purpose of this interview was to understand the practical approach applied within the prison system, specifically focusing on the Diagnostic Centre, which operates as an independent organisational unit under the Directorate for the Prison System within the Ministry of Justice.

The Centre was selected because it is responsible for conducting medical, social, psychological, pedagogical, and criminological evaluations of prisoners. These evaluations are crucial for prisoner classification, developing tailored imprisonment programs, and recommending suitable facilities where prisoners will serve their sentences. This expert's interdisciplinary experience and direct engagement with inmates provided a valuable, broad perspective. The interview questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, some of which were explored in depth during the conversation. For the purposes of this study, only segments of the interview relevant to the expert's view on current shortcomings in the rehabilitation system and on the Diagnostic Centre's specific criteria for defining recidivism were included in the analysis. Prior approval was obtained from the Ministry of Justice to conduct the interview, which took place in Zagreb at the

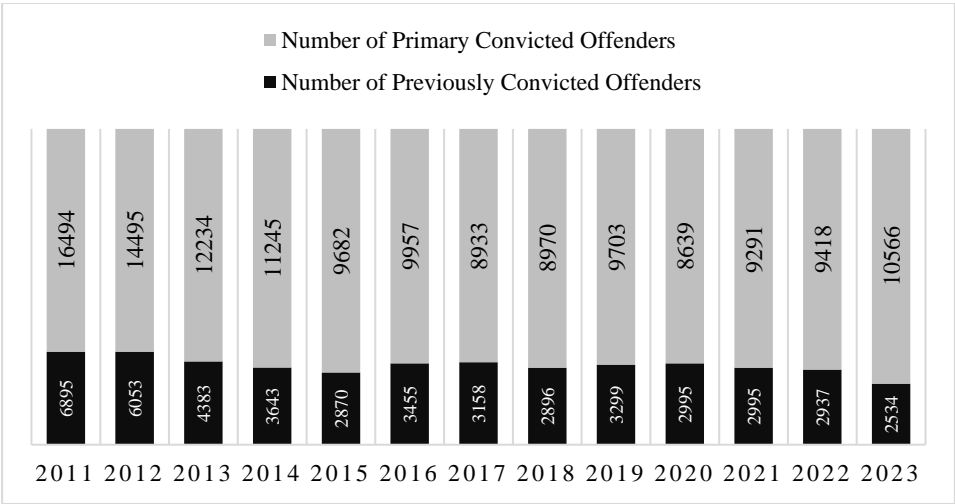
Remetinec Prison premises. Due to the prison’s security protocols, recording the interview was not permitted.

Results, Trends, and Practical Implications

The results section will present trends in recidivism and primary offenders in Croatia from 2011 to 2023, focusing on the decline in both groups and the stable share of recidivists. It will also analyse recidivism across various crime categories, with particular emphasis on property crimes. Additionally, insights from the Diagnostics Centre will shed light on how recidivism is treated in practice. An analysis of recidivism within the prison system, based on prison reports, will further illustrate how recidivism is measured and interpreted from the perspective of the prison system.

Graph 1

*Previously and Primarily Convicted Offenders from 2011 to 2023
(Ministry of Justice, statistical reports for various years)*



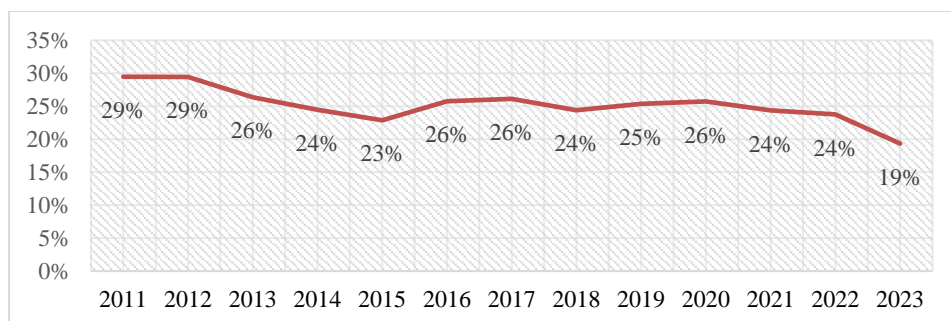
Graph 1 provides a longitudinal view of the trends in recidivism and primary offending in Croatia from 2011 to 2023 by presenting two data series: the total number of previously convicted offenders (recidivists) and primary convicted offenders each year. It reveals a clear downward trend in both categories over the 13-year period. Recidivists decreased steadily from around 6,900 in 2011 to approximately 2,500 by 2023. Similarly, primary convicted offenders experienced a more gradual decline, falling from about 16,500 in 2011 to around 10,500 by 2023. In 2023, a noteworthy trend emerged: while the number of primary

convicted offenders saw a slight decrease to 10,566, the number of recidivists dropped more sharply, reaching 2,534. This graph highlights key shifts in recidivism and first-time offences within the Croatian criminal justice system.

Graph 2

Recidivism Movements in Croatia from 2011 to 2023

(Ministry of Justice, statistical reports for various years)

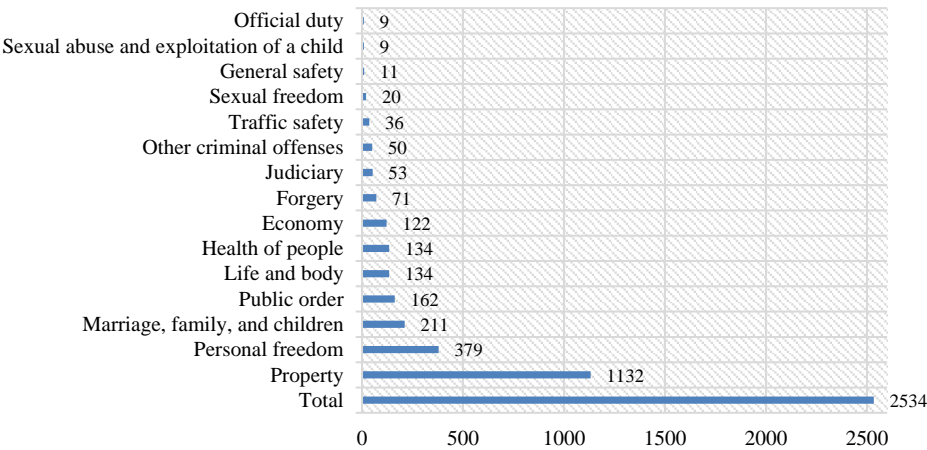


Graph 2 presents the proportion of recidivists as a percentage of the total number of convicted offenders each year, covering the period from 2011 to 2023. This proportion, referred to as the 'recidivism share,' provides insight into the persistence of repeat offending within the Croatian criminal justice system, revealing the number of individuals re-entering the system and highlighting the trend of recidivism in Croatia over the past decade. Throughout this period, the recidivism share has remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 19% and 29%. Notably, the recidivism share was 29% in 2012, decreasing to 26% in 2013. A further decrease is observed, with the share dropping from 24% in 2022 to 19% in 2023. Potential explanations for these drops in numbers will be discussed in the upcoming discussion section.

Graphs 3 and 4 provide a comprehensive view of recidivism, while graph 3 illustrates the total number of recidivists in Croatia for the year 2023, categorised by the specific types of crimes they committed, Graph 4 highlights the share of recidivists relative to the total number in Croatia by crime category, illustrating the distribution of repeat offenders and the percentage of recidivism across various types of criminal offences. From the graphs, it is evident that the largest number of recidivists is found in crimes against property, personal freedom, and public order. Notably, the highest proportion of recidivists occurs in crimes against property, crimes against the judiciary, and crimes against the economy. In both graphs, crimes against property stand out prominently, which is not surprising given that the high number of recidivists in property crimes often stems from economic necessity, opportunity, or habitual behaviour (Hannon, 2002).

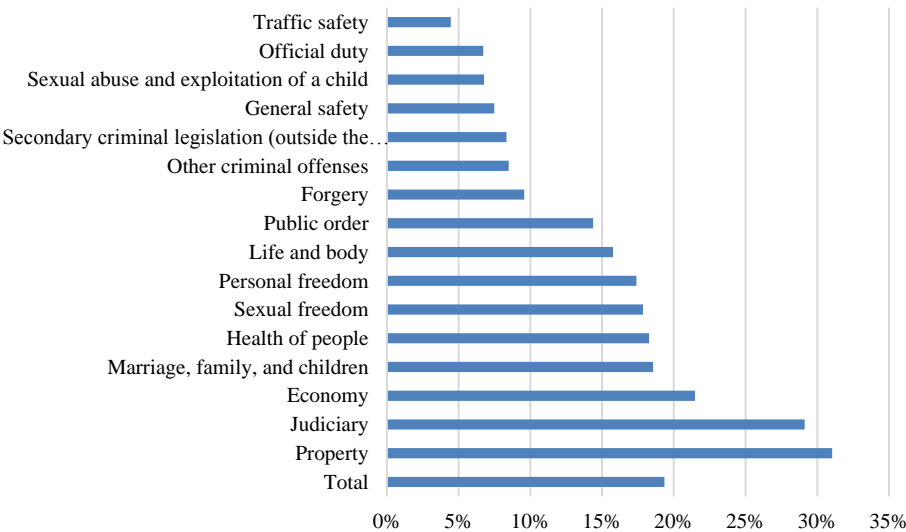
Graph 3

Total Number of Recidivists by Crime Category in 2023
(Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a)



Graph 4

Proportion of Recidivists by Crime Category in 2023
(Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a)



Through a semi-structured interview with an expert from the Diagnostic Centre, it was revealed that the goal of the prison system's approach to recidivism is to determine the actual presence of recidivism, which refers to discovering whether a person is a recidivist in the broadest criminological perspective—

essentially, whether they have reoffended, regardless of any prior convictions or incarceration. Through this approach, it is crucial to avoid disadvantaging offenders based on their past sentences, focusing instead on identifying criminological risk factors and addressing their reintegration needs. This perspective aims to create a more equitable system that prioritises rehabilitation over historical legal outcomes. The criminological approach goes beyond data collected from criminal records, using additional data such as inmate interviews, court expertise, and available external information. This distinction is crucial, as recidivist and primary offenders are separated to prevent so-called "criminal infection" (for more details see: Feuerbach, 2022).

In the prison reports for 2011 and 2012, recidivism is mentioned solely in the context of the drug-dependent population. It is noted that the recidivism rate for this group is higher than that of the general prison population. However, there is no definition provided for who qualifies as a recidivist, nor is there any mention of the overall recidivism rate or the methodology used to calculate it. This lack of clarity raises questions about the interpretation and application of recidivism data within these reports (Ministry of Justice, 2012, 2013).

In the 2013 report, recidivists are defined for the first time as individuals who have previously served a prison sentence, aligning with the narrowest definition of recidivism from a penological perspective. Accordingly, it is noted that among the entire population of inmates received for incarceration during 2013, the recidivism rate stands at 32.2% (Ministry of Justice, 2014). In the 2014 report, the total prison population is presented for the first time in relation to prior convictions. Among the overall prison population in 2014, 42% are individuals without prior convictions, 21% are those who have previously received monetary and/or conditional sentences, and 37% have prior experience serving a prison sentence (Ministry of Justice, 2015).

The definition of recidivists follows the definition from 2013, with recidivism again being particularly highlighted in the context of drug-dependent individuals. The report indicates a high recidivism rate of 70.7% for the drug-dependent population; however, there is no methodological explanation provided for how this recidivism rate was calculated (Ministry of Justice, 2015). The 2015 report introduces a new methodological approach to presenting recidivism data. Instead of showing the total prison population throughout the year based on prior convictions, it now expresses the structure of inmates in relation to recidivism as of 31 December 2015 (Ministry of Justice, 2016). Within the overall prison population for 2015, 37.70% are individuals without prior convictions, 20.79% are those who have previously received conditional and/or monetary sentences, and 41.51% have prior experience serving a prison sentence (N=2549). Additionally, a new definition of who qualifies as a recidivist is introduced, which includes individuals who have previously served a prison sentence, been in

juvenile detention, or received educational measures directed towards rehabilitation (Ministry of Justice, 2016).

The 2016 prison report presents a new and different method of data collection compared to previous years. It now shows the structure of inmates serving sentences longer than six months and juveniles in juvenile detention in relation to prior convictions throughout 2016, as well as the structure of inmates and juveniles based on prior convictions as of 31 December 2016 (Ministry of Justice, 2017). Of the total number of inmates and juveniles ($N = 1231$) serving sentences longer than six months and those in juvenile detention during 2016, 66% had prior convictions, and 42% had previously served a prison sentence. Higher rates of recidivism among drug addicts are still noted compared to the general prison population; however, the report does not specify the overall recidivism rate or provide rates for any other groups. The report also references legal amendments from 2013, which reclassified possession of drugs for personal use from criminal to misdemeanour responsibility.

Since 2013, a trend of decreasing numbers of drug-dependent inmates has been observed. The report warns that it is difficult to attribute a clear interpretation to the high proportion of recidivists in this group, noting that one possible reason for this may be their successful reintegration into society (Ministry of Justice, 2017). The 2017 prison report continues the methodology for data presentation established in 2016, illustrating the structure of inmates serving sentences longer than six months and juveniles in juvenile detention in relation to prior convictions throughout 2017 (Ministry of Justice, 2018). It also details the structure of inmates and juveniles based on prior convictions as of 31 December 2017. On that date, the total prison population comprised 36.90% individuals without prior convictions, 17.23% who had previously received conditional and/or monetary sentences, and 42.87% who had previously served a prison sentence. Concerning drug-addicted individuals, the report again cites successful rehabilitation and reintegration efforts as a potential reason for the decrease in the number of inmates in this group since 2013 (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 39). The 2018 prison report follows the methodology established in 2016 and 2017.

As of 31 December 2018, the total prison population comprised 38.87% of individuals without prior convictions, 15.92% who had previously received conditional and/or monetary sentences, and 45.21% who had previously served a prison sentence (Ministry of Justice, 2019). In the section regarding drug-addicted individuals, the report does not provide its own interpretations but simply states that the recidivism rate in this group is higher than in the general prison population, still without offering any methodological explanations (Ministry of Justice, 2019). From 2019 to 2022, the reports no longer present any data relating to the proportion of recidivists within the general population, either as of 31 December or throughout the year, nor regarding inmates serving sentences longer than six months.

A common theme across all reports is the assertion that drug addiction is almost invariably linked to criminal behaviour, with the recidivism rate in this group being higher than that of the general prison population. However, none of the reports explain what this rate is or how it is calculated. The 2020 report states that, compared to 2019, the total number of drug-dependent individuals received for serving a sentence or undergoing a treatment measure decreased by 10.36% (Ministry of Justice, 2021). At the same time, among newly admitted drug addicts, the proportion of recidivists increased compared to 2019, when 29.79% of drug addicts were serving prison sentences for the first time (Ministry of Justice, 2021). The 2019 report does not present any data or specific figures and does not define who constitutes a recidivist.

The 2021 report continues this approach, noting a smaller proportion of recidivists compared to 2020, when 23.12% of drug addicts were serving prison sentences for the first time (Ministry of Justice, 2022). The 2022 report indicates that the proportion of recidivists among newly admitted drug addicts remains the same as in 2021 (Ministry of Justice, 2024). The question arises regarding the relevance of these data and to what extent they can be interpreted, particularly when it is impossible to assert with certainty what they refer to. The lack of clear definitions and methodological explanations significantly undermines the ability to draw meaningful conclusions from the data. Without a comprehensive understanding of the population being studied and the criteria for categorising recidivists, any interpretations made may be speculative and lack validity.

Discussion

The examination of prison reports from 2011 to 2022 reveals significant inconsistencies and gaps in the presentation and definition of recidivism, particularly concerning drug-dependent individuals. In the reports, recidivism is exclusively referenced in the context of drug addiction, with claims that the recidivism rate for this group exceeds that of the general prison population. However, these reports fail to define who qualifies as a recidivist and do not provide any specific recidivism rates or the methodologies used to calculate them. This lack of clarity creates challenges for interpreting and applying recidivism data. The 2013 report establishes a definition for recidivists, but subsequent reports continue to show vague categorisations. The 2014 report marks the first instance of presenting the total prison population based on prior convictions, revealing that 42% were individuals without prior convictions and 37% had previously served a prison sentence.

However, the lack of methodological clarity continues to raise concerns, particularly regarding the reported high recidivism rates among drug-dependent inmates, which reaches 70.7% in 2014 without explanation. From 2015 onwards,

the reports adopt different methodologies, and from 2019 to 2022, they no longer present any data on the proportion of recidivists within the general population, either as of 31 December or throughout the year, nor for inmates serving sentences longer than six months. All reports maintain the assertion that drug addiction is closely linked to criminal behaviour, noting that the recidivism rate for drug addicts is higher than that of the general prison population. Still, none provide clarity on what this rate is or how it is calculated.

To accurately determine the recidivism rate, several key factors and steps must be considered. First, establishing a clear definition of recidivism is essential, as it may encompass various forms of reoffending, such as rearrests, reconvictions, or reimprisonments, ensuring consistency in data tracking and comparison (Payne, 2007). Additionally, defining a tracking period (e.g., one, three, or five years from release or sentencing) is crucial, as longer periods often reveal higher recidivism rates, while shorter ones highlight immediate effects of penal measures (Blumstein & Larson, 1971; Dadashazar, 2017; Getoš Kalac & Feuerbach, 2023; Payne, 2007; Ruggero et al., 2015). The specific population under study is also significant, as different groups (e.g., all offenders or only those with severe offences) may exhibit distinct recidivism patterns (King & Elderbroom, 2014; Maltz, 1984; Payne, 2007). Reliable data sources, along with clarity on which data is being used (such as court records, prison statistics, and police data), are essential for ensuring accuracy (Biderman & Reiss, 1967; King & Elderbroom, 2014; Payne, 2007; Ruggero et al., 2015).

The calculation of recidivism typically involves expressing the recidivism rate as a percentage of individuals who reoffend within the observed population. The overall relevance of these data raises critical questions regarding their interpretability, particularly given the inability to assert with certainty the specifics of what they refer to. The absence of clear definitions and methodological explanations significantly undermines the capacity to draw meaningful conclusions from the data. Without a comprehensive understanding of the studied population and criteria for categorising recidivists, any interpretations made are likely to be speculative and lack validity.

In light of the reports from 2016 and 2017, which attribute the decrease in drug-dependent inmates partly to successful rehabilitation and reintegration efforts, the evaluation of rehabilitation programs becomes particularly essential. These reports provide a prison-centred perspective on the declining numbers in this group, yet without detailed assessments of the programs, any conclusions about their true effectiveness remain speculative. Conducting evaluations would enable a more conclusive analysis of these programs' impact on recidivism, facilitating a clearer understanding of the relationship between rehabilitation initiatives and observed trends.

Furthermore, to better understand the drop in recidivism, it is essential to consider changes in criminal legislation. Crimes related to drug abuse stand out as categories with the highest recidivism rates, making it noteworthy to highlight the legal changes in this area (Getoš Kalac & Feuerbach, 2023). In January 2013, drug possession for personal use was reclassified from a criminal offence to a misdemeanour, intended to ease the workload of county courts and expedite sanctioning procedures. This shift resulted in a significant 13% rise in misdemeanours compared to 2012, creating a spillover effect where many criminal offences moved into the sphere of misdemeanours (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2024b). Thus, the apparent decrease in criminal offences, including recidivism, could largely reflect a reclassification rather than a genuine reduction in criminal behaviour.

Moreover, the recidivism share dropped from 24% in 2022 to 19% in 2023, a decrease that is intriguing given the absence of significant legal changes during that period. This decrease in recidivism may be partially explained by the fact that, in the same year, the number of primary convicted offenders slightly increased while the number of recidivists decreased. This difference in trends suggests that a larger proportion of those entering the system are first-time offenders, potentially contributing to the overall decline in recidivism. However, this remains a partial explanation, and other factors may also be influencing this trend. There are many reasons that potentially influence a decrease in recidivism. Improved rehabilitation programs can equip offenders with the skills and support necessary for successful reintegration into society, reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Whitney, 2009).

Additionally, increased access to community resources, such as mental health services and employment training, can address underlying issues that contribute to criminal behaviour (Pinard, 2006). Shifts in public attitudes towards offenders may also foster a more supportive environment for reintegration (Buđanovac & Mikšaj-Todorović, 2002). Economic improvements and better job opportunities provide individuals with alternatives to crime, thereby diminishing the economic motivations for reoffending (Brisman et al., 2017). While these potential reasons for the decrease in recidivism rates offer important considerations, it is essential to note that they are speculative in nature. An in-depth examination of these factors falls outside the scope of this article.

However, addressing these considerations could serve as a point for further discussion, highlighting the need for future research to explore the complex interplay of societal, economic, and systemic influences on recidivism trends. Furthermore, it will be important to monitor future data to determine whether this decrease signals a long-term trend or is merely an anomaly.

Without evaluation of reintegration programs, it remains unclear whether latest drop in recidivism reflects positive progress or a temporary fluctuation. The expert from the Diagnostic Centre also pointed out that it would be beneficial to have some form of evaluation of the rehabilitation programs that have been implemented.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while recidivism appears to be a straightforward concept involving the return to criminal behaviour, its understanding and measurement are far more complex. Various perspectives—criminological, normative, and penological—offer differing interpretations, complicating efforts to develop a universally accepted definition. Measuring recidivism presents additional challenges due to varying methods of data collection and inconsistencies in defining and categorising recidivist behaviour. In Croatia, these challenges are exacerbated by the lack of a legal definition of recidivism and the limited availability of comprehensive data. The examination of recidivism definitions and classifications across European and Balkan countries reveals significant variation in how this concept is approached within legal frameworks.

Despite the common challenges faced by these jurisdictions, their approaches to categorising and measuring recidivism vary widely, with some nations providing clearer legal definitions while others lack formal classifications. This lack of standardisation complicates the interpretation of recidivism data and limits the ability to draw meaningful comparisons across different legal systems.

The analysis of recidivism trends and primary offending in Croatia from 2011 to 2023 reveals a steady decline in both primary offenders and recidivists, alongside a relatively stable share of recidivists among all convicted individuals. Notably, property crimes remain the category with the highest proportion of recidivism, reflecting both habitual patterns and economic motivations for reoffending. Insights gathered from the Diagnostic Centre highlight a criminological approach that seeks to identify the reality of reoffending rather than focusing solely on past legal outcomes, emphasising the importance of addressing risk factors and reintegration needs to reduce future criminal behaviour.

Changes in legislation, particularly the 2013 reclassification of drug possession for personal use from a criminal offence to a misdemeanour, have also likely influenced these trends by reducing the classification of specific offences as crimes. This legislative adjustment may account for a decrease in recidivism numbers on record, though it does not necessarily reflect a genuine reduction in reoffending behaviour.

However, without a comprehensive evaluation of existing reintegration programs, it remains uncertain whether recent declines in recidivism represent true progress or temporary fluctuations. Continued monitoring of recidivism trends, combined with thorough evaluations of both existing reintegration programs and broader reintegrative strategies, is essential. These measures will enable a clearer assessment of long-term impacts and provide a basis for refining approaches aimed at reducing reoffending and supporting the effective reintegration of offenders into society.

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