# Investigation Challenges of Airmail Parcels Containing Drugs and Their Possible Solutions

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**Abstract**

*The study examines the role of postal items (letters and packages) in the drug trade in the Hungarian drug market. Every day, more than a hundred thousand of consignments arrive in Hungary from countries outside the European Union. Many of those contain drugs or raw materials necessary to produce drugs. Identifying non-compliant parcels and filtering them out from the stream is challenging work. It is because of the large quantities on the one hand and on the other, the multiple rules and regulations parcel delivery services and law enforcement agencies are dealing with. This study focuses on increasing the identification of shipments containing illicit drugs. The study aims to provide an additional explanation as to whether a change in the risk analysis method can increase the number of successful detections. After studying the route of Hungarian postal items and based on questionnaires filled out by people who have recently lived or still live in drug rehabilitation institutions, the authors want to formulate practical proposals for law enforcement agencies. The suggestions made in the study can be used in everyday practice not only by Hungarian but also by all European law enforcement agencies.*

***Keywords:*** *parcel forwarders, postal services, illicit drugs, customs, police*

## 1. Introduction

It sounds like a cliché, but it is a fact that drug use is becoming a growing problem in most countries of the world. Various drugs and the raw materials needed for their products come in large numbers from other countries[1], some of which are overrepresented in the sample, such as China and India[2]. The ordered packages are

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[1] B. Szabó, *A technikai-, és az információtechnológia fejlődés globális integrációban betöltött szerepe, és az állami szerepvállalással való közvetett kapcsolata [The role of technical and information technology development in global integration and its indirect relationship with state involvement]*, 2020, in: Csaba, Zágon; Szabó, Andrea (eds.): *Közös kihívások – egykor és most [Common challenges - then and now]* Budapest, Magyarország: Magyar Rendészettudományi Társaság Vám- és Pénzügyőri Tagozat , 2020, pp. 241.

[2] *See:* M. Tihanyi, Sz. Mátyás, V. Vince, *Drug policy in Hungary: Genesis of legal regulation*, 2020, Актуальные Вопросы Развития Государственности и Пубичного Права. Материалы VI

delivered mainly by air traffic as air parcels[3]. It may seem simple to think that packages from the above countries should be inspected so that the drugs and their raw materials entering the country cannot reach the distributors. The Airport Directorate of the National Tax and Customs Authority (NTCA) (2023) reported that more than a hundred thousand parcels arrived in Hungary as a daily average volume in 2022. However, consignments destined for Hungary can be cleared through customs at domestic airports and airports in other EU Member States and delivered as intra-Community consignments. The primary objective of our study is to describe the operation of parcel-forwarder companies and thus to formulate suggestions on how to improve further the cooperation between parcel-forwarders and law enforcement agencies to increase the accuracy of illicit substances.

The topic may consider unique, as it has yet to be dealt with in such detail or within an academic framework in Hungary. Due to the nature of the topic, the authors mixed original and secondary methods and needed to pay attention to the analysis of primary data too. Seventy-seven current or former drug users were given a questionnaire and were allowed to give their opinion about it. Several of the interviewed persons were consumers and committed drug-related cases themselves.

The authors set the objective that the ever-increasing quantities of packages containing drugs arriving in Hungary by post could be identified with greater accuracy when they arrive in the country than is currently the case.

Based on the current rules of competence and the system of procedures, the control of air parcels and airmail is carried out by the staff of the National Tax and Customs Administration (NTCA) acting as customs authorities in cooperation with the Hungarian Post and other parcel-forwarding services[4]. The customs authorities of the EU Member States also carry out risk management activities for security and safety purposes, in addition to protecting the financial and economic interests of the Community and the Member States, as required by the EU Customs Code[5]. The latter includes enforcing prohibitive or restrictive provisions, including rules prohibiting the illegal importation of drugs, in customs procedures. In risk management, customs officers usually use risk analysis methods to select high-risk packages and carry out internal inspections to filter out those that are indeed drugs and those that are likely to contain drugs or substances that are considered to be drugs or substances necessary for their manufacture. Following

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[3] S. Mátyás, E. Nyitrai, *Spatial Nature and Geographical Characteristics of Drug Crime in Hungary*, in Laws, 2022, 11(6), p. 90, https://doi.org/10.3390/ laws11060090.

[4] Companies providing postal and parcel services at Liszt Ferenc International Airport are AEO certified. The AEO programme (Authorised Economic Operator) is an EU programme which aims to increase the security of the international supply chain. It is a voluntary scheme whereby applicants for AEO status agree to meet the AEO criteria set out in EU customs legislation. The AEO authorisation is recognised in all Member States and based on mutual recognition even beyond it. It attests to the holder's customs credentials and indicates their willingness to cooperate with customs.

[5] Cf. Points 7. and 25. of Art. 5. and Art. 46. in the Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 October 2013 laying down the Union Customs Code (UCC).

the discovery and seizure of illicit drugs, the Criminal Investigation Service of the National Police will continue the investigation.

The authors also wanted to investigate drug users' experiences ordering drugs by postal and parcel services to understand these acts better.

The authors formulated the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:**

The authors claim that most drug users who consume drugs delivered by courier services use online parcel tracing solutions, and most of the time, they receive the packages as they place their order. The authors assume that packages containing illicit substances occur in a small fraction of the total volume. The competent authorities are taking a risk-based approach to increase accuracy and to carry out adequate controls.

**Hypothesis 2:**

From the perpetrators' point of view, the less risky period is the few weeks before Christmas: the known peak time when parcel traffic reaches the highest volume. Hence, criminals assume that there is less risk that authorities can identify parcels' illicit contents.

## 2. Literature review

The literature on drugs is extremely extensive. Many disciplines deal with the field (e.g. medicine, biology, chemistry, sociology, psychology), but the authors refrain from describing them. Law enforcement, sociology and criminology also deal with the field extensively both internationally and in Hungary.

Sociology and criminology examine, among other things, the social effects of drug use, both from the point of view of distributors and consumers[6]. They also examine the possibility of prevention and assistance[7].

Law enforcement also examines the area from many aspects, but we can state that due to the nature of the area, it is more characterized by a more practical approach. It appears as a problem that the police officer can take appropriate action against the person

[6] *See:* T. Rhodes, *Risk environments and drug harms: A social science for harm reduction approach*, in International Journal of Drug Policy, 20(3), 2009, pp. 193–201. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2008.10.003; E. Goode, *Drugs in American society,* Ninth Edition, 2014, McGraw-Hill Education; A. Stevens, C.E. Hughes, S. Hulme, R. Cassidy, *Depenalization, diversion and decriminalization: A realist review and programme theory of alternatives to criminalization for simple drug possession*, in European Journal of Criminology, 2022, 19(1), pp. 29–54, https://doi.org/10.1177/147737 0819887514; M. Pawson, B.C. Kelly, *Drug Normalization and Conventional Social Institutions: The Unusual Case of Prescription Drug Misuse*, in Sociological Forum, 2022, 37(1), pp. 48–69. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12778.

[7] *See:* H.R., Sumnall, *Encouraging a 'generational shift' in the UKs relationship with drugs. A commentary on the new UK drug strategy. What can be achieved with drug prevention?* In International Journal of Drug Policy, 2022, p. 109, 103841. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.drugpo.2022.103841; National Crime Agency, *County lines drug supply, vulnerability and harm 2018*, (NCA Intelligence Report NAC(19)095), 2019, https://national crimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/publications/257-county-lines-drug-supply-vulnerability-and-harm-2018/file; A. Winstock, N. Eastwood, A. Stevens, *Another drug strategy for the UK*, BMJ, 2021, n3097, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n3097; M. Sivadó, E. Lészkó, *Beszámoló egy kerekasztal beszélgetésről* In: Czene-Polgár, V.; Zsámbokiné, Ficskovszky Á. (eds.) *Innováció, elektronizáció*, tudásmenedzsment Budapest, 2018, pp. 305-314; M. Sivadó, *Új kihívások a droghelyzet kezelésében itthon, Európában és a világban – kis alkohológiai kitekintéssel*, Tanulmányok a "Biztonsági kockázatok – rendészeti válaszok" című tudományos konferenciáról, 2014, pp. 235-242.

using drugs[8] and that the police officer does not get injured or infected during the action (e.g. HIV, Hepatitis)[9]. Zoltán Csízner wrote about the role of organized crime, according to which "The spread of goods and services that can be ordered on the Internet, the impersonalization of trade, and the restrictive measures ordered due to the COVID-19 virus have created new conditions that also affect the sale of illegal goods. Risk-free ordering and delivery options, new payment methods have opened up, which demand the development and application of new methods from the intelligence agencies as well"[10] .

Only one author has written about the relationship between package forwarding services and drug shipments in the Hungarian literature. Ákos Erdős stated that "In Hungary, prohibited psychoactive substances – narcotics and new psychoactive substances – predominantly reach consumers through illegal international trade. Air passenger, mail and goods traffic is decisive from the point of view of the smuggling of prohibited psychoactive substances. (…) It has been clearly confirmed that air traffic smuggling of prohibited psychoactive substances takes place much more in mail and goods traffic than in passenger traffic."[11]. The author analyzed the reconnaissance data of the Hungarian customs authority.

In the foreign law enforcement literature, many studies deal with the problem of an increasing number of consumers ordering illegal drugs from the darknet by mail[12]. The solution is mostly seen in consumer education and stronger control of the dark web. However, the latter seems to be a difficult task for the time being, since the users of the dark web are anonymous, and the large number of people involved in this illegal trade exceeds the capacity of law enforcement agencies[13].

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[8] *See:* M. Tihanyi, *Rendőri intézkedések kábítószer-fogyasztás esetén [Police measures in case of drug consumption]*, In Rácz, J. (Ed.), *Rendészeti ismeretek a kábítószer-problémával kapcsolatban [Law enforcement knowledge of the drug problem]*, IRM Büntetőpolitikai Főosztály, 2019, pp. 324- 363, http://bunmegelozes.easyhosting.hu/dok/rendeszeti_ismeretek_a_kabitoszer_problemaval_kapcsolatban.pdf ; A. Greer, M. Selfridge, T.M. Watson, S. Macdonald, B. Pauly, *Young People Who Use Drugs Views Toward the Power and Authority of Police Officers*, Contemporary *Drug Problems*, 2022, 49(2), 170–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/009145 09211058989 .

[9] S. Mátyás, *A kábítószer-bűnözés elleni küzdelem mint stratégiai kihívás a magyar bűnüldözésben [The fight against drug crime as a strategic challenge in Hungarian law enforcement]*, NKE, 2020.

[10] Z. Csizner Z., *Ellenőrzött szállítás – az illegális kereskedelem elleni módszer szabályozá- sának története és új lehetőségei*[Controlled delivery – the history and new possibilities of the regulation of the method against illegal trade], *Belügyi Szemle*, 69 (7), 2021, 1209-1226. https://doi.org/10.38146/BSZ.2021.7.7

[11] A.Erdős, *Pénzügyőri szolgálati ismeretek 2.0 [Fiscal service skills 2.0],* Magyar Rendészettudományi Társaság Vám- és Pénzügyőri Tagozat, Budapest, 2021, p. 4.

[12]*See:* A.Morales-Gómez, S. McVie, F. Pantoja, C*ontrolled Delivery of Illegal Drug Parcels in Scotland: Does Policing Practice Align With a Public Health Approach Focused on Drug-Related Harm?*, in Journal of Drug Issues, 52(4), 2022, pp. 616–637. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/00220426221098986; J. Aldridge, R. Askew, *Delivery dilemmas: How drug cryptomarket users identify and seek to reduce their risk of detection by law enforcement*, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 41, 2017, pp. 101–109. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.drugpo. 2016.10.010; S.A. Bakken, J.J. Demant, *Sellers' risk perceptions in public and private social media drug markets*, in International Journal of Drug Policy, 2019, 73, pp. 255–262. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.drugpo.2019.03.009; S.A. Bakken, K. Moeller, S. Sandberg, *Coordination problems in cryptomarkets: Changes in cooperation, competition and valuation*, in European Journal of Criminology, 15(4), 2018, pp. 442–460. https://doi.org/10.1177/147737 0817749177

[13] A.ElBahrawy, L. Alessandretti, L. Rusnac, D. Goldsmith, A. Teytelboym, A. Baronchelli, *Collective dynamics of dark web marketplaces*, Scientific Reports, 2020, 10(1), 18827. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-74416-y

Concealment and packaging are two key components of delivery and often influence the distributor's actions. The term "concealment" refers to how a product is disguised to look like a legitimate package, especially in front of the Postal Service's X-ray machines. Packaging refers to the way a drug is packaged to avoid detection by drug-sniffing dogs or other means of detecting odors and traces[14] .

## 3. Methodology

1. We used a keyword search in several international scientific databases (Google Scholar, BASE /Bielefeld Academic Search Engine/, DART-Europe – E-theses Portal, Hungarian OAI search engine, MTMT /Hungarian Scientific Bibliography/); however, we did not find any study that would have conducted a questionnaire survey related to the postal trade of drugs and consumers.

2. In the course of the research, we carried out questionnaire data collection. The respondents were selected from current or former residents of a drug rehabilitation institution. The current residents of the rehabilitation center suffer from drug addiction, and the former residents suffered from addiction in the past. Completing the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous.

Our goal in filling out the questionnaire was to learn about criminal practices with sending and receiving parcels. The questionnaires were analyzed with the SPSS program.

Due to its nature, the subject can only do with a thorough examination of the dispatch and arrival of postal items. We visited the locations of DHL and Hungarian Post, where we studied the process of mail and package handling in and out of the country and interviewed the managers of the locations.

We reviewed the packages containing drugs arriving in Hungary by post, as well as the package delivery process, based on the reports of the employees of the package forwarding services. Next, we collected the experiences of the "other side", drug users, regarding parcel delivery and receiving services. We wanted to find out what kind of drugs are ordered by those who fill out the questionnaire, how they are hidden and packaged, and for what purpose they use mail-order services.

With the help of the literature databases, we also examined whether a literature publication had been published on the topic.

## 4. Results

### *4.1. Amendment to the law regarding packages from third countries*

Shopping on the Internet plays an increasingly important role in our lives, which has also significantly transformed our shopping habits. Ordering a product from distant countries was rare a decade ago, but it has recently become common. Trade in goods bought online has reached such proportions in the last few years (with COVID-19 setting new records for trade volumes) that the EU had to take drastic action.

[14] A. Ailipoaie, P. Shortis, *From Dealer to Doorstep – How Drugs Are Sold On the Dark Net. Global Drug Policy Observatory*, Swansea University, 2015, https://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/From-Dealer-to-Doorstep-â%C2%80%C2%93-How-Drugs-Are-Sold-On-the-Dark-Net.pdf

In relation to the Internet, it should be noted, however, that the present research looked at trading on the open Internet. The vast majority of drugs are sold via the dark web. This was not possible to investigate in the present research.

In exchange for products at a fraction of the average European price, buyers have accepted the possibility of more extended and uncertain delivery times and the impossibility of effectively enforcing a warranty against the trader in case of problems with these goods.

The import of cheap Chinese goods has already virtually eliminated specific domestic industries (electronics and light industry, such as shoes and textiles production) even before the boom in e-commerce. Looking at the payment of public charges on e-commerce, it also appears that EU countries have lost significant tax revenue, as products below EUR 22 were previously exempt from customs duties and import VAT, giving an unjustified market advantage to low-value goods from third countries. Member States have faced an increasing loss of VAT revenue due to the exemption of low-value packages. It has been estimated that at least EUR 1 billion of revenue is lost yearly due to VAT exemption and around EUR 4 billion due to fraud, typically due to undervaluation and misrepresentation as gifts (Bakai et al., 2022).

As customs duties and VAT were not imposed on imports of low-value parcels, customs authorities did not need to focus on securing fiscal revenues in this segment. Of the dual risk management objectives mentioned earlier, i.e., to safeguard the financial and economic interests of the EU and the Member States and to manage security and safety risks posing threats to our societies, only the latter remained a priority. From a customs perspective, fewer resources remained for this traffic segment. This was, of course, very much circumvented, with less than EUR 22 being declared as the product's value, which was then used not only to illegally reduce the public charges payable on the import of goods but also to import goods subject to prohibitive or restrictive measures. As a result, from 1 July 2021, all goods imported into the EU from third countries (including those below EUR 22) will be subject to import VAT.

According to the NTCA's experience, in the year following 1 July 2021, 65.5% of the volume of air parcels and airmail arriving from third countries and crossing customs borders in Hungary came from the People's Republic of China, 7.6% from the United Arab Emirates and 5% from the United Kingdom. When grouped by value, 15.8% of the items were between EUR 22 and EUR 150, and 84.2% were below EUR 22. It was the category of consignments for which customs authorities needed to have electronically analysable data before the new legislation. 99% of the declarations submitted came from only two traders (the remaining 1% was spread over 10 other traders). In almost all cases, the Airport Directorate of NTCA was the competent authority for the clearances. Of the incoming parcels, 8.8% were destined for Hungary, while 91.2% were forwarded to other EU Member States. Budapest airport is, therefore, one of the regional entry points for e-commerce into the region, where some 4 million air cargoes were cleared annually before the change. This increased to 31.5 million customs clearances for low-value parcels in the subsequent year, according to eVAM database of NCTA[15] , which translates to 37.8 million customs clearances for the entire calendar year 2022[16] .

[15] K.P. Bakai, L. Suba, A. Szabó, A., *First Year Experience of the Abolition of the €22 Rule and the Introduction of the New e-Commerce Vat Laws*, Public Finance Quarterly, 67(4), 2022, pp. 585–600, https://doi.org/10.35551/PFQ_2022_4_7

[16] Airport Directorate of NTCA, *Yearly assessment report 2022,* published in 2023.

These facts have led to a sharp increase in the administrative burden, not only for customs but also for the exporter side and have also changed other aspects of the trade. Under the previous practice, each EU Member State primarily received parcels and letters from third countries themselves. The advantage of this for each country was that all incoming mail was destined for that country, allowing them to carry out a risk analysis and to pick out or track shipments deemed suspicious. Thanks to the new rules, Chinese trading companies have set up large logistics centres in some EU countries (e.g., Frankfurt a.M. in Germany or Bruges in Belgium), where parcels sent from China to the EU are cleared through customs and then distributed to the EU countries of destination. However, once the goods have been cleared in another Member State and sent to the country of destination, as intra-EU traffic, there is no longer any opportunity to check the goods. It means, on the one hand, that the law enforcement authorities in the home country have no option but to rely on the clearance procedure of the customs clearance country and, on the other hand, that they lose the possibility of tracing the delivery to the consignee in the absence of notification.

### *4.2. The result of interview data collection and questionnaire survey related to package forwarding services*

#### *4.2.1. Experiences gained during the study of the locations of DHL and Hungarian Post, the practice of parcel handling*

Among the interviewees, XY stated that as of January 1, 2013, the monopoly of Hungarian Post in postal services ended in Hungary, and privately owned companies providing parcel forwarding and other postal services appeared. The initial interest soon seemed to wane, and a few larger, mostly foreign-owned companies were left competing for postal services in Hungary.

In parcels and letters Hungarian Post continues to handle enormous traffic (27.5 million pieces/year). Private service providers mainly deal with parcel forwarding within the country and the EU. (This is because these companies have yet to build centres that would receive packages from abroad.) Most packages from abroad enter the country's territory at Hungarian Post locations.

The main pr'blem is the conflict of different interests. It is in the interest of law enforcement agencies to uncover and seize the drugs and raw materials entering the country as much as possible, as well as to identify the customer. On the other hand, the interests of service providers are regulated by market-based economic laws. In other words, to deliver the packages to the customer as quickly and undamaged as possible. Suppose the customer finds that the ordered product arrives slowly or damaged. In that case, he will next time entrust another package forwarding service to deliver the product to its destination.

In our view, the parcel-forwarding services operating in Hungary cooperate to the maximum extent with the customs and, in broader terms, the law enforcement agencies; they try to take all possible measures to filter out illegal products; however, due to the conflict of interests, the individual parties are guided by different goals.

The product is often transported by air to the destination country for goods ordered from thousands of kilometres away. The carrier's primary concern is aviation security, particularly detecting explosive devices and harmful chemicals. Each package is checked individually by X-ray. In this sense, narcotics do not threaten flight safety and are difficult to distinguish from other substances, often in powder form (e.g., bodybuilding

powders, talcum powder and powders for weight loss), by X-ray screening or sensory examination. Mainly no such control is applied to land transport, where the chances of anuthorit to smuggle a prohibited substance into a country are even higher.

Technical development has enabled the customer to trace their package via the Internet. After arriving in the country, a package reaches the recipient within a few days. If a package becomes suspicious to law enforcement agencies, it can be detained for a short time. However, a delay of two or three days can already make the customer suspicious, so it often happens that they do not even pick up the ordered package because they are afraid of being caught. In other words, the authorities must act extremely quickly. The parcel delivery service can explain technical and logistical problems in a day or two, but the customer may become suspicious in the case of a longer time interval.

Drug dealers are incredibly cautious, they often choose the '*poste restante*' delivery method, and if anything raises their suspicions, they never pick up the shipment. The data shows parcels containing narcotics have rarely been found in parcel machines.

At non-state parcel forwarding services, the parcel is checked for new customers. It must be opened before sending, and the sender must identify himself with a document. In this case, a large percentage of prohibited products can be avoided. However, there needs to be customer identification or content control in the case of the contracted partners. Here the package collection is based on previous acquaintance and trust. In this case, risks may arise, but if it turns out that a customer needs to act following the rules, he will lose the discount he previously obtained, and his packages will no longer be delivered. Parcel forwarding companies regularly train the staff who pick up packages, so they look at customers' behaviour, what kind of goods they deliver and where they want to deliver them.

The parcel forwarders and postal operators cannot open packages and inspect their contents. If there is a suspicion that a consignment contains drugs, the Customs authorities are informed before customs clearance, and the Police are informed afterwards.

The NTCA staff continuously checks parcels arriving by air from third countries to Hungary during customs procedures. Based on risk analysis, they select those consignments that represent a high risk and are therefore checked in detail. Customs controls have three main objectives. Firstly, to safeguard the financial and economic interests of the Member States, to regulate trade and to ensure the safety and security of the citizens of the Member States. At the same time, Customs authorities must ensure the continuity of trade and promote economic development and must therefore organise their control activities in such a way as to minimise the impact on legitimate trade and to detect illegal consignments as accurately as possible. Trade facilitation and the principles of security and safety together seem at first sight to be contradictory dual objectives, which Customs authorities use risk management to achieve (Article 46 of the UCC). This implies that they can only effectively control a few per cent of trade, where the level of detail and resource requirements of controls can be illustrated by following the 'funnel principle' of gradualness. According to the latest report of the European Court of Auditors, the average proportion of customs controls in EU countries considering customs declaration items was 9.5% documentary and only 4.5% physical in 2019[17]. The former figures are not only for air transport but all modes of transport and all customs clearance. Behind the averages, there is also a spread of the figures

[17] European Court of Auditors, *Customs controls: insufficient harmonisation hampers EU financial interests*. Special Report, 2021, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR21_04/SR_Customs_controls_EN.pdf

across the Member States, which fluctuate from period to period according to the volume of trade and several other factors. It means that the Customs authorities in an average EU Member State can check slightly less than one in 10 packages without opening the consignment and examining its contents based on the documents submitted for clearance and other available data. If it finds evidence of non-compliance with customs legislation, it conducts an in-depth internal examination of part or all the consignments. Based on the above data, these are carried out on less than one occasion in 20 parcels. Customs authorities perform physical checks better than average for short periods, such as international operations and action days.

In physical checks, Customs will seek to target their investigations in areas where, based on the experience of previous seizures, information available to Customs, information received from domestic or foreign partner authorities and other considerations, above-average or exceptionally high risk levels can be identified. It needs to be made clear of success in detecting infringements before the investigation. Still, based on these risk considerations, it only expects to detect infringements in these areas more likely than elsewhere. Experience has shown that in approximately one out of three batch inspections, infringements are detected, and in two cases, the risk management system is wrong, leading to a false positive. These cases indicate an 'oversensitivity' of the risk management system, with customs spending unnecessary time checking non-infringing goods, passengers or means of transport. While this does not result in infringing goods entering the market, it wastes resources and time rather than valuable work. If there are a series of such cases, lessons should be learned, as this will require a review of the risk profiles involved. The opposite of failed customs inspections also occurs, where the risk management system does not indicate risk, but the package still contains illegal contraband, such as drugs. In this case, the selection for control is not carried out, mainly due to poor risk identification, assessment or lack of capacity. In such cases, the risk management system should be trained to identify risks by setting up new profiles. The development of the risk management system should, therefore, not simply aim at increasing the number of so-called real positive hits (detections) accurately flagged by the system or the number of cases of correct flagging of non-infringing goods since the number of such cases is mainly a consequence of the volume of traffic, given the precise knowledge of the risks. The challenge is to reduce the rate of false hits when risk management is wrong about the presence of infringing goods[18] .

Given this, the Airport Directorate of NTCA has successfully controlled parcels and mail arriving by air. In 2022, despite the significant change in clearing low-value parcels, customs carried out internal goods inspections for 6.29% of import-directed customs procedures. In that year, only 9% of the 37.8 million items cleared were consigned to or destined for Hungary, the majority being consignments destined for other EU Member States, for whom the effectiveness of the controls depended on the ability and expertise of the Hungarian customs authorities. Customs inspections were carried out on 3.5% of the transits carried out by traders operating at the airport and

[18] See: Z. Csaba, M. Gecsei, *Kockázatelemzés a gyakorlatban: cigaretta a repülőtéren [Risk analysis in practice: cigarettes at the airport]*, 2021 in Czene-Polgár, V. et al. (Eds.) *Tradíció, tudomány, minőség: 30 éves a Vám-és Pénzügyőri Tanszék [Tradition, science, quality: the Department of Customs and Excise is 30 years old]*, Budapest: Magyar Rendészettudományi Társaság Vám- és Pénzügyőri Tagozat, pp. 129-142. http://doi.org/10.37372/mrttvpt.2021.2.7 ; Rukanova et. All, *cited*; Samoilenco, *cited*; European Commission, C*ommunication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee on Customs Risk*, 2013.

not holding an AEO authorization based on individual and central risk management results. Risk management used risk information received from foreign customs authorities, in addition to its information and information received from the NTCA's central risk management unit, and on several occasions contributed to the risk management of foreign partners by sending information. Customs revealed 564 cases of suspected possession of drugs, 160 cases of suspected facilitation of drug manufacture and 123 cases of suspected abuse of new psychoactive substances. These predominantly concerned air parcels rather than passenger traffic, with a significant proportion of the latter being mail traffic[19]. According to the annual customs clearance statistics, only a tiny proportion of drug-related offences were detected compared to the full-scale volume. However, an objective assessment of this is challenging due to the need for approximate latency estimates.

### *4.2.2. The results of the questionnaire data collection*

The first question of the questionnaire was about gender. The questionnaire was filled out exclusively by men, 77 people. One of the Hungarian drug rehabilitation institutions providing the data treats only male clients.

The second question of the questionnaire sought the answer to age. Based on the given years of age, more than two-thirds of the interviewed persons were under forty. Most of them were in the age group of 20-29 (33.8%), 30-39 (28.6%) and 13-19 (11.7%). This also clearly shows the values of the primary lifetime prevalence of drug users within society since drug users mostly come from the young adult age group.

The next question (question 3) was about marital status. The answers to the question confirm the answers given based on the age question. Almost sixty per cent (59.5%) of the respondents were unmarried. This can partly be explained by drug-addicted people trying less to meet traditional social expectations (see: wedding). Due to their living situation, the conditions for social coexistence could be more favourable in their case. 26% of the respondents were married, and 6.5% were divorced. The latter value is relatively low, presumably resulting from the high proportion of unmarried people.

The fourth question was about education. The proportion of those with primary education or less (37.7%). – the proportion of high school graduates (29.9%) and the proportion of university/college graduates (7.8%).

Among the socio-demographic questions, the last question (question 5) was aimed at how long the interviewed person has been using drugs. 41.6% of them have been using drugs for 10-19 years, while nearly thirty per cent (28.6%) have used drugs for 5-9.9 years.

Question 6 sought to find out where the respondent obtained the substance consumed. More than half of the respondents (54%) stated that they get the drug from friends and acquaintances. One-third (34.9%) of the respondents bought the prohibited substance from a dealer. The proportion of people who ordered from the Internet and bought from family members was 3.2%, and nearly 5% (4.8%) of the respondents obtained drugs from other sources. This is surprising since the authors assumed that the percentage of Internet buyers would be much higher.

Examining the question by age group, we can establish that the representatives of the 20-29 and 30-39 age groups stated that they also buy online (Table 1).

[19] Airport Directorate NTCA, 2023, *cited.*

| Where did you get drug from? | Percentage |
|---|---|
| friends, acquaintances | 55,3 |
| family members | 2,6 |
| dealer | 35,5 |
| internet | 2,6 |
| other sources | 3,9 |
| **Total** | **100** |

Table 1: Question 6 – Where did you get drug from?

Based on the years of consumption, we can conclude that the values of the "from friends and acquaintances" category are the highest. Based on the years of consumption, the following outliers were found in the "from friends, acquaintances" category: 2-4.9 years (66.7%), 5-9.9 years (59.1%) and 10-19 years (62, 5 years).

In question number 7, we wanted to answer whether it had ever happened that some prohibited substance was delivered to the interviewed person via a courier service. The results showed that 81% of the respondents had never ordered drugs by mail. Less than 10% of the respondents stated that they rarely (7.9%) or often (9.5%) order drugs online. It could have been assumed that, due to computer use, the youngest age group is the one that orders the most significant proportion of drugs from the Internet. However, in the case of the 13-19 age group, this was zero per cent (just as in the case of the over fifty age group). In the case of the 13-19-year-old age group, this was zero per cent (just as in the case of the over-50 age group).

In the following question (question number 8), the interviewees commented on their experiences with parcel delivery services. Of course, only those who previously stated that they had ordered drugs online answered this question.

The vast majority of respondents (85.7%) stated that "everything was fine" or "generally everything was fine". 14.3% only said that it was "mostly not OK". From this, we can conclude that ordering by mail is far from safe, as more than a tenth of the respondents already had a negative experience.

Question 9 asked about adverse experiences more precisely than positive and negative experiences. The question was, "Has it ever happened that the material did not arrive?" 45% of the respondents stated that it has happened that the ordered narcotic drug did not arrive. This can be considered a high value and confirms the above.

In question No. 10, we wanted to determine the proportion of respondents against whom criminal proceedings were initiated concerning goods received via the courier service. Police proceedings have yet to be initiated against 90% of those interviewed, so we can count on exceptionally high latency since only one person out of ten made a negative statement. This is consistent with the answer to question number 8.

The most significant proportion (20%) of the 20-29 age group members stated that they had been prosecuted for this reason. This can be related to the fact that they can also be considered the most active age group in this crime (they most often order drugs). The next question, number 11, approaches the problem from a practical point of view. Based on this question, the authors wish to formulate recommendations for law enforcement agencies. The question concerned how the senders packaged the individual drugs (e.g., marijuana, cocaine, heroin). It can be assumed that the senders

packed it in a material they assumed would 1. Not attract attention, 2. Not be detected by drug-detecting dogs.

Nearly 40% (38.5%) of respondents indicated the combination of paper and plastic, while 30.8% indicated plastic. 7.7% indicated paper, plastic, and aluminium foil, while another 7.7% indicated the combination of plastic and aluminium foil. Plastic is mentioned in 84.7% of the answers. Plastic insulates well and protects against moisture, tearing and other damages. Based on this, during the risk analysis, it is recommended to pay more attention to the inspection of shipments with multiple packaging materials.

For marijuana, paper/plastic (29.4%) and plastic (23.5%) packaging methods were indicated. Due to the characteristic smell of marijuana, plastic is, of course, an essential packaging material. For cocaine, paper/plastic (42.9%) and plastic (28.6%), while for heroin, foil (50%) is the most popular, while paper and paper/plastic share 25% each.

Most types of packaging were observed for designer drugs (10 types). Consumers order these drugs by mail in the most significant proportion.

22.2% of respondents indicated plastic and paper/plastic, i.e. more than forty per cent of the respondents. Aluminium foil received over ten per cent, while X-ray foil received 5.6%.

Question 12 tried to determine the average quantity ordered for the four types of drugs mentioned above. In the case of marijuana, almost two-thirds of the respondents (62.5%) ordered quantities above 5 grams. In contrast, in the case of cocaine, half of the respondents indicated a value between 3.1 and 5 grams. For heroin orders, the weight value between 1 gram, 1.1-3 grams and 3.1-5 grams received a third value. The smaller orders show that heroin users are, in financial terms, mainly among the poorer drug users who cannot afford to buy larger quantities. (It may also be ordered for personal use only)

Designer drugs arrive in the country in relatively large quantities among the ordered materials. 75% of the respondents order more than 5 grams of substances. This is probably ordered with the intention of wholesale distribution.

It can be observed for each drug that the share of orders over 5 grams increases in direct proportion with the increase in the duration of consumption.

Question number 13 was about the most certain packet size. The authors wanted to find out which package sizes are the least noticeable to the authorities, according to the respondents. The categories shoebox (52.6%) and more extensive than a shoebox (13.2%) were selected by most people.

The next question (14.) concerned the safest package weight. A low package weight can arouse the authorities' interest in a specific package, so packages arrive with a greater weight than the actual weight of the substance inside. More than a third of those surveyed (34%) believe that luggage weighing up to half a kg is the least noticeable. A quarter of the respondents (24.5%) they indicated a weight between 1.1-2 kg, while 22.6% indicated a weight greater than 2.1 kg as a "safe" weight. For marijuana, paper/plastic (29.4%) and plastic (23.5%) packaging methods were indicated. Due to the characteristic smell of marijuana, plastic is, of course, an essential packaging material. For cocaine, paper/plastic (42.9%) and plastic (28.6%), while for heroin, foil (50%) is the most popular, while paper and paper/plastic share 25% each (Table 2).

| Package weight | Percentage |
|---|---|
| 0 – 0,5 kg | 34,0 |
| 0,6 – 1,0 kg | 18,9 |
| 1,1 kg – 2 kg | 24,5 |
| more than 2,1 kg | 22,6 |
| **Total** | **100** |

Table 2: Question 14. – Which is the safest package weight?

Most types of packaging were observed for designer drugs (10 types). Consumers order these drugs by mail in the most significant proportion.

22.2% of respondents indicated plastic and paper/plastic, i.e. more than forty per cent of the respondents. Aluminum foil received over ten per cent, while X-ray foil received 5.6%.

Question 12 tried to determine the average quantity ordered for the four types of drugs mentioned above. In the case of marijuana, almost two-thirds of the respondents (62.5%) ordered quantities above 5 grams. In contrast, in the case of cocaine, half of the respondents indicated a value between 3.1 and 5 grams. For heroin orders, the weight value between 1 gram, 1.1-3 grams and 3.1-5 grams received a third value. The smaller orders show that heroin users are, in financial terms, mainly among the poorer drug users who cannot afford to buy larger quantities. (It may also be ordered for personal use only)

Among the ordered materials, designer drugs arrive in the country in relatively large quantities. 75% of the respondents order more than 5 grams of substances. This is probably ordered with the intention of wholesale distribution.

It can be observed for each drug that the share of orders over 5 grams increases in direct proportion with the increase in the duration of consumption.

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The package's colour is also an essential question from the point of view of risk analysis. Question No. 15 wanted to know which colour is the least conspicuous to the police and NTCO. According to more than a third (35%) of current and former drug users, brown packaging is the least noticeable, while 17.5% think white packaging is the least noticeable. The third highest value was given to the colour grey (7.5%).

The packaging material can be important not only in terms of colour and material but also in terms of the transmission of various smells. One of the most important things about drugs is that drug-detecting dogs cannot smell the substance in the package, so criminals use packaging material (materials) that do not allow odours to pass through. Question 16 wanted to find an answer to this. Paper and plastic packaging (33.3%)

received the highest percentage, and the drug is mainly sent in aluminum foil, plastic foil and airtight bags.

The age group and the persons belonging to the period of drug consumption mostly overlap; in their case, it is possible to speak of the most excellent "precaution"; they seem to be the most cautious.

Question number 17 sought to find out the safest sending countries. After cleaning the answers (the respondents also mentioned several irrelevant countries, e.g. Uganda, East Timor, and Yemen), the highest value was given to Hungary and Switzerland.

With question 18, we wanted to determine the safest month to send the package. We assumed that due to many packages, most people mark the months at the end of the year. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicated December (64.7%), while August and October reached values above five per cent. The respondents did not give reasons for the answers, so in the case of the above two months – as a result of the anonymous filling – it is impossible to find out why August and October were selected. The package numbers do not justify this in any way.

With the expansion of the World Wide Web and postal services, more and more people follow the path of the ordered package. Question 19, in the framework of a to-be-decided answer, sought an answer to whether the person filling out the questionnaire used to follow the path of the package ordered on the Internet. Surprisingly few people answered yes, only 29.8% of the respondents. People over 50 are the most cautious, all answered yes, and most of those in the 20-39 age group answered no. Just over 20% of them only follow the path of the package.

## 5. Summary

The study examined drug-containing packages forwarded by package forwarding services. It made suggestions for law enforcement agencies that can be used during everyday law enforcement work during risk analysis. During the questionnaire analysis, it was established that the packages containing drugs are primarily wrapped in several packaging materials. During the risk analysis, shoebox-sized packages covered with brown or white packaging material are considered high risk. The most excellent chance of a drug-containing package arriving is during the period with the most significant number of packages, i.e. in December, when package traffic increases significantly due to Christmas, and there is less chance of being lost. Based on the above, the authors formulated proposals for law enforcement agencies (see below).

A factor complicating the research was the fact that it was not possible to obtain from the law enforcement agencies the data related to the territory of the drug order (where and in what quantity drug-containing packages were ordered), and there was also no data available regarding the drug-containing packages opened by the NTCA and the police. Of course, these barriers may occur future research challenges.

The following can be established about the set hypotheses:

H1: The hypothesis needed to be verified, as less than one-third of the respondents stated that they only follow the path of packages via the Internet. An even smaller percentage of the younger age group (20-39 years old) who regularly use the Internet follow the package's path.

H2: The hypothesis was confirmed, as the Christmas period is when, in the respondent's opinion, the chance of seizure is the smallest since this is the peak time of air parcel traffic.

Based on the results of the research, the authors make the following recommendations for law enforcement agencies:

Cooperation

- The research proves that the minority of parcels are consigned to the same destination country where the clearance has been conducted, and most consignments are destined for other EU Member States. Therefore, better cooperation is required among law enforcement agencies, primarily between airport customs authorities of the EU Member States because they protect societies all over the EU.

Measuring the packages

- A more frequent rummage is recommended if multiple packaging materials, especially paper combined with plastic, occur.
- Packages containing aluminum foil may be considered elevated risk.
- Shoebox-sized packages are considered elevated risk based on their size.
- Packages up to 2 kg pose higher risk than those of heavier weight.
- Brown and white packaging packages are more likely to contain illegal substances based on colour.

Timing

- Regarding time intervals, the end-of-year peak period should be addressed in risk management.

The authors see a further opportunity to continue the research in a broader frame of data collection. Primarily, they want to fill out a similar questionnaire in other European Union countries than Hungary, compare the results obtained in each country, and establish national characteristics. Also, a possible area for the continuation of the research is the questioning of the Hungarian and international law enforcement bodies, as well as examining this area from the point of view of tourism security[20] .

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