

THE EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION, BIRTH RATE, AND DRUG DEPENDENCE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

Education, demographic structure, and the prevalence of psychoactive substance use among young people are essential variables in assessing risks to national security. This study uses statistical data from the 2020-2024 period, obtained from official institutional sources, to identify relevant trends and correlations among these indicators. The analysis reveals a consistent decline in birth rates, a growing school dropout phenomenon, and an expansion of drug use among adolescents, with initiation occurring at increasingly early ages. These developments are examined through the lens of the human security paradigm, emphasizing how social vulnerabilities impact internal cohesion and the state's ability to manage emerging risks. The research findings support the need for integrated public policies in the fields of education, health, and security, based on contextual diagnosis and preventive intervention.

KEYWORDS:

national security, public education, demographic transition, drug use, adolescence

1. Introduction

Demographic indicators play a fundamental role in shaping individual well-being and in determining national security and stability. Education, the birth-to-death ratio, and the phenomenon of drug dependence are interdependent demographic factors that directly influence the social structure and the state's capacity to maintain a safe and prosperous environment. Within the framework of human security studies, these factors are crucial for understanding the dynamics of risks and vulnerabilities within communities, as well as for developing effective intervention policies.

Children represent the foundation of a stable future, and their education constitutes

the cornerstone of sustainable societal development. Investment in education reduces inequalities and fosters individuals capable of critical thinking, social integration, and active contribution to community cohesion. In contrast, the lack of access to education, combined with increased exposure to existing social vulnerabilities such as access to prohibited substances generates emerging risks to national security. Drug dependence among youth, noticeable even from middle school years, reflects these negative influences and highlights the importance of a preventive approach.

This study analyzes three demographic indicators relevant to national security: education, the birth-to-death ratio, and drug

dependence among young people. Using statistical data from the 2020-2024 period, this analysis examines the trends and impact of these factors on the Romanian socio-economic context

2. Conceptual Framework

The analysis of the relation between education, demographic transition, and the use of psychoactive substances among adolescents requires an understanding of these phenomena as structural factors with a direct impact on social stability and the functionality of state institutions. Education plays a crucial role in shaping human capital and developing individuals' capacity to participate actively in society. Limited access to education, combined with educational dropout rates or low academic performance, leads to the emergence of vulnerabilities that can undermine community cohesion and social balance.

Demographic decline, characterized by a constant decrease in birth rates and a shift in population age structure, generates imbalances with cumulative effects on public systems. Population aging and the declining proportion of the youth population influence the allocation of resources and the state's ability to ensure continuity in key areas such as education, health, and internal security.

Drug use among adolescents serves as a significant indicator of social vulnerabilities and the instability of family, school, and community relations. The early onset of such behaviors reflects a deterioration of social protection mechanisms and calls for systemic interventions.

Overall, these processes can be analyzed through the lens of human security, which integrates social, educational, and public health dimensions into the broader framework of national security. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the connections between the educational system, demographic transition, and the incidence of illicit substance use among youth, highlighting how dysfunctions in these areas can affect

the state's ability to maintain public order, sustainable development, and social cohesion.

3. Scientific Research Methodology

The methodological framework of this study is based on a qualitative approach, using statistical analysis to identify correlations and trends between key demographic indicators – education, birth-death ratio and youth drug dependence – and their implications for national security. The research relies on data collected from official sources, including the National Institute of Statistics, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the National Anti-Drug Agency, covering the period between 2020 and 2024.

The research is structured in three analytical stages. In the first stage, statistical indicators related to education are examined, with an emphasis on school attendance, dropout rates, and performance outcomes in national examinations. The second stage focuses on the demographic balance, specifically the natural growth rate of the population, regional disparities in birth and mortality rates, and their impact on Romania's demographic sustainability. The third stage analyzes the prevalence of drug use among youth, with particular attention to the age of initiation and the school or family environments that facilitate this behavior.

The methodology includes comparative analysis, correlation of data sets, and trend identification. The findings are interpreted through the lens of the human security paradigm, highlighting how demographic vulnerabilities may translate into national-level risks. In this context, the study aims to offer evidence-based insights that serve as a foundation for policymaking in education, health, and national security.

4. Results and Discussion

Recent developments in the fields of education, demography, and public health highlight a series of systemic dysfunctions that impact social stability and the state's

ability to ensure the continuity of its essential functions. This research adopts an integrated interpretation of these developments, based on data available for the period 2020-2024, and directs the analysis toward the concrete manifestations of these trends. This chapter presents and discusses the most relevant findings regarding education, the birth-death ratio, and the use of illicit substances among the youth population, with a focus on both the direct and indirect implications for social stability and the functioning of state mechanisms.

4.1. Education

The educational dimension represents a fundamental pillar in strengthening human capital and preventing the accumulation of social vulnerabilities. In Romania, limited access to quality education and high educational dropout rates seriously affect national security by amplifying social exclusion and economic vulnerabilities. Recent data from Eurostat (2024) indicate an increase in the school dropout rate from 15.6% in 2020 to 16.5% in 2022, a trend worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in rural areas where access to education was limited. Currently, this gap

increases the risk of social exclusion and juvenile delinquency, undermining both social stability and the national economy.

Approximately 28% of students in rural areas experienced significant difficulties in accessing online education, compared to only 15% of students in urban areas (Ministry of Education, 2022), highlighting a structural inequality. Reduced access to functional education limits individual development prospects, fuels social tensions and marginalization, and increases the risk of involvement in antisocial behavior. At the same time, the lack of educational opportunities restricts the professional and social integration of young people. An educated population is generally less prone to social exclusion (Blanden, 2022), contributing to a safe and cohesive community, an essential aspect of maintaining national security from a social perspective.

Moreover, existing data (UNICEF, 2023) emphasize the challenges of restoring the education system after the COVID-19 period, pointing to persistently low school attendance rates in certain disadvantaged rural areas.

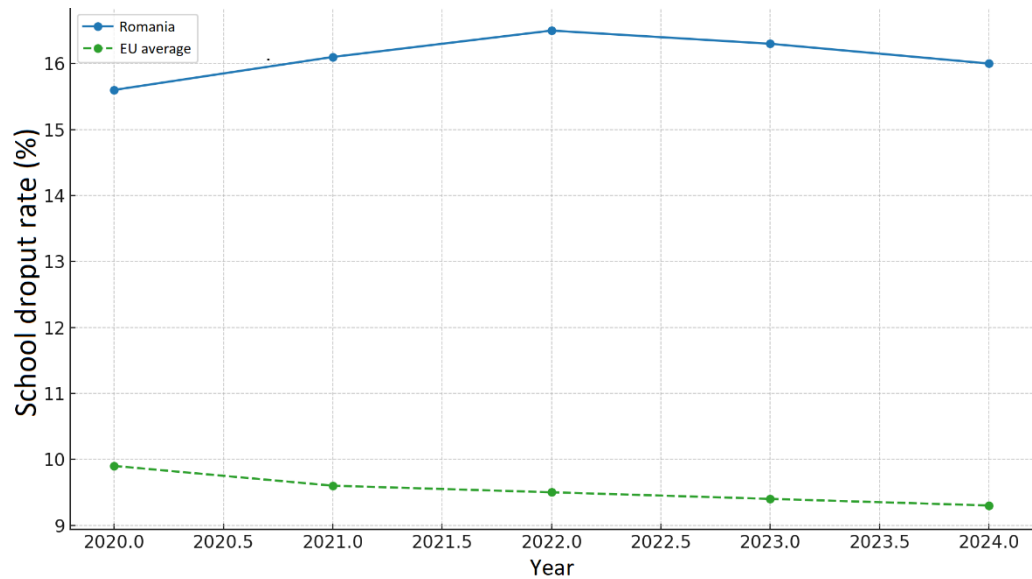


Figure no. 1: *The school dropout rate in Romania compared to the EU average during the period 2020-2024*
(Source: Data-based conceptualization by the author; Eurostat, 2024)

The graph (Figure no. 1) illustrates the school dropout rate in Romania compared to the European Union average over the period 2020-2024. A significant and persistent gap can be observed, with Romania displaying a considerably higher dropout rate, even though a slight decline was recorded between 2023 and 2024.

In 2020, the school dropout rate in Romania was 15.6%, meaning that 15.6% of Romanian youth aged between 18 and 24 left the education system without completing compulsory schooling. By 2022, this rate had increased to 16.5%, and in 2024 it slightly decreased to 16.0%. The increase in dropout rates during the pandemic years reflects the impact of limited access to education, particularly in rural areas, where educational resources and distance learning infrastructure were insufficient (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Over the same period, the European Union average steadily declined from 9.9% in 2020 to 9.3% in 2024 (Eurostat, 2024), reflecting the effectiveness of educational measures adopted by other member states to prevent school dropout and ensure equitable access to education, including during the pandemic (UNICEF, 2023). The significant gap compared to the EU average highlights the structural deficiencies in access to education in Romania, particularly in impoverished areas.

A high dropout rate implies a large number of young people lacking qualifications, who face considerable challenges in entering the labor market and are more vulnerable to social marginalization. These dynamics have direct consequences for national security, as a youth population prone to antisocial vulnerabilities can generate economic and social instability at the community level. In a competitive European context, the lack of education limits both economic development potential and the capacity to sustain social cohesion in Romania.

In the medium term, Romania should implement policies that ensure equitable

access to education by expanding school infrastructure in rural and disadvantaged areas and by allocating appropriate educational resources. Such measures could include training programs for teachers and incentives to encourage them to remain in their positions, at least in the short term, to mitigate the effects of current structural inequalities. Nevertheless, support should be directed toward students from rural areas and low-income families, who have been most severely affected by this infrastructural deficit.

Another set of policies could focus on social scholarships and academic support programs aimed at reducing school dropout rates. Encouraging students to return to school through subsidies and financial incentives, as well as providing free transportation for those living in remote areas, could significantly improve the current situation. Implementing such resilience measures could gradually reduce the rate of social exclusion by 2035, contributing to a better-qualified workforce and enhanced social stability. In the absence of sustained government intervention, educational disparities risk amplifying existing economic and social vulnerabilities, leading to a weaker economic foundation and a workforce insufficiently prepared to meet the future demands of European society.

4.2. Birth-Death Ratio

Romania's demographic decline, reflected in the decreasing birth-death ratio, directly impacts the structure of society and its capacity to sustain long-term development. This decline can be correlated with economic changes, the emigration of young people, and the challenges families face in balancing career and personal life, in the absence of effective governmental measures to address these issues.

At the same time, the mortality rate has shown a slight increase, rising from 12.7 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants in 2020 to 13.1 in 2024 (NIS, 2024). The imbalance between births and deaths is thus leading to a continued decrease in the active population

and to an accelerated aging of the population – a phenomenon that places

increasing pressure on Romania's economy and social security systems.

Table no. 1
Evolution of birth and death rates during the period 2020-2024

Year	Birth rate (births per 1,000 inhabitants)	Death rate (deaths per 1,000 inhabitants)
2020	9.2	12.7
2021	8.9	12.9
2022	8.6	13.0
2023	8.3	13.2
2024	8.2	13.1

(Source: Data-based conceptualization by the author; NIS, 2024)

The evolution of birth and death rates in Romania between 2020 and 2024 (Table no. 1) shows a steady decline in birth rates, from 9.2 to 8.2 births per 1,000 inhabitants, and an increase in death rates, from 12.7 to 13.1 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants (NIS, 2024). The data reflects a significant demographic imbalance, with an increasingly aging population and a shrinking base of active young people.

This trend negatively impacts national security and social cohesion. An aging population requires more resources for pensions and healthcare services, while declining birth rates reduce the active tax base, limiting the state's capacity to support investments in defense and social security. Without effective measures to reverse this decline, the resources available for economic development and security will continue to shrink, and demographic vulnerabilities will deepen.

From a social perspective, these phenomena also affect community structures, particularly in rural areas, where declining birth rates and external migration lead to depopulation. The absence of young people in these regions undermines local development and limits support for the elderly, who are increasingly isolated and face insufficient resources. Under these conditions, those who remain in the country bear a growing economic burden, having to support older generations, an imbalance that leads to

intergenerational tensions and weakens social solidarity at the national level.

To counteract the negative effects of demographic decline, the implementation of natality support measures and programs aimed at encouraging the return of young emigrants becomes essential. In this sense, Romania could adopt financial incentive policies for families with at least two children and support initiatives for the professional reintegration of those wishing to return to the country. In the long term, such policies could contribute not only to balancing the demographic structure but also to revitalizing local communities by providing social support and reducing the isolation of elderly individuals in depopulated areas, an outcome that would also benefit the healthcare system by reducing treatments directly linked to excessive loneliness.

In the absence of adequate measures, declining birth rates will diminish Romania's ability to maintain a skilled workforce and to attract foreign investment, given that a young and active population is a key factor in the country's economic stability. Through the implementation of effective support policies, Romania could achieve a more favorable demographic balance by 2035, one that sustains both economic development and social cohesion, thereby reducing vulnerabilities that could impact national security in the long term.

4.3. Drug Dependence

The use of illicit substances among young people is a relevant indicator of the fragility of the social environment and the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms for prevention and intervention. The upward trend of this phenomenon in Romania raises multiple concerns, ranging from the deterioration of public health to increased pressure on the educational system. Recent statistics (National Anti-Drug Agency, 2024) show a significant rise in drug use among youth, starting as early as lower secondary school. This phenomenon affects the psychological development and social integration of adolescents, exposing them to the risk of school dropout and physical and mental health problems. Substance dependence impairs their ability to integrate socially and professionally, leading to the emergence of new generations prone to antisocial behavior and deepening existing social vulnerabilities.

As a result, young people become more susceptible to involvement in delinquent acts, which places additional strain on public order and social assistance systems. In this context, drug dependence affects not only individual health but also public safety, underscoring the need for investment in prevention and rehabilitation.

The social impact of drug use is particularly severe within families and communities, where young people struggling with addiction are often marginalized and stigmatized. Social isolation and the lack of adequate support contribute to relapse, intensifying the crisis at the community level. Furthermore, the difficulty in effectively addressing these vulnerabilities also stems from the challenge of allocating the budget to tackle the problem, since resources are divided across prevention, treatment, and reintegration efforts.

Table no. 2

Drug use and rehabilitation programs for minors in Romania during the period 2020-2024

Year	Reported cases	Participants in rehabilitation programs
2020	8.213	2.048
2021	9.387	2.312
2022	10.764	2.725
2023	12.198	3.038
2024	13.842	3.462

(Source: Data-based conceptualization by the author; National Anti-Drug Agency, 2024)

The data presented (Table no. 2) indicate a constant increase in the number of reported drug use cases among minors, by approximately 69% (National Anti-Drug Agency, 2024) over the analyzed period. This trend highlights a severe social issue, with major implications for public health and the social assistance system. To counter these effects, the allocation of additional resources for prevention and psychological support becomes crucial, in order to limit the negative impact associated with the initial stages of youth social exclusion.

Over the same time frame, the number of minors participating in rehabilitation programs rose from 2,048 to 3,462 (National Anti-Drug Agency, 2024), suggesting increased awareness and an attempt to intervene proportionally. However, the rate of increase in program participation remains insufficient compared to the growth in reported cases. This discrepancy highlights an urgent need to expand treatment programs and to develop social and medical support infrastructure, adapted to current societal realities.

Drug use among young people has a significant impact on communities and

families, affecting not only their health and personal development, but also generating marginalization and stigmatization. The social isolation of affected youth further complicates their reintegration into the community, increasing the social and economic burden on families, who often bear both the financial and emotional costs of this crisis. The marginalization of individuals with addiction contributes to the weakening of social cohesion, which may also lead to a lack of trust in state institutions.

From the perspective of national security, drug dependence among minors represents a risk to the economic system and to social development. A generation affected by addiction is less capable of actively contributing to the labor force, thereby reducing the country's economic potential and intensifying existing vulnerabilities. The upward trend of this phenomenon is also associated with rising juvenile delinquency and related criminal activities.

The impact on national security is further amplified by the erosion of social and economic capital, as a growing segment of the population becomes unable to contribute meaningfully to national development. Moreover, a marginalized and stigmatized youth population may be more vulnerable to extremist influences (whether religious, political, or ideological) leading to greater exposure to national security risks.

In the medium term, Romania should adopt rigorous preventive measures, including awareness campaigns in schools and communities, and expand access to rehabilitation programs and psychological support. If these measures are effectively implemented, drug use could be significantly reduced by 2035, thus easing pressure on health and public safety resources and supporting the emergence of a healthy and active young generation.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the three indicators – education, the birth-death ratio, and youth drug dependence – emphasizes the importance of investing in future generations as an essential solution for ensuring national

security and social stability. The education of children and young people is the foundation of economic development and a resilient society. Investments in education, support for increasing birth rates, and measures to prevent drug dependence are key factors that can mitigate social and security risks.

Without equitable access to education, social exclusion and high dropout rates will intensify, limiting the professional and social development of young people and contributing to long-term national economic decline. This evolution may weaken national security, as lack of education restricts opportunities for labor market integration and fosters the expansion of organized criminal networks.

The decline in birth rates and the rise in mortality rates point to a demographic imbalance that directly affects Romania's social structure and economic capacity. In the medium term, such a demographic decline could lead to labor shortages and an aging population, thereby limiting the state's ability to sustain foreign investment in strategic sectors. Supportive natality policies and return programs for young emigrants could revitalize the demographic structure, strengthening both social cohesion and the national economy.

Drug dependence among youth exacerbates the existing intergenerational social crisis and places continuous pressure on the state's response capacity. The increase in drug consumption is associated with a rise in juvenile delinquency, amplifying both social and security risks. Prevention policies and the expansion of rehabilitation programs can help support a healthy generation that is well integrated into the community.

In conclusion, a strategic approach to the identified risks may include sustainable investments in education, tailored demographic policies, and preventive public health measures. These actions, combined with strategies for social inclusion and workforce support, can contribute to the development of a resilient society capable of withstanding long-term economic and social challenges.

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