

# Education policies in prisons: an analysis focused on the 10 largest prison populations

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## ABSTRACT

The article analyses prison education policies, within the right to education framework of the ten largest prison populations in the world identified in the World Prison Brief database of the Criminal Policy Research Institute at the University of London, which aggregates world data on the prison system. Focused on education in prisons in these ten countries, it mobilized articles published in journals indexed by SCOPUS and EBSCOhost, from 2015 to 2021, and official documents on educational and penal policies. The study showed that, despite the international legal and normative advance, the right to education in prisons still needs to be ensured in some countries. The education conceptions vary among education as formation (emancipation); education as correctional training (indoctrination); and education as a legal-normative discourse (theoretical adherence to international agreements). The last two orientations show the urgency of debates within the scope of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda.

## KEYWORDS

educational policy; prison education; human rights; lifelong learning.

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## *POLÍTICAS DE EDUCAÇÃO NAS PRISÕES: UMA ANÁLISE DAS 10 MAIORES POPULAÇÕES PRISIONAIS*

### RESUMO

O artigo analisa políticas de educação em prisões, no quadro do direito à educação, das 10 maiores populações prisionais mundiais identificadas na base de dados World Prison Brief, do Instituto de Pesquisa de Política Criminal da Universidade de Londres, que agrega dados mundiais sobre o sistema prisional. Sobre a educação nas prisões desses dez países, mobilizou artigos publicados em revistas indexadas na SCOPUS e EBSCOhost, no período de 2015 a 2021, e documentos oficiais de políticas educacionais e penais. O estudo mostrou que, apesar do avanço jurídico-normativo internacional, ainda está por assegurar, em alguns países, o direito à educação nas prisões. As concepções de educação em que se apoiam oscilam entre: educação como formação (emancipação); educação como treinamento correccional (doutrinação); e educação como discurso jurídico-normativo (adesão teórica aos pactos internacionais). Essas duas últimas mostram ser urgente promover debates no quadro da Agenda 2030 das Nações Unidas.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

políticas educacionais; educação nas prisões; direitos humanos; aprendizagem ao longo da vida.

## *POLÍTICAS EDUCATIVAS EN LAS CÁRCELES: UN ANÁLISIS CENTRADO EN LAS DIEZ POBLACIONES PENITENCIARIAS MÁS GRANDES*

### RESUMEN

El artículo analiza políticas de educación penitenciaria, sobre el derecho a la educación, de las diez poblaciones penitenciarias más grandes del mundo identificadas en la base de datos World Prison Brief del Instituto de Investigación de Políticas Criminales de la Universidad de Londres. Sobre la educación en las cárceles de estos 10 países, moviliza artículos publicados en revistas indexadas en SCOPUS y EBSCOhost, de 2015 a 2021, y documentos oficiales de políticas educativas y penales. El estudio mostró que, a pesar de los avances legales y normativos internacionales, la educación de los presos aún no está garantizada en algunos países. Las concepciones de educación varían entre: educación como formación (emancipación); educación como entrenamiento correccional (adoctrinamiento); educación como discurso jurídico-normativo (adhesión teórica a acuerdos internacionales). Los dos últimos muestran que es urgente promover debates en el marco de la Agenda 2030 de las Naciones Unidas.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

políticas educativas; educación penitenciaria; derechos humanos; aprendizaje permanente.

## INTRODUCTION

Within the human rights framework, the right to education is the fundamental matrix for access to other collective and individual rights. In spaces of deprivation of liberty, in its various conceptualizations — prisons, jails, penitentiaries, among others —, the right to education is still seen as a “benefit” or “privilege” by the vast majority of society (Barros Filho, 2021a). In our experience with educational actions and research in prison environments in Brazil and in Portugal, we have found the existence of a dichotomy facing the deprivation of freedom: a conception that is based on repression through the imprisonment of people; and another that is guided by the intention of contributing to the formation, from education, and within the framework of the exercise of citizenship to support emancipation. If the right to education is denied to prisoners, states/nations violate this universal right. How to solve the paradox, in prison contexts, between punishment and education? Why is it essential to discuss the right to education in prisons in the international legal-normative dimensions and the conceptions of education that support them?

These questions reflect the urgent need to discuss society’s projects regarding people in prison, in the nation-states that are signatories of human rights, beyond the legal frameworks in force. With this idea as a reference, the scientific relevance of the study is justified by placing the prison space as a strategic environment for youth and adult education and lifelong learning. We seek to go beyond the debate on the quantitative supply of the right to education in spaces of deprivation of liberty (UNESCO, 2021). In this sense, the aim of the study is to contribute with theoretical foundations that qualify pedagogical practices from a review of updated literature on education in prisons and current models. From the point of view of knowledge construction, the study answers the following research questions: how is the right to education in prisons assured in the legal-normative dimensions? What conceptions of education are conveyed by prison education policies?

## THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN PRISONS

The intention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 (UN, 1948), under the responsibility of the United Nations Organization (UNO), is that signatory nation-states preserve the dignity of the human person and ensure the right to education. Over the 73 years since the implementation of the UDHR, the signatory nation-states have developed and improved the legal-normative legal frameworks, following guidelines expressed in recommendations and resolutions of the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These recommendations, when considering the populations to whom the right to education must be conferred, include people in prison, taking into account the legal/penal specificities of each nation-state regarding the fulfillment of the sentence.

Historically, prisons all over the world have accumulated countless problems regarding the defense of human dignity and the guarantees of rights for imprisoned people, as denounced by the reports of institutions on the protection of human

rights, such as Human Rights Watch (2020) and Amnesty International (2021), among others.

The relevance of the study presented in this article is also justified by the fact that there are more than 11 million people in detention worldwide (UNESCO, 2021), which requires efforts to be dedicated to ensure that the right to education is effective during the time they are serving their sentences, with a view to their gaining qualifications and being (re)socialized.

Globally, research on prison education predominates in the Global North (Carrington *et al.*, 2019), and is scarce in other parts of the world (Rangel Torrijo and De Mayer, 2019). This situation is difficult to understand considering the exponential growth in the international scientific community, especially in the last seven years (Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, [n.d.]; Bennett, 2016; Key and May, 2019; Rangel Torrijo and De Mayer, 2019; UNESCO, 2019; 2021). In this same line of ideas, a study by Barros Filho (2021b) accounts for a huge concern for the lack of interest from society and universities in the theme of education in spaces of deprivation of liberty.

In 2021, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) presented a research report highlighting that, in the last two decades (2000 to 2019), the world prison population grew 25%, while the global population grew 21%. These numbers reflect the urgent need for discussion about the preservation of human rights, especially in the context of education policies aimed at people in prison. This is a collective responsibility, in which nation-states, universities, society, the press, and other social and institutional subjects urgently need to intervene in the construction of paths and projects of society that contemplate inmates as part of world agendas for the global development of humanity, in a culture of peace and guarantees of rights. This orientation is recommended by the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015, p. 18, our translation), especially in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, when it reinforces the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education that promotes “[...] lifelong learning opportunities for all [...]”.

With this orientation as a reference, the present study contributes to research on prison education policies by analyzing the situation in countries with the ten largest prison populations in the world (absolute numbers). This analysis may promote new looks beyond North America and Europe’s productions, as Frey (2014) and Ugelvik, Jewkes, and Crewe (2020) point out. In this line, it is important to understand the international and national legal-normative advances and especially to situate the education policies in prisons, considering the diversity of educational and penal orientations around the world (Biao, 2018).

Each prison establishment is also considered to have its management model and peculiarities in realizing educational interventions (De Mayer, 2013; Barros Filho, 2021a ). In this sense, the study takes into account when it goes beyond the presentation of quantitative data, as found in most prison reports.

## METHODOLOGY

From the methodological point of view, the study uses documental analysis of public educational policies in the official documents of the UN/UNESCO, from

the implementation of the UDHR (UN, 1948), as well as official data available in the websites of each nation-state. In this analysis, we chose the ten largest prison populations in the world, indicated by the database World Prison Brief,<sup>1</sup> from the Institute for Criminal Policy Research of the University of London, which aggregates global data on the prison system. In parallel, the study identified and analyzed articles indexed in the SCOPUS and EBSCOhost databases that focus on prison education, using the keywords “prison education,” “correctional education,” and “prison education” for each country investigated, considering as a time frame the period from 2015 to 2021. These searches, related to available studies from the countries selected for the research, were conducted primarily in English but extended to other languages (Portuguese, Russian, Indonesian, Spanish, and Mandarin), which had translations of the official policy documents of the penal and educational systems.

## RESULTS

Chart 1 systematizes the documents relating to international legal-normative provisions, emphasizing the right to education, especially for people in prison, considering the time frame from the UDHR, of 1948 (UN, 1948).

**Chart 1 – The international historical construction of the right to education from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.**

Year	Document
1948	Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos (UN, 1948)
1955	Regras Mínimas para Tratamento de Prisioneiros (ONU; UNESCO, 1955)
1960	Convenção Relativa à Luta Contra a Discriminação no Campo do Ensino (UNESCO, 2003)
1966	Pacto Internacional sobre os Direitos Civis e Políticos (ONU, 1966a)
1966	Pacto Internacional sobre os Direitos Econômicos, Sociais e Culturais (ONU, 1966b)
1990	Declaração Mundial sobre Educação para Todos: Satisfação das Necessidades Básicas de Aprendizagem (UNESCO, 1998a)
1997	V Conferência Internacional sobre a Educação de Adultos (UNESCO, 1998b)
2000	Educação para todos: o compromisso de Dakar (UNESCO, 2001)
2009	VI Conferência Internacional sobre a Educação de Adultos (UNESCO, 2010)
2015	Education 2030 Incheon declaration: Towards Inclusive Education and Lifelong Learning for All (UNESCO, 2016a)
2015	Recomendação sobre Aprendizagem e Educação de Adultos (UNESCO, 2016b)
2015	Regras Mínimas das Nações Unidas para o Tratamento de Reclusos (Regras de Nelson Mandela — UNODC, 2015)
2020	Quarto Relatório Global sobre Aprendizagem e Educação de Adultos (UNESCO, 2020)

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

1 <https://www.prisonstudies.org/>.

Based on the legal-normative cut of the right to education and the guarantees of human rights regarding people in prison, Chart 2 shows the ranking of the ten largest prison populations in the world in absolute numbers, concerning the general population.

**Chart 2 – Ranking of the world’s largest prison populations.**

State/Nation	Prison population	General population
1st USA	2,068,800	334,339,087
2nd China	1,690,000	1,449,560,516
3rd Brazil	811,707	213,665,097
4th India	478,600	1,403,645,823
5th Russian Federation	471,490	146,008,160
6th Thailand	309,282	70,173,608
7th Turkey	291,198	86,368,610
8th Indonesia	266,259	278,180,867
9th Mexico	220,866	131,336,192
10th Iran	189,000	85,405,618

Source: Elaborated by the authors from World Prison Brief/ICPR/University of London ([https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-total?field\\_region\\_taxonomy\\_tid=All](https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-total?field_region_taxonomy_tid=All)).

Regarding the ten countries listed in Chart 2, a search of articles published in the period from 2015 to 2021 was conducted to identify theoretical assumptions that substantiate the right to education in prisons. In relation to the United States of America (USA), which has the largest prison population in the world, with 2,068,800 people in prisons, Capettini and Rabinowitz (2021) and Sojoyner (2016) state that racial issues totally influence the profile of people in prison in this country. Black people are six times more likely to be imprisoned than white people.

According to the Human Rights Watch report (2021, p. 710) regarding the U.S. criminal legal system: “Rather than address problems of poverty or health that contribute to crime, many US jurisdictions focus on aggressive policing in poor and minority communities, fueling a vicious cycle of incarceration and police violence.”.

According to Green (2020), this social situation of prisons in the U.S. reflects the exclusionary model present in schools throughout the academic life of black and latino students, which shows the need for a pedagogy of liberation (Freire, 1984), as a possible means to overcome the existing exclusion and segregation framework. Felson and Todorović (2021), taking Paulo Freire’s dialogical pedagogy as a model for teaching the classics of ancient Greece, refer to the importance of greater engagement and reflection of imprisoned students in the process of knowledge construction in the classroom. In contrast, Castro and Brawn (2017) reveal the paradox in developing critical pedagogies in prison classrooms from the U.S. incarceration model.

The report “Mass Incarceration — 2020”, by the Prison Policy Initiative (Sawyer and Wagner, 2020), reveals that the prison model adopted in the U.S. has not been promoting possibilities of (re)socialization. In this sense, the need for political and legal reform of the current prison model is pointed out. A proposal for reforming this U.S. model is also advocated by Eisenberg (2020, p. 5) when she supports the principle of “return” in the sentence:

It must, at a minimum, include the idea of a fair chance to re-establish oneself in society, to live a decent, productive, self-sustaining, and sociable life. Attention to this principle of return forces us to critically examine “incarceration practices,” including the prison environment and programs — whether vocational, educational, religious, artistic, or recreational — that promote or hinder a prisoner’s reentry into society. These incarceration practices are vitally important to former prisoners and their future neighbors and communities.

Recognizing that prisoners are part of society and that most of them will return to society, Eisenberg (2020) calls for a change in the national discourse on the function of punishment and imprisonment. The educational processes should include, besides prisoners, the security professionals who work in prisons, the political and legal system, and society. On the other hand, all these social and institutional subjects should be mediated by an educational proposal that contributes to an inclusive social project and formation for citizenship.

Gilligan (2020), still on the subject of investment in education in prisons, refers to its importance as a strategy for preventing violence, since the punitive model in force in the U.S. promotes it instead of inhibiting it. In Lockard and Rankins-Robertson (2018) and Ahmed *et al.* (2019), we find the views of incarcerated university students who point out ways to make prisons more humane and meaningful. An example of success is referenced by Ellis (2020), who monitors former prisoners who have experienced educational programs in prison. The results she arrives at indicate that most former incarcerated students show improvements in personal and family development, increased knowledge, and development of new skills, and did not recidivate to prisons between six months and two years. In this sense, the latter author highlights the need for the realization of educational and work programs so that former prisoners do not reoffend.

In the perspective of higher education in prisons, it is worth mentioning the work developed by Bard College, in the state of New York, which develops the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI, 2021) program in six prison units. This BPI experience is being expanded through a consortium with 14 other colleges and universities in ten other U.S. states. Another relevant experience is carried out by Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, through The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (The Inside-Out Center, [n.d.]). The program has been in existence for 25 years and has several partner university institutions in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Denmark, Mexico, the Netherlands, and the UK.

China is second in the prison ranking, with 1,710,000 people in prisons. According to the Human Rights Watch (2021, p. 160) report on China, “The Chi-

nese government's crackdown on human rights defenders, journalists and activists, and restrictions on the internet also make it difficult to obtain accurate information about the Chinese government's policies and actions". This situation may account for the dearth of research on education in China's prisons, as highlighted by Zhao *et al.* (2019, p. 2714):

Research on inmate participation in the Chinese context is scarce. Academic and vocational education programs are not prevalent in all Chinese prisons because offering such programs requires additional financial resources and qualified instructors. Therefore, without a uniformly employed inmate rehabilitation framework and adequate theoretical and empirical research support, prisoner rehabilitation in China lags in essential respects.

The data above concerns the right to education in Chinese prisons. According to Li (2017), the right to education in these prisons is camouflaged in the Prison Law itself, which descriptively assures that education programs should be offered, while highlighting, however, that priority should be given to productive work to generate revenue for the maintenance of the prison establishment. This author also reveals that the mandatory work is manual, low-level, and does not contribute to developing skills and competencies for the return to society, promoting the distancing of educational possibilities in prisons.

The imprisonment model in China is even worse with Uighur<sup>2</sup> and other Turkic Muslim peoples, whose persecution is present in the report "As if We Were Enemies in a War: Mass Internment, Torture and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang," released by Amnesty International (2021). According to Smith Finley (2021), this ethnoreligious persecution has imprisoned over 1 million people for thought transformation and reeducation, with violations ranging from forced labor to torture, rape, and death. This violation of human rights shows the danger of using education or (re)education to validate a model with evidence of oppression and domination. Therefore, the situation in the prisons of Xinjiang, China must be investigated and accompanied by increased scrutiny by international human rights bodies.

From a more detailed perspective, the research by Alduais, Deng and Gokmen (2021) presents a literature review on correctional education in China, with the time span of 1987 to 2019. Their results show that 25% of the studies demonstrate a positive penal education system. The other 75% reveal that China's correctional education system presents a "negative" and "conflicting" model, "[...] whose general views are divergent, describing the correctional education system as controlling people to serve the interests of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)." (Alduais, Deng and Gokmen, 2021, p. 18) and which violate international human rights covenants.

In summary, there is a contradictory relationship between China's political, legal, and normative discourse and the current practices for imprisoning people

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2 Muslims who predominantly inhabit the Xinjiang region in northwest China.



(Yang, 2020), with education in prisons being oriented towards domination, for purposes of correctional ideological indoctrination (Li, 2017).

Brazil has the third largest prison population in the world, with 811,707 people in prisons. According to data from the National Penitentiary Department, only 24.74% of prisoners are engaged in educational activities (Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública, [n.d.]). It should be recalled that Brazil is a signatory country of human rights, having advanced in creating legal-normative instruments of the right to education in prisons. This right is foreseen in the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (Brasil, 1988), the Law of Directives and Bases for National Education (Law No. 9.394/96 — Brasil, 1996), as well as in other national directives that regulate education in prisons, primarily through formal education in the youth and adult education modality (EJA).

Despite the advance in the legal frameworks ensuring the right to education in prisons, severe reports of human rights violations in the Brazilian prison system exist. Barros Filho (2021a, p. 21, our translation) highlights the main problems of the Brazilian prison model:

Over the years, the prison system in Brazil has accumulated huge problems associated with allegations of mistreatment, torture, increased internal violence, overcrowded prisons, summary executions, and systemic corruption. These problems are in addition to countless other problems associated with poor public management regarding the fulfillment of effective policies of governments that are signatories of human rights.

These problems are magnified by prison overpopulation. Brazil has an excessive prison population growth compared to the general population growth, especially in the last two decades. In 2001, the prison population was 233,859 people in prison, while the general population was 172,385,826. In 2020, the prison population consisted of 811,707 people, and the Brazilian inhabitants numbered 211,755,692 (IBGE, 2020; Ministry of Justice and Public Security, [n.d.]). In the last 20 years, the prison population grew by 347%, while the general population grew by 22.8%. These data reflect the difficulties of the Brazilian state when it comes to resocialization.

The possibility of the privatization of Brazilian prisons as a method of reducing criminal recidivism is under debate. According to Oliveira *et al.* (2017), this possibility will promote a new profitable market that is contradictory to emancipatory principles. These authors pose the question that “[...] if one of the purposes of privatizing the prison system is to reduce the number of prisoners, how will this market prosper, that is, how will it continue to profit, if the main goal is to reduce the demand with which it works?” (Oliveira *et al.*, 2017, p. 405). Another emerging discussion, and as Souza, Nonato and Fonseca (2020) and Ireland and Lucena (2016) point out, is the need to expand the development of education policies for women in prisons.

Concerning education in prisons, it is also essential that the initial training of teachers in Pedagogy and other degrees who work in prisons have the specificity

of youth and adult education in the curriculum to include those deprived of freedom. As stated by Penna, Carvalho and Novaes (2016, p. 111) “[...] it is urgent to think about the training of an educator who is able to work with young people and adults in situations of deprivation of freedom, whether in the exercise of teaching, management, or research.” Often, teachers are inserted in prison schools without understanding their limitations and specificities.

Cabral, Onofre and Laffin (2020) amplify this discussion when they point out the need to develop a public policy for EJA in prisons based on coordinated political-pedagogical projects. Silva, Moreira and Oliveira (2016, p. 9) argue “[...] the need for a political and pedagogical project that combines and integrates the existing knowledge in prison and the diverse professionals’ work.”, reaffirming this pedagogical path for EJA in prisons. In the case of Brazil, an educational proposal for prisons should comply with the reflection of Julião (2016, p. 39), when he highlights: “An educational concept is necessary that privileges and helps develop potentialities and competences, favors the social mobility of the interns, and does not let them feel paralyzed when facing the obstacles they will encounter in the social relationship.”

From this perspective, Freirean popular education presents pedagogical foundations that can contribute to education in prisons. This discussion is shown in the research of Onofre, Fernandes and Godinho (2019, p. 470) on EJA in prisons, which also highlights the need for the development of coordinated actions beyond formal school education:

We understand that school, workshops for work, handicrafts, computers, dramatic games, religious services, leisure activities, reading groups, and discussions of documentaries, among others, are practices that educate, as coexistence, learning, and respect for others are established in them [...]. It is not about taking a subject to be assisted by several isolated actions but promoting an integrated educational program that respects particularity and makes people feel safe in the world, knowing how to make choices, and being aware that there are multiple ways to live. Such learning may contribute to social (re) integration and the organization of a life project.

The expanded political-pedagogical vision can enable new paths for education in prisons. Also, Lima, Gomes and Santiago (2019, p. 733) refer that vocational education activities in prisons, “[...] if well worked in this education modality, can present themselves as a propellant for a new future for these people.”

India has the fourth largest prison population in the world, with 478,600 people. A study published by Dhanuka (2021) provides an analysis of the Indian prison system over the past 100 years, highlighting that there has been no significant change in guarantees of human rights. On education in prisons in India, according to the latest report from the National Crime Records Bureau (2019), 114,262 people had access to educational interventions, including: 47,860 in primary education; 44,438 in adult education; 11,917 in higher education; and 10,047 in computer courses.

In 2016, the Indian government published the *Model Prison Manual* (Government of India, 2016), which presents the functioning of its prison system. In this manual, education in prisons is provided for in Chapter XIV, where the importance of education for rehabilitating prisoners and their social reintegration is highlighted. This manual proposes legal-normative actions in defense of human rights. Despite these guidelines, India still resorts to the death penalty, which mostly sentences people with profiles of poverty, social exclusion, and marginalization (George, 2015).

The Russian Federation is in fifth place of the countries with the largest prison populations, with 471,490 people in prison. A search of articles published in journals indexed in SCOPUS and EBSCOhost over the past seven years did not identify any studies on education in prisons. Therefore, in the case of this country, data were collected from the official website of the prison system of the Russian Federation. Educational actions in prisons are under the responsibility of the Department of Educational, Social and Psychological Work,<sup>3</sup> which emphasizes that “[...] according to the requirements of the penal-executive legislation, the most important means of correcting convicts are educational work, obtaining a general education and social influence.” (Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, 2015). Despite this discourse, it was not possible to find any current official reports of educational provision in the prisons of the Russian Federation. Therefore, this absence of information and official reports on education in prisons in the Russian Federation requires further investigation and greater scrutiny by international human rights bodies.

Thailand is the sixth largest country in the world ranking of prison populations, with 309,282 people in detention. In research conducted by the Thailand Institute of Justice and UNODC (2021), the prison population consists of 80% drug-related crimes. In addition, Thailand has the highest proportional rate of female prisoners globally. Another worrying factor in the realm of prison education is that only 1% of the budget of Thailand’s prison system is allocated to rehabilitation programs.

According to the Amnesty International report (2021), Thailand is denounced for severe human rights violations ranging from death sentences, enforced disappearances, torture, and persecution of human rights defenders and the press. These human rights violations are also present in the Human Rights Watch report (2021, p. 654):

Thailand faced a serious human rights crisis in 2020. Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-ocha’s government imposed restrictions on civil and political rights, particularly freedom of expression, arbitrarily arrested democracy activists, engineered the dissolution of a major opposition political party on politically motivated grounds, and enforced a nationwide state of emergency, using the Covid-19 pandemic as a pretext.

3 <https://fsin.gov.ru/structure/social/>.

Given this scenario of rights violations, prisons become spaces of repression and the possibilities of developing education in prisons are minimized. In the study, according to the methodology adopted, no articles on education in prisons in Thailand were identified. This absence of scientific production may be an indicator of the current authoritarian management model, a possibility that requires further investigation.

In seventh place in the ranking is Turkey, with 291,198 people in prisons. According to the report “Prison in Europe”, by the European Prison Observatory (2020), Turkey, despite having legislation for education in prisons, only offers literacy in closed-regime prisons. In open-regime prisons, there are some educational experiences, as mentioned by Demiray *et al.* (2016), regarding higher education with the use of digital technologies in distance education, promoted by Anadolu University (Turkey).

Regarding women prisoners, Akin (2021, p. 22) reveals that, although there are several problems in guarantees of rights, education in Turkey’s prisons is positive, justifying that “[...] prison workshops and educational opportunities are the good side of prisons in Turkey.” The research conducted on the reports of the General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses of the Turkish Ministry of Justice did not identify any updated reports on educational offerings, the latest being from 2016. This is a worrying factor, as coupled with this lack of information, Turkey has been facing a deep human rights crisis for the past five years (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This fact also requires further investigation.

Indonesia holds the eighth largest prison population in the world, with 266,259 people in detention. When investigating the official website of the General Directorate of Corrections<sup>4</sup> of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia, we found an absence of education policies in prisons for adults, despite being “theoretically” ensured in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 12, of 1995, on Corrections, Article 14, Point 1. This law highlights that imprisoned persons have the right to “[...] obtain education and teaching [...]” (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 1995, p. 9).

Indonesia has one of the strictest penal systems in the world for crimes related to drug use or trafficking, with sentences of death and life imprisonment, according to the typology of the crime. According to Amnesty International (2021) and Human Rights Watch (2021) reports, the current government of Indonesia is accused of violating rights of religious freedom, freedom of the press, sexual orientation and gender identity, and women’s rights. On the discussion of gender in Indonesia’s prisons, Hayzaki and Nurhaeni (2018, p. 1) critique the model of vocational education offered, which prioritizes policies for men, where “[...] female prisoners have not yet been able to understand their different needs that can create gender injustices when entering the labor market.”

Another aspect investigated by Gulo, Jaya and Pujiyono (2020) is the managerial factors of education program performance in correctional institutions.

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4 <http://www.ditjenpas.go.id/>.

As a result, “[...] this study suggests model and program reconstruction as a way forward to improve the implementation of anti-corruption programs in the prison environment.” (Gulo, Jaya and Pujiyono, 2020, p. 749).

According to the methodology followed in the present study, it should be noted that there is almost no research on education policies in prisons in Indonesia. It is noteworthy that this research was conducted in the languages “English” and “Indonesian,” but did not obtain many results. This is, therefore, another reality that requires further investigation, in view of the reported human rights violations.

Mexico, with 220,866 people in prisons, ranks ninth among the largest prison populations in the world. In this country, there are two prison models: the government-managed model and the privatized one. In Rangel Torrijo (2019), important contributions can be found to education in prisons in Mexico and throughout Latin America. In Mexico, there is a serious devaluation of adult education, and the situation is even worse when it comes to education in prisons. Research findings by Rangel Torrijo (2019) show that privatized prisons in Mexico, in addition to generating a higher cost, further violate the right to education. In this sense, “[...] prison education institutionalizes respect for human rights and reinforces the law, making the penal institution gain legitimacy instead of promoting the punitive imaginary.” (Rangel Torrijo, 2019, p. 805).

From the perspective of higher education in prisons in Mexico, De León Romero, López Armijos and Camacho Rojas (2021) highlight as results the reduction of criminal recidivism in graduates with academic education. These authors also highlight the need for programs that associate work strategies and family support in reducing criminal recidivism.

Iran ranks tenth among the world’s largest prison populations, with 189,000 people in detention. The search for articles concerning education in Iranian prisons did not identify any in the last seven years. Reports of human rights violations were found, however, as noted in the Amnesty International report (2021, p. 190):

The authorities heavily suppressed the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Security forces used unlawful force to crush protests. The authorities continued to arbitrarily detain hundreds of protesters, dissidents and human rights defenders, and sentenced many to imprisonment and flogging. Women, as well as ethnic and religious minorities, faced entrenched discrimination as well as violence. Enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment were committed with impunity on a widespread and systematic basis. Judicial corporal punishments amounting to torture, including floggings and amputations, were imposed. Fair trial rights were systematically violated. The death penalty was used as a weapon of political repression.

Considering the severe situation of human rights violations, it is impossible to discuss the right to education when the right to life is not respected, as stated in Amnesty International’s accusation against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In summary, the analyses carried out regarding the situation in each of the ten countries show that the conceptions and models of education in prisons are diverse.

This finding is in line with some of the results of the research conducted by UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (2021, p. 60) on education in prisons: "The experience of imprisonment differs depending the level of security, the conditions of confinement, occupancy rates, activities and programmes available to prisoners, the rights of prisoners, the prisoner-prison officer dynamic, and educational opportunities."

## CONCLUSIONS

With respect to how the right to education in prisons is ensured in the legal-normative dimensions, it can be concluded that, despite the existence of an international legal-normative advance, the realization of the right to education for people deprived of their freedom in some of the ten countries with the largest prison populations is still to be ensured. With the focus on the right to education, the research made it possible to know that, in all these ten countries, there are problems of human rights violations, caused mainly by prison overpopulation, a situation that interferes with the living conditions and opportunities for resocialization.

As for the conceptions of education conveyed by prison education policies, the study identified that these policies are sometimes materialized in the educational sense that guides them, but also other times they are manipulated or neglected in the current prison/penitentiary model. The conceptions of education on which they are based show the existence of three orientations:

1. education as development (emancipation);
2. education as training (correction/indoctrination); and
3. education as a legal-normative discourse (theoretical adherence to international pacts).

The first conception of education, based on a view of education as training, with emancipatory goals in the pedagogical process, is the case of countries like the United States, Brazil, India, and Mexico. Despite the human rights violations in the penitentiary/prison system of these countries, there are also experiences of the right to education in prisons. Therefore, in this case, what is necessary is to advance in the quantitative perspective of the offer of the right to education, as well as in the qualitative dimensions. The prison structure and the spaces destined to educational activities need to be discussed, as do the valorization of the professionals who work with education in prisons. It is also necessary to discuss the initial and continuing education of teachers who work in prisons. These aspects require new investigations that give visibility to the praxis developed in prison schools and aim to qualify the pedagogical work developed.

The second perspective of education in prisons, in which education is conceived as correctional training (domination/indoctrination), is found in countries like China and Russia. In this second conception, it can be observed that the right to education, when offered, mainly seeks to "correct/indoctrinate" prisoners by factors associated with political-ideological and ethnoreligious issues. From this point of view, before discussing the right to education, it is urgent to discuss the

criminal legal–normative system ensuring such rights violations. This is a discussion that needs to be expanded.

The third conception of education as a juridical–normative discourse, with “theoretical” adherence to international juridical–normative instruments, seems to be present in countries like Thailand, Turkey, Indonesia, and Iran. In these countries, in addition to violation of the right to education in prisons, there are also severe denunciations of human rights violations, due to torture, forced disappearance, and political, ethnic, religious, and gender persecution, among others. A criminal legal–normative profile can also be observed that is extremely punitive with issues related to drug use and trafficking, not providing opportunities for resocialization.

Given the situations identified, the nation–states must make a real political commitment in the education and justice agendas so that people in prison can be included in the context of global development. If this does not happen, we will postpone the problems experienced historically and have the nation–states as the great violators of rights. This is what has been happening in the vast majority of the countries investigated. It is urgent to go beyond the speeches made in the UN/UNESCO agendas, which reproduce the rhetoric present in legal–normative instruments, to break with a society that does not recognize prisoners as part of it. If nothing changes, we risk reaching increasingly punitive prison metropolises.

As this article has shown, education in prisons can be a path that supports the reform of the current prison model. A proposal of education is advocated that includes prisoners, professionals of the prison system, the constituted powers, researchers, the press, and the whole of society; its aim is to develop a project of society that seeks to (re) integrate people who are deprived of freedom, as well as humanize the social opinion on the subject in a reciprocal relationship of formation for citizenship. It is an interdisciplinary challenge to deal with the multifactorial diversity of the specificities present in the prison context. Otherwise, this situation will only get worse with prison overpopulation and rights violations. This collective mission requires a permanent global commitment to guarantee rights, allocate budgets adequate to the demands, and invest in educational training for the social and institutional subjects involved in this historical project of exclusion. It is necessary to put into practice the commitments of the SDG in the 2030 Agenda, including people in prison. In this sense, this study seeks to incite an urgent debate. The state, society, and the press need to know more and more about the valuable actions developed in prison spaces and their positive results. Education in prisons, if properly organized, constitutes a gateway to processes of social reconfiguration in a perspective of training for citizenship.

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