

Social Education in Prisons in Spain

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Interventi socio-educativi nelle carceri spagnole

The aim of this research is to analyse the socio-pedagogical actions carried out in Spanish prisons. To do so, we begin by analysing the main regulations covering educational policy in prisons, share as an essential axis the orientation of the custodial sentence towards the re-education and social reintegration of the prisoners, serving as a basis for justifying social intervention. Secondly, we analysed the prison population, where we observed a prevalence of men over women, a greater presence of crimes related to material offences and an average age of the population between 35 and 45 years old. Thirdly, based on the legislative and contextualized review, we analysed the programmes that are carried out in prison, the socio-educational potentials that may arise, through their principal objectives and the target groups they are aimed at, with the purpose of detecting good socio-educational practices. We underline the social and pedagogical function of these activities, as opposed to the therapeutic vision from which they emanate, highlighting the emancipatory potential of such an approach. Finally, we conclude with the professionalizing principles that can guide good practices in socio-educational intervention in prison, both in the Spanish context and in other countries with similar characteristics.

Scopo di questa ricerca è analizzare le azioni socio-pedagogiche realizzate nelle carceri spagnole. Abbiamo iniziato analizzando le norme riguardanti le politiche educative carcerarie, assumendo come asse imprescindibile l'orientamento della pena detentiva verso la rieducazione e il reinserimento sociale dei detenuti, principio base dell'intervento sociale. In secondo luogo abbiamo analizzato la popolazione carceraria, osservando una prevalenza di uomini rispetto alle donne, una più marcata presenza di crimini riguardanti offese materiali e un'età media della popolazione fra i 35 e i 45 anni. In terzo luogo, sulla base di una revisione legislativa e contestualizzata, abbiamo analizzato i programmi rieducativi realizzati nelle carceri, le potenzialità socio-educative che ne possono derivare, attraverso i loro obiettivi principali e i target a cui sono rivolti, con l'intento di individuare buone pratiche socio-educative. Abbiamo sottolineato la funzione sociale e pedagogica di tali attività, in contrasto con la visione terapeutica da cui derivano, enfatizzando il valore emancipativo di tale approccio. Infine, concludiamo con una serie di principi professionali che possono guidare buone pratiche socio-educative nelle carceri, sia nel contesto spagnolo che in altri paesi con caratteristiche analoghe.

Keywords: Social Education; Reintegration; Good Practices; Pedagogy; Prison.

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1. The Legal Framework of Rehabilitation in Spanish Prisons

We are going to conduct an analysis, from a pedagogical perspective, of the articles related to rehabilitation included in what constitutes the Spanish legal-penitentiary framework: the Spanish Constitution (CE) (1978), the General Penitentiary Organic Law (LOGP) (1979), and the Penitentiary Regulations (RP) (1996) (Gil Cantero *et al.*, 2022).

In a “Social and Democratic Rule of Law,” like ours, it is essential for educators to know, from the beginning, the legislative framework that supports, enables, and, in certain cases, limits the possibilities of educational action (Gil Cantero, 2017). This argument is particularly relevant when referring to closed institutions, where the level of potential rights violations and mistreatment is higher than elsewhere due to their opacity and difficult daily access by civil society. Therefore, it is necessary to know the legislative framework of prisons to be vigilant about its compliance.

1.1. Rehabilitation of Prisoners Through the Values of Coexistence

Even Article 1.1 of the CE, by establishing that “Spain is constituted as a social and democratic state of law that advocates as supreme values justice, liberty, equality, and pluralism,” allows us a fundamental educational orientation regarding the values that must be cultivated. Indeed, the implementation of educational programs in prison must necessarily respond, from a particular diagnostic perspective to the needs and unique requirements of prisoners (Ward, 2002; Ward *et al.*, 2024). However, at the same time, rehabilitation must be developed based on the same coexistence values of every citizen. Thus, it is very interesting for educators to consider that educational intervention programs must have as their horizon or expectation of realization the values of justice, freedom, equality, and pluralism. This translates into practice in that, when judging the ethical or finalistic framework of rehabilitation through the implementation of any educational program or activity, educators must ask themselves: Are my educational proposals really increasing the values of justice, freedom, equality, and pluralism?

1.2. Rehabilitation of Prisoners and the Free Development of Personality

Another fundamental article of the CE to conceive rehabilitation in prisons is Article 10.1, according to which, “The dignity of the individual, inviolable rights that are inherent, the free development of personality, respect for the law and the rights of others are the foundation of political order and social peace.” This article is especially relevant since it acquires a double importance regarding the prison population. Indeed, the process of penitentiary reintegration and rehabilitation consists precisely of ensuring that prisoners learn to respect the dignity and rights of others, but also, and it is not usually emphasized in pedagogical and criminological literature, to respect themselves, through a new orientation of life that distances them from criminal activity, feeling valuable.

To undertake an adequate reintegration process with inmates, it is necessary to harmonize two ideas (Gil Cantero, 2013, p. 52). On the one hand, respecting their intrinsic human dignity, regardless of the committed offense (Ward and Birgden, 2009, p. 229), and, on the other hand, recognizing the importance of carrying out valuable human acts (Brennan and Lo, 2007, p. 47; Masschelein, 2024). Respecting, therefore, the human dignity of an offender in prison cannot be understood solely in negative terms: preventing abuse, violations of rights, degrading and inhuman treatment. Respect for human dignity must also include positive action proposals, activities for the full development of their personality (Biesta, 2024). If this distinction is not clear, prisoners cannot be helped (Coyle, 2008, p. 226).

1.3. Rehabilitation of Prisoners and Non-Discrimination

Another very relevant article for rehabilitation, from the Spanish constitutional framework, is number 14, according to which “Spaniards are equal before the law, without any discrimination by birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance.” The right to education cannot be properly exercised on unjustified discriminatory grounds. No one can be denied their right to education simply because they have committed a punishable offense and are in prison. On the contrary, it could be considered that this right is not causally linked to achieving or not achieving definitive

reintegration of the inmate. It is a subjective fundamental right that belongs to the individual, as a human being, with inherent value and, precisely, due to the intrinsic incompleteness of the person, their vulnerability and possibility of permanent change. Nor would it be possible to argue that this right is relativized based on the age of the inmates, their behavior within prison, the duration of the sentence, or the type of offense committed.

Another interesting aspect that is rarely discussed is that the principle of non-discrimination must be an urgent content of direct learning for the prison population itself. As is known, the hostile environment of total institutions generate very closed groupings among prisoners based on ethnicity, language, type of offense, skin color, etc., which tend to develop discrimination, rejection, and exclusion towards the rest of the prison population, if not violence or mistreatment (Goffman, 1972). Another line of action should be aimed at avoiding discrimination against women prisoners, as they constitute a minority within the prison population and are excluded from the best possibilities of rehabilitation (Añaños-Bedriñana, 2013, 110; Gil Cantero, 2017).

1.4. The Right to Education in Prisons

Articles 27.1 and 27.2 of the CE establish the right to education in the following terms: “1. Everyone has the right to education (...) 2. Education shall aim at the full development of the human personality in respect for democratic principles of coexistence and fundamental rights and freedoms.” For the purpose of this article, these articles should also be related to Article 43.3, which states that “Public authorities shall promote health education, physical education, and sports. They shall also facilitate the proper use of leisure time.”

Similarly, and referring to the LOGP, we must link them to Article 3, which states that “1. Inmates may exercise civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights, without exclusion of the right to vote, unless they are incompatible with the purpose of their detention or the serving of the sentence” and “5. The inmate has the right to be designated by their own name.”

Also, very relevant in the same law is Chapter X dedicated entirely to “Instruction and Education.” This chapter includes the following considerations: the obligation for each prison to have a school; special attention to illiterates and young people; teaching must comply with current legislation on education and vocational training; it is proposed to promote the interest of inmates in studying by providing maximum facilities for the completion and monitoring of courses; likewise, it is proposed that prisons organize educational, cultural, and professional activities, with or without official certification; it encourages the signing of agreements with public universities, especially with the UNED, which specifically address the singular needs of the prison population without losing rigor and quality, and finally, each prison establishment must have a library and the use of newspapers and magazines should be promoted.

Article 88.2 of the RP refers to the fact that “the penitentiary administration will plan and carry out health prevention and education programs.” Article 123 proposes the distinction between “priority and complementary activities.” Regarding the former, we would find: 1. Basic training for illiterates, young people, foreigners, and people with specific problems accessing education. 2. Health education will receive preferential attention. 3. Basic training of inmates will be complemented by other activities necessary to promote their integral development.

Finally, Article 174 proposes, regarding youth modules, “five fundamental training programs”: instrumental and basic, labor, leisure and culture, physical education and sports, and special.

1.5. The Right to Education of Prisoners and the Purpose of Rehabilitation

Another article of the CE, probably the most fundamental, for the exercise of the right to education of prisoners is 25.2, according to which “Deprivation of liberty and security measures shall be aimed at rehabilitation and social reintegration (...)”.

As explained above, the right to education of prisoners must be understood in an unconditional manner, regardless of the future results of reintegration into society. But, at the same time, for it to be a practical, real right, adapted to the circumstances of the inmates, it must specifically, and not generically, be aimed at achieving reintegration. That is why it is very important to link both processes, the right

to education and the deprivation of liberty aimed at rehabilitation. Unfortunately, as we will show, this connection is not fully recognized in our legal system (Gil Cantero, 2010, p. 56; Reviriego, 2007, p. 159).

In Constitutional Court ruling 75/1998 (March 31), after recognizing that Article 25.2 of the CE establishes rehabilitation and social reintegration as the aims of punishment, it reduces them, however, to “(...) a mandate from the constituent to the legislator to guide penal and prison policy, a mandate from which subjective rights do not derive (...)”; warning repeatedly that these aims cannot be considered “(...) fundamental rights susceptible to constitutional protection (...)”. Therefore, while the right to education is indeed a fundamental right, the purpose of rehabilitation in the penitentiary setting is not.

The Supreme Court, for its part, has recalled in numerous judgments the doctrine of the Constitutional Court. For example, in the one corresponding to the 2nd Chamber, of September 15, 2005, it quotes verbatim the high court to consider again that while resocialization is an aim of punishment, it does not belong, however, to the category of fundamental rights, and adds: “(...) from the conception of the Social and Democratic Rule of Law, it is not possible to derive the requirement that it be the sole aim of punishment, nor even that it can be attributed exclusively privative functions (...)”. “Consequently, the protection of individuals (...) will be carried out through the ordinary judicial process (...) since rehabilitation and social reintegration do not constitute a fundamental right of convicts” (Delgado del Rincón, 2007, p. 98).

The reform of the new penal code, with the establishment of what has been called “reviewable life imprisonment,” has also decisively contributed to devaluing the rehabilitative and resocializing perspective. In fact, it is no longer possible to maintain that rehabilitation and social reintegration are primary objectives of the stay in prison when they are practically out of reach for certain offenders due to the committed offense.

The devaluation of rehabilitation and reintegration purposes has also been reflected in the European Penitentiary Rules (Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 2006; Gil Cantero, 2010). Commenting on this latest version, Mapelli indicates several aspects:

The prison system cannot pretend, nor is it its mission to make good men, but it can, however, try to identify those deficiencies and offer the convict resources and services that can be used to overcome them. In a way, it is proposed that resocializing therapies and psychology be displaced by the offer of social services and sociology. Therefore, it should not surprise us that those responsible for drafting it do not mention rehabilitation or reeducation at any time. (...) Social normalization is achieved through humanizing punishment better than with rehabilitative aspirations (...) (Mapelli, 2006, p. 4; italics added).

It is essential not to unlink the right to education from rehabilitation. It is very likely that the decrease and disregard of specifically educational activities in prison compared to teaching and regulated courses is due to rehabilitation being considered a mere orientative option, subject to the will of the legislator and prison workers and authorities.

2. Sociodemographic Analysis of the Spanish Penitentiary Context

Several international public policies and manuals on penitentiary educational intervention have highlighted the need to tailor educational interventions to the characteristics of the prison population (Rodley & Pollard, 2009). From this perspective, it is essential to understand the traits characterizing individuals in prison to analyse how well the programs being implemented meet the socio-educational needs for re-education and social reintegration. While people deprived of their liberty are a broad and heterogeneous group, much like society at large, there are some factors that can have an overall impact on the process of social reintegration. In this regard, we will analyse basic sociodemographic traits and socio-educational characteristics linked to program access to profile the current Spanish penitentiary context. Firstly, the Spanish prison population, like the international one, is predominantly male, with female population percentages hovering around 7% over the last five years. This fact significantly influences penitentiary intervention. As various authors have noted, the penitentiary system, in its physical setup and

in the characteristics of its socio-educational, regimental, and treatment interventions, does not equally address the needs of women in Spanish prisons, by limiting their social reintegration process (Moles *et al.*, 2023; Quiroga-Carrillo & Lorenzo, 2022). Regarding the age of the prison population, it ranges from 31 to 50 years, thus it is primarily an older adult population. Using an arithmetic mean based on data from Table 1, considering that 70% of offenders serve a sentence of up to 8 years (SGIP, 2023, p. 29), the most common profile within prison are men who start serving their sentence at 40 years of age and finish at 48. This fact is significant as the life project of an adult varies depending on their age, and in this case, given the sociodemographic characteristics, it is predictable that such a project is already established and must be assessed in terms of its connection to criminal behaviour.

Table 1 – Age of the incarcerated population.¹

Ages	Hombres	Mujeres	Total
From 18 to 20 years	381	14	395
From 21 to 25 years	3.239	150	3.389
From 26 to 30 years	5.022	300	5.322
From 31 to 40 years	12.839	1.006	13.845
From 41 to 50 years	12.191	1.108	13.299
From 51 to 60 years	6.719	557	7.276
From 61 to 70 years	2.033	183	2.216
More than 70 years old	567	39	606
Total	42.991	3.357	46.348

To analyse this, it is appropriate to consider the type of criminal offence and its various characteristics within the penal compliance model, as highlighted in the first section, where the orientation towards re-education and reintegration is also present within the regimental system and the different types of grades in which a sentence can be served. Regarding the type of crime, as observed in Table 2, crimes of a direct economic nature (crimes against property) or indirect (drug trafficking included in crimes against public health) are predominantly present. Following these, gender-related crimes, such as gender violence and sexual assault for men, are noted. For women, homicide and crimes against the Administration of Justice are observed. Regarding the living regime in the modality in which they serve their sentence, there is a continued preference for the second degree, characterized by being carried out within standardized penitentiary centres, where inmates live their day-to-day lives in modules, participating in various voluntary treatment programs. On the opposite end, there is the isolation modality aimed at those inmates who, due to their difficulties with coexistence in the centre or their type of crime (special security), only have two to four hours of cohabitation, thus making it the most difficult cohabitational model due to its characteristics. In contrast, the third-degree modality is characterized by the semi-freedom of the inmates. It is the last phase in the progression of the sentence and is often prior to the conditional freedom. This phase is characterized by the development of programs aimed at preparing for life in freedom, as well as for employment search, considered essential programs for proper social reintegration. Statistically, a common preference for the use of the second degree has been maintained, as the normalized degree, followed by the third and first degrees, as observed in Table 2.

These data point to two relevant socio-educational aspects. First, if we observe that the crimes are predominantly of a material nature, the use of the second-degree regime is not suitable, as it implies a social isolation that could increase the social problems from which the offender already suffers. In this sense, the suitability of using semi-freedom or third-degree along with socio-labour programs that improve social reintegration and community ties have been noted. Secondly, regarding the living regime, although the first degree is not predominant, it is important to note that the figures have been maintained in recent years, for both women and men. This fact implies that individuals are kept in a regime of maximum isolation, which has limited treatment programs and will make it difficult to maintain relational links both inside and outside the penal institution.

1. Note: (SGIP, 2024a, p.5)

It is also noteworthy that women have a higher percentage of treatment in the third degree, which will facilitate their social reintegration processes, always taking into account the specific gender variables (Del Pozo, 2017).

Table 2 – Crime types²

Type of Crimes	2024 Men	Women	2023 Men	Women	2022 Men	Women
Homicide and its forms	2.987	297	3.057	304	3.092	311
Lesions	1.875	153	1.877	144	1.850	140
Against Freedom	547	49	551	38	601	38
Against Sexual Freedom	4.014	63	3.940	60	3.755	56
Gender-Based Violence	5.143	0	4.835	0	4.533	2
Against Family Relationships	152	6	158	7	169	12
Against Heritage and the Socio-Economic Order	16.215	1.430	16.095	1.423	16.235	1.435
Against Public Health	6.622	866	6.661	815	6.667	859
Against Traffic Safety	1.468	51	1.363	36	1.295	32
Falsehoods	411	73	429	72	407	61
Against the Administration and Public Treasury	211	29	219	27	334	36
Against the Administration of Justice	821	125	794	125	699	131
Against Public Order	1.296	97	1.375	105	1.389	106
Other Offences (*)	990	103	927	110	819	101
No crime is recorded	158	9	125	9	125	11
Total	42.910	3.351	42.406	3.275	41.970	3.331

Table 3 – Distribution of the prison population according to the prison regime³

Degrees	2024 Men	Women	2023 Men	Women	2022 Men	Women
First Grade	485	15	482	22	525	30
Second Grade	31.854	2.000	31.464	1.979	30.815	1.994
Third Grade	7.620	1.128	7.879	1.081	7.543	1.078
Unclassified	3.032	214	2.668	203	3.203	237
Total	42.991	3.357	42.493	3.285	42.086	3.339

2. *Note:* Authors' own elaboration based on (SGIP, 2024a, 2023, 2022)

Lastly, to conclude the analysis of the Spanish penitentiary context, it is important to introduce an analysis of the treatment programs that are carried out. For this, we have selected two treatment programs related to gender crimes, gender violence, and sexual violence; two broadly developed programs related to coexistence; respect modules and programs for young people; and sociocultural and sports programs, which have a broad reach.

Firstly, regarding programs related to criminal behaviour, we have Gender Base Violence Program and Sexual Assault Control Program. Both programs are cognitive-behavioural in nature and are characterized by being developed by psychologists, with very limited participation, despite being the 3rd and 4th most committed offences. This fact is notable because, under current regulations, individuals convicted of sexual assault cannot access parole if they have not completed the Sexual Aggression Control Program, thus, there is a lack of resources that allow access to these programs.

Secondly, the coexistence programs that stand out for their development are the Respect Modules and the Youth Intervention Programs. The first program does not have a character specific to the crime but takes a socio-educational perspective on re-education integrating all areas of life in prison, to guide a civic and prosocial way of life. They are based on differentiated modules within the prison; there are currently 229 modules distributed across a total of 64 penitentiary centers. In these modules, a series of routines, rules, and procedures are developed to improve hygiene, health, good habits, interpersonal relationships, stimulate participation, and encourage responsibility (Galan & Gil, 2018). The youth program is aimed at inmates between 18 and 21 or 25 years old and is based on a comprehensive intervention that contemplates two areas: one common and another, community-based prosocial thinking. The common part involves interdisciplinary work across seven areas: academic training, sports/recreational, labour-cultural, hygienic, health, leisure, and free time, socio-familial, and preparation for life in the community (SGIP, 2007).

Table 4 – Treatment programs⁴

Program	Participation	Recipients	% Participation
Gender-Based Violence Program	1182	5143	22,98%
Sexual Assault Control Program	529	4077	12,97%
Youth Intervention	940	3.784	24,84%
Respect Modules	15556	33.854	45,95%

Thirdly, and finally, we find the sociocultural and sports programs. Regarding sociocultural activities, we observe four major action or activity groups oriented by their purpose. Thus, cultural creation programs are distinguished, aimed at the development of creativity and cultural expressions; cultural diffusion programs aimed at linking with local cultural networks; cultural training and motivation programs, which seek to foster positive attitudes towards the rest of the social groups; and finally, the reading promotion program, which seeks to initiate or strengthen reading habits among inmates. Regarding sports activities, a distinction is made between competitive sports programs, which are aimed at personal improvement as well as promoting relationships with non-criminal groups through official competitions; training and sports motivation activities, aimed at promoting sports experiences through the dissemination of information and documentation on physical education and sports; and recreational sports activity programs aimed at promoting sports practice, enhancing physical, mental, and social well-being, and promoting socially risky behaviours. In this area, we appreciate the educational dimension of sports that support the processes of re-education and reintegration. As a common key factor between the sociocultural and sports areas, besides the common characteristics, we find the possibility of linking with the outside by the inmates, since these are activities that can have spectators who share spaces with the inmates.

3. *Note:* Authors' own elaboration based on (SGIP, 2023)

4. *Note:* Authors' own elaboration based on (SGIP, 2023)

Table 5 – Socio-cultural and sports programs^{5 6}

	Recipients	Participants (monthly average 2021)	% Participation
Cultural Creation Programs	45848	13.439	29,31%
Cultural Dissemination Programs	45848	5.580	12,17%
Training and cultural motivation programs	45848	1.189	2,59%
Reading Encouragement Program	45848	1.183	2,58%
Recreational Sports Programs	45848	20.480	44,66%
Competitive Sports Programs	45848	2.444	5,33%
Sports Training and Motivation Activities Programs	45848	3.626	7,90%

In conclusion, we observe that participation in the programs carried out in prison is low except in the cases of the respect modules, due to their extensive development and thus accessibility for the inmates, and the sports and cultural dissemination programs. These programmes are characterised by the co-organisation between prisoners and staff, so that participation is necessary for the development of the activities, which is a fundamental feature of the adult education framework.

As seen in the first section, it is necessary to encourage inmates to participate in the various activities conducted in prison, so that the extended time they spend deprived of liberty can contribute to improving their socio-educational competencies for reintegration. In addition to the previously detailed types, there are a set of scenarios, programs, and functions with a socio-educational focus, both in closed and open regimes, and alternative measures to traditional penalty fulfilment (SGIP, 2024b):

- Social programs
- Health programs
- Socio-labour programs
- Cultural programs
- Programs for specific populations or situations, among others.

The Spanish penitentiary regulations consider a multitude of compliance scenarios that support Re-education and social reintegration, especially those included in special forms of penalty execution (Social Insertion Centres, Dependent Units, Extra-penitentiary Units, and so on).

3. Social Education in the Penitentiary Field: Comprehensive and Professionalized Socio-Educational Action as a Response to the Right to Reeducation

Education is not only about instruction and regulated qualification that leads to formalizing the levels of knowledge offered by the formal school system (primary, secondary, vocational training, or university studies, among others). Although this educational aspect is fundamental for human development and socio-labour inclusion (also for people deprived of freedom), it is for this reason that in this section we focus on the socio-educational dimension of the treatment. The pedagogical nature of learning and comprehensive attention to the population presents a social and civic dimension (in addition to curricular), which occurs throughout life (and is present in all environments of human, social, and ecological

5. *Note:* Authors' own elaboration based on (SGIP, 2023)

6. The recipients are the group of inmates in the second and third grades, as well as those pending classification. We exclude the first degree since its regimental characteristics do not facilitate participation in activities of this type.

development). This socio-educational purpose is aimed at promoting social maturity, promoting coexistence, rehabilitation, or socio-community inclusion (Caride, 2017).

In this sense, Social Education (as a subject of study of Social Pedagogy, a discipline and profession in Spain since 1991) (Pérez de Guzmán *et al.*, 2020); represents a necessary, quality, and professionalized response, which could be defined as:

A complex, ethical, and systemic socio-educational action (based on Human Rights) that provides rehabilitative and community support in the daily life accompaniments of the population deprived of liberty during internment, semi-freedom, and definitive freedom. Likewise, it intervenes as a conscientizing and liberating practice with related environments, generating networks and protective contexts for prevention, reintegration, and community re-incorporation through comprehensive education, socio-cultural promotion of coexistence, citizen participation, and socio-labor inclusion (Del Pozo *et al.*, 2024, p. 23).

This profession, whether under this name or others (social pedagogues, community or specialized educators, in other international cases), is a pedagogical-social career that addresses these issues from a comparative and international perspective (AIEJI-CGCEES, 2013). Increasingly, with greater professional, academic, institutional, political, and social strength in the Spanish state and globally (especially in Anglo-Saxon countries or Latin America). Therefore, social educators are active in various multidisciplinary teams of public administrations and private entities in Spain in the fields of social, educational, cultural, and health services (Galan & Del Pozo, 2019). In this sense, we can identify two necessary aspects: a) The socio-educational perspective of treatment programs. b) The professionalized participation of social educators in the processes of re-education and reintegration.

3.1. Socioeducative Perspective in the Treatment Programs

Within the framework of all prison treatment and care interventions, both in closed and open settings, there are a multitude of programs with different intervention approaches and professional functions (social work, psychology, law, and teaching, among others).

However, in order to plan, act, and evaluate the educational dimension of treatment (with quality) taking into account education as a right for reinsertion-re-education, the participation of professionals trained for this purpose is necessary: social educators (in this case in the penitentiary and penal execution fields). Let us assess various principles and strategies of a socio-educational nature in this field (Del Pozo *et al.*, 2024; Gil & Del Pozo, 2021):

- a) Re (education): permanent accompanying education that acts on everyday skills for change and prevention of recidivism. For example, the program of awareness and re-education in social skills (violent, environmental, ecological, and other crimes) [PROBECO].
- b) Re (insertion): empowerment of capacities for positive social and community action. For example, the Restorative Justice program.
- c) Holistic: Community and specialized formative actions that favour integral development. For example, the Therapeutic and Educational Units (UTE) programs.
- d) Autonomy: a rehabilitative function that enhances social circulation and maturity for the development of autonomy and social integration. For example, programs for people with substance dependencies.
- e) Awareness: raising personal and social awareness. For example, the intervention program against family violence (partner violence that is not gender-based, ascending and descending violence) (Encounter).
- f) Liberation: an emancipatory practice for empowerment that educates as political and civic beings, those deprived of their freedom. For example, cultural creation programs.

- g) Sociocultural: a contextual and multicultural dimension of human development that ensures access to culture and cultural democracy of the sociocultural abilities of all individuals. For example, cultural training and motivation programs.
- h) Participation: as a critical, reflective, and technical learning that promotes citizenship and responsible community participatory systems. For example, respect modules programs.
- i) Coexistence: accompaniment and guidance to enable, expand, and consolidate rehabilitative human relations, reducing socio-familial alienation and fostering integral development. For example, social reintegration programs.
- j) Community: active cooperation for socio-community reintegration, strengthening ordinary life outside and social integration. For example, the Social Insertion Centres (CIS) or Dependent Units (UD).

3.2. Professionalized Participation of Social Educators in Reeducation and Reintegration Processes

The involvement of non-penitentiary collaborative entities (NGOs) in the Spanish penitentiary field covers a broad scope (over 1,000 in the 2022–23 period) (SGIP, 2024b); this is a significant aspect of the extensive participation of external entities that assist the population deprived of liberty and strengthens civic responsibility. However, although many programs employ qualified social educators, the lack of definition of professionalization in the records, and the absence of guaranteed training for access and development of programs with a socio-educational emphasis weakens the quality of professional services, which also does not guarantee public penitentiary service (Del Pozo, 2013).

The educational functions of public professional bodies that make up the treatment teams in the Penitentiaries of the General State Administration (Ministry of the Interior) have not been primarily performed by qualified social educators (but by surveillance officers promoted to that position with short training offered by the penitentiary institution itself).

However, in 2021, significant challenges were overcome to improve the quality and profession of Social Education in the Penitentiary Institution regarding the speciality of entry for the latest selective processes for professional groups M2 as “Social Educators,” although access was opened to the entire profession of Educational Sciences, which still poses a challenge regarding the professionalization of the practice of educators in the General State Administration. Also, all initiatives to change the job title of about 60 people to social educators under the new framing of the labour personnel according to the IV agreement (Del Pozo, 2023).

The Generalitat of Catalonia (penitentiary administration of a Spanish region with transferred penitentiary competencies) created the speciality of social education in the body of graduates of the Generalitat of Catalonia (Law 24/2002, November 18), which was assumed by the Catalan Penitentiary Institutions. In the Basque Country (another autonomous region with penitentiary competencies, from October 2021) (RD 474/2021), the specialized intervention of social educators in the penitentiary field of the Basque Country is also contemplated (Del Pozo, 2023).

Considering all these antecedents and the academic, scientific, professional, and political reasons that have been consolidated (with extensive socio-pedagogical research in this matter, disciplinary foundations and justifications, as well as professional strengthening of the increase of qualified and collegiate social educators in Spain), after the implementation of the career of Social Education; in 2024, the “Conceptual Framework of Social Education in the Penitentiary Field. Professionalizing Documents”; was born. This document aims to guide evidence-based decision-making to strengthen Spanish Social Education in the penitentiary and penal execution field. It was prepared in collaboration with the “Master of Social Education in the Penitentiary Field”; of the National University of Distance Education (UNED), the Ibero-American Society of Social Pedagogy (SIPS), and the General Council of Colleges of Social Educators (CGCEES). Its launch took place at the International Congress “Penitentiary Social Education: Right, professionalization, and reintegration”; held at the Faculty of Education of the UNED in Madrid, in 2023, with the participation of international entities specializing in the subject, such as the European

Prison Education Association (EPEA), Promoting Professional Prison Practice (EUROPRIS), or the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison (UNED, 2023).

4. Conclusions

In this article we have carried out a socio-educational and contextualized analysis of Social Education in the Spanish prison system.

To this end, we have initially analysed the legislative framework that regulates the role of education in the deprivation of liberty. In this regard, the orientation of all activities and initiatives carried out in prison must be guided by the principles of re-education and reintegration. From this perspective, we have defended education as a fundamental human right of convicts, despite the fact that, as we have observed, it cannot be guaranteed as a subjective right to which everyone can have access. In addition, we have contextualized democratic values as principles that must be present in socio-educational intervention, in such a way that they help guarantee their rights in prison and serve as an educational basis for the formation of their citizenship.

Secondly, we have analysed the current prison situation in Spain. In this sense, we have observed that there is a majority male population with an average age of 40 to 50 years, who have mainly committed socio-economic and/or gender-based crimes. In addition, the sentence is served in the second degree, i.e. in standard prisons. In this regard, we have highlighted the need to expand access to the third degree or semi-freedom, accompanied by employment programmes in such a way as to improve the social reintegration of convicts. However, we highlight the use of the programs of Respect Modules and Therapeutic-Educational Units for the closed regime as they allow the inmates to acquire habits and guidelines of coexistence.

Finally, we have analysed the figure of the social educator as a professional specialised in the processes of reintegration and social re-education. Backed by their pedagogical and social training, these professionals contribute to the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of the reintegration processes of different groups. In the penitentiary field, we have defined the principles that should govern their professional intervention, in such a way that they are transferable to different international contexts.

In conclusion, socio-educational intervention in prison within the framework of Social Education is a right, a necessity, and a requirement to guarantee the adequate reintegration and re-education of inmates from the pedagogical and socio-community bases that characterize this profession.

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