

## CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

### Research Agenda-Setting Paper

*This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.*

#### Working Group Name:

COVID-19 in Prisons

#### Working Group Description:

Our Working Group aims to assess the impacts of COVID-19 in prison and explore associated responses from governments, prison administrations, people in prison, and other stakeholders. Documenting and understanding the diversity and scope of such impacts and initiatives in different cultural, economic, and political settings, and within the scope of existing disaster risk reduction, public health, and detention policies, is essential to meaningfully inform approaches to improving the health and well-being of people in prison and ultimately uphold their human rights. We intend to share these initiatives from around the world through the network of our partner Penal Reform International, an NGO dedicated to developing fair and effective criminal justice.

#### Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
1. Impact of COVID-19 in Prison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the impacts of COVID-19 in prisons?</li> <li>• How do the impacts vary across countries?</li> <li>• What are the factors that explain these impacts in prisons?</li> </ul>
2. Prison Administration Responses to COVID-19 at Different Scales (National/Federal, Regional/State, Jail/Prison)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the different measures taken by prison administrations to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and have they been successful/effective?</li> <li>• Has testing been widely available to both staff and people in prison?</li> <li>• Have these measures differ across countries?</li> <li>• What are the drivers of such responses?</li> <li>• What kind of information is released by prison administrations?</li> <li>• Has financial support to prison administrations changed with COVID-19?</li> </ul>

3. Decarceration in Response to COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many people have been released in which country and does the actual number of releases match numbers pledged by governments?</li> <li>• Who are the people who have been released?</li> <li>• How are priorities for release defined?</li> <li>• What are the social and political issues associated with decarceration, including the opinion of the larger society?</li> <li>• What are the positive and negative consequences of decarceration?</li> </ul>
4. Macro-Policy Context and the Politics of Decarceration in Response to COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What policies have been taken by government agencies across the countries?</li> <li>• How do governments legitimate decarceration policies?</li> <li>• Is COVID-19 affecting longer-term policies on imprisonment and disaster risk reduction (beyond COVID-19)?</li> </ul>
5. Prison Labour during COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type of labour has been imposed upon/offered to people in prison?</li> <li>• Are there any country-specific patterns of prison labour?</li> <li>• Who are the people prioritised for prison labour?</li> <li>• Is people's safety of ensured while contributing labour in prison?</li> </ul>
6. Responses of People in Prison during COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have the health, safety and well-being of people in prison been affected?</li> <li>• How have people in prison coped in different countries?</li> <li>• Are there any organic forms of responses that have emerged?</li> <li>• Are there any other stakeholders beyond people in prison, families and the prison administration involved in facilitating COVID-19 response in prisons?</li> </ul>
7. Relationship Between People in Prison and their Kin and Relatives during COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have people in prison been able to maintain relationships with their kin and relatives?</li> <li>• Have any creative forms of communication been improvised to facilitate relationships between people in prison and their kin and relatives?</li> <li>• Have relatives and kin mobilised resources and/or developed initiatives to assist people in prison?</li> </ul>

### **Ethical / Methodological Considerations:**

Our scoping research focuses on 15 countries that mirror the expertise of our research Working Group, priority research areas, and the priorities identified by our NGO partner Penal Reform International. These countries include Australia, Brazil, France, Italy, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, New Zealand, Peru, The Philippines, Russia, South Africa, the UK, and the USA. Our research entails both standalone case studies of these countries and a comparative approach.

For ethical reasons, we have decided not to go (yet) to prisons and people in prison and burden them with an externally-driven research project that may overwhelm their limited staff and resources. For the moment, we are therefore focusing on secondary data that we collect from the media, government agencies, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders. These data are collated in a cloud repository either as raw materials (when available in English) or filtered through English summaries composed by our country experts.

Data are eventually coded in search of key themes that are both specific to each country and transversal. The research questions pitched in the foregoing section have emerged from our initial analysis of our dataset. These themes are primarily analysed through the lens of key concepts and frameworks that inform disaster studies. We are nonetheless making connections with other existing approaches from public health, criminal

justice, and prison studies. Noteworthy is that we look at ethnicity, gender, age, and physical ability as transversal themes across all our questions.

We acknowledge that this scoping research is not exhaustive. For example, we have excluded jails and private prisons in the USA because there is too much information available. In some countries, this information is also filtered/censored by national government or is just not completely reliable. The quantity and quality of data thus varies from one country to another.

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### **Other Frameworks, Considerations for Collaboration, and/or Resources:**

The research of our Working Group aims to inform the advocacy of our NGO partner Penal Reform International: <https://www.penalreform.org/>. We therefore plan to publish a policy brief emphasising the challenges and opportunities of the different types of responses to COVID-19 and other pandemic within and outside of their original context.

We will also consider academic outputs such as journal articles, conference addresses, and poster presentations, whenever relevant. These early outputs, based on such scoping research, should also allow to clearly identify and justify gaps in knowledge, policy, and actions for disaster risk reduction, in its broadest sense inclusive of health hazards such as the COVID-19 pandemic, in prison. These gaps in knowledge, policy and actions should provide the springboard for eventually exploring further research opportunities on specific topics through relevant funding opportunities

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