



**Press Release
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[New Studies Reveal Increase in Incarceration for Drug Offenses in the Americas](#)

Mexico City—Today, the Research Consortium on Drugs and the Law (Colectivo de Estudios Drogas y Derecho, CEDD) will release a series of new studies showing that despite the current debate in Latin America on the need to rethink drug policy, mass incarceration for nonviolent drug offenses has increased across the region. The five thematic reports analyze the gap between discourse and reality, the criminalization of consumption, alternatives to incarceration, women imprisoned for drug offenses, and minors imprisoned for drugs in Latin America.

“In the majority of the Latin American countries surveyed, one out of every five persons in prison is incarcerated for drug offenses. Moreover, the population incarcerated for drug-related offenses in several of these countries has increased at higher rates than the general prison population,” said Alejandro Corda, a CEDD researcher from Argentina. “But this incarceration has no impact on the drug trade because people in prison for drug offenses tend to be low-level traffickers, easily replaced, and persons in vulnerable situations.”

In Colombia, the number incarcerated on drug-related offenses almost quadrupled in the past 14 years, increasing from 6,263 people in 2000 to 23,141 in 2014. In Brazil, the number increased 320 percent between 2005 and 2012, in contrast to a 51 percent increase for the general prison population.

According to the new research, between December 2006 and December 2014, the number of people incarcerated in Mexican federal prisons for drug crimes (delitos contra la salud) increased by 1,200 percent. Meanwhile, 60 percent of inmates in correctional centers in nine Mexican states are imprisoned for offenses related to cannabis.

The reports will be released in the House of Representatives of Mexico along with the Drug Policy Program at the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, CIDE) in a forum entitled People Deprived of Liberty for Drugs in Latin America: The Social Costs of Drug Policy.

“Taken together, the data presented show problems such as the feminization of drug crimes, criminalization and stigmatization of young people, and the large social cost implicit in the use of criminal law and incarceration to address the drug problem,” said Mexican Congressman Vidal Llerenas.

The reports also highlight a worrying increase in the number of women incarcerated for drug offenses. According to the study, in Argentina, 65 percent of female

prisoners are in prison for drug offenses. In Costa Rica and Peru, the percentages are 75.46 and 60.6, respectively. The vast majority are single mothers, young and low-income people, and often belong to ethnic minorities.

“The reports present evidence that the prison population incarcerated for drug crimes in the Americas has increased at a faster rate than the overall prison population,” said Catalina Pérez Correa, Professor at CIDE and CEDD project coordinator. “Long and unfair sentences have had a particularly negative effect on women, whose imprisonment has been growing, and contributes to conditions of vulnerability for their children.”

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