Restoring family visits - when and under which conditions

Estonia

Estonian Prison Service does not plan to restore family visits in the next couple of weeks.

Norway

New rules for prison visits will be presented mid-May.

Luxembourg

From the 11th of Mai 2020 onwards, the Luxembourgish Prison Administration proceeds to a gradual opening of the visits. Visits are being limited to 30 mins/visit, 2 persons above the age of 16. Visits take place in secured individual rooms where visitors and detainees are separated by glass. All visitors must disinfect their hands and wear masks. Furthermore, the options provided to have conversations over Skype are being maintained and still available. So detainees (condemned and defendants under the community regime) still have the possibility to make use of the videochat facilities in order to get in touch with their families.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) have introduced a range of measures in response to the risks presented by COVID-19, this included the suspension of ‘in person’ visits to prisoners. These measures were introduced having considered the situation in detail and Government advice. To help people in our care to stay in contact with their family and friends during the suspension of visits, NIPS launched virtual online visits from 13 April. NIPS reviewed the measures in place on 24 April and decided that the suspension of visits would remain in place subject to a further review on or by 22 May. NIPS review of its measures (including the ongoing suspension of visits) will take cognisance of the prevailing operational and community context and Government advice.

Israel

No plans to open the visits

Sweden

No steps have been taken to go back to normal regimes and all restrictions that have been put in place are still valid, for example no visits (legal visits and clergy exceptions) and no leaves. However, in addition to free calls nationally (international calls are half the normal price) there are now tests ongoing with providing inmates contact with their children by using tablets. All decisions/actions taken to limit the spread of Covid-19 are under constant evaluation,
Prisoners in closed regime and groups of inmates living together. Also, the use of mobile phones and video calls has been a significant change in our security regime. Maybe these changes will stay, but it is too early to know.

It is difficult to evaluate the situation at this moment, because we are still dealing with it. Nevertheless, one of the main measures undertaken - the increased use of electronic monitoring - has helped a lot in reducing the number of absconding from open regime prisons, which are a bit higher for the period (1st March to 12th May) 2020 compared to 2019.

Visit inmates at remand prison or treatment facilities. Compensatory measures: free of charge domestic phone calls for inmates and remand prisoners (to approved numbers). International calls were initially free of charge but are now included in the prison facilities.

Since 27 April we have a new regulation. This means that the restricted visitation of inmates will be possible again from 11.5. Several visitors may not be allowed to visit a prisoner at the same time, except for a visitor under 14 years of age or a relative/friend. Moreover, the current physical distancing guidelines provided by the World Health Organisation, will be met, as regards the number of visitors/inmates present in each visiting room.

The way forward for visits in France is to gradually allow up to 2-3 visits per inmate monthly, for those relatives/friends who meet the entrance criteria set out by the Department. Special vinyl/plastic desk shields will be placed in all visiting rooms.

In Slovenia, we intend to re-establish visits in Slovenian prison system on Monday, 18th May. Each prison facility needed to prepare its own protocol for re-establishment of visits. They have to implement standards as provided by the National Institute for Public Health. If there is an option they should provide visits on fresh air, visit through a glass barrier, visit around the table are also allowed (standards NPH). Implementation of these options depend on capacities of each prison facility.

In France, the deconfinement started gradually from May 11. Visits are limited to one visitor (adult) per inmate. The provision of laundry is not possible so far (these precautionary measures will be reassessed on June 2, second step of the national deconfinement). Contacts between inmates and their visitor must strictly respect the barrier measures: washing hands before the visit, respect a sufficient distance, not allowance of any physical contact (kissing, hugging, etc.). Wearing of a personal mask is compulsory for all visitors from the entrance of the establishment, in order to maintain a maximum level of protection against the virus in detention. Wearing of a mask by detainees is also compulsory (provided by the administration). Each visit cabin is cleaned between two visits (which has an impact on the reduction of numbers of available: sometimes 50% operational, 50% cleaned, and then a switch to allow time for cleaning).

In Italy, the deconfinement started from May 11. Visits are limited to one visitor (adult) per inmate. The provision of laundry is not be possible so far (these precautionary measures will be reassessed on June 2, second step of de-confinement). Visits in ICUs, correctional facilities, and correctional institutions are being re-established. Additionally, visits to the young and the elderly are being allowed.

No visits (applies to friends and relatives, not lawyers etc.), no leaves from prison, isolation of infected or suspected infected. Persons sentenced to prison that are not incarcerated are denied of entering any facility.

No steps have been taken to go back to normal regimes and all restrictions that have been put in place are still valid, for example no visits (legal visits and clergy exceptions) and no leaves. However, in addition to free calls nationally regarding visits there is no set date for when this will happen. The cessation of special measures related to the Covid-19 virus will happen gradually, and in line with national health policies.

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In Finland, all sports and exercise rooms and saunas in prisons will be opened as of 1.6.2020. If the prison unit has its own sauna, its use can be started immediately. The maximum number of persons in sports halls is in the same time is 10 persons. The cleaning and ventilation of premises will be done at every instance of use. The use of libraries will be monitored.

In Cyprus, the way forward for visits is to gradually allow up to 2-3 visits per inmate monthly, for those relatives/friends who meet the entrance criteria set out by the Department. Special vinyl/plastic desk shields will be placed in all visiting rooms.

In Latvia it is not planned to restore family visits for prisoners before 9 June (for now, the emergency situation in Latvia has been lifted). In the period, the prison Governor, in consultation with the Regional Director of the Penitentiary Administration of his territory and with the highest healthcare authority of the Region, shall establish a maximum number of visit hours which can be received by inmates. Each inmate is entitled to receive at least one visit per month with at least one visitor. The close cooperation at local level with the healthcare authorities is crucial, because the healthcare authorities can decide when the visit is possible.

In Lithuania, the Plan to restore family visits from 1 June, provided the lockdown is lifted. The conditions shall be set up in line with the national health policy.

In Denmark, the Plan to restore family visits from 1 June, provided the lockdown is lifted. The conditions shall be set up in line with the national health policy.

In Spain, regime changes (a selection): No visits (applies to friends and relatives, not lawyers etc.), no leaves from prison, isolation of infected or suspected infected. Persons sentenced to prison that are not incarcerated are denied of entering any prison or remand prison to start serving time if they show symptoms of Covid-19. Basic training for staff is postponed and the staff is instead deployed to prisons and remand prisons. Precautionary measures have also been imposed within the Probation Service. Physical meetings between the Probation Officers and the clients are, to the extent possible, avoided and replaced by other means of communication, such as Skype or Facetime. The Probation Officers will no longer be able to separate inmates and detainees; but main rule is to have the social distance and the masks. If those plastic/plexi separation are used, they are different from security hygaphone: they are not fully separating. Marks are put on the floor (adhesive rubber). Outside waiting family rooms (usually ruled by an association) are not opened so far. More staffs are positioned in the visit area to supervise the whole process. So far, the deconfinement is limited to family visits and, for juveniles, compulsory school. Daily outside promenade and outside sport activities (if no contact) are still ongoing. The progressive following measures (activities) are under assessment for a progressive start post 2nd June.

In Austria, the Plan is to recover the ordinary penitentiary activity (visits, inmate exchanges, educational, therapeutic activities), depending on the location of the prison and following the general sanitary instructions. Nevertheless, there are some specific rules. For example, visits are restarting, but limited to two people and avoiding physical contact.

What regime changes have you had to make and have any of these affected prisoner wellbeing and prison safety? (e.g. changes in self-harm; violence, drug use; mental health problems; relationships between staff and prisoners?)
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<th><strong>Overall, which approach/es do you think have been the most and least successful in managing Covid-19 in prisons and/or for supporting a) staff and b) prisoners and why?</strong></th>
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<th><strong>What are your plans for how you ease restrictions and move your prison into a programme of recovery?</strong></th>
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<th><strong>How have things in your prisons changed as wider public lockdown restrictions are lifted? What's worked to manage or respond to that change?</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Are there any changes you have made as a result of COVID-19 that you intend to implement permanently? Why</strong></th>
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