



EUROPEAN ORGANISATION OF
PRISON AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

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PRISON VISITS | EuroPris COVID-19 pandemic fact sheet |

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EuroPris continues to work with prison services in Europe to identify issues arising due to COVID-19 and to share experiences, practices and knowledge. When the outbreak began, most prison services immediately suspended visits, to help protect prisoners and staff against outbreaks amongst the prison population. Most prison services have now started to implement measures and policies to facilitate either physical visits or alternatives means of contact. This fact sheets presents an overview of the measures for in person visits – not alternatives such as video conferencing or compensation measures.

Please note that this fact sheet only relates to visits by relatives and friends, not lawyers, courts, probation, religious or professional services. Please also note that most prison services have reported that they have not restarted visits yet. This fact sheet collects the practice of those that have, so that they can offer guidance to other prison services in their decision-making.

1. Pre-visit health checks for visitors

In most countries that allow visits, there is some form of health check before visitors are allowed onto the prison premises. Specifically, in some countries, visitor's temperatures are measured before their visits (eg. Catalonia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Poland) and visitors fill out a form/questionnaire about their health or provide health declarations (eg. Romania, France, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Ireland, Italy). If visitors have symptoms such as fever, cough, etc. or if they were recently tested positive for the novel corona virus, they are not allowed entry to the prison. Visitor registration systems have also been introduced (eg. Italy and Belgium).

2. Adaptations to meeting rooms

Prison services have reported a range of changes that were made to meeting rooms, depending on the specific circumstances of the prisons as well as the climate. For example, prisons are either using larger rooms, to allow for more space between the visit desks, or they have built cabins for visits, or they are organizing visits outdoors (ag. Slovenia, Croatia).



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3. Hygiene and protective equipment

In all countries that allow visits, visitors are asked to wash their hands before their visit. Some countries provide hand washing stations and/or disinfectant for visitors to use prior to their visit (eg. Luxembourg, France, Romania). In some countries, gloves and/or face masks are required for visitors and/or prisoners (eg. Catalonia, Luxembourg, France, Czech Republic) and in some jurisdictions, face masks are provided by the prison. The consumption of food, including drinks, is not allowed during visits in some countries (eg. Czech Republic). Visiting areas are thoroughly cleaned with disinfectant between visits (eg. Catalonia, Romania, France, Czech Republic).

4. Distancing regulations

In most countries, physical contact is not allowed at all during visits. To facilitate this and to comply with distancing rules, visitors either have to keep two meters distance (eg. Catalonia, France, Italy, Romania, Lithuania, Belgium) and/or visits take place with a screen partition (eg. Catalonia, Luxembourg, Slovenia, France, Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Northern Ireland).

5. Limits to the number and duration of visits

In all countries that have started to allow visits, there are limits to the number and duration of visits, because it requires more staff time to organize the visits and because each visit requires more space. Limits vary from allowing only one or two persons at the same time (eg. Luxembourg, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Romania, Croatia), to allowing visits to take a maximum of 30-60 minutes (eg. Luxembourg), to a maximum number of visits for each prisoner per week or month (eg. Luxembourg, Italy, Cyprus, Austria, Romania, Belgium).

6. Priority given to children and families

Since most jurisdictions cannot open up to visits at full capacity, most give priority to direct family members of the prisoner (eg. Finland, Catalonia, Romania, Lithuania). Prisoners with underage children are usually granted more visits, exceeding the normal limit to visits (eg. Denmark, France) and in countries where only one visitor is allowed per visit, an exception is made for underage children, who can come with an adult companion (eg. Austria, Spain). Juvenile prisoners are also granted additional visits with close relations or school (eg. Denmark).