

# INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

## What Financial Help Is There?

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**Partners or relatives of people held in prison overseas generally have to cope with huge additional financial burdens. In some cases, the person held overseas is already in debt and relatives/partners find themselves having to cope with sorting out these debts as well as meeting the on-going costs of the imprisonment. In many countries, prisoners rely on their families to send money for essentials such as toiletries and stationery. In some countries, the prisoner needs money for food, medicines and bedding. This factsheet provides information on the financial assistance that may be available to you.**

### **State benefits**

You can obtain a copy of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) booklet GL32 entitled “Prisoners and their families” from the Post Office or your local library, or you can download the booklet from the DWP website ([www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)) by going to the “Resource Centre” index. The booklet provides information on claiming the appropriate benefits.

If it is your partner who has been arrested overseas and you are already claiming benefits then it is important that the claim, if it was in your partner’s name prior to their imprisonment, is transferred into your name as soon as possible. Even if the claim was already in your name, you may need to inform them of a change in your circumstances. Relatives or carers who are taking over responsibility for caring for any children may need to transfer Child Benefit arrangements and may need to investigate other financial assistance such as the Guardian’s allowance. For more detailed advice and assistance regarding applying for benefits, you can contact the local Benefits Agency office or one of the organisations listed on our ‘Family Support Organisations’ factsheet.

### **Assistance with the living costs of the prisoner overseas**

Prisoners Abroad also has a number of funds to provide assistance with essential needs for prisoners. The Craig Feehan Fund provides a monthly grant to prisoners held in developing countries for food, toiletries and bedding if there are no relatives or friends who can provide for this. Similarly, the Medical Fund can assist with essential medical costs where these cannot be afforded and are not met by the prison. In some countries, we are able to supply vitamins to prisoners. Further details are available on request.

### **Assistance with legal costs for the prisoner’s defence**

Although there are no sources of financial assistance to pay the costs of a prisoner’s defence overseas, many countries provide state-paid lawyers for those with no resources. The quality of the service provided varies considerably, especially given that the fees received for legal-aid work may be very low. However, hiring a private lawyer does not always justify the expense involved.

## **Assistance with the costs of maintaining the prisoner's home**

The provision for housing costs for prisoners held in the UK ensures that people who have been receiving mortgage interest payments in their Income Support before going into prison continue receiving this help whilst they are on remand. It also ensures that existing claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit can continue to be paid for up to 52 weeks while a person is on remand. They cease to be payable once the prisoner is sentenced unless the prisoner is expected to be released and return home within 13 weeks or unless the home is maintained by someone eligible to claim in their own right. These provisions may be extended to those who are arrested abroad but the situation is complicated by the fact that the person has been arrested overseas and may not have informed the Benefits Agency of their intention to travel abroad. Contact one of the organisations listed below for specific help and advice.

## **Assistance with family living costs**

Prisoners Abroad can assist with applications to the Family Welfare Association who provide grants to help with the costs of items such as furniture, bedding, children's clothing etc.

## **Assistance with finding money for bail, fines or deportation costs**

Unfortunately, there is no simple source of assistance for any of these costs. Many families borrow money when faced with such demands. Seeking advice from an organisation such as the National Debtline can be helpful. Many countries will pay the costs of deporting a prisoner at the end of their sentence but when a prisoner is expected to meet this cost, the family will be asked to pay. If there are no resources for this at all, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will consider, under the most exceptional circumstances, to help fund the fare. The prisoner will have to sign an undertaking to repay and the FCO may well retain the person's passport until the loan is fully repaid.

If you believe that your partner/relative will have to provide the cost of the airfare/deportation process, it is a good idea to start saving whatever you can towards the total from the time of their arrest.

A list of organisations which provide support to the children and families of prisoners is available from Prisoners Abroad's website entitled "Family Support Organisations", along with a list of useful publications.

If you require this leaflet in a large print format, please contact us. Our details are below.

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