



Assisted Prison Visits Scheme

I live in Northern Ireland, England, Wales or Scotland. Can I get help with the cost of visiting someone in prison?

If you are a close relative or partner of a prisoner and you are in receipt of certain benefits or on a low income then you may be eligible for assistance with your travel costs from the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS).

Who can apply?

- Close relative is defined as wife, husband, civil partner, natural or adoptive mother, father, sister, brother, son, grandparent, step/half-brother/sister, step child, step parent or someone who has acted in *loco parentis* for a significant part of the prisoner's childhood. A partner can be someone in a heterosexual relationship or a same sex relationship with the prisoner. If a partner is claiming APV they must have been living together and claiming benefits as a couple prior to imprisonment.
- You can also apply for assistance, if you meet all other criteria, and you are not a close relative of the prisoner but you are the sole visitor to that prisoner.
- You may also be eligible for assistance if you are escorting a qualifying young person or adult to visit someone in prison. (Please request the APVU Customer Service Guide for more information).

Who qualifies for help?

To qualify for assistance under the scheme you must first be in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Based (not contribution based) Job Seeker's Allowance
- Tax Credit
- Pension Credit

You may be eligible for help under the scheme if you are not in receipt of any of the above benefits but are on a low income and hold a Health Certificate 2 or 3. These applicants must request a special application form.

Which prisons can I visit?

The scheme will provide a contribution to the cost of making a prison visit to all prison establishments in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. People living in Northern Ireland may avail of help under this scheme to visit family members in prison in the UK. This is also the case for those living in the UK with family members imprisoned in Northern Ireland.

How often can I visit?

Help is normally provided with the cost of two visits every 28 days and up to a maximum of 26 visits in a year. This limit is applicable whether the prisoner is on remand or has been convicted or sentenced. Assisted visits can be saved up to allow two or more consecutive visits to take place during one return journey when visiting someone in another jurisdiction (e.g. travelling from Northern Ireland to England).

How do I apply?

Northern Ireland:

In order to receive an APV you should ask your local Social Security or Jobs and Benefits Office or Pension Service for form PV9 which you should fill in and return to them within 28 days of the earliest visit claimed. If you apply at a later time they will have to decide if there is a good reason for the

application being late before it can be accepted. If you do not automatically qualify for help, you will also need to fill in form HC1. In the case of visits to a prison in Great Britain, due to the additional costs of travelling outside of Northern Ireland, payment towards a visit can be made in advance.

Each time you claim you should attach the 'Confirmation of Visit' form (issued by the prison or the Visitors' Centre to confirm that the visit has taken place) to form PV9. Form PV9 should be completed for 2 visits at a time. These visits can be taken on separate dates. All tickets/receipts for transport and accommodation must be retained in case NIPS request these at a later date.

UK

All qualifying visitors should complete an application form. In addition, a 'Confirmation of Visit' slip will need to be stamped on arrival to the prison in order to validate the claim. The completed application form should be posted to the Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU, PO Box 2152, Birmingham, B15 1SD), within 28 days of making the visit along with proof of expenses. It may be possible to apply for advance payments. Visitors should contact the APVU or ICPO for guidance in making such an application.

What does the scheme cover?

The scheme will contribute towards the cost of travel to the prison by rail, road, bus, private motor vehicle, car hire, coach, ferry, taxi and air travel. The reimbursement of taxi fares is restricted in certain circumstances therefore it is better to check this out before making the journey. It is important to retain all tickets and receipts relating to the journey as these will need to be provided for reimbursement. You do not need to obtain receipts for petrol when travelling by private motor car as the cost of making the journey will be paid on a per mile basis based on the total distance between the visitor's home and the prison.

If the journey is particularly difficult, significantly long or there is limited public transport you may be eligible to claim for some assistance towards the cost of an overnight stay. Other factors will be taken into account when claiming so it is important to check eligibility prior to arranging any accommodation.

The cost of a registered child minder/after school club or similar may be considered if you do not wish to take a qualifying child under the age of 16 to the prison.

Payment of overnight allowances and other subsistence costs (food etc.) may also be permitted.

Who can help me apply?

While generally speaking the scheme works in a straight-forward way, you might wish to contact ICPO or the other organisations listed below for advice and assistance in the initial phases. Please note that as people's circumstances vary it is not possible to include every piece of information about the scheme here.

ICPO

Columba Centre
Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland
Tel: 01-505-3156 Fax: 01-601-6401
Email: icpo@iecon.ie

ICPO

50-52 Camden Square
London NW1 9XB
Tel: 0207-482-4148 Fax: 0207-482-4815
Email: prisoners@irishchaplaincy.org.uk

NIACRO Amelia House, 4 Amelia Street Belfast BT2 7GS, Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9032 0157 FREE 028 9032 0157, Fax: 087 0432 1415 Email: niacro@niacro.co.uk

Assisted Prison Visits Unit PO Box 2152, Birmingham, B15 1SD, England

Tel: 03000 632 100 (10.15-11.45 and 14.15-15.45 Mon-Fri), Email: assisted.prison.visits@hmps.gsi.gov.uk

Web links to Assisted Prison Visits Information Booklets:

Northern Ireland

<http://niprisonservice.dev.biznetprojects.co.uk/uploads/docs/Assisted%20Visits%20pdf.pdf>

UK <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/contacts/noms/assisted-prison-visits/assisted-prison-visits.pdf>

Tel: 00 353 1 5053156; Fax: 00 353 1 6292363; Email: icpo@iecon.ie; Web: www.icpo.ie