



Българско Затворническо Сдружение за Рехабилитация
Bulgarian Prisoners' Rehabilitation Association



So your loved one is arrested....

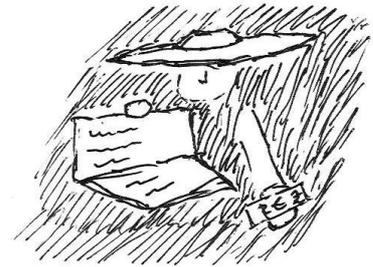
Your son, husband, father, brother, daughter, sister, wife or mother has been arrested. They are not going to have too many people looking out for them and it is the entire state of Bulgaria against your loved one. This means that what you do can greatly improve the conditions of prison for him/her and also reduce the amount of time s/he will be in prison.

There are two important first steps to make. First is to contact a lawyer that you trust, a relative, friend or friend of a friend. Picking a lawyer from advertisements or the internet is risky as there are many predator lawyers whose only objective is to rip you off, it also happens that these predator lawyers can advertise the most. Also make sure that you have evidence that you have paid the lawyer. Pay the lawyer with a witness present and have the lawyer fill out a 'power of attorney' (пълномощно) form and a 'receipt of payment' form. If a lawyer does not give you these documents it is more than likely that s/he is planning to rip you off and not actually complete the work promised on.

If you are a close relative of the arrested you can apply to become his/her 'legal defender', which gives you the same rights as a lawyer. You will be able to access and speak with your loved one and you will have the same rights as a lawyer. This is VERY useful as not only will you have up to 8 hour access to your loved one, but also the investigator, prosecutor and courts can't proceed unless you are present (if the defendant so demands). This means that the investigator and prosecutor can't question the defendant without you being there. You are eligible to become a legal defender if you are a:

(Warning)

Be wary of using lawyers recommended by other prisoners as that is a classic scam where the prisoner and the lawyer share the money. Also be careful of lawyer that approach you in the early days as they are usually the friends of the police.



What to bring a prisoner in remand prison (Arrest)

Packages

You will be allowed to bring packages of essentials to a prisoner once a month, it is very important that you include many important things as this will be the only way for the prisoner to get when s/he needs for the entire month. It should be noted that visits and packages are once a *calendar* month.

Food

- Fresh fruit and vegetables (together with all other non canned food up to 5kg)
- Salami or pre cooked meats
- Bread
- Jams
- Canned foods (up to 5kg) *don't forget the can opener*

(Warning)

If your packages are being weighed, only the food should be weighed, not the miscellaneous, toiletries or clothing and by law a prisoner is allowed 10kg of food, 5kg preserved and 5kg fresh.

Miscellaneous

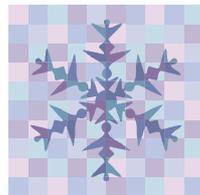
- Towel for showering (as big as possible)
- Eating utensils: plastic knives, spoons, cups, forks, plates and bowls (the stronger plastic utensils are much better, not the disposable plastic utensils)
- Phone cards (make sure you know which company has the phone in the remand as the different phone companies require different cards)
- Toilet paper
- Toiletries: bar of soap, shampoo, washing powder for cloths, toothbrush, toothpaste, nail clippers
- Flip-flop shoes or sandals, preferably rubber as they'll be used in the shower
- A large plastic bucket
- Padlock (several if allowed)
- Chess and backgammon board
- Playing cards (several sets if possible)
- Radio with headphones and batteries, preferably rechargeable batteries with a battery charger
- Reading material EG newspaper, magazines and books
- Bed set: 2 sheets, doona (blanket), doona cover, pillow case and if possible a pillow
- Stationary (as much as possible) : pens, writing paper, postage stamps
- Sewing needle and thread
- Cigarettes (even if not a smoker some packs are good to have as cigarettes are used as currency)
- Lighters (10 or 20 especially if the prisoner is a smoker)

Clothing

Don't expect your loved one to be out "for winter" or summer. Give the prisoner all the cloths s/he will need for the entire year, including summer and winter wear. Almost none of the remands have heating for the winter and if they do it is inadequate, none of the remands have air conditioning or fans for the summer. So usually prisoners will be dealing with temperatures at the two ends of the extremes, very hot and very cold. It goes without saying that you should give as many cloths as possible to a prisoner, importantly as many socks and underwear as possible as in remand prisoners are only allowed to shower and wash their cloths once a week (with the plastic bucket mentioned in the miscellaneous section)

Winter cloths

- Beanie
- Scarf
- Gloves
- Jumper
- Jacket
- Thick socks
- Warm shoes
- Warm pants
- Thermal underwear
- (don't forget the blanket mentioned in the miscellaneous section)



Summer cloths

- Singlet (undershirt)
- Shorts
- Sandals

Remand prisons get so hot inside the cells that usually prisoners have to strip down to only their underwear so as not to overheat especially in the majority of Bulgarian remand prisons that don't have running water in the cells.

Be careful

Never agree to take a package from someone you don't know and never agree to deliver a package to a prisoner that you don't know. If you have not bought the food and supplies yourself there could be contraband such as drugs inside. If you are caught delivering drugs to a prisoner, straight away you will be arrested and charged, under Bulgarian tradition you WILL be convicted even if you really didn't know about the drugs!

If a prisoner, guard or lawyer calls you who you are not familiar with do not do what they tell you to do without talking to your loved one first. They are more than likely scam-artists trying to steal your hard earned money. Do not pay a single cent to anyone without first confirming everything with the person you are trying to help, again make sure that you can prove payments and that you have met and know the people you are paying. There are many prisoners, guards, administrators and lawyer who prey on distressed family and friends of prisoners. They can promise you many things but 99% of the time they are just going to take your money and change their sim card. Stay calm, be alert, check lawyers out, see if they have offices and an established work history and test with them little amounts of money in the beginning.

Listen

It is very important that you listen to what your loved one is saying. A prisoner will always have more experience than you and the decisions will directly affect him/her, so listen. Don't make decisions on your own without consulting the prisoner you are trying to help. If a prisoner for example asks for something simple, like a red t-shirt, then make sure it IS RED. Don't go out and think "oh he asked for red, but I'm sure it doesn't really matter I'll buy him blue". Simple things like that will just waste everyone's time, money and energy. You must trust the prisoners decisions and don't baby him/her. Prisoners are all day thinking and the decisions prisoners make are not made instantaneously. There is nothing worse for a prisoner than family or friends who don't do what you ask as they're scared about getting the prisoner into trouble.

Warning: don't ever lie or hide something from a prisoner, if he/she finds out they will lose trust in you and what you're saying, so always be as honest as possible

Visits

It might sound like an obvious thing but go to the visits, see the person you are trying to help. Even if they are angry and upset, it is still better that you go and see them, talk to them and listen to them. The visits are short and don't happen often, but they are like a battery recharge for the mind of a prisoner. Also it is depressing for a prisoner to see others going to the visits but his/her name never being called. So make sure you organise someone to go to the visits if you can't.

Letters

Correspondence is also important for prisoners, make sure that you send regular mail and that you include stamps and stationary so that the prisoner can reply. Include photos of his/her family, friends and of yourself. Especially in the remand prisons send any bits of news or photos as there is a lot of isolation in remand.