

OCTOBER 2024

Unseen Victims

Report Part 2 : Prison Communications

How Prisoners in the UK Stay in Contact with Loved Ones

Product of :

Emma Wells

Edited by :

Olivia Bilgin

The understanding of how prisoners communicate with their loved ones is the main subject of this report, which additionally addresses the problems that can arise in this area.

Executive Summary

The Financial Burden of Communication and Visits for Families of Incarcerated Loved Ones in the UK

Introduction:

This report highlights the significant financial burden faced by families of incarcerated loved ones in the UK, focusing on the costs associated with maintaining communication through phone calls, emails, letters, and cards, alongside the expenses incurred from prison visits. The analysis draws comparisons between communication costs and the findings from Report One, which detailed the high costs of prison visits, offering a comprehensive understanding of the total annual financial impact on families.

Key Findings - Communication Costs

Telephone Communication:

- High Costs: Nearly half **(46.26%)** of respondents spend **over £50 per month** on telephone calls, and **21%** of respondents report spending **over £200 per month.**
- Average Annual Cost: For phone calls alone, families spend between **£600 and £2,400 annually.** For some, this figure reaches **£3,000 or more.**

Email Usage:

- Low Engagement and Delays: Most respondents (36.43%) send between 1-5 emails per month, with frequent reports of delays and attachments not being delivered.
- Average Annual Cost: For regular email communication, families spend approximately £40 to £100 per year.

Sending Moonpig Cards:

- Restricted and Limited Use: The majority of respondents (54.85%) sent between 1 and 10 cards annually, with costs ranging between £12.84 and £27.92. Some families spent up to £200 annually, particularly around special occasions.

Postage (Stamps for Letters):

- Low Cost for Most Families: The largest group of respondents (36.98%) spends £20 or less per year on stamps, though some reported spending over £60 annually on letters.

Contraband Mobile Phones

- Rising Incidents: In **2023, 14,702** mobile phones were found in UK prisons, representing a **32% increase** from the previous year. Despite the installation of in-cell phones, the use of contraband phones remains widespread.
- High Costs of Contraband Phones: Prisoners are paying **between £1,000 and £3,000** for contraband mobile phones, creating a potential black market worth £14.7 million to £44.1 million annually for the devices found in prisons. Families supporting prisoners with these phones can face lower ongoing costs for communication (as little as £7 per month) but at a high initial price.

Key Findings from Report One: Prison Visit Costs

Travel and Accommodation

- High Costs for Regular Visitors: Families making weekly or biweekly visits spend approximately **£2,805 per year on travel,** particularly those traveling long distances (100 miles round-trip).
- Additional Expenses: Families also incur costs for accommodation, meals, and other necessities during visits, with the total visit-related expenses often exceeding £3,000 per year.

Total Annual Financial Burden on Families

Combining the findings from both reports, the financial burden on families attempting to stay connected with incarcerated loved ones becomes clear. For families using both communication services and making regular visits, the total annual cost ranges from **£3,700 to £6,000,** depending on the frequency and type of communication and the distance travelled for visits.

- **Communication Costs:**

Between £700 and £2,500 annually, depending on the level of engagement in phone calls, emails, postage, and cards.

- **Visiting Costs:**

Approximately £3,000 annually for families who visit regularly, without financial assistance for travel and accommodation.

For families heavily reliant on communication or those making frequent long-distance visits, the financial burden could exceed £6,000 per year, placing a significant strain on already stressed families.

The issue of telephone services being "down" in prisons seems to be a daily occurrence across the entire prison estate, as seen in numerous HMP support groups on Facebook. Every day, there are countless posts from members asking if anyone has heard from their loved ones, which causes significant distress and concern.

In January 2024, Unseen Victims raised this issue during a consultation with British Telecom, suggesting a possible solution. We proposed implementing a system that provides real-time updates when telephone problems occur, which could then be shared with organisations to post on their websites or distribute across social media. This would help reduce confusion and alleviate concerns.

Unseen Victims were recently given a unique opportunity to present the widespread issues caused by disruptions to telephone communication between loved ones and inmates. On 20/10/24, over 700 comments appeared across social media, reporting that telephone lines were down across the entire prison estate. The affected prisons were spread throughout the UK.

During this 24-hour period, the UK was dealing with the effects of Storm Ashley. The standard explanation provided by prison officers was that the storm was responsible for the outages. However, it seems unlikely that a storm could impact prisons as widely separated as HMP Parc in South Wales and HMP Durham in Northeast England.

If the disruption was due to planned maintenance or a genuine national issue affecting prison phone services, there should be a way to inform those affected either in advance or during the outage.

Interestingly, some individuals using illegal mobile phones inside prisons claimed that the constant disruption to the phone system was the cause of them using illegal devices.

Recurring Issues and Recommendations:

1. **High Costs of Communication:** Many families expressed frustration over the high costs, with some forced to choose between maintaining contact and covering essential expenses like bills. Respondents suggested reducing the costs of phone calls and offering set monthly plans for unlimited calls to alleviate the financial burden.
2. **Inconsistent Email and Mail Services:** Frequent delays in email processing and issues with lost or delayed mail were common complaints. Families urged for quicker processing times and greater consistency across prisons.
3. **Impact of Contraband Phones:** The rising use of contraband mobile phones reflects the high costs of official communication services. While in-cell phones were intended to improve communication, they have not curbed the demand for illicit devices, with prisoners paying £1,000 to £3,000 for these phones. Reducing the cost of official communication services may help address this issue.
4. **Strain on Families:** The financial and emotional strain of staying connected with incarcerated loved ones is significant. Respondents called for more support, particularly for maintaining contact with children, and urged for policies that ease the financial burden on families.

Introduction

Prison visits are essential for maintaining family ties but can impose substantial financial burdens on families, particularly those already facing economic challenges. The Unseen Victims (CIC) provides critical support to families affected by incarceration, addressing their emotional and practical needs. This report uses both aggregated data and individual case studies to illustrate the broader trends and personal stories within the prison system.

The prison population as of **11/10/2024** stood at **86,803.** MinistryofJustice, (2024)

Looking ahead, projections indicate a continued rise in the prison population, expected to reach 94,400 by March 2025 and potentially soaring to 106,300 by March 2027.

Data Analysis



In the interest of fairness, this report's time-frame was the same as that of Report 1, High Costs of Prison visits in the UK: A Hidden burden on Families, June 2024. An increase of 61% in respondents participating reflects a higher level of engagement and provides more individuals with the opportunity to share their opinions. This growth aligns with the substantial rise in our Facebook Group membership, which increased from 452 members in June 2024 to 764 members by 14th October 2024—a 69.03% growth. This significant and healthy rate suggests strong momentum. If this trend continues, we project approximately 1,291 members over the next 12 months. However, with the expansion of our networking and the ongoing development of our services, we anticipate this number to be significantly higher. This steady growth identifies the necessity for future funding in order to continue exploring the impact that these financial burdens are placing on individuals and families and encourage further debate using lived experiences. Wells, E (2024).

The Survey

This survey was carried out for one week **(from the 18/09/2024), where we got respondents, 281 respondents.** Surveymonkey was used to generate the survey.

Phone Calls

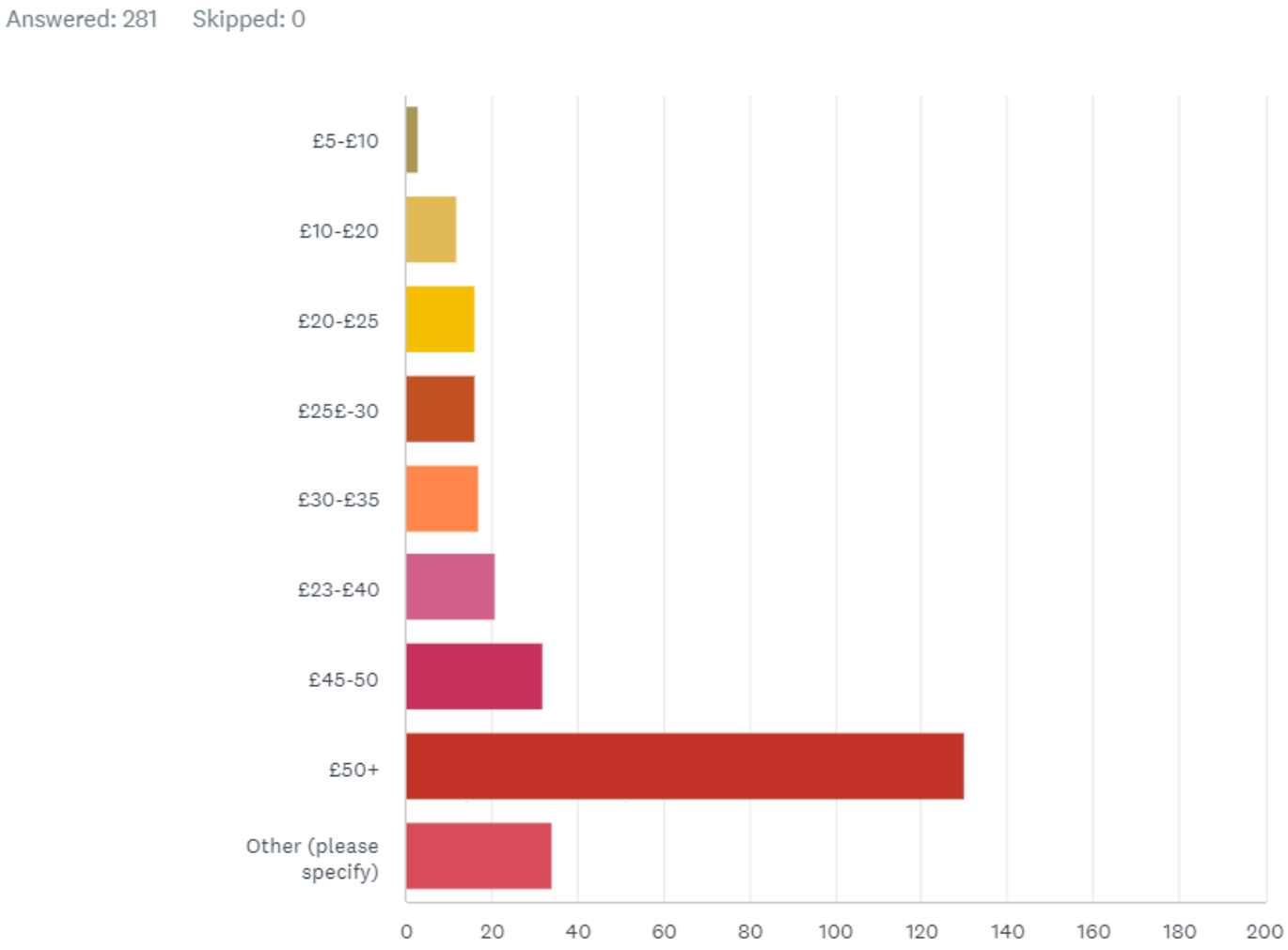
Prisoners in the UK can make phone calls to family and friends, but these are restricted to approved numbers, and calls are generally monitored. The cost of making a phone call can vary depending on the prison and the type of call (landline or mobile). At some establishments the calls are restricted to 10 minutes per call.

- Landline Calls: Usually range from 9p to 12p per minute.
- Mobile Calls: Can be more expensive, often ranging from 3p to 65p per minute

Goverment digital sevice (2012)

A prisoner contacting a loved one : A 10-minute call to a mobile phone could cost up to £6.50, and for prisoners with limited financial resources, this quickly becomes a burden.

How much does it cost you (per month) for telephone contact. Please include both your own and your loved ones spending.



This graph displays the distribution of monthly telephone contact costs for 281 respondents, including both their own and their loved ones' expenditures.

Nearly half of the respondents **(130 respondents) (46.26%) spend £50+** on telephone contact monthly, suggesting that telephone communication remains a significant expense for many.

There were 38 responses placed under other specified. The lowest result from this category was £75 per month, and the highest results mentioned being **£380**.

More than half of the 38 respondents **(55.3%) spend over £100 per month.**
8 people **(21%)** spend **£200 or more** per month.

This reinforces the notion that telephone calls as a form of communication is *a major expense* for many individuals in this group. The fact that 21% spend £200 or more further indicates that a significant portion of this population faces very high costs.

In-Cell Phone Installation

In the 12 months to March 2024, there were 10,669 incidents where mobile phones were found in prisons and 5,080 incidents where SIM cards were found. These are increases of 36% and 19% respectively, compared with the previous 12-month period.

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmpps-annual-digest-april-2023-to-march-2024

The installation of in-cell phones in prisons across England and Wales has been a significant development aimed at improving communication between prisoners and their families. As of February 2024, all 92 closed public sector prisons had in-cell phones installed, with the goal of allowing inmates to make calls from their cells in a more private, controlled environment. This change was motivated by the shortcomings of payphones on landings, which led to issues such as overheard conversations, long queues, and physical altercations.

However, while in-cell phones offer convenience and privacy, they have not eliminated the presence of contraband mobile phones within prisons. Data from the Ministry of Justice shows that the number of mobile phones found in prisons has actually increased by 36%, rising from 7,837 incidents in the 12 months ending in March 2023 to 10,669 in the 12 months ending March 2024. In addition, the quantity of mobile phones found rose by 32%, reaching 14,702 during the same period.

This upward trend in mobile phone finds seems to contradict expectations that in-cell phones would reduce the demand for illicit devices. However, it's important to note that while the number of mobile phones found has increased, incidents involving mobile phone-related items (such as SIM cards or chargers) have decreased by 6% over the same period.

This suggests that while prisoners may still attempt to obtain full mobile devices, the need for supplementary contraband phone-related items has diminished, possibly due to the wider access to communication provided by in-cell phones.

The rising number of mobile phone finds in prisons could be influenced by several factors, including enhanced search and detection methods, increased demand for contraband devices, or gaps in the current in-cell phone system, such as limits on who prisoners can contact or the times they can make calls. Despite the increased finds, it remains too early to fully gauge the long-term impact of in-cell phones on reducing contraband mobile phone use.

It is evident that in-cell phones have had little impact on the quantity of devices discovered in jails. In reality, the contrary appears to have actually happened. Why does this occur ? Is it because calling from cell phones costs so much money ?

Nano phones are available on Amazon for £21.99 : https://amzn.eu/d/30HCUz1



MiRUSI Worlds Smallest Mini Mobile Phone Supports Dual SIM Card BM10(Blue)

Brand: MiRUSI

3.7 ★★★½☆ 233 ratings

£21.99

The phone is able to make calls only and this would cost the person supporting the inmate as little as £7 per month with Vodaphone for unlimited calls and text messages.Discussion with respondents who are supporting an inmate with an illegal mobile phone identified that the vast majority of devices in prisons **are capable of accessing the internet.**

https://www.vodafone.co.uk/basket.

These phones cost between £1000-£3000 if purchased on the wing.

Approximately 12.29% of the UK prison population (based on a population of 88,000) had mobile phones found in prisons in the last year.

10,669 x £1000 = £10,669,000
10,669 x £3000 = £32,007,000

Source: Unseen Victims are quite unique in being the ONLY organisation that has direct access to the countless thousands of loved ones who are supporting a person in prison.

As such, we have privileged access and are able to directly quote individuals, with their expressed consent, please find a selection of comments, below:

“So my guess is that people are becoming human suitcases and plugging the phones....”

“Sometimes prisoners will even go halves on it and will share the phone”

“Everyone knows that it’s the officers bringing in the majority of phones in and handing them over to the gangs. The gangs then sell them on and it’s a never-ending cycle”

“Officers wear slippers at night and sneak along landings listening at cell doors to see if they can hear conversations going on, my fella told me that they can hear conversations going on next door, but certain cells never get spun”

These expenses can be financially challenging for families already under stress, which is why many advocate for more affordable communication options to reduce the burden on families and support prisoners’ rehabilitation.In Lord farmers Report, 2017 it was claimed that re-offending rates were 39% less prevalent in cases where strong family bonds were maintained. Ministry of Justice (2017).

UK prison service providers save loved ones and inmates money by offering solutions like landline redirection, where calls from prisons are directed to landlines instead of mobile phones. This significantly lowers the call rates because landline-to-landline calls are cheaper than mobile ones. Providers often offer minute bundles or pay-as-you-go options, reducing overall costs by as much as 75%. These services work within prison guidelines and allow families to maintain contact at more affordable rates.

There is a new prison phone tender expected in **2026**

1. Basic Packages: Many services provide entry-level plans starting at **£9.99 per month,** which typically include a limited number of minutes for calls to landlines at a reduced rate.
2. Popular Plans: For more frequent callers, packages with 350 to 500 minutes per month range from £19.99 to £33.59 per month

500 hours equates to just 8.33 hours per month this affords a 30-minute call per day. The inmate is paying 30p per day for these calls which is £2.10 taken from his wages which are an average of £15.50 per week.

1. Unlimited Plans: Some services offer unlimited minutes for around £49.99 to £59.99 per month, allowing inmates to call family members on mobile phones without worrying about running out of minutes

Whilst this seems like a cost-effective solution it does mean that due to the inmate paying around 10p a minute to make the calls that the associated costs for these calls will become the burden for the person supporting them due to the fact that £15.50 wages per week will not go far with unlimited time being used on phone calls
This functionality offers some explanation for the 31 responses that we received which claimed to be spending between **£100-£380 per month.**

These services work by providing a local landline number that inmates can call at a lower rate compared to mobile numbers. Calls that could potentially cost as much as cost 65p per minute to a mobile can be reduced to around 10p per minute when using these services

This approach helps families and inmates save significantly on the costs of staying connected

Emails; Via ‘Email a Prisoner’

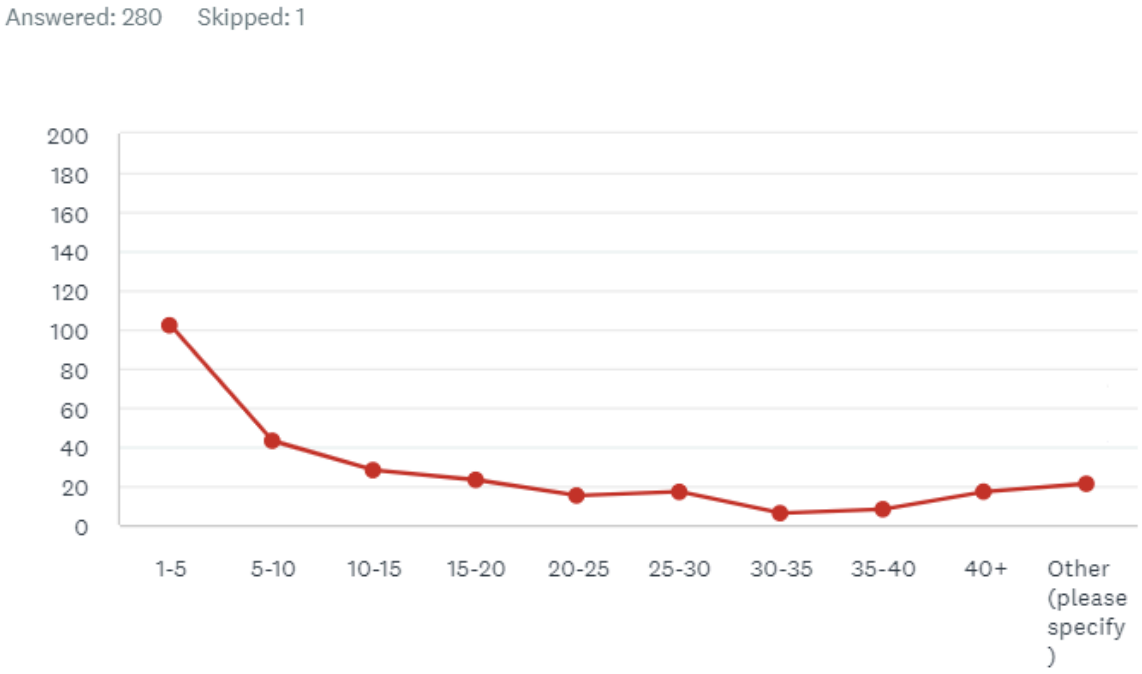
The "Email a Prisoner" service allows loved ones to send an email to a prisoner, which is printed and delivered within the prison. Some prisons also offer a reply service, where prisoners can respond to emails electronically.

- Cost to Send an Email: 42p per email (sometimes more if attachments are allowed).
- Reply Service: If the prison offers replies, the cost of a reply is 26p in addition to the 42p cost for the original message. (68p total)
- Loved ones can send images to some prisons, these cost 32p per black and white per copy

Unilink has regular discounts which lower this cost by about 10%

The total cost to send one email with a reply and four attachments every week for a year would be approximately £101.92.

How many emails do you send, per month.



The highest response shows that the majority of emails sent among our respondents were between 1-5 emails which 36.43% of respondents fall under.

The majority of people seem to engage minimally with email, with the 1-5 emails per month group being the clear dominant category. The pattern indicates that the participants use email less frequently.

Sending a ‘Moonpig’ card



Moonpig offers a popular way to send personalized cards for birthdays, anniversaries, and other occasions. While this is not prison-specific, it is a method frequently used by loved ones who want to send cards to prisoners.

- Average Cost of a Moonpig Card: Between £3.29 and £5.99 depending on the size of the card, plus 99p for standard postage.
- For a single card, the total cost can be around £4.28 to £6.98.

If a family sends 3-4 cards annually (birthday, Christmas, and other events), this could cost roughly £12.84 to £27.92 per year.

A Relevant Article : **Prison sparks row with Moonpig announcment.** Insidetime *and Insideinformation,* 15th of June 2022.

https://insidetime.org/newsround/prison-sparks-row-with-moonpig-announcement/

A prison’s announcement that birthday and greetings cards may only be sent to residents via Funky Pigeon or Moonpig has sparked an angry backlash. HMP The Mount said that from June 20, families or friends wishing to send cards to prisoners must use the two companies – which operate via websites and phone apps. If anyone sends a traditional card directly, the prisoner will receive a photocopy of it and the original will be placed in his stored property. Campaigns and Communications Manager at the Howard League for Penal Reform, said: “Sending cards and pictures is a vital way for children to remain in touch with their parents in prison, so this ban comes not only at a financial cost to families, but also a great emotional cost.” Our Empty Chair, a support group for prisoners’ families, said: “Handwritten cards, letters and drawings are genuinely life lines to people inside.

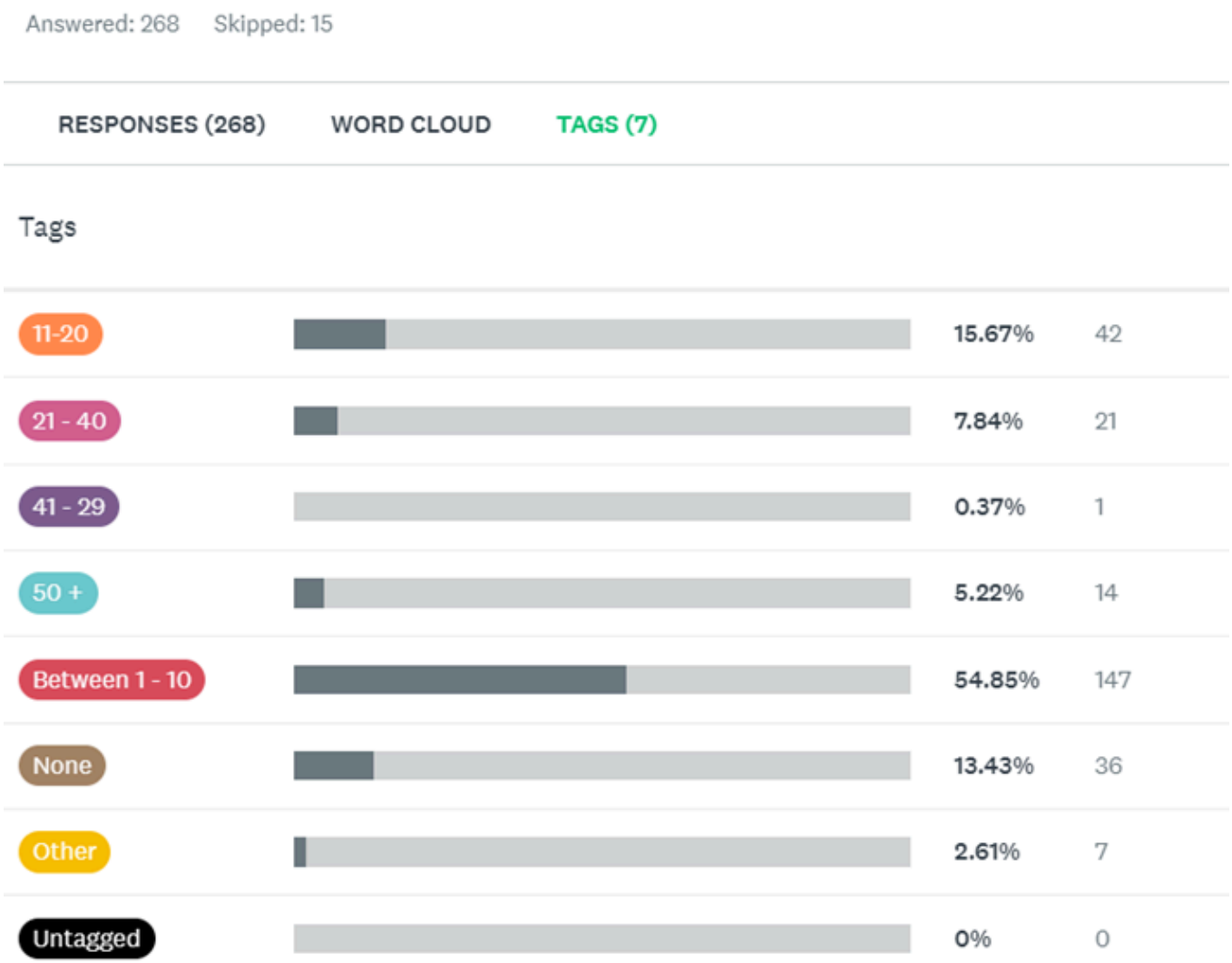
According to observations by **Unseen Victims**, in social media HMP groups which house almost **100,000 members** this appears to be a rule in place at every prison establishment.

223 participants in our survey reported to have sent in an average of 16.91 cards each *up to the date of this publication;* this equates to an average cost of between £72.39 - £118.06 depending on the size of the card and postage fees.

The most prevalent number of cards being sent in was 10 which would cost the sender around £59.03.

There were 17 individuals who had sent over 50 cards which would have cost between £214.00 to £349.00.
2 had sent in 100 cards : £428.00 to £698.00.
4 had sent in 125 cards : £535.00 to £872.50.
1 had sent in 420 which would have cost them **a staggering £1,797.60 to £2,931.60.**

How many cards have sent to your loved one during their incarceration using a retailer approved by the prison? Moonpig etc



The dominant trend in the above data shows that the majority of respondents, 54.85% (147 respondents), sent between 1 and 10 cards to their loved ones during incarceration.

This suggests that most people sent a relatively low number of cards, *likely influenced by the prison's restriction that only cards from approved retailers (such as Moonpig) were allowed.*

A notable factor influencing this data is the ban on sending cards (from 20/06/2022 to present) directly into the prison unless they were purchased through specific approved retailers, which significantly limits options for families. This restriction likely explains the high concentration of respondents sending fewer than 10 cards.The restriction to just two companies likely created logistical and financial barriers, reducing the number of cards sent overall.

Letters with Stamps

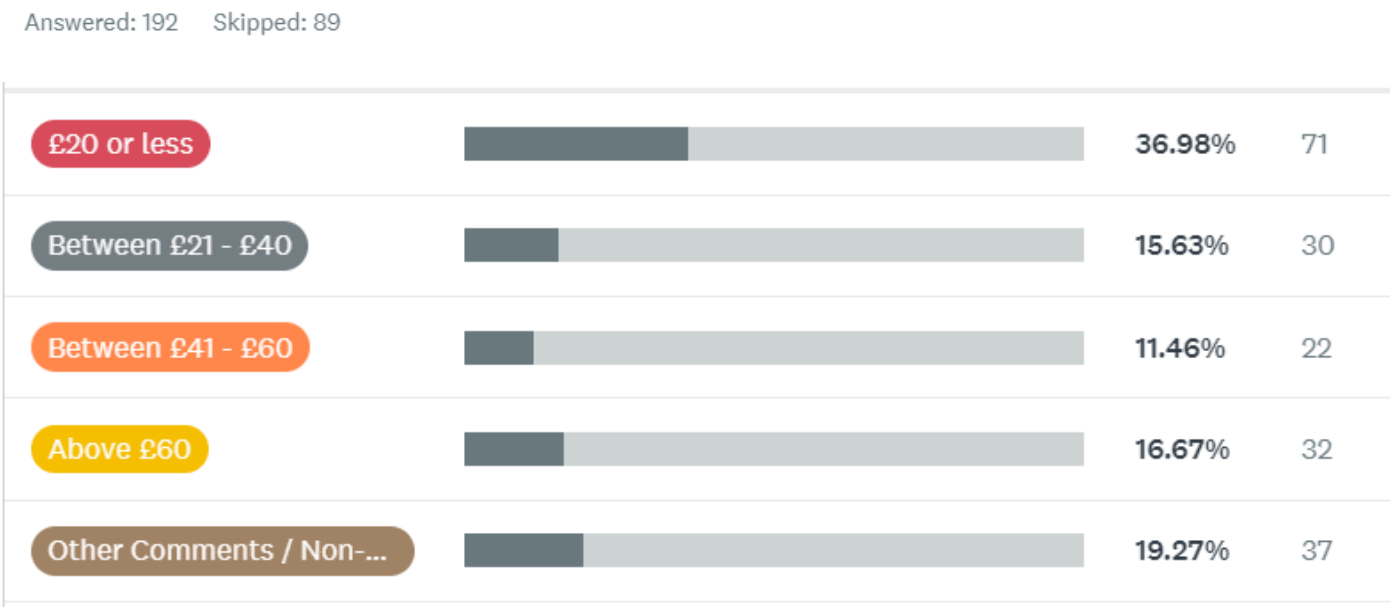
Inmates are given the means to send one letter every week free of charge from the prison.

Traditional letter writing is still a common way for prisoners and their families to communicate, and sending letters requires stamps.

- Cost of a First-Class Stamp: £1.65 per stamp as of October 2024.
- Cost of a Second-Class Stamp: 85p per stamp.

If a prisoner sends **1 letter per week for** a year using second-class stamps, the total cost for stamps would be £44.20. For first-class, this would be **£85.80 per year.**

If you send letters into prison, how much do you spend on stamps (per year).



The dominating response with 71 respondents, said they spend £20 or less annually on stamps.This suggests that the majority of respondents have low spending on stamps, likely reflecting casual or infrequent use of postal services.

A significant majority (52.61%) of respondents spend £40 or less annually, indicating that most people are casual users of stamps.

16.67% spending over £60 annually suggests a subset of respondents with a heavier reliance on physical mail.

Key Findings

Theme	Description	Supporting Data
Expensive / High Costs for Families	The significant cost of phone calls, emails, and other forms of communication in prisons were a common source of frustration for the participants.	"It costs me a fortune to keep in touch with him." "Cheaper calls would be good." "It's sad to know people have to see keeping family ties as a luxury." "Prices need to decrease. Its hard enough being without loved ones – the least that should be done is not having to worry about costs of speaking to each other."
Expenses For the Prisoners	Concerns were raised by participants on the high expense of providing for the prisoner's needs, such as food, transport, canteen, and essentials.	"Making a choice between food and family contact each week is not something prisoners should be made to do." "I pay for his phone calls and have to cut down on my own bills." "It costs so much to have a loved one in prison: travel to visits, their canteen, their phone credit, and the paying our side to get cheaper calls."

Time Consuming Mail & Responses	Responses outlining how physical mail was inconsistent, occasionally expensive, and either took an excessively long time or never arrived at all.	"Post frequently gets lost going out due to staff negligence." “Prisoners actually receive their post/letters/photos Travelling to see them costs way over £100 each time and I see them once every month.”
Lack Of Access	Respondents emphasized that different prisons have different communication access, and that certain facilities provide better services than others.	"Different officers, different rules." "Some prisons have better access for calls than others." "Prisons should have a unified text service available."
Strain On Families	Families endured a great deal of stress due to the financial and emotional strain of keeping in touch with loved ones incarcerated, particularly keeping connections with children.	"It’s hard enough being without loved ones, and prison isn’t easy for both the prisoner and loved one." "I pay £400 a month on calls; it's extortionate." “Through email allow videos included for children’s milestones to be shared.” “Make it easier for dads to stay in contact with children, especially young babies.”
Email Inconsistency	Many reported delays in the delivery of emails, with certain attachments or messages not being received at all.	"Emails not getting through quickly." "It can take days for the email to even go through." “Emails not getting through prison clearing quickly can take weeks.”

Key Categories Identified

- High costs of communication
- Inconsistency in mail and email, long waiting periods
- Limited access to communication services
- Emotional and financial strains on families, barriers to communication with children

We asked the survey respondents if they have any recommendations on areas of this topic which could be improved : ***Do you have any suggestions where improvements could be made?***

Respondents Recommendations

- **High cost of communication:** "Cheaper calls. More in line with mobile phone calls outside prison. It costs me a fortune to keep in touch with him." "It's inhumane to charge over the odds for a person to stay in touch with family." "It's costing us a bomb to support someone in prison—prison phone charges are extortionate." "Prisoners should have the option to pay a set amount each month for unlimited calls. It's unfair that people have to choose between staying in touch with family and buying food."

- **Inconsistency in email and mail:** "Emails not getting through prison quickly can take weeks." "Post frequently gets lost due to staff negligence." "Emails are delayed, particularly at weekends. It's hard when communication takes so long." "The prison staff clearing and passing out emails takes far too long. It feels like snail mail at times."

- **Limited access to communication:** "They often ring while people are at work, and they only let the phone ring three times before hanging up. There's no consistency in how they operate." "Different prisons allow different lengths of phone calls—some limit calls to 30 minutes, which is too short." "Why do some prisons have phones in the cells and others don't? It should be the same everywhere."

- **Emotional and financial strain for families:** "It's heart-breaking that some people have to choose between paying bills and staying in contact with their loved ones." "I can't afford to visit often, so staying in touch by phone and email is all we have, and it's incredibly expensive." "Keeping family ties should not be a luxury—it's critical for both the prisoner and the family to maintain a connection."

Additional findings:

A couple of respondents made a point on issues where attachments or photos are sent through email, and even though they are not received they are still charged for it. Sometimes not made aware of this.
"Emails can take days to even go through—sometimes we are charged for photos that aren't even approved."
"We shouldn't be charged for replies, the cost amounts up very quickly, sometimes we are charged for photos that aren't even approved. Sometimes it can take days for the email to even go through, the app is very poor and majority of the time doesn't even make you aware that you have a reply."

Conclusion

The financial burden of staying in contact with incarcerated loved ones is overwhelming for many families in the UK. With communication and visiting costs totalling between £3,700 and £6,000 annually, these expenses place immense pressure on families already dealing with emotional and psychological strain. Reducing communication costs, improving email and mail services, and providing better financial and emotional support for families are crucial steps in alleviating these burdens. Additionally, funding future research focused on the lived experiences of these families is essential to fully grasp the scale of the issue and drive meaningful policy changes that support family connections during incarceration.

This report highlights the overwhelming financial burden on families of prisoners in the UK. The combined annual costs of communication and visits can range from £3,700 to £6,000 and beyond, exacerbating the emotional strain of having a loved one incarcerated. Reducing communication costs, improving the efficiency of mail and email services, and addressing the issue of contraband phones are critical steps to alleviate these burdens and support families during incarceration. Maintaining family ties is essential for the emotional well-being of both prisoners and their loved ones, and more affordable communication options are urgently needed to ease the financial pressure on these families.

For families and prisoners maintaining regular contact, costs can accumulate quickly. Below is an example of the potential annual cost for a prisoner and their loved one to stay in touch:

- Phone Calls (1 x 10-minute mobile call per week): £124.80
- Emails (1 email per week): £20.80
- Moonpig Cards (3 cards per year): £12.84 to £27.92
- Postage for 20 letters: £17.00 to £33.00

Total Annual Cost Range: £173.44 to £195.52

The very basic costs for the minimum amount of contact are explained below. The access to in-cell phones has encouraged a dramatic rise in the amounts of money being spent due to the convenience of not having to queue up to make calls. Some prisons have in-cell devices which enable the user to electronically receive and reply to emails, as this trend is observed across the whole estate, we expect the number of emails being generated with dramatically increase.

Phone Calls (1 x 10-minute mobile call per week, without using a virtual landline) @ 65p per minute - £33.80
Emails with reply and 4 images costing £2.92 (1 email per week) - £151.84
Moonpig Cards (Average 5 cards per year): £22.95
Postage for 20 letters 1st class: £57.20

Total Annual Cost: £265.7

Data from report 1

For a person visiting weekly and traveling 100 miles without financial assistance, the annual travel cost is approximately £2,805, whether traveling by train or car. There is little difference in cost per mile between a train journey and traveling by car; 92% from Report 1.

Travel Costs	Per Visit	Per Month (x2)	Annually
Bus Fare	£30.60	£61.20	£734.40
Train - Scunthorpe to York	£65.50	£131	£1572
Taxi - On Occasion	£50 Round Trip	£100	-
Visit Hall	£22	£44	£528
Totals	With Taxi : £168.10 Without Taxi : £118.10	With Taxi : £336.20 Without Taxi : £236.20	£2834.40

What communication methods do you use the most. Please explain why.

Answered: 211 Skipped: 70



Phone calls significantly dominate this response, with phone calls being how 90.05% of respondents communicate.

Emails are the second most popular communication source for respondents at 22.27%.

Occurring patterns : Quoted statements from respondents

Letters and emails take far too long to be received
Phone calls allow contact with children
Phone calls allow emotions to be expressed, at ease, hear voices and feel connected
Email a prisoner frequently mentioned
Letters as lest frequent, occurs that letters are sent for special occasions, more personalised
Common issues with letters being lost and not received



We have been very fortunate to have engaged in consultation with Unilink and Email a Prisoner. We are delighted to announce that we have collaborated on a care package which will find anyone who reaches out for support to be gifted with 3 free emails, with replies when they begin a journey supporting a person on custodial prison sentence. Details will be made available on our website once this is launched, later in the year.

Recommendations

Lower Communication Costs

- Reducing the cost of phone calls, emails, and postage is essential to easing the financial burden on families of incarcerated individuals. By lowering the rates for phone calls, particularly mobile calls, and implementing affordable set monthly plans for unlimited calls, families could maintain contact without the high financial strain. More affordable communication options would also reduce the reliance on contraband mobile phones, which carry significant risks and costs.

Improve Email and Mail Systems

- Standardising and improving the processing times for email and physical mail across prisons would help reduce delays and ensure that families receive consistent and reliable communication. Attachments, which often get lost or delayed, need to be handled more efficiently to avoid additional frustration for families.

Enhance Support for Families

- More financial assistance should be provided to families who frequently visit their incarcerated loved ones. Travel, accommodation, and meal costs often accumulate, making visits an additional financial strain. Support services for maintaining family connections, particularly between parents and children, must be expanded to ease the emotional and financial burden.

Fund Future Research on Lived Experiences

- The tens of thousands of families impacted by the financial and emotional burdens of maintaining contact with incarcerated loved ones face significant hardships that often go under reported. Future research, funded and focused on these lived experiences, is critical for understanding the full scope of the challenges faced by families every year. This research would provide deeper insight into the unique struggles, help shape policy improvements, and offer tailored solutions to better support families during incarceration.

This project has been funded by :

CUMBRIA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

References

Ministry of Justice (2017). Importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/importance-of-strengthening-prisoners-family-ties-to-prevent-reoffending-and-reduce-intergenerational-crime.

insidetime & insideinformation. (2022). Prison sparks row with Moonpig announcement. [online] Available at: https://insidetime.org/newsround/prison-sparks-row-with-moonpig-announcement/

Ministry of Justice (2024). HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmpps-annual-digest-april-2023-to-march-2024 [Accessed 6 Oct. 2024].

www.vodafone.co.uk. (n.d.). Vodafone. [online] Available at: https://www.vodafone.co.uk/basket.

Ministry of Justice (2024). Prison population figures: 2024. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-population-figures-2024.

Wells, E. (2024). High Costs of Prison Visits in the UK: A Hidden Burden on Families - Unseen Victims – You're Not Alone | Support for Families of the Accused. [online] Unseen Victims – You're Not Alone | Support for Families of the Accused -. Available at: https://unseenvictims.org.uk/high-costs-of-prison-visits-in-the-uk-a-hidden-burden-on-families/ [Accessed 14 Oct. 2024].

Government Digital Service (2012). Call charges and phone numbers. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/call-charges.