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## For a Europe that respects human dignity

The European Parliament can play an important role in shaping an EU policy that respects **human dignity**

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# Did you know that...



People seeking protection in the EU have the right to be accommodated in reception facilities that guarantee a **dignified standard of living**.



Too many people seeking protection across the EU – including **sick people, pregnant women and children** – are surviving in **inhumane conditions**, sleeping in the open, with no adequate sanitary infrastructure.



There is **plenty of expertise** across the EU on how to organise dignified reception systems that **empower people and build bridges with local communities**. The EU and its Member States should leverage this experience and provide dignified reception to everyone seeking protection.

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**Dignified reception** is not only a right of asylum seekers but also a necessity so that they are not forced to homelessness and destitution. The EU and its Member States should create a reception system that ensures dignity, build bridges with local communities and work toward an EU that leaves no one behind, true to its values of **human dignity and protection**.



## Right to a dignified reception

for asylum seekers

Respect for human dignity is one of the **core values** on which the European Union (EU) is founded.

Coherent to this value, the EU is not only committed to respect the dignity of its citizens, but also of every person, including **those coming to seek protection**. This commitment is clearly expressed in the EU directive on minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers.

According to this piece of legislation, Member States shall ensure that reception is available to everyone asking for protection and that such reception provides an **adequate standard of living** for these people, which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health. 'Reception' means the provision of either the housing, food and clothing provided in kind, or the provision of financial allowances or vouchers. 'Reception' may also refer to any combination of the provision of these three basic necessities in kind with a daily expenses allowance.



## Reception of asylum seekers in Europe

too many bad practices

The current reality on the ground is far from looking like the EU legislation stipulates. In too many EU Member States, asylum seekers are sleeping on the streets or barely surviving in the inhumane conditions of **overcrowded reception centres**.

More than 15,000 people are currently stuck on the **Greek islands**,<sup>1</sup> in overcrowded camps with **appalling hygienic conditions**. Similarly, the only reception centre for migrants in **Melilla**, one of the two Spanish cities in the north coast of Africa which shares a border with Morocco, is overcrowded, and the quality of drinking water is poor.

Reception capacity in **Italy** has never been sufficient to meet the needs on the ground and was put under further pressure by the increase in arrivals in 2014-15. In response to that climate of emergency, new effort was put into reception, and the system had started to improve. However, recent changes in legislation in the fall of 2018 resulted in men, women and children being all of a sudden excluded from the right to reception and put on the streets from one day to another.

In **France**, a reception crisis has been ongoing for a long time, with no sufficient places to accommodate the people applying for protection. This insufficiency persists, despite the fact that France, unlike other states in the EU, never had to cope with a sudden increase in arrivals.

In **Belgium**, reception crises have been recurring in the past years, mainly due to political choices that lead to the hasty closure of reception places without consideration of the real foreseeable needs on the ground. In the fall of 2018, people seeking asylum, including pregnant women and children, have been left to sleep outside with no place to go.

In **Romania**, no dignified reception conditions can be guaranteed in the transit reception centre next to the border with Serbia. The capacity of the centre is not adapted to the increased number of asylum seekers crossing the border. As a result, many asylum seekers have to be accommodated in the same room with no privacy, regardless of gender and other personal needs.

Greek islands, fuel tensions among asylum seekers themselves and create a feeling of insecurity among the local population, which can result in increased anti-migration sentiments and even violence.

In this climate, **many civil society and citizens' initiatives** have stepped in to fill the gaps left by authorities. Several national authorities, often in cooperation with civil society organisations, have also developed **considerable expertise in best practices** for dignified reception. However, these good practices remain underfinanced and unsustainable in the long term without governments' support and coordination.



## Local communities can contribute to a dignified reception system

These are only a few examples of reception problems across Europe. A worrying trend is that Member States increasingly keep their reception systems substandard as a way to **deter people from seeking protection** in their territory. This is not only in absolute contradiction with fundamental EU values, but also detrimental for local societies in the long run. Lack of dignified reception forces people into **homelessness** and **destitution**, which in turn makes them extra vulnerable for exploitation and trafficking by criminal networks. Overcrowded and filthy reception areas that offer no hope of exit, such as those on the

# The European Parliament can play a crucial role

in shaping an EU that is true to its values and provides protection. JRS Europe's electoral support goes to all political forces that commit to guarantee dignified reception conditions for all people asking for protection in Europe, and in particular to those forces who:

Recognise that **successful social inclusion** of asylum seekers starts with **dignified reception**.

Promote **small-scale reception facilities** as the preferred reception model for asylum seekers as opposed to large camps or reception centres.

Small-scale reception facilities that are distributed throughout a country's territory are more conducive to **encounter, exchange** and **fruitful cooperation** among reception structures and local communities.

Invest in establishing structural **long-term cooperation between governmental administration and civil society organisations**, to guarantee the right balance of professional service provision and human contact with the local society.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Media, National situational picture regarding the islands at Eastern Aegean sea, <http://mindigital.gr/index.php/προσφυγικό-ζήτημα-refugee-crisis> [last accessed 15/03/2019]

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