

# CONFINED IN A CROWD

## RECEPTION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN COVID-19 TIMES



At JRS Europe we respect everyone who shares its story with us. So while their stories are true, names have been omitted to protect their privacy. Faces and places are the products of the author's imagination.

I WASN'T ISOLATED. I SHARED THE ROOM WITH SOMEONE WHO HAD TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 AT LEAST 3 DAYS AGO.

I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE HAD COVID BEFORE COMING TO EUROPE, SO I WAS IMMUNE.

IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO AVOID THE DISEASE: EVERYONE SHARED BATHROOMS & INFECTED PEOPLE COULD EVEN LEAVE THEIR ROOMS.

ANOTHER REAL PROBLEM WAS THE LACK OF WATER. SOMETIMES THE HOSTEL DIDN'T HAVE WATER FOR THE BATHROOM OR SINKS.



By Ivo de Jager  
Guatemalan asylum seeker in Portugal

**Big, collective centres = Big, collective risks**

The EU law requires that Member States provide asylum seekers with reception that ensures a dignified standard of living and comparable living conditions across the EU. However, to date, huge differences exist in the quality of reception provided across Europe and even within the same country.

Too often, conditions are simply undignified.

Most EU countries provide accommodation to asylum seekers in (large) collective centres rather than in 'individual' reception facilities (i.e. individual living units within larger facilities, houses or flats). These centres can accommodate hundreds

of people. Situations of overcrowding were a daily reality well before Covid-19. During the pandemic, the existing **lack of privacy** and autonomy were aggravated by the **impossibility to exercise physical distance and respect hygienic measures**. The higher the amount of people with whom one needs to share essential living spaces, the **higher the risk of contagion**.

Staying with my children in a refugee camp was a very complicated part of my life, mainly with regard to respecting quarantine measures. (...) **It was hard to find food – I could not go outside with my little daughters**, so we had to rely on support provided by others, including social workers. **We felt like we were isolated, living on an island with water lapping at the shores**. We were afraid to be in contact with other people. We received sanitary items and they had some posters [with information on Covid-19 prevention rules]. I had to explain the rules to my daughters, but it was really difficult to respect them. **For adults, it was understandable, but for my kids it was impossible to explain and comply with the requirements**. All children want to play. **We had to play inside our room almost all day**.

**38 year old rejected Turkish asylum seeker in Romania**

### Need to opt for small scale, individual reception

Privacy and autonomy are key to ensure more dignified reception conditions, to foster integration and inclusion as well as in the fight against Covid-19. JRS Europe asks European and national authorities to:

**1 Establish common quality standards for reception**

**2 Provide asylum seekers with 'individual reception' in apartments, houses or facilities that allow for privacy and self-catering**

