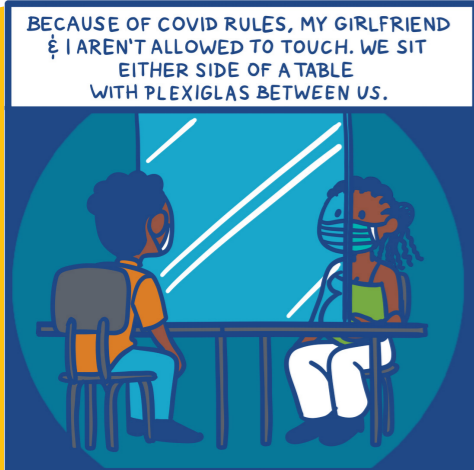


INCREASED ISOLATION

IMMIGRATION DETENTION IN COVID-19 TIMES



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



31 year old Surinamese man – detained in Belgium in February 2020

By Ivo de Jager

“ Due to Corona, from mid-March 2020 onwards we were no longer able to visit the detainees in the two Bavarian detention centres where we regularly offer legal consultation. We only received documents via the social workers and calls from the detainees themselves (they can call out but cannot be called). [...] Since mid-June we have been able to visit the detainees again, but only under strict sanitary conditions: they have to register for our counselling and then are led one after the other to a visitors' room behind glass panes. A spontaneous visit of our consultation, which before Corona took place in an open room within the cell tract, is no longer possible. ”

JRS visitor in two detention centres in Bavaria, Germany



Increased isolation because of reduction of external visits

During the Spring 2020 lockdown, many detention centres prohibited people other than the centres' staff to enter and visit detainees for at least two months. After this period, visits slowly resumed, but with stricter rules related to physical distancing and the use of PPE. In many cases, this meant that JRS visitors could no longer spontaneously reach out to detainees in common rooms.

The impossibility of receiving visits, combined with the impossibility of regularly following the news or keeping in touch with family and friends, increased pre-existing feelings of isolation and anxiety among detainees.



Guarantee the continuation of external visits in detention centres

JRS believes that the **use of detention is unlawful as long as international travel is discouraged and enforcing returns is hence not feasible.** However, if states maintain the use of detention during the pandemic, **we recommend:**

- 1 Ensuring access** to detention centres for external visitors
- 2 Establishing national protocols** on visits to ensure the safety of both detainees and visitors
- 3 Ensuring that such rules are proportionate** with the aim of preventing Covid-19 and do not penalise detainees more than the general population
- 4 Covid-19 restrictions on external visits must cease** as soon as the public health situation allows for it and not be used to reduce external access to detention centres