

LOCKED IN WITH THE VIRUS

IMMIGRATION DETENTION IN COVID-19 TIMES



At JRS Europe we respect everyone who shares its 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

THE PROTOCOL FOR THE PREVENTION OF COVID DOES NOT SEEM ACCURATE



MASKS ARE PROVIDED TO DETAINEES, BUT INFREQUENTLY

THEY HAVE SOAP TO WASH THEIR HANDS IN THE SHARED TOILETS, BUT NO HYDROALCOHOLIC GEL



THEY CAN WASH THEIR CLOTHES, BUT ONLY 3 ITEMS ONCE A WEEK

THERE IS NO SCOPE FOR KEEPING SOCIAL DISTANCE. SEVERAL COVID INFECTIONS HAVE BEEN OBSERVED, AND THEY'VE BEEN CONFINED.



HOWEVER, IT'S ISOLATION IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT WITH NOTHING TO DO, RESTRICTIONS ON MOBILE PHONE USE. NO COMMUNICATION AT ALL.

APPARENTLY, THEY HAVEN'T BEEN OFFERED ANY MENTAL HEALTH FOLLOW-UP



SJM detention visitor, Spain

Establish national standards for detention conditions

JRS advocates for the end of administrative detention and the establishment of alternatives to detention. However, as long as the EU and its Member States maintain the use of administrative detention, **JRS recommends the responsible national authorities:**



1 Establish national guidelines on Covid-19 prevention measures.

Such guidelines must cover issues such as the maximum number of people allowed to share sleeping and hygienic facilities, how to organise common rooms and canteens, and the distribution and use of PPE for detainees and staff



2 Work towards the harmonisation of detention conditions on their territories in order to ensure a humane treatment of detainees and the full respect of and access to their rights

Every week I visit the closed centre for illegal immigrants in Bruges. On the 10th of December 2020, **two detainees I used to follow up were in isolation in the medical ward with Covid-19 symptoms.** In the **next days I was informed by the management that at least 5 detainees from the same section had tested positive for Covid-19 as well as several guards.** JRS visits were to be suspended for a fortnight to allow time for testing and quarantine to stop the spread of the virus. **A few days later, I received many calls from detainees telling me of their anguish at being contaminated.** They also complained about the **lack of communication** from management, particularly about the number of guards infected and their movement from one section where inmates were Covid-positive to the other section where all inmates remained negative. **Management seemed to be increasingly overwhelmed by the situation.** On the eve of the Christmas holidays I learned from the news that the Aliens' Office had finally decided to **close the centre.** **According to the information on the website, more than half of the supervisors tested positive.** Detainees were temporarily transferred to other centres.

JRS detention visitor, Belgium

Detention centres: per definition not Covid-safe

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, detention conditions were already very varied from one country to another, as well as among different detention centres in the same nation. **Situations of overcrowding and poor hygiene conditions were a reality in several EU countries.**



In a detention centre, **detainees share all their living spaces with many people.** Within such collective arrangements, **respecting physical distancing is basically impossible and the risk of contracting and spreading the virus among detainees and staff is very high.** This was aggravated everywhere by the **lack of general guidelines** for detention centres on how to implement preventative measures.