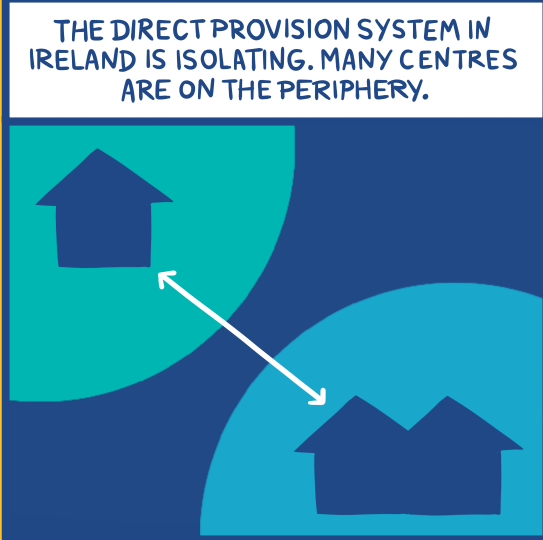


# ACCOMPANIMENT & COVID: TO BE CLOSE IN THE DISTANCE

## RECEPTION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN COVID-19 TIMES



By Ivo de Jager



JRS Outreach Officer, Ireland

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.

# Accompaniment: essential as shelter and food

The pandemic has shown how **social assistance and accompaniment are an essential element** of providing reception. In this context, **JRS calls on national authorities to:**



**1** Establish clear national rules to ensure the Covid-safe continuation of in-person social assistance and accompaniment for asylum seekers in reception



**2** Formally recognise that social assistance and accompaniment are an integral part of the reception of asylum seekers, next to providing meals and beds



The more the refugees were left alone with their worries, the greater the demand grew for pastoral care and further support. There was a **clear sense of uncertainty and tension among the refugees and staff**. It quickly became clear to me that I could not switch my work to digital communication - as was the case in many other places. **A personal presence was still urgently needed**. From spring through to autumn, I conducted the conversations exclusively outdoors during pastoral walks. The refugees were able to adapt well to this new setting. **For some of them it was very good to get out of their rooms regularly and take in fresh air.**

JRS pastoral care provider, Germany

## Accompaniment drastically reduced

Because of Covid-19 prevention measures, in most reception facilities across Europe non-essential face-to-face activities were suspended or drastically reduced. Social assistance and accompaniment, as well as activities such as language classes, vocational training, and support in looking for employment or housing

were severely impacted. Asylum seekers faced increased difficulties seeking advice and help. NGOs and reception providers have been creative and have switched to remote ways of providing services and accompaniment. In most countries, little to no guidance, nor financial

or material support, was provided by the national authorities to do so.

