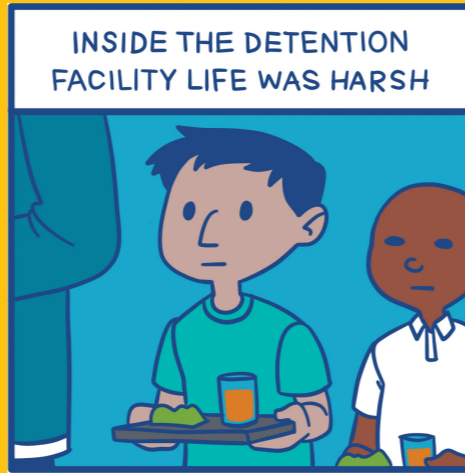


DISCONNECTED FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD

IMMIGRATION DETENTION IN COVID-19 TIMES



By Ivo de Jager



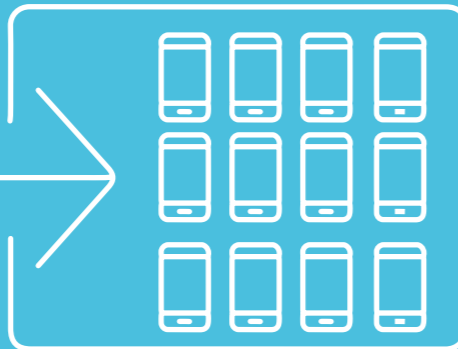
29 years old Afghan man detained in Romania from December 2019 to May 2020

At JRS Europe we respect everyone who shares their 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.

Guaranteed access to mobile phones and internet

The pandemic has made us experience what it means to be in confinement. We all fully appreciate the importance of phones and the internet to keep social contacts and for our mental well-being. Detainees are always confined. For this reason, during and beyond the pandemic, JRS recommends:

1 Ensuring sufficient access to mobile phones and internet for detainees



2 Providing the necessary infrastructure in detention centres to allow detainees to have remote contact with their families, legal assistants and representatives, and NGO visitors



“ I'm Pakistani. I was detained at Faro Airport because I was travelling with false documents. **There was no one I could talk to for 35 days.** (...) On the 4th of February [2021], I was transferred to Porto, to the detention centre. Until that day, I **never had access to my cell phone.** During my stay in Faro I had to buy several 5€ phone cards to communicate with my family. (...) **I only had one friend** that I could contact to visit me at UHSA [Porto's detention centre], **but I couldn't because the visits are cancelled due to COVID.** ”

30 years old Pakistani man, detained in Portugal between January and February 2021

Extremely limited remote contact with outside world

► Already before the Covid-19 pandemic, the possibility for detainees to access phones or internet services was generally very limited. In some cases, detainees may use their phones – including smartphones if they have one – during specific time-frames.

► But in most countries, the use of even simple mobile phones is severely limited or prohibited within detention centres. Even when phones are allowed, detainees have very small budgets to buy credit. In the context of the pandemic, with severely limited external visits, the impossibility of remaining in contact with the outside world (even remotely) increased the sense of isolation among detainees.



► Moreover, fear of the virus and a lack of clarity on how the pandemic would impact the detainees' legal situation and term in detention was compounded by the inability to follow the news and gather information.