

# Detention House Kortrijk - Belgium

## Introduction



Detention House Kortrijk is situated on the outskirts of the municipality of Kortrijk, Belgium. It falls under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government Department of Justice. The Belgian Minister of Justice (2023), and his policy cell want to give incarcerated people a better chance at reintegration into society. For this reason, the Minister intends to open fifteen detention houses in this legislature, of which Detention House Kortrijk was the first. Since it opened in September 2022, its operation is still constantly evolving.

## Scale

The facility houses a total of 77 residents, men and women. Thus, the total capacity exceeds the recommended number of 8 to 25 for a small-scale facility. However, the facility strives to operate on a small-scale base by dividing residents into several living groups of up to twelve people.

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- ☐ Small-scale
- ☒ Differentiated
- ☒ Community-integrated

## Differentiation

### *Target group:*

Detention House Kortrijk is a mixed-gender facility for adults. It houses people with sentences of less than three years. Due to prison overcrowding, this target group previously was not held in detention but under supervision using electronic monitoring. With a change in legislation, requiring the execution of sentences of less than three years, they are prioritized as a target group for this facility and others opening soon.

The placement procedure consists of a primary evaluation which is conducted by the social service of the prison in which a person is incarcerated. Currently, people with convictions of sex crimes and terrorism, and people with accurate substance use disorders are not eligible for a transfer to this facility. Detention House Kortrijk tries to have a screening via Teams with the person within 24 hours of the request. In this

screening, personal motivation and flight risk as categorized by the system is considered. If the person is accepted, they will be released from traditional prisons and are responsible for transferring to the facility themselves. They may be placed under electronic surveillance during this process. In case of inadmissible behaviour in the facility, the person may be transferred back to a traditional prison.

#### *Forms of security:*



Detention House Kortrijk combines different forms of security. Because of strict legislation, they have static and procedural security measures. The facility has multiple cameras all around the facility, unlocked doors between units, and windows that can't be fully opened. Procedural security consists of various rules some of which are peculiar to the facility and some of which are legal rules from prisons that need to be applied in the facility as well. However, they try to apply some rules less strictly as a function of better-enabling reintegration. For instance, the law prohibits the possession of cell phones and money, but this is not the case in this facility. Residents can have money and are also allowed to use a cell phone, but only in their room. A license to leave the facility must also be obtained from the Services of the Minister for Justice. These licenses are requested by default at the start of a resident's stay so that the residents can certainly leave the facility after the first month for work, education, etc.

Detention House Kortrijk mainly relies on relational security. Central to this are staff members who are "detention counselors". They are responsible for daily supervision and support. Detention counselors personally accompany each resident daily and foster positive communication and relationships.

#### *Activities:*



Detention House Kortrijk has a community regime. Residents are expected to participate in communal living and take up tasks in their respective living groups. They are not in charge of their personal schedule, although they do have a say in which activities they want to engage in, which is mandatory. From day one, residents work actively towards their reintegration, while receiving intensive support.

Together with the psychosocial service, residents make a detention plan detailing what they would like to do in or outside of the facility during the sentence, but also what their plans are once they are released. During detention, activities include work, voluntary work, education, sports etc. These activities can all take place in- or outside the facility. Housekeeping tasks are shared among residents. They are all responsible for keeping their rooms and other communal spaces clean.

Detention House Kortrijk is looking at how to better organize assistance and services in the facility. They are also looking to cooperate with organizations such as the Rode Antraciet, which organizes sports and cultural activities in Belgian prisons, in a way that is tailored to the functioning of the detention houses and thus makes more use of the residents' autonomy.

## Community-integration

### *Location and architecture:*

Detention House Kortrijk is located in Kortrijk, as part of the community. Kortrijk is a Belgian city in the Flemish province of West Flanders and has about 77 882 inhabitants (2022).<sup>1</sup> The detention house is located next to VIVES University of Applied Sciences and is easily accessible by public transportation. The Department of Justice is in search of a new building, as the current one is only available until 2027.



Detention House Kortrijk used to be a residential care center for elderly people. It is a large building with wide corridors. The interior is rather simple-looking, but together with the residents they try to make the facility look and feel more homely. Detention House Kortrijk consists of several units with 8-12 shared bedrooms and private bathrooms (for two people), a shared kitchen and a shared living room. There is one unit with nine service flats. These flats have more space and facilities, such as your own kitchen, and are intended for residents who always work outside the facility. At present, one of the service flats is used for conjugal visits. The building also has one fitness room and two recreational gardens, the latter being open during the day from 6:30-21:30.

### *Interaction with the community:*

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<sup>1</sup>Bevolking. (2022.). Kortrijk. *Stad Kortrijk in cijfers*. Retrieved, June 13th, 2023, from <https://kortrijk.incijfers.be/dashboard/dashboard/bevolking>

Since Detention House Kortrijk only opened in September 2022, there is a strong focus on creating interaction with the community. The facility makes use of the local college's gymnasium, residents work in local organizations, and residents have given back to the community by baking waffles for the local elementary school.

Detention House Kortrijk, in collaboration with VIVES Applied University, initiated a buddy project to promote interaction between students, local residents, and residents of Detention House Kortrijk. In addition, a poetry slam project was launched in the fall of 2023. A sports project was also started around soccer, where training sessions are held at the facility, and neighborhood residents are invited to participate. These soccer sessions are led by a well-known Belgian soccer player to further engage the local community. In addition, residents are actively fulfilling their obligation to spend a few days volunteering within the community as part of their restitution for past actions.

#### **Detention House Kortrijk**

Founded: 2022

Capacity: 77

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Kortrijk  
(Belgium)

Nature of interaction: Visited  
by Prison Insider and RJN  
(17-02-2023 and 09-06-  
2023)

#### **Publicity/ read more**

- About Detention House Kortrijk at the official website of the Federal Government Department of Justice :

Detentiehuis Kortrijk. (n.d.). *Federale Overheidsdienst Justitie*. Retrieved June 13th, 2023, from [https://justitie.belgium.be/nl/themas\\_en\\_dossiers/gevangenen/belgische\\_gevangenen/detentiehuizen/adres\\_detentiehuis\\_kortrijk](https://justitie.belgium.be/nl/themas_en_dossiers/gevangenen/belgische_gevangenen/detentiehuizen/adres_detentiehuis_kortrijk)