

Penitentiary Agricultural Center Ruisselede - Belgium

Introduction

Penitentiary Agricultural Center Ruisselede (from now on "PLC Ruisselede") is a dairy prison farm located seven kilometers from the city center of Ruisselede, in Belgium. Upon entering the detention facility, visitors are greeted by a large open area adorned with flowers and cobblestones, creating a farm atmosphere. It was founded in 1936 and falls under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government Department of Justice. PLC Ruisselede has an open prison regime which helps to prepare people in detention for their reintegration into society. Most residents transfer to this facility not more than two years before the end of their sentence. Residents are expected to actively work on their reintegration. This can take a lot of energy which is why most of the people do not go there more than two years before the end of their sentence.

Scale

In principle, PLC Ruisselede can accommodate 48 people, in "chambrettes", which is a type of dormitory. However, due to national overcrowding, the prison was accommodating 60 people at the time of the visit. A provisional solution was found by converting two classrooms into bedrooms for four people and another room for people who were allowed to leave the prison during the day.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

Differentiation

Target group:

PLC Ruisselede houses adult men who are at the end of their sentence. This means that almost all of them come from a closed prison. This transfer is subject to several conditions. The person must not be considered to be a flight risk, should be able to live in a community, has to have good contacts with their family, live a drug and medication-free life and has to be able to work in the agricultural center. People using drugs in the facility or engaging in violence may be excluded. Most of the residents are in the facility 24/7, but some are on 'limited detention' and can leave the facility for multiple days.

Forms of security:

The security level in PLC Ruiselede is rather low. Staff is trained and encouraged to develop good personal relationships with the residents. In addition, the staff makes an effort to get to know and understand the residents as individuals. This way they can provide sympathetic help with personal problems and hold more meaningful dialogues. Respect between residents, and respect between residents and the staff is a crucial element to guarantee these relationships.

Even though staff and residents refer first and foremost to dynamic security, there are also some static and procedural security measures in place. The facility has a fence at the entrance, but not any around the cattle pasture. Camera surveillance, alarms and locks on specific doors are also used. As a general rule, residents are not allowed to walk around freely on the premises, only in specific parts of the facility. Regarding the social network, residents are allowed to make phone calls but only at specific times and with a phone provided by the facility, not a personal phone.

Activities:

In PLC Ruiselede, the residents lead a structured life with daily routines of various work and activities. They have a say in their daily schedule and are responsible for their appointments. However it is mandatory to work in the facility. Work assignments are divided into three categories: farm work (milking, calf farming, tractor driving, etc.), workshop tasks (assembly and packaging of maintenance materials, assembly of feeders for pigs, pallet repair), and household services (kitchen, cooking, assistant cooking, janitorial duties, hairdressing, etc.). For the first two weeks, work is not mandatory, allowing individuals to acclimate to living together in a large group. Residents receive a wage for their work, providing a sense of financial compensation for their efforts. They also attend educational lessons and can participate in activities outside the facility, but have to apply for this themselves. Evening activities are organized for their recreation.

The daily schedules differ between individuals. That means that some of them are constantly involved in activities, from work to visits to meals and back to work. Others only do the work that is assigned to them and spend the rest of the day in the large common room. Here, they can watch TV and play games like cards or darts. However, staying in this room can also be challenging as it can be crowded and chaotic.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

PLC Ruiselede is located in a rural area with forest and pasture. Ruiselede is a municipality located in the Belgian province of West Flanders and has approximately 5 444 inhabitants (2022).¹ Next to PLC Ruiselede there is another high-security facility for juveniles. The facility is not accessible by regular public transportation, but a special on-call bus.

In PLC Ruiselede, two common rooms are equipped with televisions, providing recreational spaces for the residents. These rooms are furnished with tables for card games, dartboards, and a chalkboard for drawing and expressing creativity. The facility has multiple chambrettes, which offers a sleeping place for multiple people, and ten individual rooms. While there are not a lot of private rooms available, the prison does provide a visitors' room furnished with tables and chairs for conjugal or family visits. Although there is no designated garden area, the detention facility has a lot of outdoor space. However, access to certain parts of the fields and garden may be restricted to specific individuals or groups.

Interaction with the community:

Some interaction is taking place between the detention facility and the community. Like in all Belgian prisons, it is the community that provides the education and training opportunities to the people in detention, including language courses and forklift driving training. The residents are able to attend these classes, and they have the opportunity to take their exams within the community.

Furthermore, the facility supplies milk from their cows used by milk company Campina. They do some work on the farm and workshop tasks, as mentioned above. They also sell male calves and engage in activities such as assembling and packaging maintenance materials, constructing feeding troughs for fattening pigs, and repairing pallets. Additionally, the facility assists in packaging maintenance materials provided by some companies. The facility also organizes occasional events to bring the community closer. For instance, they arrange basketball matches against external teams, and once a year, they hold a half

Penitentiary Agricultural Center Ruiselede

Founded: 1936

Capacity: 60 (but at the moment
of the visit 62)

Security level: Low (open regime)

Nearest city/town: Ruiselede
(Belgium)

Nature of interaction: Visited by
RESCALED (19/08/2022)

¹Ruiselede (Tielt, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map, Location, Weather and Web Information. (2022).
City Population. Retrieved June 28th, 2023, from https://www.citypopulation.de/en/belgium/westvlaanderen/tielt/37012__ruiselede/

marathon in which community members are welcome to participate (although the event is not widely publicized).

Publicity/ read more

- About Penitentiary Agricultural Center Ruselede at the official website of the Federal Government Department of Justice:

Meer info over de gevangenis van Ruselede. (n.d.). *Federale Overheidsdienst Justitie*. Retrieved June 28th, 2023, from https://justitie.belgium.be/nl/themas_en_dossiers/gevangenis/belgische_gevangenis/gevangenis/meer_info/ruselede

- Youtube video about the Penitentiary Agricultural Center Ruselede (in Dutch):

CowForme. (2021, August 17). *Zij verdienen een tweede kans op een melkveebedrijf* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 28th, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISL2vyl8DYs>