

# Oslo halfway house, Torshov unit - Norway

## Introduction

Oslo halfway house, Torshov unit (from now on "Torshov halfway house") is located in the district of Sagene, in the municipality of Oslo, and is one of eight halfway houses in the Norwegian prison system. It was founded in 1995 and is under the direct management of the Norwegian penitentiary administration (Kriminalsoerger). Torshov halfway house is an open building with low security dedicated to preparing for the transition to freedom.

## Scale

Torshov halfway house has room for 16 residents, which makes it a small-scale facility.

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

## Differentiation

### *Target group:*

Torshov halfway house is a mixed-gender facility for adults. The target group are people who are at the end of their sentence and who are in need of help to readjust to life outside the facility. They can stay there for up to 18 months before their conditional release.

Most of the residents have been incarcerated for a while before going to the Torshov halfway house. However, Torshov halfway house does not accept people who are incarcerated for sexual offenses or organized crime. These contraindications were introduced because of previous incidents as well as the fact that it is a mixed-gender facility. Moreover, criteria for inclusion include motivation towards working on reintegration and not being considered a flight risk by the system.

### *Forms of security:*

Halfway houses in Norway are characterized by a minimum level of security. The Torshov halfway house is based on the normality principle. Because of this, the conditions of the house are supposed to closely resemble a normal social environment, with the difference being that residents must remain inside the facility at night.

Relational security plays an important role within the Torshov halfway house and is built on the foundation of trust, with a strong emphasis on open and effective communication between staff and residents, about for example on what behaviour is permissible and what is not. There are no restrictions or excessive monitoring imposed on the residents' communication or movement. The residents are also free to use technological devices. The staff is regularly present in the living room and the quality of relationships within the facility is of a familiar level. This creates an environment where residents and staff can sit on the couch together and enjoy a cup of coffee or have time for informal conversations.

In addition to relational security, there are a few static and procedural security measures in place. Residents have their own key to their room but the front door of the facility is locked at all times. To enter or leave the facility, you have to ring a bell.

### *Activities:*

The principle of normality forms the basis of the Torshov halfway house. The core idea is that a resident's routine should be as close as possible to those of people living outside the facility. To achieve this, all residents engage in work or study activities while being supported by staff. They are allowed to leave the house for work, study or other daily activities. Thus everything happens outside, as much as possible. Because of this, residents are required to already have a job or somewhere to study before getting transferred to the Torshov halfway house. This requirement is in place because all residents are expected to be away from the halfway house on temporary release during the daytime.

Since the residents are supposed to prepare themselves for life outside a detention facility, they are also expected to initiate their own free time activities. Although they do get support for this as well by the staff. The staff occasionally arranges activities inside and outside the house. They collaborate as well with the Torshov church for the parenting and relationship courses. But the general principle remains that they use the services and activities offered in the public sector, as well as all other citizens.

So people in the Torshov halfway house are in control of their own schedule. However, it is essential for each resident to strictly adhere to their designated return times. In the event of an unforeseen circumstance preventing their timely return, residents are obliged to notify the staff in advance.

Residents who are employed receive an income and are responsible for covering their own expenses, including cell phones, travel, food, cleaning products, and healthcare. Additionally, each resident has to sign a tenancy agreement and pay rent. This accounts for both the residents who study and go to work, but the rent is considerably lower compared to renting a regular apartment.

In the Torshov halfway house, residents are responsible for preparing their own dinners, with one communal dinner organized weekly. Visits, including intimate ones, are permitted within the facility. Additionally, they are granted 2.5 days per month to visit their relatives, during which they are required to inform the staff about their whereabouts. While residents are allowed to travel within Oslo, leaving the country is not permitted.

## Community-integration

### *Location and architecture:*

Torshov halfway house is situated in the Sagene district, within the larger municipality of Oslo. Oslo is the largest city in Norway and has a population of approximately 709 037 residents (2023), while Sagene itself is home to around 46 984 people (2023).<sup>1</sup> The Torshov halfway house is part of a community and is located in an accessible area, approximately a 15-minute drive from the city center. It is also accessible by public transport.

First impression of a visitor: "A house for students or a nice place for elderly people. Certainly a warm impression. It is the first floor of an apartment building, there were no security measures by entering, you just open the door and enter the living space".

The Torshov halfway house is located in an apartment building which was built in the 1970s. The halfway house blends into the neighborhood. It is the ground floor of a regular housing building, arranged around a shared children's playground, emphasizing the communal aspect of the space and promoting interaction among residents. The apartment building was originally owned by the Probation Service and was previously used for detoxification from alcoholism. It has now operated as a halfway house for over 25 years.

Each person in the detention facility has their own individual room, furnished with a bed and a desk. In addition to this, the house includes shared bathrooms, a dining room, two living rooms, a kitchen, meeting rooms, a reception, a gym, a laundry room, a common recreational area and a balcony. The entire house is

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<sup>1</sup>Oslo (Municipality, Oslo, Norway) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map, Location, Weather and Web Information. (2023). *City Population*. Retrieved October 12th, 2023, from, [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/norway/admin/oslo/0301\\_\\_oslo/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/norway/admin/oslo/0301__oslo/); Sagene (Borough, Oslo City, Norway) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map, Location, Weather and Web Information. (2023). *City Population*. Retrieved October 12th, 2023, from, [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/norway/oslocity/030103a\\_\\_sagene/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/norway/oslocity/030103a__sagene/)

decorated with paintings, flowers, decorative items... to create a homely atmosphere and foster social interaction among the residents. The balcony gives a view on a park, which gives the residents a perfect spot to occasionally have barbecues and enjoy outdoor activities.

#### *Interaction with the community:*

Because of the principle of normality, residents have daily contact with the community for work, education or use of regular services. Health care, psychologists or other services are also not internalized within the house. Residents are expected to use these public services as well. Interaction with the community occurs from two sides. On the one hand, the community helps the detention facility by participating in "dugnad" (volunteering in the community) or organizing markets. On the other hand, the residents offer something back to society by organizing waffle baking, participating in the annual market, meetings or an open day, as well as participating in regular work or studies.

In the past 25 years that the halfway house has been in operation, there have only been three serious incidents. In response to these incidents, the entire neighborhood was called together for a collective meeting. During this gathering, community members were provided with information regarding the incidents and given the opportunity to voice their questions and concerns.

#### **Oslo halfway house – Torshov unit**

Founded: 1995

Capacity: 16

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Oslo  
(Norway)

Nature of interaction: Visited  
by VZW De Huizen and  
WayBack (05/10/2022)

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

- Blogpost about Oslo halfway house, Torshov unit at the website of Reshape:

Reshape. (2022, 19 september). *Uma casa de transição em Oslo - Reshape*. Reshape. Retrieved June 1st, 2023 from <https://reshape.org/2021/12/07/uma-casa-de-transicao-em-oslo/>

- About Oslo halfway house, Torshov unit at the official website of the Norwegian Correctional Service:

Oslo overgangsbolig Torshov avdeling. (n.d.). *Kriminalomsorgen.no*. Retrieved June 1st, 2023 from <https://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/oslo-overgangsbolig-torshov-avdeling.5018829-237612.html>