

# Torres Novas Prison Establishment - Portugal

## Introduction



Torres Novas Prison Establishment (from now on "Torres Novas Prison") is a prison in Torres Novas, located in a municipality in the Santarém district, central in Portugal. The facility falls under supervision of the General Directorate of Rehabilitation and Prison Services (from now on "DGRSP"). The establishment of the DGRSP reflected a broader framework of progressive development and reform in the country's penal system

during the 20th century. The creation of DGRSP was driven by the mission to improve social support for people in detention and promote their successful reintegration into society. Torres Novas Prison is housed in the former Comarcã Prison and became an independent facility in 1995. The past year, the facility has had a lot of local media attention due to the launch of a new pilot project implementing vertical gardens at the facility.

## Scale

Torres Novas Prison has room for 38 residents and is fully occupied on average.

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

## Differentiation

### *Target group:*

The Torres Novas prison targets adult men in the final phase of their prison sentence. To qualify for placement in an "open regime" (regime aberto no exterior), individuals must have served a quarter of their sentence, hold a successful exit permit and have no pending proceedings involving pre-trial detention. Importantly, eligibility for the open regime does not depend on the length of the sentence, but rather on meeting these specific criteria.

The placement process is overseen by the DGRSP and is based on a comprehensive evaluation of the person's behavior, progress and risk assessment during their incarceration. Factors such as the person's behavior during incarceration, participation in rehabilitation programs and perceived risk to society are taken into account. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, focusing on each individual's unique circumstances and rehabilitation progress, and are consistent with Portugal's commitment to balancing reintegration with public safety.

#### *Forms of security:*



Security at Torres Novas prison, according to Portuguese levels, is described as medium. Static security measures are still very much in the foreground within this facility. The building itself gives the impression of a prison because of the fences, several cameras and the cells. Staff wear uniforms and residents may be subject to urine tests or privileges may be revoked for misconduct.

However, the smaller scale nature of the facility, compared to other Portuguese prisons, ensures that relational security is still present. The small-scale fosters closer relationships between staff and residents, which can help resolve conflicts.

Procedural security follows the same prison rules as large-scale prisons, but this open regime allows residents to go to work, albeit with limited community movement. Prison regulations may not be fully adapted to the unique needs of this regime. Nevertheless, the Torres Novas Prison facility strives to balance security with rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

#### *Activities:*

Since Torres Novas Prison applies the general Portuguese prison rules, the possibilities regarding various activities and activities within the community are rather limited. Residents have little autonomy; they have no control over their schedule and are not responsible for making arrangements with third parties. Residents' attendance at the facility varies during the week. During weekends, they



are usually in the facility around the clock. During the week, some go to work, which contributes to their gradual return to society.

Activities within the Torres Novas Prison facility are mainly focused on the residents' work schedules. During the day, most, if not all, residents leave the facility to work in the community. The main emphasis is on supporting residents to find work in the community, which can be a crucial step toward successful reintegration after release. The local government is actively involved in this and provides employment for the residents. It is important to note that work outside prison is not mandatory, but it is encouraged to assist in the residents' reintegration process. Outside of work, the range of activities offered is limited.



The recently launched pilot project on vertical gardens also aims to contribute to the social inclusion of people in detention. On the one hand, residents help build and maintain the vertical gardens. On the other hand, residents also get the opportunity to undergo training in sustainable agriculture and improve the nutritional quality of the meals produced in the prison kitchen.

In terms of leisure activities, residents have access to gaming computers in their cells, which is a source of entertainment during their free time. Communication with the outside world is facilitated by fixed-time options, including scheduled calls and visits.

## Community-integration

### *Location and architecture:*

Torres Novas Prison is located in the city of Torres Novas, which has about 34 111 inhabitants (2021). Even though the facility is part of the domain of a prison, it is still located among several residential buildings. The facility is within walking distance of the city center and there is a market 200 meters away. Torres Novas Prison is accessible by public transport.

First impression of a visitor: "It looks just like a prison, but small-scaled".

As the Torres Novas prison is located in the former Comarcã Prison building, typical prison elements are visible in the building in various ways and no homely elements are present. It is housed in one building, consisting of two wings, the main wing and the former women's wing. The residents do not have individual

bedrooms but sleep in dormitories. In addition, there are shared bathrooms, living room, kitchen and a visitors' room. There is also a common outdoor area where the vertical gardens are located.

#### *Interaction with the community:*

Other than residents leaving the facility to work in the community, little interaction with the community takes place. In fact, residents are not free to participate in other activities in the community or move about freely in the community.

Nevertheless, the community initiative, in collaboration with an outside organization (Upfarming), where residents grow vegetables in a vertical garden in the facility, also strives to combat poverty in the community by donating vegetables to the Red Cross to distribute to vulnerable families.

The DGRSP seeks to develop further projects that can help integrate the facility into the community, fostering social responsibility among residents. It also works with various stakeholders, including the municipality, business owners and community organizations such as UpFarming, to strengthen the connection between the facility and the broader community.

#### **Torres Novas Prison Establishment**

Founded: 1995

Capacity: 38

Security level: Medium

Nearest city/town: Torres Novas (Portugal)

Nature of interaction: Visited by RESHAPE (15/07/2022 and 31/05/2023)

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

- About Torres Novas Prison Establishment at the official website of the General Directorate for Rehabilitation and Prison Services in Portugal:

Estabelecimento Prisional de Torres Novas. (n.d.). *DGRSP*. Retrieved October 16th, 2023, from <https://dgrsp.justica.gov.pt/Justi%C3%A7a-de-adultos/Penas-e-medidas-privativas-de-liberdade/Estabelecimentos-prisionais/%C3%81rea-territorial-alargada-do-tribunal-de-execu%C3%A7%C3%A3o-de-penas-de-%C3%89vora/Estabelecimento-Prisional-de-Torres-Novas>

- About the implementation of the vertical garden at the official website of the Government of the Portuguese Republic:

Ministra da Justiça inaugura horta vertical do Estabelecimento Prisional de Torres Novas. (n.d.). *Government of the Portuguese Republic*. Retrieved October 16th, 2023, from

[https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc23/comunicacao/noticia?i=ministra-da-justica-inaugura-horta-vertical-do-estabelecimento-prisional-de-torres-novas-](https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc23/comunicacao/noticia?i=ministra-da-justica-inaugura-horta-vertical-do-estabelecimento-prisional-de-torres-novas)

- Youtube video about the vertical garden in the Torres Novas Prison Establishment:

Agrotonomy. (2023, April 30). *Vertical farming in a Portuguese prison. Project by @upfarming32 #verticalfarming #prison #portugal* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved October 16th, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dw6b1A3dnLQ>