

# The Mothers' Unit of Palma - Spain

## Introduction



The Mothers' Unit of Palma (also known as "La Unidad de Madre de Palma de Mallorca") is an open facility in Palma, Mallorca. The Mothers' Unit of Palma was founded in 2008 and is owned by the Ministry of Justice of the federal government of Spain. This facility is unique because of its specific target group and their distinctive working approach. It is a facility where mothers can stay in detention along with their children to maintain the relationship between them. The underlying idea is that it is better for a child to remain in the care of its own mother, even if she is in detention, rather than being placed elsewhere. This facility provides a place

where this is possible while the mother is serving her sentence. With this, the Mothers' Unit of Palma wants to minimize the effect of detention on the relationship between mother and child and give the children a safe place to grow up.

## Scale

The Mothers' Unit of Palma can accommodate 22 mothers with one or more children. The facility consists of several small apartments. Each mother can live in an apartment with her own child(ren) (space for two children).

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

## Differentiation

### *Target group:*

The target group of The Mothers' Unit of Palma is very specific. Pregnant women and mothers with their children are housed in this facility. Mothers can stay here from the age of eighteen and with children up to the age of three. However, in exceptional cases, children up to the age of six are also welcome. Women can stay here from the start of their sentence and the average length of stay is one to three years.

### *Forms of security:*

As the facility is open and small-scale, residents have various freedoms and there is a good connection between the staff and the residents. Relational security, static security and procedural security are thus combined here. Relational security is mainly expressed in the good relationship between staff and residents and the formal and informal conversations between them.

Static security is visible because the entire domain is surrounded by fences and bars on the windows. The facility also uses cameras and several locks. Searches of the room and on the person may also be carried out. With regard to procedural safety, residents can move freely inside and outside the facility during the day. They must be present in the facility at night. In addition, there are also three counting moments per day in the morning, afternoon and evening. Residents are allowed to use technological devices with monitored use.

### *Activities:*

The Mothers' Unit of Palma does not have a set schedule for its residents. Instead, residents are in control of their own program. The only mandatory activities are a certain wake-up time and being present for the counting moment three times a day. Besides this, residents choose how to fill in their schedule with education, work, sports, appointments regarding their integration, walks and other activities. Since the residents can move freely in the community, a lot of these activities take place outside the facility.

The facility offers education for both the parents and the children. They also offer hairdressing, sewing classes and other classes about topics that can help the residents find a job once they are released.



The Mothers' Unit of Palma is an open facility for mothers with their children, so contact with family and social networks is important. These contact moments are flexible and can take place both inside and outside the facility. If the mothers want to leave at night or on weekends, they must ask permission and these contact moments can only take place at fixed times. The facility has indoor and outdoor areas for visitors, both communal and private. No guards are present during visits.

## Community-integration

### *Location and architecture:*

The Mothers' Unit of Palma is located just outside the center of Palma, the capital of Mallorca. Mallorca is a Balearic Island and an integral part of Spain. Palma has about 424 837 inhabitants (2021).<sup>1</sup> The facility is located on the grounds of a prison, half of which is a prison and the other half a halfway

First impression of a visitor: "We entered through a side door which came out in the garden. The first impression was thus a very pleasant one because we immediately saw a nice open green area where the mothers and children can enjoy fresh air. There was also a little playground for the children and benches to sit on. Everywhere you looked colours were being used, which gives it a more homely vibe and brings calmness".

house. The prison is in a quiet neighbourhood, surrounded by many houses and stores, and is easily accessible by public transportation with a bus stop right in front of the facility.



When you enter The Mothers' Unit of Palma, you first walk into the garden with a small playground and some benches. Each resident has their own apartment. All these apartments are accessible to everyone and are located in the same hallway. Each apartment has a bedroom, a kitchen, a bathroom and a living area. The facility also has a visitor's room and a small private area outside where residents can meet their family and friends privately. Throughout the facility, the use of colours and other decorations is striking and it gives the facility a homely feeling.

### *Interaction with the community:*

There is some interaction between the residents of The Mothers' Unit of Palma and the community. The residents are free to walk around the community (when authorized by management) and use all the services there, such as social services, health care, shopping, etc. The facility also has a partnership with the local government regarding child care. However, this interaction only occurs in one direction. The facility does not give anything back to the community by offering volunteer work or certain services, for example.

### **The Mothers' Unit of Palma**

Founded: 2008

Capacity: 22 mothers (with their children)

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Palma (Mallorca – Spain)

Nature of interaction: Visited by VZW De Huizen (13/03/2023)

<sup>1</sup>Palma (Illes Balears, Illes Balears, Spain) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map, Location, Weather and Web Information. (2021). *City Population*. Retrieved August 16th, 2023, from [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/spain/illesbalears/illes\\_balears/07040\\_\\_palma/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/spain/illesbalears/illes_balears/07040__palma/)