



# Punishment that makes a difference?

RESCALED principles practiced in existing Norwegian prisons

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## 4.0 Lower-security prisons

Prisons with a lower-security level are characterised by the absence of the strict security measures found in high-security prisons. The residents are given more autonomy and independence within the prison. The doors and gates in a lower-security prison are locked at night and open otherwise, although leaving the prison is not allowed. The residents are more frequently allowed to visit friends and family on temporary release, and they are free to roam the prison area. The officers tend to wear a uniform inside the prison, but are most often ununiformed during activities outside of the prison. The recidivism rate after two years for people released from a lower-security prison is about 13 percent, compared to 31 for high-security.<sup>30</sup> The average expenses per bed was about 715.000 NOK in 2020, compared to about 1.2 million NOK in high-security prisons.<sup>31</sup> There is more room for local adjustments in lower-security prisons with regard to security measures, activities and freedom of movement. Consequently, the recidivism rate and expenses may vary between prisons.

### 4.1 Kriminalomsorgen Innlandet, avdeling lavere sikkerhet, Valdres

#### Introduction

Kriminalomsorgen Innlandet, avdeling lavere sikkerhet, Valdres ("Norwegian Correctional Service Innlandet, department lower-security, Valdres", from now on "Valdres prison") is a lower-security prison for men. It was opened in 1985, and is located on a small island in a relatively small village.

The establishment was initiated by a politician called Åge Hovengen, who wanted to make a smaller version of Bastøy. As opposed to Bastøy, however, you can drive to the prison by car. Only the residents of the prison and a family of farmers live on the island.



Photo: Norwegian Correctional Service / Flickr

The target group of Valdres is people with five months to two years left of their sentence, but they also allow shorter or longer sentences. Valdres has a special focus on the process of reintegration and works actively to prepare the residents for release.

#### Prison size

Valdres is a small-scale prison according to Norwegian standards, and may house up to 25 people.

#### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

<sup>30</sup> See the Norwegian Correctional Service (2021), page 22

<sup>31</sup> See the Norwegian Correctional Service (2021), page 8

## Differentiation

### *Security level:*

Since Valdres is a lower-security prison, there are few security measures. While some lower-security prisons have a low fence to prevent bypassers from entering the prison area, this is not needed at Valdres, as its location on an island works as a natural barrier between the prison and the local community. Dynamic security is key at Valdres, and the staff frequently receive training in dynamic security and prison culture as a way of preventing unwanted incidents. This is especially important when new staff arrive at the prison.

### *Target group:*

Valdres prison accepts people imprisoned for all types of offences. About 20 per cent are imprisoned for sexual offences, about 20 per cent for violent offences, about 20 per cent for fraud, about 20 per cent for drug-related crimes, about 10 per cent for financial crimes and about 10 per cent for murder. Two out of three start their sentence at Valdres. This accounts for people with short sentences. One out of three are transferred from other prisons, to serve their remaining sentence at Valdres. The population is aged between 18 and 80. The length of their sentences is between 5 months and 13 years, while the average length per 2021 was 3 years.

The target group of Valdres prison is yet people who are getting close to the end of their sentence as well as people with minor disabilities or mental health issues, who find it challenging to function in larger groups and/or are in need of close follow up. They have a high focus on rehabilitation, individually tailored treatment and reintegration, and therefore mainly accept people who are in need of comprehensive support in the reintegration process. For example, those who do not have a home, job and support system to return to.

When the prison first opened, it used to house people imprisoned for minor crimes, such as traffic offences. However, due to changes in the prison population, Valdres now house more people with longer sentences and/or who are imprisoned for more severe crimes<sup>32</sup>.

### *Activities:*

Valdres has a great focus on tailor-made approaches. They try to meet the needs and wishes of the individual person to the extent that is possible. Activities therefore vary depending on the current population as well as their needs.

At Valdres, the staff and the incarcerated person start working together towards release from day one. They also have a reintegration officer (not all prisons have this), focusing on ensuring safe and 'seamless' reintegration. At the prison, they conduct weekly meetings with the whole support system (health, benefits, school, social workers, prison governor etc.) where they discuss the reintegration path of each of the residents. They have an ambition that everyone who

**Slidreøyas venner:** Valdres prison has its own friends' association called Slidreøyas venner ('friends of the island Slidre'). The association is unique in a Norwegian context and was started by the politician who initiated the establishment, Åge Hovengen. It is still active, and they e.g. apply for funding for new buildings and arrange reintegration activities.



*In addition to the market in the city-centre, Valdres sell their products at self-service sales stalls called 'the market of honesty', which can be found in several locations around the village. Photo: Valdres prison*

<sup>32</sup> This was only mentioned by the staff when questioned about NIMBY resistance. They thought that the community was unaware of the change, and that this was one of several reasons why there were no complaints from the locals. It did not seem like the staff had experienced much issues in conjunction with the changed population. See notes and explanation for further elaboration on changes in the prison population (appendix).

leaves the prison shall have a place to live, a job/somewhere to study, and someone to call/an appointment upon release. This goal is allegedly reached with next to all residents released from Valdres.

Workplaces inside the prison include a carpentry workshop, a mechanical workshop, a laundry room, a garden and a kitchen, which is typical for Norwegian prisons.

Some of the residents work outside the prison and therefore leave the prison daily. For example, they go to work in the market downtown.

The prison also occasionally arranges activities/trips outside of the prison (e.g. a yearly pilgrimage). However, that has happened less during the covid-19 pandemic. The residents can apply to leave the prison for other reasons, for example, to meet their family in a different environment or go clothes shopping.



*The cabins for the residents are seen in the background. Photo: Private*

Evening activities include going to the gym, playing music, going to the library, going for trips outside the prison, depending on the day and availability of staff. Other activities include weekly shopping in the local grocery store, skiing, canoeing, volleyball and table tennis.

Valdres also offers occasional courses, for example, forklift courses, machine operator courses, first aid courses and courses in finances and debts. In addition, they use the competence of the prison staff and locals to provide other types of training, for example, fishing classes.

Furthermore, the employees and people imprisoned at Valdres have developed their own course (in cooperation with i.a. Wayback) called 'Tenk ut' reflection groups, which has received national and international attention. The main tool used during these sessions is 'reflection cards' (photographs taken by people in detention), which are used to reflect on one's own life and experiences. The user perspective is key in this course, meaning that one person with lived experience leads the session together with one employee.

## Community-integration

### *Location and architecture:*

Valdres prison is located in idyllic landscapes in the municipality of Vestre Slidre. Vestre Slidre is a small municipality, with only 2,200 inhabitants. It has a small city centre and is an area with quite a lot of tourism.

The prison is located on a small island, which one can drive to. The island is owned by a farmer, who lives right next to the prison together with his family. The Norwegian Correctional Service rents the prison area and buildings from him. The buildings mirror the local architecture, and the prison hence blends in with the local community. It consists of wooden buildings painted in red and black, similar to the nearby houses. If unaware, it is unlikely that bystanders would guess that Valdres is a prison.



*The architecture and surroundings of Valdres does not remind much of a traditional prison. Shown is a lavvu, a dwelling traditionally used by the indigenous Sami people, available for the residents at Valdres. Inside is a sitting area and a fireplace. The reflection groups are occasionally conducted here. Photo: Private*

Valdres prison previously used to be a campsite. This is reflected in the architecture, which consists of main houses and small cabins. Inside the main houses, one will find an administration, rooms for visits from family and friends, meeting rooms, a library, the school and a kitchen with a canteen. The residents live in small cabins, some in shared rooms and some in single rooms. The (informal) rule is that upon arrival, one starts living in a shared room, while after a while, one can 'progress' into a single room. The residents have built and designed parts of the remaining buildings themselves, for example, the art inside the workshop and a small cabin called 'hope', used for conversations/sessions with the priest.

### *Interaction with the community*

Valdres runs a market in the centre of the city, which is usually open every Friday, August to October. Here, the residents sell the goods they have produced inside the prison. Their garlic (Russian garlic which can survive in a cold climate) and Valdresrosa (local decorative item to be put up on barns) have been their most popular items. People have been coming from all over the country to buy the garlic and almost all local barns have one of the decorative items.

At times, they arrange dinners at a long table next to their sales stall in the marketplace, where everyone from the local community are able to participate for free. They also do catering for local weddings, confirmations<sup>33</sup> and baptisms. During the summer, they received a request from the municipality to run a café at the town hall. During Christmas, the oldest kids aged 5-6 in the local kindergarten wrapped and gave away toys to the fathers in the prison. As such, the children who come to visit their dad have something to play with. The aim of this initiative is to teach the children in the village about care and compassion for people in a different life situation. When picking up the gifts, the children get to ask the questions they have about life in prison. In return, the residents at Valdres have made self-produced items for the kindergarten (e.g. birdhouses).

Some of the residents at Valdres participate in voluntary work at 'Stabburshella', which is a local meeting place. It is open to everyone, but has a special focus on user involvement and reaching out to people with mental health or drug related challenges. According to the staff and people imprisoned at Valdres, these kinds of interactions contribute to a more inclusive and accepting local community.

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

- About Valdres prison at the official website of the Norwegian Correctional Service: <https://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/innlandet-kriminalomsorgen-innlandet-avd-lavere-sikkerhet-valdres.5024039-237612.html>
- Official Facebook-page: <https://www.facebook.com/Fengselet-i-Valdres-p%C3%A5-Slide%C3%B8ya-354411454740358/>
- About the products produced in the prison: <https://www.prisonmade.no/fengsler/valdres-fengsel>
- About the garlic production: <https://www.datsja.no/blogg/2016/3/6/to-hvitlk-en-munk-og-et-fengsel-i-valdres>
- About the 'Tenk ut' reflection groups: <https://frifagbevegelse.no/forside/cristian-27-er-tidligere-straftedomt-na-er-han-tilbake-i-fengsel-for-a-rehabiliterer-innsatte-6.183.526297.bed0f911b0>
- About the gift exchange with the local kindergarten: <https://www.nrk.no/innlandet/barnehagen-droppa-adventskalender-til-seg-sjolv-og-gav-til-fengselet-i-staden-1.15302264>



*The main area of the prison is located in the centre of the island. Photo: Gule sider*

**Kriminalomsorgen Innlandet,  
avdeling lavere sikkerhet,  
Valdres**

Built: 1985

Capacity: 25 males

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Valdres

<sup>33</sup> A confirmation is a ceremony whose purpose is to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. It has a long tradition in Norway and takes place at the age of 15. Confirmations can either be religious or non-religious.