

2.0 High-security prisons

Almost 70 percent of the Norwegian prison population serve their sentence in a high-security prison. The prisons themselves differ in size and architecture. Some people serve their sentences in historic and protected prisons built in the 1860s, others in modern facilities relying heavily on correctional technologies. However, the prisons have extensive security measures in common, such as barriers around the prison area, locked doors and confined spaces. The prison officers are usually uniformed throughout the day. When the residents are not at work, school or participating in leisure activities, supervised by the staff, they must remain in their cells. In Norway, the main rule is that a convicted person starts their sentence in a high-security prison. The recidivism rate after two years for people released from such prisons is about 31 percent.¹⁴ The average expenses per person in a high-security prison was 1.2 million NOK in 2020, compared to about 715.000 NOK in lower-security prisons.¹⁵

2.1 Ålesund fengsel

Introduction

Ålesund fengsel (from now on "Ålesund prison") is a high-security prison for men. It was opened in 1864 and is located at the heart of Ålesund city. Ålesund is one of the 1860s prisons, originally built for the purpose of solitary confinement.

Prison size

Ålesund prison has 27 beds and is a small-scale prison in a Norwegian context.



Photo: GangerRolf / Wikimedia Commons

Differentiation

Security level:

Ålesund prison is a high-security prison and has strict entering and leaving policies. There are yet no walls or fences surrounding the prison. While some of the 1860s prisons got new fences and an outside yard after the ideology of punishment changed, Ålesund's location in the middle of the city and status as protected limits the opportunities for expansion and renovation.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

The front door is locked at all times, except when people are entering or leaving. The prison yard is located in the back of the prison, where the surrounding buildings function as a wall around the yard. There are several static security measures, such as CCTV, metal detectors, bars and locked doors. However, Ålesund relies more on dynamic security than several other prisons due to its size and architecture.

¹⁴ See the Norwegian Correctional Service (2021), page 22

¹⁵ See the Norwegian Correctional Service (2021), page 8

Target group:

Ålesund prison accepts people imprisoned for all categories of offences. As it is a high-security prison, the detained people mainly have longer sentences and/or are imprisoned for relatively severe crimes. Residents with particularly challenging behaviour are, however, transferred to other prisons.¹⁶

Despite being a relatively big city, Ålesund only has one small prison with a high security level. The nearest lower-security prison, Hustad prison¹⁷, is located a two-hour drive away from the city. As a consequence, some people might stay in Ålesund prison even though they could serve their remaining sentence in a lower-security prison. For example, if they want to live close to their family and friends in Ålesund.

Activities:

Ålesund prison has its own school department, which is run in collaboration with Borgund upper secondary school.¹⁸ The school offers teaching in various subjects, such as English, Norwegian and tourism. They also sign certificates when the residents have acquired work experience in the workshops. In addition, Ålesund offers several other courses, sometimes at the request of the current population.

The prison collaborates with the business community in Ålesund and the surrounding area, which orders materials and products from the prison workshops. The carpentry workshop and mechanical workshop make up the largest part of the work operation in Ålesund prison. The residents receive training in technical and industrial production, woodworking, welding, surface treatment and assembling. The training results in a number of quality products. Among the larger products that are produced are impregnated picnic benches, dining tables and coffee tables. Smaller products include drink coasters, 'Sunnmørsfjøla'¹⁹ and wood stacks. These products are sold on the website of the prison, and also at www.prisonmade.no, which is the national page for all products made in Norwegian prisons. The prison also produces wine boxes for a Norwegian wine company based in Piemonte, Italy, and gift boxes in wood for a distillery.



The courtyard of Ålesund prison. The graffiti are made by a resident. Photo: Ålesund prison

Adapting to the circumstances: Ålesund prison have their own 3D printer, which has been used to produce visors during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Coasters hand-made by people incarcerated in Ålesund. Photo: Ålesund prison

¹⁶ In a paper written by Baldursson in 2000, the author noted that the general rule in Iceland is that 'difficult' residents are transferred to small-scale prisons. He argued that this had been successful as serious problems rarely occurred in small-scale prisons, mainly because of the positive staff-resident relationships that are found in these facilities. Contrary to this observation, staff in several of the prisons presented in this report noted that 'demanding' residents were transferred to larger-prisons, because small prisons did not have the staff and resources to meet the needs of these residents. At the time when the paper of Baldursson was written, Iceland had four small prisons with 9-16 beds and one larger prison with 87 beds. The prisons in this report, where the staff mentioned this issue, had between 27 and 60 beds. At the same time, the staff in several of the small-scale prisons stated that they often accepted incarcerated people who struggled to function in large-scale prisons. For example, because of negative influence by other detainees, minor disabilities or mental health challenges. Thus, it seemed as though the small scale facilities were perceived as a good solution for people in need of comprehensive support, however, did not have the resources to handle residents with repetitive violent behaviour or severe mental health issues.

¹⁷ See 3.2 Hustad fengsel.

¹⁸ All Norwegian prisons collaborate with the local upper-secondary school with regard to education. See notes and explanations on the 'import model' for further explanation (appendix).

¹⁹ Local product (chopping board): <https://alesundfengsel.no/produkt/sunnmorsfjola/>

Although the majority of the people detained in Ålesund work at the carpentry workshop or at the mechanical workshop, others do cleaning work, laundry and food distribution.

Ålesund also has a special focus on a healthy diet and lifestyle. Evening activities include workouts in the gym and yoga. The yoga sessions are held by 'Gangsteryoga', an NGO teaching yoga in Norwegian prisons. Among the instructors are people who have previously been incarcerated.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

Ålesund prison is located in the city of Ålesund, the 9th biggest city in Norway. The city has about 52,900 inhabitants, and is known for its big and export-oriented business community.

The prison is located at the heart of the city, in a yellow building. The city of Ålesund is made up of many old buildings similar to the prison, and Ålesund prison hence blends in with the local architecture. As there are no walls or fences, Ålesund does not look like a prison from the outside.

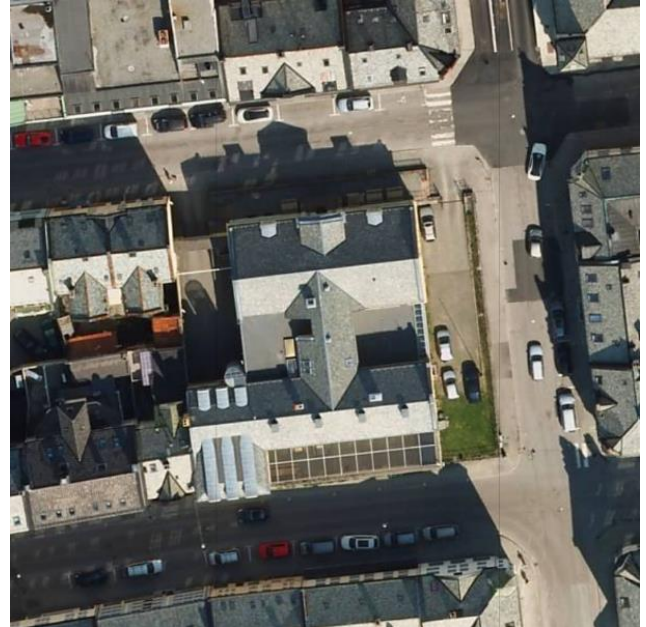
Ålesund is one of the 1860s prisons, and originally consisted of cells, a courthouse and living space for the prison governor. The courthouse is now renovated, and used as a meeting room and entry hall. The house has three floors. In the basement, one will find the prison workshops and laundry room. On the ground floor, one will find the cells as well as a gym, a room for visits and the health department. On the second floor, one will find a large common room, which is used for e.g. meals and sessions with the priest. Except for this room, there is limited space for interaction, as the prison was originally built for solitary confinement.

The building is protected, which leaves limited room for renovation. Its location in the heart of the city surrounded by other protected buildings also limits the opportunities for expansion. The staff and residents, however, have been very creative with the space. Every little corner of Ålesund is taken advantage of to the fullest, even in the basement. Yet, politicians, internal staff and the prison administration have argued that the prison is in need of a replacement. The arguments have been that the interior is in a bad condition and that the infrastructure does not meet the standards of a modern correctional service.

Ålesund was built during a time when they had a completely different view on crime and rehabilitation, and the staff at Ålesund have been concerned with preserving the prison's history. This is reflected in the interior, where e.g. tools used by the guards in the 1860s are displayed on the walls.

Interaction with the community

Ålesund is a high-security prison and despite its location in the middle of the city, the residents do not interact much with the local community. However, they do produce goods that are sold to the locals. Their most popular items have been handmade benches, where the demand has been higher than the supply. These can be found all over the town, in public and private spaces.



Aerial photo of Ålesund prison, centre. Photo: Gule sider

Ålesund fengsel

Built: 1864 / 1907

Capacity: 27 males

Security level: High

Nearest city/town: Ålesund

Nature of interaction: Visit

Publicity/read more:

- About Ålesund prison at the official website of the Norwegian Correctional Service: <https://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/aalesund-fengsel.5056879-237612.html>
- Prisonmade Ålesund: <https://alesundfengsel.no/prisonmade/>
- About Gangsteryoga: <https://www.backinthering.no/gangsteryoga>