

# Etablissement du Simplon – Switzerland

## Introduction



Etablissement du Simplon, also referred to as "Simplon 43," is a detention facility located in Lausanne, the fourth-largest city in Switzerland. It was founded in April 2012. As a public facility, it is under the responsibility of the State Penitentiary Service (SPEN) of the canton of Vaud, located in the French-speaking region of the country. Administratively, Simplon is connected to the neighbouring Bois-Mermet prison. Etablissement du Simplon is primarily a halfway house, but it also functions as a detention facility for a limited number of residents.

The primary purpose of the Simplon facility, as assigned by the SPEN, is to carry out custodial sentences through semi-custodial and work-release programs. The facility aims to achieve two specific objectives: firstly, to prevent a complete disconnection from society and maintain professional integration for individuals serving semi-custodial sentences; and secondly, to facilitate the professional reintegration of convicted individuals through work release programs, following the principle of "work outside, free time in custody."

## Scale

At the time of its opening, Etablissement du Simplon accommodated forty-six male residents in closed, open, or semi-open regimes. The facility now houses a total of forty residents, including six reserved for closed detention under the regime of open normal execution, and the remaining places are used for semi-open and open detention. The distribution of residents is flexible and depends on the current needs of the penitentiary service.

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiation
- Community-integration

Simplon also allows specific individuals to live at home and only report weekly to the facility. In such situations, the facility manages the residents' finances throughout their sentence. Although Simplon exceeds the recommended limit of thirty places for a small-scale facility, it maintains an intimate and personalised structure that allows for close supervision and individualised follow-up.

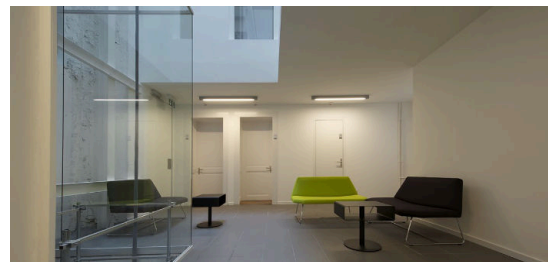
## Differentiation

### Target group

Etablissement du Simplon is a mixed-gender facility that primarily accommodates men, although it remains open to women when necessary. Over the past year, however, there have been no female residents. A partially designated floor is reserved for women, separated by a door that can be opened or closed depending on the composition of the population. When few women are present, the remaining part of the floor may be used for men or for young adults aged between eighteen and twenty-five, allowing the facility to adjust its space according to current needs.

Initially, Simplon only accepted residents aged twenty-five and above, but in recent years, it has extended its services to include younger adults aged between eighteen and twenty-five. Some of these young residents are sentenced under juvenile law but can be placed at Simplon when the circumstances allow only in semi-open detention. Whenever possible, women or younger residents are accommodated in separate areas to ensure appropriate supervision and privacy.

The facility accommodates residents under several detention regimes. Those in semi-detention continue their employment, vocational training, child keeping or studies outside the facility and return to Simplon for rest periods and leisure time. Others are placed under the external work regime, which applies to individuals who



have already served part of their sentence and are permitted to work/ study outside while spending their rest hours within the facility. Finally, the ordinary regime, corresponding to open normal execution, applies to individuals serving short sentences within the facility, often for minor offences or unpaid fines, and includes domestic duties such as cleaning, cooking, and maintenance.

Simplon also includes six places dedicated to closed (ordinary) detention, although the facility was not initially designed for this purpose. As a result, its infrastructure and activity programs are limited, especially for those who cannot leave the premises. Because most residents in open and semi-detention regimes work outside during the day, the facility offers few in-house activities, making closed detention particularly difficult. Daily life for these residents mainly consists of basic household tasks and occasional activities during weekends.

Simplon does not have an internal medical service. Therefore, individuals with significant medical needs are excluded and referred to other facilities for further care. Residents under open normal execution are required to go to a nearby prison for medical appointments, which is often considered inconvenient.

Simplon mainly accommodates individuals serving short sentences, sometimes lasting only a few weeks, particularly for minor offences or unpaid fines. The duration of detention can depend on the amount owed, and some residents even choose to serve time instead of paying. To be placed at Simplon, residents must have employment, which forms an integral part of their reintegration process. Those who fail to comply with facility rules or who misbehave lose their right to return and are transferred to a closed prison.

### **Forms of security**

All forms of security are combined at Etablissement du Simplon, but relational security remains the predominant form. The staff maintain close contact with each resident, and the philosophy of daily life is based on mutual trust and personal responsibility.

There are a total of eighteen staff members. The Assistant Director's office is located on the top floor, near the section designated for closed detention. The management team also includes a chief surveillance officer, ten uniformed and experienced guards who are not formally trained in corrections, one social worker to whom residents can address requests and permission matters, and one part-time educator who organises activities within the facility, particularly for residents in closed detention. The general atmosphere within Simplon is described as friendly and family-like, with trust as the foundation of all interactions.

In terms of static security, the measures remain limited. The building is not fenced, and the windows are not barred. A former X-ray scanner was removed due to technical issues and false alarms; manual checks and handheld scanners are now used as needed. Cameras are installed throughout the facility, providing discreet monitoring. The rooms remain open during the day, while the hallways are locked at night. Random urine or alcohol tests are occasionally conducted, and in some cases, blood tests may be performed if verification is needed.

Regarding technology, residents in open detention are permitted to use smartphones and other personal electronic devices, except in communal areas. Those in closed detention have access to a shared computer.

## Activities

Few activities are offered at Etablissement du Simplon because most residents work or train outside the facility. Residents serving their sentences inside the facility are primarily occupied with household tasks and maintenance duties. Occasionally, the educator organises leisure or cultural activities on weekends.

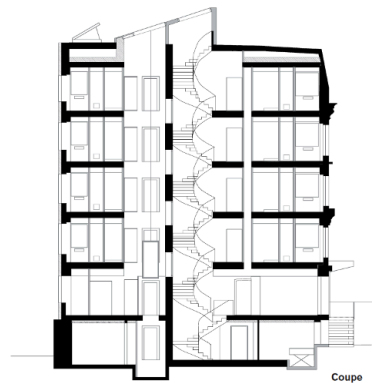
The facility has recently been authorised to provide vocational training in cooking, which represents a significant step toward strengthening its rehabilitative mission. A small workshop also exists, where residents can engage in manual work, such as making paper bags.

Residents are responsible for managing their own appointments and schedules. Those who work and earn money contribute to the cost of their accommodation, paying twenty-one Swiss francs per day. For residents who cannot afford this amount, a reduced rate of one franc (raised at min 10.- on 1.1.2026) per day is available upon request. The Assistant director considers this arrangement both fair and cost-efficient, as most residents are employed and pay taxes, thereby contributing directly to the facility's financial sustainability.

## Community integration

### *Location and architecture*

Etablissement du Simplon is located in the centre of Lausanne, directly behind the central train station, in the canton of Vaud. Lausanne, the fourth-largest city in Switzerland, has a population of approximately 141,000 (as of 2022)<sup>1</sup> and is situated near Lake Léman. The neighbourhood surrounding the facility is typically urban, consisting of residential buildings, shops, and offices. Before being converted into a detention facility, the building served as an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. Its transformation into an open detention house took place without public opposition.



The facility itself consists of private bedrooms, although some are shared. The facilities include communal bathrooms, a shared dining area, a living room, a lounge, a garden, a sports room, and a laundry room. The interiors are clean and tastefully decorated, though residents have limited space for personal items. A small area beside each bed is designated for photos, notes, or drawings.

<sup>1</sup>Lausanne (District de Lausanne, Vaud, Switzerland) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map, Location, Weather and Web Information. (n.d.). City Population, retrieved June 26th, 2023, from [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/switzerland/vaud/vaud/5586\\_\\_lausanne/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/switzerland/vaud/vaud/5586__lausanne/)

### *Interaction with the community*

The primary connection between Simplon and the community is established through the residents themselves, who engage in external work and professional activities outside the facility. These external engagements play a central role in their reintegration process and indirectly contribute to maintaining positive social connections with the broader community.

Beyond work, residents also interact with the community in other ways; they are permitted to visit their families, go shopping, or attend medical appointments, allowing them to maintain a certain degree of autonomy and normality in their daily lives. Such activities occur within the local community and help reinforce their social reintegration. The only exception concerns residents in closed detention, who are not authorised to leave the facility. For medical needs, they must attend appointments at the nearest prison, which can sometimes be perceived as inconvenient or burdensome.

#### **Etablissement du Simplon**

Founded: 2012

Capacity: 40

Autonomy level: Low level of autonomy

Nearest city: Lausanne (Switzerland)

Nature of interaction:

Visited by RESCALED

(06-03-2025)

### **Publicity / Read more**

- About Etablissement du Simplon at the official website of the Prison and Probation Service in the canton of Vaud:  
Etablissement du Simplon. (n.d.). État de Vaud. Retrieved March 6th, 2025, from <https://www.vd.ch/themes/securite/service-penitentiaire/etablisements-penitentiaires/prison-du-bois-mermet/etablissement-du-simplon>
- A brochure about Etablissement du Simplon, including pictures and floor plans of the building at the official website of the Prison and Probation Service in the canton of Vaud:  
Établissement pénitentiaire Simplon 43 - Lausanne. (2012). Canton de Vaud. Retrieved March 6th, 2025, from [https://www.vd.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/organisation/dinf/sipal/fichiers\\_pdf/94\\_Simplon\\_43.pdf](https://www.vd.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/organisation/dinf/sipal/fichiers_pdf/94_Simplon_43.pdf)