

# Detention House Vorst - Belgium

## Introduction

Detention House Vorst is located in Vorst, a municipality near Brussels, the capital of Belgium. The city is officially bilingual in French and Dutch, therefore the facility operates in these two languages. It is the second detention house in Belgium and falls under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government Department of Justice. The facility officially opened in July 2023 and is located on the site of a former women's wing of the old prison.

## Scale

Detention House Vorst has a maximum capacity of 57 residents, exceeding the recommended limit of 30 for a small-scale facility. However, to maintain a small-scale environment, the facility divides residents into several living groups of nineteen people each.

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

## Differentiation

### *Target group:*

Detention House Vorst accommodates men serving short-term sentences of up to three years.<sup>1</sup> Those with convictions for sex crimes, terrorism, or severe psychiatric disorders are not eligible for transfer to this facility. Due to prison overcrowding, this group of individuals was previously monitored electronically instead of being in prison.

The placement process begins with a suitability evaluation, which assesses various conditions. Screening is conducted to evaluate factors such as personal motivation and flight risk. If a person is suitable, the person can be transferred from a traditional prison and they must arrange their own transfer to the facility. Inappropriate behavior during their stay may result in their return to a traditional prison.

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<sup>1</sup>In November 2024, Belgium implemented measures addressing overcrowding, and as a result, detention houses are now temporarily accommodating men serving short-term sentences of up to five years.

### *Forms of security:*

Detention House Vorst uses a combination of security measures, primarily focusing on relational security. This approach emphasizes the importance of building positive relationships between residents and staff. Each resident has a dedicated detention counselor as their primary point of contact, responsible for daily supervision and support. These counselors accompany residents throughout the day, fostering open communication and collaboration. Both staff and residents value a shared "we-story," promoting a sense of community and collective problem-solving.

In addition to relational security, the facility includes several static security measures. It features a locked entrance and is surrounded by high walls, remnants of the former women's prison. Multiple cameras are installed throughout the facility and windows can only be partially opened.

Procedural security encompasses various rules, some specific to the facility and others mandated by prison regulations. However, certain rules are applied more flexibly to facilitate reintegration. For instance, while the law prohibits the possession of cell phones and money, residents at this facility are allowed to have both, though cell phones may only be used in their rooms. Additionally, residents must obtain a license to leave the facility from the Services of the Minister for Justice. These licenses are typically requested at the start of a resident's stay, allowing them to leave for work or education after a two-week observation period, which can be extended if necessary. From 9 p.m. to 6.30 a.m., residents are required to remain in their rooms.

### *Activities:*

Detention House Vorst operates under a community regime where residents are encouraged to engage in communal living and take on responsibilities within their living groups. While they do not manage their personal schedules, they have input regarding mandatory activities they wish to participate in. From day one, residents actively work towards their reintegration, supported intensively throughout the process.

In collaboration with the psychosocial service, residents create a detention plan outlining their goals for activities during their stay, as well as their plans for after release. Activities may include work, volunteer opportunities, education, and sports, occurring both inside and outside the facility. For instance, soccer is scheduled every Tuesday. Residents also share housekeeping duties, ensuring that they keep their rooms and communal areas clean and tidy.

## Community-integration

### *Location and architecture:*

Detention House Vorst is located in the city center of Vorst. This municipality is situated in the Brussels-Capital Region, close to the capital city of Brussels, and is one of the 19 municipalities that comprise the region. The facility is located on the grounds of a former women's prison, known as Berkendael, and next to a primary school. Public transportation is easily accessible at the end of the street.

The architecture of detention house Vorst retains elements of the old prison structure but strives for a homely atmosphere. The original prison doors are unlocked, allowing residents to move freely through the building. The facility consists of three levels: the ground floor, the first floor, and the second floor, which accommodate several living groups of nineteen men each. Each living group has eighteen individual rooms and one double room. On the ground floor, there is an observation unit for incoming men. They typically stay here for at least two weeks before they can move upstairs if they choose to do so.

All residents have a private/double room with a toilet. Showers, kitchens, an arcade, fitness facilities, and a living room are shared by each living group. Common areas such as the garden, visiting rooms, and gymnasium are accessible to all residents in the facility, promoting a sense of community.

### *Interaction with the community:*

Detention House Vorst encourages interaction between the residents and the community by providing opportunities for them to leave the facility for sports, work, and volunteer activities. They organize events such as river clean-ups and invite an external soccer coach to conduct practice sessions within the detention house.

Additionally, the facility collaborates with the Municipality of Vorst. Once a week, a gardener from the municipality helps maintain the detention house garden, while residents often join the gardener in maintaining public spaces in the municipality. Discussions are ongoing with the municipality to explore the possibility of providing participants with certificates for their contributions.

The facility also promotes community engagement through activities like a city walk recently organized by De Rode Antraciet. This event was open to neighborhood residents, and detention house residents were

### Detention House Vorst

Founded: 2023

Capacity: 57

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Vorst  
(Belgium)

Nature of interaction:

Visited by VZW De Huizen  
(01/10/2024)

also invited to participate. The walk along with a coffee moment, fostering connection among all participants.

### **Publicity/ read more**

- About Detention House Vorst at the official website of the Federal Government Department of Justice :

Detentiehuis Vorst. (n.d.). Federale Overheidsdienst Justitie. Retrieved October 11th, 2024, from

[https://justitie.belgium.be/nl/themas\\_en\\_dossiers/gevangenen/belgische\\_gevangenen/detentiehuisen/adres\\_detentiehuis\\_vorst](https://justitie.belgium.be/nl/themas_en_dossiers/gevangenen/belgische_gevangenen/detentiehuisen/adres_detentiehuis_vorst)

- A video about the operation of Detention House Vorst, including visuals of the facility (in French):

Centre d'Action Laïque. (2024, January 17). Maison de détention : une vraie solution ? [Video].

Retrieved October 11th, 2024, from YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VO\\_yUsLclE8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VO_yUsLclE8)