

# Halbe Treppe - Germany

## Introduction

Halbe Treppe is an open detention facility for women located in the Mohorn district of the town of Wilsdruff, in the German state of Saxony. The facility was established in 2022 through a collaboration between the Saxon State Ministry of Justice, Chemnitz Prison, and the NGO Outlaw gGmbH, which is responsible for its daily operations. Halbe Treppe was created to address the lack of suitable settings for open, sentence-based detention for women in Saxony, offering an environment focused on rehabilitation and autonomy.

Women begin their prison sentences at Chemnitz Prison and can then be transferred there. The project was conceived and inspired by Outlaw gGmbH and the Saxon State Ministry of Justice. Simone Stüber, the current director of the facility, put the theoretical concept into practice and places a strong focus on the specific needs and experiences of incarcerated women within the project.

Its approach centers on pro-social learning within a small group structure that encourages a “positive group culture.” The facility supports participants in developing personal goals, preparing emotionally and structurally for release, and building toward an independent and socially responsible life. The name Halbe Treppe (“Half the Staircase”) symbolizes the incremental and reflective journey each woman takes on the path to reintegration.

## Scale

Halbe Treppe has a maximum capacity of four residents, including space for one mother-child pair, though the facility remains flexible and has accommodated two mothers with children when needed. Due to the small size of the facility, it is not divided into separate units or departments. While it operates with a highly personalized approach, it is not formally classified as a small-scale facility, as it falls below the recommended range of 8 to 30 residents.

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiation
- Community-integration

## **Differentiation**

### *Target group:*

Halbe Treppe accommodates adult women, including mothers with children, and is designed to be flexible in adapting to the specific needs of its residents. While there is no fixed age limit for accompanying children, unlike traditional prisons where the maximum is typically three years old, current practice has included hosting children up to 12 years old.

Most residents were previously placed in closed prisons, although this is not a formal requirement. The women housed in the facility are typically convicted of non-violent offenses, such as drug-related crimes, property crimes, and fraud. Placement is generally proposed by the prison administration, and while there are no strict criteria, certain contraindications apply: individuals with physical disabilities, convictions related to organized crime, terrorism, or sexual offenses, and those without legal residence permits are not eligible.

The average length of stay is approximately six months, but this can be adjusted depending on the sentence or individual circumstances, with some residents staying up to a year or longer if needed.

### *Forms of security:*

Halbe Treppe primarily relies on relational security, centering its approach on trust, mutual respect, and close, supportive relationships between staff and residents. Each woman is assigned a dedicated staff member who serves as her primary point of contact for individual follow-up and support, and staff regularly spend time in communal spaces, sharing meals and encouraging a sense of community.

Rather than enforcing strict rules or visible controls, the facility emphasizes personal responsibility and adaptation to individual needs. Static security measures are minimal. There are no uniforms, ankle monitors, or locked doors, and residents hold keys to their own rooms. While there is a fence around the property, it is largely symbolic and not used for security. Staff may conduct occasional bag checks or drug and alcohol testing, and rooms can be inspected if necessary, though such actions require prior resident consent at the start of the stay.

Procedural security is lightly applied and shaped more by external prison system requirements than by internal policy. For example, overnight stays or excursions longer than eight hours require formal approval. Overall, security at Halbe Treppe is embedded in relationships and personal development. When asked about security protocols, staff expressed surprise at the question itself, emphasizing that their work is not grounded in control, but in supporting women.

### *Activities:*

Residents at Halbe Treppe have a high degree of autonomy in shaping their daily routines and long-term goals. While the staff offers support and guidance, it is the women themselves who largely make decisions about how to spend their time. They live together as a self-managed living group, sharing responsibilities like grocery shopping and cooking, which fosters a sense of mutual support.

A typical day includes breakfast, work or outside appointments, cooking, and free time, with the flexibility to go shopping, relax, or participate in weekly conversation groups shaped by the residents' experiences. On the weekends, the facility organizes optional excursions such as visits to museums or swimming trips.

Residents are free to move within the facility at night and within the community during the day. They have unrestricted access to personal mobile phones and laptops, and there are no limitations on visitation. A wide range of activities is available, most of which take place outside the facility, including paid and voluntary work, education, sports, and creative or practical tasks. At the time of the visit, one resident was working in an elderly care facility and another at a beverage distribution center. Voluntary work is also possible within the facility, but there is no obligation to engage in work. The overarching goal is to support each woman in building a stable and self-directed future, with tailored programming that responds to individual needs rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all schedule.

## **Community-integration**

### *Location and architecture:*

Halbe Treppe is located in the village of Mohorn, part of the municipality of Wilsdruff. While the immediate surroundings are rural and quiet, the facility is embedded in a residential neighborhood, surrounded by homes and small community workshops. The area offers a mix of green space and local amenities, and is easily accessible by public transport through a nearby bus stop. Although Mohorn is more remote compared to larger urban centers, the facility's setting supports both tranquility and community integration.

The facility itself is housed on the grounds of the historic Threeside Farm of Mohorn, which includes a barn and expansive garden areas. Architecturally, Halbe Treppe resembles a small, shared apartment. Each resident has a private bedroom and bathroom, while the kitchen, living room, and outdoor areas are shared, except for the mother-child unit, which has its own private kitchen. The atmosphere is intentionally homely. There are no institutional features such as bars, surveillance towers, or staff uniforms. Instead, the design reflects the facility's commitment to normalization and autonomy.

### *Interaction with the community:*

Halbe Treppe maintains consistent and natural ties with the surrounding community. Residents make everyday use of local services, such as public transportation, healthcare, and shopping, just like any other member of the community. Those who are employed work regular jobs in the surrounding area and are covered by standard health insurance, allowing them to access local doctors and other professionals. The facility also collaborates with external organizations to support residents, including addiction counseling and debt counseling services.

**Halbe Treppe**  
Founded: 2022  
Capacity: 4  
Autonomy level: High level of autonomy  
Nearest town: Wilsdruff (Germany)  
Nature of interaction:  
Interviewed by RESCALED (May 2025)

Importantly, there has been no reported resistance from the local population; the facility's presence in the village has not led to any "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) issues. Rather than relying on special programs or segregated services, Halbe Treppe allows residents to engage with the broader community in a normalized way. Its location near event-friendly venues and the historic town center further facilitates organic interaction.

### **Publicity/ read more**

- Minister of Justice Katja Meier's visit to Halbe Treppe and official information from the Saxon Ministry of Justice:  
Sächsisches Staatsministerium der Justiz. (2022, November 11). *Vollzug in freien Formen für weibliche Strafgefangene*. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://www.justiz.sachsen.de/smj/vollzug-in-freien-formen-fuer-weibliche-strafgefangene-7227.html>
- Facility overview and project description by Outlaw gGmbH, the managing NGO:  
Outlaw gGmbH. (n.d.). *Halbe Treppe – Vollzug in freien Formen für Frauen*. Outlaw. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from [https://www.outlaw-ggmbh.de/einrichtung?tx\\_outlaw\\_facility\[uid\]=208&cHash=0d1a24e278b31a5303fea3cc03db892f](https://www.outlaw-ggmbh.de/einrichtung?tx_outlaw_facility[uid]=208&cHash=0d1a24e278b31a5303fea3cc03db892f)
- Article with additional background and photographs of the facility and project:  
Katholische Gefängnisseelsorge in Deutschland. (2023, January 25). *Einrichtung des Vollzugs in freien Formen für weibliche Strafgefangene*. Gefängnisseelsorge. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://gefaengnisseelsorge.net/einrichtung-des-vollzugs-in-freien-formen-fuer-weibliche-strafgefangene>