

Institution Publique de Protection de la Jeunesse (IPPJ) de Saint-Servais – Belgium

Introduction

The Institution Publique de Protection de la Jeunesse (IPPJ) de Saint-Servais is a residential facility for girls located near Namur in Wallonia, the French-speaking region of Belgium. It is the only IPPJ in the Wallonia–Brussels Federation exclusively for girls, meaning young women from across the region, including Brussels, may be placed here. Founded nearly a century ago, the facility will celebrate its centenary in 2026. Staff consider the geographical distance from residents' home environments beneficial, especially for those from urban settings marked by prostitution, substance abuse, or violence.

The IPPJ network forms part of Belgium's public youth protection system and operates under the *décret de l'aide à la jeunesse (18.01.2018)*. Juveniles judges make placement décisions and contact the liaison unit which assigns residents to the institutions according to needs and availability.

Scale

The IPPJ de Saint-Servais accommodates thirty-nine girls across several separate houses. The property's small size allows for close individual follow-up and creates a family-like atmosphere. Each house is dedicated to a particular programme or level of supervision.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiation
- Community-integration

Differentiation

Target group

The facility accommodates girls aged twelve to twenty who have committed offences and are placed under judicial order. Common offences include theft, drug-related crimes, and involvement in prostitution. Residents increasingly present complex psychological or behavioural difficulties. There are no formal

contraindications for admission, and the facility is often used as a last-resort placement when other options have failed. Due to high demand, a waiting list is maintained.

Placement at the facility involves several programme options tailored to the resident's stage of reintegration and needs:

- Service d'Évaluation et d'Orientation (SEVORE): A short-term, eight-place observation unit where residents are assessed for social functioning, psychological needs, and orientation, helping determine the most suitable programme placement.
- Open system education units: Two groups of twelve residents each, hosting girls for an average of three months. Stays may be extended for those with psychological or behavioural difficulties. Residents may have supervised weekend home visits depending on progress.
- Time-out Unit: Short-term accommodation (two weeks to one month) for residents temporarily transferred from other units due to behavioural incidents or crises, aiming to reintegrate them quickly into regular programmes.
- Closed system education unit: A small closed section with five places, physically separated and equipped with camera surveillance, serving as a last-resort measure. Residents attend classes and structured activities on-site, with gradual supervised exposure to outdoor activities.

Residents are placed in these programmes based on judicial decisions and recommendations from the liaison unit.

Forms of security

Security at the IPPJ de Saint-Servais is based on relational and procedural principles, with limited static measures. Most units are open, allowing residents to move freely within designated areas, while the closed system education unit has stricter controls. Staff emphasise trust, communication, and predictability, with isolation used only to ensure the protection of staff members, other young people and the young girl herself.

The multidisciplinary team includes ninety-five staff members, covering educators, social workers, psychologists, one psychiatrist, teachers, nurses, management personnel, surveillance staff, and visiting medical professionals such as doctors. This staffing ensures continuous supervision and comprehensive support for residents' psychological, educational, and health needs.

Activities

The facility integrates educational, therapeutic, and personal development activities. Residents attend classes on-site or follow tailored individual educational plans aimed at reintegration into mainstream schooling or vocational training. Therapeutic support includes individual and group sessions addressing emotional regulation, social skills, and trauma.

Equine therapy is a longstanding feature of the facility, supporting self-confidence, responsibility, and emotional regulation. Weekend activities, creative projects, and outdoor initiatives are organised to strengthen cooperation and self-esteem. Residents in open system education units may participate in weekend home visits after careful assessment and judicial authorisation. All activities are closely coordinated with programme goals and individual reintegration plans.

Community integration

Location and architecture

The IPPJ de Saint-Servais is located in a quiet, semi-rural setting outside Namur, accessible by public transport. The property is large and secluded, providing a safe and reflective environment away from urban influences. The facility consists of several houses, each dedicated to a specific programme, connected by internal paths to create a small village-like atmosphere. Classrooms, therapy rooms, and meadows for equine therapy are located within the estate.

Buildings are functional and domestic in style, reflecting the facility's philosophy of openness and care. Most houses are open, with no physical barriers, while the closed system education unit has limited access and camera surveillance. The grounds include gardens and spaces for outdoor activities, fostering a calm, safe, and supportive environment.

Interaction with the community

Daily interaction with the surrounding community is limited due to the age and judicial status of residents. Girls attend school on-site, and contact with the outside world occurs mainly through family visits when authorised. Occasional collaborations with local organisations or participation in community events take place, but these are exceptional. The facility maintains professional partnerships with

IPPJ Saint-Servais

Founded: 1926

Capacity: 39

Autonomy level: Low level
of autonomy

Nearest city: Namur
(Belgium)

Nature of interaction:
Visited by RESCALED
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external organisations in education, vocational training, and mental health care to support gradual reintegration after leaving the IPPJ.

Publicity / Read more

- About the Institution Publique de Protection de la Jeunesse (IPPJ) de Saint-Servais
Aide à la Jeunesse. IPPJ de Saint-Servais. Retrieved March 6, 2025, from <https://www.aidealajeunesse.cfwb.be>
- About the European Mettray Organisation and its international collaboration network
EUROMET – European Mettray Organisation. Who we are. Retrieved March 6, 2025, from <https://www.eurometalliance.org/who-we-are>