

Living Israel NGO M - Estonia

Introduction

Living Israel NGO (Living Israel Kongregatsioon MTÜ) is a faith-based facility located in Tallinn, Estonia. Founded in 2014, the facility offers housing, addiction recovery, and reintegration support primarily for individuals leaving prison (particularly those granted early release) as well as for others struggling with addiction. Residents may enter the program at various stages: at the beginning or end of their sentence, or after release as part of their ongoing sobriety journey.

The facility is operated by the Estonian branch of the international Living Israel network, a Christian missionary organization with roots in Israel and active communities across several countries. The Tallinn facility was initially established by Israeli missionaries Ljova Mordahhajeve and Vadim Koiffman, who laid the foundation before entrusting the day-to-day leadership to local staff.

Operating as a closed facility, Living Israel maintains a structured and disciplined environment designed to support recovery and prevent relapse. Through a formal agreement with the Estonian prison system, the facility provides accommodation, spiritual and psychological counseling, and access to structured reintegration programs to incarcerated people who will be released early.

Scale

Living Israel NGO typically has a maximum capacity of 22, which makes it a small-scale facility.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiation
- Community-integration

Differentiation

Target group:

The facility is intended for adult men and women who are struggling with addiction. Admission to the program requires a commitment to sobriety and a willingness to adhere to the center's house rules and structured environment. The facility does not accept individuals solely seeking shelter, those under the influence at the time of arrival, or individuals with serious mental health disorders that would prevent participation in the structured program. The placement is initiated through direct contact: the prospective

resident, often currently in a different detention facility, contacts the center and receives an interview. If necessary after acceptance, staff will arrange transportation from the prison.

Residents typically stay between six months and two years, depending on their progress and individual circumstances. The facility is supported by three permanent staff members and a Ukrainian volunteer family, one of whom was a former participant in the program and now helps lead soup kitchen services and worship activities.

Forms of security:

The facility combines static, procedural, and relational security to ensure a safe and structured environment. Static security is maintained through 24/7 on-site staff presence and locked exterior doors. Depending on individual cases, the facility may also apply additional measures such as electronic ankle monitors, drug tests, and searches, particularly when mandated by court decisions. There are no perimeter fences, and staff do not wear uniforms, though residents themselves are required to.

Procedural security is built into the facility's daily operations and rules. For the first three months, residents are not permitted to use personal phones, and television and radio are prohibited. Alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and romantic relationships are strictly forbidden, and violations, especially verbal abuse or persistent rule-breaking, can result in dismissal from the program. Relational security is also a defining feature of the facility. Many staff members, including the volunteers, have previously gone through the program themselves or have direct experience with incarceration. This shared background enables them to build trust with current residents and encourage a supportive, empathetic environment.

Activities:

The daily program at Living Israel NGO is highly structured, especially during the first three months of residency. This initial stabilization period is designed to help participants establish healthy routines and focus on recovery without external distractions. During this time, residents are only permitted to leave the facility for work and must return by 19:00.

All residents follow a consistent weekday schedule, beginning with a wake-up and preparation period between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m., followed by breakfast and a morning group training or counselling session. Work, which is mandatory, takes place both inside and outside the facility, split into morning and afternoon

blocks, with a short lunch break in between. In the afternoon, residents have a blend of independent and structured activity time, which includes joint evening activities and personal free time.

Daily chores, such as cleaning and housekeeping, are part of the program and help residents develop practical life skills. Two residents serve as designated cooks for the facility throughout their stay. Residents are aided in finding external employment, and financial management support is provided early on to build budgeting and savings skills. Education is also a key focus, with mandatory daily lessons encouraging self-development and intellectual growth. Residents also have access to a gym, musical instruments (such as piano and guitar), board games, and a small library. Additional support is provided through a range of therapeutic and spiritual programs, including pastoral care, psychological counselling, and sessions with mentors who have lived experience.

Sport and recreational activities are offered both on-site and externally. Every Sunday, residents have the opportunity to play football at the nearby A. Le Coq Arena. As they progress through the program, their autonomy increases: after three months, they may begin to use mobile phones, receive visitors, and attend appointments such as those with the unemployment office or social worker. After six months, depending on behavior, they may also be granted home visits during scheduled day-leave periods.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

Living Israel NGO is located in the Nõmme district of Tallinn, Estonia, a suburb of the capital. The facility is somewhat removed from residential neighborhoods and the area is quiet, but public transportation is easily accessible.

The current building was brought into use four years ago, following earlier iterations of the program that operated across multiple rented sites. This newer facility was specifically chosen for its size and suitability to house both the rehabilitation center and the affiliated church. Architecturally, the building has an Israeli influence, with design elements that create a warm, vibrant, and energizing environment. Bright tapestries, red leather sofas, and glass-walled halls filled with potted tropical plants contribute to a welcoming environment.

Residents share bedrooms, bathrooms, a kitchen, a dining room, and multiple common areas. The large dining table in the communal dining hall fosters a family-style atmosphere during meals. Shared spaces are also available for workshops, educational sessions, and leisure activities. Residents seeking solitude or spiritual reflection often spend time in the chapel located within the building.

Interaction with the community:

Although Living Israel NGO is a closed facility and the building's location limits spontaneous interaction with the public, the facility actively encourages integration through structured partnerships and community service. Residents are employed through partnerships with companies such as "Puhastusprof" cleaning services, which provide stable work placements. The center also works closely with the probation services, psychiatric hospitals, local prisons, and the umbrella organization Avatud Lootuse Fond, which coordinates Christian rehabilitation programs in the region. Local government cooperation further strengthens the program.

Residents also participate in outreach initiatives that extend the facility's presence beyond its physical walls. These include weekly food aid distributions, charitable evangelism efforts on weekends at Tallinn's central market, and clothing drives for people experiencing homelessness. The facility is actively involved in organizing and supporting Christian community events and offers testimony and educational outreach at other rehabilitation centers and parishes such as Oleviste Church. A key part of this outreach includes sharing lived experience narratives to promote understanding and hope.

Living Israel NGO is additionally linked to a social enterprise (its affiliated food bank) which provides ongoing food support to both individuals and other charitable organizations. Finally, residents take part in local football tournaments, offering a recreational and social outlet that also fosters integration in the community.

Living Israel NGO

Founded: 2014

Capacity: 22

Autonomy level: Restricted level of autonomy

Nearest Town: Tallinn (Estonia)

Nature of interaction:

Visited by NGO Village of Hope (February 2025)

Publicity/ read more

- About Living Israel NGO:

Living Israel. (n.d.). *Living Israel – Bringing Hope to the Streets*. Living Israel. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://livingisrael.org/>