

# Correctional Facility

December 10, 2025

I alight from the train at D. and walk to the correctional facility. The path leads through the small village and past fields. A group of men wearing orange vests comes towards me, possibly equipped for collecting rubbish—it looks like they are coming from where I am headed. A bridge crosses the motorway, separating the facility from the village. The scale of the prison complex becomes more apparent with every step across the bridge. At the main entrance, I join a group of around 40 law students whom I am accompanying today.

The complex is impressively vast, surrounded by two rows of fences and barbed wire. The entrance consists of three gates. We are collected by a prison officer and led through the gates into a covered area where security checks for visitors, delivery personnel, and others take place. Each gate must be closed again before the next one opens, so the arrival process itself takes some time. We have to hand over our keys and ID in a paper envelope and pass through a scanner. Received by the prison director, we are led through two further gates into an exercise yard, in the middle of which stands a decorated Christmas tree. The expansive site resembles a village, encompassing several freestanding buildings, green spaces, a sports field, and plots of land, all surrounded by fences and barbed wire, with fields and mountains visible in the background.

The facility houses inmates in regular detention, measure-based detention, and preventive detention.

We are led through the regular detention section in small groups. All doors in the building have multiple locks. Next to each lock there is a white or orange circular dot. I ask a member of staff what these mean. He evades the question and gives no answer. They are probably technical markings relating to the locking system.

We are led to a prison workshop and I ask about the level of pay. The director informs me that inmates receive approximately 40 CHF per day.

I ask what happens if an inmate attacks a member of prison staff: “solitary setting”. The principle is: if you obey the rules, you get something in return. If you disobey the rules, you are subject to further restrictions, basic things are taken away from you, and you are placed in the „solitary setting“ — a euphemism for solitary confinement. In the surveillance center there are at least 10 screens. Next to it is a room where parcels and letters are X-rayed. Two staff members push packages through the machine, just like at an airport. One inmate has ordered a book titled „10 Ways to Kill Someone with Your Bare Hands.“ „Inmates are allowed to order any book they wish to read. We are not permitted to intervene. However, in cases of suspicious orders, we monitor the person more closely and also speak to them about it,“ explains a member of the staff.

In one of the freestanding buildings, a pilot program for preventive detention is underway. This is where the prison director used to live with his family. Six inmates subject to preventive detention live here as a shared household. „These inmates are suitable for this because they get along well with others and have demonstrated good behavior,“ the prison officer explains. On the first floor there is an open living area with sofas, a television, a dining area, and a kitchen. On the second floor are the six rooms — not cells — which are not locked overnight either. The residents were permitted to furnish the house according to their own wishes within a set budget. Puzzle pictures hang on the walls. The windows have bars on the outside.

Unlike the other inmates, those subject to preventive detention are free to move around the site (except into the measure-based detention building) and to participate in all available activities such as work, classes, sport, and so on.

Although those under preventive detention are granted considerably more freedom and autonomy, they are nonetheless confined like the other inmates and live on the same grounds, in a prison. They may no longer be punished, as they have already served their sentence. Yet they are not permitted to re-enter society either, since they continue to be classified as too dangerous to be released.

Here in prison, the inmates move from their cells to the prison workshop, to the sports field, to classes. Just like in life outside the walls.