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PREMIER CONGRÈS DES NATIONS UNIES EN MATIÈRE DE
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ETABLISSEMENTS OUVERTS

LES ÉTABLISSEMENTS DU TYPE OUVERT
EN BELGIQUE

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NATIONS UNIES

Summary

There are four open institutions in Belgium: two in the form of schools (Marneffe and Hoogstraten) and two in the form of farms (St-Hubert and Ruiselede). The school-type institutions are intended primarily to receive young first offenders between the ages of 16 and 25 years who seem capable of benefiting from the open system. Their sentence must not exceed 20 years and they must still have at least 9 months to serve. In addition, those institutions also receive adult first offenders under 40 years of age whose sentence does not exceed 10 years. The latter are specially selected.

First offenders who do not meet the above conditions but are nevertheless capable of benefiting from an open regime are sent to the prison-type institutions if they are suited for farm work.

The Marneffe school-type institution, which receives only French-speaking offenders, is an old chateau near the town of Huy. It has neither a surrounding wall nor barred windows. It accommodates an average of 100 inmates. The regime is congregative during the day and separate at night. The cell has been replaced by a small room. From the moment a prisoner is admitted he is placed under a discipline to which he freely consents and he pledges on his honour to observe the rules in force in the institution. The functions of the staff are particularly delicate and specialized. Their main duty is to observe, supervise and educate the prisoners. Although that is particularly the function of the director, the deputy director, the chaplain, the housemaster and the teachers, an active part in the operation of the system is also taken by the technicians and security staff of all ranks.

Half the population of the institution is assigned to farm work (market-gardening) and the remainder to carpentry, household tasks or building maintenance.

General and vocational training is given, and these are also study groups at which attendance is optional. Team sports and gymnastics are a regular feature.

A scout group, in which membership is optional, has been set up in the institution. More than half the inmates have joined. The group is organized along the same lines as scout groups outside, and when its various sections meet, none of the prison staff is present. The group is visited by outside scout troops and goes on outings. Rovers are authorized to go camping for several days at a distance of 100 kilometres from the institution.

There is also at Marneffe an organization known as the « *solidarité* » (mutual aid), which has a twofold programme consisting, first in the distribution of food, tobacco and delicacies to needy prisoners from gifts provided anonymously by their companions, and, second, in the manufacture of objects made by volunteers and sold outside. The proceeds from such sales, together with the profit derived from the operation of a canteen for visitors on Sunday, are used to help the needy families of prisoners and for the distribution of toys to the children of prisoners and to other children.

During their leisure time, the prisoners have at their disposal recreation facilities in the form of a radio, a library and parlour games. Every week a film is shown.

Although Marneffe has been in existence for too short a time — it was established in 1947 — for definite conclusions to be drawn, there is good reason to be very satisfied with the results obtained. The number of escapes is very small and the percentage of recidivism is substantially lower than among prisoners in other institutions.

The Hoogstraten school-type institution, which was opened in 1931, is situated in the northern part of the country near the town of Turnhout. It is exclusively for Flemish-speaking offenders and at present, has 125 inmates. Although the régime and activities are about the same as at Marneffe, industrial work is more developed and training is given in printing, smithy, carpentry, baking and radio repair. Whereas the prisoners admitted to Marneffe are first observed in a closed prison, there is at Hoogstraten a special section for incoming prisoners. The information given concerning the staff at Marneffe applies equally to Hoogstraten.

The St-Hubert farm-type institution, which is situated near the town of the same name, has an average of 35 prisoners, who are assigned to farm work. The régime is congregative both day and night. It receives French-speaking prisoners, while Flemish-speaking prisoners are sent to Ruiselede, which is the same type of institution. There are prison farms. In both cases, the director deals with matters concerning the régime and a technical staff provides vocational training corresponding to the activities of the institution.

This archiving project is a collaborative effort between United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and American Society of Criminology, Division of International Criminology. Any comments or questions should be directed to Cindy J. Smith at CJSmithphd@comcast.net or Emil Wandzilak at emil.wandzilak@unodc.org.