



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Boards' Charter Flight Monitoring Team

**For reporting year
1 January 2022 – 31 December 2022**

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Introductory sections 1 – 2

1. The role of the Independent Monitoring Boards' (IMB) Charter Flight Monitoring Team

The Charter Flight Monitoring Team (CFMT) is appointed on an administrative, non-statutory basis by agreement between Home Office Immigration Enforcement (HOIE) and the IMB Management Board. The CFMT's role is to monitor and report on the conditions and treatment of people detained under immigration powers who are removed from the UK on charter flights. Its remit begins when the individual is transferred to the custody of overseas escorts in an immigration removal centre (IRC) and ends at the point of handover to local officials at the receiving destination. It is best practice for the CFMT to attend the briefing to overseas escorts when they muster for an operation.

2 Executive summary Background to this report

2.1.1 The CFMT presents its findings for the calendar year 2022. It monitored ten charter removal operations to the destinations listed in section 7 of this report as well as the relocation operation to Rwanda on 14 June until it was aborted and collections for a charter to Vietnam on 18 January.

2.1.2 Returnees to Europe were principally individuals transferred from prison to an IRC for their removal. The cohort on the November charter to Albania included men who had crossed the channel in small boats and were held in the Short-Term Holding Facility in Manston, near Dover. The cohorts on the long-haul flights included foreign national offenders, but not exclusively.

2.1.3 Enforced removal can be stressful. Some returnees were acutely distressed. A few operational misjudgments and some poor escorting practice may have added to their distress.

2.1.4 HOIE achieved contemporaneous oversight of many aspects of the removal process on the day. A contract monitor flew on all the flights the CFMT observed. Contract monitors also attended collections from IRCs, but HOIE did not appear to have the resource to cover collections from all the IRCs involved in an operation.

Departments of state and contractors

2.1.5 The aircraft were again chartered by HOIE. Mitie Care & Custody Limited (C&C) remained HOIE's escort contractor. Healthcare services were again provided by IPRS Aeromed contracted by C&C.

2.2 Main judgements

2.2.1 Was returnees' safety achieved?

Appropriate measures were taken to safeguard returnees against infection during the early months of the year when the Covid restrictions remained in force.

Physical restraints were put on some returnees and some also experienced use of force, including some who had already been identified as at risk of suicide or self-harm.

The length of time for which a restraint or use of force was retained was questionable in some cases.

2.2.2 Were returnees treated fairly and with humanity?

Returnees were generally treated kindly and with respect throughout the removal process.

However, there were significant exceptions as this report demonstrates including,

- confining returnees in parked vehicles for long periods,
- the unsuitability of the area in which women were assembled for the West Africa charter,
- returnees surrounded unnecessarily by escorts,
- apparent lack of information and
- failure to ensure that interpreting facilities were always available and used when needed.

2.2.3 Were returnees' health and wellbeing needs met?

The paramedics' services during the removal process appeared sufficient. HOIE's insistence on removing or trying to remove vulnerable people, some perhaps with mental health problems, may accord with policy but it is morally questionable.

2.2.4 Were returnees well prepared for their removal?

The CFMT cannot assess to what extent returnees had been prepared and supported in advance by custodial staff in the IRC or by local HOIE officials. Returnees' anxieties around financial support indicated a lack of engagement by local staff or officials.

The returnees, with the exception of one cohort, knew they were due to be removed before they first met the escorts. The cohort collected from Manston for the charter to Albania on 17 November did not.

Returnees were generally offered a leaflet, in their own language, about the process on the day and an official complaints form, by the escorts not by local custodial staff or officials.

2.3 Recommendations

To HOIE

2.3.1 The extent of use of force or of restraint on returnees to European destinations on the one hand and on returnees to non-European destinations on the other hand was noticeable. It must be kept under constant review.

2.3.2. The room in Derwentside IRC in which the women for the West Africa charter were assembled was not suitable for the numbers involved; the issue was exacerbated by timing (see section 4.2.6). They were individually transferred to the custody of the escorts in a small search room, which achieved privacy but was not ideal. Alternative arrangements must be set up for any future charter collections from that IRC.

2.3.3 Returnees' understandable anxieties about money could and should be ameliorated in advance. Custodial staff or Home Office officials in the IRC must better manage expectations around returnees' applications for a resettlement grant under the facilitated returns scheme. Secondly, HOIE must agree a best practice approach with the Prison Service to resolve the problem of returnees being removed with postal orders, received in prison, which they cannot cash in the destination country: see sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.

2.3.4 In each of its last four annual reports, the CFMT recommended that the use of airports far from the southeast be discontinued. The recommendation was rejected each time and the practice continued during the reporting period. The issue is perhaps now complicated by the opening of further detention sites. Positioning is therefore a core consideration. Returnees should be accommodated for removal in IRCs which are as close as possible to the departure port, as a matter of practice, not aspiration: see section 4.7.6.

To HOIE and C&C

2.3.5 The practice of confining returnees for hours in parked vehicles is unacceptable: see section 4.7. The practice should cease.

2.3.6 The need assessments on which interpreters were booked for returnees to Europe were often unreliable. The assessments were made by IRC staff. It appeared that interpreters may not have been booked if a returnee had some knowledge of English. The information escorts must communicate is new and may seem complicated. The quality of these assessments must be improved. Additionally, the escort contractor must ensure that its staff consistently use Bigword, a telephone interpreting service available to them. The practice of using an English-speaking returnee to interpret for another returnee must cease. It is clear from the official responses to the CFMT's reports on the November and December operations that this is unacceptable to HOIE and the escort contractor: see section 4.13.

To C&C

2.3.7 The person escort record (PER) is an official record and should be a reliable source of evidence. This was not consistently achieved. It must be: see sections 4.16.4 and 4.16.5.

2.4 Progress since the CFMT's last report

2.4.1 Three welcome changes in escorting practice were introduced during the year: filming a returnee's pat down search, allowing returnees to walk up the plane steps without escorts holding their arms, unless a risk assessment indicates otherwise, and allowing returnees to use a toilet on the plane in privacy, subject again to individual risk assessment.

2.4.2 Use of advance escorting parties has not reduced the length of time some returnees spend in parked vehicles. This remains a key issue of concern.

Evidence sections 3 – 6

3 Safety

3.1 Suicide and self-harm risks

3.1.1 Known vulnerability of this order is not of itself a barrier to enforced removal. A care plan should be created, tailored to the needs of the individual whose risk of suicide or self-harm in the face of removal has been detected in the IRC (care plan).

3.1.2 To the best of the CFMT's knowledge five people left their IRCs on current care plans for removal on long-haul flights. Three were additionally on constant observation lest they harm themselves. A few were nonetheless put in restraints. The escorts' decision whether or not to put a vulnerable person in a restraint may be a difficult judgement call in the heat of the operational moment, but it needs to be carefully weighed.

3.1.3 To the best of the CFMT's knowledge, none of the returnees to Europe left on a current care plan.

3.2 Use of restraint and of force

3.2.1 Detention Service Order 07/2016 (the DSO) regulates the use of restraint and force on escorted moves on charters. Practitioners must comply with the requirements of the Home Office manual on escorting safely. Permissible criteria for use of restraint or of force include to prevent self-harm and to prevent individuals obstructing their removal.

3.2.2 The DSO expectations are that any use of restraint or force:

- must be reasonable, necessary and proportionate having regard to all the circumstances;
- must be fully documented;
- should be for the minimum time possible and the duration continuously reviewed and
- should be filmed.

3.2.3 The waist restraint belt (WRB) was the most commonly used form of restraint. It can be applied in one of three positions: free, which allows unrestricted arm and hand movement; restricted, which allows some arm and hand movement; and secure, which totally restricts such movement. The WRB can be adjusted from one position to another. If the returnee does not physically resist application of the belt, and no force is used to achieve compliance, the use is recorded as a passive application.

3.2.4 Seven of the operations monitored in the reporting period were to European destinations. There was no use of force or of a WRB in either of the operations to Romania, or that to Lithuania, with one use of the WRB in the operation to Poland, two uses in the September operation to Albania, one use in the November operation and one in the December operation preceded by a brief application of force. The CFMT monitored fewer operations to Europe last year than in the reporting period. An exact assessment of whether the numbers between the two years point to an increase or decrease is not possible.

3.2.5 Four of the operations monitored during the reporting period were to non-European destinations. The CFMT recorded nine uses of a WRB and 17 of force. Examples:

- A Zimbabwean was put into a WRB when he met the escorts. He was on a current care plan: his vulnerability was known. The man's subsequent non-compliant behaviour before he left the IRC and later during the journey resulted in an increase in the level of this restraint and various uses of force, including putting him in ankle straps to carry him from the IRC to the van in which he was to travel to the airport. He was violent once in the van, head butting escorts and punching the nose of one of them. The ankle straps were removed during the journey to the airport. He was calm as he walked up the steps into the plane and apologised to escorts whom he had hurt. He was fully compliant during the flight, until presented with his medication pack to take with him. He became angry and tried to headbutt or bite escorts near him. Force was used to control him and he was cuffed for the rest of the journey. The CFMT found no evidence that anyone tried to understand why the medication pack was a trigger for someone known to be vulnerable, despite the fact that there was time during the flight for this to have been considered.
- Another Zimbabwean had been removed from association in his IRC: this means he had been segregated. He was considered non-compliant from the start and refused to communicate with his escorts. He was put in a WRB. He was carried onto the plane.
- A Jamaican had been removed from association in his IRC following violent incidents earlier in the day. He was taken out of his room by five IRC officers kitted up in personal protection equipment, essentially riot gear. The escorts put him in a WRB in the secure position. He was carried on to the plane. He did not resist.
- Another Jamaican told the escorts when he met them that he would be killed if he returned to Jamaica and they might as well cut his throat then and there. He was put in a WRB. He was calm and compliant throughout. The CFMT has no evidence that he had the means on him to harm himself had he wanted to.
- Further examples are cited in sections 3.2.6 and 3.2.7.

3.2.6 Two of the seven men to be relocated to Rwanda were subject to care plans and under constant observation. One was put in a WRB. The CFMT considered the decision reasonable as he had confirmed to the escorts that he still had thoughts of self-harm and when he was searched the escorts discovered that he had the means to do it with him.

3.2.7 Three in the same cohort were subjected to use of force, one briefly in his van and two once on the plane and in their seat belts. The two started to scream out their fear and distress, each trying to hurl his torso and head backwards and forwards. Each was still in his WRB, and each was seated with an escort on either side, his arms tightly held, his head controlled by an escort facing him. The legs of one had been 'secured'. The CFMT considered that the head control on one man may have involved excessive pressure. The head control of the other appeared more measured.

3.2.7.1 There was nothing the two men could physically do, except possibly hurt themselves and the head controls were continuously applied to prevent this. The men's actions were sustained over more than 20 minutes up to the moment when the senior escort on board announced that the flight was cancelled.

3.2.8 Use of a WRB should be a carefully judged decision and not a default reaction to a returnee simply saying he did not want to go. The CFMT noted escorts' differing reactions to such statements. Examples from the Rwanda operation:

- One man was clearly unhappy when he met the escorts and said "I am so tired". The senior escort discussed him with colleagues and decided against putting him in a WRB. Another, also unhappy, asked the escorts why he was being forced to go: he offered no

physical resistance, nor did he use aggressive language. He was put in a WRB on the decision of a different senior escort. A third, on a care plan, was unhappy and asked the escorts not to “tie” him. He was not put in a WRB.

3.2.9 The CFMT always covered use of restraint or of force in its charter reports. The HOIE’s formal responses to the CFMT’s reports on the uses in the Zimbabwe, Jamaica and Rwanda operations were as follows:

- on Zimbabwe, that the uses of force had been justified and proportionate but the failure to film all the incidents was not acceptable;
- on Jamaica, that there were no issues; and
- on Rwanda, that it had been necessary, justified and proportionate.

3.2.10 The quality of some reports on use of restraint or force was poor, including for the Rwanda operation. HOIE accepted the CFMT’s criticisms. For example, failure to record that one of the men had had his legs ‘secured’: specifically, why, how, by whom, and for how long?

3.2.11. The duration of some uses of force was questionable: examples:

- The second Zimbabwean mentioned in section 3.2.5 was not released from his WRB until five hours after take-off, seemingly because of his perceived defiant manner by refusing to communicate with anybody. He was not obliged to. The CFMT was not confident risk had been continuously reviewed or that it was necessary to keep him in his WRB for so long.
- A West African was resistant to being searched and was argumentative. He had a legal case pending. He was put in a WRB in the least restrictive position. The man calmed down. News that his removal had been cancelled came through after he had arrived at the airport and his WRB was taken off. The CFMT queried why it had been retained for so long after he was calm.

3.2.12 For years, returnees’ arms were held as they walked up the plane steps by an escort walking with them on either side. The contact was known as a guiding hold and was made on a blanket basis. The practice was abandoned in January. Each returnee was to be allowed to walk up the steps freely, albeit with an escort on either side, unless an individual risk assessment indicated otherwise. The CFMT welcomed this change. It took a little time to embed. Whilst the hands-on approach was unusual by the end of the reporting period, the CFMT observed that the practice of close escorting was the norm – three, or four or five escorts walking up the steps with the returnee, but not touching him or her.

3.3 Infection control measures: see section 5.3 of this report.

4 Fair and humane treatment

There is an overlap between some of these considerations and those reported above, under safety.

4.1 The briefing and instructions to the staff at muster

The briefings set the scene from the escorting perspective and were delivered by the senior escort who read out a briefing script verbatim. There was always an alert about the possible need for restraint or use of force, but also an emphasis on escorts' need to focus on the care of the returnees. The potential vulnerability of returnees to Zimbabwe, Jamaica and West Africa was highlighted: some might be anxious about their future in the destination country. The same alert was not given during the Rwanda briefing.

4.2 Collection at the IRC when escorts met their returnees for the first time

4.2.1 All the collections the CFMT observed, bar one, followed a standard approach. The senior escort introduced him- or herself, checked that the returnee knew what was happening that day and passed on basic information, working through a checklist. Its use was well-established by the end of the reporting period. In the CFMT's view, it covered the essentials. The returnee then had a non-invasive pat down search of body and clothing, usually in a dedicated search room out of sight of anyone not involved in that process. Property was checked and the returnee then left the building to join a vehicle for the journey to the departure port.

4.2.2 These introductory contacts with the senior escort had been filmed for some time, via a body-worn camera. In response to a suggestion from the CFMT searching was also filmed from mid-January though there were a few omissions. Returnees were alerted to the use of these cameras.

4.2.3 Assembling returnees' property was problematic historically and often delayed the collection process for long-haul flights. In May, the escort contractor introduced advance parties of a small team of escorts who arrived at the IRC early and worked with IRC staff to assemble and bag property and also try to resolve other issues which might otherwise cause problems during collection. This approach seemed to work well.

4.2.4 Returnees, particularly those who have just come from a prison, may only have the clothes they are wearing which may be insufficient to keep them warm on arrival at their destination in winter. Not all the senior escorts leading collections seemed alert to the possible need nor all IRCs geared up to meet it. Jackets were sometimes offered. All the men collected from Manston in November were given shoes to replace their flipflops by staff there just before they met the escorts.

4.2.5 The suitability of the area in an IRC to be used for collection is an important consideration. The choice of area lies with IRC managers. A dedicated search room was not available for two collections for European flights, from different IRCs. The returnees were searched publicly. A search room, off a narrow corridor, was used for the collection of each woman for the West Africa charter. This ensured privacy but it was not ideal as property had to be checked in the narrow corridor.

4.2.6 Returnees were typically brought from their residential units to a small waiting room off the area allocated for collection. This was helpful from the escorting standpoint, except in one instance. There were protests outside the IRC from which women were to be collected for the West Africa charter. The police required the escorts to wait for some hours, a short distance away. The IRC's managers misjudged their timings. The women were assembled in the area allocated for collection far too early, the first arriving nearly two hours before the escorts walked in and the last just over an hour before. The women were distressed, and the last to arrive, who was on a care plan and constant observation, acutely so. Some of the women were being supported by mental health staff. Most were seated close together for a long time, facing not only their distress and anxiety but also that of the woman who arrived last.

4.2.6.1 When the senior escort arrived, the CFMT alerted him to the potential difficulties around privacy if the women were collected in front of each other in the area in which they had been assembled, which had been the IRC's intention. He decided to use a separate search room, down a corridor away from the allocated area.

4.2.7 There was also unhelpful proximity of another sort. The collections from Manston took place in screened cubicles giving onto a narrow corridor. There were far too many people milling around. The impact on the nine men being collected may have been of intimidation. At one point the CFMT counted 31 people present most of whom appeared superfluous to the collection process. When each man left the collection area to walk to the waiting coach, he was escorted by six or seven men who were not part of the escorting cadre: they may have had a security role. Guiding holds were used.

4.3 The vehicles in which returnees travelled from their IRCs to the airport

4.3.1 Returnees and their escorts usually travelled in coaches, on which hot and cold drinks, snacks and a recreational pack were offered. Each coach had a WC. Some men (including all of the Jamaica and Rwanda cohorts) travelled with their escorts in vans on which some provisions were carried. If a man needed to relieve himself during the journey in the van, he either had to hang on or use a disposable urine bag. Returnees in coaches were sometimes allowed to stand up to relieve back pressure but not to move around.

4.3.2 Not every coach was fit for purpose:

- One used in the Lithuania operation had no running water. The WC could not be flushed, nor could returnees wash their hands. The men in that vehicle were moved to a replacement coach but by then the first man into the defective coach had spent well over an hour in it. The stench in the replacement coach by the time it reached the airport suggested that its WC tank had not been fully emptied in advance.
- The driver of a coach used in the December Albania operation announced in advance that the WC was suitable for liquid waste only.

4.4 Information about money

4.4.1 Returnees were often anxious about money, especially those returning to Europe, flagging the issue to escorts on collection, or later, including to the chief immigration officer leading the flight (the CIO). Some successful applicants under the facilitated returns scheme referred to in section 6 of this report seemed not to know the outcome of their application or wanted reassurance. The senior escort on the collection was often, but not always, able to confirm the position. Other returnees remained anxious: there seemed to be a lack of knowledge, possibly around the application process and its eligibility criteria.

4.4.2 A few returnees left the country with postal orders in their property received whilst in prison which they would be unable to cash in the destination country. The amounts known to the CFMT ranged from £20 to £100. This is not a new problem and HOIE has tried to resolve it. The CFMT did not know what attempts, if any, the Prison Service made to help recipients convert the postal orders into cash nor whether IRCs were consistently alert to the issue when dealing with their new arrivals. For example, two men due to go to Jamaica had postal orders in their property when they arrived at their respective IRCs. One IRC cashed the postal order; the other IRC said it could not help.

4.5 Information generally

4.5.1 The core information given verbally at collection covered the essentials and was usually repeated once the returnee had got onto the coach or van. The CFMT was generally satisfied that returnees had been told they would be filmed (including when getting onto the plane), there would be a CIO to whom they could have access on the plane, they would have access to a phone in their vehicle, and that food and drink would be available during the journey.

4.5.2 Each returnee was generally given a written information pack in his or her principal language, containing HOIE's Charter Flight information leaflet, an official Home Office complaints form and a document about the escort contractor. Some of the information packs for the Lithuanians were in English, which was not appropriate.

4.5.3 Escorts were consistently instructed at muster to ensure that the official complaints form was understood. Not every returnee was interested in it, but the CFMT has scant evidence that escorts routinely attempted an explanation, even with the help of an interpreter where needed.

4.6 Non-disclosure of information

4.6.1 The CFMT heard the escorts instructed on three separate operations not to disclose the flight departure location to the returnees. Two of these operations had attracted media interest and public protests outside some IRCs. The CFMT questions whether non-disclosure was a proportionate response to security concerns. It accorded neither dignity nor respect to the individuals affected. Their journey by road to an unknown destination was likely to contribute to their anxiety and distress.

4.6.2 The men collected from Manston were not told they were to be removed that day until after they were in the care and custody of the escorts. They were thus

denied respect. Escorts were uncomfortable with this approach and alerted the CFMT to it before the collections started. The practical effect was that the escorts did not ask the men at collection if they knew what was happening that day. Other parts of the collection brief were also not delivered – such as reference to a plane, and access to a CIO on it. The tale appeared to be that each man was being driven to another part of this country where he would meet an immigration officer. In the event, after each collection, Border Force officials formally notified each man that he had required entry clearance to the UK, did not have it and was being removed to Albania that day. The information packs were offered on the coach, once each man knew what was actually happening.

4.6.3 The ‘tale’ referred to above is supported by the PER for the first man into the coach. It recorded an early conversation between the returnee and his escort when the returnee was told he would be going somewhere to meet an immigration officer and Border Force. The returnee asked where they were going. Cambridgeshire was the answer which was factually inaccurate. A few minutes later the escort was informed that the returnee did not know he was being removed and he was given his information pack.

4.7 In-vehicle confinement

4.7.1 The time some returnees spend confined in vehicles has been a concern of the CFMT for three years and reported regularly. C&C was willing to discuss this concern over the reporting period but the CFMT observed no discernable improvement.

- The time some returnees spent confined in parked vehicles in their IRC remained unacceptable;
- the time returnees spent in vehicles on the road between their IRC and an airport far from it simply made the general problem worse; and
- the time some returnees spent confined in parked vehicles at the airport pre-boarding remained unacceptable.

4.7.2 The first returnee collected from an IRC was the first on the coach and spent the longest time in it whilst it was parked inside the IRC. This is a recognized outcome of long-standing escorting practice. Examples of time spent in a parked coach inside an IRC:

- Two hours 50 minutes: the returnee in question remarked that he had lost the will to live as the coach started to pull out of the IRC;
- Two hours 25 minutes for another returnee being removed on a different operation;
- Two hours 15 minutes for someone else on yet another different operation.

4.7.3 An airport in the Midlands was used for six of the operations the CFMT observed. The length of the road journey from IRCs in the southeast extended the time these returnees spent confined in vehicles.

4.7.4 Returnees did not board the plane as soon as the coach reached the airport. That is also long-standing practice. There was always a waiting period during which returnees remained stuck in parked vehicles. For some, it was very long. Examples:

- Nearly five hours, for a group of returnees, between arrival at the airport and getting on the plane;

- Two hours 45 minutes for someone else on a different operation and
- One hour 50 minutes for the man who had already spent two hours 15 minutes at the outset sitting in his parked coach at his IRC.

4.7.5 Cancellation or deferral of removal was confirmed for some during the journey from an IRC or at the airport. The individuals were returned to detention, but not quickly and they remained confined in vehicles for long periods. Examples:

- A man whose removal was cancelled 10 minutes after he had left his IRC had to travel on to the airport and sit in a coach there for two hours before joining another coach for the return journey to detention: he was confined in coaches well in excess of seven hours.
- The removal of four of the women for the West Africa charter was cancelled shortly before they reached the airport. They too had to wait at the airport before getting onto another coach to travel to an IRC in the southeast. They then had to wait in the coach between an hour and one hour 45 minutes to be admitted into the IRC, although there had been ample time for the staff there to be told they were coming. By the time the last woman was admitted at 3.50am she had spent eight hours 30 minutes confined in coaches.

4.7.6 Returnees in prisons were transferred to IRCs for removal. There were some curious positioning decisions: two men in Birmingham prison were moved to an IRC in the southeast around 30 hours before their charter collection and four from Preston prison to a different IRC in the southeast, also around 30 hours before collection. They were all on the same flight which left from Birmingham.

4.8 Moves during the night

Returnees to Europe travelled to the airport through the night. IRC collections typically started around 1am-2am and earlier if the IRC was far from the departure airport. There was a rationale for these night moves to meet early morning flights under the Dublin Convention arrangements. The timings have not changed post-Brexit. The information the CFMT was given towards the end of the reporting period suggests that the timings suit, or are convenient for, the receiving country, regardless of the impact of the night moves upon the returnees. The CFMT was also told that arrival at the destination well within local daylight hours would assist any returnees who needed to travel up-country to reach home. This seeming welfare consideration may be overstated as some of the returnees appear to have been met by family or friends on arrival.

4.9 Boarding the plane

It was uneventful with a few exceptions. A man being removed to Zimbabwe and another being removed to Jamaica were each carried onto the plane. One man bound for Rwanda allegedly resisted at the top of the steps and was lifted over the threshold. WRBs were moved to the secure position for boarding. Guiding holds were rarely used although close escorting was typical: see section 3.2.12.

4.10 A misjudged seating plan on a plane

The four men who boarded the Rwanda plane were seated far too close together despite the size of the cabin. They may have fed off each other's distress. This

proximity, particularly of the two men protesting, was noted on the plane by the HOIE contract monitor, one of the paramedics and the CFMT. The senior escort was not willing to make a change.

4.11 The flight

4.11.1 A cooked breakfast was served on all the European flights and two hot meals on the long-haul flights. The menus were described as Halal. Hot and cold drinks were also offered.

4.11.2 Pillows and blankets were potentially available for returnees' use but in some instances the carrier on European flights did not have enough of them.

4.11.3 During most of the reporting period returnees were not allowed to use the toilets on the plane in conditions of privacy: the door was always wedged slightly ajar and an escort stood just outside. The CFMT has reported its concerns about this demeaning practice since 2016. The practice was abandoned on 17 November. Since then, returnees have been allowed to close the toilet door unless an individual risk assessment indicated this would be unwise. The CFMT welcomed the change. It should be rolled out to use of a toilet in an IRC during collection and to use of the WC on a coach.

4.12 Access to the CIO on the flight

4.12.1 The CIO was accessible to the returnees, sometimes conducting a formal 'surgery' to which the applicants were brought one by one, or speaking to them at their seats when a formal meeting was not possible because of space constraints on the plane. The services of a professional interpreter, if one flew, were well used during these contacts.

4.12.2 All contact between a returnee and the CIO was supervised by members of the escorts' security team on the plane. The CFMT considered that the security team presence at the beginning of the surgery on the September flight to Albania was excessive, with the applicant unnecessarily hemmed in which could have been intimidating. The escorts' security team lead accepted this observation and reduced the numbers of his team directly around the applicant.

4.12.3 The issues returnees typically presented to the CIO were financial or around property, such as a phone or ID documentation, still retained by the police. There were immigration issues as well, such as, for returnees to Europe, the length of the re-entry ban.

4.12.4 All the CIOs gave the applicant a courteous hearing and were generally friendly in their approach. They gave unpopular news firmly. If the next possible step was for the applicant to make a formal written complaint, the CIO suggested this course of action. Complaint forms were available on the plane. Not all opted to make a formal complaint. If this happened, escorts passed the completed form on to the CIO for action on return to the UK.

4.12.5 The CIO on the flight to West Africa held a surgery, attended by ten applicants, over a period of two hours and then saw another at his seat. The CIO

responded calmly to argumentative applicants and those who presented him with a mass of paperwork which he then read.

4.13 Interpreting support

4.13.1 Interpreting facilities should be easily available at all collections and at all stages of the removal journey but were not.

4.13.2 Use of interpreters in person was more consistent during the reporting period than previously observed. Their services were booked in reliance on the IRC's assessment of a returnee's ability to speak English. Some of these assessments in respect of returnees to Europe were patently unreliable. The CFMT flagged this to HOIE.

4.13.3 The interpreters were well used and helpful when they were present at collections, on a coach, and on the plane.

4.13.4 There were interpreters for one of the operations to Romania and all those to Albania but not sufficient in number to cover collections from all the IRCs involved. An example:

- The Albanian returnee was very young, spoke no English and looked bewildered and frightened throughout his collection. No interpreter had been booked, nor did the escorts use Bigword. The senior escort dealt with him kindly, but the CFMT doubted whether the young man understood anything of what was said to him. He did eventually have some interpreting support, from a fellow returnee, but not until 45 minutes after the young man had got into the coach.

4.13.5 There were no interpreters for the operations to Poland or Lithuania. Bigword was intended to close gaps but its use was rare in European operations despite obvious need. English-speaking fellow returnees were asked to help out: this appeared to be the preferred approach over use of Bigword.

4.13.6 A professional interpreter attended each of the Vietnam collections the CFMT observed and one flew.

4.13.7 Five professional interpreters were involved in the Rwanda operation offering support in Kurdish-Sorani, Farsi, Vietnamese, Albanian and Arabic and were due to fly. The man for whom the Arabic interpreter had been booked spoke Kurdish-Sorani. His interpreter did not attend his collection. The man was in a fragile state. The CFMT was told that the interpreter travelled separately to the airfield in a van immediately behind the one in which the man was travelling. This decision was both poor and inexplicable as was the interval of some 40 minutes between the man's arrival at the airfield and his first recorded contact with an interpreter in person.

4.13.8 A Twi-speaking interpreter attended one of the collections for the West Africa operation and flew.

4.13.9 The CFMT observed the empathetic approach of the same Vietnamese-speaking interpreter twice in the reporting period, including during the protests on the Rwanda plane. His client was one of the protestors. The interpreter peeled away

briefly to find tissues with which he wiped away his client's tears and the spittle from his face. The CFMT believes he chose to travel back to the IRC with his client after relocation was cancelled. The other interpreters who had been on the plane did not opt to accompany their client on the journey back to detention.

4.14 Returnees' access to telephones

4.14.1 Returnees are not allowed to keep personal mobiles with them: they are packed in their luggage. Returnees were told they would have access to an escort's work phone during the journey and at collection were encouraged to write down numbers they might need.

4.14.2 The senior escort on a coach has a work phone and the CFMT observed it was passed round to returnees if they needed to contact lawyers or wanted to contact friends or family.

4.14.3 HOIE piloted a different approach from July. Returnees could keep their IRC-issued mobiles whilst travelling to the departure airport: they would therefore not be dependent on access to an escort's work phone. The CFMT welcomed this development: it may have been intended to close the gap reported in the following paragraph. The pilot was abandoned in November. HOIE concluded that there were already 'many opportunities' for returnees 'to access justice' whilst held in an IRC.

4.14.4 C&C failed to check whether there was a work phone in all the vans used in the Rwanda operation. One man did not have access to a phone and was distressed that he could not contact his lawyer during the road journey. None of his escorts had a work phone to offer him. This omission was not noticed until after the man had been driven away from his IRC.

4.15 Meeting returnees' cultural or other needs

4.15.1 Female returnees were always accompanied by female escorts who sat with them in the coach and on the plane and walked up the steps into it with them. The searches during collection were always carried out by female escorts.

4.15.2 The Lithuania operation took place during Ramadan. The CFMT observed that the senior escort on the IRC collections checked whether any of the returnees was observing the fast. Dates were available with which to break it.

4.15.3 Returnees are not allowed to smoke once in the care and custody of the escorts, which may heighten anxiety. The escorts carry Nicorette lozenges or similar products. The CFMT was satisfied that these tobacco substitutes were routinely offered to returnees in coaches.

4.15.4 One of the women for the West Africa charter took comfort from her faith and was supported by a member of the IRC's chaplaincy team. When checking her property with her the escorts went to some trouble to find a particular edition of the Bible the woman wanted. She was allowed to keep it with her. One of the Rwanda men had his Qu'ran with him and tried to read it inside his van at the airfield. The escorts turned on the overhead lights to help him do so.

4.16 Interaction between escorts and returnees

4.16.1 Enforced removal can be expected to be a stressful experience. The CFMT observed escorts who were alert to this. Examples of proactive engagement with returnees include:

- Some escorts playing card games with their returnee;
- An escort having a long conversation in the coach with his returnee about motor bikes, travel generally and the history of Albania;
- Escorts maintaining a relaxed dialogue with their returnee during the last few hours of the Jamaica flight and then during the long and unexpected wait to disembark by which point the escorts had been on duty for more than 12 hours;
- The examples cited in section 4.15.4.

4.16.2 There were less satisfactory examples:

- Escorts' failure to communicate at all with an English-speaking returnee to Europe who was awake throughout the coach journey to the airport.
- Lack of engagement between escorts and non-English speaking returnees who travelled in vans when an interpreter was not one of the passengers: the CFMT found no evidence that Bigword had been considered.
- Escorts' failure to provide one of the men bound for Rwanda with effective interpreting support at critical junctures: see section 4.13.7. The same man, who needed timely access to a paramedic, was not offered it throughout his journey to the airfield, another poor escorting decision (see section 5.2.4).

4.16.3 Escorts tried to resolve problems if they could. Examples:

- A returnee was worried on collection that a new phone dropped off for him by a relative might be missing because it had not been logged by the IRC staff. The escorts took time to go through his three pieces of luggage and found the phone. His mind was put at rest.
- A returnee was very distressed about the loss of his bank card. His escorts took the initiative of contacting the emergency service at the bank, which was helpful.
- An escort took time and trouble during the flight to help his returnee fill out a Home Office complaint form.

4.16.4 Events and interactions starting at the point of collection and ending with disembarkation must be recorded in the PER. It must be written up contemporaneously for each returnee by his or her escort and is an official document. Completion of these documents continued to improve over the reporting period. There were significant omissions in some of the Rwanda PERS. Examples:

- The CFMT arrived at the airfield after the men, as a result of the public protests outside an IRC. The CFMT was told that the men were allowed to step outside their vans when parked up at the airfield, but these brief outings were not consistently recorded. Some PERs presented a picture of uninterrupted long in-vehicle confinement.
- One man asked for an opportunity for prayer: his PER did not record whether he was allowed to, outside the van, as some were.

4.16.5 Some PERs recorded long iterations of essential information to non-English speaking returnees once in the coach. The PERs did not consistently record how this communication took place: with the help of an interpreter or via Bigword? These omissions cast doubt on the reliability of the official record in this respect.

5. Healthcare

5.1 Fitness to fly

This is assessed by healthcare staff in the IRC in advance. Their assessment was not challenged by C&C's contracted paramedics during any of the collections the CFMT observed.

5.2 Medical cover

5.2.1 C&C's contracted paramedics assumed responsibility for a returnee's healthcare as he or she was collected for removal. A paramedic, sometimes two at the same IRC, were present, and took charge of confidential medical documents and prescribed medication. Each appeared to familiarise him or herself with any medical information provided by the IRC. The same paramedic travelled to the airport with the returnees and two or three flew. If more than one coach was used because of the number of returnees collected from the same IRC, paramedic cover was not always available on each coach.

5.2.2 Medical interventions were occasionally required during collections. Examples:

- A man bound for Rwanda appeared to have a panic attack whilst he was being searched: a paramedic attended him;
- in the West Africa operation, a paramedic administered a blood pressure and sugar level test to a male returnee and dispensed prescribed medication to a female returnee.

5.2.3 The paramedics responded to any medical issues to which the escorts alerted them during the road journey, at the airport and on the plane. They were typically headaches or nausea. They dispensed prescribed medication. They returned it and any medical documents to the returnee to whom they belonged before the end of the flight.

5.2.4 The CFMT observed the collection of six men for the Rwanda operation from their IRC. The seventh left from a different IRC and the events immediately preceding his collection were monitored by other independent observers who quickly passed their information to the CFMT. The man had been taken from his room to the IRC's healthcare centre where he was assessed to be having a panic attack. He was also given painkillers and deemed fit to fly. The independent observers on the spot described him to the CFMT as both very distressed and hardly able to walk as he left the IRC. He travelled to the airfield in a van. A paramedic did not travel with him, but in another van, behind his. The CFMT considered this was a serious error of judgement. The man's van pulled over enroute when the paramedic carried out what was described as a general health check.

5.3 Infection control measures

5.3.1 Domestic legal restrictions around the Covid pandemic continued to apply until shortly after the first three operations the CFMT monitored. Returnees' temperatures were taken during collection, they were given face coverings and encouraged to wear them. The temperatures of the majority of returnees continued to be taken during the rest of the reporting period and face coverings continued to be given.

5.3.2 An anti-malaria tablet was offered to each of the men bound for Rwanda after arrival at the flight departure location. All refused them.

6 Preparation for Removal and re-integration support

6.1 Timely preparation

The CFMT cannot gauge to what extent returnees had been properly prepared in advance. The men collected from Manston cannot have had such support: see section 4.6.2. The concerns about money reported in section 4.4.1 suggest lack of timely engagement.

6.2 Returning to Europe

Financial support was available. It took various forms:

- A resettlement grant under the facilitated returns scheme (FRS) available to eligible foreign national offenders who agree to leave voluntarily. Payment is downloaded to a card which successful applicants were given on the plane with an explanatory letter from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). At least 50 returnees over the seven European flights the CFMT monitored, received it.
- A destitute payment, in cash, made on the plane at the CIO's discretion to a typical maximum of £40 during the reporting period. It is intended to enable the recipient to travel home from the destination port. At least 34 returnees, over the seven flights, received it.
- Occasionally a grant from a charity, Hibiscus.

6.3 Returning elsewhere

6.3.1 Vietnam: 14 received an FRS grant and one a grant from Hibiscus.

6.3.2 Zimbabwe: 16 of the 26 returnees were given a new IOM assistance package, and three received an FRS grant, on the plane. The Home Office decided that the remaining seven would each be given a cash grant of \$150 on the plane, so that each received something.

6.3.3 Jamaica: The Home Office had funded two NGOs in Jamaica which provide reintegration and rehabilitation support. The CFMT was told that both projects were managed by one of the Home Office's locally engaged colleagues.

6.3.4 West Africa: At the request of the Nigerian authorities HOIE provided \$50 to each Nigerian on the plane to cover initial reintegration expenses. Two also received a destitute payment. At the request of the Ghanaian authorities each Ghanaian received \$50 to cover the cost of Covid testing. These returnees also had access to staff from an NGO on arrival in Accra.

6.3.5 Relocation to Rwanda: The CFMT does not know whether any of the men had been told what to expect upon arrival. All were offered a Rwanda leaflet once they reached the airfield, hopefully in their own language. The CFMT did not see it and did not know what information it contained.

7 The work of the CFMT

7.1 The CFMT is composed of IMB members from prisons or the immigration detention estate. All are volunteers, taking on CFMT duties in addition to those on their home Boards. There were five members at the start of the reporting period and five at the end of whom four were recruited during the summer and autumn.

7.2 The CFMT monitored ten charter removals to the destinations listed below in addition to the activity recorded in section 2.1.1.

Poland (25 January),
Romania (15 February and 27 September),
Zimbabwe (2 March),
Lithuania (13 April),
Jamaica (17 May),
Lagos and Accra (29 June) and
Albania (1 September, 17 November and 1 December).

7.3 The CFMT presented formal reports to HOIE on each monitored operation. Responses, to which C&C contributed, took the form of an action plan. The action plans on the CFMT's reports on Poland (January), Romania (February) and Jamaica (May) were not published to the CFMT until February 2023.

7.4 The CFMT continued to meet HOIE and the escort contractor quarterly – a particularly useful forum.

7.5 The CFMT leader is entitled to receive copies of returnees' written charter-related complaints and of replies if the complainant has consented to the complaint being shared with the IMB. Notification was not regular or consistent during the reporting period. The CFMT believes HOIE is now addressing this.

7.5.1 The CFMT leader was notified of four written complaints, of which one related to an escort's use of language. It was substantiated. The other three, on other issues, such as escorts' alleged mistreatment, were not.

7.5.2 It is difficult to make a judgement, based on the outcome of four complaints, of the effectiveness of the process: for example, the range and depth of the investigation and the quality of the response. None of the incidents complained of took place during an operation the CFMT monitored. The CFMT is aware of four other complaints arising in an operation the CFMT monitored in the reporting period. They are still seemingly under investigation.



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