

Chartered Forced Return Operation to Georgia

3rd to 4th November 2025

Human Rights Monitoring Report

Introduction

This report is submitted in connection with a chartered forced return operation ██████████ in Ireland to ██████████ in Georgia that took place between the 3rd and 4th November 2025. A Human Rights Monitor (thereafter referred to as the Monitor) was appointed by the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (thereafter referred to as the Department of Justice). This report contains a factual account and observations from the Monitor.

The report focuses on the following areas:

- A factual description to illustrate how the operation unfolded;
- The treatment of people subject to forced return (thereafter referred to as returnees), including any vulnerable groups;
- Any force or means of restraint used; and
- Relevant recommendations or exceptionally good practices.

The report is set out in the following phases of the operation

- Phase 1 - Pre-Event Briefings to the Monitor;
- Phase 2 - Day of Operation Briefings and Pre-Departure Arrangements;
- Phase 3 - Boarding and Flight; and
- Phase 4 - Arrival and Handover.

Within each phase, the Monitor provides observations on any relevant matters.

Phase 1 - Pre-Event Briefings to the Monitor

This phase covers a number of pre-event briefings provided to the Monitor. The following aspects are considered to be relevant.

Observations:

Prior to the operation, the Monitor received a number of detailed and informative briefings from a Department of Justice official and from a garda supervisor attached to the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB). All of the briefings provided to the Monitor were detailed and informative.

A final and comprehensive pre-event briefing was delivered by a GNIB supervising officer on ██████████. This briefing outlined the garda command structure, the operational plan and timings for the operation. The following key points were discussed:

- The flight was planned to leave on 3 November 2025.
- This is the third charter flight to Georgia in 2025. Generally, the previous operations took place without incident.
- 40 to 50 people had been selected for return. This is likely to be subject to change.
- 42 returnees were in custody at that time. Of which, 35 were males and seven were females. One male was serving a custodial sentence.
- There could be five families on the flight. This may include 10 children aged from three to 17.

- Checks have been made with regards to dietary and religious needs. The in-flight food supplier for this operation has been changed.
- Risk assessments had been completed. Most were assessed as low risk at that time with nine at medium risk.
- There will be a number of gardaí assigned as escort officers to each returnee. [REDACTED]
- Returnees are aware that they are being returned at some point, and will be told the exact date this weekend. One of the families travelling on the flight might be moved to hotel accommodation before Monday (for easier travel purposes). The other families will not be told until the morning of the operation.
- Deportation orders were already issued for each returnee.
- A medical team, an interpreter and an air travel partner will travel on the flight. [REDACTED]
- Prior to the flight, families will be taken to a waiting facility [REDACTED] near to the airport. No cells will be used and suitable accommodation and refreshments will be provided. The Monitor requested a visit to this location.
- A discussion took place on the issue of items of property belonging to returnees and difficulties encountered during the last two operations. It was explained that GNIB are confident that all property will be handed over by the Irish Prison Service (IPS) to the escort teams.

Phase 2 - Day of Operation Briefings and Pre-Departure Arrangements

During this phase, the following aspects are considered to be relevant.

Full Operational Briefing

On Monday 3 November 2025, two operational briefings were conducted [REDACTED]. These took place at a remote site and were delivered to those persons involved in the operation. This included the back-up team (also travelling on the flight), operational support gardaí (most of these gardaí were assisting with security at the airport but were not travelling on the flight), the medical team and the interpreter. While a journalist and a photographer were invited by GNIB to observe the pre-departure arrangements, they did not travel on the flight.

Observations:

- This was the largest return operation to date.
- A total of 52 people will be on the flight. This consists of 35 males and seven females who had been held by the IPS.
- Three families were also on the flight and this included three mothers and seven children. The ages of the children ranged from five months old to 17.
- A list of the returnees was provided to the Monitor.
- 113 gardaí and two support staff will be on the flight.

- Returnees in the custody of the IPS will be collected by escort teams from five prison locations.
- Returnees will be searched by the escort teams on collection and before placing them in vans for the journey to [REDACTED]. This process was not observed by the Monitor.
- Any personal items of property belonging to the returnees that is handed over by the IPS will be retained by the escort teams and given to the returnees on arrival in Tbilisi.
- The role of the Monitor and the importance of providing full access to the Monitor was explained.
- The roles of the medical team and the interpreter were also explained.
- A video of a previous forced return operation was shown. This provided a good visual aide for those who had not previously participated in a forced return. While the footage included actual returnees, their faces were obscured to protect their identity.
- Movement of returnees during security checks, boarding and on the flight will be limited to one person at a time.
- The briefing highlighted the importance of gardaí maintaining good standards of behaviour. This included off-duty behaviour in Georgia.
- Use of force was included in the briefing. It was highlighted that this will be on a case-by-case basis.
- Except returnees, all persons involved in the operation were provided with high-visibility vests. Depending on the role of individuals, different coloured vests were allocated with the title of their function displayed on them. This included all gardaí (escorts and back-up team), an Interpreter, the Medical Team, an Air Partner Representative and the Monitor.
- Once boarded, and prior to take-off, returnees will be allowed to make telephone calls to family members or legal representatives.
- The Medical Team informed the Monitor that some of returnees had medical needs which included mental health conditions. Some returnees had cardiac conditions, a few were on methadone, one was detoxing and one had a history of depression and self-harm.

Security Risk Assessments for Returnees:

Risk assessments on all returnees were made available to the Monitor.

Observations:

- One returnee had indicated that he was unwilling to leave prison.
- Of those held in prison, nine were assessed as medium risk and 33 low risk.
- [REDACTED]
- The level of risk determined the number of escorting officers assigned to each returnee.

Waiting Facility for Families:

Three families were located at [REDACTED]. At [REDACTED] the Monitor conducted a visit to the waiting facility and explained their role to the families. The interpreter was at this location. A number of gardaí were in the room with the families, but were not in uniform.

Observations:

- A large conference room was used as a waiting facility for the families. This room was in good condition and provided sufficient space and seating for the families.
- Toys were available for the children.
- Food was provided, but one of the mothers complained that there was no vegan meal provided. A garda member present assured the Monitor that appropriate food would be sourced.
- Two of the families said that they understood what was happening and raised no issues about how they had been treated. A teenager from one of these two families said that a garda member had been very helpful in terms of explaining how they could return as a student at some later date.
- The mother of the third family said that she had not cooperated with the escort teams when they came to collect her this morning. She said that she was obstructive and refused to leave. She said that she was unhappy when she was restrained in front of her children. The restraint used appeared to be limited to taking hold of her arms. She explained that she was waiting to hear from her solicitor with regards to an appeal against her removal from the State.
- During the visit, gardaí were observed engaging well with the families, particularly with the children.

Travel to [REDACTED]:

All of those involved in the operation left the briefing location and waiting facility to travel to [REDACTED]. This journey was co-ordinated to coincide with the arrival of the vans that had collected the returnees from the IPS.

Security Checks:

Security checks took place at [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Observations:

- All persons moving airside went through security checks.
- Security checks were conducted by [REDACTED] Search Unit staff. Only jackets and a few outer tops were removed. These checks were not intrusive and all officials present were very courteous to the families.
- Families were the first cohort to go through security checks. One child activated the search arch alarm, and as a result, a cursory check of their outer clothes and shoes was conducted.
- The mother of one of the families (who had earlier raised concerns about being restrained in front of her children) was visibly upset and appeared angry while

undergoing her security check. Although she was not observed saying anything, she snatched her items of property after they had been scanned.

- Returnees were the second cohort to go through security checks. Returnees were taken directly from the vans and walked through the security check one at a time.
- Three returnees were wearing handcuffs and all returnees were held on each arm by escorting officers.
- One returnee wearing handcuffs asked to smoke. It was explained this could not be permitted at this time.
- Following security checks, returnees were taken back to the vans.
- A few of the family members and returnees requested the use of a toilet in the security area and this was facilitated. While the toilet doors were not closed, they were kept ajar and only the escorting officers were in attendance.
- Escorting officers were firm but friendly and the behaviour of gardaí to returnees was professional. Likewise, the behaviour of returnees to gardaí was also good and there were no incidents of note during this process.
- When all persons had been through security, the convoy moved to the waiting aircraft for boarding.

Phase 3 - Boarding and Flight

A seating plan was provided to the Monitor. During this phase, the following aspects are considered to be relevant.

Boarding

Boarding commenced at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The journalist and the photographer were present for this phase.

Observations:

- Prior to boarding, the aircraft was searched by a garda search team. No items of concern were found.
- The families were boarded first and this took place while the returnees were still going through their security checks. This process was not observed by the Monitor. Families were located in seating towards the rear of the aircraft.
- A soft mat was placed near the aircraft. The Monitor was informed that this was only for use in case any additional use of force was necessary and was intended to reduce the risk of injuries.
- Large items/luggage belonging to returnees were placed in the hold of the aircraft. Smaller items were retained by the escort teams and taken onto the plane.
- Returnees started to board one at a time and were held on each arm by an escort officer.
- As gardaí went to remove one male returnee (number 10 on the list of returnees) from a van, the Monitor heard sounds of a struggle coming from the entrance door to the van. At this point, the Monitor was unable to see what was happening. The soft mat was brought over to the van and almost immediately the returnee was removed from the van and placed on the mat, face up and lying on his back. This returnee was struggling and being restrained by a number of gardaí. The returnee was already [REDACTED] restraints were placed on him. The

returnee was shouting but it was unclear what he was saying. Once he was under control, he was lifted face up in a prone position by several gardaí and taken onto the aircraft. At that point, he was taken towards his seat and he continued to struggle. This delayed the boarding process for a period of time until gardaí were satisfied that he was under control. One of the escort team later informed the Monitor that this returnee was demanding access to his mobile phone. He was told that it was in the hold of the aircraft and was shown a property receipt to reassure him that it was going on the flight. The returnee said that this was fake information and he continued to demand that he be given his phone. No injuries appeared to be sustained by the returnee or the escort officers during this struggle and the use of the mat probably contributed to this. All of the gardaí involved in this incident dealt with it in a calm and professional manner.

- Two other returnees were wearing handcuffs during this phase and boarded without incident.
- Escorting officers were firm but friendly and the behaviour of gardaí to returnees was professional. Apart from returnee 10, the behaviour of returnees to gardaí was also good and there were no other incidents of note during this process.

Aircraft Condition:

Observations:

- The aircraft was an appropriate size for this flight and offered sufficient space.
- One of the aircraft doors was kept open until the aircraft was ready to depart.
- The aircraft was clean, well maintained and protected against excessive heat, cold and noise.
- The air-conditioning/heating system was used appropriately.
- There was no inflight entertainment system available on this aircraft.

Well-Being:

Observations:

- Returnees were strategically placed throughout the aircraft. This was determined by their risk assessment and set out in a seating plan.
- Escort officers were positioned either side of returnees and the back-up team were positioned nearby.
- Prior to departure, returnees were told that they could make contact with family members or legal representatives.
- Toilet visits were managed appropriately during the flight.
- A suitable meal was provided with vegetarian meals available. The Monitor confirmed that a vegan meal was provided to the mother who had complained earlier about the food provided at the family waiting facility.
- Sufficient water and other non-alcoholic beverages were available. For safety reasons, hot drinks were not provided.
- Many of the escort officers appeared to have developed a good rapport with the returnees.

- During the flight, the Escort Leader informed the Monitor that personal items of property belonging to two female returnees had inadvertently been left behind at two different garda premises. Through the interpreter, the Escort Leader informed the returnees about this situation and explained that he would arrange to have their property shipped to them. One of the returnees appeared satisfied with this explanation, but the other was shouting and visibly upset.
- Another returnee requested access to their mobile phone in order to arrange transportation to their home (250km from Tbilisi). It was explained that access would be provided immediately prior to disembarkation from the aircraft.

Restraint and Use of Force:

Observations:

- Following the resistance at the boarding phase, returnee number 10 was seated while wearing handcuffs and his arms were interlinked by escorting officers to restrict the movement of his arms.
- Prior to take-off, and for a considerable amount of time after take-off, returnee number 10 shouted regularly. The Interpreter explained that he was saying that he was not going to go on the flight unless he got access to his phone. The Interpreter explained to the returnee that he would get his phone back when he landed in Tbilisi. This did not placate him and the shouting continued. On a couple of occasions, he said that his handcuffs were hurting his wrists. After take-off, a back-up team officer readjusted the handcuffs. Other returnees started to react to the shouting and asked the Interpreter if he was doing enough to help this returnee.

- The escorting officers continued to try and calm this returnee and at about 9.55pm, he stopped shouting. Shortly afterwards, all restraints were removed from him. There was no further incidents during the flight with this returnee.
- During the flight, another returnee became agitated in connection with an appeal that he had made against removal from the State. At one point, the returnee attempted to stand up but was prevented from doing so by an escort officer who placed a hand on his arm and encouraged him to sit down. Through the Interpreter, the Escort Leader explained the appeals process and this seemed to resolve this situation.
- The Escort Leader informed the Monitor that shortly after take-off, handcuffs were removed from the other two returnees.
- No sedatives were used during the flight.
- No additional restraints or other use of force was observed during the flight.

Phase 4 - Arrival and Handover

The flight arrived at [REDACTED] in Georgia [REDACTED] (local time) on Tuesday 4 November 2025.

Handover

Shortly after landing, local authorities came to the front of the aircraft. The following aspects are considered to be relevant.

Observations:

- Handover documents were provided by the Escort Leader to the local border force officers.
- No information was provided to the local border force officers that could endanger the returnee's safety.
- Medication for returnees was handed over to local border force officers.
- Personal items that were taken onto the aircraft earlier, were handed over to the returnees at the point of disembarkation.
- Returnees left the aircraft one at a time and were transported by local authorities to the terminal.
- On leaving the aircraft, returnee number 10 nodded in acknowledgement towards the Escort Leader.
- No restraints or use of force was observed during this process.
- The Escort Leader managed the handover process well.

Summary

Overall, the operation was conducted in a humane manner, respectful of the dignity of the returnees and in compliance with the fundamental rights enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, applicable international human rights law and national legislation.

Handcuffs were placed on three returnees during the pre-departure, boarding and early flight phases. In addition, escorting officers placed leg restraints on one of the returnees who had refused to board the aircraft. All handcuffs and other restraints were later removed during the flight. No other use of force was observed and no other restraints were used.

The management of families during the return operation was professional, friendly and compassionate. Although the families may not have witnessed the struggle with the returnee who did not want to board the aircraft, it is likely that they heard the returnee shouting for a considerable time. This was unavoidable and thankfully it eventually stopped.

Throughout the operation, escorting officers were firm but friendly and the behaviour towards returnees was professional. Apart from the returnee who did not want to board the aircraft, the behaviour of returnees to gardaí was also good and there were no incidents of note. The Monitor observed good examples of rapport building by the escorting officers with the returnees and the families.

Following the last two return operations, the Monitors report included recommendations to address the issue of missing items of property belonging to returnees. During this operation, further difficulties were encountered with property that was inadvertently left behind. For one returnee, this appeared to be particularly upsetting. It is important that An Garda Síochána ensures that all property belonging to a returnee in its possession is taken on the return flight.

Recommendation

As a result of the observations contained in this report, a recommendation is submitted for consideration.

1. An Garda Síochána must ensure that all property belonging to a returnee in its possession is taken on the return flight.

