

**National Chartered Forced Return Operation (NCFRO)**  
**Flight to Tbilisi Georgia on Thursday 27 February 2025**  
**Report of Human Rights Monitor.**

Name of Monitor: [REDACTED]

**Report**

**A. Activity Prior to day of Departure.**

1. The monitor agreed to partake in the National Return Operation on 5 February. He was given an information note prepared by the Department of Justice on the role of Human Rights Monitor, the September 2021 version of the Frontex publication "Forced-Return Monitoring" and the FAIR (Finding Agreement in Return) chapter D7.1, "Improved Return Monitoring Guidelines". He read all of these documents and used them as a template for the performance of his role.
2. On [REDACTED] the monitor participated, in an observer capacity, at a package meeting of the administrative, legal and police leadership for the operation. The full range of legal, logistical, security and human rights issues were considered at that meeting. The fact that unaccompanied adults had been detained over the previous two weeks with a view to return was noted.
3. On [REDACTED] [REDACTED], the monitor also had a meeting with the Escort Leader, the Leader of the Back Up team and the leader within the Garda National Immigration Bureau of the ground support for the NCFRO. He was informed that a large number of the proposed escort and back up teams for the flight had participated in a two-day familiarization course. He was also given an outline of the planned activity for the day of the return flight.

**B. Pre-Departure activity on the day of the Flight.**

4. The monitor arrived at [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] on Thursday 27 February. He was given a chair and desk in the main operations room. He was also given a high visibility jacket with the words Observer printed both on the front and back of it, which he wore until the flight arrived in Tbilisi.
5. The monitor was informed that five people who were to be returned (one unaccompanied female adult and four unaccompanied male adults) had already been delivered to [REDACTED]. The monitor asked on two occasions to visit the room in which these detainees were being held and was granted immediate access on both occasions. They were being held in a large, well ventilated, room with a number of Gardai and the interpreter for the

flight. When asked, the detainees, who were seated unrestrained around the wall of the room, said that they were being treated well. One detainee expressed a wish to stay in Ireland. The monitor informed him that his role was to monitor the flight and that any legal issues should be raised with his legal team. The room had an ample supply of sandwiches, fruit and bottled water.

6. The monitor attended a briefing for the Back Up Team at [REDACTED]. The leader of the Back Up Team outlined the planned transport of 25 people who were being detained in [REDACTED] and drew attention to the Monitor's presence at the briefing.
7. The fact that the Back Up Team had access to cable ties, and traditional handcuffs, if necessary was mentioned, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] The Back Up Team leader, the Escort Leader and the Chief Superintendent directing the GNIB stressed that restraints were only to be used as a matter of last resort, that the Team members should have regard to their Human Rights training and that all but one of the people to be deported had no criminal record, other than refusing to leave the State.
8. The Back Up team departed for [REDACTED] and collected 24 people (23 unaccompanied adult males and one unaccompanied adult female) in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] where each of the people to be returned [REDACTED]. The head of the Back Up Team informed the monitor that no restraints had been used during the transfer to the plane.
9. One unaccompanied male adult made a successful application, during the afternoon, to the High Court to prevent his deportation. All of the checked in baggage for the people detained in [REDACTED] had been forwarded to the charter company and this person's baggage was transported to Tbilisi. The charter company arranged for the baggage to be returned to Dublin by express delivery.
10. The monitor attended, as an observer, the briefing for the main escort team at [REDACTED]. The same points that had been made in relation to restraint, the need to respect human rights, the role of the monitor and the fact that all but one of the people being returned had no criminal record were made at this briefing by the Escort Leader and the Chief Superintendent. Each escort pair were asked to ensure that they had access to at least one handcuff key. The role of the monitor was drawn to the attention of the Escort team.
11. The escort team was told to consult the seating plan for the plane to identify where they were seated. This seating plan, which was on the wall of the operations room, identified the people to be detained by number rather than name, in order to respect their privacy. One unaccompanied adult male was identified as high risk due to behavioural issues that had arisen in detention and

two unaccompanied adult males were identified as medium risk, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] The Back Up team were seated close to the High and Medium Risk returnees.

### **C. Boarding of Plane and Flight**

12. At [REDACTED] the transfer of the people to be returned and the escort team to the airplane began. This involved meeting up with the [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] carrying the family unit, who had been brought to a [REDACTED]. The monitor was seated in the front of one of the van's carrying escorts and people who were to be returned. The monitor could hear the conversations at the back of the van and these seemed to be relaxed.
13. The monitor observed the screening by airport security of the detainees who were to be returned who had been detained in the airport Garda Station. This screening passed without incident.
14. The full convoy of escorts, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] for the family unit proceeded to the plane. The plane was searched. Then the escort team boarded the plane. The monitor took a seat of his choice in the centre of the plane. The boarding of the people to be returned then commenced. The Escort Leader called out the names of the escorts with whom the person to be returned would be sitting and that person was then brought on board by two members of the back up team. No restraints were used at any stage in this process.
15. The Documents and other personal items of the returnees were contained in a zip pouch which was held by the relevant Garda Escort. These bags were returned to the returnees before they left the flight on arrival in Tbilisi.
16. A family unit consisting of the father, the mother and their [REDACTED] son were transported in a separate van to the plane. The mother and the son boarded together. The boy was allowed to lead the way and to run to his seat. This unit was seated apart from other returnees with the mother and son sharing a row of three seats with a female garda escort and the father seated immediately in front with two escorts. The rows in front of and behind the family unit were left empty.
17. One of the returnees [REDACTED] found it difficult to sit in a standard seat. The Escort Leader arranged for him to sit in the first row with the use of two seats.
18. The flight departed a few minutes after its planned departure time of [REDACTED]. The flight took five hours and fifteen minutes. In total 28 adult males, 3 adult females and one infant were returned to Georgia.
19. The pilot gave regular updates in English of the flight's progress.
20. A system was put in place to use the toilets, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] accompanying the returnee to the toilet. The privacy of the returnees was respected in this process. The

monitor observed [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Back Up Team also replaced Escort Team members who needed to use the toilets or to take a rest.

21. A full refreshments and meal service was provided during the flight. This consisted of the distribution of peanuts shortly after departure, the provision of a full meal roughly two hours after departure and the provision of an apple and a wafer biscuit shortly before landing. Plastic cutlery was provided and the meal had a choice of main courses with a chicken or vegetarian dish being offered. A tomato salad and a piece of cake was also offered with bread as an option. A range of cold drinks were offered. No alcohol or hot drinks was offered. All passengers were offered the same meal service.
22. The monitor had full range of movement on the flight and walked the length of the plane on three occasions. He spent two further periods observing the treatment of the family unit. No concerns were raised with the monitor, nor with the translator. The medical team informed the monitor that there had been two minor medical issues and that they were satisfied with the facilities provided.
23. The returnees were able to communicate with other returnees in adjacent rows.
24. On arrival, the returnees departed the plane as a group and were greeted by the Georgian police and customs authorities who had been provided with the details of their arrival. A liaison officer from the GNIB was present landside with the Georgian police.
25. The Garda Press Office had a camera team on hand in Dublin Airport to film the NCFRO. This team did not travel on the flight. The resulting film is to be anonymized to respect the privacy of both the returnees and others on the flight. The plan is that a film will be prepared which will be used for training purposes.

#### **D. Recommendations and best practice.**

26. The two-day familiarization course clearly assisted the effective and human rights centred conduct of the NCFRO. The monitor understands that a further course is planned and would recommend that these courses form part of the ongoing training for return operations
27. The monitor was clearly identified by means of a high visibility vest. A different colour for this vest could be considered.

**1 March 2025.**

**ENDS**