

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

**For reporting year
1 January 2021 – 31 December 2021**

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Contents

| Introductory sections 1 – 2 | | Page |
|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| 1. | The role of the Independent Monitoring Boards' (IMB) Charter Flight Monitoring Team | 3 |
| 2. | Executive summary | 4 - 7 |
| Evidence sections 3 – 6 | | |
| 3. | Safety | 8 - 11 |
| 4. | Fair and humane treatment | 12 - 18 |
| 5. | Healthcare | 19 - 20 |
| 6. | Preparation for removal | 21 - 22 |
| The work of the CFMT | | 23 |

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 the 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

2.1 Background to this report

2.1.1. The CFMT presents its findings for the calendar year 2021, during which the Covid-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on the CFMT's ability to monitor physically.

2.1.2. Enforced charter removals were mainly to European destinations, Albania, Lithuania, Poland and Romania. There were typically two such charters a week although the Albanian authorities did not accept any flights from the UK during the first quarter of the year. A few charters to other European destinations were cancelled or postponed in the same period, on Covid grounds.

2.1.3. There were also seven long-haul charters, two to each of Jamaica, Vietnam and Zimbabwe and one to West Africa. Two intended charters to Pakistan were postponed at short notice when the receiving authorities refused permission. A charter to India was similarly postponed. HOIE withdrew a possible charter to Somalia.

2.1.4. Returnees to Europe were principally individuals transferred from prison to an IRC for their removal. The cohorts on long-haul charters included some of the same group.

2.1.5. Charter flight removals to European Union countries party to the Dublin Convention¹ ceased on 31 December 2020. There are no new returns agreements with individual European member states. The CFMT understood they were intended by HM Government.

2.1.6. CFMT activity during the year

The CFMT fully monitored two charters to Albania, one to Romania and one to Zimbabwe, and the UK aspects of a charter to Vietnam. The CFMT supplemented these first-hand experiences by monitoring some other operations remotely using arrangements set up with HOIE.

2.1.7. Departments of state and contractors

As before, the aircraft were chartered by HOIE. Mitie Care & Custody Limited remained HOIE's escort contractor. Healthcare services were provided by IPRS Aeromed contracted by the escort contractor.

2.2. Main judgments

2.2.1. Was returnees' safety achieved?

¹ The Dublin Convention permitted a member state to transfer an asylum applicant to another EU country responsible for considering the asylum claim.

The pandemic persisted throughout the reporting period. Efforts were made to safeguard returnees from exposure to infection. HOIE made strategic decisions at the start of the period:

- to charter wide-bodied planes in which social distancing could be achieved to a greater degree than was possible in single-aisle aircraft, and
- against using airports far away from IRCs in the south-east in order to minimise the time returnees spent seated close together in a coach. This was a short-term plan. Use of distant airports was resumed in the second quarter of the reporting period.

Returnees were invited to take Covid tests in advance of removal. Further infection control measures were encouraged during the removal process itself. They were not 100% successful as some returnees were unwilling to co-operate.

2.2.2 The CFMT had some concerns about use of force or of restraints on some returnees, recorded later in this report.

2.2.3. **Were returnees treated fairly and with humanity?**

Many were treated kindly and with respect. There were significant exceptions including:

- no use of professional interpreting services at the IRC from which most of the Vietnamese returnees were collected for the April charter,
- seating some returnees to Zimbabwe in July in the secure section of vans for no apparent reason, and
- continuing to confine some returnees in vehicles for long periods of time.

Other examples of the lack of fair and humane treatment are cited elsewhere in this report.

2.2.4. **Were returnees well prepared for their removal?**

The CFMT cannot assess to what extent returnees had actually been prepared in advance by custodial staff or HOIE officials in the IRC.

Most of the returnees observed on the day acknowledged they knew what was happening, although the CFMT is not confident that all the Vietnamese returnees collected from IRCs for the April charter fully understood.

Returnees were generally offered a leaflet, in their own language, about the process on the day and an official complaints form. Only the occasional escort checked whether this data was understood.

2.3. **Recommendations**

TO THE MINISTER

2.3.1. The CFMT recommended in each of its last three annual reports against continued use of airports distant from IRCs in the south east. The recommendation was rejected each time. This report illustrates the inhumanity of keeping returnees confined in vehicles for hours en route to the plane leaving from a distant airport. The recommendation against continued use of airports distant from IRCs in the southeast is therefore repeated.

TO HOIE

2.3.2 Regarding the rapid response teams (RRT) – see section 4.2:

- they should not be used for charter escorting if they have not been trained to provide the same standards of returnees' care as the contractor's escorts.
- All RRT vans used to transport charter returnees must carry the range of welfare items available in the contractor's vehicles.
- The rationale to seat a charter returnee in the secure section of an RRT van must be transparent and individually risk-assessed.

2.3.3 Some returnees who had been transferred from prisons to an IRC for removal left the UK with funds in the form of a postal order which they could not cash at their destination. The problem needs to be resolved either within the prison estate or with the receiving IRC: for example, prisons or IRCs should identify incoming postal orders and arrange for the funds to be credited to the returnee before removal: see section 6.3.

TO HOIE AND TO THE ESCORT CONTRACTOR

2.3.4 Some returnees were collected from the IRC while their legal challenges against removal were ongoing. Some challenges were successful. HOIE must ensure it has robust systems for notifying the escort contractor promptly of a cancelled removal. The case study in paragraph 3.6.4 indicates that a returnee asserted his removal had been cancelled before he was collected by the escorts and that they were not officially notified for some time.

2.3.5 Returnees must not continue to be confined in vehicles for hours during their journey to the plane: see section 4.6. The practice of using airports distant from IRCs in the southeast must be discontinued and the following contributing time factors reduced to minimise the total period of confinement:

- time allocated to collection from IRCs, and
- time spent hanging around at the airport before boarding the plane.

2.3.6 The duration of restraints used on returnees must be individually risk-assessed. The default position reported in section 3.6.7 is unacceptable.

2.3.7 In its last report the CFMT recommended that a supply of compression socks be available on the plane and offered to returnees under the guidance of the contractor's paramedics. It was accepted but differences of opinion around cost then emerged. Provision was therefore patchy. Compression socks must be offered to all returnees on long-haul flights. They must also be available to any returnees on short-haul flights who need them on medical grounds.

TO THE ESCORT CONTRACTOR

2.3.8 The person escort record (PER) is an official record and source of evidence. The contractor's escorts must record all relevant events, welfare and other, affecting their returnees. The PER is also a means of demonstrating the frequency and quality of conversations between an escort and the returnee. The standard of recording improved over the reporting period. However, not all PERS consistently demonstrated satisfactory levels of recording or engagement. There is room for continued improvement: see section 4.4.4

2.4 Progress since the CFMT's last report

The Minister responded five days after the report was published. Some recommendations were specific to concerns around enforced removals under the Dublin Convention which ceased at the end of last year. A key issue of continuing concern has not been resolved – the time some returnees spend confined in vehicles on their way to, and then at, the airport.

Evidence sections 3 – 6

3. Safety

3.1 Suicide and self-harm risks

3.1.1 The approach to the care and management of people who are at risk of self-harm and/or suicide is set out in Detention Services Order (DSO) 6/2008, entitled 'Assessment, Care in Detention and Teamwork' (ACDT). Those so identified have individual ACDT care plans in which their state of mind, care and supervision must be regularly recorded.

3.1.2. In a response to a recommendation in the CFMT's last annual report about removal of vulnerable people, the CFMT was told that:

- 'the return of individuals with vulnerabilities to safe countries...will continue to be risk assessed on an individual basis, ensuring that welfare is central to any returns plan' and
- "vulnerability was not in itself a barrier to removal"

3.1.3 The CFMT's role is to monitor the welfare and treatment of individuals during the removal process on the day. It does not know whether prior risk assessment of the sort cited above took place as a matter of practice.

3.1.4 Vulnerable people continued to be removed in the reporting period, although the numbers were not of the order reported last year in the context of Dublin Convention removals. Examples include:

- Three Vietnamese with live ACDT care plans, in the returnee cohort of 21 removed in April.
- Three Zimbabweans with live ACDT care plans, in the returnee cohort of 14 removed in July. Different vulnerabilities of three others had been flagged before removal.
- One Jamaican with a live ACDT care plan, in the returnee cohort of seven removed in August. The intended removal of another, also with a live ACDT care plan, was cancelled at the airport for legal reasons.
- Two Bulgarians with live ACDT care plans, in the returnee cohort of five removed in April.

3.1.5 A live ACDT care plan must travel with the subject returnee. Escorting staff must engage in meaningful and supportive ways while the subject is in their charge and record this in the care plan. Some escorts failed to maintain the care plan, for example, in respect of each of the three Zimbabweans cited in paragraph 3.4.

3.2 Escorts' use of restraints and of force

3.2.1 DSO 07/2016 regulates use of restraint and force on escorted moves, including in the context of charter removals. Permissible circumstances include prevention of self-harm and if an individual is trying to obstruct removal. Practitioners must comply with the requirements of the Home Office manual on escorting safely. A review of the manual started in September 2018. The new manual was published after the end of the reporting period. The CFMT was represented at a formal demonstration of new techniques and equipment in March 2021.

3.2.2 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;
- secure, which totally restricts such movement.

The WRB can be adjusted from one position to another. If someone co-operates as a WRB is being fitted and no force is used to achieve compliance, the use of the WRB is categorised as passive.

3.2.3 The CFMT's evidence for this year is of little use of restraint and/or force on former prisoners being removed to European destinations. The long-haul flights present a different picture. Examples include:

- Three Vietnamese, in the cohort of 21 removed in April, put in WRBs, fitted in the IRC after the individual had been transferred to the custody of the escorts. Each co-operated as the WRB was fitted. Two of the three were leaving on live ACDT care plans.
- Two Zimbabweans, in the cohort of 14 removed in July, put in WRBs, fitted in the IRC after the individual had been transferred to the custody of the escorts. Each co-operated as the WRB was fitted. A third Zimbabwean was put in a WRB on the plane, some hours after take-off, following his violent and protracted disruption: force was also used.
- A Ghanaian in September who said he would not go onto the plane, was put in a WRB. He offered no physical resistance. He co-operated as his WRB was fitted.

3.2.4 Legal challenge to removal was sometimes unresolved when a returnee was collected from an IRC. This could lead to the returnee not co-operating with his collection and restraint being used. An example:

- A Jamaican who believed his removal on the August charter had been cancelled was presented by IRC staff to the escorts under restraint. The

escorts put him in a WRB in the secure position. His collection took nearly 40 minutes during which he appeared to have had a long discussion with the escorts about his cancelled removal. They were not officially notified of the cancellation until eight minutes after the man left the IRC. His WRB was removed, and he returned to his IRC.

3.2.5 The CFMT assessed most uses of the WRB to have been reasonable and proportionate. Examples of exceptions are:

- One of the Vietnamese in April who was simply argumentative, questioning the reason for his deportation. He was not on a live ACDT care plan. He offered no physical resistance. He did not have access to an interpreter at the time.
- Putting one of the Zimbabweans in a WRB for the July charter at the IRC was wholly inappropriate. He presented no risk of disruption. Fortunately, someone carried out a risk assessment before the man left for the airport and his WRB was taken off. He had been in it, unnecessarily, for over an hour.

3.2.6 The CFMT observed the use of force (which included the application of techniques intended to achieve compliance via pain) and restraint on a Zimbabwean on the plane in July and assessed it to have been reasonable, necessary and proportionate.

3.2.7 DSO 07/2016 requires use of restraint and/or force to be recorded. The detail must include the reason for and the duration of use. The DSO states that restraint must be used for the minimum time possible. The CFMT noted that a returnee once put in a WRB at the IRC, even when the application was passive, was kept in it until after the aircraft took off. This has been the escorts' standard approach for years, and seemingly accepted by HOIE. The CFMT knows of only two instances in this reporting period when a WRB was removed before take-off.

3.2.8 A few use of restraint records were poor; for example, failure to record the rationale for use or its duration. There was a lack of clarity in one instance about whether a WRB had been fitted in the free or a more restrictive position. The CFMT referred its observations to the detention and escorting security team who accepted that the particular reports did not paint a clear picture.

3.2.9 The process of transferring a returnee to the custody of the escorts in an IRC continued to be filmed. The lead escort had a body-worn camera. In its last report the CFMT recommended a second camera officer when force was being used on a returnee in an IRC. As far as the CFMT is aware, there were no circumstances this year which warranted a second camera officer filming a use of force in an IRC. The use of force on the plane on the Zimbabwean cited in paragraph 3.6.6 was filmed.

3.2.10 A returnee does not walk freely up the steps into the plane. An escort walks up on either side, each holding the returnee's arm. This contact is known as a guiding hold. It was used throughout the reporting period on a blanket basis. Returnees were not individually risk-assessed. The rationale was that the returnee was moving through an insecure area, although the vehicle in which the returnee travelled was invariably parked very close to the steps. Use of the guiding hold must be recorded in writing as a passive use of restraint. Records show that the guiding hold was maintained this year for a matter of minutes. The CFMT is satisfied that most returnees were told in advance that their arms would be held and many more than once. A significant change in policy was introduced after the end of the reporting period; use of the guiding hold must be individually risk-assessed.

3.3. **Infection control measures:** see section 5.1 of this report.

3.4 **HOIE oversight**

HOIE's contemporaneous oversight of all aspects of the escorting contractor's performance on the day was more consistent than previously although the resource was limited – seemingly not enough personnel to cover all aspects at all relevant locations. The pattern appeared to be of one contract monitor attending a muster briefing for escorts, then a collection from an IRC, and then travelling to the airport to observe returnees boarding the plane. A contract monitor generally flew. The Home Office monitors were again drawn from both the escort contract monitoring team and the detention and escorting security team. The CFMT additionally observed Home Office officials from the local compliance team attending charter collections at Brook House IRC.

4. Fair and humane treatment

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

4.1 The briefing to escorts at muster

There was typically a large group at the main muster. The escorts were addressed by the senior security officer (SSO) leading the escorting operation. The SSO went through a standard checklist, sometimes at speed. It covered a range of topics, many directly related to the care and welfare of the charter returnees. The CFMT noticed that a number of the escorts appeared to switch off and that muster instructions around returnees' care and welfare were not consistently followed. For example, some escorts ignored the standing instruction to complete PERs 'fully'; see paragraph 4.4.4.

4.2 Use of a different cadre of escorts

4.2.1 Some of the contractor's escorts were self-isolating in July. The escorting resource was supplemented for the July charter to Zimbabwe by staff in HOIE's RRT. They attended collections from IRCs, drove returnees to the airport in RRT vans, and flew.

4.2.2 These vans had normal seating with a segregated secure section at the back for one person. The CFMT observed some returnees being seated in the secure section for no apparent reason. It appeared to be a random choice, not a considered response to the individual's actual behaviour during the collection process at the IRC.

4.2.3 The range of welfare items available to returnees travelling in the escort contractor's vehicles, including a disposable urine bag, were not carried in RRT vans.

4.2.4 RRT escorts were assigned to three of the Zimbabweans with live ACDT care plans. They failed to record the necessary checks in the care plans at any point in the journey.

4.3 Collection at the IRC

4.3.1. The returnees whose collection the CFMT attended were presented to the escorts by IRC staff, usually a single officer. The contractor's escorts generally accorded returnees dignity and respect. The CFMT observed, as it had before, that escorts showed good interpersonal skills when dealing with English-speaking returnees. The CFMT noticed that when a professional interpreter was present some escorts asked them to interpret information in bite-sized pieces whilst others rattled off a chunk of information in one hit, which may have been indigestible for both the interpreter and the returnee.

4.3.2. All returnees were searched – a non-invasive search of the body and clothing. This is standard practice, carried out by escorts of the same gender as the returnee. Searches the CFMT observed were carried out privately, in a small, dedicated room. The CFMT considered it desirable that searches be filmed in the interests of both the returnee and the escorts. This suggestion was adopted just after the end of the reporting period with the requirement that one of the searching team had a body-worn camera. The CFMT hopes this new approach will become standard practice.

4.3.3. The escort contractor accepted the CFMT's 2019 recommendation that all returnees be offered a comfort break before leaving their IRC and took steps during 2020 to implement it. However, the CFMT was not satisfied the practice was fully embedded by the end of the reporting period.

4.4. Verbal briefings to returnees

4.4.1. When present at a collection from an IRC, the CFMT heard what each returnee was told. Most of the core information was given at that point. That first-hand evidence was supplemented by reading the PER of other returnees on the same charter collected from IRCs at which the CFMT was not present, as well as of many returnees on other operations over the year.

4.4.2. The PER is an official document and source of evidence. Escorts were reminded at the muster briefings the CFMT attended of the raft of information they must give each returnee. They were also instructed to note it fully in the PER.

4.4.3 The escort contract monitoring arm of HOIE introduced a PER checklist in January. It was intended as an aide-memoire for the escorts. The CFMT was interested in its introduction but noted over time that ticks on the checklist were not invariably supported by narrative evidence in the PER itself.

4.4.4 The standard of recording has improved over the reporting period. However, it is clear that some core information, if it had indeed been passed on, was not recorded in a PER. Examples of omissions include:

- the offer of a comfort break before leaving the IRC,
- potential access to the Chief Immigration Officer (CIO) on the plane, and
- the possibility of having a pillow or blanket on the plane.

The CFMT noted the same omissions in its last report.

4.5. Written information for returnees on the day

4.5.1. A personalised information pack was again offered to returnees. Its contents had been translated into the returnee's principal language. The pack comprised the official Home Office complaint form, HOIE's charter flight information booklet and the escort contractor's information booklet.

4.5.2. The pack was usually offered during collection from the IRC. Returnees brought to the airport from the Manchester Residential Short-term Holding Facility appeared not to be given any documentation of this sort until they reached the airport unless their escorts from Manchester were in the overseas cadre.

4.5.3. The Home Office complaint forms were also available on coaches and on the plane. The CFMT has some evidence that escorts pointed out the Home Office's complaint form to some returnees travelling by coach.

4.5.4. An assumption of literacy, even in the returnee's principal language, may result in unfairness. Not every returnee is interested in the information pack, but it is an exceptional escort who takes the trouble to explain its contents. The CFMT has few examples of escorts taking this initiative and involving an interpreter where available and needed.

4.6. The journey from the IRC to the plane

4.6.1. The CFMT's recommendation in each of its last two reports that the first and third component of time spent in vehicles had to be better managed to minimise in-vehicle confinement was accepted. A review was intended. The CFMT observed no change in practice during the reporting period. Returnees continued to be confined in vehicles for long periods, regardless of its possible impact on them.

4.6.2 These periods of confinement have three components: (a) time spent sitting in a vehicle in the IRC yard before it leaves for the airport; (b) the road journey from the IRC to the airport; and (c) the wait between arriving at the airport and boarding the plane.

4.6.3. Examples include the following by reference to the three components:

Time spent sitting in a vehicle in the IRC yard before the journey had even begun:

- one hour 50 minutes in the case of a returnee collected in March for a charter to Romania;
- two hours nine minutes in the case of a returnee collected in August for the charter to Jamaica;
- at least three hours in the case of a returnee collected in November for the charter to Jamaica who was first seated in a coach, then moved to a van, then moved back to a coach and finally back to a van in the IRC yard.

There is continued in-vehicle confinement during the journey from the IRC to the airport. Use of a distant airport is a significant contributor. The period of confinement was made even worse in some cases by a stop at a service area on the way to an airport in the midlands. Returnees were not allowed to leave the vehicle. For example:

- A service area stop of 55 minutes in the case of a returnee collected from Heathrow IRC for the charter to Jamaica in August. He spent six hours 25 minutes confined in the vehicle between the time at which he entered it and the time he left it to board the plane.
- A service area stop of 40 minutes in the case of some returnees collected from Heathrow IRC for the charter to Lagos and Accra in September, the stop described in one PER as to 'avoid arriving too early'. This suggests their collection from the IRC had started too early. They spent around six hours 25 minutes confined in a vehicle between the time at which they joined it at the IRC and the time they left it to board the plane.
- A service area stop of 30 minutes in the case of some returnees collected from Gatwick IRC for a charter to Albania in October. This again suggests their collection had started too early. One of these returnees spent seven hours confined in his coach between the time he joined it at the IRC and the time he left it to board the plane.

Examples of continued in-vehicle confinement between the time of arrival at the airport and boarding the plane:

- Four hours 20 minutes in the case of a returnee on the August charter to Jamaica, a huge contributor to his total time of in-vehicle confinement, which was over eight hours.
- Four hours 23 minutes in the case of a returnee on the same charter who had been collected from a prison.
- Around three hours 25 minutes for some returnees on a charter to Albania in October. The total time of in-vehicle confinement for one was six hours 45 minutes.

4.6.4 The adverse implications of long in-vehicle confinement of returnees are patent; for example:

- A few returnees who travelled to the airport in a coach were sometimes allowed to stand up briefly but not walk around. Returnees who travelled in a van had to remain seated throughout.
- A coach has a small WC which returnees can use during the road journey but see section 4.6.5. Returnees in a van can only be offered a disposable urine bag once on the road.

4.6.5 Not all coaches were fit for purpose. An example:

- There was no running water in a coach used for the journey to a distant airport in October which included a 30-minute service area stop. The WC could not be flushed.

4.6.6 The review referred to in paragraph 4.6.1 took two years. Its outcome was a report by the escort contractor which HOIE accepted. The CFMT received it after the end of this reporting period. In the CFMT's view there is no commitment in it to minimising in-vehicle confinement. The CFMT continues to monitor the issue. One welcome change has been introduced – provision of diversionary materials and games to help returnees while away the time spent in vehicles.

4.7. Boarding the plane

Returnees were escorted onto the plane swiftly, one by one, with an escort on either side, using guiding holds. There were more escorts walking up immediately behind, to push the returnee onwards if he paused on a step. Returnees were filmed going up the steps.

4.8. The flight

4.8.1. The CFMT flew on the charters to Albania in June and October, to Zimbabwe in July and to Romania in November. Each one, other than the flight to Zimbabwe, was uneventful. The incident resulting in use of force and restraint on one Zimbabwean man during the flight is recorded in section 3.2.5.

4.8.2. Blankets and pillows were carried on board and mostly offered to returnees.

4.8.3. The CIO leading a charter flight decided whether to hold an on-board 'surgery'. The surgery gives a returnee the chance to raise immigration issues for the last time with the only person on the flight with the professional competence to address them.

4.8.4. There was a surgery during the flight to Albania in June and to Zimbabwe in July. Surgeries on the short-haul flights to Europe tend to be the exception not the rule. The CFMT was satisfied that the CIO spoke with any returnee whom the escorts drew to attention. The CFMT was not satisfied the escorts consistently alerted returnees to the possibility of talking to the CIO.

4.8.5. The CIO's approach at surgeries and in other direct contacts with returnees was to listen and be helpful where possible.

4.8.6. A few returnees had concerns not directly related to their immigration status, such as missing property either still in a prison or with the police, or having a postal order they could not cash. Escorts encouraged them to use the official Home Office complaints route. If they opted to, the completed complaint was passed to the CIO for action once back in the UK.

4.8.7 Returnees were, again, denied privacy when using the lavatory on the plane. The door was always held slightly ajar. This remains the standard approach. It is not individually risk-assessed and should be. HOIE and the escorting contractor consider that privacy of use is risky, on the grounds of security or safety. The blanket ban on privacy of use is demeaning. Having to use the lavatory with the door ajar upset one of the Zimbabweans in July. Escorts were able to calm him, and he later used the lavatory without the complete privacy he wanted.

4.9. **Financial needs:** see sections 6.2 and 6.3.

4.10 **Disembarkation**

Disembarkation from the charters on which the CFMT travelled was without incident. The Zimbabweans on the July flight were called forward individually. The man who had been put in a WRB during the flight was called forward last. His WRB was then released. The Albanians in June and October left quickly en masse. In November the receiving authorities in Romania (police) asked for a particular returnee to be called forward first and he was. The second to leave the plane had asked if he might go early as he had an onward flight. The senior escort on the flight facilitated this. The rest of the cohort left en masse, quickly. The interpreter was called forward to assist, if needed.

4.11. **Use of interpreters**

4.11.1 Use of professional interpreters increased during the reporting period for charter operations to European destinations. The CFMT understood that the likely need was gauged in advance by the relevant section within the Home Office responsible for making the bookings. They were used effectively during collections and on flights the CFMT observed with the caveat in section 4.3.1.

4.11.2 No professional interpreters were booked to assist at the IRC from which most of the Vietnamese were collected for the April charter. The CFMT observed many non-English speakers did not appear to understand what they were being told. The CFMT also queried how much those who claimed to speak a little English understood when briefed about processes so unfamiliar. A professional interpreter attended at the airport.

4.11.3 Communications gaps can be closed to an extent by telephone interpreting services, such as Big Word. They are accessible to the escorts but were not routinely used despite the need.

4.12. **Access to nicotine substitutes**

Smoking is not allowed once the returnee is in the custody of the escorts. This may heighten anxiety for some. The escorts carry Nicorette lozenges or similar products. The CFMT was satisfied by the end of the reporting period that a stock was carried

on coaches and offered to returnees and sometimes on the plane as well. It was not satisfied that this provision was available in vans.

4.13 Interaction between escorts and returnees

4.13.1 The CFMT has examples of escorts engaging with returnees in a friendly, respectful and empathetic manner. Examples include:

- The approach of the senior officer and the search team at the collections the CFMT observed.
- Some escorts taking trouble to talk to a returnee about any challenges likely to be faced on returning home.
- A few escorts playing a game available on the in-flight entertainment menu with the returnee in his/her charge.
- Returnees able to change their seat on the plane from one in the centre row to a window seat. (The seating configuration on the wide-bodied aircraft was 2+3+2).

4.13.2 There are less satisfactory examples, including:

- A returnee allowed to use the lavatory on the plane because 'he asked nicely'. This note in the PER may have been intended to be jocular. It was inappropriate.
- A returnee handed a Home Office rebuttal letter on the plane who could not read it because his spectacles were in his hold luggage. There was no evidence of an escort then reading it to him or otherwise attempting an explanation of its contents.
- A stop at a service area where escorts could buy themselves a hot drink which they brought back onto the coach: no such provision made for returnees.

5. Healthcare

5.1. Infection control measures in the context of the pandemic

5.1.1 Not all escorts wore face coverings at the musters the CFMT attended. All wore them throughout the IRC collections the CFMT observed.

5.1.2 The CFMT understood that returnees were encouraged to take a lateral flow test during the 72 hours immediately preceding their scheduled arrival at their overseas destination. Some who refused at the IRC later agreed to the test either on collection or at the airport. These tests were made by the escorts' paramedics.

5.1.3 Lithuania mandated a clear PCR test. The CFMT has an example of removal being cancelled after a Lithuanian returnee had left his IRC in view of his sustained refusal to be tested.

5.1.4 Returnees were temperature tested during the collection process by the escorts' paramedic. They were each given a face covering with spares and encouraged to remain masked throughout the journey. The escorts also carried spares and periodically offered a new face covering.

5.1.5. Social distancing between the escorts and the returnee was not attempted during any of the collections the CFMT observed. It was impossible while a returnee was being searched.

5.2. Fitness to fly

This is assessed by healthcare staff in the IRC before a returnee is presented to the escorts. The assessment was not challenged during any of the collections the CFMT observed.

5.3. Attention to healthcare needs at collection and during the journey

5.3.1. The paramedics assumed responsibility for a returnee's healthcare needs once he/she was presented to the escorts and took charge of confidential medical documents (including negative Covid test results) and prescribed medication from the IRC healthcare team. A paramedic attended each collection and travelled on to the airport. Two or three also flew.

5.3.2. The paramedics whom the CFMT observed during collections were professional and generally empathetic. PERs showed that escorts were proactive in alerting paramedics to any medical need that a returnee expressed during the journey, even if only a headache. Prescribed medicines were also dispensed.

5.3.3 In August, escorts carried an elderly Jamaican with an historic spinal injury gently up the plane steps. A paramedic was in attendance.

5.4. Handover of medication at the destination

The paramedics returned prescribed medication and confidential medical documents to the returnee to whom they belonged shortly before that person left the plane. This was the standard approach. Some escorts failed to record the handover in the PER.

6. Preparation for Removal

6.1 Timely preparation

6.1.1 The CFMT cannot assess to what extent returnees had been well-prepared in advance, including about reintegration support available for the Ghanaian on the September charter or the Jamaicans on the August and November charters: see section 2.2.4.

6.1.2 The CFMT understands that the Vietnamese cohort in April was required to self-isolate on arrival. The CFMT was notified on the plane to Zimbabwe in July that these returnees would also be required to self-isolate. The CFMT does not know whether either returnee cohort had been warned in advance.

6.2 Financial assistance

6.2.1 Destitution payments were potentially available on the European flights if authorised by the CIO. They were cash payments usually, to a maximum of £50, to enable returnees without enough cash to travel home from the destination airport. The request could be made directly by the returnee to the CIO or communicated to the CIO by escorts. The CFMT has evidence of many such payments during the reporting period, typically of less than £50. Occasionally, someone was missed; for example, one man left with £3.85. The CFMT found no evidence that his need was drawn to the CIO's attention.

6.2.2 Some former prisoners had applied, whilst in prison, for the financial and general reintegration support available under the facilitated return scheme. If accepted on the scheme, the payment card and explanatory paperwork were given to the returnee during the flight. The CFMT noted that some returnees asserted they were on the scheme when they were not.

6.2.3 Financial grants were also made by a charity to a few returnees, arranged either when in prison or later when in the IRC. These cash sums were given on the plane.

6.3 **Postal orders** - In the latter part of the reporting period, the CFMT became aware that a few returnees had postal orders in their property which they could not cash once in the destination country. They had either been issued with them whilst they were in prison, or the postal orders had been sent to them in prison by friends or family. The largest sum known to the CFMT was £150. This is a problem the escort contractor cannot deal with. The CFMT recognises that Returns Logistics contacted HM Prison Service about the issue. It had not been resolved by the end of this reporting period; see section 2.3.3.

6.4 **Other forms of reintegration support** – Returns Logistics has given the CFMT the information presented in this section. The CIO does not provide a

destitution cash payment if there is other assistance provided by the destination country, usually via a UK-funded local NGO programme.

6.4.1 For returnees to Nigeria or Ghana: The receiving authorities in Nigeria requested the Home Office to provide all Nigerian returnees on the September charter with 20,000 naira to assist with immediate post-arrival needs. The CIO gave each of the six Nigerians this amount on the flight and received no direct requests for destitution payments.

It is understood that a Ghanaian NGO provides post-arrival assistance in the form of refreshments, funds for onward travel, temporary accommodation if required, counselling and medical assistance. There was one Ghanaian on the September charter.

6.4.2 For returnees to Jamaica: The HO funds two NGOs in Jamaica which provide reintegration and rehabilitation support to returnees. One provides accommodation, skills training, and emotional support and counselling to those who request it. The other provides help with onward travel and re-documentation.

6.4.3 For returnees to Vietnam: The charters took place during the pandemic. Returnees were taken straight to quarantine on arrival for which the Home Office paid. The Vietnamese authorities took responsibility thereafter.

6.5.2 For returnees to Albania, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Romania: There is no Home Office-funded support in these states, and many of these returnees received destitution cash payments authorised by the CIO on the plane.

7. The work of the CFMT

7.1. The CFMT is composed of Board members from prisons, non-residential immigration short-term holding facilities and IRCs. They are volunteers, taking on CFMT duties in addition to those on their home Boards. There were six in the team during the summer, reduced to five in the autumn. Recruitment is intended. There was no face-to-face CFMT monitoring during the first quarter of the year for reasons associated with the pandemic.

7.2 The range of CFMT activity monitoring over the reporting period is recorded in paragraph 2.1.6.

7.3. The CFMT continued to present reports to HOIE, which it circulated to the escort contractor. Responses took the form of an action plan. It appeared to take months to formulate. Quarterly meetings between the CFMT, HOIE and the escort contractor continued and were particularly useful.

7.5. The Home Office detention and escorting complaints team provides the CFMT with data on returnees' charter-related complaints, when the returnee has consented to the complaint being shared with the CFMT. According to that source, there was only one during the reporting period.