

WHY FOOTBALL BOYCOTTS RUSSIA BUT NOT ISRAEL

 Ken Early
 Sport


Arrests of deportees place extra pressure on prison space

Overcrowding crisis after mass arrests of foreign nationals ahead of deportation

Intended deportees 'competing for floor space with violent offenders, murderers'

 CONOR LALLY
 Crime and Security Editor

Mass arrests of foreign nationals in advance of deportation flights have resulted in spikes in prisoner numbers in some jails, with space on the floor for mattresses having almost run out in one Dublin prison recently for the first time. The overcrowding crisis events are arising as prisoner numbers are already at record levels, and growing six to seven times faster than before.

Prison sources said deportees were being "dumped" into jails, often for long periods, though they had committed no crimes, and with no notice to the Irish Prison Service. Intended deportees were now "competing for floor space with violent offenders, sex offenders, murderers", as were others now in jail in the Republic.

The problem has arisen again in recent days following the arrest, and lodging in prison, of dozens of South Africans last Thursday. They were detained during a Garda National Immigration Bureau operation in advance of deportation charter flights in the next 10 days.

At the end of last week there were 5,805 prisoners in the system - 556 on mattresses on floors - and that number looks set to reach 6,000 for the first time later this year. Staff are concerned at the record rate of growth in the prisoner population, especially over the past 12 months.

Prisoner population
 The Irish prisoner population reached 4,000 for the first time in 2009 and had grown to 5,000 for the first time by 2024. That means whereas it took 15 years for the number of prisoners to increase from 4,000 to 5,000, the increase from 5,000 to 6,000 is on course to occur within a two-year window.

The Department of Justice said Minister Jim O'Callaghan and the Government were "acutely aware of the capacity constraints in our prisons" and the challenges that posed for prisoners and staff. It added prisoner numbers were

growing because gardaí were solving more crimes and there were now more court sittings.

However, steps had already been taken to introduce the electronic tagging of prisoners, outside jail settings, and to divert away from jails women charged with crimes awaiting trial. Prison spaces would increase by 1,500 by 2031, with €527 million already approved by Government.

Temporary release
 The Irish Prison Service said it "must accept into custody all people committed to prison by the courts" and, as such, "has no control over the numbers committed to custody". Temporary release was used to alleviate overcrowding, while considering "the safety of the public".

It added the Government had made "significant capital funding available" to provide additional capacity, which had increased by 418 berths since 2022, with plans for 1,500 additional prison places.

Last Thursday 14 South African men were lodged into the Dóchas Centre, the women's prison on the Mountjoy campus, Dublin. They were detained in a Garda operation so they could be deported on the latest Government-chartered deportation flight. That brought prisoner numbers there to 236, though it has a bed capacity of 146 and was designed for 85.

The South African men arrested last week were taken to Cloverhill Prison, Dublin, with a group of about 30 lodged there.

Last Friday, the female prison on Limerick had 95 prisoners and was operating at 170 per cent of its 56-bed capacity. The Dóchas Centre was at 162 per cent capacity, Portlaoise Prison at 138 per cent, Cork Prison at 135 per cent and Mountjoy men's jail at 134 per cent. Overall, the prison system was at 123 per cent capacity, with the lowest capacity - of 96 per cent - at Shelton Abbey Open Prison in Co Wicklow.

Only 2% of asylum seekers transferred back to EU states:
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"Dhaka in Bangladesh has close to 37 million residents. Thousands of street sweepers are under pressure to keep it clean and liveable

 Sally Hayden
 World News


TIPPING BY ACCIDENT RISE OF THE INVOLUNTARY GRATUITY

 Conor Pope
 Pricewater

Baltic out there
 Poc fada hits Helsinki

Members of Helsinki Harps GAA club and the wider Irish community staged a poc fada on the frozen Baltic sea waters of Töölönlahti Bay in the Finnish capital, braving temperatures of minus 20 degrees.

Photograph: Jimmy Doyle



Rubio rounds off a 'tense transatlantic' weekend

DEREK SCALLY

US secretary of state Marco Rubio has named Slovakia and Hungary, headed by Trump-friendly leaders, as a "key component" in Washington's future engagement with Europe.

Rubio is to meet Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán in Budapest today after warning EU leaders in Munich that the US was interested in allies "not paralysed into inaction by fear of climate change, fear of war, fear of technology".

In Slovakia yesterday, Rubio said the Trump administration expected "every country in the world to act in their national interest; that is what countries are supposed to do. When our national interests are aligned... this is an extraordinary opportunity for co-operation and partnership."

He also promised Slovakia and Hungary "concrete actions that we will take together in ways that are beneficial to your people and our people".

Back in Munich, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas wel-

comed as "important" Rubio's message that the US and Europe are "intertwined" but said it was "also clear that we don't see eye to eye on all issues and this will remain the case".

She dismissed as "fashionable Euro-bashing" claims by Rubio, echoing others in the Trump administration that Europe's political establishment was pushing the Continent to a cultural and economic abyss.

"Contrary to what some may say, woke, decadent Europe is not facing civilisational erasure," she said.

While EU leaders in Munich offered polite resistance, Slovak prime minister Robert Fico, who visited Trump last month in Florida, told Rubio in Bratislava that the EU was in "deep crisis".

Meanwhile, Orbán, whose April re-election is not assured, stayed away from Munich to launch a weekend series of campaign broadsides against the "oppressive machinery" of the EU.

"Fear-mongering about Putin is primitive and unserious. Brussels, however, is a palpable

reality and a source of imminent danger," said Orbán in a state-of-the-nation address drawing parallels between the EU and the Soviet regime that dominated postwar Hungarian life for decades.

Rubio is expected to endorse Orbán in person, echoing last week's online endorsement by Trump of Orbán as a "truly strong and powerful leader".

→ Europe ponders its future: embrace an ally, submit to a bully or go it alone?: page 6

Fines of €25,000 for M50 toll evaders are 'about fairness'

TIM O'BRIEN

Fines of up to €25,000, the seizure of lorries, vans and cars and potential six-month prison sentences for failure to pay the M50 toll charges have been defended by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).

"Enforcement is about fairness for the 97 per cent of the road users who use the M50 and who do pay their toll," the roads authority said.

The organisation, which is the parent body to eFlow, the barrier-free electronic tolling system on Dublin's M50, was commenting after Dublin District Court imposed fines of up to €25,000 on 22 car, van and truck drivers who failed to appear in court in January.

On January 19th the court imposed a cumulative total of €428,000 on errant motorists.

The tolling system allows ve-

hicles to pass between junctions 6 and 7 of the M50 without stopping, using cameras to record licence plates. eFlow provides a range of billing and payment options including video tolling and tags.

On the M50, about 4,000 journeys a day - based on 3 per cent of the annual average daily traffic figures - remain unpaid.

Tolls dodged
 For these motorists, the consequences can be severe. According to an internal TII report, a total of 50 vehicle owners have been given the maximum fine of €25,000 by the courts. The number of tolls dodged ranged from 81 to 1,502. Vehicles involved have ranged from private cars and commercial vans to articulated trucks.

The TII report notes the courts typically take into account the number of unpaid pas-

sages, whether there were any payments made and the number of letters issued to the vehicle owners.

In February 2023, Pierse Fitzgibbon Solicitors for TII proceeded with a High Court summons against a commercial company with a very large debt because of their toll evasion on the M50. This resulted in the sheriff seizing several of the company's vehicles.

"The seizing of the vehicles encouraged this company to resolve their debt and ensured their compliance going forward," said TII's director of corporate communications, Séan O'Neill.

In 2025 alone, Pierse Fitzgibbon Solicitors sent more than 850 cases to the sheriff to retrieve the debt owed. This resulted in 74 vehicles being seized by the sheriff from toll-evading motorists.

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Weather

Blustery with widespread showers in a fresh westerly breeze. Highs of 6-10 degrees but turning cooler later.

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Business Today

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Sports Monday

Rugby: Andy Farrell has hit out at the 'keyboard warriors' who have contributed to the negative and often nasty targeting of his young outhalves.

National Football League: Donegal never looked in trouble when seeing off Mayo in Letterkenny.