

# Pledge to free up UK jails sees just 17 EU prisoners sent home to serve time



Just 17 foreign criminals have been sent home to serve their sentences under a treaty that was intended to clear Britain's jails of mainland European offenders.

Ministers had hoped to deport thousands of offenders under a European Union treaty that would see convicts serve their sentences in their home countries. But in more than two years of operation, just 17 European criminals have been removed.

The number of criminals from the rest of the EU has risen markedly under the Coalition, despite David Cameron promising to "*personally intervene*" to have them sent home in greater numbers.

The EU Prisoner Transfer Agreement was signed by Britain and 17 other member states and came into force in December 2011.

Since then three Belgians, a Latvian, a Maltese and 12 Dutch prisoners have been sent home. Ten were guilty of drugs offences, three of sexual offences, one for causing death by dangerous driving and one for a stabbing.

At the same time, 10 British citizens have been transferred from other EU states, meaning overall the scheme has opened up just seven extra prison spaces.

There are 10,695 foreign prisoners in British jails, costing around £370 million a year.

That is a modest fall of around 500 since the Coalition came to power, despite a pledge by Mr Cameron to do "*everything in*

*my power” to get them removed, including raising the issue with other foreign leaders. In the same period, the number of European prisoners has increased from 3,670 to 4,700.*

Poles make up the largest group, with 938 in prison in December 2013, up from 650 in September 2010 – meaning they have overtaken Jamaicans as the largest group of foreign nationals in British jails.

They are followed by Irish prisoners (up from 680 to 779), Romanians (up from 381 to 547) and Lithuanians (from 384 to 502).

However, Poland and Ireland were granted an opt-out from the scheme by the last Labour government.

Sadiq Khan, the shadow justice minister who uncovered the figures, said the failure to implement the agreement presented an *“enormous drain on stretched budgets”*.

*“Back in 2010 David Cameron said he would personally intervene to make sure thousands of foreign criminals would be sent back to their home countries to serve their prison sentences. Yet, four years on and still only a handful have been repatriated. The Prime Minister must, as a matter of urgency, roll up his sleeves and make sure the EU repatriation scheme is working properly and that all of the nation states are signed up to it, if the number of foreign criminals in our jails is to be cut.”*

Jeremy Wright, the prisons minister, admitted the number of prisoners sent home *“remains low”*, but said the agreement was at *“an early stage”*. He said nearly 2,000 foreign offenders were deported last year before their prison sentence had finished.

*“Whereas this government has begun to reduce the foreign national population in prison since 2010, between 1997 and 2010 the number of foreign nationals in our prisons more than*

*doubled.”*

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