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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

Assessment of third countries' level of cooperation on readmission in 2022

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Contents

Introduction	2
Reading guidance	
Terminology	
Armenia	13
Azerbaijan	16
Bangladesh	18
Cabo Verde	21
Cameroon	24
China	27
Congo	30
Côte d’Ivoire	32
Democratic Republic of the Congo	35
The Gambia	44
Ghana	48
Guinea	50
India	53
Iran	56
Iraq	59
Kosovo*	62
Mali	65
Morocco	68
Nepal	71
Nigeria	73
Pakistan	76
Russia	79
Senegal	80
Somalia	83
Sri Lanka	86
Sudan	89
Tunisia	91
Türkiye	94
Uzbekistan	97
Vietnam	100

RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED

Introduction

Overall context

The work on return and readmission has evolved considerably over the past few years. The common EU system for returns, combining stronger structures inside the EU with more effective cooperation in third countries, is progressively taking shape. In this context, the mechanism established under Article 25a of the Visa Code¹ is an important tool to achieve a more effective cooperation with third countries on return and readmission and to reinforce the EU's capacity to return in an effective, safe and dignified way those persons who do not or no longer have the right to stay in the EU.

Article 25a of the Visa Code provides that the Commission assesses at least once a year third countries' cooperation on readmission and reports its findings to the Council. The mechanism thus contributes to the comprehensive approach to migration, as proposed in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum², which calls for joint efforts to ensure that progress on readmission proceeds in parallel to that in other areas of EU migration partnerships with third countries. Swift action is needed to ensure effective returns to countries of origin and transit, from the EU and from third countries along the routes³. In this context, the European Council has repeatedly called on the Commission and Member States to pull together the full range of EU policies, tools, and instruments - including diplomacy, development, trade and visas, as well as legal migration - in a strategic way and to use them as leverage to improve cooperation on readmission and to increase returns⁴. In the conclusions of its special meeting on 9 February 2023, the European Council recalled the importance of a unified, comprehensive, and effective EU policy on return and readmission, as well as of an integrated approach to reintegration. In this context, the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code plays a key role in ensuring that specific issues identified in readmission cooperation are regularly raised and addressed with third countries as part of the continuous targeted engagement on readmission. It also provides a mechanism for leveraging the EU's common visa policy in case readmission cooperation remains insufficient. The European Council invited the Commission and the Council to make full use of the mechanism provided for by Article 25a of the Visa Code⁵.

It is in this context that the Commission is presenting the fourth annual assessment report covering readmission cooperation in the year 2022. The assessment is based on quantitative data, as well as

¹ Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code), as amended by Regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019, OJ L 188 of 12.7.2019, p. 25.

² COM(2020) 609 final.

³ Conclusions of the European Council of 9 February 2023, EUCO 1/23.

⁴ Conclusions of the European Council of 16 December 2021, EUCO 22/21, and of 9 February 2023, EUCO 1/23.

⁵ Conclusions of the European Council of 9 February 2023, EUCO 1/23.

RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED

qualitative information related to return and readmission cooperation with the third countries assessed, as provided by the Member States of the EU and the Schengen Associated Countries (thereafter, the Member States). Based on Member States' input, and in reference to the scale of readmission requests and the number of persons ordered to leave (hereinafter, the caseload), the findings show that a number of third countries need to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission, as indicated in the specific country sections of this report.

Follow-up to the previous assessment reports

In the first three assessment cycles, the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code created opportunities to re-invigorate discussions on readmission with certain third countries (e.g. Ghana, Morocco) and opened new channels of discussion and communication on readmission, where no targeted engagement had taken place previously (e.g. Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Mali). Further, it has helped address persistent or emerging problems with concrete results (e.g. Bangladesh, Senegal, Iraq) and allowed for progress in the discussion on readmission (e.g. The Gambia).

Following the report on readmission cooperation in 2019 and pursuant to the provisions of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission proposed to the Council the adoption of temporary restrictive measures on short-stay visas for nationals of Bangladesh⁶, Iraq⁷ and The Gambia⁸. In view of the enhanced engagement with Bangladesh and the concerted actions taken by Bangladesh, as well as the progress demonstrated in the cooperation on readmission, the Council did not take action at that time. Concerning the proposal on Iraq, action was then not taken by the Council in view of the constructive cooperation on the situation at the EU-Belarus external border in 2021. However, as cooperation on readmission remained insufficient, the Council decided to resume discussions on the proposal in 2023. As regards the proposal for The Gambia, the Council adopted these measures on 7 October 2021 (in force as of 1 November 2021)⁹.

Following the report on readmission cooperation in 2020, the Commission proposed to the Council the adoption of temporary restrictive measures on short-stay visas for nationals of Senegal¹⁰, as well as to move to the next stage of measures for The Gambia, in accordance with Article 25a (5)(b), with a gradual increase of the visa fees¹¹. Despite the continuous engagement of the EU to

⁶ COM (2021) 412 final.

⁷ COM (2021) 414 final.

⁸ COM (2021) 413 final.

⁹ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1781 of 7 October 2021 on the suspension of certain provisions of Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council with respect to The Gambia, OJ L 360, 11.10.2021, p. 124.

¹⁰ COM(2022) 631 final.

¹¹ COM(2022) 632 final.

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improve The Gambia's level of cooperation, it was concluded at that time that substantial and sustained progress on all phases of the readmission procedure was not achieved. The second stage measures entered into force, upon adoption by the Council, on 8 December 2022¹². In accordance with Article 25a (7), the Commission is reporting on the progress achieved in The Gambia's cooperation on readmission with the present report. As regards the Commission's proposal for Senegal, the decision is pending in the Council.

Assessment of the level of cooperation in 2022

Selection criteria and assessment indicators

This annual assessment report on readmission cooperation in the year 2022 covers 33 third countries whose nationals are subject to short-stay visa requirements (hereinafter visa-required third countries) that fulfil one of the following two criteria:

- 1) A **quantitative criterion**, which comprises two elements:
 - a. 1 000 or more return decisions issued by Member States to the nationals of a third country in 2021 (indication of the scale of the issue of return Member States are confronted with), and
 - b. 1 000 or more nationals of that third country found in 2021 in the territory of EU Member States with no right to stay (indication of a potential trend of return decisions and consequently scale of the issue of readmission).
- 2) A **qualitative criterion**, which includes all visa-required third countries with which there is an EU Readmission Agreement or arrangement in place.

Based on these criteria, the following third countries were subject to an assessment: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, China, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo^{*13}, Mali, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

While fulfilling the quantitative criterion, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Palestine were excluded from the assessment as it is not possible to establish effective operational contacts due to the

¹² Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2459 of 8 December 2022 on the application of an increased visa fee with respect to The Gambia, OJ L 321, 15.12.2022.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

¹³ Regulation (EU) 2023/850 of 19 April 2023 amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 grants visa free travel to Kosovo-passport holders to the Schengen area and will become effective as of 1 January 2024. Kosovo will then be covered in the regular Commission reports issued under the visa suspension mechanism.

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conditions in these third countries, whereas Eritrea and Belarus¹⁴ were excluded due to the asylum recognition rate above 75% in the EU in 2021. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine precludes possibilities of engagement with Russia and the assessment has been excluded from the report. The criteria and the geographical scope of the assessment were presented to and endorsed by Member States in January 2023¹⁵.

The report presents the EU's engagement with the abovementioned third countries in the area of readmission, as well as the existence and the implementation of EU tools and projects designed to support readmission processes. It assesses readmission cooperation of the identified 33 third countries in 2022 based on the qualitative and quantitative data and information provided by Member States to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and to Eurostat, as of 31 March 2023. The data and information reflect the quantitative and qualitative indicators laid out in Article 25a (2) of the Visa Code.

The **qualitative indicators** set out in the Visa Code refer to the level of cooperation in the different stages of the return and readmission process: (i) cooperation in the identification procedure and in the issuance of emergency travel documents, (ii) acceptance of the European travel document, (iii) acceptance of the readmission of persons to be returned to third countries, and (iv) acceptance of return flights and operations. Member States' detailed assessment of these indicators is collected through a **comprehensive questionnaire** related to the individual steps of the return and readmission process, submitted to Frontex through the Irregular Migration Management Application (IRMA). Building on the experience and the feedback received in previous assessment exercises, the Commission, together with Frontex, further refined the questionnaire. The main amendments concern a reduction of the number of questions on the impact of COVID-19 on cooperation.

The **quantitative indicators** refer to (i) the number of third country nationals ordered to leave¹⁶, (ii) the number of third country nationals returned to third countries¹⁷ as a share of return decisions issued (i.e. the return rate), (iii) the number of readmission requests submitted by Member States¹⁸ and (iv) the share of accepted readmission requests¹⁹, measured by the issuance of travel documents (i.e. the issuance rate). The return rate provides an indication of the effectiveness of the return and readmission process. The issuance rate provides a more specific indication of the effectiveness of third countries' cooperation in the readmission process.

¹⁴ The EU-Belarus Readmission Agreement entered into force in July 2020. Belarus' authorities announced the suspension of the Agreement on 28 June 2021.

¹⁵ In the Irregular Migration and Expulsion Working Party meeting of 18 January 2023 and in the Readmission Expert Group meeting on 20 January 2023.

¹⁶ As provided by Member States to Eurostat.

¹⁷ As provided by Member States to Eurostat.

¹⁸ As provided by Member States (with the exception of Cyprus, Denmark and Romania) via IRMA to Frontex.

¹⁹ As provided by Member States (with the exception of Cyprus, Denmark and Romania) via IRMA to Frontex.

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Collecting timely, accurate and complete datasets on all four indicators from Member States is essential in the preparation and follow up to the assessment and is key to use the mechanism to its full potential. The four indicators are considered as defined by Eurostat and Frontex in the guidance provided to Member States.

To reflect **the overall readmission context**, annex 2 includes the following three additional sets of data for 2022:

- **number of irregular border crossings**²⁰, which suggests the potential dimension of irregular migration movements from a given third country to the EU,
- **asylum recognition rate**²¹, which provides an indication of the potential upcoming return caseload for specific nationalities,
- **visa refusal rate**, which is related to the relative scale of the risk of irregular migration movements to the EU (one of the elements considered when examining requests for visas).

The combination of these three datasets gives an indication of the approximate scale, trends and risks of irregular migration and readmission for each of the third country assessed within the overall readmission context.

Each Member State's **assessment based on the quantitative and qualitative indicators is weighted based on its caseload** in terms of the number of third country nationals who have been ordered to leave and the number of readmission requests submitted to the third country's authorities.

The **weighted assessments, together with the overall readmission context, inform the conclusion** on whether the third country needs to take concrete steps to improve the level of cooperation on readmission.

Following the discussion with Member States in the Council and taking into account the lessons learned from the previous reports, the fourth assessment report has been streamlined. In light of Member States' assessment of the level of cooperation on the different stages of the readmission process, the report identifies concrete operational actions needed to address substantial challenges and improve cooperation. Remaining strongly rooted in and based on a technical analysis of the indicators on readmission cooperation, the report contains detailed indications on the third countries where cooperation needs improvement.

Further information on the structure of the report is provided in the "Reading guidance" (p. 9).

The mechanism's strategic value

²⁰ As provided by Member States to Frontex.

²¹ As provided by Member States to Eurostat.

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The first three assessment cycles have demonstrated the mechanism's strategic value and its effectiveness in fostering progress in third countries' readmission cooperation when used to its full potential. Engagement on the basis of a Commission proposal for temporary restrictive visa measures, has proven particularly effective and impacted positively third countries' willingness to improve cooperation.

Following the proposal for visa measures for Bangladesh (15 July 2021) and the continuous intensive dialogue with the Bangladeshi authorities, the third country has continuously demonstrated efforts to improve cooperation. These include starting to reduce the accumulated backlog of cases submitted by Member States, increasing the efficiency in the responses to readmission requests, as well as introducing a number of organisational measures to facilitate coordination and monitoring of readmission related efforts in the EU. These efforts have led to some progress in the operational cooperation with Member States. As regards cooperation with Senegal, following the Commission's proposal (9 November 2022) regular technical dialogues on readmission have taken place. Senegal started taking concrete actions to improve cooperation, such as establishing communication channels with Member States to facilitate the coordination and monitoring of readmission related efforts in the EU, and the acceptance of charter flights and identification missions for some Member States. These steps have materialised in some improvements in the operational cooperation with some Member States. Following the entry into force of the second stage measures for The Gambia (8 December 2022), The Gambian authorities took constructive steps to improve cooperation, including by facilitating the communication with Member States through organisational measures with the appointment of a focal point for readmission, improvements in the identification, the issuance of travel documents and increased responsiveness to some Member States, as well as regular acceptance and effective organisation of charter flights. These measures resulted in some improvements in the operational cooperation. As regards cooperation with Iraq, the intensive dialogue with the authorities that followed the Commission's proposal (15 July 2021) has in March 2023 led to steps taken to improve cooperation with Member States, such as the expression of a political commitment on readmission, which was followed by constructive outreach to some Member States' diplomatic representations on operational cooperation.

In light of the outcomes of the previous assessment cycles and of Member States' requests for a shorter and swifter process, the Commission is presenting the report earlier than the previous cycles and is bridging the gap between the data collection and the assessment to further increase the effectiveness of the mechanism.

The Commission will continue to regularly inform the Member States in the Council and in relevant expert groups about the targeted readmission engagement it is undertaking with the third countries concerned.

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Trends in the cooperation in 2022

Increase of irregular border crossings

Following the decrease of irregular border crossings in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the numbers have sharply increased since 2021. This trend continued in 2022 and thus far in 2023. In 2022, 331 433 irregular border crossings were detected at the EU's external borders. This represents a 66% increase compared to the previous year and the highest number of irregular border crossing since 2016. Increased irregular border crossings and unfounded asylum applications pose a burden to the migration systems of the Member States and are likely to be followed by return orders if the persons concerned have no right to stay in the EU. In 2022, the effect of this increase was already apparent in Member States' caseloads with regards to several third countries.

Uneven cooperation across Member States

Similar to previous years, Member States' assessments of cooperation in 2022 reflect an uneven level of cooperation by certain third countries. There are several factors that might have an impact on the level of cooperation on readmission in the long or short term, including political, diplomatic and historical bilateral relations between a Member State and a third country or changes in migratory trends.

The annual assessments highlight the shortcomings in readmission cooperation for each third country assessed. Over time, this reporting and assessment exercise has allowed the EU and its Member States to target engagement on specific aspects of readmission cooperation and to identify, together with the third countries concerned concrete actions to trigger improvement in the cooperation with all Member States. In the follow up to the assessment, including when considering submitting proposals on temporary visa restrictive measures, the Commission takes into account the third country's level of cooperation with all Member States, with the aim to improve cooperation for all. Thereby the mechanism contributes to amplifying progress in readmission cooperation of third countries and fosters solidarity among Member States, as part of a well-functioning common EU system for returns.

Next steps

The Commission will present and discuss this assessment report with the Council. Together with the High Representative, including through the EU Delegations, the Commission will continuously engage with all third countries concerned, with a special focus on those that need to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. These exchanges will present opportunities to communicate the EU's expectations as regards progress in readmission cooperation, to address specific challenges in the operational cooperation, and to focus on the

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concrete steps to improve cooperation. The Commission will closely and continuously involve Member States in the process.

Reading guidance

The first part of each country fiche provides a short overview of the framework in which readmission cooperation takes place, as well as the **EU engagement and steps taken** on readmission since the previous annual report.

The second part of each country fiche focuses on the **cooperation on readmission**. It presents an overview of Member States' return and readmission related figures and the number of Member States that reported having interacted with the third country in the reporting period. It then provides Member States' responses to the question on the **overall cooperation on readmission in 2022**, weighted by caseload and visually represented with a pie chart.

The report further presents Member States' assessment of the individual steps of the readmission process: **identification procedure, issuance of travel documents and return operations**. For each of the sections, the qualitative questionnaire gave Member States the opportunity to provide a scaled (very good, good, average, poor, very poor) assessment of the cooperation on the respective step of the readmission process. This is followed by an account of **concrete steps** that the third country needs to undertake to improve readmission cooperation in the different stages of the return and readmission process and based on the input and information provided by Member States.

The assessment is weighted on the Member States' share in the overall caseload in terms of return decisions and readmission requests. Minor inconsistencies of up to 1% may occur due to rounding.

Terminology

1. Timely: In cases where there is an EU Readmission Agreement/arrangement, the travel documents are issued within the deadlines foreseen in that agreement/arrangement.
2. When there is no EU Readmission Agreement/arrangement, but there is a bilateral one, deadlines should be the ones foreseen in the applicable bilateral agreement/arrangement for the respective Member State.
3. When there is no (EU or bilateral) agreement/arrangement, timely issuance should be interpreted by default as 30 days from the request for identification/re-documentation, as foreseen by the Convention on International Civil Aviation, Annex IX, Chapter 5.

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Algeria

Engagement to date

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations for an EU Readmission Agreement with Algeria in November 2002. To date, negotiations have not formally started. An Informal Dialogue on Migration and Mobility has taken place regularly since 2016, also on the joint efforts to prevent irregular migration. Algeria has worked to prevent irregular migration to the EU. The last meeting took place on 13 July 2023, during which readmission cooperation was discussed, followed by a technical workshop. Algeria showed signs of being willing to engage with the EU on a range of migration topics. Although Algeria agreed to holding meetings on readmission in line with the agreed Partnership Priorities²² that regulate the relations between the EU and Algeria, to date no such meetings could be organised. There is no other cooperation instrument or process in place at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Algeria to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. During a meeting with the new Algerian Ambassador to the EU on 17 January 2023, the Commission further raised the need to improve cooperation on readmission.

Five Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Algeria.

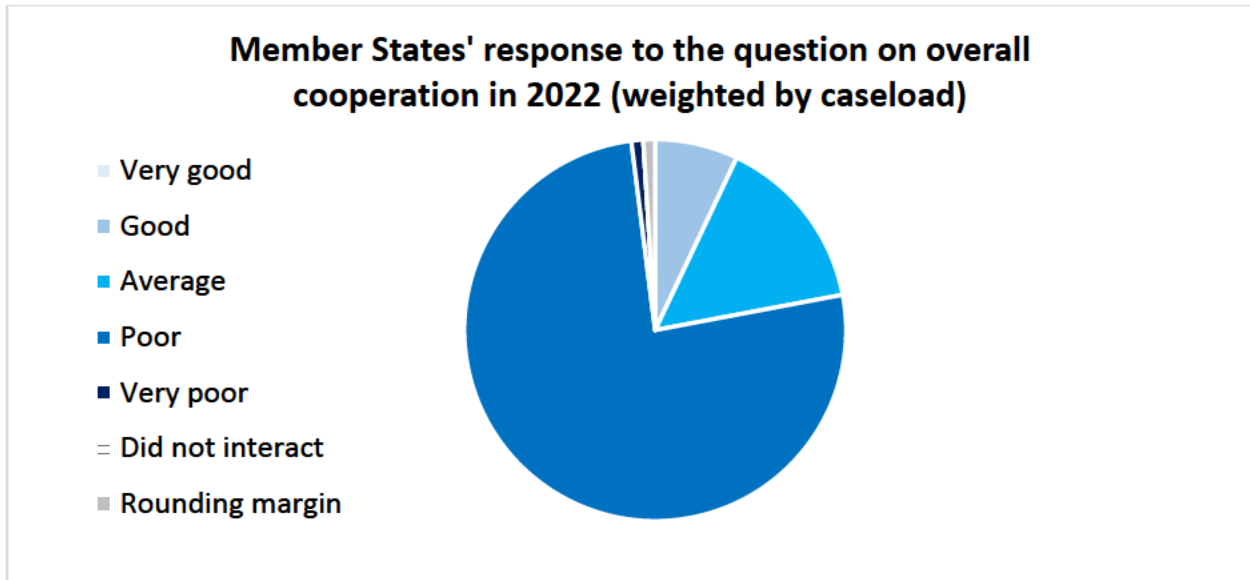
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 33 970 Algerian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 935 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 9%. Member States submitted 7 055 readmission requests to the Algerian authorities, who issued 1 986 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 28%.

24 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Algeria for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, six Member States (76% of the caseload) assessed Algeria's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, five (15% of the caseload) as average, nine (7% of the caseload) as good, three (1% of the caseload) as very poor, and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very good. This is represented in the graph below.

²² The "Priorités communes de Partenariat entre l'Algérie et l'UE au titre de la Politique européenne de voisinage" regulate the relations between the EU and Algeria, covering all aspects of the relations. The Partnership Priorities from 2017 have expired and negotiations are ongoing about their renewal.

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11 Member States (13% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, vaccination or quarantine, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to two Member States, these measures were applied to returnees only. For two Member States, authorities were responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements, by allowing testing upon arrival and/or by granting exemptions to the testing requirements for returnees. This was not the case for the other nine Member States.

Algeria's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by seven Member States (86% of the caseload), as good or very good by nine (10% of the caseload), and as poor or very poor by eight (3% of the caseload).

23 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 11 of them, requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. It was very often or often the case for eight Member States and rarely or never/almost never the case for four Member States. Six Member States (74% of the caseload) assessed Algeria's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as poor or very poor, 13 Member States (18% of the caseload) as good or very good, and four Member States (7% of the caseload) as average. The remaining Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, two Member States (74% of the caseload) assessed Algeria's cooperation as poor, seven (15% of the caseload) as average, and eight (7% of the caseload) as good or very good. Seven Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases and travel documents issued.

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Algeria needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Algeria needs to extend existing good practices to all Member States; accept conducting consular interviews via videoconference; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under the EU or national legal frameworks; issue travel documents in a timely manner; issue travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality; ensure that the validity period of travel documents is adequate; extend or renew travel documents upon request; lift restrictions on returns by scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirements for escorts, the requirement of a transit permit or the obligation to use direct flights); accept return operations via charter flights from all Member States.

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Armenia

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement²³ with Armenia entered into force on 1 January 2014. It was concluded together with a Visa Facilitation Agreement²⁴, in the context of a Mobility Partnership²⁵. Eight meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee took place since then to assess the implementation of the Agreement. The last meeting, held on 14 July 2022, confirmed the satisfactory implementation of the Agreement. The EU is financing a Readmission Case Management System (RCMS)²⁶ which is operational since 2019, with 13 Member States currently connected.

Five Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Armenia.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 2 350 Armenian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 625 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 27%. Member States submitted 868 readmission requests to the Armenian authorities, who issued 696 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 80%.

14 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Armenia for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, 10 Member States (92% of the caseload) assessed Armenia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very good, three (4% of the caseload) as good, and one (2% of the caseload) as average. This is represented in the graph below.

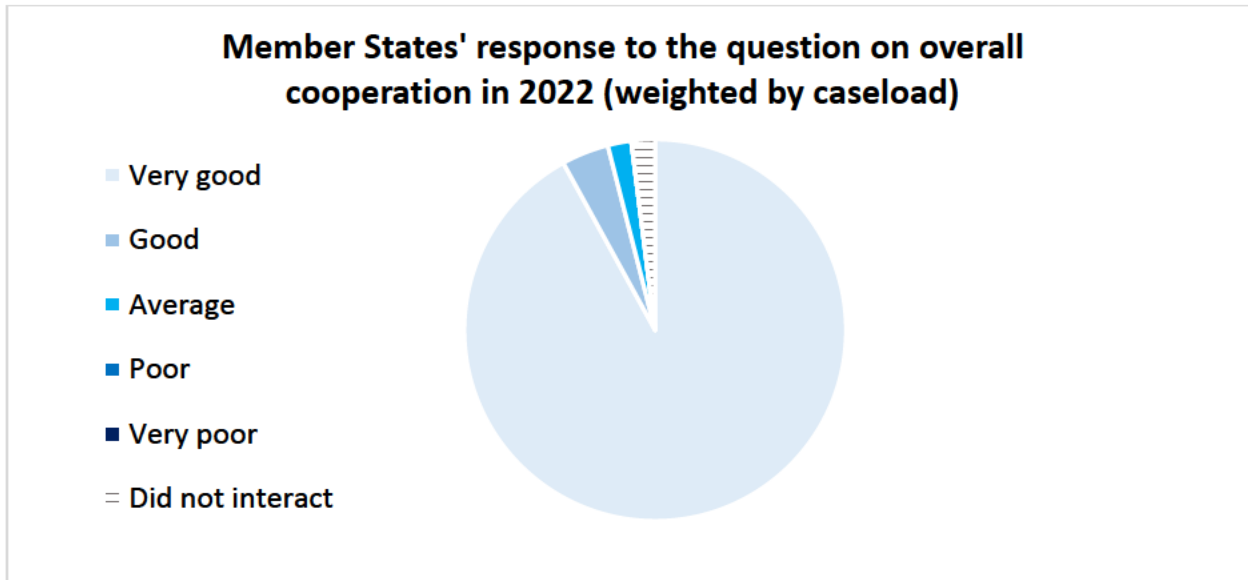
²³ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia on the readmission of persons residing without an authorization, OJ L 289/12, 31.10.2013.

²⁴ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia on the facilitation of the issuance of visas, OJ L 289/2, 31.10.2013.

²⁵ Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership between the European Union and Armenia, 27.10.2011.

²⁶ An electronic platform facilitating the exchange of information between competent authorities in Member States and in a given third country in order to process individual readmission cases.

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Two Member States (4% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements** continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to these two Member States, all nationals entering Armenia required negative COVID-19 PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, and the authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Armenia's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good by eight Member States (88% of the caseload), as good by five (8% of the caseload), and as average by one (2% of the caseload).

13 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For all 13 of them, requests were always/almost always or very often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. Nine Member States (90% of the caseload) assessed Armenia's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as very good, three (6% of the caseload) as good, and one (2% of the caseload) as average. The one (1% of the caseload) remaining Member State did not request travel documents in 2022.

As regards **return operations**, seven Member States (91% of the caseload) assessed Armenia's cooperation as very good, two (3% of the caseload) as good, and one (2% of the caseload) as average. Four Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

To further improve readmission cooperation, Armenia needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement and extend existing good practices to all Member States. In particular, Armenia needs to ensure timely responses to readmission requests in the RCMS for all Member States; readmit returnees' spouses who hold another nationality;

RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED

carry out consular interviews upon request, including via videoconference; swiftly issue travel documents for all Member States with a validity period of 120 days, as stipulated in the Agreement; lift restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirements for escorts, transit permits).

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Azerbaijan

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement²⁷ with Azerbaijan entered into force on 1 September 2014. It was concluded together with a Visa Facilitation Agreement²⁸, in the context of a Mobility Partnership²⁹. Seven meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee took place since then to assess the implementation of the Agreement. The last meeting, held on 22 June 2022, confirmed the satisfactory implementation of the EU Readmission Agreement.

Through the European Readmission Capacity Building Facility under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the EU is financing a project to develop a Readmission Case Management System (RCMS)³⁰ in Azerbaijan, in parallel to the model RCMS³¹.

One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with Azerbaijan.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 1 130 Azerbaijani nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 640 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 57%. Member States submitted 419 readmission requests to the Azerbaijani authorities, who issued 435 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 104%.

13 Member States (92% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Azerbaijan for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, three Member States (61% of the caseload) assessed Azerbaijan's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, six (16% of the caseload) as very good, three (14% of the caseload) as average, and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.

²⁷ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the readmission of persons residing without authorization, OJ L 128/17, 30.4.2014.

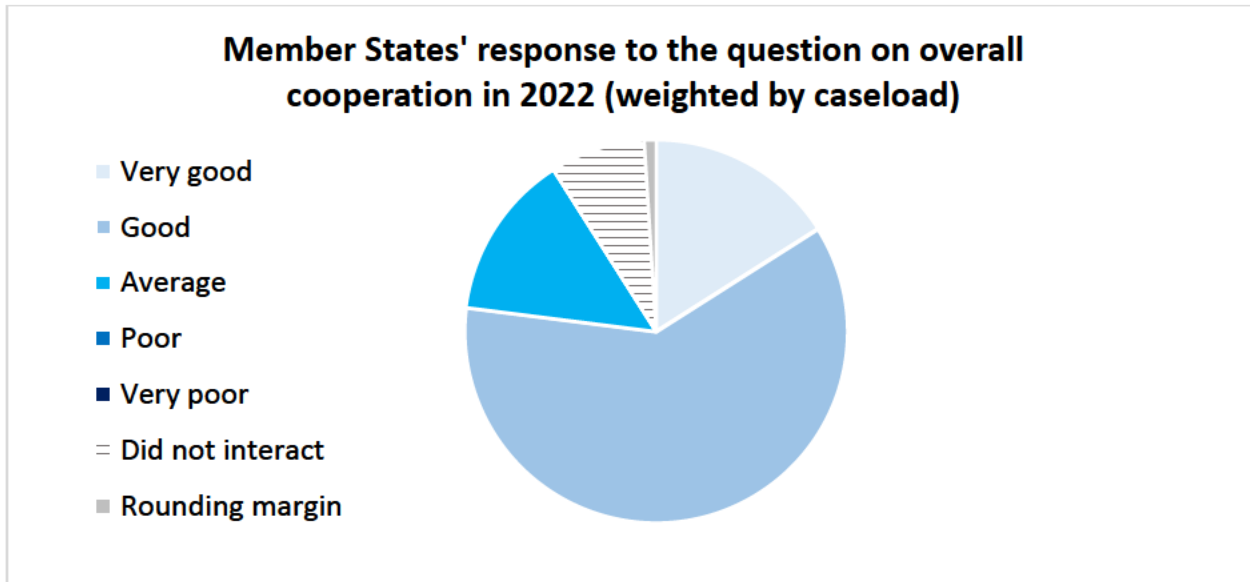
²⁸ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the facilitation of the issuance of visas, OJ L 128/49, 30.4.2014.

²⁹ Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the European Union and its participating Member States, Brussels, 5.12.2013.

³⁰ An electronic platform facilitating the exchange of information between competent authorities in Member States and in a given third country in order to process individual readmission cases.

³¹ A common centralised platform for Member States, connected to customized segments located in participating third countries, developed in 2020 by the EU and the International Organization for Migration. The first deployment is taking place in Azerbaijan.

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Azerbaijan's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good by seven Member States (73% of the caseload), as good by two (15% of the caseload), as average by one (3% of the caseload), and as very poor by two (less than 1% of the caseload). The remaining Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Azerbaijan on identification in 2022.

11 Member States (90% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 10 of them, requests were always/almost always or very often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely the case for one Member State. Nine Member States (83% of the caseload) assessed Azerbaijan's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as very good or good, one (3% of the caseload) as average, and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. The two remaining Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, six Member States (77% of the caseload) assessed Azerbaijan's cooperation as good or very good and one (3% of the caseload) as average. Six Member States (13% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

To further improve readmission cooperation, Azerbaijan needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement and extend existing good practices to all Member States. In particular, Azerbaijan needs to respect the deadlines for the identification procedure and for the issuance of travel documents for all Member States; issue travel documents with a validity period of 150 days for all Member States as stipulated in the Agreement; lift restrictions on scheduled and charter flights for all Member States (e.g. visa requirements for escorts, transit permits).

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Bangladesh

Engagement to date

The non-binding EU readmission arrangement with Bangladesh, the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the Identification and Return of Persons without an Authorisation to Stay, was concluded on 20 September 2017. In 2018, Bangladesh concluded identical SOPs with Norway and in April 2019 agreed to extend the application of the EU SOPs to Switzerland. Seven meetings of the Joint Working Group took place to date. As a follow-up to a high-level visit to Bangladesh in November 2022, the March 2023 Joint Working Group took place back-to-back with the first meeting of the informal Migration and Mobility Dialogue and a technical Roundtable on Talent Partnership.

Through the European Readmission Capacity Building Facility under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the EU is financing a Readmission Case Management System (RCMS)³² with Bangladesh, launched on 9 November 2020, to support the implementation of the SOPs. 16 Member States (75% of the caseload) are connected to the system.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

Follow up to the proposed measures

Bangladesh's cooperation on readmission in 2019 had been assessed as insufficient and the Commission proposed the suspension of certain provisions of the Visa Code with respect to Bangladesh on 15 July 2021. Following the Commission's proposal, the Commission and the High Representative entered an extensive and continuous dialogue with the Bangladeshi authorities, both in Brussels and in Dhaka, at operational, technical and political level, with a view to improve Bangladesh's cooperation on the readmission of its nationals with no right to stay in the EU. The Council did not take action at that time.

In regular exchanges, as well as during the seventh Joint Working Group meeting held in March 2023, the Commission clearly communicated to Bangladesh the EU's expectations for substantial and sustained progress in cooperation in all stages of the readmission process, in particular the respect of the deadlines for identification and issuance of travel documents stipulated in the SOPs and in increasing the efforts towards effective returns. These include implementing the changes identified in the JWG to increase the transparency of the RCMS, refraining from imposing additional requirements in the framework of the return procedure, and ensuring training and handover for the Bangladeshi officials responsible for the treatment of readmission applications.

³²An electronic platform facilitating the exchange of information between competent authorities in Member States and in a given third country in order to process individual readmission cases.

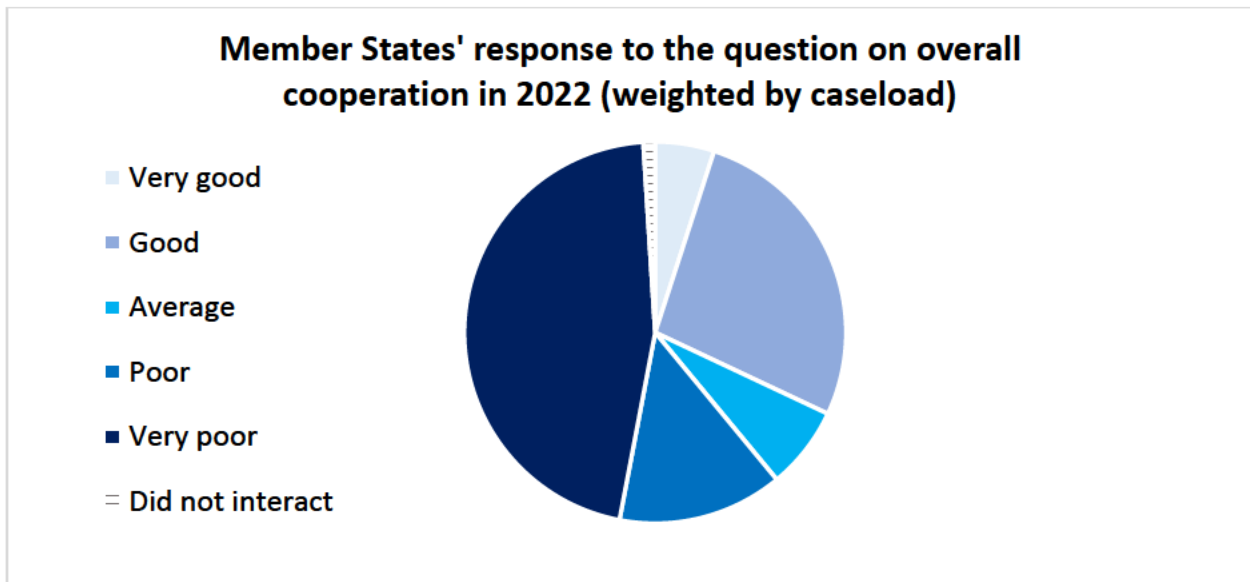
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Cooperation on effective return operations needs to continue. A positive step in 2023 was the lifting of the limitation on the number of returnees on charter flights.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 16 795 Bangladeshi nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 970 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 6%. Member States submitted 734 readmission requests to the Bangladeshi authorities, who issued 526 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 72%.

22 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Bangladesh for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, four Member States (46% of the caseload) assessed Bangladesh's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor, seven (27% of the caseload) as good, five (14% of the caseload) as poor, five (7% of the caseload) as average, and one (5% of the caseload) as very good. This is represented in the graph below.



Three Member States (2% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements** such as PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine, vaccination, and treatment costs continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to one Member State, these measures were applied to returnees only. For one Member State, authorities were responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Bangladesh's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor or very poor by eight Member States (46% of the caseload), as very good or good by seven (31% of the caseload),

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and as average by five (8% of the caseload). Two Member States (14% of the caseload), reported not having interacted with Bangladesh on identification in 2022.

16 Member States (80% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 11 of them, requests were always/almost always or very often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was often the case for two of them, and rarely or never/almost never for three. Eight Member States (34% of the caseload) assessed Bangladesh's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good or very good, two (32% of the caseload) as poor, and six (14% of the caseload) as average. The remaining six Member States (18% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022, due to no replies on identification, the lack of relevant cases, and the refusal of returnees to be identified.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (44% of the caseload) assessed Bangladesh's cooperation as average, and 13 (36% of the caseload) as good or very good. Six Member States (18% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in the reporting year.

Following the Commission's proposal for restrictive visa measures, Bangladesh has undertaken concrete steps to improve the operational cooperation on readmission, such as starting to reduce the accumulated backlog of cases submitted by Member States and increasing the efficiency in the responses to readmission requests; introducing organisational measures and communication processes to facilitate the coordination and monitoring of readmission related efforts in the EU; lifting limitations on the number of returnees on charter flights; facilitating the connection of more Member States to the RMCS.

However, there are still tangible issues that need to be addressed. Bangladesh needs to fully respect the provisions of the SOPs and to extend existing good practices to all Member States. In particular, Bangladesh needs to reinforce the cooperation with all Member States; ensure timely responses to readmission requests and to requests for the issuance of travel documents, where the deadlines stipulated in the SOPs are still significantly exceeded; increase the transparency of the return and readmission processes through improvements in the RCMS identified in the JWG; refrain from imposing additional requirements and requesting documents not foreseen by the SOPs in the framework of the return procedure; continue accepting charter flights without limitations on the number of returnees on board, in line with the practice that has started on 15 March 2023.

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Cabo Verde

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement³³ with Cabo Verde entered into force on 1 December 2014. Since then, five meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee took place. The last meeting, held on 9 March 2023, confirmed the satisfactory implementation of the Agreement.

One Member State reported having signed a bilateral agreement/arrangement with Cabo Verde, which has not yet entered into force.

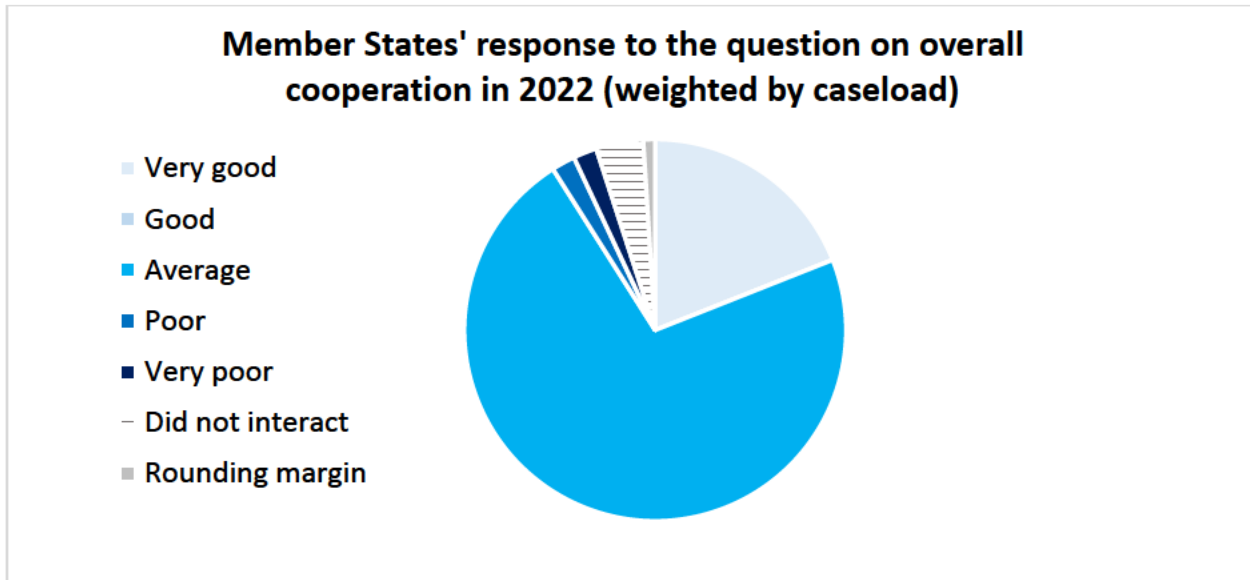
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 395 Cabo Verdean nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 35 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 9%. Member States submitted 28 readmission requests to Cabo Verdean authorities, who issued 15 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 54%.

Six Member States (96% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Cabo Verde for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, two Member States (72% of the caseload) assessed Cabo Verde's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, two (19% of the caseload) as very good, one (2% of the caseload) as poor, and one (2% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.

³³ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Cape Verde on the readmission of persons residing without authorization, OJ L 282/50, 24/10/2013.

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Two Member States (19% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests or vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to both Member States, these measures were applied to all nationals and the authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Cabo Verde's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good or very good by four Member States (91% of the caseload), and as poor by one (2% of the caseload). The remaining Member State (2% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Cabo Verde on identification in 2022.

Five Member States (94% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For two of them, requests were (almost) always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. It was very often the case for two other Member States and rarely the case for one. Two Member States (73% of the caseload) assessed Cabo Verde's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as average and three (21% of the caseload) as good or very good. The remaining Member State (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested travel documents in 2022.

As regards **return operations**, one Member State (71% of the caseload) assessed Cabo Verde's cooperation as average, two (19% of the caseload) as good or very good, and one (2% of the caseload) as poor. Two Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

To improve readmission cooperation, Cabo Verde needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement. In particular, Cabo Verde needs to accept biometric evidence;

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organise consular interviews upon Member States' request; respect the time limits for replies to readmission requests; issue travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality; issue travel documents with a validity of six months, as stipulated in the Agreement; lift restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirements for escorts, transit permits).

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Cameroon

Engagement to date

Besides the Cotonou Agreement³⁴, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place with Cameroon at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Cameroon to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. On 17 February 2023, a meeting with the Ambassador of Cameroon took place in Brussels, also in the context of the increase of Cameroonian nationals in Cyprus and Lithuania.

Three Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Cameroon.

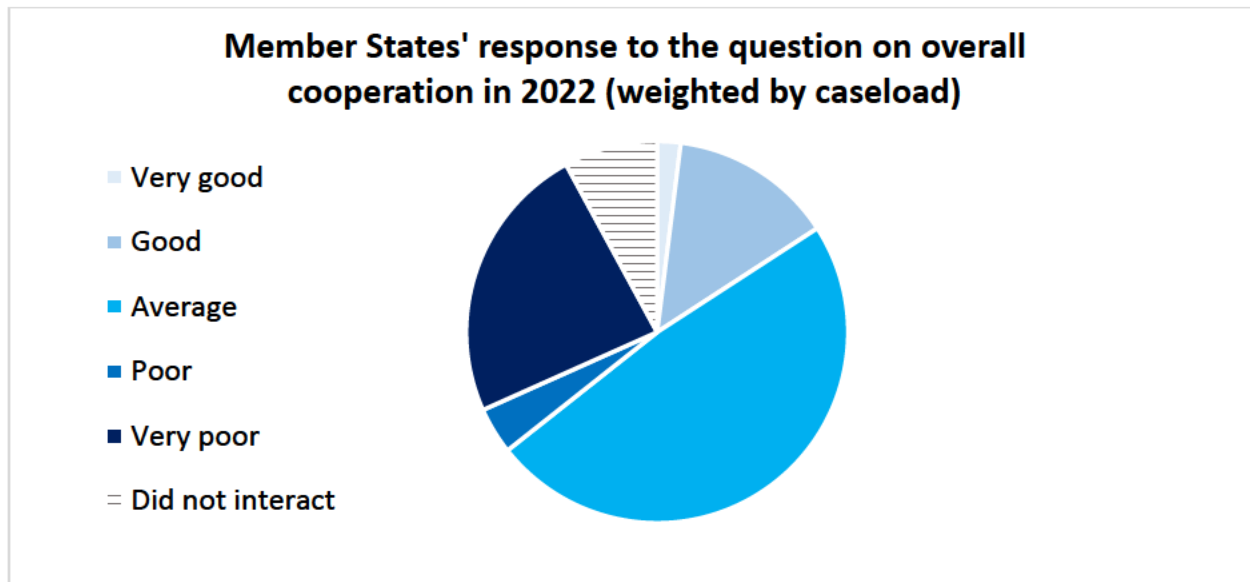
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 3 550 Cameroonian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 385 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 11%. Member States submitted 386 readmission requests to the Cameroonian authorities, who issued 106 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 27%.

19 Member States (92% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Cameroon for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, three Member States (49% of the caseload) assessed Cameroon's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, four (24% of the caseload) as very poor, five (14% of the caseload) as good, two (4% of the caseload) as poor, and five (2% of the caseload) as very good. This is represented in the graph below.

³⁴ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Cameroon is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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Five Member States (14% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements** such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to two Member States, these measures were applied to returnees only. For one of them the measures applied also to escorts. For two Member States the authorities were responsive to the request to lift these measures, while for three, this was not the case.

Cameroon's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good or very good by eight Member States (52% of the caseload), as average by two (12% of the caseload), and as poor or very poor by seven (11% of the caseload). Two Member States (17% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Cameroon on identification.

16 Member States (71% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For five of them, requests were always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was often or very often the case for seven Member States, and rarely or never/almost never for four. Four Member States (49% of the caseload) assessed Cameroon's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as average, 10 Member States (17% of the caseload) as good or very good, and two (7% of the caseload) as poor or very poor. The remaining three Member States (20% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of responses or no relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, seven Member States (53% of the caseload) assessed Cameroon's cooperation as good or very good and one (1% of the caseload) as average. 11 Member States (38% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year.

To improve readmission cooperation, Cameroon needs to extend existing good practices to all Member States, in particular ensure timely responses and swift follow up to readmission

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requests; organise consular interviews upon request; extend the possibility to conduct consular interviews via videoconference to all Member States; refrain from conducting interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue travel documents with a sufficient validity period and without taking into account elements other than nationality; extend or renew travel documents upon request; lift restrictions on both scheduled and charter flights.

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China

Engagement to date

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations for an EU Readmission Agreement with China in 2002. The Agreement is being negotiated in parallel with a Visa Facilitation Agreement, as part of the second phase of the roadmap agreed under the EU-China Mobility and Migration Dialogue (MMD). The negotiations started in 2017. The last round of negotiations took place in May 2019, marking little progress. A seminar on return management, with the participation of Member States, took place in December 2021.

Following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with China to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. On 10 February 2022, a meeting with the Ambassador of China took place in Brussels.

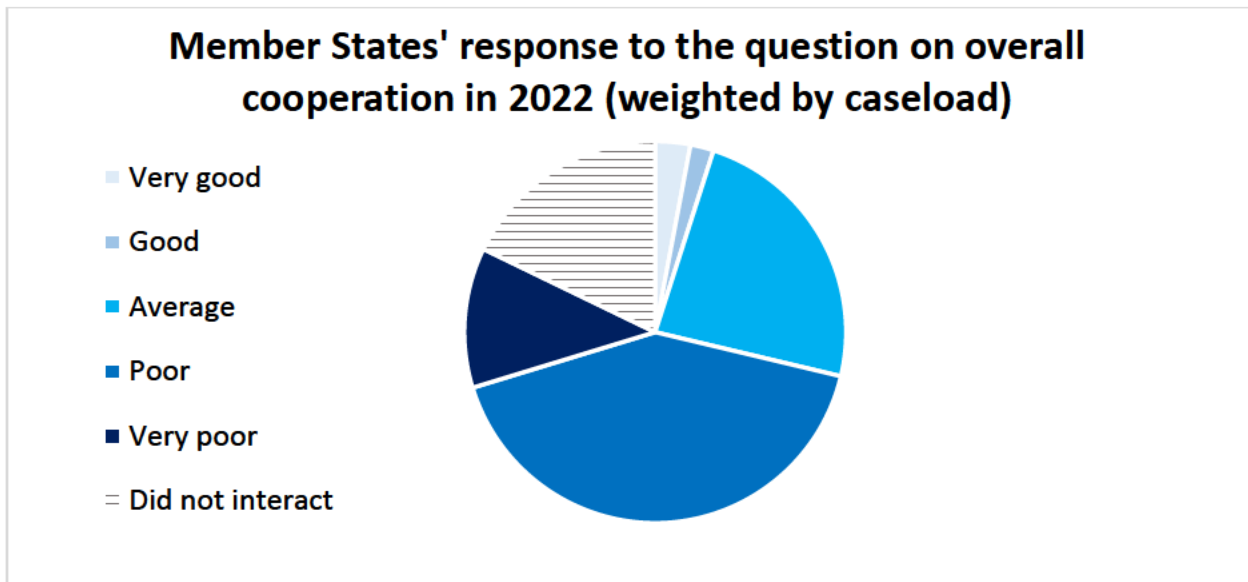
One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with China.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 3 580 Chinese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 925 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 26%. Member States submitted 120 readmission requests to Chinese authorities, who issued 28 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 23%.

14 Member States (82% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of China for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, three Member States (42% of the caseload) assessed China's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, four (24% of the caseload) as average, three (12% of the caseload) as very poor, three (3% of the caseload) as very good, and one (2% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.

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10 Member States (42% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, results registered in the "Customs Health declaration app", quarantine and vaccination requirements, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to three Member States, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were mostly not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements, yet one Member State noted that the requirement for regular passengers to undertake a new COVID-19 test when transiting was lifted for returnees.

China's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor or very poor by five Member States (52% of the caseload), as average by five (25% of the caseload) and as very good or good by four (5% of the caseload).

13 Member States (62% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 11 of them, requests were always/almost always, very often or often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for two Member States. Three Member States (28% of the caseload) assessed China's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as poor or very poor, five (20% of the caseload) as very good or good, and five (14% of the caseload) as average. The remaining Member State (20% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of cases.

As regards **return operations**, five Member States (45% of the caseload) assessed China's cooperation as poor, one (3% of the caseload) as average, and two (3% of the caseload) as good or very good. Six Member States (31% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to COVID-19 related restrictions and the lack of relevant cases.

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China needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, China needs to ensure timely responses and swift follow up to readmission requests, including for forced returns from all Member States; shorten identification procedures by carrying out consular interviews also outside of the context of identification missions; extend the possibility to conduct consular interviews via videoconference to all Member States; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue travel documents with a sufficient validity period; lift COVID-19 related restrictions for all Member States to resume forced returns; lift restrictions on readmission upon arrival and on scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirements for escorts); facilitate arrangements for the organisation of charter flights.

The conclusion of an EU Readmission Agreement would further contribute to ensuring more effective and predictable readmission cooperation with all Member States.

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Congo

Engagement to date

Besides the Cotonou Agreement³⁵, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place with Congo at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Congo to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. On 17 February 2023, a meeting with the Ambassador of Congo took place in Brussels.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

Two Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Congo.

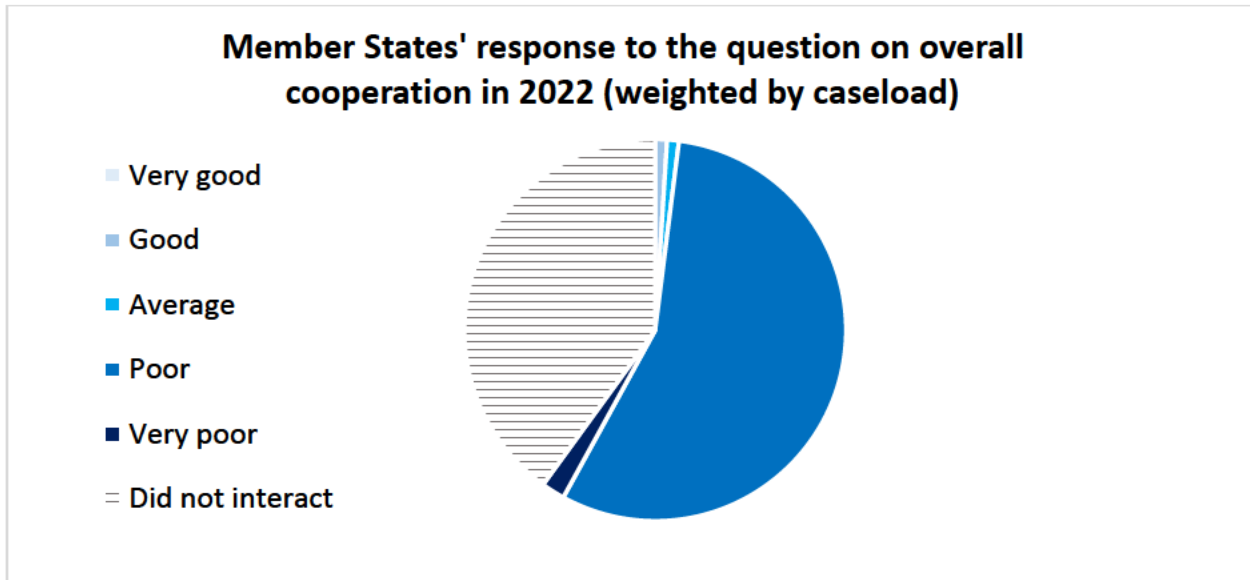
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 2 175 Congolese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 150 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 7%. Member States submitted 64 readmission requests to the Congolese authorities, who issued 23 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 36%.

Seven Member States (60% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Congo for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, two Member States (56% of the caseload) assessed Congo's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, three Member States (2% of the caseload) as very poor, one (1% of the caseload) as average, and one (1% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.

³⁵ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Congo is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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Congo's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by two Member States (55% of the caseload), as poor or very poor by three (2% of the caseload), and as good by one (1% of the caseload). The remaining Member State (1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Congo on identification.

Five Member States (58% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For two of them, requests were very often or always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was never/almost never the case for three Member States. Two Member States (55% of the caseload) assessed Congo's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as average and three Member States (3% of the caseload) as poor or very poor. The two remaining Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents due to the lack of replies on identification and no relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, one Member State (55% of the caseload) assessed Congo's cooperation as average, and one (1% of the caseload) as very poor. Five Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

Congo needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Congo needs to ensure timely responses to readmission requests and to requests for the issuance of travel documents; refrain from taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; and from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; set up consular interviews via videoconference; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; lift restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. transit permits).

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Côte d'Ivoire

Engagement to date

The non-binding EU readmission arrangement with Côte d'Ivoire (Document partagé entre le gouvernement de la République du Côte d'Ivoire et l'Union Européenne) was concluded on 17 October 2018. Since then, four meetings of the Joint Working Group took place. At the last meeting, held on 20 September 2022, both sides noted the progress made in the implementation of the arrangement, and discussed the necessary steps to address ongoing challenges in readmission cooperation, and agreed on jointly exploring the possible development of the RCMS³⁶.

To support identification and overall operational cooperation on readmission, four Ivorian liaison officers have been deployed in the embassies in Belgium, Germany, France and Italy. Following the fourth Joint Working Group meeting, Côte d'Ivoire agreed that Ivorian embassies in other Member States may request the temporary support of these liaison officers when strictly necessary.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

Three Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Côte d'Ivoire.

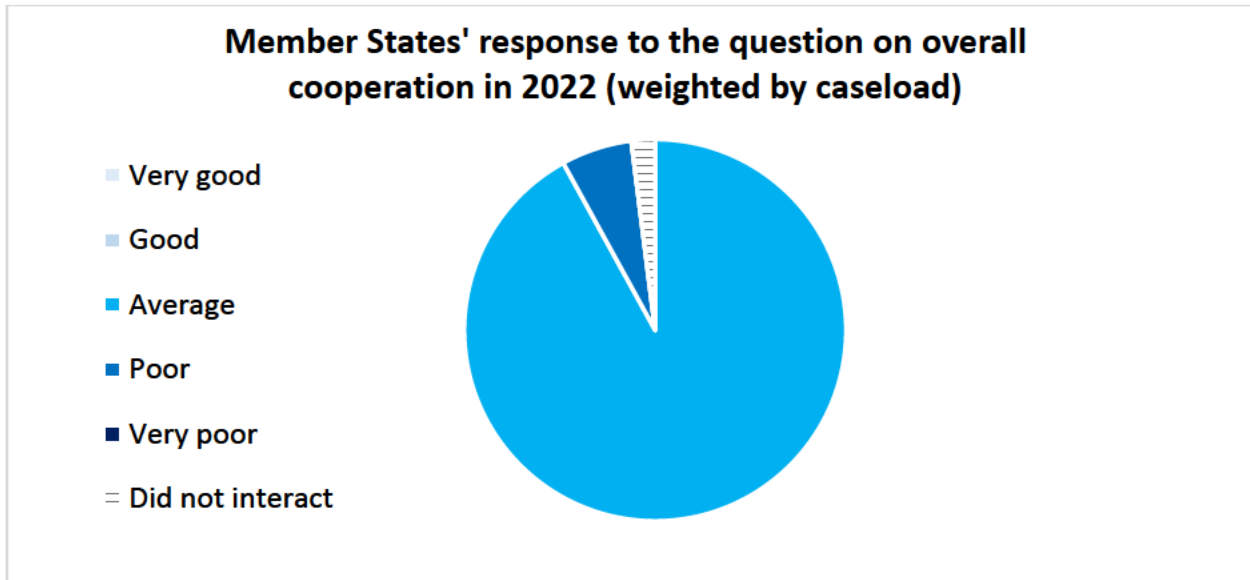
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 5 245 Ivorian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 190 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 4%. Member States submitted 440 readmission requests to Ivorian authorities, who issued 139 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 32%.

12 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, six (92% of the caseload) assessed Côte d'Ivoire's overall **cooperation on readmission** as average, four (6% of the caseload) as poor, and two (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.

³⁶ An electronic platform facilitating the exchange of information between competent authorities in Member States and in a given third country in order to process individual readmission cases.

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Three Member States (9% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests and vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to one Member State, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Côte d'Ivoire's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by three Member States (85% of the caseload), as average by four (8% of the caseload), and as poor or very poor by five (6% of the caseload).

10 Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For five of them, requests were often, very often or always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for the other five. Four Member States (92% of the caseload) assessed Côte d'Ivoire's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good, four (3% of the caseload) as poor or very poor, and two (less than 1% of the caseload) as average. The remaining two Member States (3% of the caseload) did not request any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (91% of the caseload) assessed Côte d'Ivoire's cooperation as average and three (2% of the caseload) as good. Six Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

In view of the overall readmission context and the high number of irregularly arriving Ivorian nationals, Côte d'Ivoire needs to take concrete steps to improve readmission cooperation, in the framework of the partnership with Côte d'Ivoire. More specifically, Côte

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d'Ivoire needs fully respect the provisions of the EU readmission arrangement, in particular, ensure timely responses to readmission requests and to requests for the issuance of travel documents, as stipulated in the arrangement; remove COVID-19 related restrictions for all Member States; organise consular interviews upon request, including via videoconference for all Member States; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; refrain from taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than it is currently the case; lift restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. transit permits); facilitate arrangements for charter flights; establish more effective communication channels with the Member States.

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

Engagement to date

Beside the Cotonou Agreement³⁷, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place at EU-level with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with DRC to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. On 3 June 2022 and 3 March 2023, exchanges with the Ambassador of DRC were held in Brussels.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

Two Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with DRC.

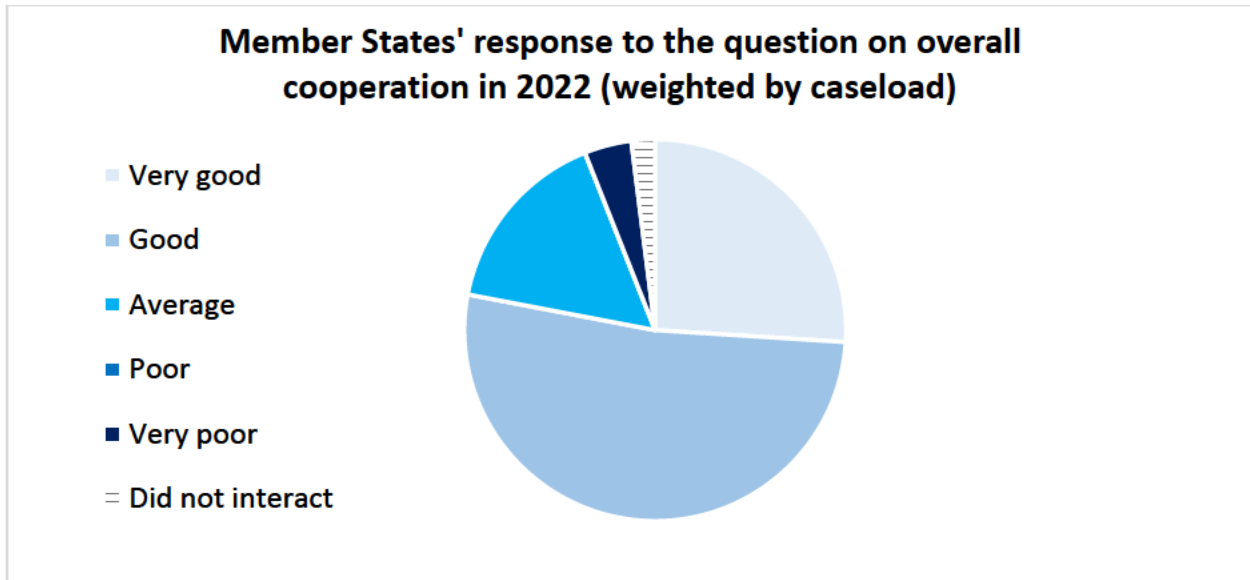
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 4 605 DRC nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 465 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 10%. Member States submitted 438 readmission requests to DRC authorities, who issued 136 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 31%.

14 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of DRC for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, two Member States (52% of the caseload) assessed DRC's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, two (26% of the caseload) as very good, six (16% of the caseload) as average, two (4% of the caseload) as very poor, and two (less than 1% of the caseload) as poor. This is represented in the graph below.

³⁷ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which the Democratic Republic of the Congo is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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Two Member States (3% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to these two Member States, these measures were applied to all nationals. One Member State indicated that authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

DRC's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good or good by four Member States (78% of the caseload), as average by four (14% of the caseload), and as poor or very poor by six (8% of the caseload).

14 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For nine of them, requests were often, very often or always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for five Member States. Four Member States (78% of the caseload) assessed DRC's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good or very good, four (12% of the caseload) as average, and six Member States (8% of the caseload) as poor or very poor.

As regards **return operations**, five Member States (79% of the caseload) assessed DRC's cooperation as very good or good and three (4% of the caseload) as average. Six Member States (15% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases and travel documents issued.

To further improve readmission cooperation, DRC needs to extend existing good practices to all Member States, in particular ensure timely responses to readmission requests; organise consular interviews as necessary, including via videoconference; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept a

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broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality; lift restrictions on both scheduled flights and charter flights; lift COVID-19 related restrictions for all Member States.

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Egypt

Engagement to date

The EU-Egypt Association Agreement³⁸, which refers to readmission obligations in relation to own nationals, entered into force on 1 June 2004. There is no other cooperation instrument or process in place at EU level with Egypt dedicated to readmission. The third EU-Egypt Migration Dialogue took place on 16 November 2021. Cooperation on return and readmission was discussed among other topics at the meeting of the Subcommittee on Justice and Security and the Working Group for Migration, Social and Consular Affairs held on 7 December 2022, as well as during a high-level visit from 25 to 28 March 2023, during which stepping up cooperation on preventing irregular migration was also discussed, and at the Association Committee on 22 May 2023.

In view of the overall readmission context and following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Egypt to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. On 27 January 2023 a meeting with the Ambassador of Egypt took place in Brussels.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

Three Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Egypt.

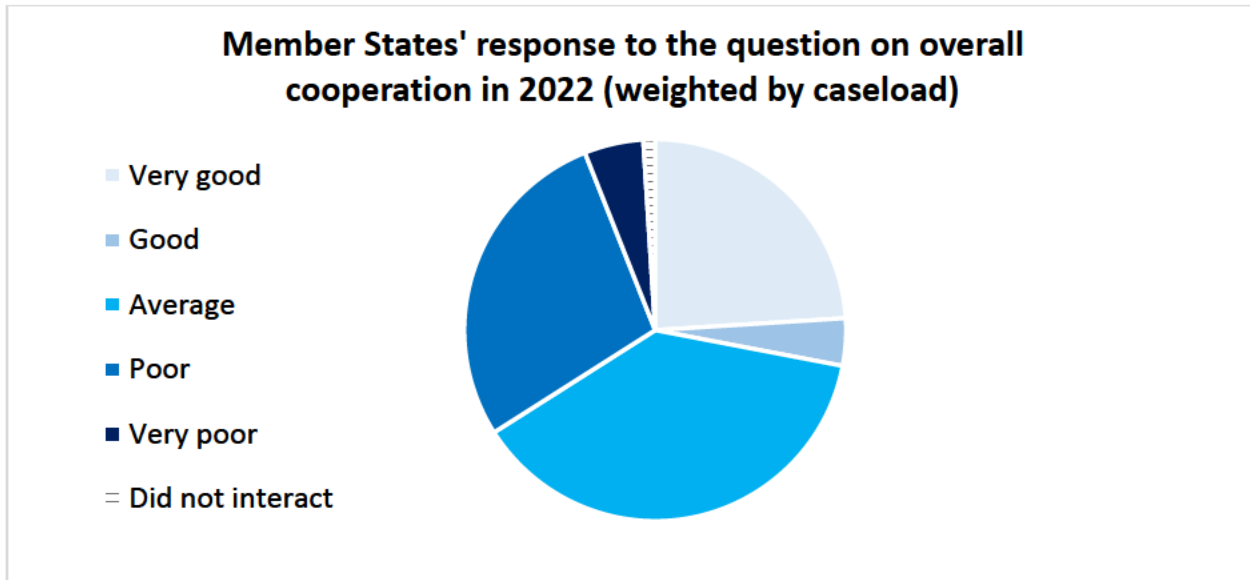
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 6 800 Egyptian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 950 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 14%. Member States submitted 1 123 readmission requests to Egyptian authorities, who issued 119 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 11%.

21 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Egypt for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, 10 Member States (38% of the caseload) assessed Egypt's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, four (28% of the caseload) as poor, three (24% of the caseload) as very good, one (5% of the caseload) as very poor, and three (4% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.

³⁸ Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States and the Arab Republic of Egypt, OJ L 304/39, 30.09.2004.

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Four Member States (26% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine or vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to one Member State these measures were applied to returnees only. For two Member States authorities were responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Egypt's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor or very poor by six Member States (42% of the caseload), as good or very good by seven (27% of the caseload), and as average by seven (26% of the caseload). One Member State (5% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Egypt on identification in 2022.

All 21 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 10 of them, requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was often or very often the case for eight Member States, and never/almost never or rarely the case for three. 10 Member States (51% of the caseload) assessed Egypt's cooperation on the **issuance of travel documents** as good or very good, four (27% of the caseload) as poor, and seven (21% of the caseload) as average.

As regards **return operations**, 12 Member States (49% of the caseload) assessed Egypt's cooperation as good or very good and four (45% of the caseload) as average. Five Member States (5% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of necessity, of documents and of relevant cases.

In view of the overall readmission context and the high number of irregularly arriving Egyptian nationals, Egypt needs to take concrete steps to improve readmission cooperation, in the framework of the partnership with Egypt. More specifically, Egypt needs to extend

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existing good practices to all Member States; establish effective communication channels with Member States; ensure swift, timely and efficient follow up to readmission requests and to requests for the issuance of travel documents; promptly organise consular interviews upon request; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. identity documents other than valid or expired passports) from more Member States than is currently the case; refrain from considering elements other than nationality when issuing travel documents; lift restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirement for escorts); lift COVID-19 related restrictions for all Member States.

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Ethiopia

Engagement to date

The non-binding EU readmission arrangement with Ethiopia (Admission procedures for the return of Ethiopians from European Union Member States) was concluded on 5 February 2018. The last meeting of the Joint Working Group established under the arrangement took place on 29 November 2019. Two technical meetings, the last one on 6 March 2020, took place in addition to the Joint Working Group meeting. A nation-wide state of emergency due to the conflict in northern Ethiopia ended in February 2022. Although the state of emergency has been lifted, return cooperation has not resumed in practice.

Following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Ethiopia to present the outcome of the assessment and to discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. In exchanges at technical level with the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2021 and in June 2022, the EU stressed the need to restart cooperation on readmission and to fully implement the EU readmission arrangement. On 12 April 2023, a meeting with the Ambassador of Ethiopia took place in Brussels to discuss readmission cooperation.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

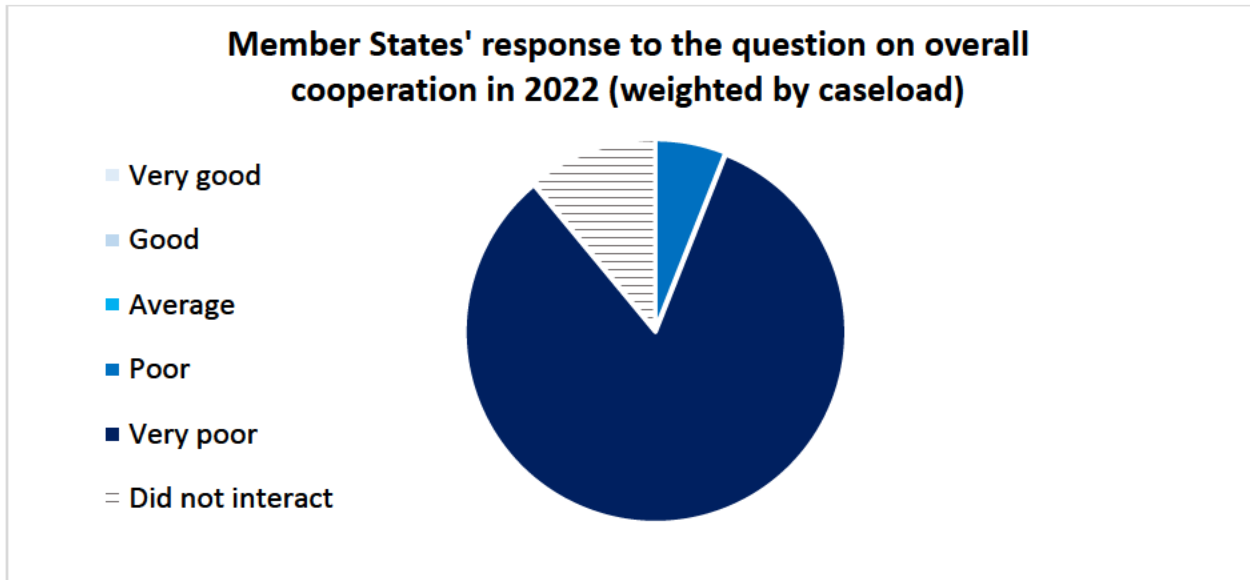
One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with Ethiopia.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 1 170 Ethiopian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 120 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 10%. Member States submitted 281 readmission requests to the Ethiopian authorities, who issued 9 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 3%.

10 Member States (89% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Ethiopia for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, seven Member States (83% of the caseload) assessed Ethiopia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor, and three (6% of the caseload) as poor. This is represented in the graph below.

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Two Member States (16% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related requirements/restrictions**, such as a general refusal to carry out returns, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Ethiopia's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor by eight Member States (82% of the caseload), and as poor by two (4% of the caseload).

Six Member States (56% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For five of them, requests were never/almost never responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was often the case for one Member State. All six Member States (56% of the caseload) assessed Ethiopia's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as very poor. The remaining four (32% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of responses to previous requests for identification.

As regards **return operations**, one Member State (35% of the caseload) assessed Ethiopia's cooperation as average, and two (14% of the caseload) as good. Seven Member States (40% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of identified cases or the lack of travel documents issued.

Ethiopia needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Ethiopia needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU readmission arrangement, in particular, ensure responses to readmission requests and requests for the issuance of travel documents, as stipulated in the arrangement; organise consular interviews upon request; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to

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establish nationality is provided; accept forced returns; accept returns via scheduled and charter flights for forced and voluntary returns from all Member States.

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The Gambia

Engagement to date

The non-binding EU readmission arrangement with The Gambia (Good Practices on identification and return) entered into operation on 16 November 2018. The arrangement is complemented by Operational Conclusions, agreed in May 2019, which define the modalities for return operations, including on the number of persons on board per charter flight and the number of charter flights per month.

Implementation of the arrangement did not start for a considerable time, due to a series of moratoria imposed by The Gambia on returns by charter flights as of March 2019. The moratorium was finally lifted in March 2022, following which four successful return operations were carried out in June, July, September, and November 2022, with landing permits issued in a timely manner in the last three cases. Following high-level discussions at Ministerial level in June 2022, The Gambia communicated on 22 September 2022 its views on the state of play on cooperation. The first meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) established under the arrangement took place on 12 October 2022, four years after the conclusion of the arrangement. The second meeting of the JWG took place on 20 March 2023. While acknowledging the steps taken by The Gambia, the Commission indicated that further efforts were needed to ensure the full implementation of the arrangement towards all Member States and the need for The Gambia to show progress and to address the existing backlog of readmission cases in a substantial and sustainable way.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

Four Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with The Gambia.

Follow up to the adoption of measures

Cooperation on readmission with The Gambia has been assessed as insufficient in the assessment of third countries' level of cooperation on readmission in 2019. Taking into account the additional steps taken by the EU to improve the cooperation, as well as the EU's overall relations with The Gambia, the Commission proposed temporary restrictive measures on short-stay visas for Gambian nationals on 15 July 2021³⁹. In view of the lack of improvement in the cooperation, the Council adopted these measures on 7 October 2021 (in force as of 1 November 2021)⁴⁰.

³⁹ COM (2021) 413 final

⁴⁰ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1781 of 7 October 2021 on the suspension of certain provisions of Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council with respect to The Gambia, OJ L 360, 11.10.2021, p. 124.

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Despite the continuous engagement of the EU to improve the level of cooperation of The Gambia, the Commission assessed in 2022 that substantial and sustained progress has not been achieved, that The Gambia's cooperation remained insufficient in all phases of the return and readmission process and that further action was therefore needed. In November 2022 the Commission proposed the second stage of visa restrictive measures for The Gambia in accordance with Article 25a (5)(b) of the Visa Code. These measures entered into force, upon adoption by the Council, on 8 December 2022.

The EU reiterated the need to restart cooperation on processing of readmission applications and on return operations based on the Good Practices to reduce the existing backlog, including during high-level meetings with the Gambian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February 2023 and two meetings of the JWG (October 2022 and March 2023). The Commission stressed the need to relaunch cooperation on all phases of the readmission process, in particular by reactivating the embassies' processing and responsiveness towards all Member States to achieve substantive and sustained progress.

According to Article 25a (7), at the latest six months after the entry into force of the visa measures, the Commission shall report to the European Parliament and to the Council on progress achieved in the third country's cooperation on readmission. The present assessment fulfils this obligation. Following the first and the second meetings of the JWG, as well as the continuous engagement by the Commission and the High Representative at all levels, including locally, The Gambia has undertaken a number of steps to improve cooperation on readmission. In particular, The Gambia undertook steps to facilitate communication through the appointment of a focal point for readmission in one embassy in the EU, as well as to ensure that regular charter flights continued to take place, with the timely issuance of landing permits. Some Member States reported improvements in the identification, including through identification missions, consular identification visits and the use of videoconference tools, as well as in the issuance of travel documents and an increased responsiveness from some Gambian embassies. These efforts have resulted in some improvements in operational cooperation, also reflected in this assessment.

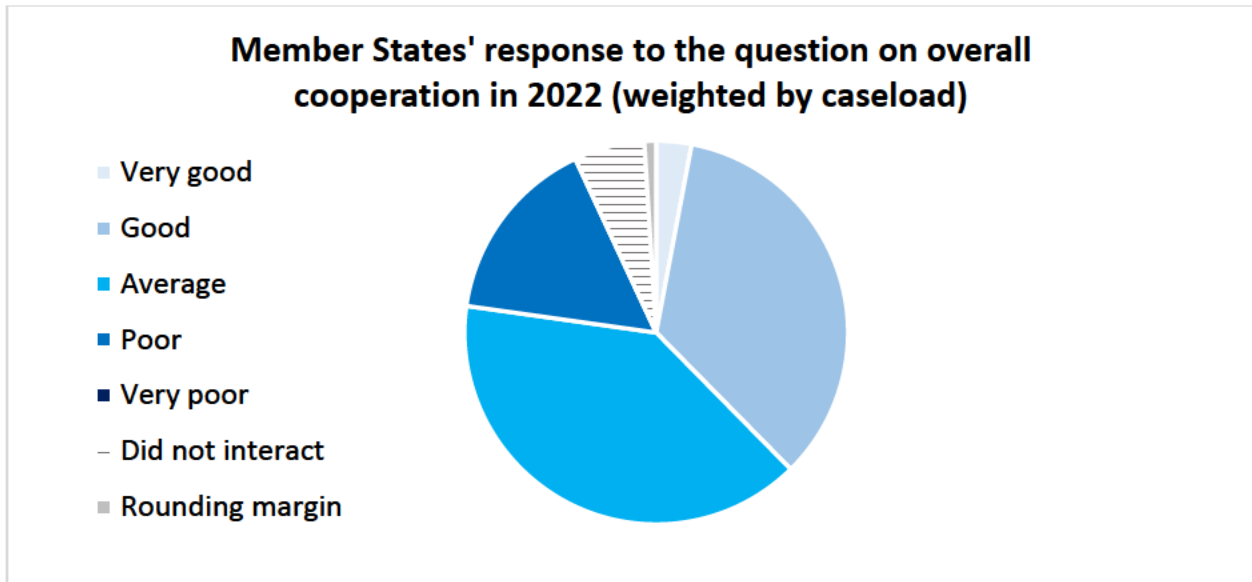
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 2 170 Gambian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions (the caseload) and 290 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 13%. Member States submitted 792 readmission requests to the Gambian authorities, who issued 281 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 35%.

14 Member States (94% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of The Gambia for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, five Member States (40% of the caseload) assessed The Gambia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, four (35% of the caseload) as good,

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three (16% of the caseload) as poor, one (3% of the caseload) as very good, and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.



Four Member States (43% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements** continued to impact the cooperation in 2022, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

The Gambia's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor or very poor by five Member States (44% of the caseload), as good or very good by four (37% of the caseload), and as average by five (13% of the caseload).

13 Member States (94% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For seven of them, requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was often the case for four Member States, and never for two. Six Member States (66% of the caseload) assessed The Gambia's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good or very good, three (16% of the caseload) as poor or very poor, and four (12% of the caseload) as average. The remaining Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of identified/confirmed cases in the reporting period.

As regards **return operations**, four Member States (81% of the caseload) assessed The Gambia's cooperation as average, five Member States (10% of the caseload) as good or very good, and five (3% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year.

Following the introduction of visa restrictive measures in 2021 and 2022, The Gambia has started undertaking steps to improve the operational cooperation, such as introducing

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organisational measures and communication processes to facilitate the coordination and monitoring of readmission related efforts in the EU; responding to identification requests and issuing travel documents within the established timeframe for some Member States; testing to conduct consular interviews via videoconference for one Member State; accepting joint identification missions; resuming the acceptance of returns by charter flights; accepting the invitation to participate in a workshop to explore the possibility of establishing an electronic readmission case management system (planned for September 2023).

However, there are still tangible issues that need to be addressed. The Gambia needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU readmission arrangement, in particular respond to readmission requests; organise consular interviews upon request, including via videoconference; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under EU or national legal frameworks (e.g. criminal records); accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. expired passports and other identity documents, photocopies) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality and with a validity period of six months, as stipulated in the arrangement; ensure effective cooperation on the organisation of charter flights (e.g. accepting the frequency and number of returnees as agreed with the EU; granting landing permits in a timely manner).

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Ghana

Engagement to date

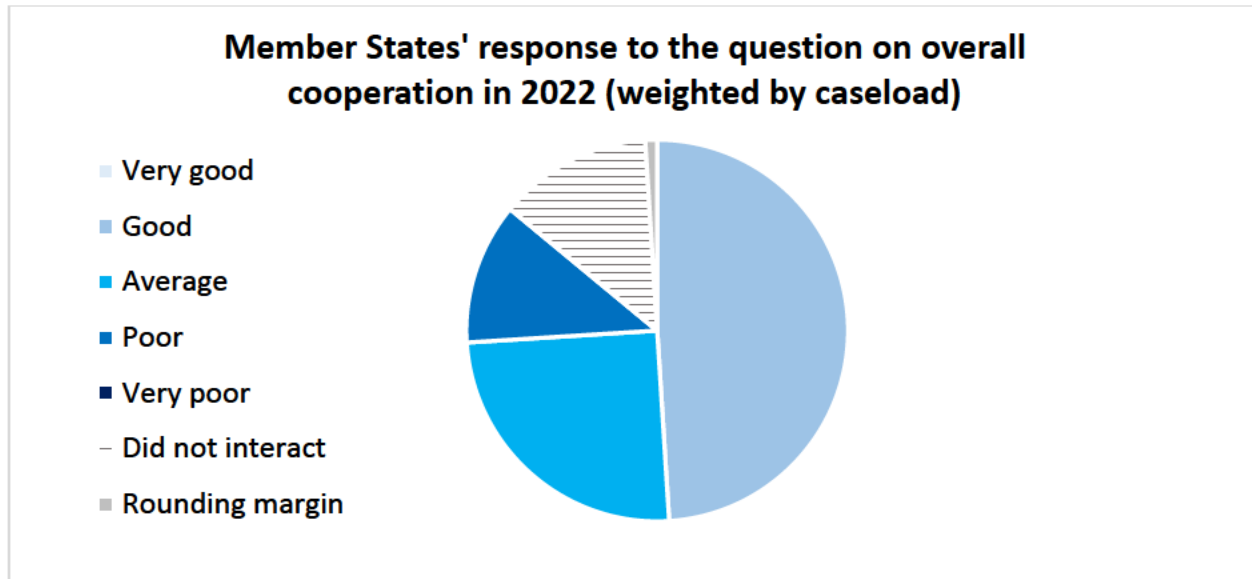
Besides the Cotonou Agreement⁴¹, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place with Ghana at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 1 500 Ghanaian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 280 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 19%. Member States submitted 629 readmission requests to the Ghanaian authorities, who issued 296 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 47%.

A total of 17 Member States (87% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Ghana for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, four Member States (49% of the caseload) assessed Ghana's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, seven (25% of the caseload) as average, and six (12% of the caseload) as poor. This is represented in the graph below.



⁴¹ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Ghana is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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Nine Member States (14% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests or vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to two Member States, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements in one case, while they were not in all other cases.

Ghana's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by six Member States (51% of the caseload), as average by six (25% of the caseload), and as poor by five (11% of the caseload).

15 Member States (85% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 10 of them, requests were always/almost always, very often or often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was never/almost never or rarely the case for five Member States. Five Member States (64% of the caseload) assessed Ghana's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good, five (13% of the caseload) as poor or very poor, and five (8% of the caseload) as average. The remaining two Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents during the reporting year due to the lack of cases for one and the automatic issuance of travel documents following positive identification for the other.

As regards **return operations**, eight Member States (78% of the caseload) assessed Ghana's cooperation as good, three (4% of the caseload) as average, and one (1% of the caseload) as poor. Five Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

To improve readmission cooperation, Ghana needs to establish more effective communication channels with Member States; expedite procedures to ensure timely responses; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality; lift COVID-19 related restrictions; lift restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. transit permits, visa requirement for escorts) and on charter flights (e.g. limitations on the number of returnees on board).

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Guinea

Engagement to date

The non-binding EU readmission arrangement with Guinea (Document partagé entre les représentants du Gouvernement Guinéen et de l'Union Européenne portant sur la coopération en matière de migration irrégulière) was concluded in July 2017. Four meetings of the Joint Working Group have taken place since then to assess the implementation of the arrangement, the last one on 19 October 2019. Since the September 2021 coup, the organisation of the fifth Joint Working Group meeting and further political engagement have been put on hold. Steps are being sought to relaunch engagement at technical level.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

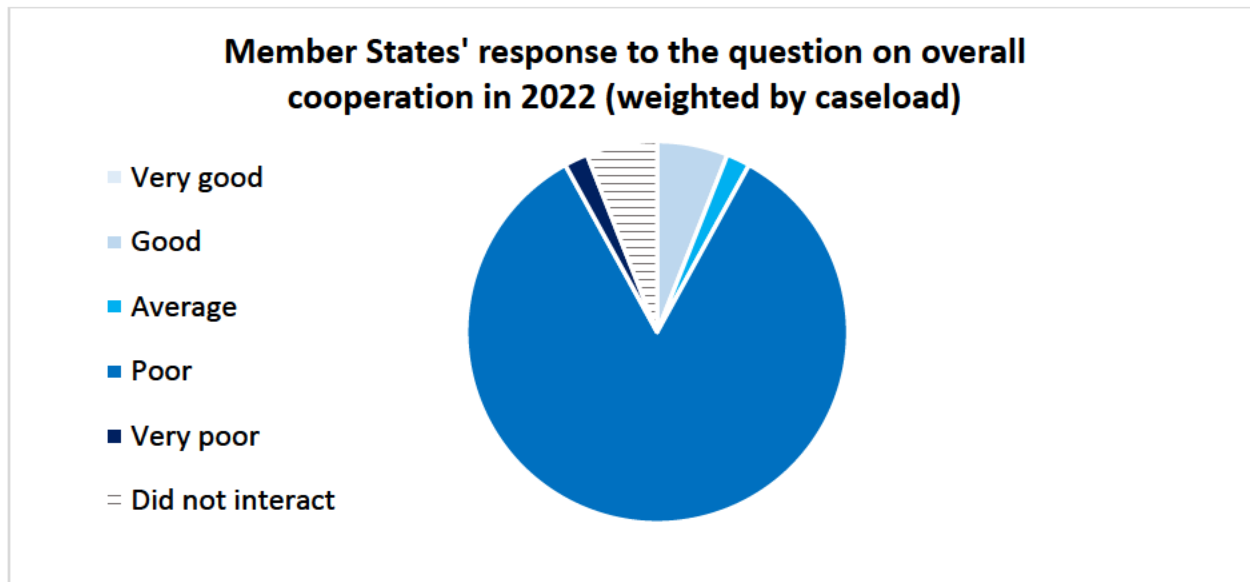
Three Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Guinea.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 5 175 Guinean nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 240 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 5%. Member States submitted 554 readmission requests to Guinean authorities, who issued 189 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 34%.

14 Member States (94% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Guinea for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, five (84% of the caseload) assessed Guinea's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, one (6% of the caseload) as good, four (2% of the caseload) as very poor, and four (2% of the caseload) as average. This is represented in the graph below.

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Four Member States (9% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to two Member States, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Guinea's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor or very poor by eight Member States (85% of the caseload), as good or very good by two (7% of the caseload), and as average by four (2% of the caseload).

13 Member States (93% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For five of them, requests were often or very often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for eight Member States. 10 Member States (84% of the caseload) assessed Guinea's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as poor or very poor, two (9% of the caseload) as good or very good, and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as average. The remaining Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (83% of the caseload) assessed Guinea's cooperation as average, and three (7% of the caseload) as good. Eight Member States (4% of the caseload) reported having not attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to few or no relevant cases, Guinea's refusal to accept forced returns, and difficult cooperation on identification.

Guinea needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Guinea needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU readmission arrangement and extend existing good practices to all Member States, in particular ensure timely

RESTREINT UE/EU RESTRICTED

responses to readmission requests; organise consular interviews upon request, including via videoconference for all Member States; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under the EU or national legal frameworks (e.g. health concerns or criminal records); swiftly issue travel documents with a validity period of three months, as stipulated in the arrangement and without taking into account elements other than nationality; lift the stringent COVID-19 related restrictions for all Member States to resume forced returns; lift restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirements for escorts, transit permits); facilitate arrangements for charter flights as stipulated in the arrangement.

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India

Engagement to date

A Joint Declaration on a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM)⁴² between India and the European Union and its Member States was agreed on 29 March 2016 in the framework of the EU-India High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility (HLDMM). Irregular migration is one of the priority areas of the CAMM. The last meeting of the High-Level Dialogue took place in October 2022. A workshop on return and readmission took place in June 2022.

One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with India.

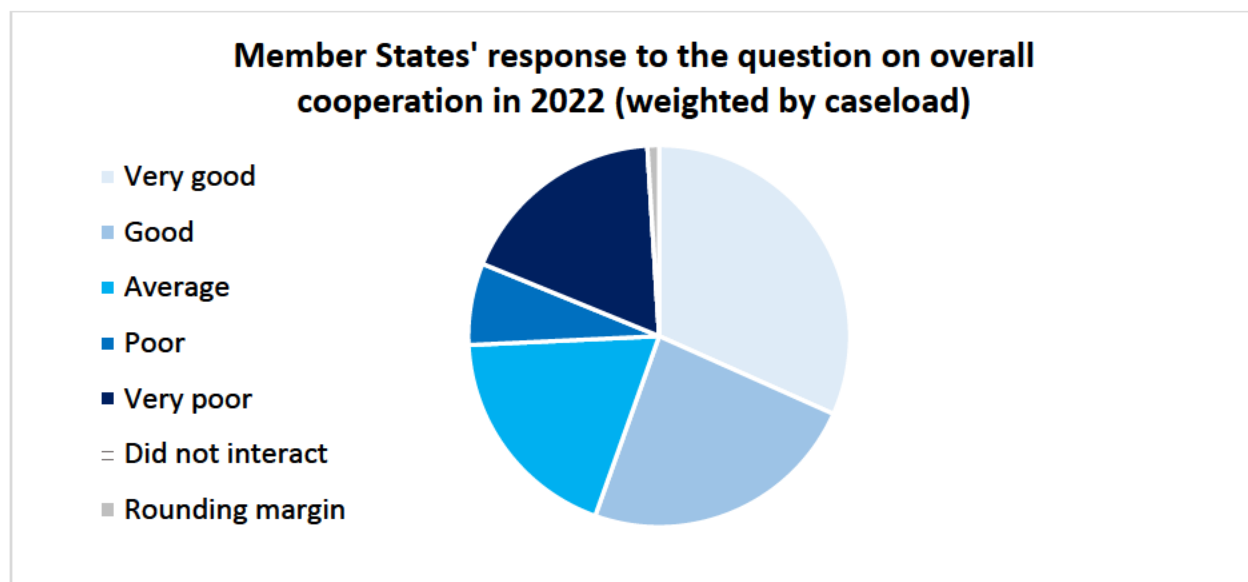
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 15 390 Indian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 340 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 15%. Member States submitted 583 readmission requests to Indian authorities, who issued 181 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 31%.

23 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of India for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, three Member States (32% of the caseload) assessed India's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very good, eight (24% of the caseload) as good, five (18% of the caseload) as average, three (18% of the caseload) as very poor, and four (7% of the caseload) as poor. This is represented in the graph below.

⁴² Joint Declaration on a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility between India and the European Union and its Member States, Brussels, 29.03.2016.

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Four Member States (39% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine, vaccination and requests for treatment costs, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements for three Member States, while they were responsive for one.

India's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by eight Member States (44% of the caseload), as average by seven (29% of the caseload), as poor by three (7% of the caseload), and as very poor by three (5% of the caseload). Two Member States (14% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with India on identification in 2022.

23 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 11 of them, requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for three Member States. Eight Member States (44% of the caseload) assessed India's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good, six (31% of the caseload) as average, four (16% of the caseload) as very good, three (5% of the caseload) as very poor, and two (3% of the caseload) as poor.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (32% of the caseload) assessed India's cooperation as very good, six (24% of the caseload) as average, four (14% of the caseload) as good, and one (7% of the caseload) as poor. Nine Member States (23% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year, due to the lack of relevant cases and of travel documents issued.

In view of the overall readmission context and the high number of irregularly arriving Indian nationals, India needs to take concrete steps to improve readmission cooperation in the

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framework of the partnership with India. More specifically, India needs to accept forced returns from all Member States; establish effective communication channels with Member States; ensure timely responses to readmission requests, including for undocumented cases; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; extend the possibility to conduct interviews via videoconference to all Member States; swiftly issue travel documents, including for forced returns, with a sufficient validity period and without taking into account elements other than nationality; facilitate the issuance of visas for escorts for the effective organisation of scheduled flights; facilitate arrangements for charter flights with all Member States.

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Iran

Engagement to date

To date, targeted engagement on readmission with Iran has not been possible.

Terms of References for a Comprehensive Dialogue between Iran and the EU on Migration and Refugee issues, including a reference to cooperation on non-voluntary returns, have been agreed in 2019, but are pending formal signature.

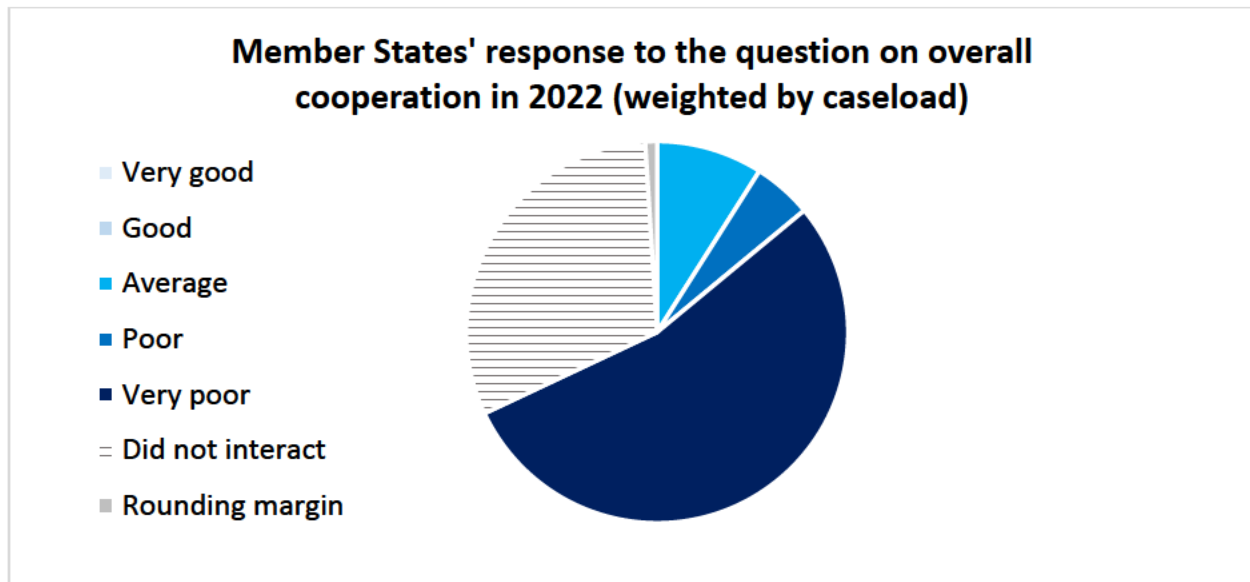
Despite efforts of the EU to reach out to Iran to discuss migration related issues, including readmission cooperation, it has not been possible to establish a meaningful engagement with Iran on readmission. No engagement was possible with Iranian authorities in follow up to the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 6 040 Iranian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 740 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 12%. Member States submitted 2 150 readmission requests to Iranian authorities, who issued 51 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 2%. Member States assessed Iran's cooperation solely based on cooperation on voluntary returns, as Iran does not accept forced returns.

16 Member States (69% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Iran for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, eight Member States (54% of the caseload) assessed **Iran's overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor, five (9% of the caseload) as average, two (5% of the caseload) as poor, and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.

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Three Member States (7% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine or vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to all three, these measures were applied to all nationals. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Iran's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor or poor by six Member States (55% of the caseload), as average by four (10% of the caseload) and as good by four (3% of the caseload). The two remaining Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Iran on identification in 2022.

13 Member States (25% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For seven of them, requests were often, very often or always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for six Member States. Eight Member States (17% of the caseload) assessed Iran's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as poor or very poor, two (6% of the caseload) as average, and three (2% of the caseload) as good. The three remaining Member States (44% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to no replies on identification and the lack of relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (10% of the caseload) assessed Iran's cooperation as poor or very poor, two (9% of the caseload) as good, and four (5% of the caseload) as average. Seven Member States (45% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

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Iran needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Iran needs to accept forced returns from all Member States; ensure timely responses to readmission requests and requests for the issuance of travel documents; lift COVID-19 related restrictions for all Member States; organise consular interviews upon request, including via videoconference for all Member States; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; refrain from taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; lift restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. transit permits and visa requirements for escorts); facilitate arrangements for charter flights.

However, the complicated diplomatic and political circumstances in the country could affect possibilities for engagement.

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Iraq

Engagement to date

The EU–Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement⁴³, which entered into force in 2018 provides for an obligation for both parties to readmit their own nationals (Article 105(3)). The last meeting of the EU-Iraq Cooperation Council took place on 19 March 2023 in Brussels. Migration management, including readmission cooperation, featured prominently on the agenda.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

Four Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Iraq.

Follow up to the proposed measures

Following the Commission’s proposal of 15 July 2021 for the suspension of certain provisions of the Visa Code in respect to Iraq⁴⁴, the Commission and the High Representative entered into an extensive dialogue with the Iraqi authorities, both in Brussels and in Iraq at operational, technical and political level, with a view to improve Iraq’s cooperation on the readmission of its citizens with no right to stay in the EU. These exchanges continued into 2023, including following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code. The EU reiterated the need for further concrete steps in all stages of the readmission process (identification, issuance of travel documents, and return operations) to transform the political commitments into concrete results to achieve substantial and sustained progress with all Member States. More specifically, the Commission underlined the need to work towards a credible plan to reduce the backlog of cases, to put in place predictable and transparent procedures to structure cooperation and accept in relevant numbers returns from all Member States.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 14 750 Iraqi nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 875 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 13%. Member States submitted 2 195 readmission requests to the Iraqi authorities, who issued 504 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 23%. Member States assessed Iraq’s cooperation

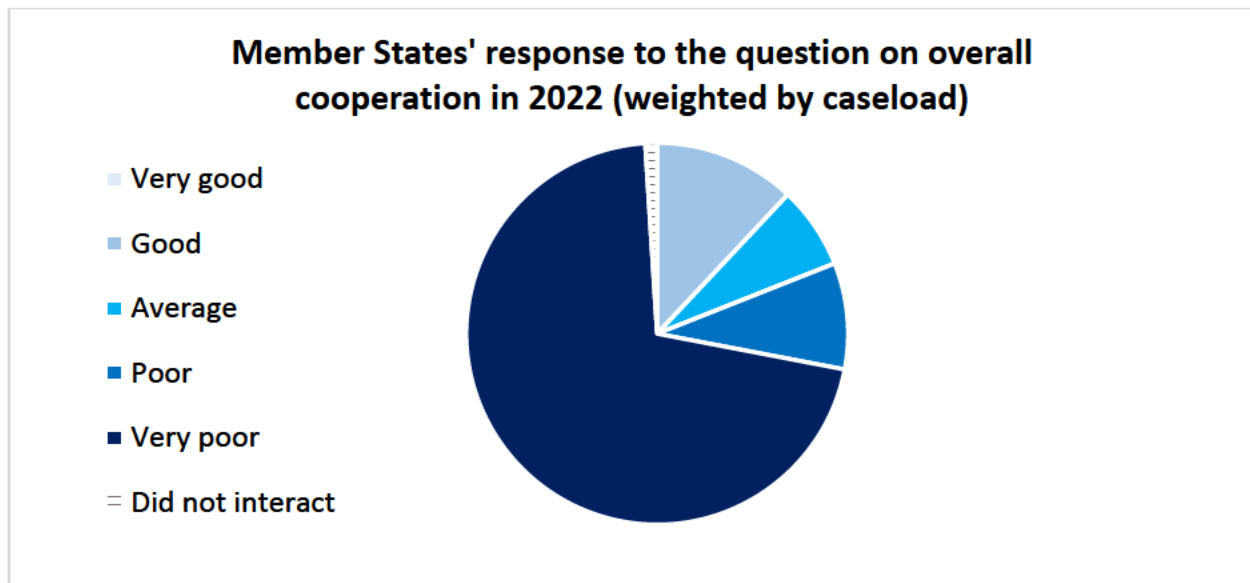
⁴³ Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States and the Republic of Iraq, OJ L 204/20, 31.7.2012.

⁴⁴ COM (2021) 414 final of 15.7.2021.

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solely based on cooperation on voluntary returns as Iraq did not accept forced returns (except returnees with criminal records in certain cases).

22 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Iraq for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, nine (71% of the caseload) assessed Iraq's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor, five (12% of the caseload) as good, four (9% of the caseload) as poor, and four (7% of the caseload) as average. This is represented in the graph below.



Four Member States (11% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine or vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to one Member State, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Iraq's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor or very poor by nine Member States (47% of the caseload), as average by seven (37% of the caseload), and as good or very good by six (16% of the caseload).

22 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 12 of them, requests were always/almost always or very often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for 10 Member States. 13 Member States (81% of the caseload) assessed Iraq's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as poor or very poor, six (16% of the caseload) as good or very good, and three (2% of the caseload) as average.

As regards **return operations**, six Member States (38% of the caseload) assessed Iraq's cooperation as poor or very poor, five (21% of the caseload) as average, and six (18% of the

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caseload) as good or very good. Five Member States (22% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases and difficulties with the issuance of travel documents.

Following the Commission's proposal for measures, Iraq has undertaken a step forward in an expressed political commitment on readmission, which was followed by constructive outreach to some Member States' diplomatic representations on operational cooperation.

However, there are still tangible issues that need to be addressed. Iraq needs to work towards predictable and transparent procedures and a credible plan to reduce the existing backlog of cases and implement concrete steps in all stages of the readmission process. In particular, Iraq needs to start readmitting its citizens with no right to stay in the EU from all requesting Member States and without limitations on categories and types of return; ensure timely responses to readmission requests, including those not returning voluntarily; organise consular interviews as necessary, including via videoconference for all Member States; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under the EU or national legal frameworks (e.g. criminal records); swiftly issue travel documents with a sufficient validity period and without taking into account elements other than nationality; accept a relevant number of returns to be carried out through charter and scheduled flights from all Member States; lift the restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. Baghdad as the only arrival airport, visa requirements for escorts and transit permits).

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Kosovo*

Engagement to date

Cooperation on readmission with Kosovo takes place on a bilateral basis with the Member States. 15 Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Kosovo.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement⁴⁵ between the EU and Kosovo (Article 88), which entered into force in 2016, also provides a basis for cooperation on readmission.

Following the final adoption in April 2023 of the proposal to grant visa-free travel⁴⁶, Kosovo passport holders will be able to travel to the EU without the need for a short-stay visa as of 1 January 2024.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 4 255 citizens of Kosovo who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 395 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 33%. Member States submitted 445 readmission requests to Kosovo's authorities, who issued 217 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 49%.

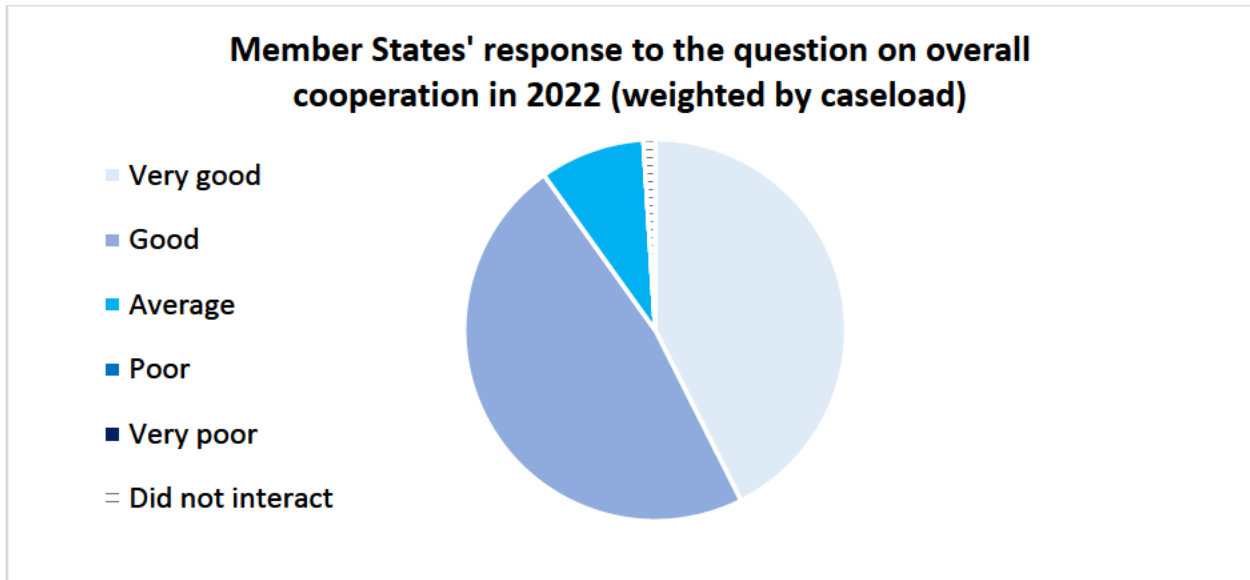
16 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Kosovo for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, five (48% of the caseload) assessed Kosovo's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, 10 (42% of the caseload) as very good and one (9% of the caseload) as average. This is represented in the graph below.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

⁴⁵ Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Community and Kosovo, OJ L 71/3, 16.3.2016.

⁴⁶ Regulation (EU) No 2023/850 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (Kosovo (This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.)) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 April 2023 amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1806, OJ L 110/1 of 25.4.2023.

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One Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, applied to all citizens, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Kosovo's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good or good by 14 Member States (90% of the caseload), and as average by one (9% of the caseload). One Member State (1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Kosovo on identification.

10 Member States (43% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For all of them requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. 10 Member States (43% of the caseload) assessed Kosovo's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good or very good. The remaining six Member States (57% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 as they mostly made use of the EU travel document or laissez-passer that they issued.

As regards **return operations**, 10 Member States (70% of the caseload) assessed Kosovo's cooperation as good or very good, and three (11% of the caseload) as average. Three Member States (19% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

Cooperation with Kosovo continued to proceed smoothly, based on a large number of bilateral agreements and established practices with the Member States, which were generally well respected. To further improve cooperation, Kosovo needs to extend existing good practices to all Member States, in particular remove COVID-19 related restrictions for all of them; extend the possibility to conduct consular interviews via videoconference to all

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Member States; refrain from considering elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; lift restrictions on both scheduled flights and charter flights.

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Mali

Engagement to date

Besides the Cotonou Agreement⁴⁷, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place with Mali at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Mali to present the outcome of the assessment and to discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. On 17 February 2023, a meeting with the Ambassador of Mali took place in Brussels.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with Mali.

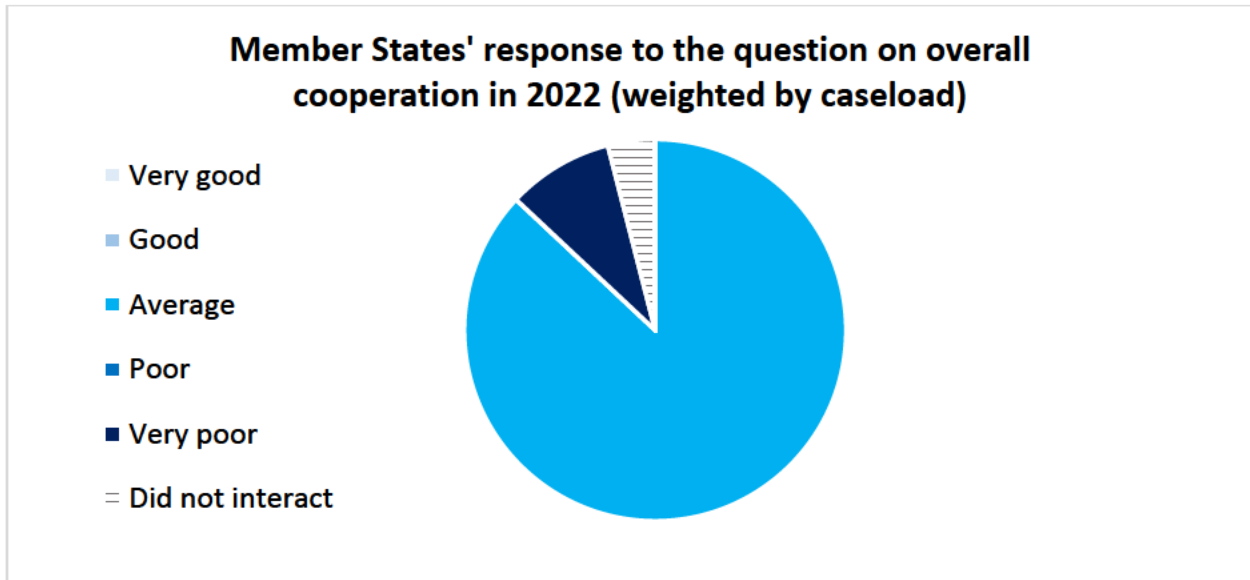
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 4 200 Malian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 160 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 4%. Member States submitted 297 readmission requests to the Malian authorities, who issued 87 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 29%.

11 Member States (96% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Mali for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, five Member States (87% of the caseload) assessed Mali's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, and six (9% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.

⁴⁷ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Mali is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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Mali's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by five Member States (87% of the caseload), and as very poor by the other five (3% of the caseload). The remaining Member State (6% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Mali on identification.

Five Member States (86% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For two of them, requests were very often or often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for three Member States. Two Member States (86% of the caseload) assessed Mali's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as average, and three (less than 1% of the caseload) as poor or very poor. The six remaining Member States (10% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents due to previous experience with the lack of responses to requests or no relevant cases in 2022.

As regards **return operations**, two Member States (86% of the caseload) assessed Mali's cooperation as average, and two (6% of the caseload) as poor. Seven Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

Mali needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Mali needs to establish effective communication channels with Member States; ensure timely responses to readmission requests, including for undocumented cases and to requests for the issuance of travel documents from all Member States; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. valid and expired passports and biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; organise interviews upon request, including via videoconference; allow for the organisation of identification missions upon request for all Member States; refrain from conducting interviews for cases where sufficient evidence to

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establish nationality is provided; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under the EU or national legal frameworks; refrain from considering other elements in addition to nationality when deciding on issuing a travel document; lift restrictions on scheduled flights for all Member States; facilitate arrangements for charter flights.

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Morocco

Engagement to date

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations for a Readmission Agreement with Morocco in 2000. Negotiations started in 2003 and were interrupted in 2010. In 2015, negotiations were relaunched in parallel with the negotiations of a Visa Facilitation Agreement. They were interrupted again in December 2015 due to other aspects of the EU's relations with Morocco. The political dialogue with Morocco was relaunched in 2019 and cooperation on migration reinvigorated. In July 2022, the Commission and Morocco jointly launched an Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnership to step up their cooperation on preventing irregular migration. Negotiations on an EU Readmission Agreement have not re-started yet.

A Senior Officials Meeting took place in March 2022, followed by a meeting of the sub-committee on social affairs and migration in May 2022, and a senior level technical meeting in September 2022. In all these occasions, the need to enhance cooperation on readmission was raised. The resumption of the dialogue on migration confirmed the joint commitment to enhance cooperation in all areas related to migration, including the role of Morocco in preventing irregular migration.

Following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Morocco to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation. Opportunities are being sought for a seminar on readmission.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

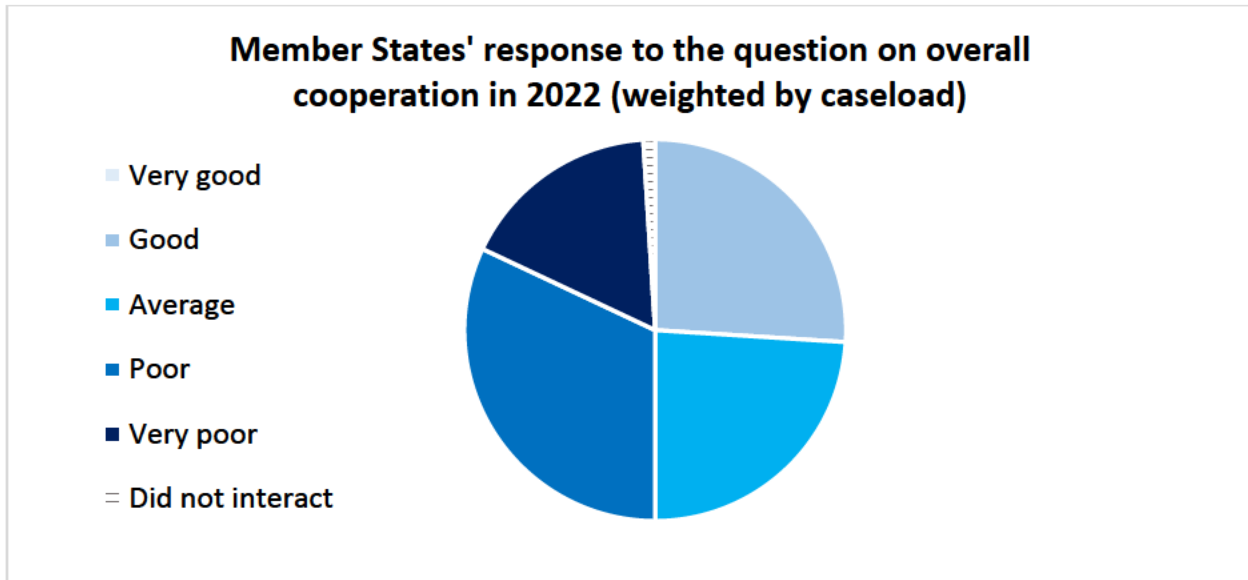
Three Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Morocco.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 30 745 Moroccan nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 205 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 7%. Member States submitted 5 620 readmission requests to the Moroccan authorities, who issued 742 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 13%.

24 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Morocco for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, five Member States (32% of the caseload) assessed Morocco's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, eight (26% of the caseload) as good, seven (24% of the caseload) as average, and four (17% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.

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12 Member States (64% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements** continued to impact the cooperation in 2022, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests and vaccination. According to two Member States, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Morocco's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor or very poor by 11 Member States (53% of the caseload), as good by five (24% of the caseload), and as average by eight (21% of the caseload).

24 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 14 of them, requests were often or very often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was always/almost always the case for three Member States and rarely or never/almost never the case for seven. Eight Member States (37% of the caseload) assessed Morocco's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as average, eight (36% of the caseload) as poor or very poor, and eight (26% of the caseload) as good.

As regards **return operations**, five Member States (43% of the caseload) assessed Morocco's cooperation as poor, nine (30% of the caseload) as good or very good, and seven (25% of the caseload) as average. Three Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year.

Morocco needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Morocco needs to extend existing good practices to all Member States, in particular ensure timely, swift and efficient follow up to identification procedures; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. information extracted from the Visa Information System)

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from more Member States than is currently the case; accept conducting consular interviews for all Member States, including via videoconference; organise identification missions upon request for all Member States; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under the EU or national legal frameworks; swiftly issue travel documents with a sufficient validity period and without taking into account elements other than the nationality; accept to renew such documents if need be; refrain from imposing restrictions on returns by scheduled flights (e.g. requirement of transit permits, limiting the number of returnees per flight or the obligation to use specific airlines); accept return operations via charter flights for all Member States.

The conclusion of an EU Readmission Agreement would further contribute to ensuring more effective and predictable readmission cooperation with all Member States.

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Nepal

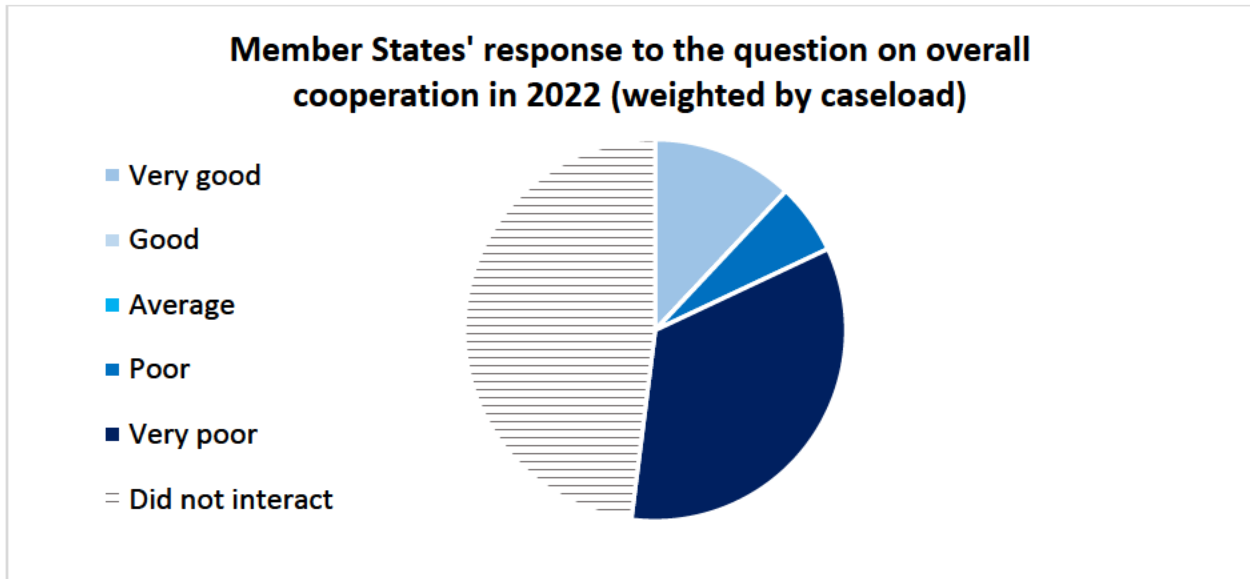
Engagement to date

There is no cooperation instrument or process in place with Nepal at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 3 230 Nepalese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 505 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 16%. Member States submitted 62 readmission requests to the Nepalese authorities, who issued 3 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 5%.

Nine Member States (52% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Nepal for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, two Member States (34% of the caseload) assessed Nepal's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor, two (12% of the caseload) as very good, three (6% of the caseload) as poor, and two (less than 1% of the caseload) as average. This is represented in the graph below.



Nepal's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good by two Member States (12% of the caseload), as poor by three (4% of the caseload), and as very poor by two (3% of the caseload). Two Member States (33% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Nepal on identification in 2022 due to the lack of relevant cases.

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Seven Member States (48% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For four of them, requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely the case for two Member States, and never/almost never the case for one. Four Member States (47% of the caseload) assessed Nepal's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as very good or good, two (less than 1% of the caseload) as average, and one (1% of the caseload) as very poor. The remaining two Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of cases and the lack of replies on identification.

As regards **return operations**, two Member States (4% of the caseload) assessed Nepal's cooperation as good, and one (1% of the caseload) as very good. Six Member States (47% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

To improve readmission cooperation, Nepal needs to swiftly respond to readmission requests from all Member States on both forced and voluntary returns; establish effective communication channels with Member States; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue travel documents, including in cases of forced returns.

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Nigeria

Engagement to date

Besides the Cotonou Agreement⁴⁸, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place with Nigeria at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations for an EU Readmission Agreement with Nigeria in September 2016. Negotiations were launched in October 2016. After a two-year suspension between 2018 and 2020, negotiations restarted in January 2021 and 5 rounds took place until March 2021 in a virtual format, without much progress, to then be suspended again. Following EU and Member States' joint *demarche* and intense high-level engagement in Brussels and Abuja, Nigeria appointed a new Chief Negotiator and, on 10 March 2022, lifted the suspension of return flights imposed in December 2021. Negotiations resumed in July 2022. Since then, three rounds took place with good progress. The latest negotiation round was held in May 2023, following Nigeria's Presidential elections of 25 February 2023.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

Seven Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Nigeria.

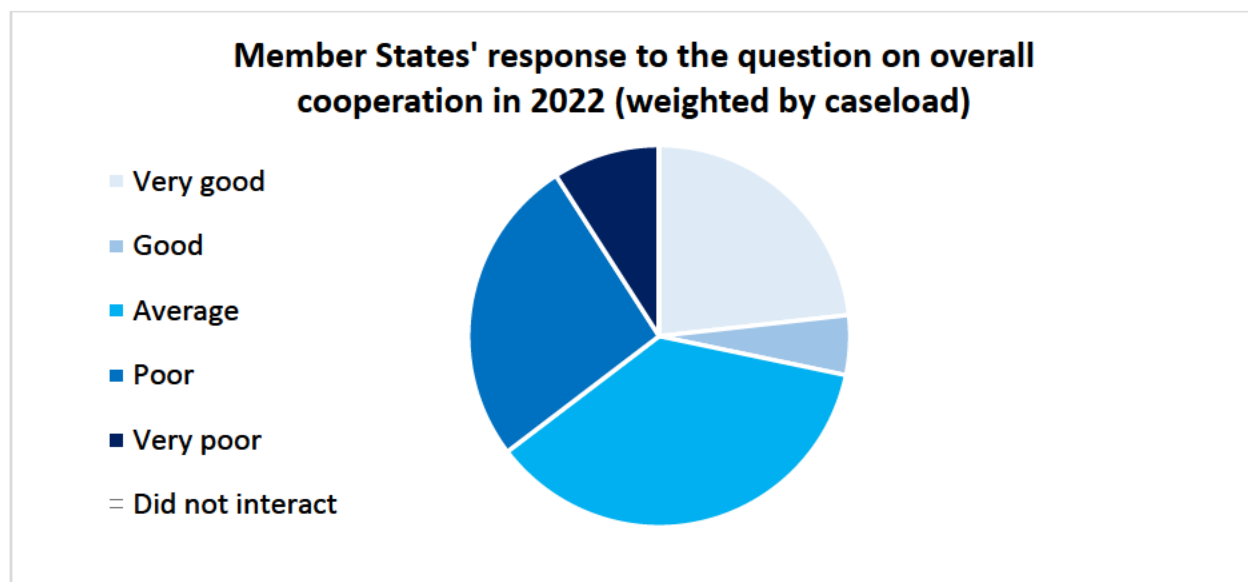
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 9 075 Nigerian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 560 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 17%. Member States submitted 3 115 readmission requests to Nigerian authorities, who issued 597 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 19%.

25 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Nigeria for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, five Member States (36% of the caseload) assessed Nigeria's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, five (26% of the caseload) as poor, five (23% of the caseload) as very good, three (9% of the caseload) as very poor, and seven (5% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.

⁴⁸ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Nigeria is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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Nine Member States (48% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine or vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to two Member States, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements for six Member States, while they were responsive for three.

Cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by eight Member States (41% of the caseload), as good or very good by 12 (35% of the caseload), and as poor or very poor by four (22% of the caseload). The remaining Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Nigeria on identification in 2022.

24 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 20 of them, requests were often, very often or always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for four Member States. Eight Member States (60% of the caseload) assessed Nigeria's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as average, 12 (36% of the caseload) as good or very good, and four (3% of the caseload) as poor or very poor. The remaining Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents due to the lack of positive identification.

As regards **return operations**, 15 Member States (41% of the caseload) assessed Nigeria's cooperation as good or very good, three (36% of the caseload) as average, and two (22% of the caseload) as poor. Four Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to ineffective cooperation for one and no relevant cases for three of them.

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To improve readmission cooperation Nigeria needs to extend existing good practices to all Member States, in particular ensure timely responses to identification requests; organise consular interviews upon request, including via videoconference; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. photocopies of identity documents, biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality; lift restrictions on both scheduled flights and charter flights.

The conclusion of an EU Readmission Agreement would further contribute to ensuring more effective and predictable readmission cooperation with all Member States.

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Pakistan

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement⁴⁹ with Pakistan entered into force on 1 December 2010. 14 meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee (JRC) took place since then. At the last JRC meeting on 15 March 2023 in Islamabad, the Commission emphasised the need for Pakistan to adhere to the letter of the Agreement to improve readmission cooperation, especially the respect of the deadlines, and to make the necessary changes to the Readmission Case Management System. The 14th JRC meeting was organised back-to-back with the first Migration and Mobility Dialogue and a roundtable on Talent Partnerships.

In view of the overall readmission context, following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Pakistan to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation.

The EU-funded RCMS⁵⁰ has been operational since 2018, with currently 24 Member States connected.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with Pakistan.

Cooperation on readmission

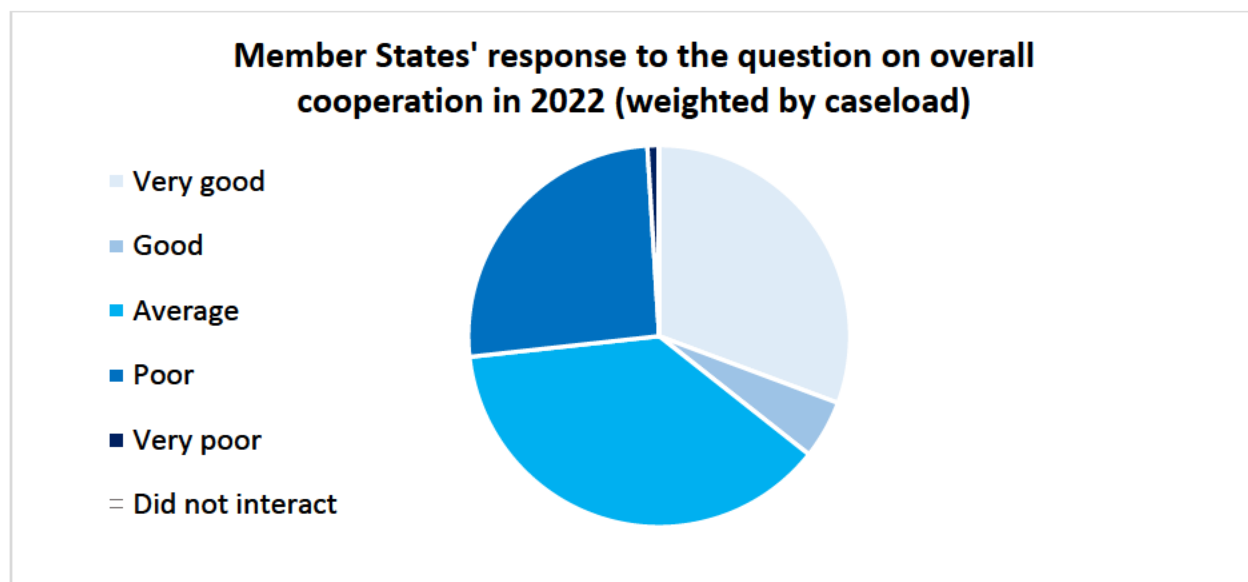
In 2022, 25 540 Pakistani nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 170 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 8%. Member States submitted 3 988 readmission requests to the Pakistani authorities, who issued 1 473 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 37%.

25 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Pakistan for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, 11 Member States (38% of the caseload) assessed Pakistan's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, six (31% of the caseload) as very good, two (26% of the caseload) as poor, five (5% of the caseload) as good, and one (1% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.

⁴⁹ Agreement between the European Community and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the readmission of persons residing without authorization, OJ L 287/52, 4.11.2010.

⁵⁰ An electronic platform facilitating the exchange of information between competent authorities in Member States and in a given third country in order to process individual readmission cases.

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Four Member States (3% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine and vaccination requirements, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to one Member State, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were mostly not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements, however for three Member States they exempted returnees from testing and/or vaccination requirements.

Pakistan's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by 11 Member States (63% of the caseload), as very good or good by 11 (27% of the caseload), and as poor by two (1% of the caseload). One Member State (9% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Pakistan on identification in 2022.

23 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 21 of them, requests were always/almost always, very often or often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely the case for two Member States. 12 Member States (36% of the caseload) assessed Pakistan's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as very good or good, eight (36% of the caseload) as average, and three (26% of the caseload) as poor. The two remaining Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having requested the issuance of travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of identification, Covid-19 related measures, absconding or pending legal proceedings.

As regards **return operations**, 11 Member States (54% of the caseload) assessed Pakistan's cooperation as very good or good, six (18% of the caseload) as average, and one (13% of the caseload) as poor. Seven Member States (14% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

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In view of the overall readmission context and the high number of irregularly arriving Pakistani nationals, Pakistan needs to take concrete steps to improve readmission cooperation, in the framework of the partnership with Pakistan. More specifically, Pakistan needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement and extend existing good practices to all Member States. In particular, Pakistan needs to ensure timely responses to readmission requests, including for negative replies; organise consular interviews upon request, including via videoconference for all Member States; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; refrain from requesting information not provided for in the Agreement, as well as confidential information that is not releasable under the EU or national legal frameworks; swiftly issue travel documents, with a validity period of six months, as stipulated in the Agreement and without taking into account elements other than nationality; facilitate the electronic issuance of travel documents through the RCMS to increase the efficiency of the process; lift restrictions to readmission upon arrival, as well as on both scheduled flights and charter flights (e.g. limited number of flights and frequency, number of returnees on board, delays in the issuance of landing and transit permits and visa requirements for escorts).

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Russia

The EU Readmission Agreement⁵¹ with Russia entered into force on 1 June 2007, together with a Visa Facilitation Agreement. 19 meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee took place since then to assess the implementation of the Agreement, the latest of which on 22 November 2019. No meeting could take place in 2020 or 2021, due to the pandemic and Russia's insistence to hold the meeting physically.

Following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the EU suspended engagement with the Russian authorities and fully suspended in September 2022 the implementation of the Visa Facilitation Agreement⁵².

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the related sanctions have had consequences on all areas of cooperation with Russia, including readmission. The current situation precludes possibilities of engagement with Russia.

⁵¹ Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on readmission, OJ L 129/40, 17.5.2007.

⁵² Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on the facilitation of the issuance of visas to the citizens of the European Union and the Russian Federation, OJ L 129/27, 17.5.2007.

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Senegal

Engagement to date

Besides the Cotonou Agreement⁵³, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place with Senegal at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

The issue of readmission was discussed with Senegal during political and technical level engagements, including during the high-level exchanges of the Commission with Senegal in February and November 2022 and the Commission services' technical mission in June 2022. The EU underlined the need for a regular targeted dialogue on readmission. This was in principle accepted by Senegal in September 2022. Two technical dialogues on readmission at senior official level have taken place in December 2022 and May 2023.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with Senegal.

Follow up to the proposed measures

Senegal's cooperation on readmission in 2020 had been assessed as insufficient and the Commission proposed restrictive visa measures on 9 November 2022. The decision is still pending before the Council. In the follow up to the Commission's proposal, the Commission and the High Representative further intensified their engagement with Senegal at political, technical and operational level, both in Brussels and Dakar. On 30 March 2023, a meeting with the Ambassador of Senegal took place in Brussels.

During the exchanges, including in the two technical dialogues on readmission at senior officials' level, the Commission stressed the EU's expectations for substantial and sustained progress in the cooperation in all stages of the readmission process. More specifically, the Commission underlined the need for the effective and timely follow up to identification requests, the organisation of identification missions upon request, the timely issuance of travel documents following positive identification, effective cooperation on return operations, as well as the presentation of an action plan to address the backlog of return cases.

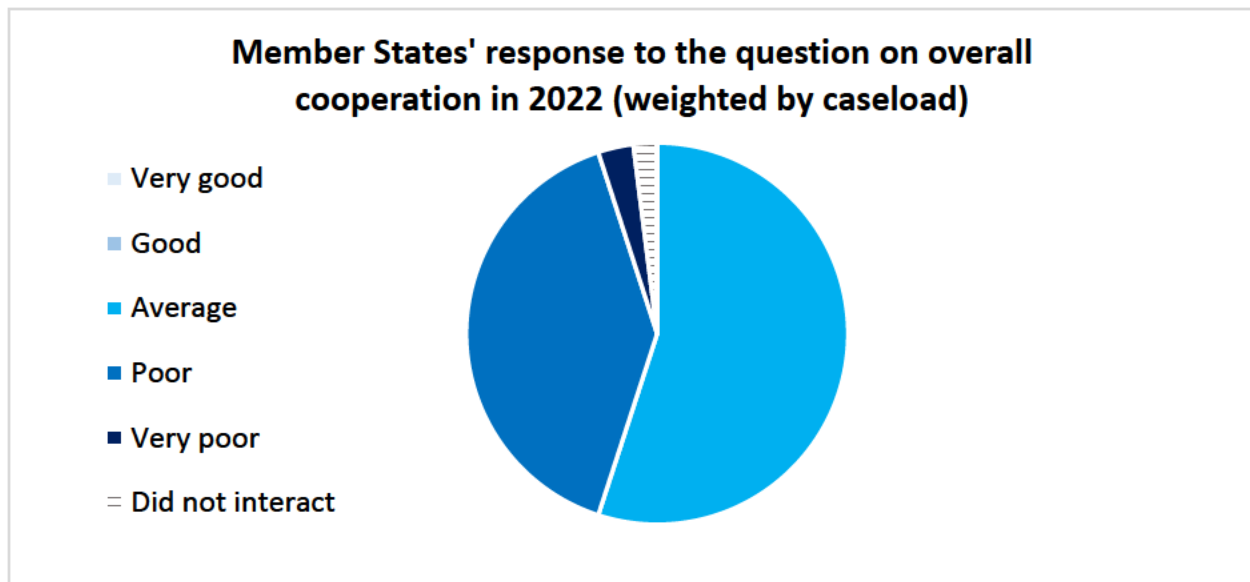
Cooperation on readmission

⁵³ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Senegal is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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In 2022, 4 445 Senegalese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 310 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 7%. Member States submitted 762 readmission requests to Senegalese authorities, who issued 145 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 19%.

15 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Senegal for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, three Member States (55% of the caseload) assessed Senegal's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, three (40% of the caseload) as poor, seven (3% of the caseload) as very poor, and two (less than 1% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.



Four Member States (60% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests for all nationals, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Senegal's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by two Member States (54% of the caseload), as poor or very poor by 10 (38% of the caseload), and as good by two (1% of the caseload). The remaining Member State (5% of the caseload), reported not having interacted with Senegal on identification in 2022.

12 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For six of them, requests were never/almost never or rarely responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was always/almost always, very often or often the case for six. Two Member States (52% of the caseload) assessed Senegal's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good, three (24% of the caseload) as average, and seven (22% of the

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caseload) as poor or very poor. The three remaining Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of replies on identification and the lack of relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, one Member State (52% of the caseload) assessed Senegal's cooperation as poor, four (36% of the caseload) as average, and two (3% of the caseload) as good. Eight Member States (8% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to a lack of responses to requests for identification or travel documents and the lack of relevant cases.

Following the Commission's proposal for measures, Senegal has undertaken some concrete steps to improve the operational cooperation on readmission, such as introducing organisational measures and communication processes to facilitate the coordination and monitoring of readmission related efforts in the EU and accepting charter flights and identification missions upon request from Member States.

However, there are still tangible issues that need to be addressed. Senegal needs to establish effective communication channels with all Member States; swiftly respond to readmission requests, including for forced returns, undocumented cases and cases of negative identifications; organise consular interviews via videoconference upon request; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; swiftly issue travel documents with a sufficient validity period; accept charter flights from all Member States to address the backlog of cases; grant landing permits with sufficient time ahead of the flight.

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Somalia

Engagement to date

Besides the Cotonou Agreement⁵⁴, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place with Somalia at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

Following the formation of the new government in June 2022, the EU Delegation and the EURLO identified the interlocutors in the federal government for discussing and addressing issues concerning return and readmission. Exchanges on readmission cooperation at technical and political level took place locally.

Two Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Somalia.

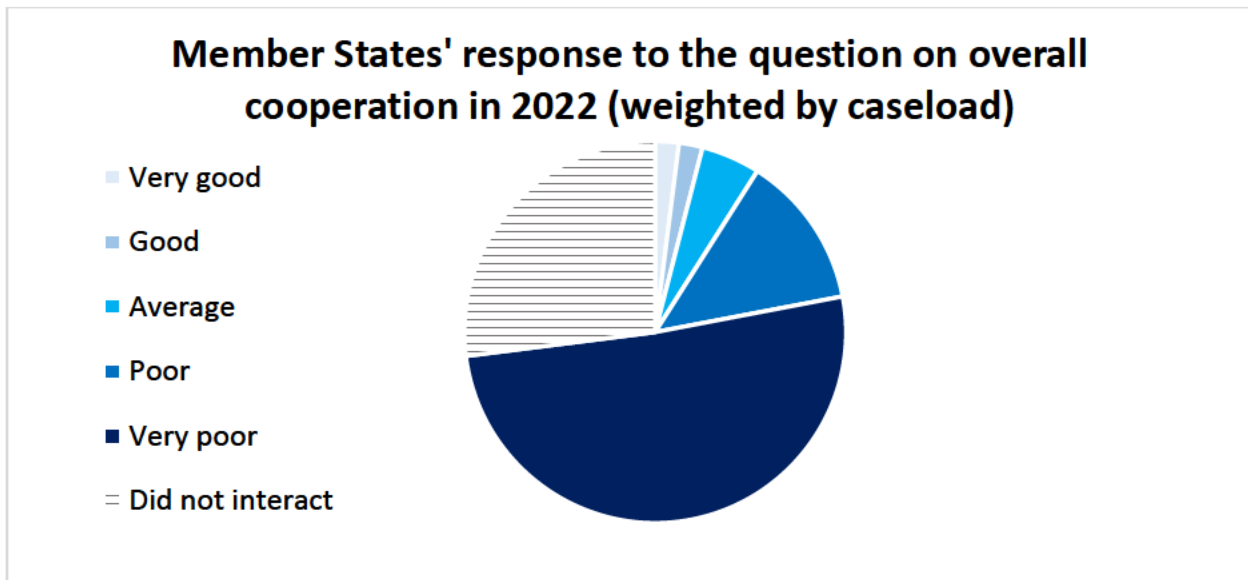
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 4 205 Somalian nationals, who had no right to stay in the Member States, were issued return decisions and 300 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 7%. Member States submitted 722 readmission requests to the Somalian authorities, who issued 42 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 6%.

14 Member States (73% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Somalia for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, five Member States (51% of the caseload) assessed Somalia's **overall cooperation** on readmission as very poor, four (13% of the caseload) as poor, two (5% of the caseload) as average, one (2% of the caseload) as very good, and two (2% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.

⁵⁴ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Somalia is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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Three Member States (14% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine or vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. For two Member States, authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements, while for one they were.

Somalia's **cooperation in the identification procedure** was assessed as average by three Member States (34% of the caseload), as poor or very poor by five (25% of the caseload), and as good or very good by six Member States (13% of the caseload).

Six Member States (34% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For two of them, requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely the case for one Member State, and never/almost never the case for three. Four Member States (32% of the caseload) assessed Somalia's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as very poor, one (2% of the caseload) as poor, and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as good. The remaining eight Member States (39% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022, due to the lack of relevant cases or no responses to readmission requests, or because returns were carried out based on other official documents, including occasionally the EU travel document or laissez-passer.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (30% of the caseload) assessed Somalia's cooperation as poor or very poor, two (24% of the caseload) as average, and four (9% of the caseload) as good or very good. Five Member States (10% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year.

Somalia needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Somalia needs to start cooperating with all Member States on both voluntary

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and forced returns, including by establishing effective communication channels with Member States; respond to readmission requests, also in cases of negative identification; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. valid and expired passports, biometric and other evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; organise consular interviews upon request; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; swiftly issue travel documents, including for forced returns; refrain from taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; accept charter flights.

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Sri Lanka

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement⁵⁵ with Sri Lanka entered into force on 1 May 2005. Due to the civil war and political developments at that time, the Agreement was not effectively implemented for several years. Since 2013, seven meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee took place to assess the implementation of the Agreement, the last one on 20 July 2021. In the latter, both parties underlined the transparency and efficiency gains of the Readmission Case Management System (RCMS)⁵⁶ as the single channel of communication and agreed on a standard procedure for the organisation of charter flights. Due to the volatile political and economic situation in Sri Lanka in the spring of 2022, it was decided to postpone the eighth Joint Readmission Committee meeting initially foreseen for July 2022.

The EU-funded RCMS has been operational since February 2020, with currently 16 Member States connected.

One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with Sri Lanka.

Cooperation on readmission

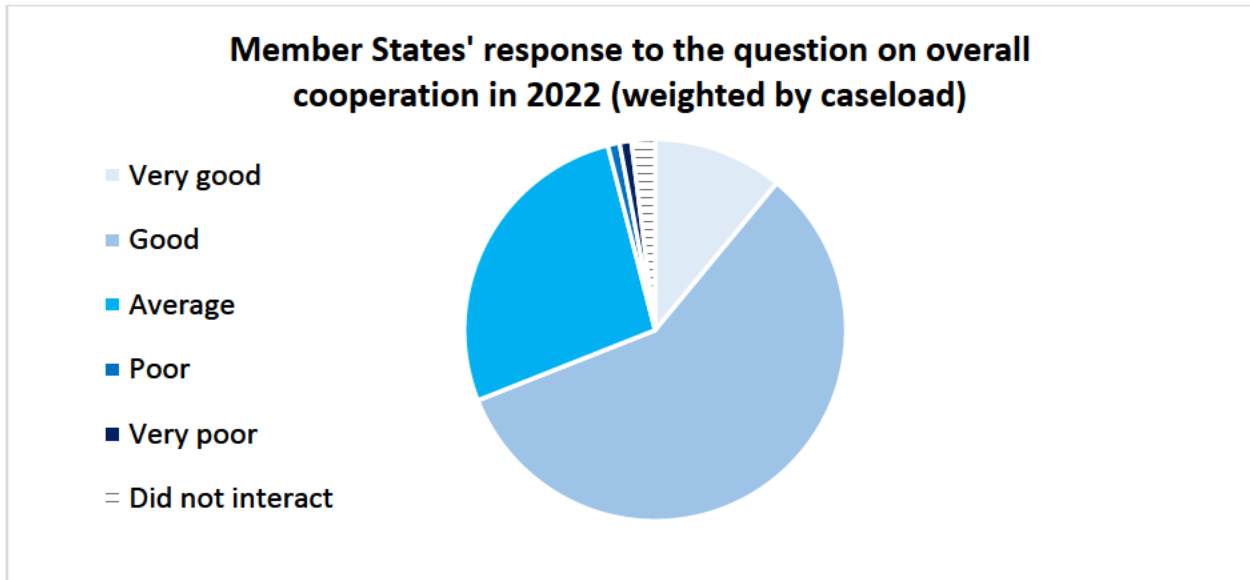
In 2022, 2 825 Sri Lankan nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions (the caseload) and 485 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 17%. Member States submitted 632 readmission requests to Sri Lankan authorities, who issued 302 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 48%.

15 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Sri Lanka for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, eight Member States (58% of the caseload) assessed Sri Lanka's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, two (27% of the caseload) as average, three (11% of the caseload) as very good, one (1% of the caseload) as poor, and one (1% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.

⁵⁵ Agreement between the European Community and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, OJ L 124/43, 17.5.2005.

⁵⁶ An electronic platform facilitating the exchange of information between competent authorities in Member States and in a given third country in order to process individual readmission cases.

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Two Member States (28% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests and certifications, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to one Member State, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Sri Lanka's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good or very good by 11 Member States (56% of the caseload), as average by one (26% of the caseload), and as poor or very poor by two (2% of the caseload). The remaining Member State (12% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Sri Lanka on identification in 2022.

13 Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For seven of them, requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was very often the case for five Member States, and rarely the case for one. 11 Member States (66% of the caseload) assessed Sri Lanka's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good or very good, and two (27% of the caseload) as average. The remaining two Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of relevant cases or replies to readmission requests.

As regards **return operations**, nine Member States (50% of the caseload) assessed Sri Lanka's cooperation as good or very good, and one (26% of the caseload) as average. Five Member States (21% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year mainly due to the lack of relevant cases and to voluntary returns taking place.

To further improve readmission cooperation, Sri Lanka needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement and extend existing good practices to all Member States.

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In particular, Sri Lanka needs to respect deadlines for the issuance of travel documents; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. photocopies of identity documents, accepting biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; organise consular interviews via videoconference for all Member States upon request; lift the restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirements for escorts); lift the remaining COVID-19 related restrictions for all Member States.

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Sudan

Engagement to date

Besides the Cotonou Agreement⁵⁷, there is no other cooperation instrument or process in place with Sudan at EU-level dedicated to readmission.

The 2021 coup d'état put on hold the preparations for a formal EU-Sudan migration cooperation, as well as for direct high-level engagement and EU programmes.

Due to the political context and the overall situation in the country in 2023, no engagement took place as a follow up to the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with Sudan.

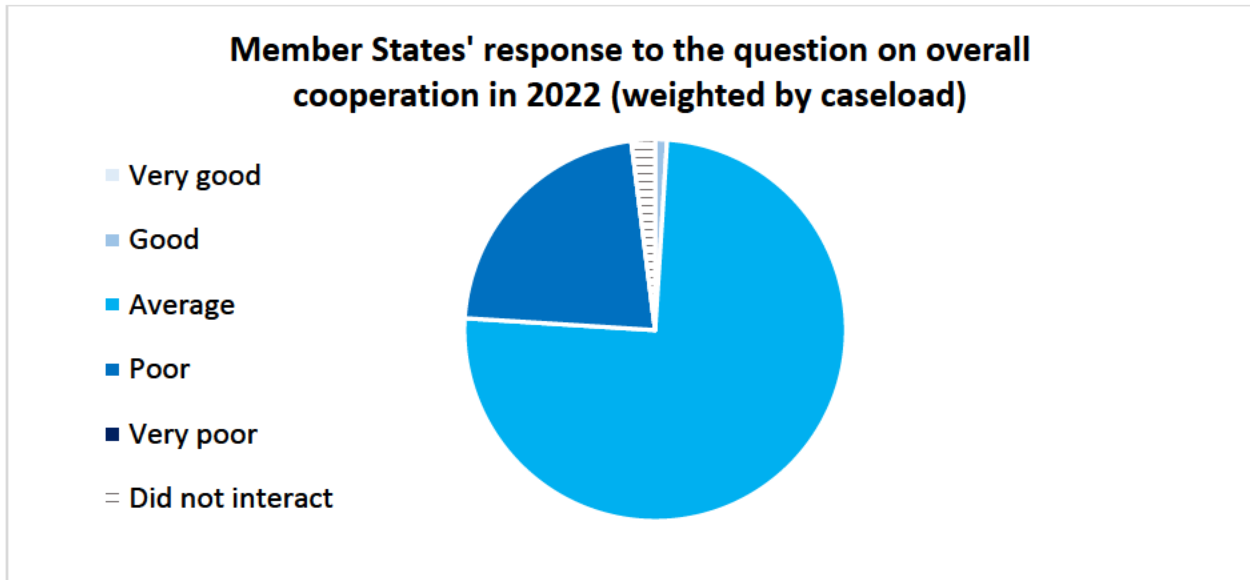
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 2 220 Sudanese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 110 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 5%. Member States submitted 330 readmission requests to the Sudanese authorities, who issued 42 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 13%.

14 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Sudan for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, eight Member States (75% of the caseload) assessed Sudan's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, three (22% of the caseload) as poor, two (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor, and one (1% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.

⁵⁷ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Sudan is party, states the commitment of each State (party to the agreement) to accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who have no right to stay on the territory of a Member State. This commitment is reinforced in the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Post-Cotonou Agreement, pending conclusion.

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Sudan's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by nine Member States (69% of the caseload), as poor or very poor by three (23% of the caseload), and as good or very good by two (1% of the caseload).

12 Member States (93% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For eight of them, requests were often, very often or always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for four Member States. Seven Member States (88% of the caseload) assessed Sudan's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as average, three (4% of the caseload) as poor or very poor, and two (1% of the caseload) as good. The remaining two (less than 1% of the caseload) Member States reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of replies on identification and the lack of relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, four Member States (73% of the caseload) assessed Sudan's cooperation as average, and six (19% of the caseload) as good. Four Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

Sudan needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. More specifically, Sudan needs to ensure timely responses to readmission requests and to requests for issuance of emergency travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; organise consular interviews, including via videoconference upon request for all Member States; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept biometric evidence from all Member States; remove restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirements for escorts).

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Tunisia

Engagement to date

A Mobility Partnership⁵⁸ with Tunisia was launched in March 2014. The Council authorised the opening of negotiations for a Readmission Agreement and a Visa Facilitation Agreement with Tunisia in December 2014. Negotiations started in October 2016, advancing at a good pace in 2018 and early 2019, with progress at technical level. Since 2019, the negotiations were suspended due to the presidential and legislative elections and the subsequent government changes.

The last EU-Tunisia sub-committee meeting on migration and social affairs, held on 31 January 2023, addressed the role of Tunisia in preventing irregular migration, as well as readmission cooperation. Following the subcommittee meeting, it was agreed that activities to promote exchanges on good practice and improve readmission cooperation would take place. This commitment was further reiterated in light of the significant increase of irregular arrivals to the EU from Tunisia in the framework of a Commission services' joint technical mission in March 2023 and during the political level visit of the Commission to Tunisia in April 2023, where the EU and Tunisia also agreed to jointly launch an Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnership to step up their cooperation on fighting smuggling and on preventing irregular migration. The issue of return and reintegration is part of the migration pillar in the Memorandum of Understanding on a comprehensive partnership between the EU and Tunisia, signed on 17 July 2023.

In view of the overall readmission context, following the adoption of the third report under the mechanism of Article 25a of the Visa Code, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Tunisia to present the outcome of the assessment and discuss the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post. Five Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Tunisia.

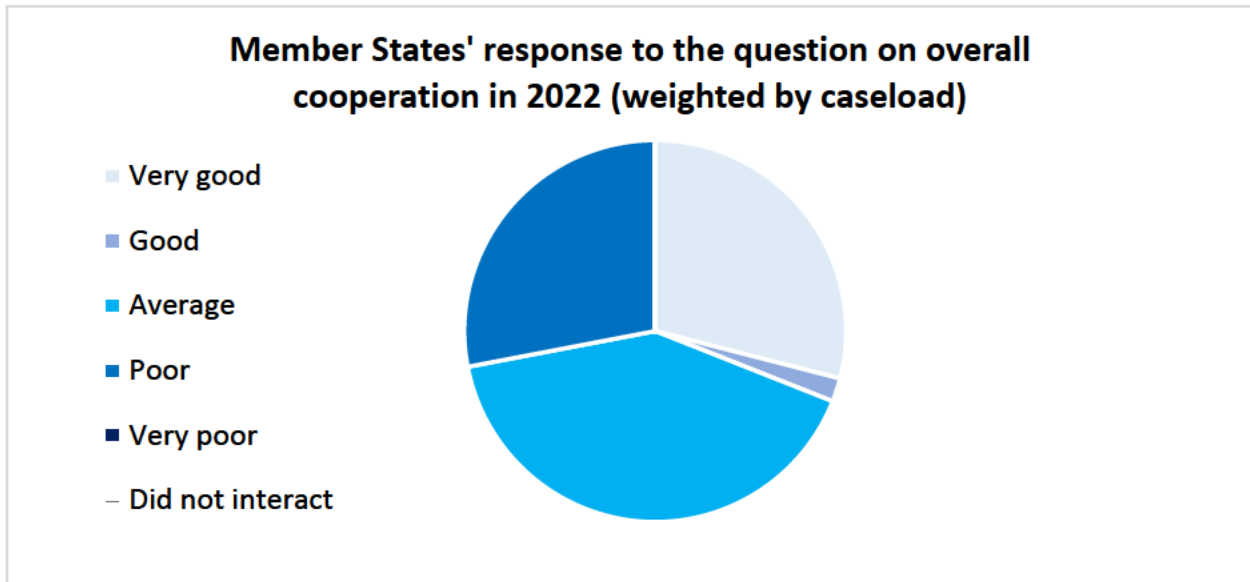
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 22 780 Tunisian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 270 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 10%. Member States submitted 6 686 readmission requests to the Tunisian authorities, who issued 2 556 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 38%.

⁵⁸ Déclaration conjointe pour le Partenariat de Mobilité entre la Tunisie, l'Union européenne et ses États membres participants, Bruxelles, 3.3.2014.

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22 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Tunisia for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, 10 Member States (41% of the caseload) assessed Tunisia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, one (29% of the caseload) as very good, three (28% of the caseload) as poor, seven (2% of the caseload) as good, and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. This is represented in the graph below.



Nine Member States (34% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, quarantine, and mandatory vaccinations, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to two Member States, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements for one Member State, which was not the case for the other Member State.

Tunisia's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by 10 Member States (37% of the caseload), as poor or very poor by five (32% of the caseload), and as good or very good by seven (30% of the caseload).

21 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 18 of them, requests were always/almost always, very often or often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely or never/almost never the case for three. Four Member States (61% of the caseload) assessed Tunisia's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as poor or very poor, eight (37% of the caseload) as good or very good and nine (2% of the caseload) as average. One Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of relevant cases.

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As regards return operations, 13 Member States (38% of the caseload) assessed Tunisia's cooperation as good or very good, four (36% of the caseload) as average, and one (25% of the caseload) as poor. Four Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year.

In view of the overall readmission context and the high number of irregularly arriving Tunisian nationals, Tunisia needs to take concrete steps to improve readmission cooperation, in the framework of the comprehensive partnership with Tunisia. More specifically, Tunisia needs to extend existing good cooperation practices to all Member States. In particular, Tunisia needs to lift COVID-19 related restrictions for all Member States; ensure swift, timely and efficient follow up to readmission requests; organise consular interviews upon request, including via videoconference for all Member States; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from all Member States; organise identification missions upon request; swiftly issue travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality; accept charter flights from all requesting Member States; lift restrictions on both scheduled flights and charter flights.

The conclusion of an EU Readmission Agreement would further contribute to ensuring a more effective and predictable readmission cooperation with all Member States.

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Türkiye

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement⁵⁹ with Türkiye entered into force on 1 October 2014. Two meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee (JRC) took place since then to assess the implementation of the Agreement, the last one on 19 January 2016. Since then, Türkiye has refused to hold further meetings of the JRC. Türkiye is implementing the EU Readmission Agreement, except with Cyprus and for the third country nationals' clause. Türkiye maintains its position not to implement the third-country nationals' clause until the short-stay visa requirement for Türkiye's citizens travelling to the Schengen area is lifted.

The EU-Turkey Statement serves as the key framework for cooperation on migration with Türkiye. Türkiye suspended returns under the Statement since March 2020 and has not resumed them yet.

The last subcommittee meeting on customs, taxation, drug trafficking and money laundering took place on 28 April 2023. The Commission met with Turkish counterparts at technical level to discuss relevant aspects of migration management and areas of mutual cooperation.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

Two Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Türkiye.

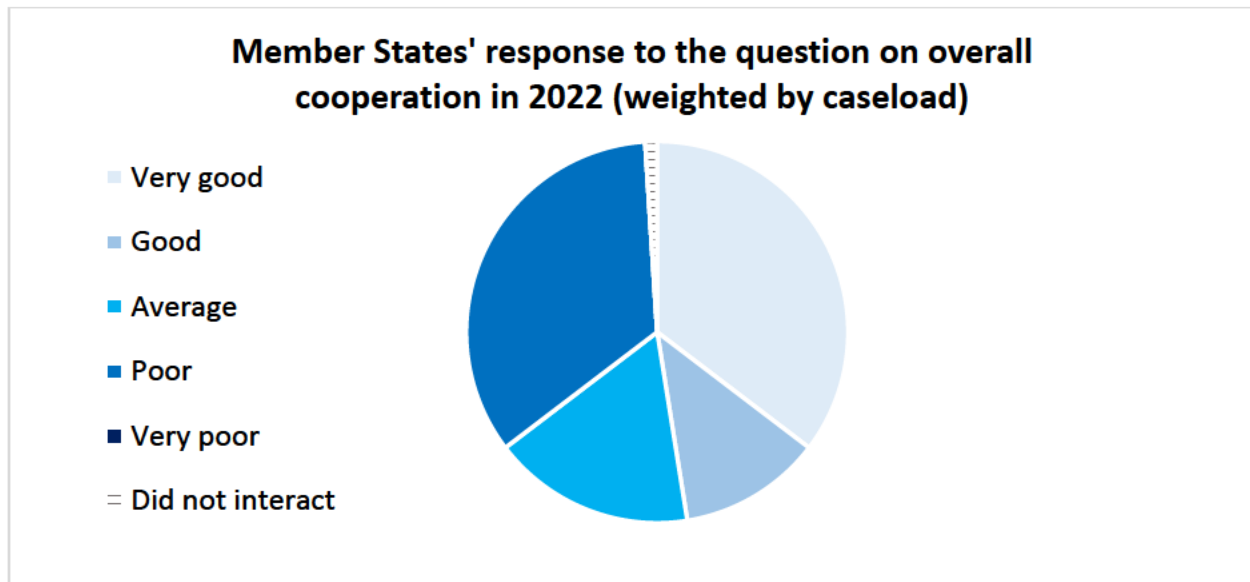
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 14 380 Turkish nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 4 285 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 30%. Member States submitted 1 367 readmission requests to the Turkish authorities, who issued 762 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 56%.

24 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Türkiye for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, 11 Member States (35% of the caseload) assessed Türkiye's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very good, two (34% of the caseload) as poor, five (17% of the caseload) as average, and six (12% of the caseload) as good. This is represented in the graph below.

⁵⁹ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorization, OJ L 134/3, 7.5.2014.

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Three Member States (3% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests or vaccination, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to one Member State, these measures were applied to returnees only. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Türkiye's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good or good by 14 Member States (47% of the caseload), as average by seven (37% of the caseload), and as poor by one (15% of the caseload). Two Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with the Türkiye on identification in 2022.

22 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 13 of them, requests were always/almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was very often or often the case for seven of them, and rarely for two. 17 Member States (51% of the caseload) assessed Türkiye's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as very good or good, four (27% of the caseload) as average, and one (20% of the caseload) as poor. The remaining two Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 because Türkiye accepted returns based on expired passports, or on any documents or photocopies thereof with the national identification number, without the need to recourse to the travel document.

As regards **return operations**, 16 Member States (78% of the caseload) assessed Türkiye's cooperation as very good or good, two as average (4% of the caseload), and one (15% of the caseload) as poor. Five Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to returns carried out via land, the lack of relevant cases and voluntary returns taking place.

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In view of the overall readmission context and the high number of irregularly arriving Turkish nationals, Türkiye needs to take concrete steps to improve readmission cooperation, in the framework of the partnership with Türkiye. More specifically, Türkiye needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement, including Article 4 on the readmission of third country nationals, and extend existing good practices to all Member States. Returns under the EU-Turkey Statement should resume. In particular, Türkiye needs to ensure timely responses to readmission requests without taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; refrain from requesting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; extend the possibility to conduct consular interviews via videoconference to all Member States; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under the EU or national legal frameworks; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue travel documents with a validity period of three months, as stipulated in the Agreement and without taking into account elements other than the nationality; accept charter flights from all Member States; lift restrictions on scheduled flights.

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Uzbekistan

Engagement to date

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)⁶⁰ between the EU and Uzbekistan refers to readmission obligations. The new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), the negotiations of which were finalised in July 2022, includes a detailed article on irregular migration and readmission that, once in force, should further facilitate the readmission process. There is no other instrument or process in place with Uzbekistan at EU-level specifically dedicated to readmission cooperation.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

One Member State reported having a bilateral agreement/arrangement in place with Uzbekistan.

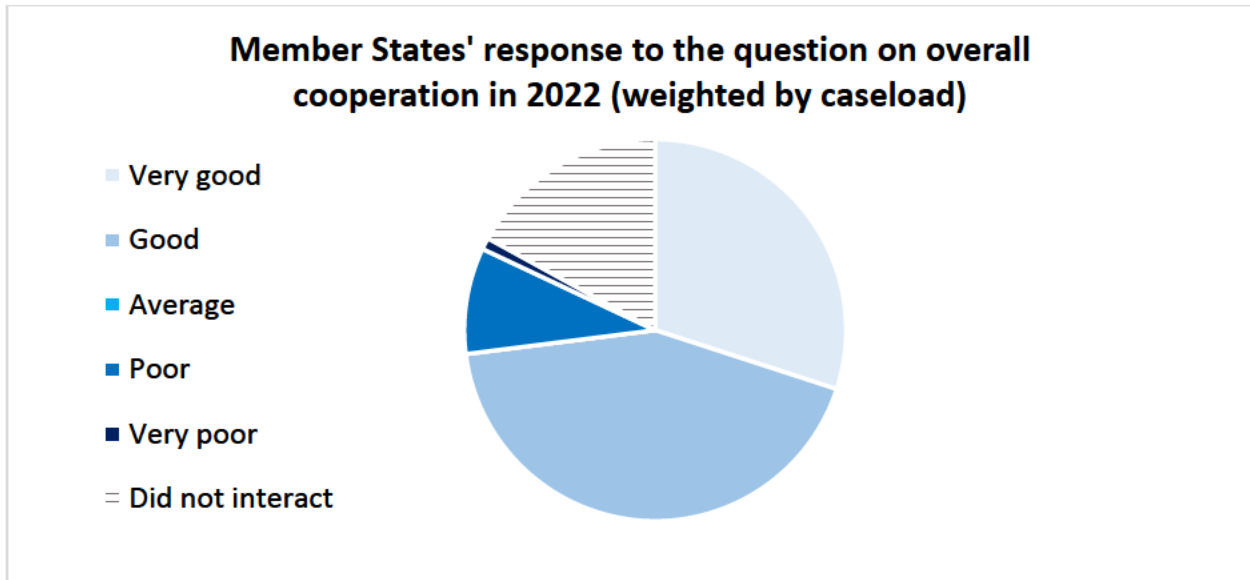
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 2 455 Uzbek nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 640 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 67%. Member States submitted 38 readmission requests to the Uzbek authorities, who issued 15 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 39%.

12 Member States (83% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Uzbekistan for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, three Member States (43% caseload) assessed Uzbekistan's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, four (30% of the caseload) as very good, three (9% of the caseload) as poor, and two (1% of the caseload) as average. This is represented in the graph below.

⁶⁰ Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Uzbekistan OJ L 229/3, 31.08.1999.

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One Member State (1% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Uzbekistan's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good or good by six Member States (55% of the caseload), as average by three (6% of the caseload), and as poor or very poor by two (4% of the caseload). The remaining Member State (18% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Uzbekistan on identification in 2022.

10 Member States (78% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For seven of them, requests were always or almost always responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was very often or often the case for three Member States. Six Member States (43% of the caseload) assessed Uzbekistan's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as very good or good, two (31% of the caseload) as average, and two (4% of the caseload) as poor or very poor. The remaining two Member States (5% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to a low caseload.

As regards **return operations**, five Member States (54% of the caseload) assessed Uzbekistan's cooperation as very good, three (5% of the caseload) as good, and one (5% of the caseload) as poor. Three Member States (19% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases.

To further improve readmission cooperation, Uzbekistan needs to provide answers to readmission request in a timely manner; refrain from taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; conduct interviews upon request; establish more effective communication channels with Member States; swiftly issue travel

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documents; accept biometric evidence for all Member States; facilitate the issuance of visas for escorts.

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Vietnam

Engagement to date

The EU-Vietnam Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation⁶¹, which refers to readmission obligations (Article 27), was concluded in 2016 and entered into force on 1 August 2020.

Cooperation on readmission is supported by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

Seven Member States reported having bilateral agreements/arrangements in place with Vietnam.

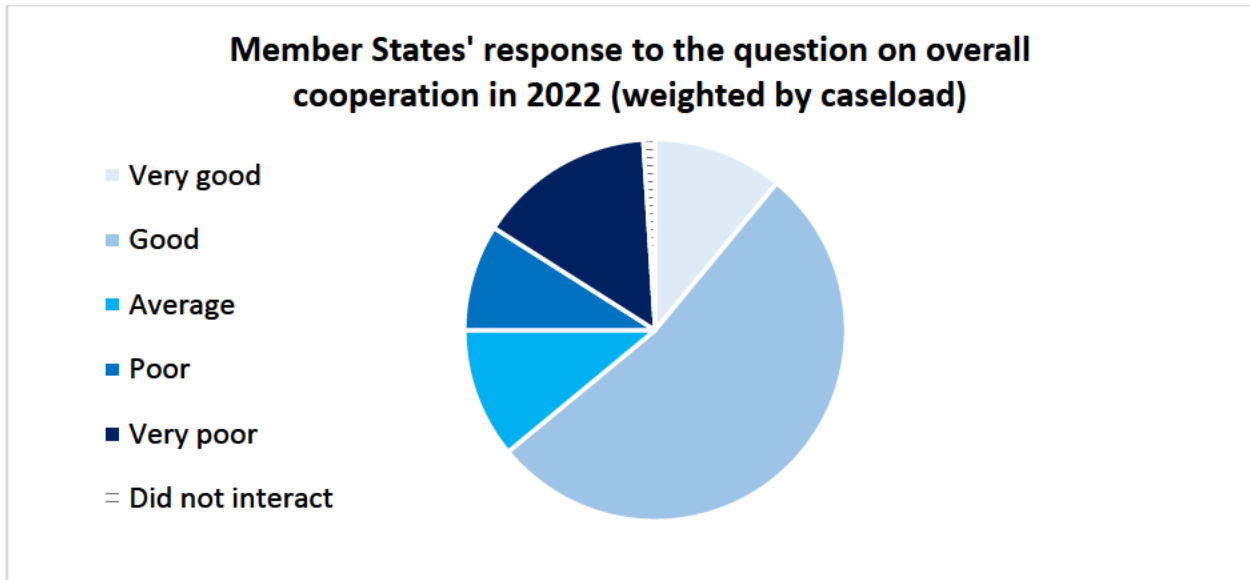
Cooperation on readmission

In 2022, 3 035 Vietnamese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 795 were returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 26%. Member States submitted 604 readmission requests to the Vietnamese authorities, who issued 180 travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 30%.

18 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Vietnam for readmission matters in 2022. Of these, five Member States (53% of the caseload) assessed Vietnam's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, one (15% of the caseload) as very poor, four (11% of the caseload) as very good, five (11% of the caseload) as average, and three (9% of the caseload) as poor. This is represented in the graph below.

⁶¹ Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation between the European Union and its Member States the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, OJ L 329/8, 31.12.2016.

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Five Member States (11% of the caseload) reported that **COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements**, such as mandatory PCR/Rapid Antigen tests, vaccination, quarantine or suspension of flights, continued to impact the cooperation in 2022. According to these Member States, such measures were applied to all nationals. Authorities were not responsive to possible alternative solutions to lift these requirements.

Vietnam's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good or very good by seven Member States (61% of the caseload), as average by six (20% of the caseload), and as poor or very poor by three (16% of the caseload). Two Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Vietnam on the identification of persons in 2022.

14 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having requested travel documents during the reporting period. For 12 of them, requests were always/almost always or very often responded to with the **issuance of travel documents**. This was rarely the case for two of them. 10 Member States (74% of the caseload) assessed Vietnam's cooperation on the issuance of travel documents as good or very good, two (16% of the caseload) as poor or very poor, and two (7% of the caseload) as average. The remaining four Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having requested any travel documents in 2022 due to the lack of relevant cases.

As regards **return operations**, 10 Member States (70% of the caseload) assessed Vietnam's cooperation as good or very good, and four (10% of the caseload) as average. Four Member States (19% of the caseload) reported not having attempted any return operation in the reporting year due to the lack of relevant cases and the general restrictions on the readmission of Vietnamese nationals.

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To improve readmission cooperation, Vietnam needs to extend the existing good cooperation to all Member States. In particular, Vietnam needs to accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. information extracted from the Visa Information System, photocopies of documents, biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; organise consular interviews and identification missions upon request; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; speed up the identification phase of the readmission process; swiftly issue travel documents for all Member States without taking into account elements other than nationality; lift restrictions on returns by scheduled or charter flights (e.g. requirement of transit permits, limiting the number of returnees per flight or visa requirements for escorts).