

Palestine*

EU engagement to date

The Commission has so far not engaged with Palestinian authorities on readmission cooperation, as no specific issues have been raised by Member States.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2019, 3 915 Palestinian nationals staying illegally in the Member States were issued return decisions and 170 effectively returned to Palestine resulting in a **return rate** of 4%. Member States submitted 33 readmission requests to the Palestinian authorities, who issued 5 travel documents resulting in an **issuance rate** of 15%.

A total of 12 Member States reported having approached the authorities of Palestine for readmission matters related to its nationals in 2019. No Member States have **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Palestine.

Half of the responding Member States, accounting for three quarters of Palestinian nationals ordered to leave the EU assess the **cooperation on identification procedures** with Palestine as very good or good. Five Member States have an established routine for cooperation on identification that is effectively implemented with Palestine's diplomatic missions. For half of the Member States consular interviews are always or very often performed upon their request, with, on average, satisfactory outcomes. In the case of three Member States, interviews are also always requested by the Palestinian authorities in cases where sufficient in evidences to establish nationality were already provided (e.g. valid or expired travel documents).

Palestinian authorities issue travel documents only if Jordanian, Egyptian or, primarily, Israeli authorities approve the return via their territory due to the lack of direct access to Palestinian territories. As the only travel documents issued are Palestinian passports, which are requested by the neighbouring countries to transit through their territories, and whose issuance is subject to Israeli scrutiny, the procedure may require an application signed by the returnee and is time-consuming and can take 2-3 months. Even if passports are available, transit approval has to be requested from one of the neighbouring countries. One Member State reported, that none of the countries grants permission for transit, hence no returns to Palestine have been possible in recent years. The Member State with nearly three quarters of return decisions issued to Palestinian nationals, reports not requesting any travel documents, since returns to Palestine cannot be performed. According to half of the responding Member States, accounting for 10% of return decisions issued, the **issuance of travel documents** rarely or never takes place in a timely manner.

Member States report that returns by **charters flights** are not accepted by Palestine, however this does not reflect a decision of Palestinian authorities but the fact that all airports in the Palestinian territories have been closed for years.

* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

In general, three quarters of the responding Member States have assessed the **overall cooperation on return and readmission** as stable or deteriorating, though mainly pointing to the fact that returns are hampered by the Jordanian, Israeli or Egyptian authorities who refuse transit via their territories.

With a total of 3 915 Palestinian nationals ordered to leave in 2019, Palestine ranks 22nd amongst visa-bound third countries whose nationals have been issued return decisions in the Member States. Overall, about a third of the Member States interact on readmission with Palestine – the rest have few or no cases – on a very small number readmission requests submitted, a fraction of the number of return decisions issued. No jointly agreed procedures are in place at EU level and few Member States have an established routine. Identification processes are conducted satisfactorily for Member States representing three quarters of return decisions including through interviews, but for half of them the issuance of documents is not timely or not pursued at all. To improve cooperation, identification processes could be expedited and followed through swiftly with issuing travel documents, also without interviews for documented cases. For the readmission process to be finalised with effective return, however, due to the lack of direct access to Palestine, transit requires approval by its neighbours which postpones or completely hampers returns.