



Council of the
European Union

**Brussels, 7 March 2024
(OR. en)**

7245/24

LIMITE

**ASIM 26
MIGR 98
JAI 378
RELEX 264
FRONT 77**

NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP)
Subject: Presidency discussion paper – Coordination of the local and regional networks of the European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers: Challenges and opportunities

Delegations will find in annex a discussion paper on the above-mentioned topic for the Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP) working party meeting on 14 March 2024 (see CM 1711/1/24 REV1, item 4).

Presidency discussion paper – Coordination of the local and regional networks of the European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers: Challenges and opportunities

Lessons-learned from the IMEX Expulsion discussion

On 8 February, the Belgian Presidency organized a discussion on liaison officers at the IMEX Expulsion meeting. The focus was set on the return-related aspects of the mandates of the different types of liaison officers. The main objective was to encourage the optimization and the use of the immigration liaison officers' networks while also emphasizing the need of improving the communication and cooperation between liaison officers deployed in third countries. As a follow-up to this discussion, and in order to broaden the scope of the discussion beyond the field of return, the Presidency wishes to pursue the debates with the Member States at the forthcoming EMWP meeting. The state of play on the coordination of the local and regional networks under the framework of the European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers (hereafter, the ILO Network) will be addressed.

For an explanation on the role, the mandate and the reporting obligations of European Return Liaison Officers (EURLOs), European Migration Liaison Officers (EMLOs) and Frontex Liaison Officers (FLOs), delegations are invited to consult the Presidency paper which was circulated for the purpose of the discussion at the IMEX Expulsion of 8 February¹.

¹ ST 5494/24

This discussion emphasized four main points which can be relevant for the discussion at the forthcoming EMWP meeting:

- 1) An active participation of Member States in the ILO Steering Board is key for giving a clear strategic direction, promoting operational cooperation and ensuring effective information sharing and coordinated approach between liaison officers, towards and with the host country.
- 2) Some Member States mentioned the need of more political support for the work of liaison officers with local authorities.
- 3) The mandates and roles of national liaison officers differ widely between Member States, ranging from generic to specialized (e.g. on document security or airlines).
- 4) Delegations pointed out a number of elements which could increase the attractiveness of the position of European Liaison Officer (EMLOs, EURLOs and FLOs): financial attractiveness (taking into account the limits of Frontex's financial framework), costs to be borne by Member States, administrative burden, security problems related to the host third countries, possibilities for career development after the posting as well as possibility to bring the family together.

Coordination of local and regional ILO networks

The European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers (hereafter “The ILO Network”) aims at ensuring better coordination and optimization of the use of the liaison officers deployed to third countries. The ILO Network covers a wide range of migration-related activities, with a focus on prevention of irregular migration, counter-smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings, but also facilitating dignified and effective return, readmission and reintegration activities, contributing to integrated management of the Union’s external borders, as well as supporting management of legal immigration, including in the area of international protection, resettlement and pre-departure integration measures undertaken by Member States and the Union.

Immigration liaison officers (ILOs) deployed to the same countries or regions constitute local or regional cooperation networks². Given that liaison officers dealing with migration-related issues are deployed by different competent authorities and that their mandates and tasks may overlap, efforts should be made to enhance cooperation among officers operating within the same third country or region. Local and regional facilitators, especially EMLOs, play a fundamental role in animating and supporting the Network in the field.

EMLOs are important actors at the service of the migration policy. They are seconded national experts deployed by the European Commission in the EU Delegations, who support the effective implementation of the EU policy on irregular migration, migrant smuggling and return, trafficking in human beings, border management, international protection and resettlement, and legal migration. They also chair the ILO Network meetings on the ground with other European and national liaison officers deployed. The network of EMLOs was established in 2015 with the objective of building a consistent agenda on migration with identified priority third countries, which requires presence in that country of a person knowing the technicalities of the migration file and speaking “the same language” as his or her interlocutors. Such EMLO posts were created in 16 third countries, the list of which has largely remained unchanged since.

In locations where the Commission does not deploy EMLOs, immigration liaison officers deployed by Union agencies facilitate the local or regional networks. In those locations where neither the Commission nor Union agencies deploy immigration liaison officers, the network should be facilitated by a national immigration liaison officer³ as agreed in the Steering Board of the Network. It is therefore also important to consider this situation regarding the reinforcement of communication and coordination on the spot.

² Article 5(1) of the ILO Regulation: Immigration liaison officers deployed to the same countries or regions shall constitute local or regional cooperation networks and cooperate, where and when appropriate, with liaison officers deployed by countries other than Member States.

³ Article 5 (2) of Regulation (EU) 2019/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the creation of a European network of immigration liaison officers (recast)

Appointments and deployments

Given the existence of the different types of European liaison officers and of those posted by the Member States, with corresponding mandates and administrative arrangements, there is a need to closely coordinate on the priority countries for their deployments to ensure adequate coverage of relevant migration areas in some third countries (such as e.g. in Bangladesh where the EMLO has been performing the mandate of a EURLO in addition to their own) or avoiding overlap where such resources are deemed unnecessary.

Furthermore, the secondment procedure of different liaison officers is time-consuming, taking in the case of EMLOs between 4 and 6 months on average, with the key obstacle to faster deployment being the months-long security clearance procedure.

The tables below illustrate the range of ILO Networks in place, and the different types of liaison officers with a coordinating role, based on the latest information given by the Member States and the Commission.

Third countries	Seconding Member State	Deployments of EMLOs
Bangladesh	Germany	X
Egypt	/	New EMLO starting on 01/04/2024
Ethiopia (regional mandate: Horn of Africa)	Germany	X
Georgia (regional mandate covering Eastern Partnership)	/	New EMLO starting on 01/05/2024
Lebanon (regional mandate covering Syria and Jordan)	Luxembourg	X
Mali	France	X
Morocco	Germany	X
Niger	Germany	Evacuated, working from Berlin until 31/03/2024, (publication of post)
Nigeria	/	New EMLO starting on 01/04/2024
Pakistan (regional mandate covering Afghanistan)		Ongoing secondment
Senegal	Germany	X

Serbia <i>(regional mandate: Western Balkans)</i>	Germany	X
Sudan <i>(regional mandate covering Chad)</i>	Germany	Evacuated: working from Berlin
The Gambia	/	Ongoing secondment
Tunisia <i>(regional mandate covering Libya)</i>	France	X
Türkiye	Germany	X

Third countries	Deploying Member State/SAC/Agency	Type of liaison officer
Brazil	Portugal	ILO
Central Asia <i>(regional mandate covering Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan)</i>	Poland	EURLO ; until July 31, 2024
China	The Netherlands	ILO
Colombia	Spain	ILO
Democratic Republic of Congo	Belgium	EURLO
Ghana	Norway	EURLO
Gulf countries <i>(regional mandate covering UAE, Qatar and Oman)</i>	Germany	ILO, deployed in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Iran	Norway	ILO
Iraq	Norway	EURLO
Moldova	FRONTEX	FLO
Thailand	The Netherlands	ILO
Vietnam	Poland	EURLO ; until January 31, 2024 (under the process of extending deployment)
Ivory Coast <i>(regional mandate covering Guinea Conakry)</i>	France	New EURLO starting on 01/04/2024

Tools for communication and coordination

As indicated in the ILO Regulation⁴ and in the IMEX Expulsion Presidency paper, Regulation (EU) 2019/1240 sets a framework to promote the establishment of local ILO networks. In addition, pursuant to Article 9 of the ILO Network Regulation, the Commission established a dedicated workspace within the European Migration Network - Information Exchange System (EMN IES) to promote and ensure effective information exchange between liaison officers. This tool allows for a better sharing of information on the host country, whether in the form of reports or ad hoc operational information, mutual support and complementarities between the liaison officers. DG HOME organizes biannual seminars for EMLOs i.e. to update them on the latest policy developments. Such information sessions could be opened (e.g. by way of a remote connection) also to other liaison officers to enhance synergies and contribute to ‘speaking with a single voice’. It would also implement European priorities on the spot by making the link between the work carried out locally and in Brussels. The sub-optimal utilization of these local networks and the low percentage of registration of national liaison officers on the platform (around 20%) hamper significantly the added value of a European approach regarding immigration liaison officers.

The role of the EU Delegations is also key in ensuring coordination. Examples of good practices in some Delegations are regular quarterly meetings which allow to transmit the state of play and reflections concerning the specific partner country.

At the forthcoming EMWP meeting, the Presidency would like to invite delegations to reflect and share their views on the following questions:

- 1) *What experiences in cooperation within the Immigration Liaison Officers Network do you have, at strategic level through the Steering Board of the ILO Network and at a more operational level through the ILOs deployed in third countries (EMLOs, EURLOs and ILOs per se)?*
- 2) *What are your views on the main challenges, opportunities, coordination mechanism and information exchange within the network?*

⁴ Articles 5 and 9 of Regulation 2019/1240