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**RELEASABLE TO THE SCHENGEN ASSOCIATED COUNTRIES - ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN,
NORWAY, SWITZERLAND**



**Council of the
European Union**

**Brussels, 23 July 2024
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Assessment of third countries' level of cooperation on readmission in 2023

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COM(2024) 340 final

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

Assessment of third countries' level of cooperation on readmission in 2023

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Introduction

Overall context

The adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum¹ ('Pact') in May 2024 reflects the commitment to manage migration in a fair and orderly way, allowing the EU and Member States to move from ad hoc to long-term and sustainable solutions. In this framework, the common EU system for returns is a key component to ensure that returns can deliver within the overall objectives of the EU's migration and asylum policy. This approach combines stronger structures inside the EU, also facilitated by the work of the Return Coordinator with Member States on targeted return actions, with more effective cooperation with third countries on return and readmission.

Return and readmission are essential elements of a credible migration policy, of the comprehensive approach put forward by the Pact, and constitute a key building block in the implementation of the new legislation.

The importance of the comprehensive approach to migration was underlined by the European Council in the conclusions of its meeting on 14-15 December 2023: the EU should pursue a comprehensive approach to migration, which combines increased external action, mutually beneficial comprehensive partnerships with countries of origin and transit, addressing the root causes of migration, opportunities for legal migration, more effective protection of EU external borders, resolutely fighting organised crime, human trafficking and smuggling, instrumentalisation of migration as a hybrid threat and stepping up returns². A shift is now needed to a more pragmatic and assertive way of ensuring that the EU's own interests are reflected in these partnerships, using the EU's collective leverage to its full potential.

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, and invited the Commission and the Council to make full use of the mechanism established under Article 25a of the Visa Code³.

¹ The 10 pieces of legislation comprising the Pact are published in the Official Journal L, 22.05.2024.

² Conclusions of the European Council of 9 February 2023, EUCO 1/23.

³ Ibidem

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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 responds to the Pact's call for joint efforts to ensure that progress on readmission proceeds in parallel to progress in other areas of EU migration partnerships with third countries⁴. The mechanism under 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 provides a mechanism for leveraging the EU's common visa policy, including the possibility of introducing visa measures temporarily suspending the application of certain provisions for the issuance of short-stay visas for nationals of third countries ('visa measures') for which action is needed to improve readmission cooperation⁵.

To further expand the EU toolbox to foster readmission cooperation, the Commission is looking into all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools identified by the Council⁶, including diplomacy, development, trade and visas, as well as opportunities for legal migration.

For the 64 countries and territories with whom the EU has a visa-free regime in place, the visa suspension mechanism is a safeguard against irregular migration – the reform of the mechanism should further strengthen it to this end. In its proposal⁷ for the new General System of Preference (GSP) Regulation, the Commission introduced insufficient cooperation on readmission as a new ground for withdrawal of trade preferences. However, the co-legislators did not reach an agreement.

The setting up of Talent Partnerships⁸ with key countries can provide a strategic and sustainable cooperation framework on legal migration opportunities as part of a broader cooperation on migration management, including effective return and readmission. Migration-related actions under the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument "should contribute to the effective implementation of EU agreements and dialogues on migration with third countries by encouraging cooperation relying on a flexible

⁴ COM(2020) 609 final.

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

⁶ Ibidem

⁷ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on applying a generalised scheme of tariff preferences and repealing Regulation (EU) No 978/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 22 September 2021 COM(2021) 579 final.

⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Attracting skills and talent to the EU, 27 April 2022 COM(2022) 657 final.

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initiative approach and supported by a coordination mechanism under the Instrument⁹. These tools need to be further developed and implemented coherently with the 25a mechanism.

The legal framework for readmission has been further strengthened in 2023 by the signature of the Samoa Agreement¹⁰ which replaces the Cotonou Agreement¹¹, and serves as the overarching legal framework for relations between the EU Member States and African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries for the next 20 years, and contains inter alia detailed obligations on return and readmission.

It is in this context that the Commission is presenting this fifth annual assessment report covering readmission cooperation in the year 2023. The assessment is based on quantitative data, as well as 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 ('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 ('the caseload'), the findings show that a number of third countries need to improve readmission cooperation and that further action is needed, as indicated in the specific country assessments of this report.

Follow-up to the previous assessment reports

In the first four 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. Ethiopia, Senegal) and opened new channels of discussion and communication on readmission, where no targeted engagement had taken place previously (e.g. Cameroon, Congo, Lebanon). Further, it has helped address persistent or emerging problems with concrete results and allowed for relevant progress in cooperation (e.g. Bangladesh, Iraq, The Gambia, and for the latter it resulted in the lifting of the second stage measures in April 2024).

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009, OJ L 295/1.

¹⁰ Partnership Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, of the other part, ST/8372/2023/REV/1, OJ L, 2023/2862, 28.12.2023.

¹¹ The ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement 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 Annex I of the New EU/ACP Partnership Agreement, also referred to as the Samoa Agreement, which has been concluded in November 2023 (see previous footnote).

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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 visa measures on short-stay visas for nationals of Bangladesh¹², Iraq¹³ and The Gambia¹⁴. The Council adopted the Commission's proposal on The Gambia on 7 October 2021¹⁵. In view of the enhanced engagement 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 with Iraq remained insufficient, the Council decided to resume discussions on the proposal in 2023. The discussions continue in the Council.

Following the report on readmission cooperation in 2020, the Commission proposed to the Council the adoption of visa measures on short-stay visas for nationals of Senegal¹⁶, as well as to move to the second stage measures for The Gambia, in accordance with Article 25a (5)(b), with a gradual increase of the visa fees¹⁷. The second stage measures entered into force, upon adoption by the Council on 8 December 2022¹⁸. As regards the Commission's proposal for Senegal, the discussions continue in the Council.

Following the report on readmission cooperation in 2022, the Commission proposed to the Council the adoption of visa measures for nationals of Ethiopia¹⁹, as well as to repeal the application of the increased visa fee for nationals of The Gambia²⁰ which was adopted by the Council on 12 April 2024²¹. As regards Ethiopia, despite the continuous engagement of the EU to improve cooperation on readmission, cooperation remained insufficient and the Council adopted the Commission's proposal on 29 April 2024²².

¹² COM (2021) 412 final.

¹³ COM (2021) 414 final.

¹⁴ COM (2021) 413 final.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ COM (2022) 631 final.

¹⁷ COM (2022) 632 final.

¹⁸ 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 321/18, 15.12.2022.

¹⁹ COM (2023) 568 final.

²⁰ COM (2023) 569 final.

²¹ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/1231 of 12 April 2024 on repealing Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2459 on the application of an increased visa fee with respect to The Gambia, OJ L 25.4.2024.

²² Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/1341 of 29 April 2024 on the suspension of certain provisions of Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council in respect of Ethiopia, OJ L, 14.05.2024.

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Assessment of the level of cooperation in 2023

Selection criteria and assessment indicators

This annual assessment report on readmission cooperation in the year 2023 covers 34 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 2022 (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 2022 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 were subject to an assessment: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, China, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo^{*}, Mali, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tunisia, Türkiye, and Vietnam.

While fulfilling the quantitative criterion, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Palestine are excluded from the assessment as it is not possible to establish effective operational contacts due to the conditions on the ground, whereas Eritrea and Belarus²³ are excluded due to the asylum recognition rate above 75% in the EU in 2022. Russia is excluded due to its war of aggression against Ukraine, which precludes engagement. The criteria and the geographical

^{*} 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.

Following the final adoption by the EU co-legislators of the proposal to grant visa-free travel for Kosovo in April 2023, Kosovo passport holders are able to travel to the EU without a short-stay visa as of 1 January 2024.

²³ The EU-Belarus Readmission Agreement entered into force in July 2020. Belarus' authorities announced the suspension of the Agreement on 28 June 2021.

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scope of the assessment were presented to and endorsed by the Member States in December 2023²⁴.

The mechanism delivering for the implementation of the Pact

The annual assessment of readmission cooperation allows the Commission to identify shortcomings and possible actions to be undertaken in view of the implementation of the new Pact legislation, in particular the border procedure.²⁵

With the border procedure, those who do not fulfil the conditions to enter the EU will go through a screening process at the external border where they will be subject to identification, security and health checks. These persons will also be registered in the asylum and migration database (Eurodac) ensuring clear identification for anyone who enters the EU as an asylum seeker or an irregular migrant.

With the new procedure, a shift can be anticipated in relation to the return and readmission process and how the caseload will be distributed for certain nationalities from the country of destination to the country of arrival in the EU. The border procedure will apply for asylum applicants who are unlikely to need protection (i.e. those for whom the asylum recognition rate is 20% and below). It will ensure that, if international protection is refused to an applicant, that person will be swiftly returned.

Further, timeframes for identification and issuance of travel documents will have to be reduced, as the border procedure will last for 24 weeks maximum (12 weeks for the asylum process and 12 weeks for the return process). During this time, the persons will stay in designated areas at the border with no right to enter the EU.

The information collected in the assessment reports provides a helpful baseline to identify challenges that should be overcome in view of the implementation of the border procedure.

The mechanism takes into account the importance of the implementation of the border procedure when assessing readmission cooperation and will reflect how cooperation delivers particularly for EU countries implementing the border procedure.

In the follow up of this assessment report and in its engagement with third countries, notably with those where the asylum recognition rate for their nationals is 20% or lower, the

²⁴ In the Irregular Migration and Expulsion Working Party meeting of 20 December 2023 and in the Readmission Expert Group meeting of 16 November 2023.

²⁵ Regulation (EU) 2024/1349 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a return border procedure, and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1148.

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Commission will focus on communicating and addressing the foreseeable needs for a smooth implementation of the border procedure.

The mechanism's strategic value

This is the fifth assessment report under Article 25a and the mechanism has now proven it delivers results. The first four 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's proposal for visa measures has proven particularly effective and impacted positively third countries' willingness to improve cooperation. Intensive engagement, including with third countries that are subject to a proposal for measures, has in some cases fostered concrete improvements and triggered favourable dynamics in the cooperation which allowed for a widening of the migration partnerships.

Following the Commission's proposal for visa measures (15 July 2021)²⁶, a continuous and constructive dialogue with Bangladesh has been in place. In this context, Bangladesh has taken concrete actions to improve cooperation. These include reducing the accumulated backlog of cases submitted by Member States, increasing the efficiency in the responses to readmission requests, the openness to and acceptance of flights, introducing a number of organisational measures to facilitate coordination and monitoring of readmission related efforts in the EU, and significant improvements to the Readmission Case Management System ('RCMS')²⁷. These efforts have led to progress in the operational cooperation with Member States that has been reflected in this year's report.

Following the entry into force of the second stage measures for The Gambia (8 December 2022)²⁸, 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 acceptance and effective organisation of charter flights. The Commission assessed that, since the entry into force of the second stage measures, a substantial and sustained improvement in the cooperation on readmission could be established regarding the organisation of return

²⁶ COM (2021) 412 final.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ 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 321/18, 15.12.2022.

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flights and operations. Therefore, the Commission proposed the withdrawal of the increased visa fee for nationals of The Gambia in September 2023²⁹. The proposal was adopted by the Council on 12 April 2024³⁰. As a result of the constant engagement by the Commission, some improvement has materialised and it is demonstrated in this year's report.

Reaching the full potential of the mechanism

The first four years of implementation of Article 25a of the Visa Code have provided valuable lessons learned. A first structured assessment of the process was carried out in the framework of the Visa Code evaluation³¹ and took into account the first two assessment reports adopted by the Commission. The Council under the Belgian Presidency discussed the effectiveness of the mechanism.

The Visa Code evaluation acknowledged that the exercise has strengthened data collection and sharing in the area of readmission cooperation and created new opportunities for coordination among EU and Member States. The evaluation has highlighted a number of elements for improvement that the Commission had already put in place for the fourth assessment report, notably reducing the time between data collection and drafting of the report and allowing for an adoption date closer to the data. One of the main recommendations to the Commission is to enhance efforts to reduce the duration of the exercise, which this year is achieved by presenting the report simultaneously with a proposal. The Commission is tabling a proposal for the introduction of visa measures in relation to nationals of Somalia.

In the Council, Member States have consistently stressed their support for the Article 25a mechanism and in discussions on strengthening its effectiveness have called on the Commission to use it to its full potential, to present more proposals, and for clear deadlines to monitor third countries' progress on readmission. Member States have underlined the need for a strengthened solidarity between themselves and a Team Europe approach to ensure that the need to improve readmission cooperation is addressed in a consistent manner.

The mechanism could be further strengthened by making coherent use of the relevant leverages (e.g. GSP, legal migration, NDICI incitative approach). Further efforts need to be made to ensure that accurate, consistent and complete datasets are collected and shared timely by the Member States.

²⁹ COM (2023) 569 final.

³⁰ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/1231 of 12 April 2024 on repealing Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2459 on the application of an increased visa fee with respect to The Gambia, OJ L 25.4.2024.

³¹ SWD(2024) 108 final, Commission Staff Working Document Evaluation EU visa policy – evaluation of the Visa Code.

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When considering putting forward proposals, the Commission takes into account the EU's overall relations with the third countries concerned, including in the field of migration, as well as the steps taken by the Commission to improve the level of readmission cooperation. To ensure that this mechanism contributes to the objective of improving cooperation on readmission for all Member States, the Commission looked at whether cooperation varied across Member States, when considering possible measures towards the third countries concerned. 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.

Next steps on the assessment report

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 where a proposal for visa measures has been tabled, and those who need to improve cooperation. 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 concrete steps to improve cooperation. The Commission will closely and continuously involve Member States in the process.

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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 indicators³² and the number of Member States that reported having interacted with the third country in the reporting period.

The country fiche then provides Member States' responses to the question on the **overall cooperation on readmission in 2023**, weighted by caseload and represented with a pie chart. The report further presents Member States' assessment of the individual steps of the readmission process: **identification procedure, issuance of emergency 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.

The last part of the country fiche points to the level of cooperation and the needs for improvement, based on the individual third country assessment. It contains an account of **targeted concrete steps and benchmarks** that the third country needs to undertake to improve readmission cooperation in the different stages of the return and readmission process, based on the set of indicators and the qualitative 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 (*third section on the issuance of travel documents*): 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.

³² Return and readmission-related indicators refer to: (i) the number of third country nationals ordered to leave, (ii) the number of third country nationals returned to third countries as a percentage of the number of third country nationals ordered to leave (i.e. the return rate), (iii) the number of readmission requests submitted by Member States and (iv) the percentage of accepted readmission requests, measured by the issuance of travel documents (i.e. the issuance rate). Data used for (i) and (ii) results from Eurostat aggregation of quarterly data as available on 27 March 2024, day of release of the figures by Eurostat as per Regulation 2020/851 of 18 June 2020 amending Regulation 862/2007 on Community statistics on migration and international protection. Data used for (iii) and (iv) was provided by Member States to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) through the Irregular Migration Management Application (IRMA) and was extracted on 27 March 2024.

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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. The last meeting of the Dialogue 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 Priorities³³ 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 reports under 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. This message was reiterated at the meeting of the Informal Dialogue on 13 July 2023.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 32 620 Algerian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 3 140 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 10%. Member States submitted 8 181 readmission requests to the Algerian authorities, who issued 1 856 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 23%.

23 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Algeria on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, eight Member States (10% of the caseload) assessed Algeria's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, eight (13% of the caseload) as average, three (73% of the caseload) as poor, two (less than 1% of the caseload) as very good and two (1% of the caseload) as very poor. Eight Member States (2% of the

³³ 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 2017 Partnership Priorities have expired and negotiations are ongoing about their renewal.

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caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Algeria on readmission-related matters in 2023, due to issues linked to diplomatic relations in one case, and due to the lack of caseload.

21 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Algerian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Algeria's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by eight Member States (13% of the caseload), as good by six (10% of the caseload), as very good by three (1% of the caseload), as very poor by two (1% of the caseload) and as poor by two (73% of the caseload). Two Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Algeria on identification due to the lack of relevant caseload.

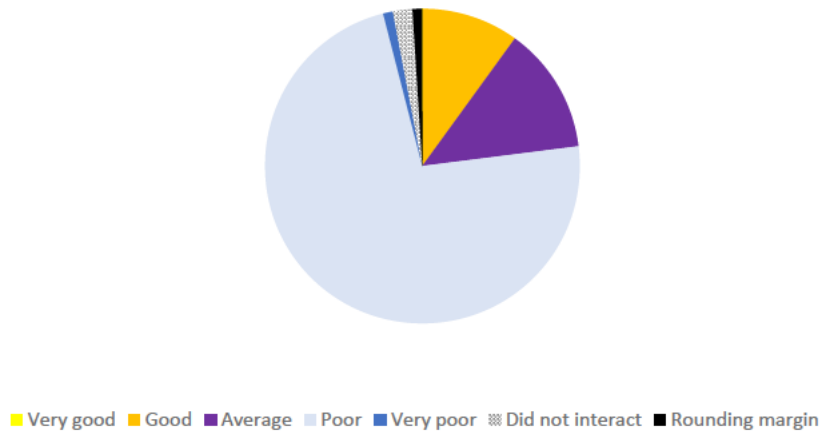
21 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 18 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and three that they were not. Seven Member States (13% of the caseload) assessed Algeria's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as good, six (1% of the caseload) as very good, three (10% of the caseload) as average, three (73% of the caseload) as poor and two (1% of the caseload) as very poor. Two Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 since the returnees were in possession of a valid travel document.

As regards **return operations**, 17 Member States (98% of the caseload) interacted with Algeria in 2023. Nine Member States (13% of the caseload) assessed Algeria's cooperation as good, five Member States (84% of the caseload) as average and three Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) as very good. Six Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of emergency travel documents issued and due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.

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Member States' assessment of overall readmission cooperation



Algeria needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. Algeria needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and cooperate with all Member States. More specifically, Algeria needs to ensure timely, swift and efficient follow up to identification procedures; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. expired passports, information extracted from the Visa Information System) from more Member States than is currently the case; accept conducting consular interviews for all Member States, including via phone or 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/national legal frameworks; swiftly issue travel documents with a sufficient validity period and without taking into account elements other than nationality; accept to renew such documents, if need be; accept return operations via charter flights from all Member States. Algeria should consider waiving restrictions on returns by scheduled flights (e.g. visa requirement for escorts or the obligation to use direct flights).

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Armenia

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement³⁴ with Armenia entered into force on 1 January 2014. It was concluded together with a Visa Facilitation Agreement³⁵, in the context of a Mobility Partnership³⁶. Nine meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee have taken place to assess the implementation of the Agreement. The last meeting, held on 25 October 2023 in Yerevan, confirmed the satisfactory implementation of the Agreement. The EU-funded RCMS has been operational since 2019, with 13 Member States currently connected.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 2 875 Armenian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 605 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 21%. Member States submitted 678 readmission requests to the Armenian authorities, who issued 439 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 65%.

16 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Armenia on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, nine Member States (58% of the caseload) assessed Armenia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very good, six (40% of the caseload) as good and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as average. 15 Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Armenia on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

14 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Armenian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Armenia's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good by 11 Member States (94% of the caseload), as good by two (4% of the caseload) and as average by one (less than 1% of the caseload). Two Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Armenia on identification of irregularly staying persons, as all returnees were in possession of valid travel documents.

³⁴ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia on the readmission of persons residing without an authorisation, OJ L 289/13, 31.10.2013.

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership between the European Union and Armenia, 27.10.2011.

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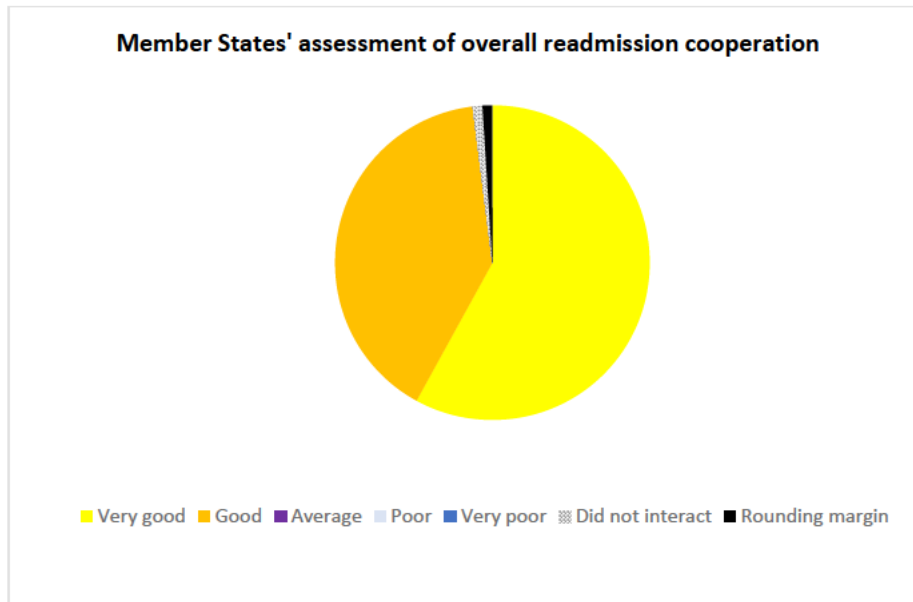
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12 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023, all of which were issued upon request. Eight Member States (59% of the caseload) assessed Armenia’s cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very good and four (38% of the caseload) as good. Four Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, 12 Member States (98% of the caseload) interacted with Armenia in 2023. Six Member States (8% of the caseload) assessed Armenia’s cooperation as very good, five (88% of the caseload) as good and one (1% of the caseload) as average. Four Member States (1% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States’ responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



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, for some remaining Member States, Armenia needs to respect the deadlines for the issuance of emergency travel documents as stipulated in the Agreement and accept conducting consular interviews via phone or videoconference.

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Azerbaijan

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement³⁷ with Azerbaijan entered into force on 1 September 2014. It was concluded together with a Visa Facilitation Agreement³⁸, in the context of a Mobility Partnership³⁹. Seven meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee took place of which the last on 22 June 2022. The next meeting is planned for the second half of 2024.

The EU is financing a project to develop a RCMS in Azerbaijan.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 1 365 Azerbaijani nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 680 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 50%. Member States submitted 413 readmission requests to the Azerbaijani authorities, who issued 208 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 50%.

17 Member States (96% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Azerbaijan on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, eight Member States (17% of the caseload) assessed Azerbaijan's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very good, eight (77% of the caseload) as good and one (2% of the caseload) as average. 14 Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Azerbaijan on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

14 Member States (93% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Azerbaijani authorities on identification matters in 2023. Azerbaijan's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good by eight Member States (22% of the caseload), as good by five (69% of the caseload) and as average by one (2% of the caseload). Three Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Azerbaijan on identification due to the lack of relevant caseload.

³⁷ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, OJ L 128/17, 30.4.2014.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the European Union and its participating Member States, Brussels, 5.12.2013.

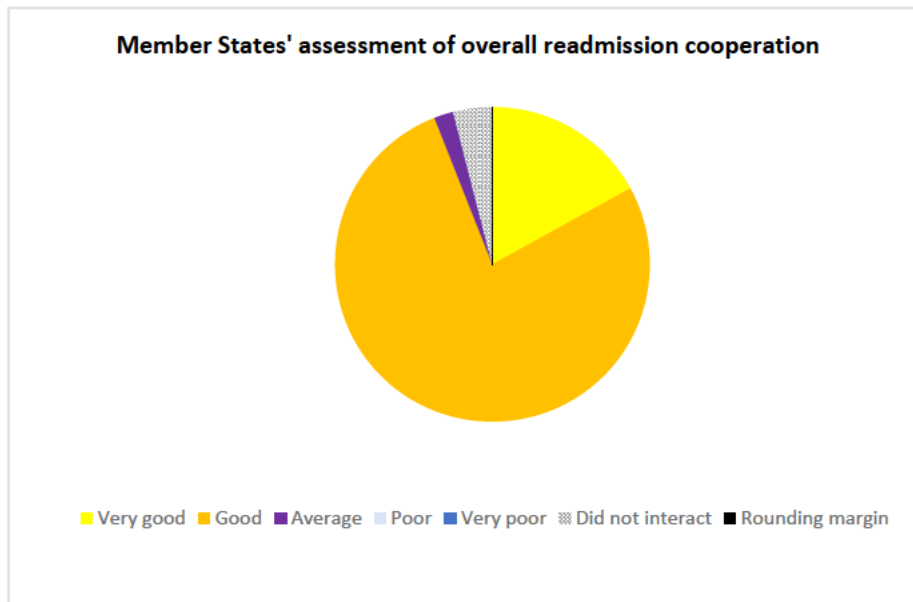
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14 Member States (93% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 13 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and one that they were not. Eight Member States (22% of the caseload) assessed Azerbaijan's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very good, five (69% of the caseload) as good and one (2% of the caseload) as average. Three Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, 11 Member States (92% of the caseload) interacted with Azerbaijan in 2023. Five Member States (65% of the caseload) assessed Azerbaijan's cooperation as very good, five (24% of the caseload) as good and one (2% of the caseload) as average. Six Member States (4% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



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, for some remaining Member States, Azerbaijan needs to respect the deadlines for the issuance of emergency travel documents, as stipulated in the Agreement and accept conducting consular interviews via phone or videoconference. For some remaining Member States, Azerbaijan should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts).

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Bangladesh

Engagement to date

The 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. Eight meetings of the Joint Working Group took place to date. The last meeting, held on 4 March 2024 took place back-to-back with the second meeting of the informal Migration and Mobility Dialogue and the second technical Roundtable on Talent Partnerships.

The EU-funded RCMS to support the implementation of the SOPs, has been operational since 9 November 2020. 24 Member States 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 2021.⁴⁰ Following the Commission's proposal, the Commission and the High Representative entered into an extensive and continuous dialogue with the Bangladeshi authorities, both in Brussels and in Dhaka, at political, operational and technical level, with a view to improve Bangladesh's cooperation on readmission. Bangladesh immediately undertook constructive and concerted efforts to reduce the backlog of cases. The Council did not take action at that time.

In regular exchanges, as well as during the sixth, seventh and eighth Joint Working Group meeting held in March 2022, 2023 and 2024 respectively, the Commission 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 emergency travel documents, stipulated in the SOPs, and increasing the efforts towards effective returns.

Positive steps taken by Bangladesh in 2023 were the lifting of the limitation on the number of returnees on charter flights and subsequently two well-received joint return operations in March 2023 and January 2024.

⁴⁰ COM(2021) 412 final.

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During the eighth Joint Working Group meeting in March 2024, Bangladesh strengthened further its proactive approach with concrete proposals to improve cooperation and address shortcomings. Bangladesh discontinued the practice of requesting the signature of the returnee on the emergency travel document, which was implemented in three Member States. Bangladesh agreed to improve the issuance of emergency travel documents and to increase the transparency of the procedures in RCMS.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 14 625 Bangladeshi nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 345 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 9%. Member States submitted 1 764 readmission requests to the Bangladeshi authorities, who issued 1 335 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 76%.

21 Member States (94% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Bangladesh on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, six Member States (12% of the caseload) assessed Bangladesh's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, six (8% of the caseload) as average, five (44% of the caseload) as poor and four (31% of the caseload) as very good. 10 Member States (6% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Bangladesh on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

20 Member States (94% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Bangladeshi authorities on identification matters in 2023. Bangladesh's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by six Member States (39% of the caseload), as very good by five (33% of the caseload), as good by five (10% of the caseload), as poor by three (11% of the caseload) and as very poor by one (1% of the caseload). One Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Bangladesh on identification due to the lack of relevant caseload.

19 Member States (91% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 18 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and one that they were not. Six Member States (13% of the caseload) assessed Bangladesh's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, five (36% of the caseload) as very good, five (10% of the caseload) as good, two (33% of the caseload) as poor and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Two Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

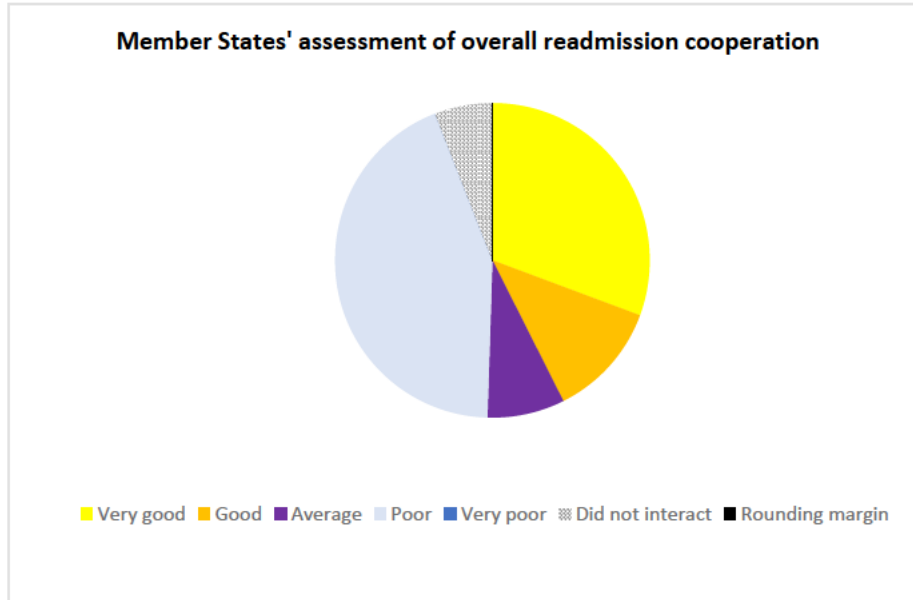
As regards **return operations**, 17 Member States (91% of the caseload) interacted with Bangladesh in 2023. Seven Member States (17% of the caseload) assessed Bangladesh's

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cooperation as good, five (31% of the caseload) as very good, four (33% of the caseload) as average and one (11% of the caseload) as poor. Four Member States (3% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Following the Commission's proposal for visa measures, Bangladesh has undertaken concrete steps to improve the cooperation on readmission, such as lifting the limitation on the number of returnees on charter flights and subsequently well-receiving two joint return operations in March 2023 and January 2024. Bangladesh agreed to modifications and new functionalities for the RCMS during a technical meeting in December 2023.

In early 2024, Bangladesh discontinued the practice of requesting the signature of the returnee on the emergency travel document, which was implemented in three Member States. Bangladesh agreed to improve the issuance of emergency travel documents and to increase the transparency of the procedures in the RCMS.

However, there are still issues that need to be addressed. To achieve substantial and sustained progress, Bangladesh needs to fully implement the SOPs and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Bangladesh needs to respect the timelines stated in the SOPs for responding to requests for readmission, identification and issuance of emergency travel documents.

With regards to identification, Bangladesh needs to ensure evidence accepted by diplomatic missions is in line with the SOPs, including biometric evidence, and to discontinue the practice of requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national

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legal frameworks. Interviews need to be organised upon request and in a timely manner, and the option of interviews via VTC made available for all Member States. Outcomes of interviews need to be improved and communicated timely to Member States. In cases where sufficient evidence is available, interviews should not be made mandatory.

With regards to the issuance of emergency travel documents, Bangladesh needs to ensure emergency travel documents are renewed when requested and discontinue the practice to consider elements other than nationality prior to their issuance.

With regards to return operations, Bangladesh needs to accept charter flights from all Member States and should consider removing restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts) for all Member States.

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Burundi

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Burundi dedicated to readmission.

Three Member States reported having **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Burundi. This is the first time that Burundi fits the criteria to be assessed in the framework of the Article 25a mechanism.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 620 Burundian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 25 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 4%. Member States submitted 21 readmission requests to the Burundian authorities, who issued 11 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 52%.

Nine Member States (52% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Burundi on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, six Member States (39% of the caseload) assessed Burundi's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor, two (13% of the caseload) as average and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as poor. 22 Member States (47% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Burundi on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the returnees being readmitted to the third country of transit and due to the lack of relevant caseload.

Nine Member States (52% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Burundian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Burundi's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor by six Member States (30% of the caseload), as poor by one (9% of the caseload), as average by one (13% of the caseload) and as good by one (less than 1% of the caseload).

Seven Member States (43% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, one Member State indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and all the rest that they were not. Six Member States (30% of the caseload) assessed Burundi's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very poor and one (13% of the caseload) as average. The remaining two Member States (9% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to a lack of replies to identification requests or due to the lack of cooperation with the responsible Embassy.

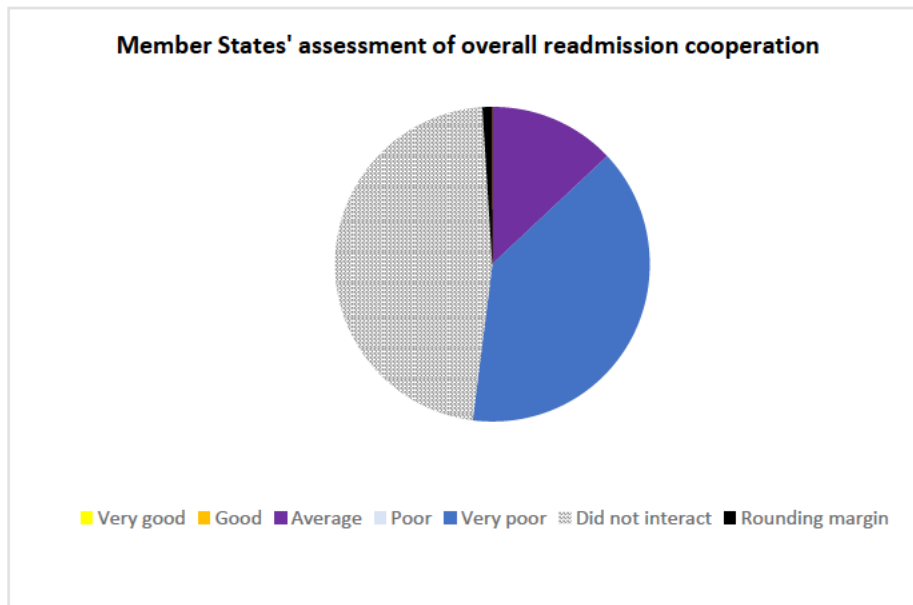
As regards **return operations**, six Member States (45% of the caseload) interacted with Burundi in 2023. Three Member States (12% of the caseload) assessed Burundi's cooperation

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as good, two (15% of the caseload) as average and one (18% of the caseload) as very poor. Three Member States (7% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of replies to requests for identification and issuance of emergency travel documents or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Burundi needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. Burundi needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and cooperate with all Member States. More specifically, Burundian Embassies and Consulates need to improve their communication with Member States' authorities on every step of the readmission process. On identification, Burundi needs to improve the outcomes of consular interviews, which hardly lead to satisfactory results, needs to extend to all Member States the possibility of conducting consular interviews via phone or videoconference, and refrain from requesting interviews when sufficient proof of nationality is provided and from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks. On cooperation on the issuance of emergency travel documents, Burundi needs to issue documents for forced return cases. Cooperation on return operations for forced return needs to improve, and Burundi should consider waiving the requirement of visa for escorts.

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Cabo Verde

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement⁴¹ with Cabo Verde entered into force on 1 December 2014, simultaneously with the Visa Facilitation Agreement⁴². Five meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee took place, the last on 9 March 2023, back-to-back with the Joint Visa Facilitation Committee.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 390 Cabo Verde nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 50 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 13%. Member States submitted 42 readmission requests to the Cabo Verde authorities, who issued 16 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 38%.

Five Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Cabo Verde on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, two Member States (5% of the caseload) assessed Cabo Verde's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, two (17% of the caseload) as very good and one (73% of the caseload) as average. 26 Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Cabo Verde on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

Five Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Cabo Verde authorities on identification matters in 2023. Cabo Verde's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor by two Member States (5% of the caseload), as very good by two (17% of the caseload) and as average by one (73% of the caseload).

Three Member States (78% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023 and that Cabo Verde responded with the **issuance of emergency travel documents**. One Member State (73% of the caseload) assessed Cabo Verde's cooperation on the issuance of emergency travel documents as poor, one (1% of the caseload) as average and one (4% of the caseload) as very good. The remaining three Member States (18% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the

⁴¹ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Cape Verde on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, OJ L 282/15, 24/10/2013.

⁴² Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Cape Verde on facilitating the issue of short-stay visas to citizens of the Republic of Cape Verde and of the European Union, OJ L 282/3, 24/10/2013.

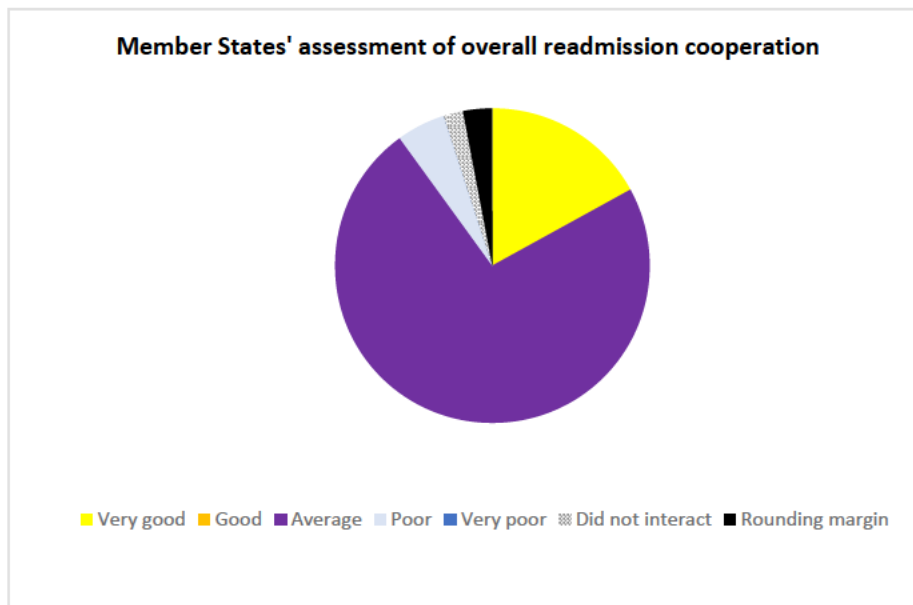
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lack of return operations in 2023 or due to the possibility to use a copy of documents submitted for the purpose of identification, or the EU Travel Document for return.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (87% of the caseload) interacted with Cabo Verde in 2023. One Member State (1% of the caseload) assessed Cabo Verde's cooperation as poor, one (73% of the caseload) as average and one (13% of the caseload) as good. Two Member States (8% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Cabo Verde needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. Cabo Verde needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement and cooperate with all Member States. More specifically, Cabo Verde needs to ensure timely, swift and efficient follow up to identification procedures; accept a broader range of evidence in line with the Agreement (e.g. biometric evidence, information extracted from the Visa Information System); accept conducting consular interviews, including via phone or videoconference; organise identification missions upon request; refrain from taking into account elements other than nationality when deciding on whether or not to issue an emergency travel document. Cabo Verde should consider lifting restrictions on returns by scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts).

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Cameroon

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Cameroon dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the reports under 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 and on 7 March 2024, meetings with the Ambassador of Cameroon took place in Brussels, also in the context of the increase of irregular border crossings of Cameroonian nationals. On 13 June 2023, a Structured Political Dialogue between the EU and Cameroon took place, during which readmission cooperation was raised. The upcoming Partnership Dialogue scheduled for July 2024 will address, inter alia, migration, including readmission.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 4 620 Cameroonian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 230 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 5%. Member States submitted 262 readmission requests to Cameroon's authorities, who issued 105 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 40%.

18 Member States (94% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Cameroon on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, five Member States (39% of the caseload) assessed Cameroon's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, four (8% of the caseload) as poor, four (3% of the caseload) as very good, four (26% of the caseload) as very poor and one (17% of the caseload) as good. 13 Member States (6% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Cameroon on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation or due to the lack of relevant caseload. One Member State indicated that the level of cooperation continued to be affected by COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements in 2023, as Cameroon continued to impose COVID-19 tests until July 2023.

17 Member States (69% of the caseload) reported having interacted with Cameroon's authorities on identification matters in 2023. Cameroon's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor by five Member States (9% of the caseload), as average by four (2% of the caseload), as very good by four (3% of the caseload), as good by two (54% of

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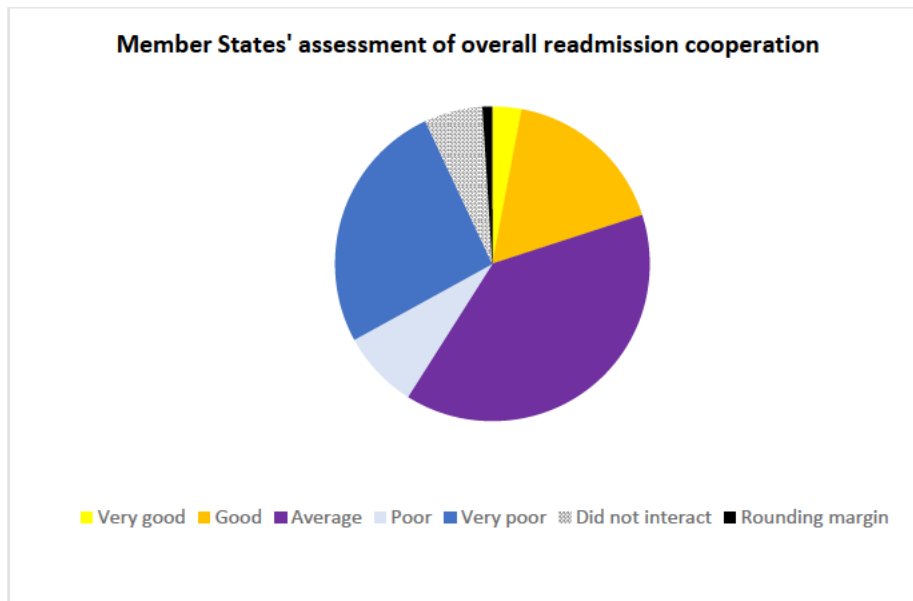
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the caseload) and as very poor by two (1% of the caseload). One Member State (24% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Cameroon on identification due to the lack of cooperation in previous years.

17 Member States (69% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 15 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and two that they were not. Six Member States (45% of the caseload) assessed Cameroon’s cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as poor, five (3% of the caseload) as average, four (3% of the caseload) as very good, one (1% of the caseload) as very poor and one (17% of the caseload) as good. One Member State (24% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation from the Cameroonian authorities.

As regards **return operations**, 12 Member States (66% of the caseload) interacted with Cameroon in 2023. Six Member States (57% of the caseload) assessed Cameroon’s cooperation as good, three (3% of the caseload) as average, two (1% of the caseload) as very good and one (5% of the caseload) as poor. Six Member States (27% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States’ responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



To improve readmission cooperation, Cameroon needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically,

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Cameroon needs to ensure timely responses and swift follow up to readmission requests; organise consular interviews upon request; extend the possibility to conduct consular interviews via phone or 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 or information from the Visa Information System) from more Member States than is currently the case; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under the EU or national legal frameworks (e.g. health status); swiftly issue emergency travel documents with a sufficient validity period and without taking into account elements other than nationality (e.g. family situation); and extend or renew emergency travel documents upon request. Cameroon should consider lifting restrictions on both scheduled (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts) and charter flights (e.g. limitation of the maximum number of returnees per flight).

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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 to be 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. A seminar on readmission cooperation is being planned for the second half of 2024.

Following the adoption of the reports under 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 2023, a meeting with the Ambassador of China took place in Brussels.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 4 005 Chinese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 650 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 41%. Member States submitted 171 readmission requests to the Chinese authorities, who issued 69 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 40%.

17 Member States (91% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of China on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, six Member States (29% of the caseload) assessed China's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, four (10% of the caseload) as good, three (25% of the caseload) as very poor, two (8% of the caseload) as poor and two (19% of the caseload) as very good. 14 Member States (9% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of China on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of caseload. Four Member States indicated that the level of cooperation continued to be affected by COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements in 2023 (COVID-19 test requirement, at least for a part of the reporting period).

15 Member States (70% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Chinese authorities on identification matters in 2023. China's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by six Member States (29% of the caseload), as poor by four (13% of the caseload), as average by three (8% of the caseload), as very good by one (17% of the caseload) and as very poor by one (2% of the caseload). Two Member States (20% of the

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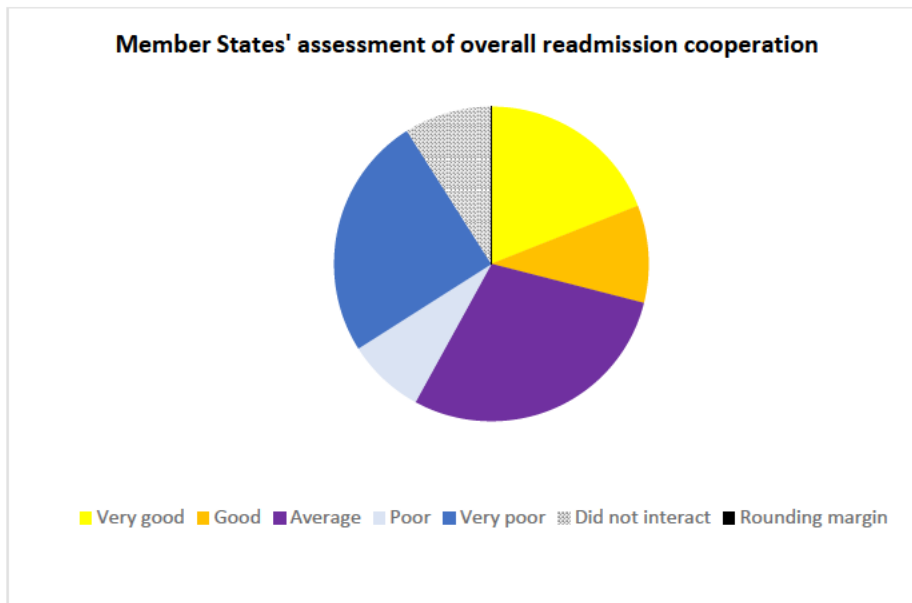
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caseload) reported not having interacted with China on identification due to the lack of replies to readmission requests or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

13 Member States (67% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023 and that China responded with the **issuance of emergency travel documents**. Four Member States (26% of the caseload) assessed China's cooperation on the issuance of emergency travel documents as average, four (12% of the caseload) as good, three (20% of caseload) as very good, one (4% of the caseload) as poor and one (5% of the caseload) as very poor. Four Member States (24% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of response, no prior identification, or because returnees were in possession of valid passports.

As regards **return operations**, 13 Member States (66% of the caseload) interacted with China in 2023. Seven Member States (24% of the caseload) assessed China's cooperation as good, four (24% of the caseload) as average and two (19% of the caseload) very good. Four Member States (24% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of replies to other steps of the procedure or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



To improve readmission cooperation, China needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, China needs to ensure timely, swift and efficient follow up to identification procedures; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. information extracted from the Visa Information

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System, biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; accept conducting consular interviews for all Member States, including via phone or 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/national legal frameworks; swiftly issue emergency travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality. To facilitate return operations, China should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts).

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

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Congo dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the reports, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with Congo both in Brussels and in Brazzaville. On 17 February 2023, in a meeting in Brussels with the Ambassador of Congo, the EU's expectations and the practical steps to improve readmission cooperation were discussed. In 2023 and 2024 exchanges were held in Brazzaville with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the Ministry of Interior.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 1 890 Congolese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 110 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 6%. Member States submitted 44 readmission requests to the Congolese authorities, who issued 34 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 77%.

Seven Member States (75% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Congo on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, four Member States (73% of the caseload) assessed Congo's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, two (1% of the caseload) as very poor and one (1% of the caseload) as poor. 24 Member States (25% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Congo on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of replies to previous requests or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

Six Member States (75% of the caseload) reported having interacted with Congolese authorities on identification matters in 2023. Congo's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by four Member States (73% of the caseload), as poor by one (1% of the caseload) and as very poor by one (1% of the caseload). One Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Congo on identification due to the lack of communication and cooperation from the Embassy.

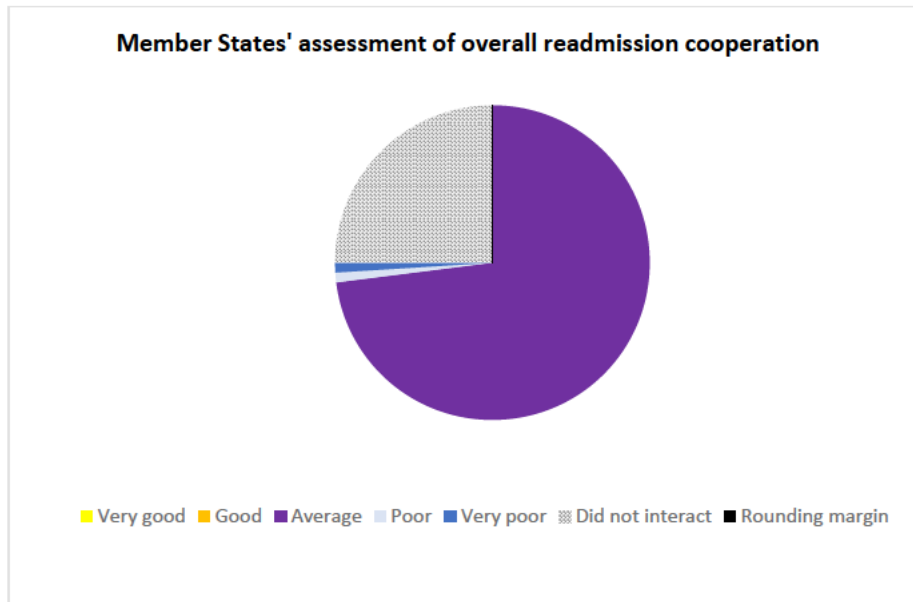
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Seven Member States (75% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, four indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and three that they were not. Two Member States (73% of the caseload) assessed Congo's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as good, two (less than 1% of the caseload) as average, two (1% of the caseload) as very poor and one (1% of the caseload) as poor.

As regards **return operations**, four Member States (73% of the caseload) interacted with Congo in 2023. Three Member States (1% of the caseload) assessed Congo's cooperation as average and one (72% of the caseload) as good. Three Member States (2% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of replies to readmission requests or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



To improve readmission cooperation, Congo needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Congo needs to confirm nationality (without further investigation) upon submission of expired passport, expired emergency travel document, valid or expired ID card, or information extracted from the Visa Information System and accept a wider range of evidence for further investigation. Congo needs to organise consular interviews upon request and in a timely manner for all Member States and consider organising consular interviews in the most adequate format, including via phone or videoconference for all Member States.

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Congo needs to refrain from requesting interviews when sufficient proof of nationality is provided, and needs to discontinue the practice of requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks nor take into account elements other than nationality when deciding whether to issue an emergency travel document. On the issuance of emergency travel documents, Congo needs to proceed timely. To facilitate return operations, Congo should consider waiving the requirement of visa for escorts.

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Côte d'Ivoire

Engagement to date

The EU readmission arrangement with Côte d'Ivoire (Joint document of the Government of the Ivory Coast and the European Union on the procedures for identification and readmission of migrants presumed to be Ivorian nationals staying irregularly in the European Union) was concluded on 17 October 2018. Since then, five meetings of the Joint Working Group took place, the last one on 28 September 2023. The issue of readmission cooperation was addressed during a high-level visit to Abidjan in September 2023, in the follow up of the 10-Point Plan for Lampedusa presented by the Commission in the context of increased irregular arrivals.

To support identification and overall operational cooperation on readmission, four Ivorian security attachés have been deployed in the embassies in Belgium, Germany, France and Italy.

An EU-funded project explored a possible deployment of the RCMS with Côte d'Ivoire.

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

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 4 680 Ivorian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 215 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 5%. Member States submitted 559 readmission requests to the Ivorian authorities, who issued 180 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 32%.

A total of 12 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, four Member States (85% of the caseload) assessed Côte d'Ivoire's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, four (12% of the caseload) as average, two (1% of the caseload) as very poor, one (less than 1% of the caseload) as poor and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very good. 19 Member States (9% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to a lack of relevant caseload. One Member State indicated that the level of cooperation continued to be affected by COVID-19 related testing requirements during the reporting period.

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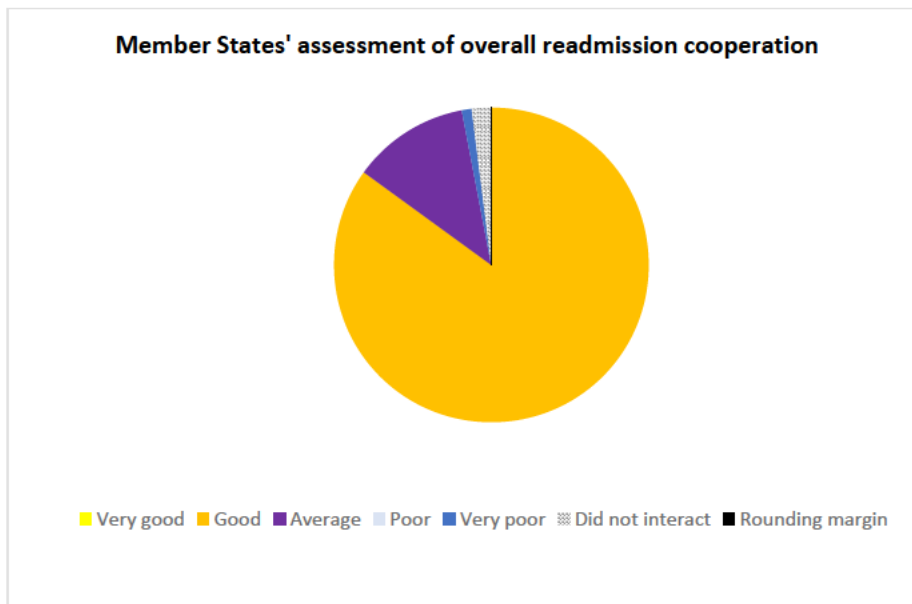
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12 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Ivorian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Côte d’Ivoire’s cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by four Member States (85% of the caseload), as average by four (12% of the caseload), as very poor by two (less than 1% of the caseload), as poor by one (1% of the caseload) and as very good by one (less than 1% of the caseload).

11 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, seven indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and four that they were not. Seven Member States (97% of the caseload) assessed Côte d’Ivoire’s cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as good, two (1% of the caseload) as very poor, one (less than 1% of the caseload) as average and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as poor. One Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of replies to identification requests.

As regards **return operations**, seven Member States (98% of the caseload) interacted with Côte d’Ivoire in 2023, via scheduled flights only. No Member State attempted to carry out returns via charter flights. Six Member States (97% of the caseload) assessed cooperation as good and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as average. Five Member States (1% of the caseload) did not attempt any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of emergency travel documents issued or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States’ responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



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In view of the overall readmission context and of the high number of irregularly arriving Ivorian nationals, Côte d'Ivoire needs to take concrete steps to improve readmission cooperation. To further improve readmission cooperation, Côte d'Ivoire needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU readmission arrangement and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Côte d'Ivoire needs to ensure timely responses to documented and undocumented readmission requests, as stipulated in the arrangement; accept as proof of nationality the documents listed in the arrangement (i.e. expired passport, a valid or expired national identity card, expired consular laissez-passer and the VIS hits); accept the photocopies of these documents as evidence to be considered in view of identification for all Member States; accept biometric evidence in the identification process for all Member States; organise consular interviews in the most adequate format, including via phone or videoconference, for all Member States; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; refrain from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks at any stage of the readmission procedure; issue emergency travel documents in a timely manner, with a validity period in line with the provisions of the EU readmission arrangement. Côte d'Ivoire should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts).

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Cuba

Engagement to date

There is no cooperation instrument or process in place at EU-level with Cuba dedicated to readmission. This is the first time that Cuba fits the criteria to be assessed in the framework of the Article 25a mechanism.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 1 140 Cuban nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 135 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 12%. Member States submitted 45 readmission requests to the Cuban authorities, who issued 3 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 7%.

Member States assessed Cuba's cooperation solely based on voluntary returns, as Cuba does not accept forced returns.

13 Member States (63% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Cuba on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, five Member States (25% of the caseload) assessed Cuba's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, three (2% of the caseload) as good, two (9% of the caseload) as average, two (27% of the caseload) as very poor and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very good. 18 Member States (37% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Cuba on readmission-related matters in 2023 mainly due to the lack of relevant caseload.

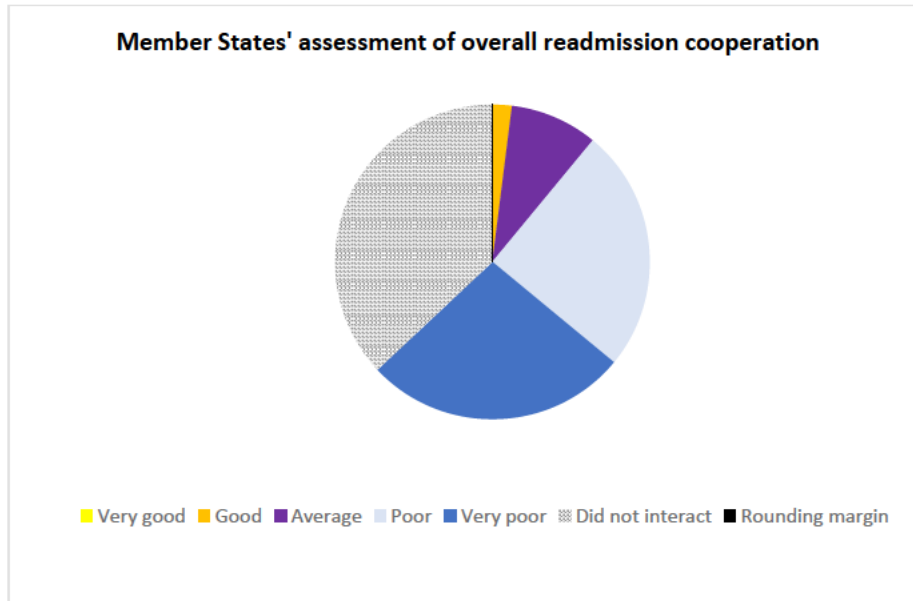
Nine Member States (54% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Cuban authorities on identification matters in 2023. Cuba's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor by three Member States (44% of the caseload), as very poor by two (5% of the caseload), as average by two (2% of the caseload), as good by one (1% of the caseload) and as very good by one (2% of the caseload). Four Member States (9% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Cuba on identification due to the lack of relevant caseload.

Six Member States (31% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, two indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and four that they were not. Three Member States (4% of the caseload) assessed Cuba's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, two (27% of the caseload) as very poor and one (1% of the caseload) as poor. Seven Member States (32% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the fact that the returnees had valid documents.

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As regards **return operations**, seven Member States (35% of the caseload) interacted with Cuba in 2023. Four Member States (32% of the caseload) assessed Cuba's cooperation as average, two (2% of the caseload) as very good and one (2% of the caseload) as good. Six Member States (28% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the impossibility of carrying out forced returns or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Cuba needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. Cuba needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and cooperate with all Member States. More specifically, Cuba needs to cooperate on forced returns; accept a wider range of evidence than is currently the case; and refrain from taking into account elements other than nationality when deciding whether to issue an emergency travel document.

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the reports under 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 March 2023, a meeting with the Ambassador of DRC was held in Brussels.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 5 875 DRC nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 185 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 3%. Member States submitted 216 readmission requests to the DRC authorities, who issued 127 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 59%.

15 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of DRC on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, four Member States (51% of the caseload) assessed DRC **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, four (23% of the caseload) as good, three (1% of the caseload) as poor, three (9% of the caseload) as very poor and one (13% of the caseload) as very good. 16 Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of DRC on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload or the lack of engagement. Two Member States indicated that the level of cooperation continued to be affected by COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements (COVID-19 tests) in 2023. According to one Member State, DRC authorities accepted returnees without COVID-19 test results upon the EURLO's intervention.

15 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the DRC authorities on identification matters. DRC's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by four Member States (1% of the caseload), as poor by four (24% of the caseload), as very poor by three (9% of the caseload), as average by three (50% of the caseload) and as very good by one (13% of the caseload).

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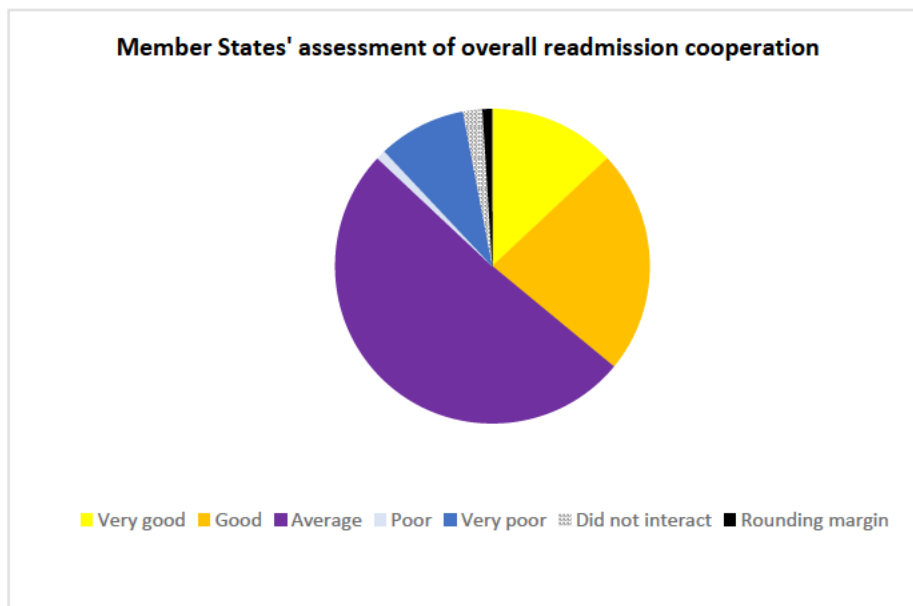
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11 Member States (67% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, nine indicated that emergency travel documents are issued upon request and two that they were not. Four Member States (51% of the caseload) assessed DRC's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, three (14% of the caseload) as very good, two (1% of the caseload) as very poor, one (less than 1% of the caseload) as good and one as poor (1% of the caseload). Four Member States (31% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation by the DRC authorities or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, 10 Member States (89% of the caseload) interacted with DRC in 2023. Five Member States (72% of the caseload) assessed DRC cooperation as good, three (3% of the caseload) as average and two (14% of the caseload) as very good. Five Member States (9% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation by the DRC authorities or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



To improve readmission cooperation, DRC needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, DRC needs to ensure timely responses to readmission requests; organise consular interviews upon requests, including via phone or videoconference; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence, information extracted from the Visa

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Information System) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue emergency travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality (e.g. health status); extend or renew emergency travel documents upon request. DRC should consider lifting restrictions on both scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts) and charter flights (e.g. late issuance of permits).

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Egypt

Engagement to date

The EU-Egypt Association Agreement⁴³, 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, as well as stepping up cooperation on preventing irregular migration, was discussed among other topics during a high-level visit from 25 to 28 March 2023 and at the Association Committee on 22 May 2023. On 17 March 2024, the EU and Egypt signed a Joint Declaration launching a new Strategic and Comprehensive partnership of which migration and mobility is one of the six joint priorities.

In view of the overall readmission context and following the adoption of the reports under 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.

Following the signing of the Joint Declaration between the EU and Egypt in March 2024, discussions on readmission are being planned.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement 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 2023, 7 800 Egyptian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 745 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 10%. Member States submitted 1 127 readmission requests to the Egyptian authorities, who issued 146 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 13%.

⁴³ 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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20 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Egypt on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, 10 Member States (17% of the caseload) assessed Egypt's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, three (26% of the caseload) as very good, three (15% of the caseload) as average, three (11% of the caseload) as poor and one (27% of the caseload) as very poor. 11 Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Egypt on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

18 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Egyptian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Egypt's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by five Member States (12% of the caseload), as very good by four (29% of the caseload), as average by four (16% of the caseload), as poor by four (13% of the caseload) and as very poor by one (27% of the caseload). Two Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Egypt on identification due to the lack of relevant caseload.

17 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 16 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and one that they were not. Six Member States (9% of the caseload) assessed Egypt's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very good, six (48% of the caseload) as good, two (2% of the caseload) as average, two (10% of the caseload) as poor and one (27% of the caseload) as very poor. Three Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents since the returnees had valid travel documents.

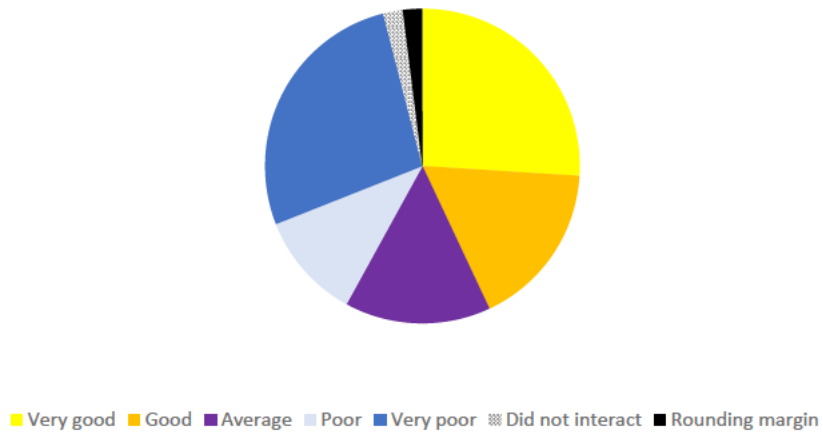
As regards **return operations**, 17 Member States (92% of the caseload) interacted with Egypt in 2023. 11 Member States (28% of the caseload) assessed Egypt's cooperation as good, three (24% of the caseload) as very good, two (40% of the caseload) as average and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as poor. Three Member States (5% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.

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Member States' assessment of overall readmission cooperation



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 the EU. To improve readmission cooperation, Egypt needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Egypt needs to accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence, information extracted from the Visa Information System); accept biometric evidence in view of identification without making it mandatory; ensure timely responses to readmission requests for some remaining Member States; organise consular interviews upon request including via phone or videoconference and improve their outcome. For some remaining Member States, Egypt should refrain from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks. For some remaining Member States, Egypt needs to timely issue emergency travel documents for voluntary and forced returns without taking into account elements other than nationality; extend or renew emergency travel documents upon request. On return operations, Egypt should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled and charter flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts).

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Ethiopia

Engagement to date

The EU readmission arrangement with Ethiopia (Admission procedures for the return of Ethiopians from European Union Member States) was concluded on 5 February 2018. Two technical meetings and three meetings of the Joint Working Group have taken place, the most recent one in Addis Ababa on 27 February 2024.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

Follow up to the proposed measures

Ethiopia's cooperation on readmission in 2022 was assessed as insufficient and the Commission proposed visa measures on 27 September 2023.

In the follow up to the adoption of the proposal, the Commission and the High Representative further intensified their engagement with Ethiopia at political, technical and operational level, both in Brussels and Addis Ababa, and in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023. In these meetings the EU underlined the need to swiftly resume cooperation on readmission, to respect the Admission Procedures in full, and stressed the urgency to meet in the format of the Joint Working Group.

At the end of October 2023, Ethiopia communicated its readiness to resume the implementation of the readmission arrangement. The Commission underlined that cooperation remained unsatisfactory and urged Ethiopia to agree on holding a Joint Working Group in early 2024.

The Joint Working Group meeting took place in Addis Ababa on 27 February 2024. Ethiopia committed to restart cooperating according to the letter and spirit of the readmission arrangement, also for forced return cases. In view of the planned identification mission to five Member States between 9 and 23 March 2024, Ethiopia agreed to confirm nationality and issue travel documents on the spot when possible, and to process all remaining cases according to the timelines of the arrangement.

The Commission continued engaging with Ethiopia and monitoring cooperation, including the results of the identification mission. Taking into account the lack of improvements on

readmission cooperation, the Council decided to adopt the Commission's proposal for visa measures on 29 April 2024⁴⁴.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 1 425 Ethiopian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 150 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 11%. Member States submitted 116 readmission requests to the Ethiopian authorities, who issued 19 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 16%.

10 Member States (81% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Ethiopia on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, six Member States (69% of the caseload) assessed Ethiopia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor and four (12% of the caseload) as poor. 21 Member States (18% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Ethiopia on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the long-standing lack of cooperation from the Ethiopian side, due to the lack of representation in the country or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

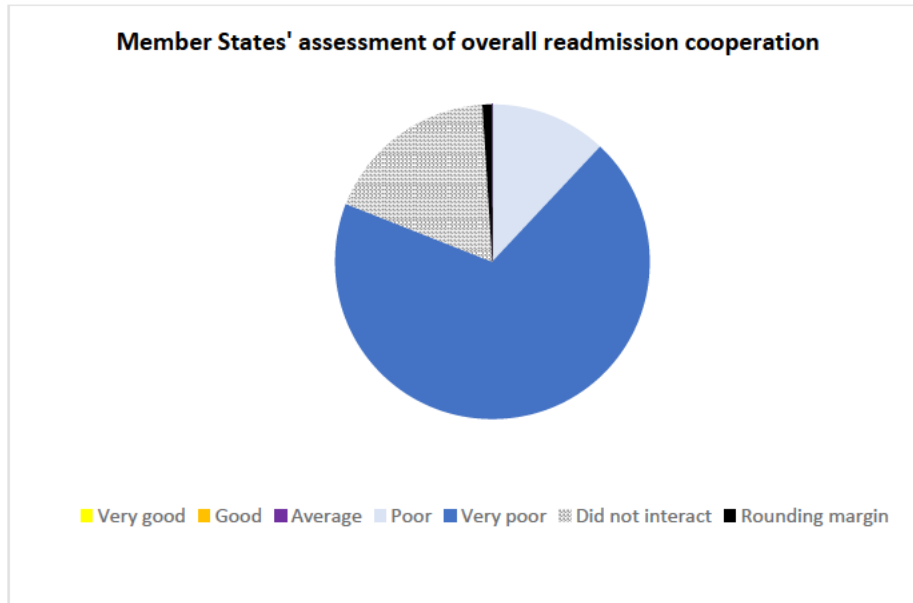
10 Member States (81% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Ethiopian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Ethiopia's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor by six Member States (71% of the caseload), as poor by three (8% of the caseload) and as average by one (1% of the caseload).

Seven Member States (46% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, four indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and three that they were not. Five Member States (42% of the caseload) assessed Ethiopia's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very poor and two (4% of the caseload) as poor. Three Member States (35% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of replies by Ethiopia to identification requests.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (33% of the caseload) interacted with Ethiopia in 2023. Two Member States (21% of the caseload) assessed Ethiopia's cooperation as good and one (12% of the caseload) as average. Seven Member States (48% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of replies to requests for identification or due to Ethiopia not issuing emergency travel documents, and due to the lack of relevant caseload.

⁴⁴ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/1341 of 29 April 2024 on the suspension of certain provisions of Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council in respect of Ethiopia, OJ L, 14.05.2024.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Following the Commission's proposal for visa measures, the engagement on readmission with Ethiopia intensified further, including with the holding of a Joint Working Group. However, concrete progress has not materialised yet. The following issues need to be addressed. To achieve substantial and sustained progress, Ethiopia needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission, fully implement the EU readmission arrangement, restart meaningful cooperation on forced return and cooperate with all Member States. In particular, Ethiopia needs to accept the expired passport as a proof of nationality (without further investigation) for all Member States in compliance with the readmission arrangement. Ethiopia needs to organise consular interviews upon Member States' requests in a timely manner, consider the use of videoconferencing for identification purposes, and not request interviews when sufficient proof of nationality is provided. Ethiopia should refrain from asking information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks in the context of identification procedure/emergency travel document issuance and should not take into account elements other than nationality (such as the nature of the return or the existence of a reintegration package) when deciding whether or not to issue an emergency travel document. To facilitate return operations, Ethiopia should consider waiving the requirement of visa for escorts. Ethiopia should issue emergency travel documents timely for voluntary and forced returns.

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The Gambia

Engagement to date

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

Four meetings of the Joint Working Group (JWG) established under the arrangement took place between October 2022 and May 2024. The issue of readmission cooperation was addressed during a first political dialogue with The Gambia in January 2023 and during a high-level visit to Banjul in October 2023, in the follow up of the 10-Point Plan for Lampedusa presented by the Commission in the context of increased irregular arrivals.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

An EU-funded project explores a possible deployment of the RCMS with The Gambia.

Five 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 in 2019 was assessed as insufficient. Following the proposal from the Commission, the Council adopted visa measures in October 2021 (first stage, in force as of 1 November 2021)⁴⁵ and in November 2022 (second stage, in accordance with 25a (5)(b) of the Visa Code, in force as of 8 December 2022)⁴⁶.

Following the Commission's proposals and the adoption of the Council decisions in 2021 and 2022, the Commission and the High Representative entered in an extensive and continuous dialogue with the Gambian authorities, both in Brussels and in Banjul, at operational, technical and political level, with a view to improve The Gambia's cooperation on readmission.

⁴⁵ 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, based on COM (2021) 413 final.

⁴⁶ 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 321/18, 15.12.2022, based on COM (2022) 632 final.

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The EU continued an intensified engagement in 2023, including during high-level meetings with the Gambian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and by holding two Joint Working Group meetings in March and in December 2023. In these exchanges, the Commission reiterated the need to improve and extend to all Member States the cooperation on the processing of readmission applications and on return operations based on the Good Practices, and to ensure regular flights to reduce the existing backlog.

The Gambia took positive steps in this regard. In particular, The Gambia ensured 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 phone or videoconference tools, as well as in the issuance of travel documents and an increased responsiveness from some Gambian embassies. These efforts resulted in some improvements in operational cooperation, and the Commission proposed the repeal of the second stage of the visa measures on 28 September 2023. The Council adopted the proposal on 12 April 2024⁴⁷. The first set of visa measures remains in place.

Continuous monitoring of the cooperation is in place through meetings with The Gambian ambassador to the EU who has been appointed as a focal point on readmission. A Joint Working Group took place on 17 May 2024.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 1 845 Gambian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 685 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 37%. Member States submitted 1 133 readmission requests to The Gambia's authorities, who issued 479 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 42%.

14 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of The Gambia on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, seven Member States (77% of the caseload) assessed The Gambia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, three (4% of the caseload) as very good, two (3% of the caseload) as poor, one (1% of the caseload) as average and one (13% of the caseload) as very poor. 17 Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of The Gambia on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of representation in the country, the lack of replies to communication attempts with the embassies or the lack of relevant caseload.

⁴⁷ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/1231 of 12 April 2024 on repealing Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2459 on the application of an increased visa fee with respect to The Gambia, OJ L 25.4.2024, based on COM (2023) 569 final.

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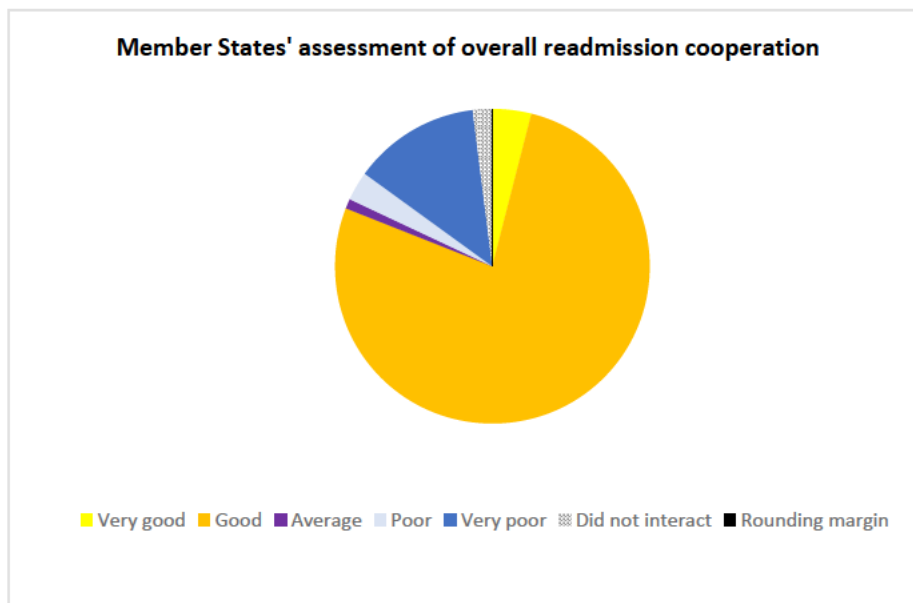
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14 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having interacted with The Gambia’s authorities on identification matters in 2023. The Gambia’s cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by six Member States (77% of the caseload), as very good by four (4% of the caseload), as poor by three (15% of the caseload) and as average by one (1% of the caseload).

13 Member States (96% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 12 Member States indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and one that they were not. Five Member States (23% of the caseload) assessed The Gambia’s cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, four (43% of the caseload) as very good, three (30% of the caseload) as good and one as poor (less than 1% of the caseload). One Member State (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to changes in the administrative status of the returnees/suspension of the return.

As regards **return operations**, 12 Member States (98% of the caseload) interacted with The Gambia in 2023. Seven Member States (62% of the caseload) assessed The Gambia’s cooperation as good, three (5% of the caseload) as very good and two (30% of the caseload) as average. Two Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States’ responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Following the adoption of the second step of visa measures on 8 December 2022, in 2023 The Gambia has undertaken constructive steps to improve the cooperation on

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readmission, such as ensuring that charter flights continued to take place, with the timely issuance of landing permit, improving communication with some Member States, accepting the organisation of identification missions with swifter issuance of emergency travel documents on confirmed cases. In view of this, the Commission proposed to lift the second step measures on 28 September 2023 and the Council adopted it on 12 April 2024.

However, there are still issues that need to be addressed. To achieve substantial and sustained progress, The Gambia needs to fully implement the provisions of the Good Practices and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, The Gambia needs to reply to the readmission requests from all the Member States (in particular to Member States with small or moderate caseload whose documented cases remained with no reply), refrain from imposing interviews on documented cases, improve timelines for the organisation of interviews and the identification outcomes (notably by providing justification for cases where nationality is not confirmed) and discontinue the practice of requesting information not -releasable under EU/national legal frameworks.

In the Member States where there is no physical diplomatic mission or with considerable caseload, The Gambia needs to accept conducting interviews via phone or videoconference and expand the good practice enabling the honorary consuls to issue emergency travel documents on confirmed of documented cases, and in relation to all types of returns and to all the Member States requesting them. The validity of the emergency travel documents needs to be aligned (up to 6 months) as per the agreed Practices, The Gambia needs to ensure effective and predictable cooperation on the organisation of charter flights, including on frequency, number of returnees accepted and timely issuance of landing permits.

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Ghana

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Ghana dedicated to readmission.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 1 515 Ghanaian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 280 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 18%. Member States submitted 390 readmission requests to the Ghanaian authorities, who issued 153 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 39%.

16 Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Ghana on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, six Member States (31% of the caseload) assessed Ghana's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, five (17% of the caseload) as poor, three (4% of the caseload) as good, one (31% of the caseload) as very good and one (12% of the caseload) as very poor. 15 Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Ghana on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload. One Member State indicated that the level of cooperation continued to be affected by COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements (i.e. mandatory PCR testing) in 2023.

16 Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Ghanaian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Ghana's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by five Member States (21% of the caseload), as poor by five (19% of the caseload), as very good by three (35% of the caseload), as good by two (8% of the caseload) and as very poor by one (12% of the caseload).

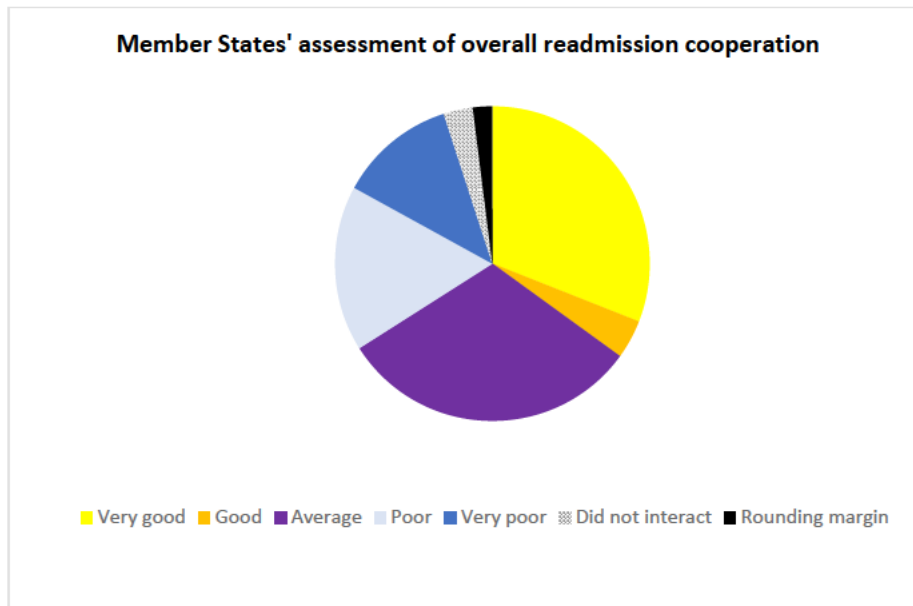
12 Member States (79% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 10 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and two that they were not. Four Member States (22% of the caseload) assessed Ghana's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as good, four (18% of the caseload) as poor, two (8% of the caseload) as average, one (31% of the caseload) as very good and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Four Member States (16% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

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As regards **return operations**, eight Member States (71% of the caseload) interacted with Ghana in 2023. Seven Member States (40% of the caseload) assessed Ghana’s cooperation as good and one (31% of the caseload) as very good. Eight Member States (24% of the caseload) did not attempt any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload. For one of them, this was due to Ghana not issuing any emergency travel documents and for another due to scheduling issues.

The graph below represents Member States’ responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



To improve readmission cooperation, Ghana needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Ghana needs to ensure timely responses to documented and undocumented readmission requests; accept expired passports, valid or expired identification cards, information extracted from the Visa Information System, expired emergency travel document as proof of nationality and/or their photocopies for all Member States; organise interviews upon request in the most relevant format; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; refrain from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks at any stage of the readmission procedure; issue emergency travel documents in a timely manner and with a satisfactory validity period. Ghana should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts, issuing transit authorisation).

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Guinea

Engagement to date

The EU readmission arrangement with Guinea (Good practices for the efficient operation of the return procedure) was concluded in July 2017. Five meetings of the Joint Working Group have taken place to assess the implementation of the arrangement, the last one on 13 December 2023, after two years in which the engagement had been put on hold following the September 2021 coup.

The issue of readmission cooperation was addressed during a high-level visit to Conakry in September 2023, in the follow up of the 10-Point Plan for Lampedusa presented by the Commission in the context of increased irregular arrivals.

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

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 5 210 Guinean nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 285 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 5%. Member States submitted 621 readmission requests to the Guinean authorities, who issued 235 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 38%.

15 Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Guinea on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, seven Member States (15% of the caseload) assessed Guinea's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, five (2% of the caseload) as very poor, two (67% of the caseload) as average and one (10% of the caseload) as good. 16 Member States (5% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Guinea on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload. One Member State indicated that the level of cooperation continued to be affected by COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements in 2023, with mandatory PCR tests for returnees until May 2023, which led to the cancellation of return operations. Cooperation, which was already not satisfactory for the majority of Member States, considerably worsened in the end of 2023 and the first half of 2024 for the remaining ones.

14 Member States (87% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Guinean authorities on identification matters in 2023. Guinea's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor by six Member States (1% of the caseload), as poor by

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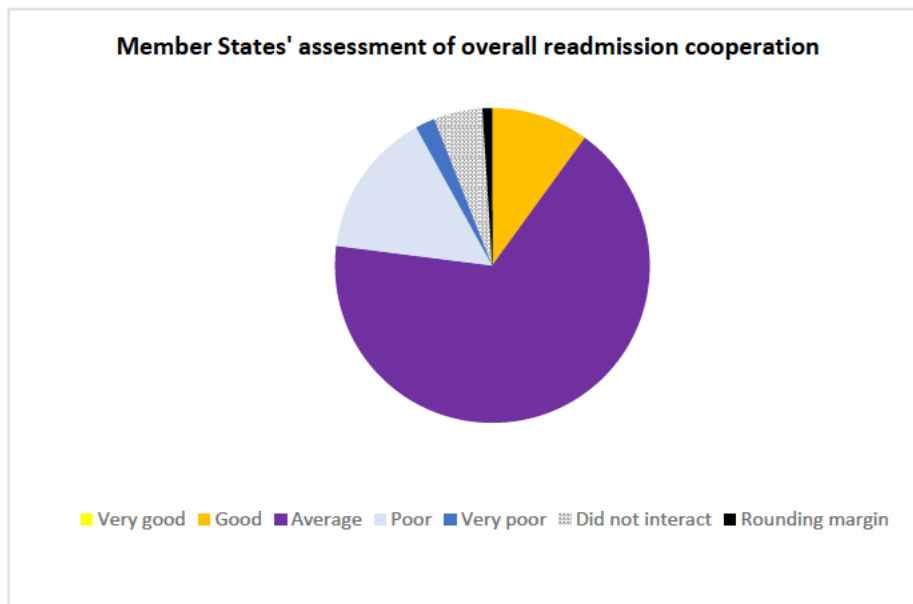
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four (6% of the caseload), as average by two (2% of the caseload) and as good by two (77% of the caseload). One Member State (8% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Guinea on identification due to the impossibility to carry out identification interviews.

12 Member States (93% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, six indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and six that they were not. Five Member States (2% of the caseload) assessed Guinea’s cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very poor, three (72% of the caseload) as average, three (9% of the caseload) as poor and one (10% of the caseload) as good. Three Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the unavailability of the embassy or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, six Member States (92% of the caseload) interacted with Guinea in 2023. Four Member States (25% of the caseload) assessed Guinea’s cooperation as average and two (67% of the caseload) as good. Nine Member States (3% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of replies to requests for identification and for the issuance of emergency travel documents or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States’ responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



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

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cooperation. To improve readmission cooperation, Guinea needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect the provisions of the EU readmission arrangement and extend existing good practices to all Member States.

More specifically, Guinea needs to ensure efficient and predictable procedures, as well as timely responses to documented and undocumented readmission requests; follow up on readmission requests by organising consular interviews upon request in the most adequate format, including via phone or videoconference; ensure the efficient organisation and swift follow up to identification missions upon request; systematically follow up to positive identification by swiftly issuing emergency travel documents for both forced and voluntary returns, and without taking into account elements other than nationality; should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts). Guinea needs to facilitate arrangements for regular charter flights, including timely issuance of landing permits, as stipulated in the arrangement, also in view of addressing the accumulated backlog due to the continued increase of irregular arrivals.

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India

Engagement to date

A Joint Declaration on a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM)⁴⁸ 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). Countering irregular migration is one of the priority areas of the CAMM. The last meeting of the High-Level Dialogue took place in October 2023. A workshop on return and readmission took place in June 2022. A further workshop on return and readmission is scheduled for the second half of 2024.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 14 785 Indian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 620 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 11%. Member States submitted 1 223 readmission requests to the Indian authorities, who issued 234 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 19%.

20 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of India on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, eight Member States (18% of the caseload) assessed India's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, four (31% of the caseload) as poor, three (34% of the caseload) as very good, three (10% of the caseload) as good and two (4% of the caseload) as very poor. 11 Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of India on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

20 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Indian authorities on identification matters in 2023. India's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by seven Member States (12% of the caseload), as poor by five (39% of the caseload), as good by four (28% of the caseload), as very good by two (13% of the caseload) and as very poor by two (4% of the caseload).

18 Member States (93% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 15 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon

⁴⁸ Joint Declaration on a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility between India and the European Union and its Member States, Brussels, 29.03.2016.

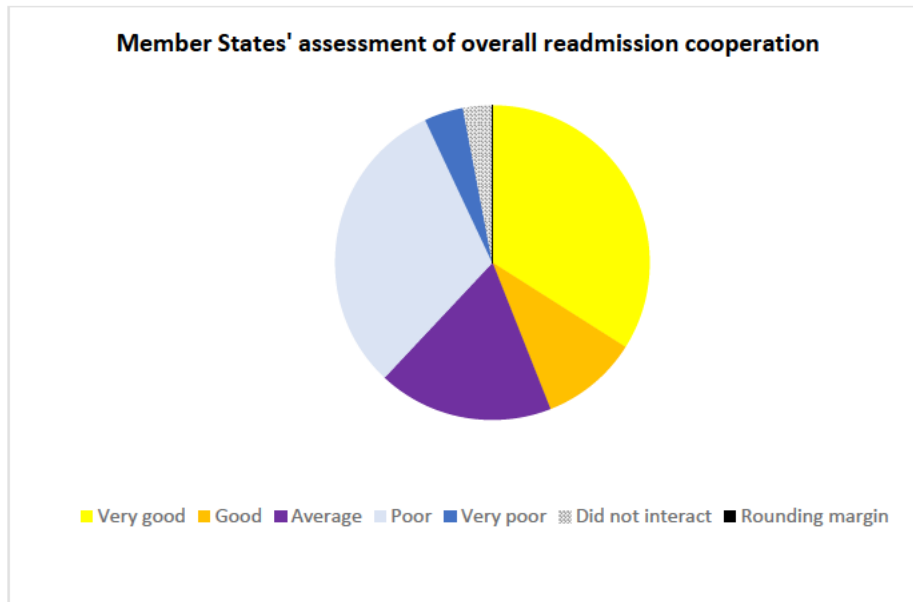
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request and three that they were not. Seven Member States (38% of the caseload) assessed India's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, four (29% of the caseload) as good, four (10% of the caseload) as poor and three (16% of the caseload) as very good. Two Member States (3% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to India not issuing any emergency travel documents for forced returns or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, 13 Member States (84% of the caseload) interacted with India in 2023. Eight Member States (66% of the caseload) assessed India's cooperation as good, two (8% of the caseload) as average, two (6% of the caseload) as very good and one (3% of the caseload) as poor. Seven Member States (13% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



To improve readmission cooperation, India needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, India needs to accept forced returns and respond timely to readmission and identification requests from all Member States.

With regards to identification, India needs to accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence, information extracted from the Visa Information System), accept biometric evidence without making it mandatory in the identification process and

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discontinue the practice of requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks. Interviews need to be organised upon request and in a timely manner, outcomes need to improve and the option of interviews via VTC made available for all Member States. In cases where sufficient evidence is available, consular interviews should not be made mandatory.

Following identification, India needs to issue emergency travel documents upon request for both voluntary and forced returns in a timely manner for all Member States. India needs to refrain from taking elements other than nationality into account when deciding on whether or not to issue an emergency travel document and needs to discontinue the practice to condition their issuance upon the signature of the returnee and the provision of flight details. India needs to ensure that emergency travel documents are renewed when requested and with sufficient validity. With regards to return operations, India should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights.

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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 forced returns, have been agreed but not formally signed in 2019.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 3 815 Iranian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 485 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 13%. Member States submitted 532 readmission requests to the Iranian authorities, who issued 27 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 5%.

Member States assessed the cooperation with Iran solely based on voluntary returns, as Iran does not accept forced returns.

14 Member States (85% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Iran on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, seven Member States (64% of the caseload) assessed Iran's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor, four (10% of the caseload) as poor, two (10% of the caseload) as good and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very good. 17 Member States (15% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Iran on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation on forced returns, due to the possibility to carry out voluntary returns or due to the lack of relevant caseload. Two Member States indicated that the level of cooperation continued to be affected by COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements during the reporting period.

14 Member States (85% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Iranian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Iran's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor by six Member States (42% of the caseload), as good by four (15% of the caseload), as average by two (27% of the caseload), as poor by one (less than 1% of the caseload) and as very good by one (less than 1% of the caseload).

10 Member States (50% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, seven indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and three that they were not. Four Member States (32% of the caseload) assessed Iran's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel** documents as very poor, two (6% of the caseload) as poor, two (3% of the caseload) as good and two (9% of the caseload) as very good. Four Member States (35% of the caseload) reported not having

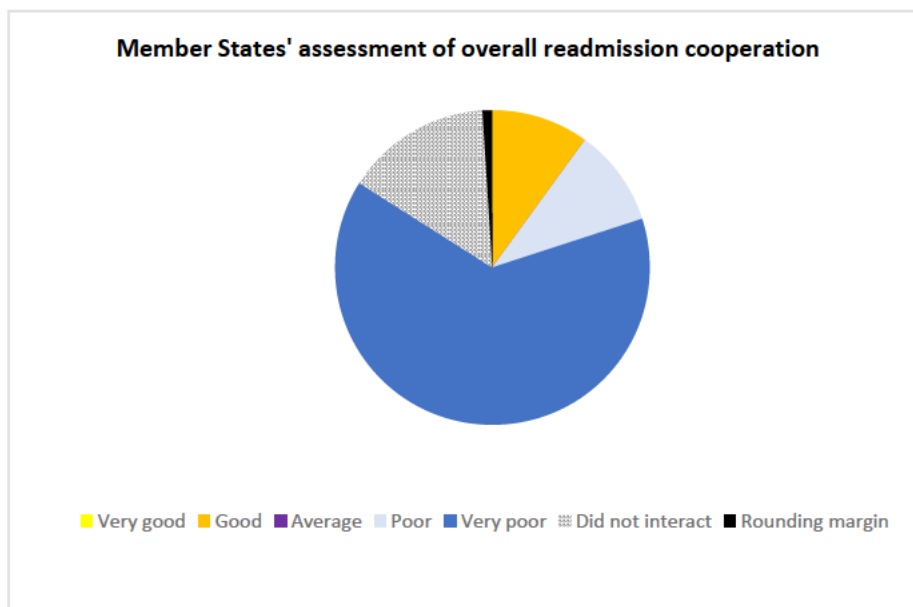
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requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to impossibility to conduct forced returns or due to the lack of caseload.

As regards **return operations**, seven Member States (24% of the caseload) interacted with Iran in 2023. Two Member States (2% of the caseload) assessed Iran's cooperation as very good, two (5% of the caseload) as poor, one (3% of the caseload) as average, one (9% of the caseload) as good and one (4% of the caseload) as very poor. Seven Member States (62% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation on forced returns or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Iran needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. Iran needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and cooperate with all Member States. More specifically, Iran needs to start cooperating with all Member States on returns; harmonise which evidence is accepted in the identification process and discontinue the practice of requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks. Interviews need to be organised upon request and in a timely manner for all Member States, and the option of interviews via VTC made available for all Member States. In cases where sufficient evidence is available, consular interviews should not be made mandatory. Following identification, Iran needs to issue emergency travel documents upon request. Iran needs to refrain from taking elements other than nationality into account when deciding on whether or not to issue an

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emergency travel document. With regards to return operations, Iran should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights (transit permit and visa for escort requirements).

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Iraq

Engagement to date

The EU–Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement⁴⁹, 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. The first meeting of the Sub-Committee on Development Cooperation took place on 17 January 2024.

Regular meetings monitoring cooperation on readmission are held at Senior Official level with the Iraqi Ambassador in Brussels.

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

Seven 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 2021⁵⁰ for the suspension of certain provisions of the Visa Code in respect to Iraq, the Commission and the High Representative entered into an extensive dialogue with the Iraqi authorities, both in Brussels and in Iraq, at political, senior official and technical 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 in 2023, including following the adoption of the third and fourth reports under 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 and to accept in relevant numbers returns from all Member States. The Commission prepared draft Standard Operating Procedures between the EU and Iraq to put in place predictable and transparent procedures to structure cooperation. During the first planned negotiations on 3 May 2024, Iraq did not enter into discussions on the concrete provisions of the draft text proposed by the EU. On 7 June 2024, Iraq sent its own proposed draft text to the Commission.

⁴⁹ Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States and the Republic of Iraq, OJ L 203/1, 10.8.2018.

⁵⁰ COM (2021) 414 final.

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Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 11 420 Iraqi nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 650 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 14%. Member States submitted 2 031 readmission requests to the Iraqi authorities, who issued 553 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 27%.

22 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Iraq on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, eight Member States (42% of the caseload) assessed Iraq's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, six (25% of the caseload) as average, four (25% of the caseload) as very poor, three (7% of the caseload) as very good and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as poor. Among these, two Member States assessed Iraq's cooperation solely based on voluntary returns, as Iraq does not accept forced returns for those two Member States. Nine Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Iraq on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

21 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Iraqi authorities on identification matters in 2023. Iraq's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by eight Member States (48% of the caseload), as average by five (19% of the caseload), as very good by four (7% of the caseload), as very poor by three (23% of the caseload) and as poor by one (less than 1% of the caseload). One Member State (1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Iraq on identification due to the decision of the Member State to focus on the return of previously identified persons.

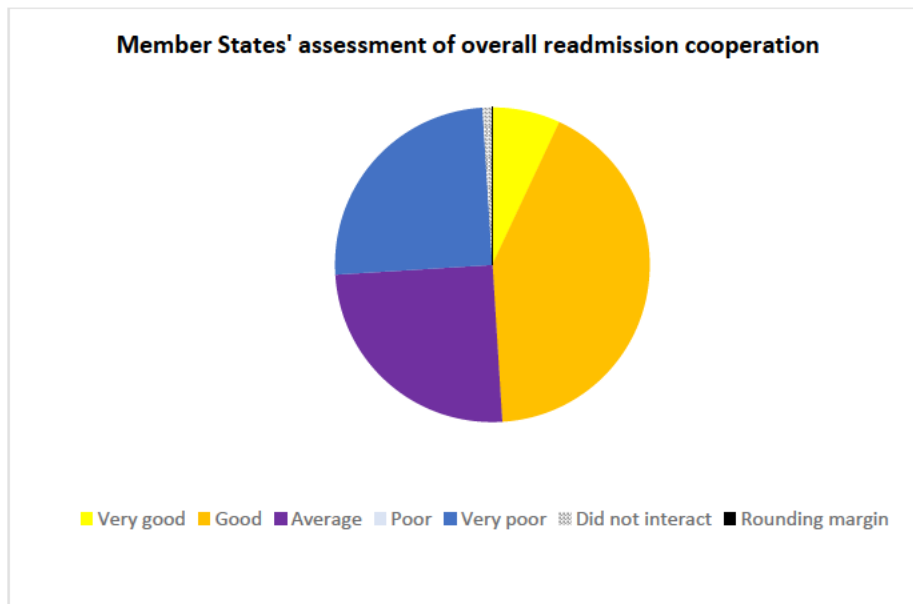
21 Member States (94% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 17 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and four that they were not. Six Member States (13% of the caseload) assessed Iraq's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, five (45% of the caseload) as good, four (4% of the caseload) as very good, three (12% of the caseload) as poor and three (20% of the caseload) as very poor. One Member State (6% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, 18 Member States (90% of the caseload) interacted with Iraq in 2023. Nine Member States (44% of the caseload) assessed Iraq's cooperation as good, four (16% of the caseload) as very good, three (13% of the caseload) as average and two (17% of the caseload) as poor. Four Member States (9% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 because no emergency travel documents were issued or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

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The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Following the Commission's proposal for visa measures, Iraq has undertaken a step forward and expressed its political commitment on readmission, which was followed by the start of operational cooperation.

However, there are tangible issues that need to be addressed. To achieve substantial and sustained progress, Iraq needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and work towards predictable and transparent procedures, increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure and extend existing good practices to all Member States. In particular, Iraq needs to accept the readmission of its nationals with no right to stay in the EU from all requesting Member States, without limitations on types of return and without making it conditional to the conclusion of a bilateral agreement; ensure timely responses to readmission requests; organise consular interviews as necessary, including via videoconference 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/national legal frameworks; swiftly issue emergency travel documents without taking into account elements other than nationality and without requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks (e.g. family and health situation, criminal records); accept return operations via charter flights from all Member States

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and should consider lifting restrictions on both scheduled and charter flights (e.g. Baghdad as the only place for return).

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Kosovo*

Engagement to date

Cooperation on readmission with Kosovo takes place on a bilateral basis with the Member States.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement⁵¹ 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 travel⁵², Kosovo passport holders are able to travel to the EU without the need for a short-stay visa as of 1 January 2024.

15 Member States reported having **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Kosovo.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 3 725 citizens of Kosovo who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 530 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 41%. Member States submitted 388 readmission requests to Kosovo's authorities, who issued 179 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 46%.

19 Member States (83% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Kosovo on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, 12 (31% of the caseload) assessed Kosovo's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very good and seven (52% of the caseload) as good. 12 Member States (17% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Kosovo on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

17 Member States (80% of the caseload) reported having interacted with Kosovo's authorities on identification matters in 2023. Kosovo's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good by 10 (60% of the caseload), as good by six (20% of the caseload) and

* 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.

⁵¹ Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Community and Kosovo, OJ L 71/3, 16.3.2016.

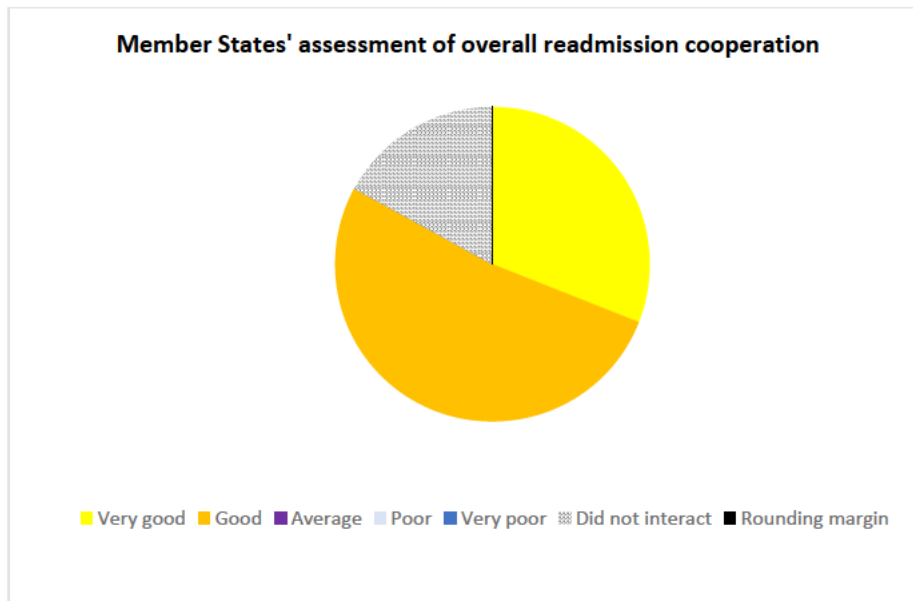
⁵² Regulation (EU) 2023/850 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 April 2023 amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (Kosovo (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.)), OJ L 110/1 of 25.4.2023.

as average by one (less than 1% of the caseload). Two Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Kosovo on identification of irregularly staying persons, due to the lack of relevant caseload.

11 Member States (25% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023 and reported that Kosovo responded with the issuance of emergency travel documents. Seven Member States (18% of the caseload) assessed Kosovo's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very good and four (7% of the caseload) as good. Eight Member States (58% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the use of EU Travel Documents.

As regards **return operations**, 15 Member States (81% of the caseload) interacted with Kosovo in 2023. 10 Member States (34% of the caseload) assessed Kosovo's cooperation as very good and five Member States (47% of the caseload) as good. Four Member States (1% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



To further improve readmission cooperation, Kosovo needs to fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, with regards to identification, Kosovo needs to accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence, information extracted from the Visa Information System) . For some remaining Member States, interviews need to be

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organised upon request and in a timely manner, and the option of interviews via VTC needs to be made available. In cases where sufficient evidence is available, interviews should not be made mandatory. With regards to the issuance of emergency travel documents, for some remaining Member States Kosovo needs to discontinue the practice to take into account elements other than nationality prior to issuing them, issue them upon request and in a timely manner and consistently renew expired emergency travel documents. With regards to return operations, Kosovo should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights and restrictions/constraints on readmission upon arrival.

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Mali

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Mali dedicated to readmission.

Following the adoption of the reports under 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 2023, 3 415 Malian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 140 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 4%. Member States submitted 263 readmission requests to the Malian authorities, who issued 120 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 46%.

11 Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Mali on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, five (6% of the caseload) assessed Mali's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, three (1% of the caseload) as very poor, two (89% of the caseload) as average and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very good. 20 Member States (4% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Mali on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of any interaction/replies from the diplomatic mission or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

10 Member States (95% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Malian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Mali's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor by four Member States (1% of the caseload), average by three (89% of the caseload), as poor by two (5% of the caseload), as very good by one (less than 1% of the caseload). One Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Mali on identification due to the lack of relevant caseload.

Seven Member States (90% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, two indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and five that they were not. Four Member States (2% of the caseload) assessed

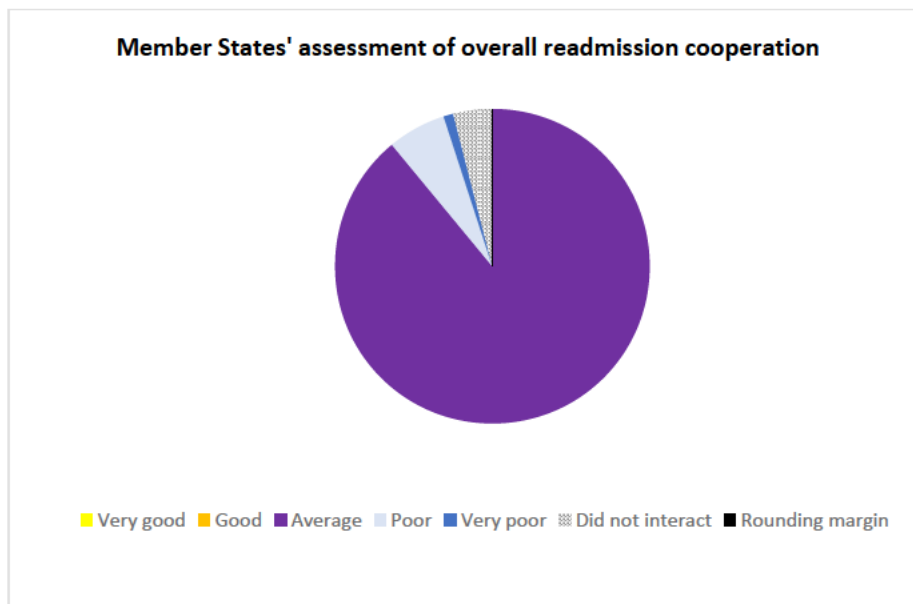
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Mali's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very poor, two (89% of the caseload) as average and one as poor (less than one% of the caseload). The remaining four Member States (5% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of confirmed cases, including one case of document fraud.

As regards **return operations**, four Member States (89% of the caseload) interacted with Mali in 2023. Three Member States (89% of the caseload) assessed Mali's cooperation as average and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as good. Seven Member States (7% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Mali needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. Mali needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and to cooperate with all Member States. More specifically, Mali needs to ensure timely responses to documented and undocumented readmission requests, accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. expired passports, valid or expired national identity cards, expired emergency travel documents, information extracted from the Visa Information System, biometric evidence and relevant photocopies) for more Member States than is currently the case; organize consular interviews upon request in the most adequate format, including via phone or videoconference; refrain from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks or consider elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure; issue emergency travel documents

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including for forced returns. To facilitate return operations, Mali should consider waiving restrictions on scheduled 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 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 improve 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 reports under 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 dedicated workshop on readmission.

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

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 35 065 Moroccan nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 760 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 8%. Member States submitted 7 710 readmission requests to the Moroccan authorities, who issued 1 265 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 16%.

26 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Morocco on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, eight (26% of the caseload) assessed Morocco's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, eight (16% of the

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caseload) as average, four (27% of the caseload) as poor, four (12% of the caseload) as very poor and two (19% of the caseload) as very good. Five Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Morocco on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload. One Member State indicated that the level of cooperation continued to be affected by COVID-19 related requirements until the end of February 2023.

25 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Moroccan authorities on identification matters in 2023. Morocco's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by eight Member States (23% of the caseload), as poor by seven (33% of the caseload), as average by four (9% of the caseload), as very good by three (23% of the caseload) and as very poor by three (11% of the caseload). One Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Morocco on identification due the lack of cooperation.

25 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 22 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and three that they were not. Eight Member States (38% of the caseload) assessed Morocco's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, six (22% of the caseload) as good, five (24% of the caseload) as very good, three (6% of the caseload) as poor and three (11% of the caseload) as very poor. One Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

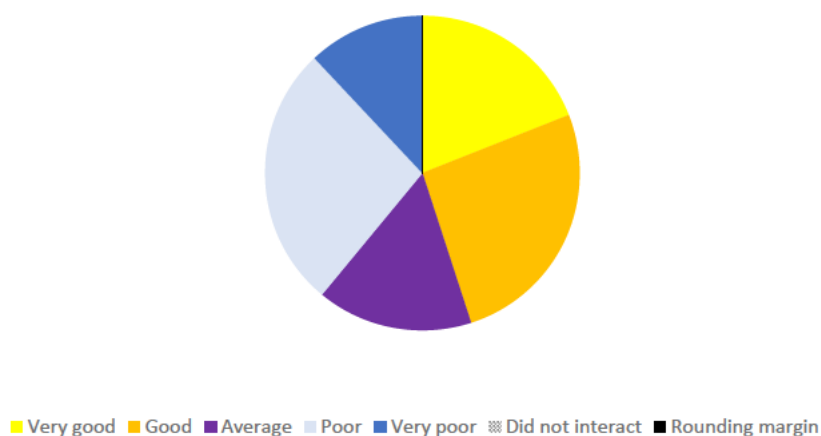
As regards **return operations**, 20 Member States (99% of the caseload) interacted with Morocco in 2023. Nine Member States (30% of the caseload) assessed Morocco's cooperation as good, six (39% of the caseload) as average, two (19% of the caseload) as very good, two (11% of the caseload) as poor and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Six Member States (1% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to Morocco not issuing emergency travel documents, due to legal challenges or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.

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Member States' assessment of overall readmission cooperation



In view of the overall readmission context and the high number of irregularly arriving Moroccan nationals, Morocco needs to take concrete steps to improve readmission cooperation, in the framework of the partnership with the EU. To improve readmission cooperation, Morocco needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Morocco needs to 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) from more Member States than is currently the case; conduct consular interviews for all Member States, including via phone or 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/national legal frameworks; swiftly issue emergency travel documents with a sufficient validity period and without taking into account elements other than nationality; accept to renew such documents, if needed; should consider lifting 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); and accept return operations via 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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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 2023, 3 705 Nepalese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 490 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 13%. Member States submitted 93 readmission requests to the Nepalese authorities, who issued 54 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 58%.

Nine Member States (64% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Nepal on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, four Member States (3% of the caseload) assessed Nepal's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, three Member States (58% of the caseload) as very good and two (3% of the caseload) as very poor. 22 Member States (36% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Nepal on readmission-related matters in 2023 mainly due to the lack of relevant caseload.

Nine Member States (64% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Nepalese authorities on identification matters in 2023. Nepal's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor by four Member States (4% of the caseload), as very good by two (26% of the caseload), as very poor by two (2% of the caseload) and as good by one (31% of the caseload).

Seven Member States (62% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, four indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and three that they were not. Two Member States (4% of the caseload) assessed Nepal's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very poor, two (26% of the caseload) as very good, two (1% of the caseload) as poor and one (31% of the caseload) as good. Two Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

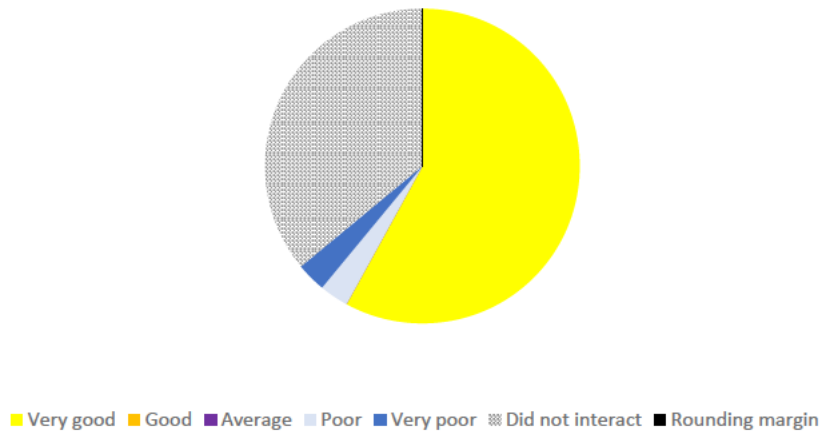
As regards **return operations**, three Member States (4% of the caseload) interacted with Nepal in 2023. Two Member States (4% of the caseload) assessed Nepal's cooperation as good and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as poor. Six Member States (60% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to people having returned voluntarily or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.

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Member States' assessment of overall readmission cooperation



To further improve readmission cooperation, Nepal needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission, and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, for some remaining Member States Nepal needs to accept forced returns; respond consistently to requests, and refrain from requesting the ID number or photocopy of travel documents as a precondition for issuing an emergency travel document.

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Nigeria

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Nigeria 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 *démarche* 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. 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. To respond to some questions raised by Nigeria on the agreed draft, a technical discussion to finalise the text took place in October 2023 in Abuja in the margins of the EU-Nigeria Senior Officials' Meeting.

Further engagement at all levels, including at high level is taking place both in Brussels and Abuja to conclude the negotiations of the readmission agreement.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) and a European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) post.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 11 120 Nigerian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 175 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 11%. Member States submitted 1 873 readmission requests to the Nigerian authorities, who issued 857 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 46%.

25 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Nigeria on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, 11 Member States (31% of the caseload) assessed Nigeria's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, seven (41% of the caseload) as average, four (25% of the caseload) as very good, two (2% of the caseload) as poor and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Six Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Nigeria on readmission-related

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matters in 2023 due to the returnees being readmitted to the third country of transit or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

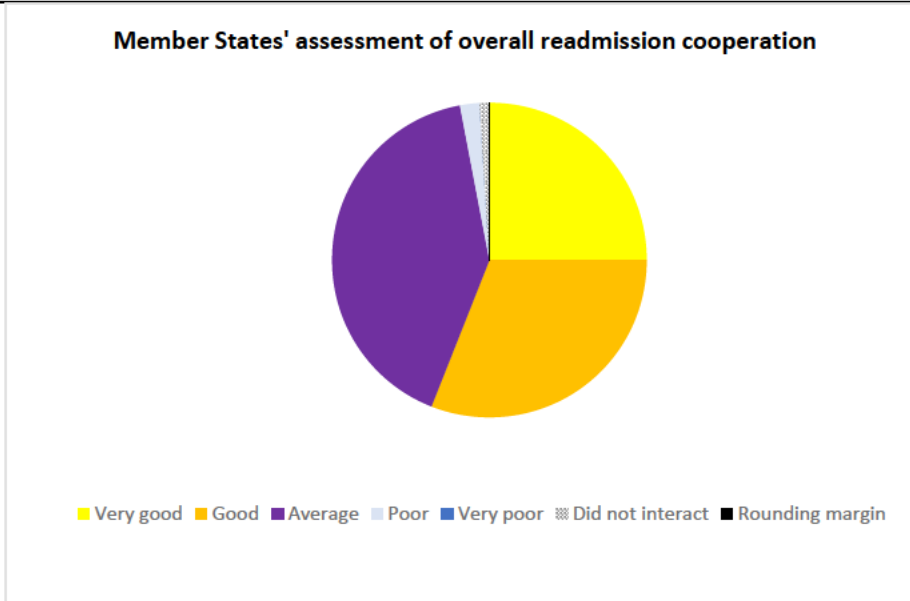
23 Member States (74% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Nigerian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Nigeria's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by eight Member States (42% of the caseload), as good by seven (3% of the caseload), as very good by six (27% of the caseload), as poor by one (1% of the caseload) and as very poor by one (less than 1% of the caseload). Two Member States (26% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Nigeria on identification due to the returnees being in possession of travel documents or having voluntarily returned.

23 Member States (74% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 21 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and two that they were not. Seven Member States (42% of the caseload) assessed Nigeria's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, six Member States (26% of the caseload) as very good, six (2% of the caseload) as good, three (3% of the caseload) as poor and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Two Member States (26% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to people having returned voluntarily.

As regards **return operations**, 20 Member States (99% of the caseload) interacted with Nigeria in 2023. 13 Member States (54% of the caseload) assessed Nigeria's cooperation as good, four (26% of the caseload) as very good, one (less than one% of the caseload) as average, one (18% of the caseload) as poor and one Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Five Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.

Member States' assessment of overall readmission cooperation



To further improve readmission cooperation, Nigeria needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Nigeria needs to respect relevant deadlines on identification and on the issuance of emergency travel documents. For some remaining Member States, Nigeria needs to confirm nationality without further investigation upon presentation of expired passport, valid or expired ID card, and information extracted from the Visa Information System. Nigeria needs to accept a broader range of evidence for further investigation in view of nationality verification and accept biometric evidence without making it mandatory. For all Member States consular interviews need to be organised upon request in a timely manner and the outcomes should improve. Nigeria needs to extend to all Member States the possibility of conducting consular interviews by phone or videoconferencing, refrain from conducting interviews when sufficient proof of nationality is provided and refrain from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks. Nigeria needs to improve its timely issuance of emergency travel documents for all Member States, including on forced return cases, and not take elements other than nationality into account when deciding whether or not to issue an emergency travel document. Nigeria needs to consider issuing travel documents with sufficient validity. On return operations via charter flights, Nigeria should consider increasing the number of returnees allowed on the flight, being more flexible on receiving the list of passengers and waiving the visa requirement for escorts.

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Pakistan

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement⁵³ with Pakistan entered into force on 1 December 2010. 15 meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee (JRC) have taken place. The last meeting, held on 24 April 2024 in Brussels, took place back-to-back with the second meeting of the informal Migration and Mobility Dialogue and the second technical Roundtable on Talent Partnerships. Prior to the 15th JRC meeting, a technical workshop on the RCMS took place with Pakistani authorities.

In view of the overall readmission context, following the adoption of the reports under 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 RCMS has been operational since 2018, with currently 23 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 2023, 15 405 Pakistani nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 1 620 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 11%. Member States submitted 6 793 readmission requests to the Pakistani authorities, who issued 2 240 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 33%.

25 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Pakistan on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, 10 (63% of the caseload) assessed Pakistan's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, seven (22% of the caseload) as good, four (3% of the caseload) as poor, three (12% of the caseload) as very good and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Six Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Pakistan on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

⁵³ Agreement between the European Community and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, OJ L 287/52, 4.11.2010.

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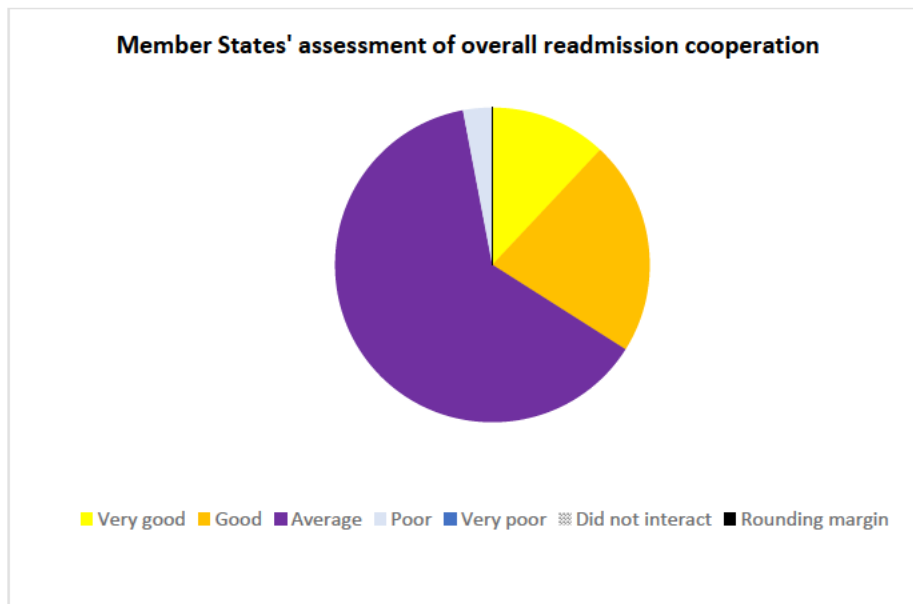
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25 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Pakistani authorities on identification matters in 2023. Pakistan’s cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by 10 Member States (51% of the caseload), as good by eight (34% of the caseload), as poor by five (3% of the caseload) and as very good by two (12% of the caseload).

23 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 21 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and two that they were not. Eight Member States (31% of the caseload) assessed Pakistan’s cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as good, six (31% of the caseload) as very good, five (35% of the caseload) as average, three (2% of the caseload) as poor and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Two Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, 20 Member States (97% of the caseload) interacted with Pakistan in 2023. Nine Member States (48% of the caseload) assessed Pakistan’s cooperation as good, five (14% of the caseload) as very good, five (35% of the caseload) as average, and one Member State (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Five Member States (3% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to Pakistan not issuing any emergency travel documents and due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States’ responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



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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 the EU. To improve readmission cooperation, Pakistan needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully implement the EU Readmission Agreement and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Pakistan needs to respond in a timely manner to requests for readmission and identification and accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence). Pakistan needs to discontinue the practice of requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal framework, in particular criminal records. Further, interviews need to be organised upon request and in a timely manner, and the option of interviews via VTC made available for all Member States. Outcomes of interviews need to be improved and in cases where sufficient evidence is available, interviews should not be made mandatory. Pakistan needs to propose solutions on how to tackle the readmission of unregistered minors and other undocumented persons, cooperate more closely with Member States, consider Member States' requests to prioritise the processing of certain cases and discontinue the clearance procedure for returnees with valid passports. Technical support to Member States facing problems with the RCMS needs to be strengthened.

Following identification, Pakistan needs to issue emergency travel documents upon request in a timely manner and with a validity of six months (as stated in the EURA) for all Member States. Pakistan needs to discontinue the practice to consider elements other than nationality prior to their issuance and consider accepting the EUTD for all Member States.

With regards to return operations, Pakistan needs to remove restrictions on charter and scheduled flights which are in place for some Member States and accept all readmitted persons upon arrival.

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Senegal

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Senegal dedicated to readmission.

Since December 2022, three technical dialogues on readmission at senior official level have taken place. The issue of readmission was discussed with Senegal during political and technical level engagements, including at high-level meetings in March and a high-level visit to Dakar in September 2023, in the follow up of the 10-Point Plan for Lampedusa presented by the Commission in the context of increased irregular arrivals.

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

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

Follow up to the proposed measures

Senegal's cooperation on readmission in 2020 was assessed as insufficient and the Commission proposed visa measures on 9 November 2022⁵⁴. The decision is 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. Three technical dialogues on readmission at senior official level have taken place since December 2022. In August 2023, March and May 2024, meetings with the Ambassador of Senegal, as the coordinator for readmission related efforts of Senegalese representations in the EU, took place in Brussels.

During the exchanges, including in the three 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 and identification missions, 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.

⁵⁴ COM (2022) 631 final.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 3 840 Senegalese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 365 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 10%. Member States submitted 761 readmission requests to the Senegalese authorities, who issued 194 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 25%.

15 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Senegal on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, eight Member States (85% of the caseload) assessed Senegal's **overall cooperation on readmission** as poor, five (6% of the caseload) as average, one (less than 1% of the caseload) as good and one (7% of the caseload) as very good. 16 Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Senegal on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

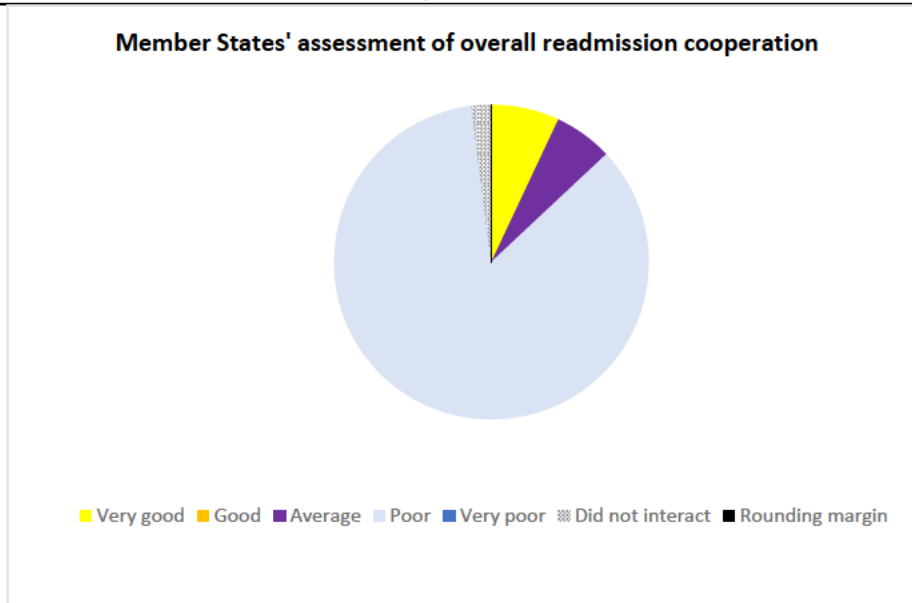
15 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Senegalese authorities on identification matters in 2023. Senegal's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as poor by 10 Member States (33% of the caseload), as average by three (58% of the caseload) and as good by two (7% of the caseload).

13 Member States (97% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 11 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and two that they were not. Six Member States (88% of the caseload) assessed Senegal's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as average, four (2% of the caseload) as poor, one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor, one (1% of the caseload) as good and one (7% of the caseload) as very good. Two Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, nine Member States (95% of the caseload) interacted with Senegal in 2023. Five Member States (80% of the caseload) assessed Senegal's cooperation as good, three (14% of the caseload) as average and one (1% of the caseload) as very good. Six Member States (2% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 because no emergency travel documents were issued or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.

Member States' assessment of overall readmission cooperation



Following the Commission's proposal for visa measures, Senegal has undertaken some 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 some Member States.

However, there are still tangible issues that need to be addressed. To achieve substantial and sustained progress, Senegal needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and cooperate with all Member States. More specifically, Senegal needs to establish effective communication channels with all Member States; swiftly respond to readmission requests, including for undocumented cases; organise consular interviews in a timely manner upon request, and via phone or videoconference, in particular in those Member States where no Senegalese embassy is located; ensure swift follow up to identification interviews and short term identification missions; refrain from requiring to conduct consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; accept valid and expired passports to establish nationality; swiftly issue emergency travel documents upon positive identification for forced and voluntary returns; refrain from taking into consideration elements other than nationality (such as family and health related matters, judicial and administrative proceedings and the voluntary nature of the return); refrain from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks; relaunch cooperation on charter flights and accept the organisation of charter flights from all Member States.

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Sierra Leone

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Sierra Leone dedicated to readmission. This is the first time that Sierra Leone fits the criteria to be assessed in the framework of the Article 25a mechanism.

Two Member States reported having **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Sierra Leone.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 1 355 Sierra Leonian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 45 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 3%. Member States submitted 62 readmission requests to the Sierra Leonian authorities, who issued 4 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 6%.

Eight Member States (38% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Sierra Leone on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, four Member States (20% of the caseload) assessed Sierra Leone's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very poor, two (13% of the caseload) as poor and two (5% of the caseload) as good. 23 Member States (61% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Sierra Leone on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation in previous years or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

Eight Member States (38% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Sierra Leonian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Sierra Leone's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor by five Member States (31% of the caseload), as good by two (5% of the caseload) and as poor by one (2% of the caseload).

Five Member States (22% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, one indicated that emergency travel documents were sometimes issued upon request and four that they were not. Four Member States (17% of the caseload) assessed Sierra Leone's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very poor and one (5% of the caseload) as good. The remaining three Member States (17% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of positive replies to identification requests.

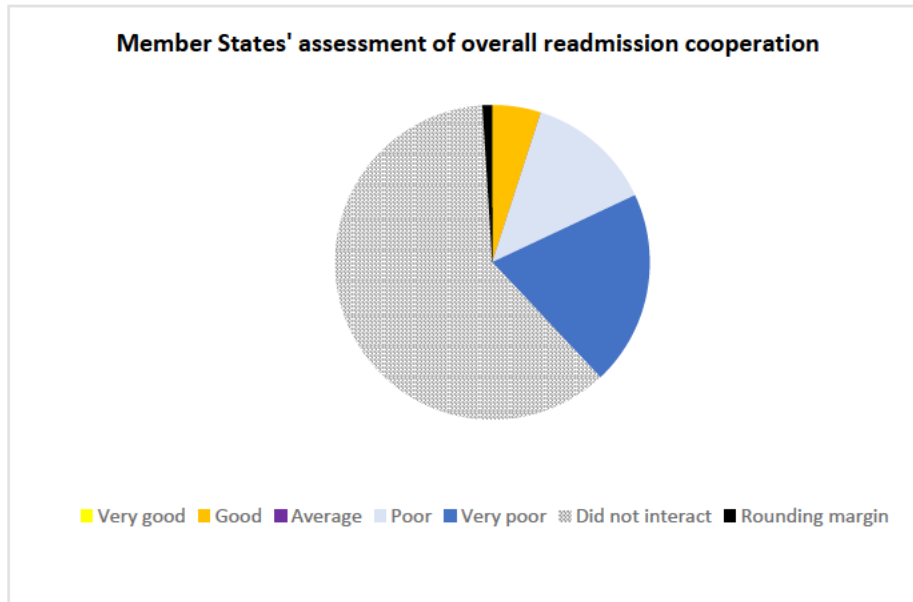
As regards **return operations**, five Member States (35% of the caseload) interacted with Sierra Leone in 2023. Four Member States (25% of the caseload) assessed Sierra Leone's

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cooperation as good and one (11% of the caseload) as average. Three Member States (3% of the caseload) did not attempt any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of replies to readmission requests or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Sierra Leone needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. Sierra Leone needs to fully respect international commitments on readmission and cooperate with all Member States. More specifically, Sierra Leone needs to ensure timely responses to documented and undocumented readmission requests; accept expired passports, valid or expired identification cards, information extracted from the Visa Information System, expired emergency travel document and/or their photocopies as proof of nationality or evidence to be considered in view of identification for all Member States; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; organise identification missions upon request; refrain from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks at any stage of the readmission procedure; issue emergency travel documents following positive identification. Sierra Leone should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled and charter flights.

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Somalia

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Somalia dedicated to readmission. Regular exchanges on readmission cooperation have taken place at political, senior officials and technical level.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 4 980 Somali nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 215 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 4%. Member States submitted 379 readmission requests to the Somali authorities, who issued 46 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 12%.

14 Member States (60% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Somalia on readmission-related matters. Of these, five Member States (6% of the caseload) assessed Somalia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, five (40% of the caseload) as very poor, two (7% of the caseload) as poor, one (4% of the caseload) as good and one (3% of the caseload) as very good. As Somalia does not accept forced returns from most Member States, more than half of the responding Member States indicated having assessed cooperation solely based on voluntary returns. 17 Member States (40% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Somalia on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

14 Member States (60% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Somali authorities on identification matters in 2023. Somalia's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very poor by four Member States (31% of the caseload), as good by four (9% of the caseload), as average by three (10% of the caseload), as very good by two (8% of the caseload) and as poor by one (2% of the caseload).

Eight Member States (27% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, five indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and three that they were not. Four Member States (24% of the caseload) assessed Somalia's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very poor, three (1% of the caseload) as average and one (2% of the caseload) as poor. Six Member States (33% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents

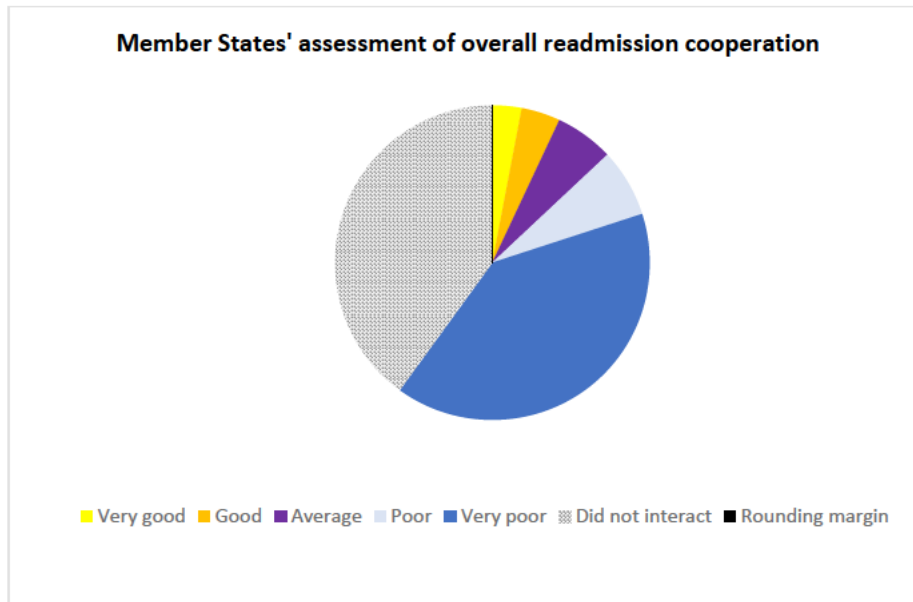
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in 2023. For the majority, this was due to the fact that Somalia does not accept forced returns, while for two, this was due to the use of the EU or Member State-issued travel documents in a limited number of cases.

As regards **return operations**, nine Member States (28% of the caseload) interacted with Somalia in 2023, on scheduled flights only. No Member State attempted to carry out charter flights. Two Member States (14% of the caseload) assessed Somalia's cooperation as very poor, two (5% of the caseload) as average, two Member States (3% of the caseload) as very good, two (5% of the caseload) as good and one (2% of the caseload) as poor. Five Member States (31% of the caseload) did not attempt any return operation in 2023 due to the impossibility to carry out forced returns, due to the lack of responses in previous stages of the readmission process or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



Action is needed to improve cooperation in the field of readmission. The Commission is tabling a proposal for visa measures alongside this report.

To achieve substantial and sustained progress, Somalia needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission, fully respect international commitments on readmission and cooperate with all Member States. In particular, Somalia needs to start cooperating with all Member States on both voluntary and forced returns, including by identifying clear interlocutors and establishing effective communication channels; ensure timely responses to documented and undocumented readmission

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requests; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. expired passports, valid or expired national identity cards, expired emergency travel documents, information extracted from the Visa Information System, biometric evidence and relevant photocopies) for more Member States than is currently the case; refrain from conducting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; organise consular interviews upon request in the most adequate format, including via phone or videoconference; refrain from requesting information non-releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks at any stage of the readmission procedure; issue emergency travel documents including for forced returns and/or accept the EU Travel Document for all Member States. Somalia should consider lifting restrictions on scheduled flights, such as waiving the requirement of visa for escorts, and accept charter flights from all Member States.

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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, the last one on 20 July 2021. 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 now planned to take place in July 2024. On 19 March 2024, a meeting with the Ambassador of Sri Lanka took place in Brussels.

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

Two Member States reported having **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Sri Lanka.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 3 450 Sri Lankan nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 475 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 14%. Member States submitted 365 readmission requests to the Sri Lankan authorities, who issued 187 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 51%.

14 Member States (92% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Sri Lanka on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, six Member States (54% of the caseload) assessed Sri Lanka's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, five (35% of the caseload) as very good, two (2% of the caseload) as average and one (1% of the caseload) as very poor. 17 Member States (9% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Sri Lanka on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

14 Member States (92% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Sri Lankan authorities on identification matters in 2023. Sri Lanka's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good by five Member States (35% of the caseload), as good by five (54% of the caseload), as average by two (1% of the caseload), as poor by one (1% of the caseload) and as very poor by one (1% of the caseload).

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.

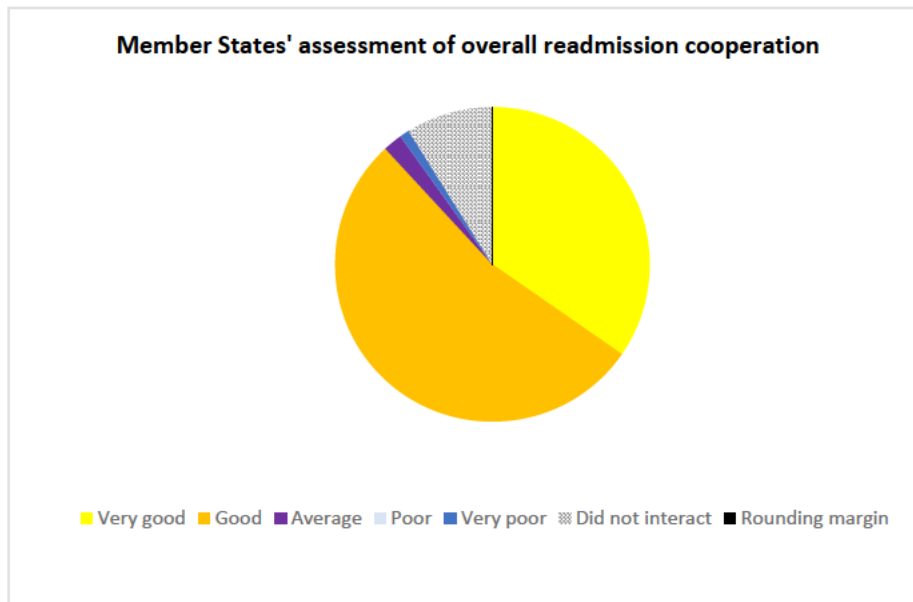
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12 Member States (90% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 11 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and one that they were not. Eight Member States (42% of the caseload) assessed Sri Lanka's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very good, three (47% of the caseload) as good and one (1% of the caseload) as average. The remaining two Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

As regards **return operations**, 10 Member States (74% of the caseload) interacted with Sri Lanka in 2023. Seven Member States (56% of the caseload) assessed Sri Lanka's cooperation as good, two (17% of the caseload) as very good and one (1% of the caseload) as very poor. Four Member States (18% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



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. More specifically, for some remaining Member States Sri Lanka needs to respect deadlines for the issuance of emergency travel documents, with a validity period of at least six months as stipulated in the Agreement. Sri Lanka needs to accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. information extracted from the Visa Information System; biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case. For some remaining Member States Sri Lanka needs to organise consular interviews via

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**phone or videoconference upon request. Sri Lanka should consider lifting restrictions on
scheduled flights (e.g. waiving the visa requirement for escorts).**

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Sudan

Sudan has been included for reasons of methodological completeness. However, the text below should be read in light of the situation in the country which renders engagement impossible.

Engagement to date

During the reporting period, besides the Cotonou Agreement, there was no other cooperation instrument in place at EU-level with Sudan dedicated to readmission.

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.

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.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 2 690 Sudanese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 55 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 2%. Member States submitted 217 readmission requests to the Sudanese authorities, who issued 21 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 10%.

11 Member States (71% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Sudan on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, six Member States (61% of the caseload) assessed Sudan's **overall cooperation on readmission** as average, three (5% of the caseload) as poor, and two (4% of the caseload) as good. 20 Member States (29% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Sudan on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the security situation in the country, due to COVID-19 related restrictions/requirements or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

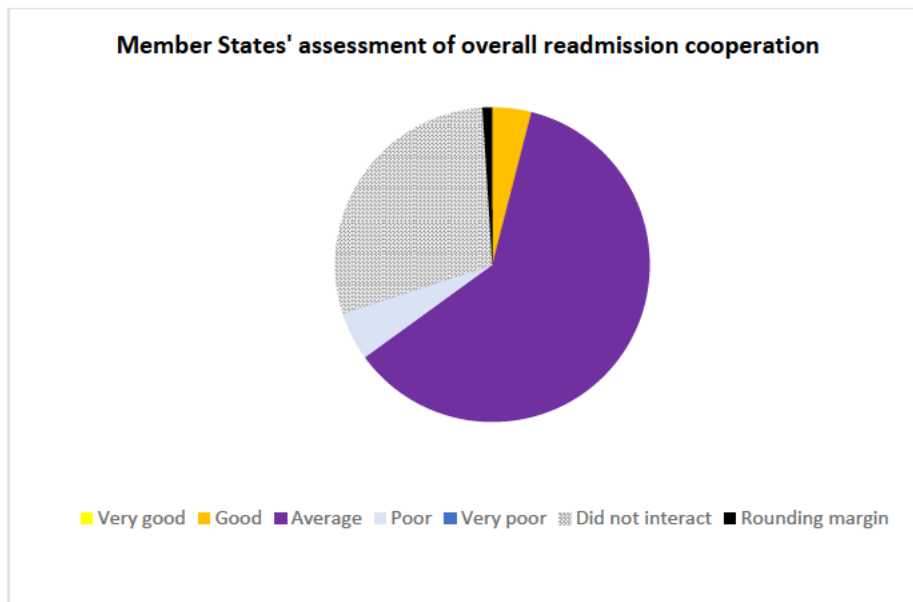
11 Member States (71% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Sudanese authorities on identification matters in 2023. Sudan's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as average by six Member States (56% of the caseload), as poor by four (14% of the caseload) and as good by one (less than 1% of the caseload).

Eight Member States (64% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, five indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and three that they were not. Three Member States (13% of the caseload)

assessed Sudan's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as good, two Member States (49% of the caseload) as average, two (1% of the caseload) as very poor and one (1% of the caseload) as poor. Three Member States (7% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the overall situation in the country or due to the lack of identified cases.

As regards **return operations**, three Member States (58% of the caseload) interacted with Sudan in 2023. Two Member States (57% of the caseload) assessed Sudan's cooperation as average and one (1% of the caseload) as good. Eight Member States (13% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of identified cases, due to Sudan not issuing any emergency travel documents or due to the overall situation in the country.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



When the conditions allow, Sudan needs to take concrete steps to improve cooperation in the field of readmission based on the following elements. Sudan needs to ensure timely responses to documented and undocumented readmission requests and cooperate with all Member States on issuance of travel documents and return operations.

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Tunisia

Engagement to date

A Mobility Partnership⁵⁶ 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 high 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 cooperation on countering migrant smuggling and on preventing irregular migration. Return and readmission 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. A technical visit of the Commission took place in January 2024.

In view of the overall readmission context, following the adoption of the reports under 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.

Six Member States reported having **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Tunisia.

Cooperation on readmission

⁵⁶ 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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In 2023, 19 140 Tunisian nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 155 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 11%. Member States submitted 7 384 readmission requests to the Tunisian authorities, who issued 2 617 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 35%.

22 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Tunisia on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, nine Member States (7% of the caseload) assessed Tunisia's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, five (16% of the caseload) as average, four (45% of the caseload) as poor, three (31% of the caseload) as very good and one (less than 1% of the caseload) as very poor. Nine Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Tunisia on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

22 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Tunisian authorities on identification matters in 2023. Tunisia's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by 10 Member States (7% of the caseload), as poor by four (44% of the caseload), as very good by three (31% of the caseload), as average by three (16% of the caseload) and as very poor by two (1% of the caseload).

20 Member States (100% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 19 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and one that they were not. 10 Member States (40% of the caseload) assessed Tunisia's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as good, five (46% of the caseload) as poor, three (14% of the caseload) as average and two (less than 1% of the caseload) as very good. Two Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

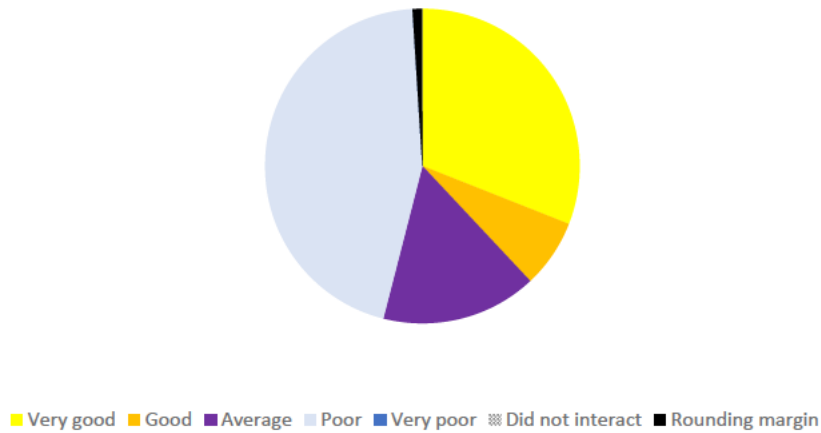
As regards **return operations**, 19 Member States (99% of the caseload) interacted with Tunisia in 2023. Nine Member States (7% of the caseload) assessed Tunisia's cooperation as good, four (31% of the caseload) as very good, four (17% of the caseload) as average and two (44% of the caseload) as poor. Three Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to Tunisia not issuing any emergency travel documents or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.

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Member States' assessment of overall readmission cooperation



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 partnership with the EU. To improve readmission cooperation, Tunisia needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Tunisia needs to ensure timely responses to readmission requests, without taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure (e.g. personal and family situation); refrain from requesting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; extend the possibility to conduct consular interviews via phone or videoconference to all Member States; refrain from requesting confidential information that is not releasable under the EU/national legal frameworks; accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. biometric evidence and information extracted from the Visa Information System) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue emergency travel documents with a sufficient validity period; accept charter flights from all Member States and consider lifting restrictions on flights (e.g. maximum number of returnees per charter).

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Türkiye

Engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement⁵⁷ with Türkiye entered into force on 1 October 2014. Two meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee (JRC) have taken place, the last one on 19 January 2016. Türkiye has refused to hold further meetings of the JRC. Türkiye is implementing the EU Readmission Agreement, but not the third country nationals' clause and not with Cyprus. 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 Commission met with Turkish counterparts at technical level to discuss relevant aspects of migration management and areas of mutual cooperation on 15 November 2023. An EU-Türkiye High Level Dialogue on Migration and Security took place on 23 November 2023 in Brussels.

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 2023, 21 610 Turkish nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 5 650 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 26%. Member States submitted 1 565 readmission requests to the Turkish authorities, who issued 598 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 38%.

23 Member States (99% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Türkiye on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, 10 Member States (22% of the caseload) assessed Türkiye's **overall cooperation on readmission** as very good, six Member States (9% of the caseload) as good, six (47% of the caseload) as average and one (21% of the

⁵⁷ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, OJ L 134/3, 7.5.2014.

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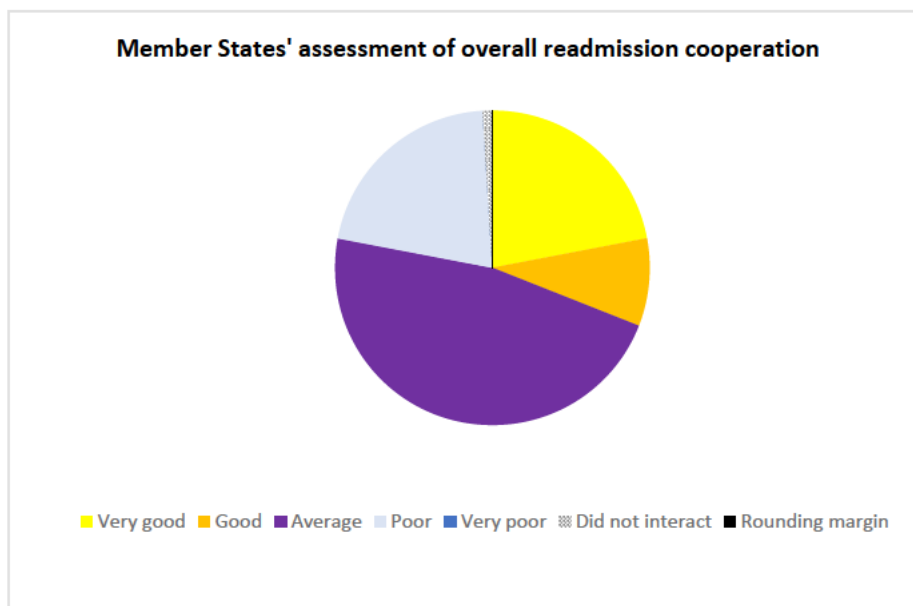
caseload) as poor. Eight Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Türkiye on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation or the lack of relevant caseload.

21 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Turkish authorities on identification matters. Türkiye’s cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as very good by nine Member States (22% of the caseload), as good by six (16% of the caseload) and as average by six (60% of the caseload). Two Member States (1% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with Türkiye on identification due to returnees being in possession of valid travel documents.

20 Member States (98% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023 and reported that Türkiye responded with the **issuance of emergency travel documents**. Nine Member States (24% of the caseload) assessed Türkiye’s cooperation on the issuance of emergency travel documents as very good, six (34% of the caseload) as good and five (40% of the caseload) as average. The remaining three (1% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to returnees being in possession of valid travel document.

As regards **return operations**, 21 Member States (99% of the caseload) interacted with Türkiye in 2023. 10 Member States (70% of the caseload) assessed Türkiye’s cooperation as good, nine (20% of the caseload) as very good and two (8% of the caseload) as average. Two Member States (less than 1% of the caseload) have not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States’ responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



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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 the EU. To improve readmission cooperation, Türkiye needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect the provisions of the EU Readmission Agreement towards all Member States, including as regards the readmission of third country nationals and extend existing good practices to all Member States. More specifically, Türkiye needs to ensure timely responses to readmission requests without taking into account elements other than nationality at any stage of the readmission procedure (e.g. requesting confirmation that all legal remedies have been exhausted); refrain from requesting consular interviews when sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided; extend the possibility to conduct consular interviews via phone or 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 and information extracted from the Visa Information System) from more Member States than is currently the case; swiftly issue emergency travel documents with a validity period of three months as stipulated in the Agreement and without taking into account elements other than nationality; accept charter flights from all Member States and lift restrictions (e.g. maximum number of returnees).

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Vietnam

Engagement to date

The EU-Vietnam Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation⁵⁸, which refers to readmission obligations (Article 27), was concluded in 2016 and entered into force on 1 August 2020.

Cooperation on readmission is supported through regular local-level engagement by a European Return Liaison Officer (EURLO) post.

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

Cooperation on readmission

In 2023, 2 510 Vietnamese nationals who had no right to stay in the Member States were issued return decisions and 450 were effectively returned following an order to leave, resulting in a **return rate** of 18%. Member States submitted 510 readmission requests to the Vietnamese authorities, who issued 378 emergency travel documents, resulting in an **issuance rate** of 74%.

16 Member States (90% of the caseload) reported having approached the authorities of Vietnam on readmission-related matters in 2023. Of these, eight Member States (19% of the caseload) assessed Vietnam's **overall cooperation on readmission** as good, three (10% of the caseload) as very good, three (21% of the caseload) as poor and two (40% of the caseload) as average. 15 Member States (9% of the caseload) reported not having approached the authorities of Vietnam on readmission-related matters in 2023 due to the lack of cooperation in one case or due to the lack of relevant caseload.

15 Member States (88% of the caseload) reported having interacted with the Vietnamese authorities on identification matters in 2023. Vietnam's cooperation in the **identification procedure** was assessed as good by five Member States (50% of the caseload), as very good by four (12% of the caseload), as average by three (6% of the caseload) and as poor by three (21% of the caseload). One Member State (2% of the caseload) reported not having interacted with the third country on identification due to the lack of relevant caseload.

14 Member States (88% of the caseload) reported having requested emergency travel documents in 2023. Of these, 13 indicated that emergency travel documents were issued upon request and one that they were not. Eight Member States (20% of the caseload) assessed

⁵⁸ 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.

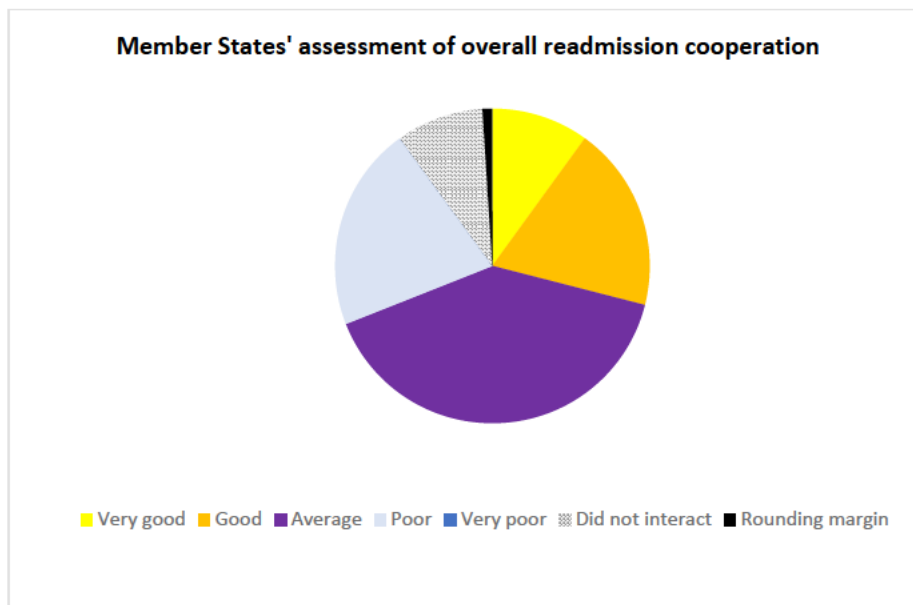
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Vietnam's cooperation on the **issuance of emergency travel documents** as very good, four (49% of the caseload) as good, one (2% of the caseload) as average and one (17% of the caseload) as poor. Two Member States (2% of the caseload) reported not having requested any emergency travel documents in 2023 due to the lack of positive identification in one case, and due to returnees being in possession of valid passports in the other case.

As regards **return operations**, 15 Member States (90% of the caseload) interacted with Vietnam in 2023. Nine Member States (36% of the caseload) assessed Vietnam's cooperation as good, four (15% of the caseload) as very good and two (38% of the caseload) as average. One Member State (1% of the caseload) has not attempted any return operation in 2023 due to the lack of relevant caseload.

The graph below represents Member States' responses to the question on overall readmission cooperation in 2023, weighted by caseload.



To improve readmission cooperation, Vietnam needs to increase effectiveness in all phases of the readmission procedure, fully respect international commitments on readmission and extend existing good practices to all Member States. In particular, Vietnam needs to accept a broader range of evidence (e.g. information extracted from the Visa Information System, biometric evidence) from more Member States than is currently the case; organise consular interviews, including via phone or 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; swiftly issue emergency travel documents for all Member States without taking into account elements

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other than nationality; accept to renew such documents if need be for all Member States; and accept return operations via charter flights. To facilitate return operations, Vietnam should consider lifting restrictions on returns by scheduled flights (e.g. requirement of transit permits, visa requirement for escorts).

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