

Morocco

EU engagement to date

The Commission has been negotiating a Readmission agreement with Morocco since 2003. Interrupted in 2010, the negotiations were relaunched in 2015 in parallel with the negotiations of a Visa Facilitation Agreement. They were interrupted again in December 2015 due to other aspects of Union's relations with Morocco. The political dialogue with Morocco was relaunched in 2019 and cooperation on migration reinvigorated, but readmission negotiations have not yet re-started. At the Association Council of 27 June 2019, the EU and Morocco issued a joint declaration setting the areas of cooperation – migration and mobility is one of those with cooperation on returns and readmission a part of it. Morocco is the beneficiary of a large number of projects on migration management, notably in support of border management where important results have been achieved, although none supporting readmission activities.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2019, 34 830 Moroccan nationals staying illegally in the Member States were issued return decisions and 10 235 effectively returned to Morocco resulting in a **return rate** of 29%. Member States submitted 5 160 readmission requests to Moroccan authorities, which issued 2 388 travel documents resulting in an **issuance rate** of 46%.

A total of 23 Member States reported having approached the authorities of Morocco for readmission matters related to its nationals in 2019.

Five Member States, accounting for two thirds of return decisions issued to Moroccan nationals report having **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Morocco, whose relevant provisions are, in general, often or always respected for four of them.

About half of responding Member States, where more than half of all Moroccan nationals ordered to leave are to be found, assess the **cooperation in identification procedures** with Morocco as good or very good, while four Member States, accounting for slightly more than 40% of return decisions issued to Moroccan nationals, assess it as average and seven, accounting for 5% of return decisions, as poor or very poor. Several Member States report a lengthy identification procedure and a cumbersome and sometimes unclear procedure imposed by Morocco.

This is reflected in 15 Member States having an established routine for cooperation on identification that is often to always effectively implemented with Moroccan diplomatic missions for 13 of them.

For 10 Member States consular interviews are often or always performed upon their request, with, on average, acceptable or satisfactory outcomes. For eight Member States, representing almost a third of return decisions issued, consular interviews are rarely or never performed upon their request. Moroccan authorities are not available to organise identification missions.

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Interviews are also often requested by Moroccan authorities in cases where sufficient evidence to establish nationality was already provided (e.g. valid or expired travel documents) in the case of eight Member States.

In addition, information non-releasable under the EU/national legal framework is often to always requested by Moroccan authorities to five Member States.

Evidence accepted very often includes not only valid or expired passports, but also other identity documents, photocopies of documents, biometric evidence and, for a few Member States only, information extracted from the VIS.

Except for a few Member States, it is generally not possible for interviews to take place by phone or videoconference.

For more than half of the responding Member States, representing two-thirds of Moroccan nationals ordered to leave, the **issuance of travel documents** often or always takes place in a timely manner. It is rarely to never the case for seven Member States representing less than 5% of Moroccan nationals ordered to leave. The remaining Member States representing nearly a third, have no experience with issuance of travel documents or have not reported.

Additional elements other than nationality are also often taken into account by Morocco when deciding whether to issue travel documents or not, in the case of six Member States.

Returns by **charters flights** are not accepted by Morocco. A few Member States report that certain restrictions are applied in case of returns by **scheduled flights**, namely a limited number of returnees per flight.

In general, Member States, with few exceptions have assessed the **overall cooperation on return and readmission** as stable or improved since 2015.

With a total of 34 830 Moroccan nationals ordered to leave in 2019, Morocco ranks first amongst visa-bound third countries whose nationals have been issued return decisions in the Member States. Overall, more than two-thirds of Member States interact with Morocco on readmission matters on a significant number of cases, even though only a fraction of the high number of return decisions issued to Moroccan nationals are followed up with requests for readmission. No jointly agreed procedures are in place at EU level and of the five bilateral agreements/arrangements in place, four are respected, accounting for less than half of the return decisions issued. Identification processes, including interviews, deliver good results for about two thirds of the caseload (good for Member States representing half of the return decisions, average for those issuing 40% of the return decisions and poor for those issuing 10% of return decisions). Issuance of travel documents is timely for Member States representing two thirds of return decisions but delayed for several Member States with a comparatively smaller caseload. Charter flights are not accepted. For a more effective and predictable readmission cooperation, the better cooperation practices would need to be extended to all Member States, while taking into account the specific bilateral practices with some Member States. Given the very high number of cases, a set of commonly agreed procedures would bring effectiveness and predictability. Such process could be supported by a EURLO and potentially a RCMS.

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Identification processes could be expedited, by including interviews as requested by all Member States and information from VIS. The timing in issuing travel documents could also be improved for several Member States. Further improvements could be envisaged by accepting charter flights. All this should result in a better rate of issuance of travel documents, encourage a higher number of readmission requests by Member States and, subsequently, trigger a higher return rate.