



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

The Director-General

Brussels,  
HOME.C1/dp

**Subject: EU readmission cooperation with partner countries – state of play**

Dear Mr Lopez Aguilar,

I would like to thank you for your invitation to have on 1 February an exchange of views with the LIBE Committee on the negotiation and implementation of the EU readmission agreements and arrangements. I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that the Commission will be represented, like at the previous occasion on 23 March 2021, by Deputy Director-General Mr Johannes Luchner.

During our previous exchange we were not able to provide you with a complete overview for the year 2020 because the full set of data was not yet available. This time round, we will update you on the basis of the complete 2020 Eurostat data (please note that the full data set for 2021 will become available in spring 2022).

On a general note, let me underline that the overall level of enforcement of return decisions has decreased in 2021. The impact of the pandemic on return operations and activities needs to be taken into account in this context but the overall trend of cooperation from previous years were confirmed.

The Commission is continuing to implement the commitments set out in the Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Pact includes a strong emphasis on improving cooperation with key countries of origin and transit to be achieved through comprehensive, tailor-made and mutually beneficial partnerships, of which readmission is an important component. The Commission also adopted in April 2021 the EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration<sup>1</sup>, which is currently being implemented, that promotes the humane, effective and sustainable return of irregular migrants and further places cooperation on voluntary return and reintegration in the context of the overall migration partnerships.

Another important development since our last exchange in March 2021 is the work done in the context of the implementation of the mechanism established by Article 25a of the revised Visa Code. Following the adoption by the Commission on 10 February 2021<sup>2</sup> of the first report assessing the level of third countries' cooperation on readmission in 2019, the Commission and the High Representative engaged with a number of third countries and intensified the dialogue on readmission at political, technical and operational level. For three third countries such

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2021) 120 final.

<sup>2</sup> COM(2021) 55 final EU RESTRICTED.

cooperation was considered not to be sufficient despite the additional steps taken by the EU. In the light of this, and taking into account the EU's overall relations with the relevant third countries, on 15 July 2021 the Commission proposed to the Council to adopt temporary measures on the suspension of certain provisions for the issuance of short-stay visa for applicants who are nationals of Bangladesh, Iraq and The Gambia<sup>3</sup>. In the following months, the Commission and the High Representative continued their intensified engagement with these third countries. Due to the lack of improvements of the cooperation with The Gambia, the Council adopted temporary measures on short stay visas for applicants who are nationals of The Gambia on 7 October 2021<sup>4</sup>. As a result of the enhanced engagement with Bangladesh, and taking into account the ensuing improvements made during the preceding months, in November the Council decided not to act upon the proposal on measures for Bangladesh. The Council is still considering the Commission's proposal for temporary measures on short-stay visas for Iraqi nationals.

On 21 December 2021, the Commission adopted the second report under the mechanism established by Article 25a of the revised Visa Code<sup>5</sup>. The report contains an assessment of the cooperation on readmission with 32 third countries in 2020. Based on the assessment and following discussions with Member States, the Commission and the High Representative will intensify the engagement with a number of these third countries to foster better cooperation on readmission.

As it was done following the adoption of the assessment report for the year 2019, my services took the necessary measures to allow LIBE Committee Members to read the assessment report.

Similar to previous occasions, please find in annex a detailed account of the state of play of our cooperation with third countries where readmission agreements or arrangements are in place, as well as information on financing.

I trust you will find the information provided in the annexes useful and that the LIBE Committee meeting of 1 February will provide us with a further opportunity to exchange views on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Monique PARIAT  
*[e-signed]*

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<sup>3</sup> COM(2021) 413 final, COM (2021) 412 final, and COM (2021) 414 final.

<sup>4</sup> Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1781 of 7 October 2021 on the suspension of certain provisions of Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council with respect to The Gambia, OJ L 360, 11.10.2021, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> COM(2021) 828 final, EU RESTRICTED.

## **Annex 1: Information regarding the implementation of existing EU readmission agreements and arrangements and ongoing negotiations (since the previous report to the LIBE committee)**

### **March 2021 to December 2021**

#### **1. Joint Readmission Committee and Joint Working Group meetings**

The restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic had an important impact on the feasibility of holding the regular Joint Readmission Committee (JRC) and Joint Working Group (JWG) meetings with partner countries.

The Commission remained in contact with third countries' authorities as much as possible over operational readmission matters and in some cases held JRC or JWG meetings by way of video conferencing:

- 15 June 2021, 3<sup>rd</sup> JWG with Ivory Coast,
- 29 June 2021, 7<sup>th</sup> JRC with Armenia,
- 20 July 2021, 7<sup>th</sup> JRC with Sri Lanka,
- 9 November 2021, 11<sup>th</sup> JRC with Georgia,
- 18 November 2021, 14<sup>th</sup> JRC with Ukraine,
- 26 November 2021, 7<sup>th</sup> JRC with Montenegro,
- 6 December 2021, 8<sup>th</sup> JRC with Bosnia and Herzegovina (in Sarajevo).

#### **2. EU readmission agreements - return and readmission data for 2020 and main outcomes of Joint Readmission Committee meetings**

##### **Turkey**

The **EU-Turkey readmission agreement** is still not respected in all its provisions by Turkey. Turkey remains on the position that it will not implement the third country nationals' clause until it is exempted from the Schengen short-stay visa obligation, and it also does not implement the agreement towards Cyprus concerning the prevention of irregular departures.

In the wider context of engagement on migration management dialogue with Turkey, which includes the EU-Turkey High Level Dialogue on Migration and Security of 12 October 2021 in Ankara, the Commission has been insisting to organise the regular meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee established by the agreement, but also that Turkey respects its bilateral readmission obligations with Greece, especially in the context of the arrivals via the land border.

In the absence of regular meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee, it is difficult to get a clear picture, including through statistics, of the level of cooperation on the readmission of Turkish nationals via the EU-Turkey readmission agreement. Reports from Member States nevertheless show that cooperation is uneven, with some Member States receiving more and quicker replies to readmission applications than others. The Commission continues to insist on regular meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee vis-à-vis Turkish authorities.

The **EU-Turkey Statement** remains of paramount importance in managing migration on the Eastern Mediterranean route, with Turkey continuing to make efforts to provide shelter and with the EU's financial support to host over 3.6 million Syrians and refugees from other countries.

The total number of irregular arrivals to Greece stood at 6 716 in the year 2021 up to 30 November, down by 51% from 13 611 in 2020.

The return operations under the EU-Turkey Statement remained suspended in the reporting period. Turkish authorities have not yet responded to inquiries as to when they would resume operations, despite repeated requests. The total number of readmitted persons under the EU-Turkey Statement stood at 2 133, including 412 Syrian nationals. In 2020, 139 irregular migrants returned from the Greek islands to Turkey.

### **Pakistan**

During the last meeting of the Joint Readmission Committee in February 2021, both sides agreed that it was in their mutual interest to return to the letter of the agreement in order to improve its implementation, and thereby providing clarity and predictability to the practitioners of both sides. Improvements should thus in particular be achieved regarding the respect of deadlines for replies, providing justifications in case of refusals and facilitating issuing of visas for escorts.

The second phase of the Readmission Case Management System (RCMS) project implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which entails the expansion of the system from the four pilot Member States (DE, BE, EL and FR) to all 14 Member States that expressed an interest to join the system, was finally launched in autumn 2021. The roll out of the RCMS in the additional Member States (and the Pakistani diplomatic missions in those countries) was again considerably delayed due to the unfavourable pandemic situation. However, at the time of writing, the system is operational in four additional Member States, and Pakistan and the IOM have agreed to work constructively together with a view to completing the roll-out of the system in the remaining Member States within the shortest possible time-frame.

### **Russia and Eastern Partnership countries**

Member States continue to report challenges in their cooperation with **Russia**, in particular the non-respect of time-limits set by the agreement and the refusal, on various pretexts, to readmit some individuals identified as Russian nationals (transliteration errors in Cyrillic, unregistered people following the overhaul of population registers, etc.). After a marked slowdown in recent years of effective returns, cooperation on readmission has slowly picked up again even though Russia continues to make the implementation of the agreement more difficult with, for example, new requirements for visas for escorts. No date has been set for the next meeting of the Joint Readmission Committee as Russia insists that it should take place in person (the last meeting was held on 22 November 2019).

During the 11<sup>th</sup> EU-**Georgia** Joint Readmission Committee meeting, held in November 2021 via videoconference, Member States commended Georgia's excellent cooperation on return and readmission, which continued to be very satisfactory despite the pandemic. The good cooperation was also reflected in the increase of the issuance rate of travel documents to 74% in 2020 (compared to 71% in 2019). Member States generally deem cooperation excellent, also thanks to a performant Readmission Case Management System (used by 19 Member States). Georgia is undertaking significant efforts to prevent irregular migration, including through the

revised Entry-Exit Law that entered into force in January 2021, and close bilateral cooperation on border management with individual Member States. Nevertheless, the high number of unfounded asylum applications and Georgian nationals involved in organised crime remain a concern for several Member States.

The seventh meeting of the EU-**Armenia** Joint Readmission Committee meeting held in June 2021 via videoconference, confirmed the good implementation of the readmission agreement. Member States continue to express overall satisfaction. Despite having suspended returns for a few months at the very beginning of the pandemic, and a poorly performing health sector, Armenia continued to readmit its nationals without obstacles. In 2020, the issuance rate of travel documents decreased to 57% as compared to 68% in 2019. The Readmission Case Management System, which has been developed with the help of the EU in 2018, is now used by eight Member States.

Regarding **Azerbaijan**, the level of cooperation decreased, with a decline of the issuance rate for travel documents to 41% in 2020 (as compared to 54% in 2019) and a corresponding decrease in effective returns. Return operations were suspended in the beginning of 2020 due to the pandemic and continued for almost one year. An EU-funded project to develop a Readmission Case Management System is underway, and entered its testing phase in 2021. The written exchange for the sixth Joint Readmission Committee meeting has been ongoing since October 2020.

The cooperation on readmission with **Moldova** continued to work well, which was also reflected in an increase of the issuance rate for travel documents to 60% in 2020 (compared to 40% in 2019). The number of asylum applications lodged by Moldovan nationals continued to be high (4 835 in 2020) and a point of concern for Member States. A meeting of the Joint Readmission Committee is envisaged in the first half of 2022.

As regards **Ukraine**, the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Joint Readmission Committee was conducted via videoconferencing in November 2021. The meeting confirmed the positive cooperation on readmission despite the pandemic conditions, as demonstrated by both the qualitative assessment from Member States, various statistical indicators and the successful rollout of the Readmission Case Management System. Specific issues related to the implementation of the agreement were addressed: travel documents for children born in EU Member States to Ukrainian parents; establishing Ukrainian nationality of the residents of Lugansk, Donetsk and Crimea; duration of the substitute travel document. The number of return decisions issued to Ukrainian nationals has dropped in 2020 (37 080 in 2019, 21 540 in 2020) and there was a notable decrease in effective returns in 2020 (27 200 in 2019, 11 292 in 2020).

On 2 December 2021, **Belarus** unilaterally suspended the EU-Belarus readmission agreement (in force since 1 July 2020). Cooperation has essentially stopped with most Member States in a marked reversal to previously good cooperation on readmission.

### **Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia**

The EU continued to ensure a successful performance of all existing EU readmission agreements with the Western Balkans countries, even though effective returns decreased. This can be attributed to the processing of increased volumes of decisions, a backlog in consecutive years and possibly secondary movements<sup>6</sup>, internal Member States' obstacles as well as the

<sup>6</sup> As pointed out in the third Report under the Visa Suspension Mechanism, COM(2020) 325 final.

restrictions in the EU and Western Balkan countries due to the pandemic. Member States continue to assess the cooperation on readmission with all Western Balkan countries as satisfactory and solid.

### **Cabo Verde**

Member States have regularly expressed their satisfaction with the level of cooperation on readmission from Cabo Verde. A fifth meeting of the EU-Cabo Verde Joint Readmission Committee is scheduled for the first half of 2022.

### **Sri-Lanka**

The 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Joint Readmission Committee took place in July 2021 via videoconference. The new version of Readmission Case Management System was launched in February 2020 and significantly contributed to improve the cooperation in the first months of the system's inception, with a positive response rate to readmission requests of 92% in 2020. Despite a drop in the issuance rate for travel documents and effective returns, which were due to pandemic-related restrictions and a nationwide lockdown, Member States express their satisfaction with the cooperation by the Sri Lankan authorities.

## **3. Ongoing negotiations of EU Readmission Agreements**

The Commission has directives to negotiate readmission agreements with Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, China, Jordan and Nigeria.

With the reinvigoration of political relations between the EU and **Morocco**, the parallel negotiations of a readmission agreement and a visa facilitation agreement, which have been on hold since 2015, could restart once all the conditions through the relaunch of the wider dialogue on migration and mobility are in place. The pandemic has slowed the possible holding of such dialogue, but suitable dates are being sought.

Negotiations with **Nigeria** restarted on 28 January 2021, honouring the commitment Nigeria made during the seventh Ministerial dialogue of 18 November 2020. Five rounds have followed in virtual format in quick succession, the last one of which was held on 18 March 2022. Since then, negotiations have again ground to a standstill, with Nigeria showing little openness towards compromise. In December 2021, Nigeria issued a moratorium on returns, due to the pandemic.

The negotiations with **Tunisia**, after good progress at technical level in 2018, have been on hold during the electoral period in 2019 and during 2020 due to the pandemic and the lack of stable interlocutors in the Tunisian administration. The Commission is seeking to relaunch the process in the framework of the wider dialogue on migration with the country.

As regards **Algeria**, negotiations never started. So far, exchanges on irregular migration mostly take place via the informal dialogue on migration, the sixth meeting of which was held virtually on 1 July 2021.

The negotiations on a readmission agreement with **Jordan** (and parallel visa facilitation agreement) never started and it seems unlikely that they will be re-launched in the foreseeable future.

While negotiating directives for an agreement on cooperation in combatting irregular immigration (including on readmission) with **China** were already adopted in November 2002, negotiations could only start in 2017, under the umbrella of the EU-China High Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility. Despite three rounds held to date (in December 2017, September 2018 and May 2019), the talks are still in an exploratory phase. The progress on the parallel negotiations of a visa facilitation agreement is equally slow. No new round of negotiations or meeting of the High Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility could take place since the beginning of the pandemic.

#### **4. EU readmission arrangements - Return and readmission data and main outcomes of Joint Working Groups**

##### **Afghanistan**

The Joint Declaration on Migration Cooperation was signed in April 2021. However, since the coming to power of the Taliban in August 2021, the situation in Afghanistan has been deemed clearly not safe for now and for the foreseeable future, hence the implementation of the Joint Declaration and of returns have been suspended.

##### **Bangladesh**

The implementation of the mechanism under Article 25a of the Visa Code in relation to the level of cooperation in the year 2019 led to the adoption by the Commission of a proposal for a Council implementing decision imposing visa measures on Bangladesh<sup>7</sup>.

The fifth EU-Bangladesh Joint Working Group meeting, which was held on 21 June, took stock of the implementation of the Standard Operation Procedures on readmission, notably in the context of the ongoing Visa Code mechanism process. The EU passed a clear messages on the progress expected in readmission cooperation in order to avoid possible restrictive measures. Bangladesh responded constructively and pledged to continue engaging to achieve such progress, despite the difficulties they face due to the pandemic restrictions, shortage of staff and technical difficulties with the Readmission Case Management System. Both parties committed also to hold the Joint Working Group meetings more frequently, i.e. every 6 months in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures, while meeting frequently also at technical level to discuss the caseload and clarify any possible issues.

Based on the improved readmission cooperation and in the implementation of the Standard Operation Procedures, the Council decided in November not to adopt restrictive measures in relation to Bangladesh. The Commission will continue to closely monitor readmission cooperation by Bangladesh, to ensure that improvements are sustained.

##### **Ethiopia**

Cooperation on identification and issuance of travel documents following the EU arrangement “Admission Procedures for the Return of Ethiopians from European Union Member States” agreed on 5 February 2018 has proven difficult. These issues have been discussed during the Joint Working Group meetings of 13 May and 28 November 2019 and a technical meeting in

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<sup>7</sup> COM(2021) 412 final.

March 2020, with the new Ethiopian administration who assured that problems would be addressed.

In 2020, the effective enforcement of return decisions dropped to 14% with 1 100 return decision issued and 155 enforced (against to 17%, in 2019, with 1 415 return decision issued and 240 returns).

Return operations were effectively on hold between September and October 2020, as Ethiopia informed that it was not in a position to accept returns due to the pandemic. While return operations were possible for a limited number of cases which were cleared before the pandemic, Ethiopia has not restarted processing readmission requests leading to an increase in the existing backlog. The arrangements agreed between the Commission and the relevant Ethiopian agency on alternative solutions to COVID-19 related restrictions towards returnees, were not honoured.

Following the spread over of the inter-state conflict and state of emergency declared in November 2021, the political engagement with Ethiopian authorities is re-examined in this context.

### **Guinea**

The readmission arrangement with Guinea “Good practices for the efficient operation of the return procedure” is applicable since July 2017. Following a steep decrease in the arrivals of Guinean nationals in 2019 (dropping to 846 from over 13 000 in 2018 and 2017), the number of illegal border crossings gradually increased over 2020 and January-October 2021, with respectively 1 113 and 2 379 detected arrivals. The number of return decisions and effective returns has decreased with respectively 9 695 return decisions and 275 returns in 2019 and 6 895 return decisions and 170 returns in 2020. The level of enforcement of return decisions remains low, 3% in 2019 and 2% in 2020.

Four Joint Working Group meetings have taken place since the signature of the arrangement. Following the coup d'état of 5 September 2021, the political engagement with Guinea is being re-examined in this context.

### **The Gambia**

Compared to 2019 (12%), the level of enforcement of return decisions has decreased in 2020 to 7%, mainly due to a drop in the orders to leave (2 765 Gambian nationals who have no right to stay in Member States, were issued return decisions and 195 effectively returned to The Gambia). At the same time, the number of persons to be returned has been accumulating over the years in EU Member States given the moratorium imposed by the Gambian authorities on all forced returns from the EU and further limitations since. On 6 April 2021, the Gambian authorities indicated that the country was not in a position to receive returnees until further notice, and in June 2021, they confirmed the existence of ‘a moratorium on forced return or repatriation until after the elections in December 2021.

As a result, the EU readmission arrangement “Good Practices on identification and return”, which is applicable since 16 November 2018 has hardly been tested. The EU has been engaging continuously with the Gambian authorities to move towards a resumption of return flights, taking account of both the capacity concerns on the Gambian side and the needs of the EU Member States to return Gambian nationals illegally staying in the EU.

Against this background, since cooperation on readmission with The Gambia was considered insufficient, and taking into account the EU overall relations with this country, the Commission



proposed to the Council to adopt temporary measures on the suspension of certain provisions for the issuance of short-stay visa for applicants who are nationals of The Gambia, in accordance with Article 25a of the Visa Code. The Council adopted this implementing decision on 7 October 2021 and the restrictive measures are in force as of 1 November 2021. The Commission will monitor the impact of these measures on readmission cooperation and will report to the European Parliament and to the Council on progress achieved.

### **Ivory Coast**

The readmission arrangement with the Ivory Coast is applied since October 2018. The arrival of irregular migrants has remained high over the last years, even though it decreased from over 13 000 in 2017 to 1 500 in 2019, with a slight increase again in the last 2 years (2 225 in 2020 and 3 339 in January-October 2021). Prior to the pandemic, the number of return orders increased every year, reaching 8 290 in 2019; it fell to 5 625 in 2020. Similarly, the number of effective returns gradually increased until 2019, reaching 295, before dropping to 120 in 2020. This tendency is reflected in the level of enforcement of return decisions, which decreased from 4% in 2019 to 2% in 2020.

Three Joint Working Group meetings have taken place to date, the last one on 15 June 2021. On that occasion, the Commission introduced the advantages of setting up a Readmission Case Management System, which the Ivory Coast considered interesting for further exploring. However, more coherent and transparent procedures are required, as well as a more even cooperation with all the Member States. The fourth Joint Working Group meeting is set to take place in the first half of 2022.

## **Annex 2: Data on Irregular Border Crossing (source: Frontex)**

<b>Citizenship</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2020/2019 change</b>
Total	1.822.102	511.047	204.654	149.036	141.741	125.113	-12%
Syria	594.017	88.551	19.452	14.378	24.339	21.581	-11%
Afghanistan	267.480	54.366	7.576	12.666	34.154	10.089	-70%
Tunisia	1.061	1.368	6.520	5.230	2.799	13.191	371%
Algeria	3.331	5.140	7.443	6.101	5.314	13.247	149%
Bangladesh	13.098	9.445	9.384	2.043	2.254	5.414	140%
Morocco	12.966	6.836	11.279	13.498	8.020	17.121	113%
Somalia	17.694	8.244	3.332	1.537	3.297	2.052	-38%
Turkey	591	1.060	2.957	8.412	7.880	3.947	-50%
Pakistan	43.310	17.973	10.015	4.988	3.799	2.603	-31%
Sudan	9.661	9.515	6.325	2.128	1.907	1.832	-4%
Côte d'Ivoire	5.010	14.300	13.085	5.269	1.500	2.225	48%
Iraq	101.263	32.068	10.177	10.114	6.433	2.057	-68%
Mali	6.526	10.270	7.789	11.728	748	1.031	38%
Cameroon	3.040	4.417	4.117	3.028	2.354	1.151	-51%
Congo (Kinshasa)	828	471	331	1.838	3.070	842	-73%
Albania	9.459	5.475	7.401	4.593	2.055	1.429	-30%
Iran	24.662	6.605	1.662	2.127	3.478	1.602	-54%
Guinea	5.174	15.985	13.160	13.297	846	1.113	32%
Nigeria	23.605	37.811	18.310	1.611	871	888	2%
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.116	948	1.381	602	1.352	628	-54%
Eritrea	40.349	21.349	7.304	3.903	655	1.006	54%
Senegal	6.352	10.391	6.347	2.508	398	364	-9%
Libya	1.037	1.176	1.383	589	379	1.069	182%
Ghana	5.005	5.756	4.058	897	493	450	-9%
Gambia	8.874	12.927	8.522	2.780	394	279	-29%
Sierra Leone	445	1.617	1.375	502	231	310	34%

### **Annex 3: Information on the EU financing for return, readmission and related activities**

The EU provides support to Member States both financially, under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), and operationally, via the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).

#### **Funding implemented by the Member States**

There is no minimum funding requirement for Member States in the field of returns and readmission, nor any specific funding allocation for the implementation of EU readmission agreements. Member States are responsible for the execution of all phases of the return process and allocate financial resources accordingly.

Under the AMIF national programmes for 2014-2020 Member States have, out of the EUR 7 billion budget available<sup>8</sup>, together allocated just over EUR 1 billion towards the specific objective of enhancing fair and effective return strategies which contribute to combating illegal immigration, with an emphasis on sustainability of return and effective readmission in the countries of origin and transit. This funding covers various return-related activities for that programming period, including for reintegration.

This AMIF funding also includes support for Member States' national return efforts and for specific joint European initiatives (in particular the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN), the European Integrated Return Management Initiative (EURINT), and the European Return Liaison Officers Network (EURLO)).

#### **Funding implemented by the Commission (direct and indirect management)**

Regarding support programmed by the Commission and implemented by indirect management, this includes funding for readmission, under the Readmission Capacity Building Facility<sup>9</sup> (EURCAP), in which a total of EUR 38.5 million in financial support was provided over the period 2014-2020 to countries with which the EU is seeking to improve readmission cooperation. The Facility, implemented operationally by the IOM, intervenes in the areas relevant to the successful preparation and implementation of readmission agreements/commitments with priority third countries (such as the Readmission Case Management Systems for Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Azerbaijan, or government capacity building in the area of migration management as in The Gambia). Such tools have so far proved successful in improving the effectiveness and transparency of the readmission cooperation and processes.

#### **Operational assistance offered by EU Agencies ('Frontex')**

Related to operational assistance to Member States, a total of EUR 57.5 million were allocated to return support activities under the 2021 European Border and Coast Guard Agency ('Frontex') budget.

Funding under the Frontex budget enables the Agency to provide operational assistance to Member States on several aspects of return, notably pre-return measures, carrying out return operations, as well as post-return measures, including reintegration support. This assistance covers the organisation of identification missions, exchange of return experts (counsellors and

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<sup>8</sup> This amount reflects the AMIF's actual budget for the 2014-2020 period after top-ups and de-commitments.

<sup>9</sup> More information is publicly available at: <https://eea.iom.int/eurcap>.

consular engagement), organisation of scheduled and charter flights (including with the support of escorts and forced-return monitors), provide technical support to partner country authorities in readmission processes, and provide guidelines and training for return operations for the authorities and staff in both EU and the partner countries.

In mid-2022, Frontex will take over the activities of the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN). This will ensure that the benefits of the Network are extended equally to all Member States. Frontex will provide support in organising tailored return and reintegration assistance to returnees, notably through providers of reintegration services in third countries.

To prepare, Frontex is currently developing and piloting its reintegration support through the Joint Reintegration Services (JRS) pilot which started in May 2021. This pilot paves the way for the full operationalisation of the Agency's mandate on assisted voluntary return and reintegration.