

# Data on returns of irregular migrants

The [Return Directive](#) is the main piece of EU legislation applied to return procedures. Under this directive, Member States shall generally issue a return decision (an administrative or judicial decision imposing an obligation to leave the territory of Member States) against every third-country national (TCN) found to be irregularly present in their territory. A [proposal](#) to recast the EU Return Directive is currently being discussed within the European Parliament and the Council. This infographic aims to provide relevant data on the EU return policy.

## Enforcement of return decisions

The graphs in Figure 1 show the evolution in the number of third-country nationals found to be irregularly present in the territory of the Member States and the share among them of children (under 18 years old). Only persons who are detected by national authorities are recorded in these figures, thus they do not reflect the total number of persons present in the EU on an unauthorised basis. The graph shows a clear peak in 2015, a year in which detections of irregular border crossings of the EU's external borders also [peaked](#), according to Frontex data. The bar at the bottom shows the top nationalities of third-country nationals found to be irregularly present in the territory of Member States in 2017.

Figure 1: TCNs found to be irregularly present in the EU



Data source: Eurostat.

Figure 2 shows the evolution in the number of third-country nationals ordered to leave the territory of the Member States and the number of those effectively returned to a third country. These numbers do not include persons who are transferred from one Member State to another under the [Dublin Regulation](#). A substantial gap can be seen between the two figures, suggesting the difficulties national authorities face when enforcing return decisions.



Data source: Eurostat.

Figure 3: TCNs ordered to leave and effectively returned by Member State (2017)

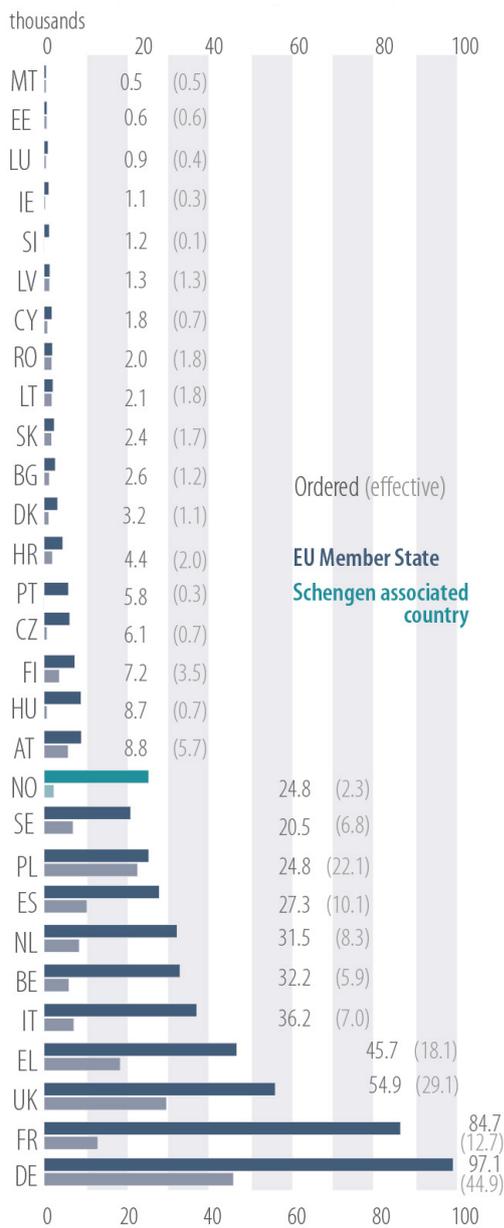
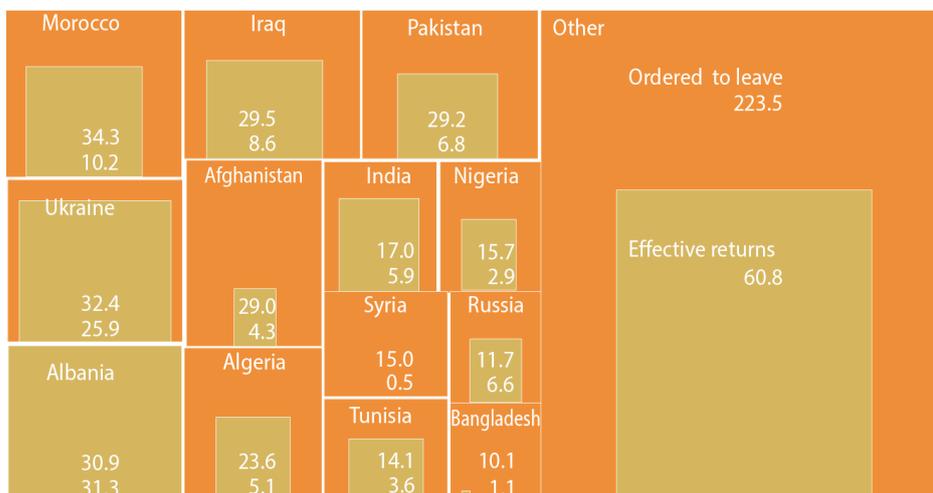


Figure 3 shows the number of third-country nationals ordered to leave and those effectively returned to third countries by each Member State in 2017. Data for Norway are also included, as it is a Schengen associated country and is bound by the [EU Return Directive](#). Data for the other three Schengen associated countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) are not available. Data from the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark are included, even though they are not bound by the EU Return Directive.

The chart in Figure 4 shows the top nationalities of third-country nationals ordered to leave the territory of the Member States and of those effectively returned to a third country in 2017. There are substantial differences in the percentages of third-country nationals effectively returned depending on their nationalities suggesting a more collaborative approach in return procedures from certain countries of origin as well as the existence of specific country situations preventing the enforcement of return decisions issued against their citizens. In some cases, the number of third-country nationals effectively returned within a year is higher than the number ordered to leave (e.g. Albania), a situation that is explained by the fact that return decisions may be enforced in a year later than that of their adoption.

Data source: Eurostat, Eurostat.

Figure 4: Top nationalities of TCNs ordered to leave and effectively returned from the EU in 2017 (in thousands)



Data source: Eurostat, Eurostat.

## Voluntary return and assisted return

Third-country nationals subject to a return decision may voluntarily comply with the obligation to return (voluntary return) or be forced to leave the territory of Member States (forced return), as provided for under the EU Return Directive and national implementing laws. In either case, they may benefit from programmes aiming to encourage return and to provide reintegration assistance (assisted return). Data on voluntary/forced and assisted/non-assisted return are scarce and incomplete, as Eurostat collects them on a voluntary basis since 2014, and consequently are not available for several Member States.

Figure 5 shows the number of persons returned from Member States on both voluntary and forced basis. The one on the left is based on Eurostat data and does not include figures for seven Member States, including countries relevant from the point of view of returns – the United Kingdom, Germany and Greece. The right-hand side chart is based on Frontex data including figures for all Member States and three Schengen associated countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland). Figure 6 shows the number of voluntary and forced returns<sup>1</sup> concluded from certain Member States in 2017. Data are not available for seven Member States. However, lack of data should not be interpreted in the sense that that Member State resorts only to forced returns.

Figure 5: Discrepancies in the numbers of voluntary and forced returns from the EU

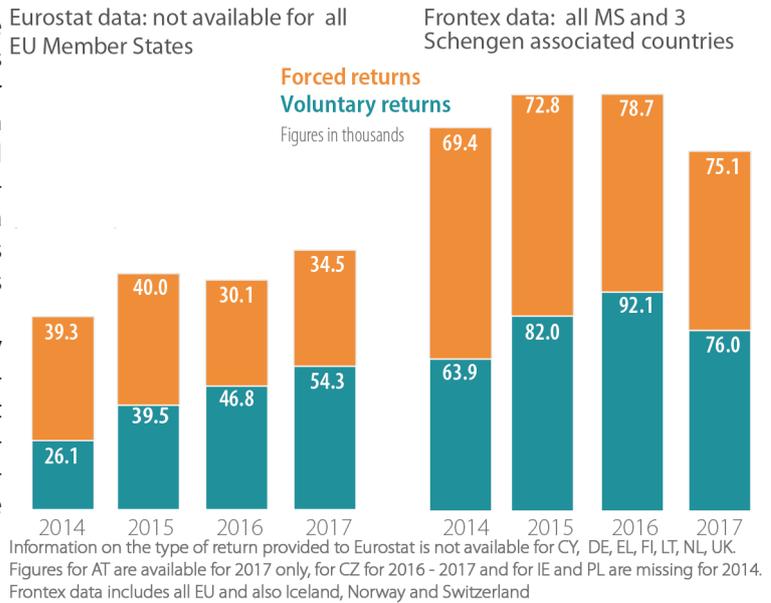
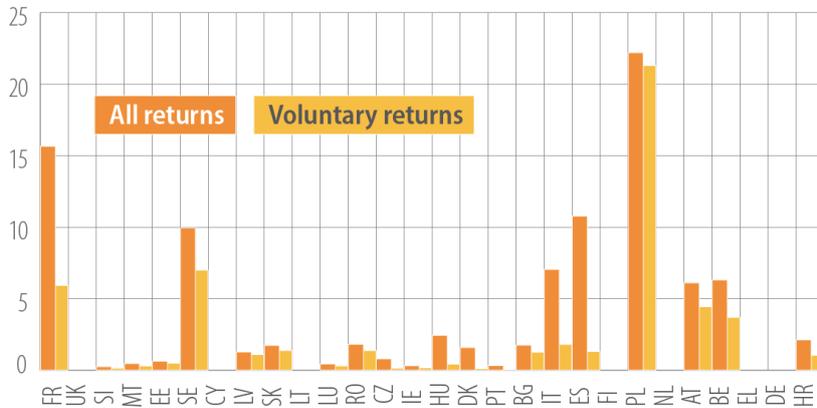


Figure 6: Voluntary and forced returns in 2017 (in thousands)



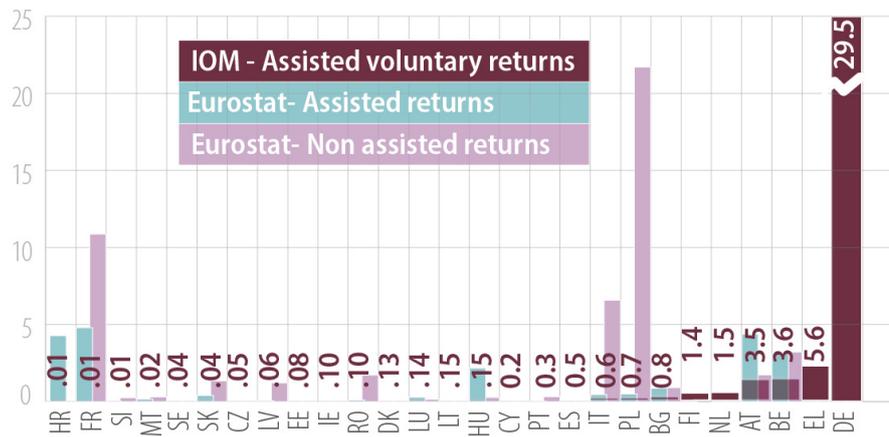
Data source: Eurostat, Frontex.

Figure 7 shows the number of assisted and non-assisted returns<sup>1</sup> concluded from certain Member States in 2017. Data sources are Eurostat (that does not provide information for 11 Member States) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which collects data on its assisted voluntary return programmes.

Data source: Eurostat.

However, these figures do not represent the total amount of assisted returns from Member States as data are collected on a voluntary basis. Member States may also implement national assisted return programmes that are not recorded in the statistics of these institutions.

Figure 7: Assisted and non-assisted returns in 2017 (in thousands)

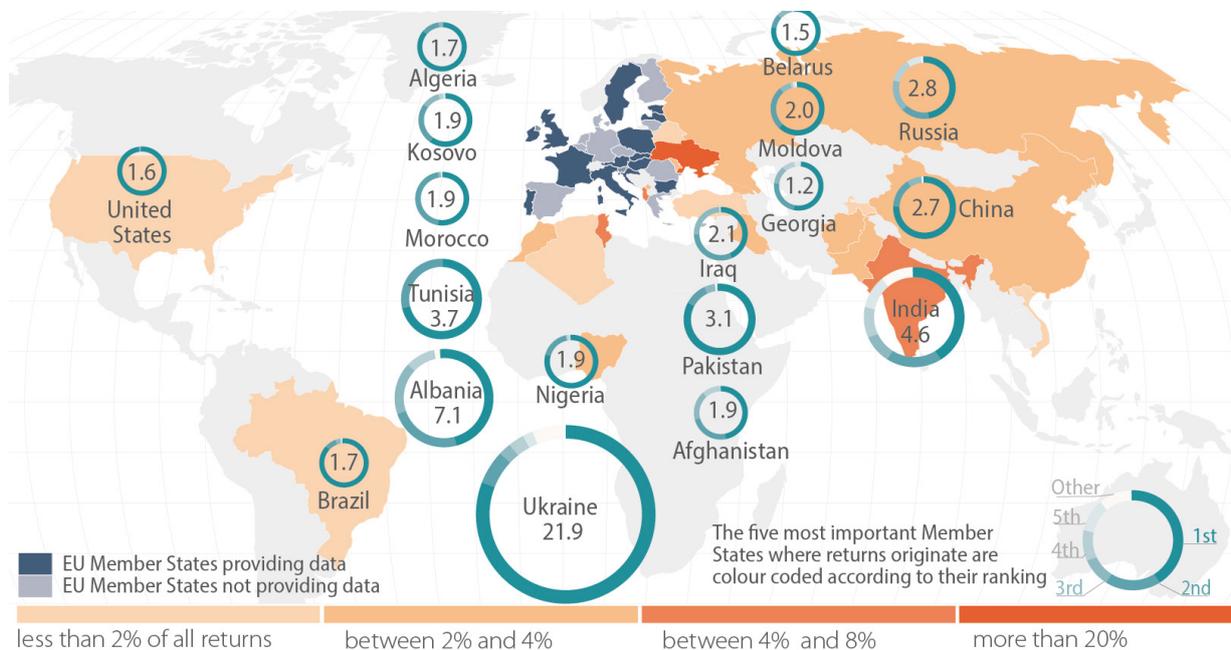


Data source: Eurostat, IOM.

## Data on returns by main countries of destination

Eurostat provides information on third-country nationals effectively returned from certain Member States by country of destination. The country of destination might not be the returnee’s country of nationality as they can also be returned to a country of transit or to other third countries under certain circumstances as provided for in the [EU Return Directive](#).

Figure 8: Countries of destination of returns from the EU in 2017 (in thousands)



Data source: Eurostat.

The map shows the main countries of destination of third-country nationals effectively returned from the European Union in 2017 as reported to Eurostat by 17 Member States. Ukraine is the main country of destination for returnees from the Member States providing data, followed by Albania, India, Tunisia and Pakistan. The EU has concluded readmission agreements with all of them except India and Tunisia.<sup>2</sup> The numbers of effective returns to these main countries of destination are not aligned with the numbers of third-country nationals effectively returned by country of nationality, as showed in Figure 4. The discrepancy might be due to the absence of data from 11 Member States or to the possible enforcement of return decisions to countries that are not the country of nationality of the returnee.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Data on type of return and assistance are incomplete or not available for CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, IE, LT, NL, SE, UK.

<sup>2</sup> The EU has concluded readmission agreements with [Hong Kong](#), [Macao](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Albania](#), [Russia](#), [Ukraine](#), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [North Macedonia](#), [Montenegro](#), [Serbia](#), [Moldova](#), [Pakistan](#), [Georgia](#), [Armenia](#), [Azerbaijan](#), [Turkey](#) and [Cape Verde](#), and has readmission arrangements (non-binding) with [six other countries](#) (Afghanistan, Guinea, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire).

**Country codes:** Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Malta (MT), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), United Kingdom (UK).

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