

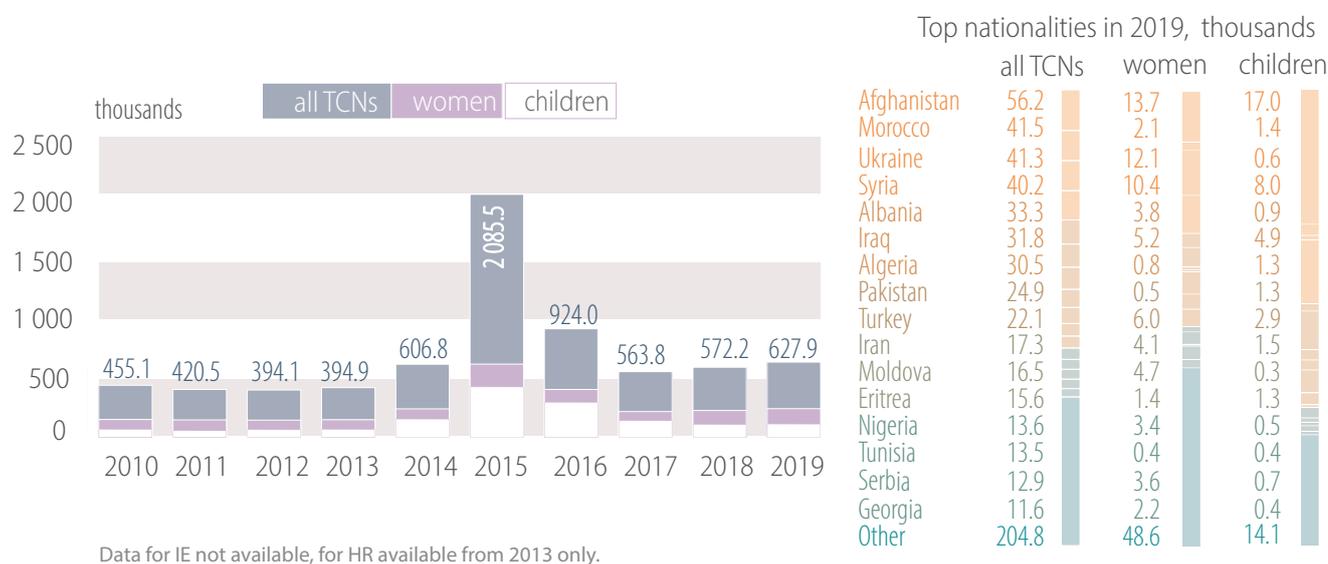
Data on returns of irregular migrants

The [Return Directive](#) is the main piece of EU legislation governing return procedures. In general terms, under this directive, Member States must issue a return decision (an administrative or judicial decision imposing an obligation to leave the territory) for every third-country national found to be irregularly present on their territory. A [proposal](#) to recast the EU Return Directive is currently under discussion in the European Parliament and in Council. This infographic sets out the key data relating to EU return policy.

Enforcement of return decisions

Figure 1 shows the evolution in the number of third-country nationals found to be irregularly present in the territory of the EU 27 and the share among them of women and children (persons under the age of 18, as set out in Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Only people detected by national authorities are recorded in these figures, which are not therefore intended to reflect the total number of people present in the EU on an unauthorised basis. The table on the right shows the top nationalities of third-country nationals (TCNs) found to be irregularly present on the territory of the EU 27 in 2019, with disaggregated information relating to women and children.

Figure 1 – TCNs found to be irregularly present in the EU and main countries of origin in 2019

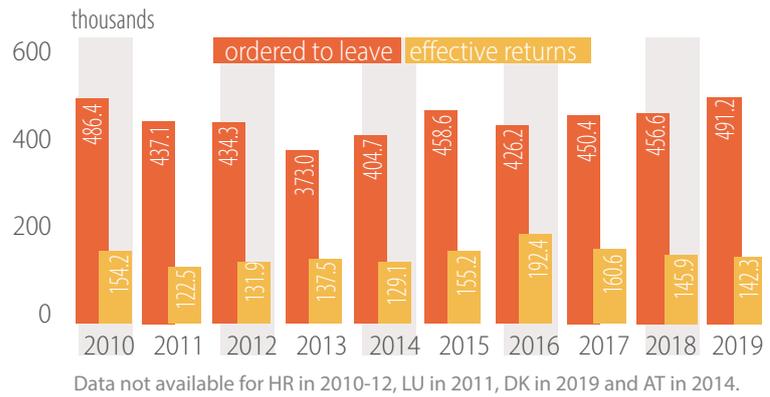


Migration patterns differ across countries of origin and they change according to population group. Therefore, although Afghanistan topped the country of origin rankings for all three groups, when looking at women only, Ukraine was in second place with more than 12 100 women, followed by Syria, with just below 10 400. For children, meanwhile, the second most important country of origin was Syria, with more than 8 000 children, followed by Iraq with almost 5 000.

This is an update of a [briefing](#) from April 2019.

Figure 2 shows the evolution in the numbers of third-country nationals ordered to leave the territory of the EU and of those effectively returned to a third country. As the chart shows, the number of return decisions issued by EU Member States between 2010 and 2019 remained relatively constant at about 0.5 million a year, although with slight peaks in 2010 and 2019. Similarly, the number of effective returns has trailed behind at a yearly rate of 0.2 million since 2010.

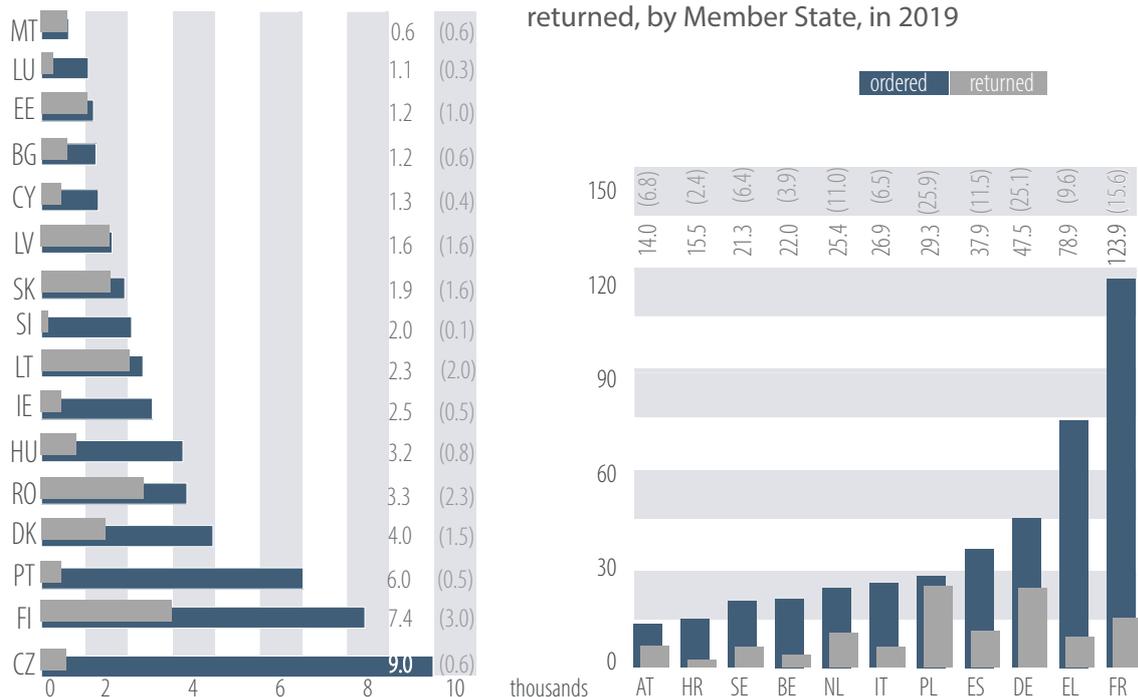
Figure 2 – TCNs ordered to leave and effective returns



Although the number increased in 2015 and 2016, it has since then followed a downward path. As a result, the EU's return rate was 33.8% in 2015, rising to 45.8% in 2016, and then falling to 36.6% in 2017, 31.9% in 2018 and 28.9% in 2019. These percentages reflect the difficulties national authorities face when trying to enforce return decisions. It should be noted that these numbers do not include people who are transferred from one Member State to another under the [Dublin Regulation](#).

Figure 3a shows the number of third-country nationals ordered to leave and those effectively returned to third countries by each Member State in 2019. Although for most Member States there is a clear gap between the data on third-country nationals ordered to leave and those effectively returned, the return rates of Member States differed widely in 2019, with some Member States approaching a 100% return rate (e.g. Malta, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Poland) and others ranging around 10% (e.g. Czechia with a return rate of 6.5%, Portugal with 7.8%, Greece with 12.2%, France with 12.6% and Croatia with 15.4%). The reasons for these differences are manifold and include national authorities' ability to ensure cooperation from returnees' countries of origin, and the willingness of transit countries or third countries to accept returnees from Member States. In addition, it should be noted that return rates can vary significantly from one year to another in certain Member States (e.g. Greece had a return rate of 39.5% in 2017, 21.4% in 2018 and 12.2% in 2019) and that return decisions may be enforced but not in the year they were adopted.

Figure 3a – TCNs ordered to leave and effectively returned, by Member State, in 2019



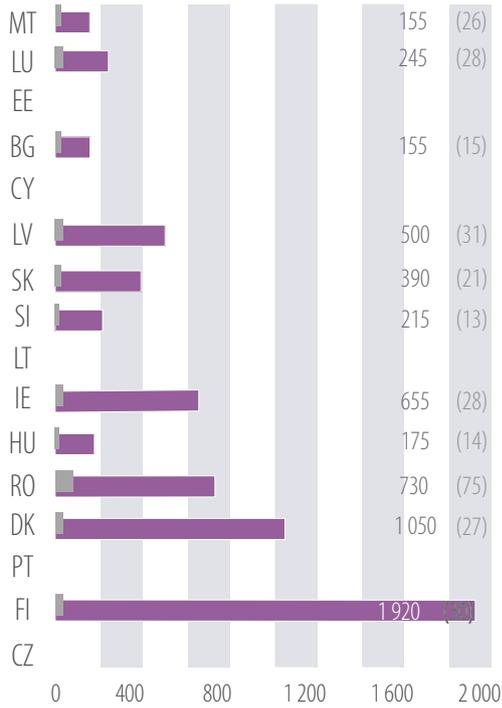
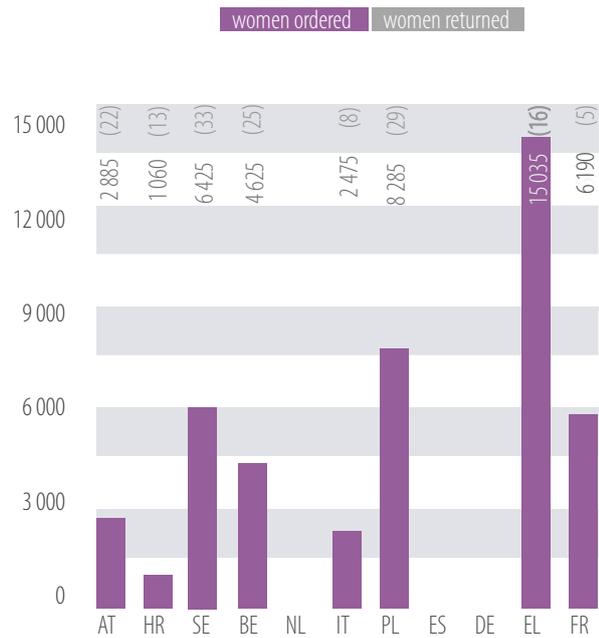


Figure 3b – Women from third countries ordered to leave and effectively returned in 2019



Figures 3b and 3c show the number of women and children from third countries ordered to leave and effectively returned by each Member State in 2019. The collection of data disaggregated by age and sex began in 2018 and this data is not available for all EU countries. The information collected shows that return decisions affecting women are hardly ever implemented, whereas those relating to children are implemented in some Member States. However, there is no information regarding the number of children who were unaccompanied and who therefore had to be returned necessarily 'to a member of his or her family, a nominated guardian or adequate reception facilities in the State of return', in accordance with Article 10 of the current Return Directive.

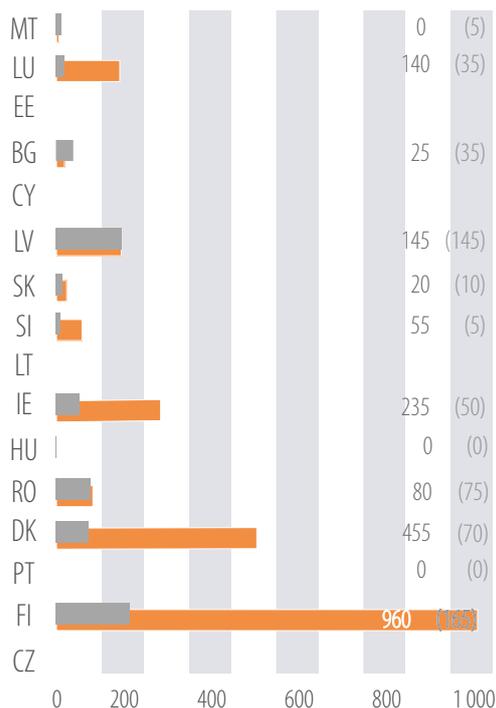


Figure 3c – Children (under 18 year of age) from third countries, ordered to leave and effectively returned in 2019

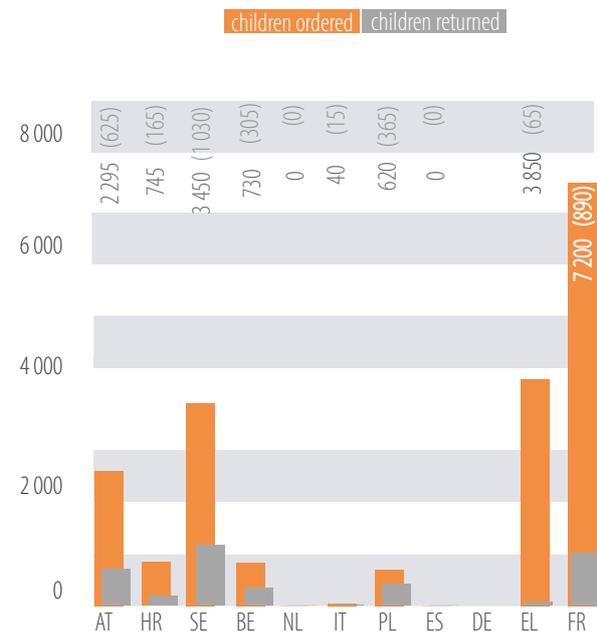


Figure 4 – Top nationalities of TCNs ordered to leave and effectively returned in 2019

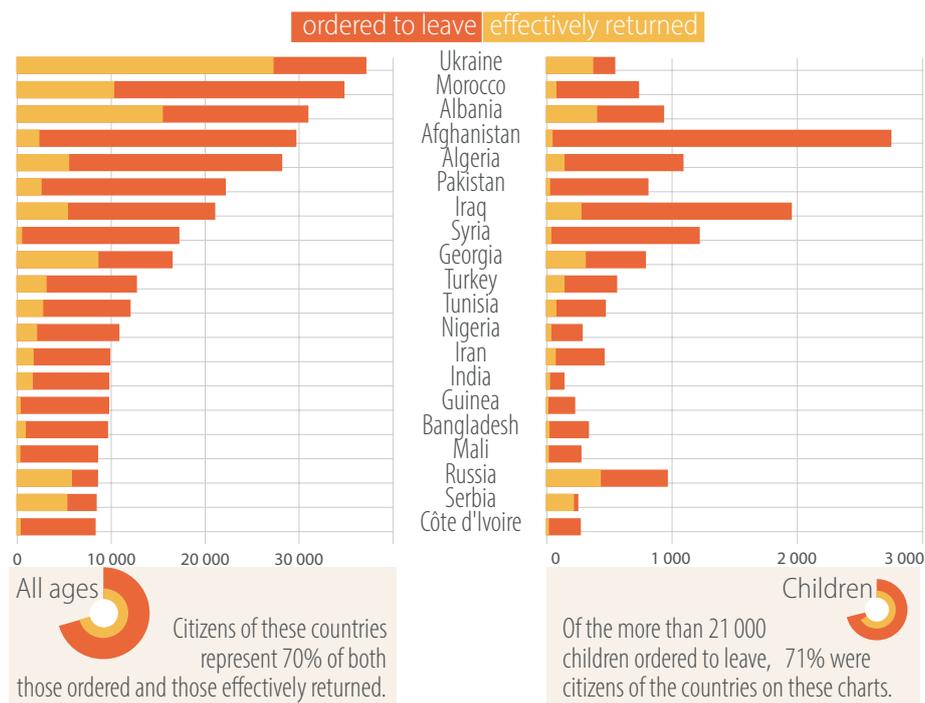


Figure 4 charts the top 20 nationalities of all third-country nationals ordered to leave the territory of the EU and of those effectively returned to a third country, as well as the top nationalities of children from third countries ordered to leave and effectively returned in 2019. There are substantial differences in the percentages of third-country nationals effectively returned depending on their nationalities, suggesting a more collaborative approach to return procedures on the part of certain countries of origin, and also the reality of the situations in specific countries preventing the enforcement of return decisions issued against their citizens (e.g. Afghanistan and Syria). Furthermore, there are also significant differences between data corresponding to all third-country nationals and those regarding children. Here, it is noteworthy that the top four countries of origin of third-country national children ordered to leave the EU in 2019 were Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Algeria, whereas for ordered returns of children and adults taken together these top positions were occupied by Ukraine, Morocco, Albania and Afghanistan.

Voluntary return and assisted return

Third country nationals subject to a return decision can either voluntarily comply with the obligation to return (voluntary departure) or be forced to leave (enforced return), as provided for under the EU Return Directive and national implementing laws. Figure 5 shows the number of total and voluntary returns from selected Member States. Data is not available for eight Member States, including countries such as Greece and Germany that are relevant from the point of view of returns. However, a lack of data cannot be interpreted to mean that the Member State concerned resorts only to forced returns, as Eurostat collects these figures on a voluntary basis.

Figure 5 – Voluntary and forced returns from selected Member States in 2019

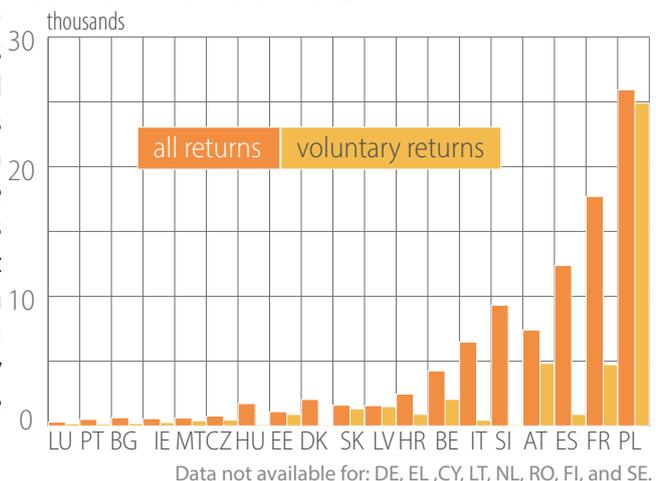
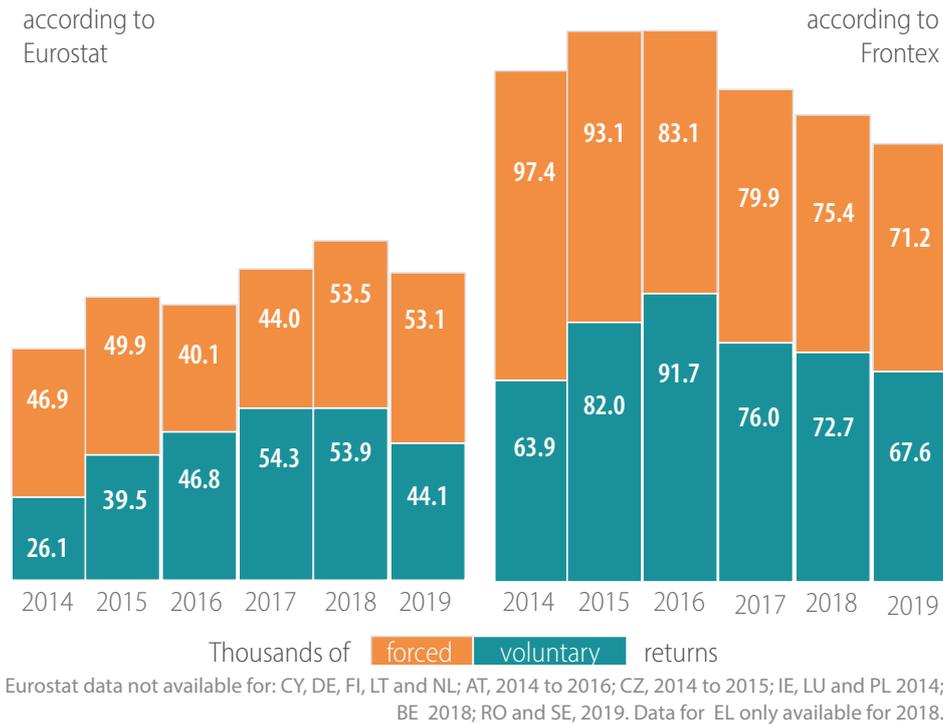


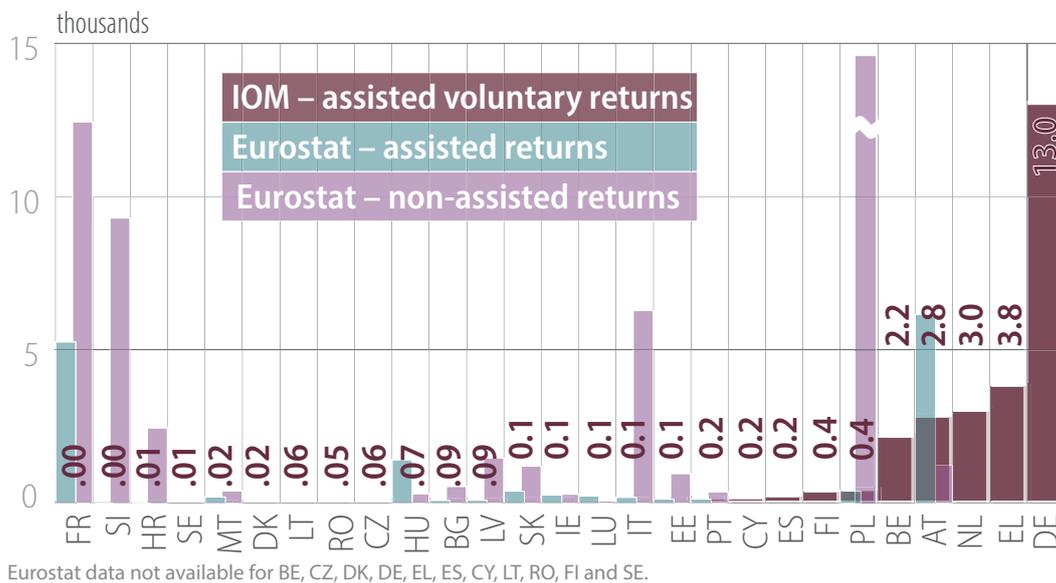
Figure 6 – Discrepancies in the numbers of voluntary and forced returns



The charts in Figure 6 show the number of people returned from the EU on both a voluntary and a forced basis. The left-hand chart is based on Eurostat data and does not include figures for five Member States, including countries relevant from the point of view of returns, such as Germany, and includes information from other Member States only for some years (e.g. Greece only for 2018). The right-hand chart is based on Frontex data and includes figures for all Member States, the United Kingdom and three Schengen associated countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland).

Figure 7 shows the number of assisted and non-assisted returns concluded from certain Member States in 2019. The data sources are Eurostat – which does not provide information for 11 Member States – and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – which collects data on its assisted voluntary return programmes. However, these figures do not represent the total number of assisted returns from Member States, as data are collected on a voluntary basis by Eurostat and IOM, and 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 2019

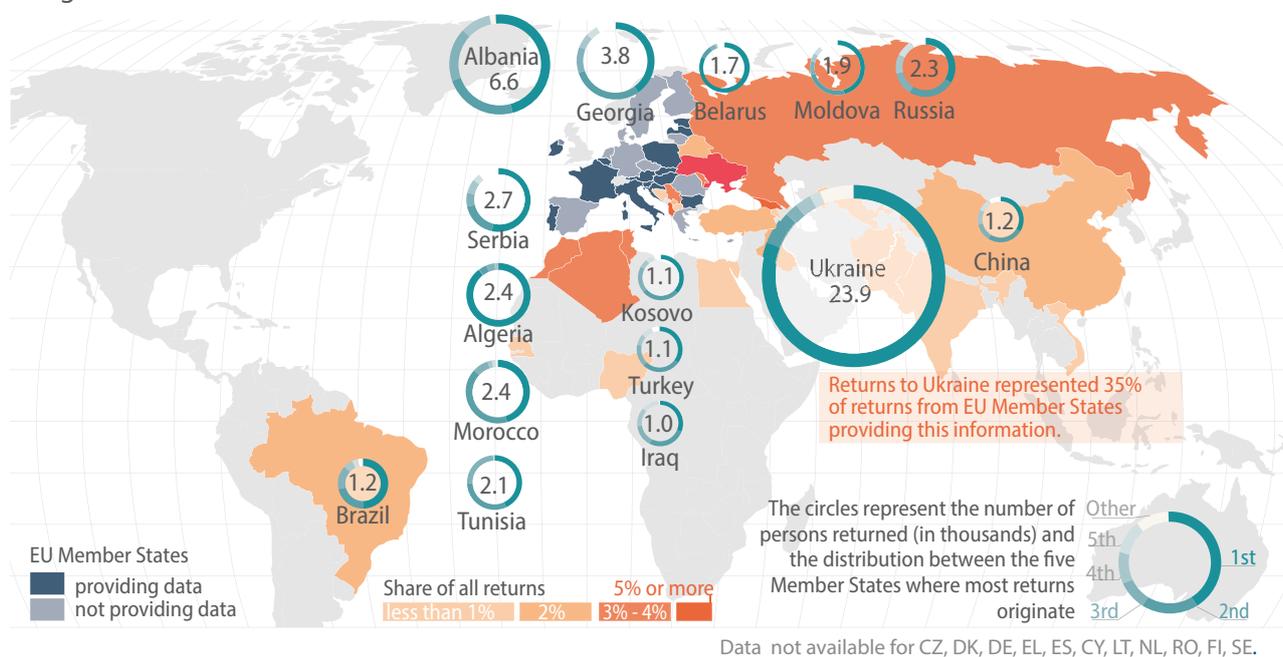


Data on returns by main countries of destination

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 another third country under the circumstances provided for in Article 3 of the [EU Return Directive](#).

The map in Figure 8 shows the main countries of destination of third-country nationals effectively returned from the European Union in 2019 as reported to Eurostat by 16 Member States. The third countries highlighted on the map represent more than 90% of all returns from Member States providing data, with Ukraine as the main country of destination for returnees followed by Albania, Georgia, Serbia, Algeria, Morocco and Russia. The EU has concluded readmission agreements with all of them except Algeria and Morocco,¹ although with this last country there is an informal agreement in the form of a mobility partnership.² Discrepancies between the numbers of effective returns to these main countries of destination and the numbers of third-country nationals effectively returned by country of nationality, as shown in Figure 4, may 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.

Figure 8 – Countries of destination of returns from a number of EU Member States in 2019



Sources:

Figure 1: [Eurostat \[migr_eipre\]](#). Figure 2: [Eurostat \[migr_eirtn\]](#), [\[migr_eiord\]](#). Figures 3a, 3b, 3c: [Eurostat \[migr_eiord\]](#), [\[migr_eirtn\]](#). Figure 4: [Eurostat \[migr_eiord\]](#), [\[migr_eirtn\]](#). Figure 5: [Eurostat, \[migr_eirt_vol\]](#). Figure 6: [Eurostat, Frontex](#). Figure 7: [Eurostat, IOM](#). Figure 8: [Eurostat \[migr_eirt_des\]](#).

Notes:

¹The EU has concluded formal readmission agreements with [Hong Kong](#), [Macao](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Albania](#), [Russia](#), [Ukraine](#), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [North Macedonia](#), [Montenegro](#), [Serbia](#), [Moldova](#), [Pakistan](#), [Georgia](#), [Armenia](#), [Azerbaijan](#), [Turkey](#), [Cape Verde](#) and [Belarus](#). It has also made informal (non-binding) readmission arrangements with a number of countries. Frontex, meanwhile, has also secured agreements aiming to facilitate the readmission of returnees. For a recent analysis of these different types of agreements, see: European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, [The Return Directive 2008/115/EC](#), June 2020, pp.165-189.

² See [Joint declaration establishing a Mobility Partnership between the Kingdom of Morocco and the European Union and its Member States](#), 3 June 2013.

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

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