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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Presidency discussion paper on promoting the use of liaison officers to improve readmission cooperation

Delegations will find below the above-mentioned Presidency discussion paper for the forthcoming Integration, Migration and Expulsion (IMEX Expulsion) working party meeting on 24 April 2023.

**PRESIDENCY DISCUSSION PAPER ON PROMOTING THE USE OF LIAISON
OFFICERS TO IMPROVE READMISSION COOPERATION**

Having an effective return policy has been a long-standing objective for the EU. Third country cooperation is essential for successful return and readmission policy and one of the tools to foster such cooperation is the use of the liaison officers. Frontex is operating a network of the European Return Liaison Officers (EURLOs), which helps to facilitate the local contacts and contribute to successful implementation of returns. They are also part of the European network of immigration liaison officers (the ILO Network). Delegations are invited to consult the note in the annex prepared by Frontex, which outlines the EURLO activities, deployment process and current/future deployments.

Sweden has recently taken some innovative approaches to using liaison officers through ARLO project (Ambulating Return Liaison Officers/Rapid Deployment Officers), which tested a new concept of having rapid deployment officers deployed from the Swedish police to the key third countries for a short assignment, lasting from a few days up to three months. At the forthcoming Integration, Migration and Expulsion (IMEX Expulsion) working party meeting delegations will have an opportunity to hear more about the project from its authors.

At this meeting the Presidency would like to invite delegations to reflect and share their views on the following questions:

- *Are your current priority countries/regions in the area of return covered by the existing locations of EURLO deployments? If not, which are the third countries where you consider a EURLO deployment could be valuable?*
- *Would a EURLO help you strengthening the cooperation on return with a country/region? If not, why?*

- *What factors (i.e. administrative, operational, etc) could limit your capacity and/or willingness to deploy an EURLO and what would help raising your interest? What kind of additional support would you expect from Frontex?*
 - *Do you have national return liaison officers, and how do their activities connect to those of EURLOs//EMLOs?*
 - *Could the rapid deployment officers, as tested through ARLO project, be a new and effective way of working, which could be replicated by other MS, or eventually at the EU level?*
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BACKGROUND NOTE**THE EUROPEAN RETURN LIAISON OFFICERS (EURLO) NETWORK****INTRODUCTION**

The European Return Liaison Officers (EURLO) Network consists of national return liaison officers deployed by EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries ('Member States') to a host third country or region to enhance cooperation and support Member States and Frontex at all phases of the return process. The deploying Member State has a leading role in the EURLO deployment and its administration. On its side, Frontex ensures coordination of the EURLO Network and supports Member States in the deployment process and day-to-day management. The EURLO Network is implemented as part of the overall EU Policy on Return and Readmission.

Each EURLO deployment is based on a dedicated Implementation Plan tailored to the identified needs outlining the activities to be undertaken by the EURLO during the return process. Frontex finances and reimburses costs incurred by the deploying Member State throughout the deployment on the basis of a bilateral Grant Agreement.

Current and foreseen deployments

Nine (9) EURLOs have been deployed heretofore covering thirteen (13) third countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo covering also the Republic of the Congo by Belgium, Egypt by the Netherlands, Ghana by Norway, The Gambia by Estonia, Nigeria by Finland, Ethiopia and Kenya with an extended mandate to Somalia by Sweden, Uzbekistan also covering Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Vietnam both by Poland. A new deployment to Iraq by Sweden has started on 18 April 2023.

Two (2) calls for deployment to Bangladesh and Cote d'Ivoire/Guinea remain open.

EURLO activities

The EURLO activities encompass all phases of the return process, namely

- Pre-return phase, when cooperation is established with the host third country authorities and the EURLO can support, inter alia, with the establishment/verification of identity and/or nationality of returnees and acquisition of travel documents;
- Return operations, including voluntary returns, when the EURLO helps with the organisation of return flights, transit, and handover procedures at the border;
- Post-return phase during which the EURLO can facilitate the reintegration of returnees and support the return of vulnerable persons, as relevant.

The deployment process

Following a proposal for an EURLO deployment to a specific new country or region by a Member State, the European Commission or Frontex on its own initiative, a call for deployment is launched and any Member State can submit a Business Case flagging its interest. The Business Case is assessed by Frontex, the European Commission and Member States via the High-Level Round Table on Return and, as a final step, Frontex' support is formally granted via a decision by the Agency's Executive Director. Subsequently, following the completion of all necessary administrative procedures, the EURLO deployment to the host third country is implemented.

The EURLO Network is not limited to the existing countries of deployment but depends on the interest and priorities expressed by a Member State, the European Commission or Frontex.