

Ethiopia

EU engagement to date

The EU and Ethiopia agreed on “Admission Procedures for the Return of Ethiopians from European Union Member States” on 1 November 2017. Arrangements identical to the Admission Procedures were later agreed between Ethiopia and Norway and Switzerland. Two meetings of the Joint Working Group and two additional technical meetings organised by the Commission have taken place since, to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Admission Procedures the latest in March 2020.

An EMLO is present in the country and the deployment of a fulltime EURLO to support operational cooperation is ongoing.

A technical assessment of the implementation of the Admission Procedures, carried out by independent consultants and finalised in May 2020, listed a number of short and long term recommendations on how to improve the cooperation on an operational level: adequate IT equipment and training for staff of competent Ethiopian agencies, a RCMS, extended use of videoconferencing and identification missions for identification processes and clear decision making processes and instructions for issuance of travel documents. Article 13 of the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Ethiopia is party, prescribes the commitment of the partner countries to cooperate with the EU in readmitting its own nationals.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2019, 1 395 Ethiopian nationals staying illegally in the Member States were issued return decisions and 215 nationals returned to Ethiopia resulting in a **return rate** of 15%. Member States submitted 985 readmission requests to Ethiopian authorities, who issued 41 travel documents resulting in an **issuance rate** of 4%.

A total of 15 Member States reported having approached the authorities of Ethiopia for readmission matters related to its nationals in 2019.

According to nine of them the relevant provisions of the **existing Admission Procedures** are rarely to never respected by Ethiopia. This can be largely attributed to the fact that Ethiopia does not respect the timelines agreed in the Procedures, imposes verification of nationality by central authorities in all submitted cases and frequently does not follow up with travel documents issuance.

Overall, more than half of responding Member States, assess the overall cooperation with Ethiopia in the **identification procedure** as poor or very poor (86% of all Ethiopian nationals ordered to leave are to be found in those Member States). Three Member States find it is good or very good.

This is reflected in the fact that a routine for cooperation on identification with Ethiopian diplomatic missions, as formulated in Admission Procedures, is not implemented effectively. While two Member States consider it is often to always implemented, it is rarely to never the case for seven Member States. This results in delayed responses (if at all) and no interviews

being conducted by the diplomatic missions. Instead, an operational routine for submission of requests for verification of nationality has been agreed with the central authorities in end 2019.

For 11 Member States consular interviews are rarely to never performed upon their request as necessary. Among the other four Member States where they took place outcomes were satisfactory in three of them.

Ethiopian authorities are very often available to organise short term identification missions, which in practice replaced the consular interviews. Among the six Member States which experienced them, half of them find their outcomes as very good or good, two consider them poor and one acceptable.

Interviews to verify the nationality – in practice never made by the consulates, but conducted by the experts of the identification missions, with final decision by the competent central authority – are often requested by Ethiopian authorities also in cases where sufficient evidence to establish nationality is provided (e.g. valid or expired travel documents).

Evidence accepted does not always include valid or expired passports, according to three Member States. Half of the responding Member States confirm that information extracted from the VIS and other (identity) documents were accepted.

According to more than half of responding Member States, the **issuance of travel documents** rarely or never takes place in a timely manner. Those Member States represent 87% of return decisions made in relation to Ethiopia nationals.

Four Member States, representing 65% of the return decisions, inform that the Ethiopian diplomatic missions are reluctant to issue travel documents in cases where nationality is confirmed by the central authorities. Additional elements are also required by the missions, such as a declaration by the returnee that return is voluntary, information on his/her health condition or family situation in the EU.

Ethiopia does not impose restrictions to readmission upon arrival of persons who are to be legally returned. Visas are required for the escorts staying overnight, but can be obtained at the airport.

Returns by **charters flights** are accepted by Ethiopia, but one Member State signals that restrictions apply (number of flights, frequency and landing permit required).

In general, a third of the Member States assessed the **overall cooperation on return and readmission** as improving since 2015, and the rest as stable or poor in equal proportion.

With a total of 1 395 Ethiopian nationals ordered to leave in 2019, Ethiopia ranks 35th amongst visa-bound third countries whose nationals have been issued return decisions in the Member States. Overall, half of the Member States interact with Ethiopia on readmission and practices are gradually being established. The provisions of the readmission arrangement (and the equivalent provisions of the bilateral arrangements) are largely not followed by the Ethiopian authorities with only 4% of the cases submitted being

finalised with a travel document issued. For Member States representing more than three quarters of return decisions issued, identification processes are slow, deliver unsatisfactory results and are rarely followed up with issuance of travel document, as in most cases Ethiopian authorities decide whether to issue travel documents on individual circumstances of the returnees, rather than on established nationality, as foreseen in the readmission arrangement. Cooperation could be improved by Ethiopia, by building solid practices and decision making workflows within its administration, conducive to the correct implementation of the arrangement for forced returns. Furthermore the respect of timelines agreed for identification and swift issuance of travel documents, without interviews for documented cases is necessary. This, potentially facilitated by a capacity building project including an RCMS, as well as the EURLO should result in a better rate of issuance of travel documents and a higher return rate.