

Armenia

EU engagement to date

The EU Readmission Agreement with Armenia entered into force on 1 January 2014. It was negotiated together with a Visa Facilitation Agreement, in the context of a Mobility Partnership. Six meetings of the Joint Readmission Committee took place since then to assess the implementation of the Agreement, the last one in July 2020 by written exchange. In the latter the Commission proposed use of biometric data for identification in difficult cases and printing of travel documents directly from the Readmission Case Management System (RCMS)¹⁰ as ways to improve further cooperation on readmission. Armenia does not envisage either at the moment.

Through the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument, the EU financed a project to improve various aspects of Armenia's migration management, including a RCMS, operational since February 2019, with currently seven Member States connected. A EUR 900 000 government to government ERRIN¹¹ project on Return and Reintegration is currently building the Armenian government capacity to provide reintegration to returnees from ERRIN Member States.

Cooperation on readmission

In 2019, 3 755 Armenian nationals staying illegally in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 080 effectively returned to Armenia resulting in a **return rate** of 55%. Member States submitted 1 556 readmission requests to Armenian authorities, who issued 1 148 travel documents resulting in an **issuance rate** of 74%.

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

According to 12 Member States the relevant provisions of the existing **EU-Armenia Readmission Agreement** are always or very often respected by Armenia.

Two Schengen Associated Countries and one EU Member State with an opt-out from EU Readmission Agreement report having **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Armenia, whose relevant provisions are always/almost always respected.

All responding Member States assess the overall cooperation with Armenia in the **identification procedure** as very good or good, also thanks to the launch of the RCMS in February 2019, which accelerated the processing of readmission requests and improved observance of time limits.

¹⁰ An electronic platform facilitating the exchange of information between competent authorities in Member States and in a given third country in order to advance on individual cases in the return and readmission process.

¹¹ The European Return and Reintegration Network - a network of 15 EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries, established to facilitate cooperation between migration authorities in the area of return and reintegration of irregular migrants.

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This is reflected in 12 Member States having an established routine for cooperation on identification, which for all of them is always/almost always effectively implemented with diplomatic missions.

Regarding identification processes, almost half of the reporting Member States have no or limited need for requesting consular interviews. Of the remaining eight Member States, six reported consular interviews are conducted rarely to never, while two reported consular interviews are always/almost always conducted when requested. The results of the consular interviews were assessed by Member States as satisfactory or very satisfactory. With the exception of one Member State there is no practice reported for interviews by phone or videoconference.

Evidence accepted includes not only valid or expired passports, but also information extracted from the VIS, as well as other identity documents (ID cards, birth/citizenship certificates, driving licences, military ID cards/booklets, as well as their photocopies), all being accepted very often or always. Biometric evidence is only accepted for five of the reporting Member States, however identification is most often successfully carried out without it.

Two thirds of reporting Member States do not need identification missions. Armenia often to always organises identification missions to those who do need with outcomes rated as good and very good.

According to 80% of the responding Member States the **issuance of travel documents** takes place very often or always in a timely manner. As travel documents are issued in a timely manner and in accordance with the relevant provisions of the EU-Armenia Readmission Agreement, there has been no need for an **EU Travel Document** or *laissez-passer* issued by Member States. One Member State has experienced problems with issuance of travel documents for non-Armenian family members.

One third of reporting Member States indicated acceptance of **charter flights** by Armenia, without any challenges or limitations (the remaining Member States have not tried).

With one exception, all reporting Member States encounter no restrictions in returns by **scheduled flights**. However, one Member State reported on cases where Armenia had issued travel documents but subsequently refused to readmit its citizens with health problems, arguing that they should be taken care of in the Member State where comparatively better health care can be provided.

In a trend from 2015, 40% of reporting Member States have assessed the **overall cooperation on return and readmission** as stable and 20% as good, while 33% consider it has improved. No Member State reported poor cooperation or deterioration.

With a total of 3 755 Armenian nationals ordered to leave in 2019, Armenia ranks 24th amongst visa-bound third countries whose nationals have been issued return decisions in the Member States. Overall, half of the Member States interact with Armenia – the other half has few or no cases – with well-established and even readmission practices that are gradually increasing in effectiveness with the support of the RCMS. The Readmission Agreement provisions (and the equivalent provisions of the bilateral arrangements) are

generally well respected, in cooperation with all Member States. Identification processes are conducted successfully, including through interviews, and issuance of travel documents is timely. Charter flights are generally accepted and no obstacles imposed for scheduled flights return. The efficiency of cooperation could be improved further by allowing identification by biometric data, when needed, and direct printing of travel documents from RCMS. This should result in a better rate of issuance of travel documents and a higher return rate.