

## **Belarus**

### **EU engagement to date**

The **EU Readmission Agreement** with Belarus was signed on 8 January 2020 and entered into force on 1 July 2020 (together with a Visa Facilitation Agreement).

### **Cooperation on readmission**

In 2019, 2 945 Belarusian nationals staying illegally in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 670 effectively returned to Belarus resulting in a **return rate** of 91%. Member States submitted 95 readmission requests to Belarusian authorities, who issued 70 travel documents resulting in an **issuance rate** of 74%.

One Member State informed that it has a **bilateral agreement** with Belarus.

A total of 18 Member States reported having approached the authorities of Belarus for readmission matters related to its nationals in 2019.

All of them assessed the overall cooperation with Belarus in the **identification procedure** as good or very good (except one which rated it as average).

This is reflected in 13 Member States having a functioning established routine with Belarus diplomatic missions, with only one informing that it is not effective.

For all responding Member States, valid or expired passport is accepted as evidence, however three Member States informed that their photocopies are not accepted. According to ten Member States information extracted from the VIS is often or always accepted. Biometric evidence was also used by ten Member States, while in the case of five Member States it was never proposed.

For six Member States consular interviews are organised as necessary upon their request with good results, while others indicated that identification is concluded without the need for an interview. In principle, interviews are not available by videoconference. Only one Member State indicated that identification missions are organised and assessed their outcomes positively.

All responding Member States, except one, reported that the **issuance of travel documents** often to always takes place in a timely manner.

Return operations by **charter flights** were accepted from three Member States. Other Member States have not attempted it.

Certain restrictions in case of returns by **scheduled flights** are applied according to seven Member States (mostly concerning visas for escorts), while the remaining ones had no such experience.

In principle, all responding Member States assessed the **overall cooperation on return and readmission** as positive or stable since 2015.

*With a total of 2 945 Belarusian nationals ordered to leave in 2019, Belarus ranks 28<sup>th</sup> amongst visa-bound third countries whose nationals have been issued return decisions in the Member States. Overall, about two-thirds of the Member States interact on readmission with Belarus– the rest have few or no cases. While only one bilateral agreement was in place in 2019, and the EU Agreement was not signed yet, readmission practices are well established and effective. Identification processes are conducted successfully, including through interviews, if needed, and issuance of travel documents is timely for all interacting Member States. Charter flights are accepted and no obstacles imposed for scheduled flights return. While the return rate is in 2019 already at 91% and no issues of effectiveness have been signaled, the new EU Readmission Agreement is likely to bring uniformity of practices, increase effectiveness and therefore diminish the administrative burden of the readmission process on both Member States and Belarus.*