

## **Tunisia**

### **EU engagement to date**

Tunisia has concluded a Mobility Partnership with the EU in 2014. Negotiations of a Readmission Agreement and a Visa Facilitation Agreement opened in October 2016. After a slow start, negotiations advanced at good pace in 2018/early 2019 with progress at technical level. However, the round confirmed for end April/early May 2019 was postponed by Tunisia, first to June and then to a date still to be decided, due to the presidential and legislative elections of autumn 2019 and the subsequent government changes affecting the administration at high level. Negotiations have not resumed yet. An additional element slowing down the negotiations is the request from Tunisia to discuss in parallel relevant provisions for an agreement on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) in view of a holistic approach to migration ensuring the links between provision of services and visa issues.

### **Cooperation on readmission**

In 2019, 12 045 Tunisian nationals staying illegally in the Member States were issued return decisions and 2 670 effectively returned to Tunisia, resulting in a return rate of 22%. Member States submitted 4 812 readmission requests to Tunisian authorities, who issued 1 413 travel documents resulting in an **issuance rate** of 29%, with three Member States representing together 97% of the requests submitted and 89% of the return decisions issued in relation to Tunisia.

A total of 20 Member States reported having approached the authorities of Tunisia for readmission matters related to its nationals in 2019.

Six Member States reported having **bilateral agreements/arrangements** in place with Tunisia, whose relevant provisions are often to always respected for four of them, representing more than three quarters of the return decisions, except for timelines.

Two-thirds of the responding Member States representing 93% of the return decision issued assessed positively the cooperation with Tunisia in the **identification procedure**. However, the Member State with nearly two-third of return decisions issued notes that deadlines are not respected and the process is time consuming. Four Member States representing 6% of the return decisions assessed the cooperation as average and the remaining two as poor.

This is reflected in 16 of the responding Member States having an established routine for cooperation on identification that is implemented with Tunisia diplomatic missions effectively, except for one Member State that reported lack of response. Deadlines are sometimes not respected.

One third of the Member States indicated that consular interviews are performed upon their request as necessary, while for another third interviews are rarely or never organised. One of the most concerned Member States reported the lack of interview being an issue when evidence for identification is not available.

The requirements for identification and the procedure followed vary, also according to the bilateral agreements in place. In general, verification seems to be mostly done by the central authorities, on the basis of evidence, but interviews can also take place. Biometric evidence is widely accepted, but the confirmation is not immediate.

The **issuance of travel documents** often to always takes place in a timely manner according to seven Member States representing a quarter of return decisions issued. The Member State accounting for nearly two thirds of the return decisions issued, notices discrepancies of practices and timeliness depending on the consulate. For another eight, the travel documents are rarely or never issued in a timely manner.

Five Member States indicated that **charter flights** are accepted, with some restrictions on the number of returnees on board and the timing for the landing permit. Four Member States reported charters are not accepted, while 11 have not attempted to return via charter flights.

Seven Member States have reported that the **overall cooperation on return and readmission** has improved since 2015, while three noticed a deterioration and six no changes.

*With a total of 12 045 Tunisian nationals ordered to leave in 2019, Tunisia ranks seventh amongst visa-bound third countries whose nationals have been issued return decisions in the Member States. Overall, two-thirds of Member States interact with Tunisia on high number of readmission requests (a third of the return decisions issued) and six have bilateral agreements/arrangements whose provisions are often respected, but for the deadlines in the case of the Member State representing close to two-third of all return decisions issued. While negotiations on an EU Readmission Agreement are ongoing, a readmission routine is in place in three quarters of Member States, covering 97% of the cases. Identification processes are conducted successfully, including through the use of biometrics, yet unevenly when it comes to interviews for Member States accounting for a quarter of return decisions issued and with delays and using up much time for the Member State representing almost two thirds of return decisions issued. They are unsuccessful for the rest. The same pattern in timeliness is observed for issuance of travel documents. For a more effective and predictable readmission cooperation, identification processes would need to be expedited, including by performing interviews as requested by all Member States, and be followed through swiftly with issuing travel documents. Further improvements could be envisaged by accepting charter flights from all requesting Member States. This should result in a better rate of issuance of travel documents and a higher return rate.*