

## Eritrea

### **EU engagement to date**

The Commission has not engaged so far with the Eritrean authorities specifically on readmission cooperation and the country has not been prioritised for such engagement due to the high asylum recognition in the EU. Article 13 of the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, to which Eritrea is party, prescribes the commitment of the partner countries to cooperate with the EU in readmitting its own nationals.

### **Cooperation on readmission:**

In 2019, 3 615 nationals staying illegally in the Member States were issued return decisions and 155 effectively returned to Eritrea resulting in a **return rate** of 4%. Member States submitted 116 readmission requests to Eritrean authorities, who issued 6 travel documents resulting in an **issuance rate** of 5%.

A total of eight Member States, accounting for 48% of all return decisions issued in relation to Eritrean nationals, reported having approached the authorities of Eritrea for readmission matters related to its nationals (amongst Member States who did not report about interactions with Eritrea, one alone represents 35% of all Eritreans ordered to leave).

The overall cooperation with Eritrea in the **identification procedure** is assessed as poor or very poor by all interacting Member States, but one, who considers it very good, even though the verification process remains slow and the cooperation of the returnee needed.

This is reflected in only four Member States having an established routine for cooperation on identification with Eritrea diplomatic missions which, according to all of them, is not effectively implemented.

For more than half of responding Member States, consular interviews are never/almost never performed upon their request and if they do take place their outcomes are unsatisfactory. A number of Member States accounting for one-third of Eritrean nationals ordered to leave inform that that the interviews, possible by phone for one of them, are always required, no matter how sufficient evidence of nationality, or that they receive the confirmation of nationality only verbally.

Evidence accepted in the identification process: for half of the Member States the valid or expired passports are accepted, however not the information extracted from the VIS, and for a number of them the other identity documents are considered.

According to three Member States the **issuance of travel documents** never/almost never takes place in a timely manner – issuance may take up to two or three months according to one of them. For one Member State, issuance often takes place in a timely manner, but only for voluntary returns.

One Member State informs that, additional elements other than nationality such as declaration of voluntary return, are also always taken into account by Eritrea when deciding whether to issue travel documents or not.

Only two Member States have tested the possibility of **charter flights** and Eritrean authorities do not accept them. For three Member States restrictions in the form of visa requirements for escorts apply in the case of **scheduled flights**.

In general, most reporting Member States find the **overall cooperation on return and readmission** unsatisfactory, deteriorated, inexistent or impossible to assess, indicating as key factor the prevailing political and security situation of the country.

*With a total of 3 615 Eritrean nationals ordered to leave in 2019, Eritrea ranks 27<sup>th</sup> amongst visa-bound third countries whose nationals have been issued return decisions in the Member States. The asylum recognition rate of Eritrean nationals is high in most Member States, leading to a limited operational practice on readmission. Returns however took place during the reporting period. Overall, one quarter of the Member States, accounting for less than half of the return decisions issued, have attempted engaging with Eritrea on readmission and submitted a small number of readmission requests. No jointly agreed procedures are in place at EU level, Member States have no bilateral instruments and no effective readmission routine is in place. Cooperation on identification and issuance of travel documents is poor for most cases and the few resulting returns – mostly voluntary – can take place by scheduled flight only. Taking into account the evolution of the situation in the country, for a more effective and predictable readmission cooperation a structured practice would need to be built with clearly agreed procedures, including commitment to accept forced returns.*